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Some Thoughts on the Mutual Displacements/  
Appropriations/Accommodations of Culture  
in Three Contemporary American Women Writers

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If, in the not-too-distant past, our moral relatedness to other human beings seemed to depend upon ideas of sympathy, identification, and communion, the current mood in literary criticism and philosophical reflection suggests that a far stronger and more important moral category might be our ability to recognize and accept difference. The word difference, of course, is most closely associated with the work of Jacques Derrida. It has, however, in recent years, acquired something of a life of its own, figuring in the discussions of many critics whose philosophies of ethics and literary composition differ quite substantially from Derrida's. One of the questions which contemporary thinking about difference has provoked is whether difference (or Derrida's own difference) can exist as a moral category except in relation to ideas of sympathy, identification, and communion, which difference, then, does not so much deny as resist. I take it that Stanley Cavell's discussions of what he calls aversive thinking and Wolfgang Iser's recently articulated theory (in a different but related context) of boundary crossing are attempts to preserve and define the relationship between identification and difference, without which difference might simply fly in the face of the moral imagination which it seems at first to promote.<sup>1</sup>

In the following paper I will explore, in relation to concepts of likeness and difference, a third term, which I will

then use in order to distinguish among various modes of cultural displacement and/or appropriation and/or accommodation in the fictional writings of three contemporary American women authors--Toni Morrison, Grace Paley, and Cynthia Ozick. My observations, however, will hopefully apply as well to other recent female writers, such as Gloria Naylor, Maxine Hong Kingston, Marilynne Robinson, and Alice Walker. The term I wish to investigate is, simply, autonomy. By autonomy I mean the absolute refusal by a society or an individual of likeness. Autonomy, then, is not, in the first instance at least, the aversion of conformity (to invoke Cavell invoking Emerson), or (to invoke Iser) the transgression of boundaries--if, we understand by these terms, two-way processes of backing and forthing, departure and return. Rather, it constitutes a denial of relationship. Sometimes this refusal or denial of likeness, with its accompanying accusations against the dominant culture, seems motivated by very good reasons, such as the existence of racism or antisemitism within the society in which one might discover one's likeness to others. Nonetheless, since it often involves, not simply an act of withdrawal from the dominant culture, but a direct aggression against it (the autonomous culture seeking to displace the dominant one), it raises certain moral questions. Indeed, in almost all the texts which concern me the refusal of relationship violates other of the text's statements concerning the importance of establishing human relations across barriers of difference--such as differences of gender, generation, or class. Autonomy, in other words, accentuates an aspect of the terms aversion and

transgression, which, in the completed processes represented by these terms, is mediated by the achievement of some kind of cultural accommodation. To what degree, we might ask, is this disdain by one culture for another, with the mutual violations of culture in which it issues, an inherent and necessary feature of the aversions and transgressions which may, ultimately, create cultural pluralism?

The writers whom I will discuss in relation to concepts of likeness, difference, and autonomy are all American women, who specifically define themselves in their writings in opposition to male culture. All of them are also ethnically different, both from the mainstream of American society and also from each other. This ethnic difference is important to them and functions actively in their writing. Thus, they are writers who are each doubly different within American society, and, even though they share with each other a concern with feminist issues, they are also different from each other in terms of race or religion or ethnic designation. In addition, they are writers who are not only important figures on the contemporary American literary landscape, but whose works evidence a significant interrelation. The question I want to explore through an examination of a triangulation of influence and response in Morrison, Paley, and Ozick is how and why and (most important perhaps) at what cost, these writers, through strategies of locating (at some moment, at least) cultural autonomy, carve out or discover a place for themselves within American culture. As one traces the argument submerged within a network of interconnected texts by these

writers--Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon (1977) and Beloved (1987), Grace Paley's "The Long-Distance Runner" in Enormous Changes at the Last Minute (1960) and "Zagrowsky Tells," "The Story Hearer," and "Listening" in Later the Same Day (1985), and Cynthia Ozick's The Shawl (1990), by which I mean both of its previously published short stories, "The Shawl" (1980) and "Rosa" (1983)--one discovers at best an uneasy relationship between African Americans and American Jews, which promises no easy union in the end.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, what on first glance might well appear to be a system of allusion and invocation linking these texts, with each text in its turn responding to the others, emerges upon further consideration as a network of mutual aggressions and bristling claims of religious/racial difference. And yet, the texts do put us in mind of each other; and (as I hope this essay will itself witness) they do promote an important debate concerning American culture. How, then, might we want to describe the conversation in which these texts engage?

Of all contemporary societies, America is probably the most clearly associated with the idea of cultural pluralism. Therefore, even though the question of the interrelations of sub-cultures within any larger culture is not a specifically American issue, nonetheless it has special relevance to America. For that reason, when posed in relation to American texts, the question promises to yield specially vivid insights into culture formation. An aspect of the inquiry of this paper is whether American pluralism is, as Werner Sollors has, for example, argued, the particular American inflection of nationalism, thus

concealing or expressing--depending on how you look at it--the fundamental likeness among Americans;<sup>3</sup> or whether, in Sacvan Bercovitch's way of thinking, it amounts to a powerfully creative mystification, promoting what Bercovitch calls a consensus of dissensus;<sup>4</sup> or whether, perhaps, it constitutes multiple, mutually antagonistic declarations of independence and autonomy, constituting a form of inter-ethnic aggression. And if, as I shall argue, it is indeed a mode of direct cross-cultural conflict, what is the mechanism whereby, through processes of declaring their autonomy, individuals do, in the final analysis, discover their relationship to each other, and, through negotiating the genuine differences that divide them, create, in their declaration of autonomy, something like community identity? In other words, how might inter-ethnic aggression, as painful as it is, constitute an important element of what, in the final analysis, creates cultural pluralism in America? For whatever criticisms we might want to bring to bear against American culture, it does boast an achievement in ethnic coexistence which, however imperfect, is difficult to rival elsewhere.

i. The mutual displacements of culture in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon

One of the striking differences between mid-century African American fiction (the major classics such as Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man and Richard Wright's Native Son) and its more recent expressions is the degree to which contemporary texts stress the autonomy of the black experience, its independence

from the white culture which surrounds it. Of course, there is no doubt in this later fiction, as in the 200-year-old written tradition from which it develops, about the disfigurement of African American life perpetrated by white culture, first through the institution of slavery, later through the perpetuation of many of slavery's most heinous evils through institutionalized and popular racism. Nonetheless, whereas earlier African American writers dramatized the relationship between white people and black people, which had so cruelly disadvantaged African Americans, the recent emphasis has been on the remarkable coherence of black culture, despite the nasty assaults of white society upon it.

This autonomy, in the view of African Americanist critics such as Henry Louis Gates and Houston Baker, was preserved from white devastation by its remaining secret and concealed. In Gates's vocabulary, white signifying and black signifyin(g) may sound the same. But they are utterly, albeit imperceptibly or invisibly, different. Indeed, their difference has to do with how a large part of what appears invisible to whites is what African Americans deliberately conceal from them.<sup>5</sup> This protective self-concealment has its antithesis in the white cultural move which motivates it: the deliberate and often violent concealment of black culture by white culture, which thus makes black culture, from the white perspective, invisible. (Black) concealment, then, in Gates's and Baker's readings of African American culture, is by no means synonymous with (white) concealment (i.e., concealment as a strategy of white culture to



refuse to see and acknowledge black culture). Nor is the invisibility of black culture within white culture what white culture means by the term invisibility; in the African American view of the matter, African American invisibility is the very form of its visibility, its self-expression, which is also its power to cast into shadow and doubt (to banish and dissolve and even, perhaps, to blacken in the purely pejorative sense of the word) white culture itself. This, in Gates's and Baker's readings (especially in Baker's reading of Ellison's Invisible Man) is a major strategy of black literary texts.

And yet surely African American writers know (as I have argued elsewhere that Ellison knows) how hard it is to keep a secret across the highly permeable borders of a pluralistic society like America.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, a question we might put to African American literary culture is not, simply, what is the deep, dark secret it keeps, but what is the open secret it carefully exposes to view? and why and to what consequence its openness? The autonomy described by Baker and Gates or dramatized in the fictions of Morrison, Naylor, Jones, and Walker may not be as hermetically sealed as it might at first appear. Indeed, the complex relationship between--on the one hand--the invisible and secret difference between concealment and concealment, invisibility and invisibility, signifyin(g) and signifying and--on the other hand--between deep, dark secrets and open ones seems to me to constitute the structure and achievement of Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon. What is the secret of this text? and what kind of secret is it, if it is so easily exposed?

Like many twentieth-century African American fictions, this novel is an odyssey of self- and cultural discovery.<sup>7</sup> It records the story of the (male) protagonist's return to the place where his ancestors first arrived in America, the place to which they brought their African traditions and where those traditions still flourish, albeit in decisively transformed and even fragmented forms. And, as the protagonist puts together the puzzle of the past (which is the puzzle of his own African American identity), he suddenly discovers not only the fact that an autonomous and uniquely black culture exists but the equally important facts both that this culture (alongside Indian culture, to which the text also sensitively responds) has been violently overlaid and displaced by white culture and that it has maintained itself precisely by its apparent compliance with the white desire that it remain silent and invisible. As he is traveling back from Virginia to Michigan, Milkman experiences a sudden revelation of the meanings which "lay beneath the names" of American places, names as common as "Ohio, Indiana, Michigan." These names are now "dressed up like Indian warriors from whom their names came. ... Names they got from yearnings, gestures, flaws, events, mistakes, weaknesses. Names that bore witness" (pp. 333-34).

The important historical work, then, which Morrison's novel performs is nothing less than the recovery (most definitively defined in the writings of Walter Benjamin) of the minority history which the majority culture has consciously or unconsciously, violently or merely passively, repressed. It is therefore with a shock of sudden recognition that the reader of

this novel realizes that the song of Solomon (which Milkman has known all his life and which the reader similarly has known since the opening pages of the novel, if not from the title itself) is not, initially at least, an allusion to white Judeo-Christian culture. Rather, it is simultaneously an act of historical recovery and an accusation against white culture, which cannot imagine a song of Solomon which is not its own; which cannot, in other words, grant the autonomy of African and African American culture, and which indeed has systematically tried to conceal all traces of African America's past. Singing its own history, African American culture asserts itself, preserves itself, through what enters white culture only as an ironic quotation of it, which black culture thus invisibly subverts.

Morrison's point here is not that, contrary to its myth of itself as a melting pot, American culture contains no place for the accommodation of cultures. Quite the contrary, in order to stress the severity of the African American situation vis-a-vis the dominant culture, Morrison goes out of her way to cite the various modes of cultural accommodation American society does, indeed, afford--even, in limited ways, to African Americans. Hence, we are only a few paragraphs into the story when Morrison gives us the charming and rather whimsical story of the naming of Not Doctor Street (which picks up a major conceit in Sula concerning the naming of the black community called the Bottom). When the city council, in the interests of public order, posts notices "saying that the avenue running northerly and southerly from Shore Road fronting the lake to the junction of routes 6 and

2 leading to Pennsylvania, and also running parallel to and between Rutherford Avenue and Broadway, had always been and would always be known as Mains Avenue and not Doctor Street" they are enforcing their authority in precisely that autocratic but highly imperfect way in which authority proceeds in America: through a declaration which contains within it a clearly demarcated place for subversion and/or complementarity: "Mains Avenue and not/ and Not Doctor Street." Such a pattern of African American self-assertion through the negation of white culture continues throughout the book (both Pilate and her name are figures for this).

The problem with the kind of cultural accommodation America affords is that, however it works for other Americans, for black Americans the place of accommodation is too narrow and too late to provide meaningful relief for severe, pervasive human suffering. The conflict between the black community and the white authorities over who will name the main avenues of black communities is no simple argument concerning municipal power; it is an urgent matter of life and death. As Milkman's mother goes into labor on the steps of "No Mercy Hospital," we realize that the African American nation simply doesn't have the time to realize its goals through the subtle processes of carefully concealed negations. Names which bear witness, like the name Dead itself, or like Guitar Bains (p. 88), both of which reveal/conceal the savage history of black-white relations in America, simply have very little power to effect real change. Therefore, unlike the white male author, like Hawthorne, who can

discover in the custom house of his culture the saving remnant of the past, through which he can recover and revise that story, making himself, through strategies of subversion and negation and transformation, into the author of one of the founding texts of the new nation, the African American writer (male or female, but especially female) must dissociate him/herself completely from the majority tradition in which s/he finds herself. Indeed, because of the overwhelming power of that tradition, s/he must not simply declare her independence of it, but, rather, displace it, force it into the position of declaring its independence of him/her.

This is precisely what happens in Song of Solomon. Even more startling about this book than its assertion of cultural autonomy is its claim of priority and origination, which, alongside its declaration of independence, it also carefully, albeit openly, conceals. Like the place names of American geography, or like the bones which Pilate carries around with her from place to place (which she thinks to be those of a white man, but which turn out to be those of her own father), the origins of white Judeo-Christian culture, this book discovers, may finally be black not white. For what the novel reminds us of, as it invokes in order (in the first instance) to turn aside the biblical text, is something about the biblical "Song of Solomon" itself, which the white reader (Jewish or Christian) might only barely recall and which the biblical text itself so carefully and openly conceals: its own relationship to African culture: "I am black, but [and?] comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem ... Look

not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept... My beloved is mine, and I am his" (I. 5-6).<sup>8</sup>

Not only is "Solomon" in the African American song of Solomon a corruption of the original African "Shalimar"/ "Shaleemone," but, according to Morrison's novel, the Hebrew Shle'omo, of which the English Solomon in the biblical "Song of Solomon" is also a corruption, may itself be a corruption of the original African. Indeed, within the Hebrew text itself is an earlier variant on the name, Shle'omo (spelled in Hebrew shin, lamed, mem, hay; there are no vowels in the Hebrew), which is Salmon, but which could well be pronounced Shalmon (Hebrew spelling: sin, lamed, mem, vav, nun--shin and sin are identical letters, voiced differently). Nor does this earlier variant on the Hebrew for Solomon appear just any place in the scriptures. Rather it is part of the genealogy, which appears at the end of the Book of Ruth, and which, according to a recent commentator on the text, was likely tacked on after the story was complete (need I recall here that Milkman's mother is named Ruth?). This is the genealogy leading from Peretz through the house of David (with S(h)almon an ancestor of Boaz, the father of Ruth's son), which is to say, of course, the genealogy leading to Solomon as well, and directly on to Christ, on his father's side (in some Christian versions of the Book of Ruth, the genealogy is made to extend through Solomon). This is a genealogy which, the editor of the Anchor Bible notes, persisted, "in one stream of

tradition, on into Matthew ... Matthew included three women in his genealogical composition, Rahab the harlot, Bathsheba the not unwilling adulteress, and Ruth the Moabitess. Not particular happy company for valorous Ruth, but of such as these three [and, we might add, Tamar, mother of Peretz], the Bible consistently says, is built up the line of King David, and of one whom a later segment of the people of God would call the Son of David."<sup>9</sup> This may not be unrelated, other critics have suggested, to the fact of an immaculate conception, which both by-passes the line of adulterous relations but also, insofar as the father of this child is not the husband of his mother, carries on this line, raising its own questions of legitimacy.

In any event, what seems clear about Morrison's novel is that both Milkman and Pilate take on the imperatives of an African Americanist reconstruction of the genealogy leading to the savior. In this context it is more than relevant that Milkman's birth is as much a matter of Pilate's magical interference as of the sexual relationship between his parents, while Pilate's lack of a navel certainly throws into question her human ancestry. It is therefore no accident that in Morrison's novel the words "Shaleemon," "S(h)almon," and "Shle'omo" reproduce each other almost as closely as the words "Solomon" and "Solomon." But even though "Shaleemone" and "S(h)almon"/"Shle'omo" and "Solomon" and "Solomon" may sound identical, the signifyin(g) of the one is in fact entirely different from the signifyin(g) of the other. And there is no doubt in this novel (as in Gates's theory of black vernacular) which comes first.

Indeed, what Morrison is here presenting is an anti-Christian scheme (the major female character is not called Pilate for nothing) which is simultaneously an antitypological scheme, redefining not only the typological relations between Old Testament and New but between African American and Judeo-Christian culture.

Therefore, the final scene of the novel (which refuses to tell us who, if anyone, survives the fratricidal violence, Milkman or his "brother" Guitar)--reconstructs two important biblical moments, both of which hinge on the figure of Isaac who is also for Christians the type of Christ. One of these is the scene of the akeda (the binding of Isaac) which the text evokes through its repeated references to the rock (which is mentioned no fewer than five times--pp. 339-341) on which the event takes place and which is further recalled through Milkman's words to Guitar, which echo both Isaac's words to Abraham and Abraham's to God (not to mention Moses's to God): "Here I am."<sup>10</sup> But this "rock" is "doubled-headed" (p. 326) the text tells us; the scene it figures forth is multiply double. Therefore it conjures up (in addition to its own African American scene) not only the scene of the sacrifice/crucifixion but the scene as well of the moment of the separation of cultures, when the brothers Isaac and Ishmael entered into their insoluble conflict, to go their separate but unequal ways. Though Israel, Morrison's story begins to intimate, may have imagined itself free of Hagar (in this story, Pilate's granddaughter), whom, along with her son, the original patriarch so cruelly abandoned to survive on her



own, the twin nation, to which Hagar gave birth and in whose shadow Israel moves, cannot so easily be dismissed. Indeed, who is to say, Morrison's book suggests, whose story is the echo of whose? With only the written record of the dominant nation remaining, how can we know that Israel's story is not an imitation of Ishmael's, that (in the long lineage of usurping brothers), Isaac was not the first to displace unjustly the rightful heir, his brother, to whom he now denies all voice and all justice? Though the Judeo-Christian tradition usually associated black people with the descendents of Ham, many American blacks, especially in the 1960s, declared themselves part of the nation of Islam. This is the nation which evolves out of God's promise to Ishmael, which precisely parallels the promise to Abraham, that, like Abraham, Ishmael will father a great nation.

If Pilate (like Beloved later) is the savior in this novel, she plays this role, not (as the reader might first imagine) within the white Judeo-Christian tradition but within the black (Islamic) tradition, which the novel imaginatively figures forth. Not only does this tradition have its own song of Solomon, but that song may be the very song the Jews, and later the Christians, took as their own. "Should we put a rock or a cross on it?" Milkman asks about the grave which he and Pilate have dug for her father's (his grandfather's) bones. "Pilate shook her head. She reached up and yanked her earring from her ear... Then she made a little hole with her fingers and place in it the single word Jake ever wrote," her name, Pilate (p. 339). Neither

the cross nor the rock (either the rock of the akedah or the rocks which Jews ritually place on newly dug graves) will mark this spot. If Christianity displaced Judaism through Christ (who, as the antitype of Isaac, achieves the status not only of fulfillment but of priority), Morrison's African Americanism displaces them both in a similarly antitypological move, in which the fulfillment of Christ is his killing or displacement as well, as it is also the killing or displacement of the Ishmael-usurping Isaac.

Before I proceed with my argument, let me state that I see no problem at all with Morrison's anger against white western (American/ British/ European), Jewish/Christian culture (though one must pause to note here the active participation of the Moslem nations in the African slave trade). The question is, rather, what are the consequences, for African Americans as well as American whites, of the act of aggression and/or counter-aggression that this novel sets into motion? and how, in the final analysis, might the book's own act of displacement close down and/or open up the space of cultural accommodation?

Before I trace the path back from displacement to the aversive strategy of this text (which depends upon the openness of the secret it keeps), let me carry Morrison's argument all the way in the direction of its subversive intentions. For, even if Morrison's novel allows for the possibility of cultural accommodation (which I believe it does), nonetheless it also places sizable and potentially insurmountable barriers in the way of that accommodation. The problem is that the object of attack

in Morrison's novel is not some general level of white culture, in which certain biblical assumptions have remained unexamined and certain biased structures of thinking and acting have remained stubbornly in place. Rather, just as behind the Song of Solomon there exists a name identical to it yet totally different from it, which it displaces and by which it itself may have been displaced, so there exists behind that biblical "Song of Solomon" a text identical to it in terms of its words, but not in terms of its meaning, nor in terms of its name, which that biblical text also displaces. This is "The Song of Songs"/Shir H'shirim of the Jewish bible.

Does Morrison's Song of Solomon, in its claim of anteriority, slip into the place of Jewish culture, as the text from which white Christian culture derives? Or does it discover a place anterior even to Jewish culture? In either case, the novel would seem to be in direct conflict, not simply or primarily with Christian culture (which is the dominant culture in America) but with Jewish culture, the Jewish biblical "song," becoming the direct object of its displacement. And while American Jews, in the twentieth century, certainly do bear a responsibility to their fellow African American citizens, they constitute neither the dominant culture in America nor the primary cause of black slavery. Indeed, until very recently, Jews (outside America, if not within America itself) occupied a position no less oppressed than that of African Americans.

It is, therefore, highly troubling that Morrison's most recent novel, Beloved, which concerns both the African American

exodus from slavery (in parallel with the major event of the Old Testament) and the crucifixion and resurrection of a beloved savior (in parallel with the New), should be prefaced with precisely the scriptural text that expressly warrants Christianity's own displacement of the Jews: "I will call them my people,/ which were not my people;/ and her beloved,/ which was not beloved" (St. Paul, Epistle to the Romans; the major male protagonists in this novel are almost all named Paul). This is the text, from the New Testament, which Morrison's title and major figure in the novel cannot help but evoke (at least in the minds of Western, Jewish or Christian readers). It is a text which (through the word beloved) is also inevitably recalled (again, at least for some Western readers) by the title and major conceit of Song of Solomon, whose opening lines concern the beloved. Whether Morrison's quotation from Paul has as its objective the substitution of African American history for Christian history rather than for Jewish history (the major events of Beloved are an exodus from slavery and a resurrection) matters less than the fact that what is going on here is some kind of displacement, in a series of such displacements, and in which the displacement of the Jews is very much a central event.

This displacement might not be terribly troublesome, as I have already begun to suggest, were it not for the history of Jewish-Christian relations which has itself attended the substitution of the new law for the old and which culminated in the very recent past, in Europe, in the Nazi Holocaust. Given the act of historical recovery within the autonomy of black

culture and history, which motivates Morrison's Beloved, her dedication to "60 million and more" serves an obvious important function, consonant with her enterprise to recover the autonomy of the black experience in America. According to Morrison's own account, this "figure is the best educated guess at the number of black Africans who ... died either as captives in Africa or on slave ships."<sup>11</sup> Beloved would remember, not only slavery and its aftermath, but the genocide which preceded it, which American culture (both black and white) has, according to the novel's concluding chapter, willfully and violently "disremembered." Yet the number "60 million" cannot help but recall another number, also associated with genocide, a genocide which also has its origins within a textual/religious struggle, which the novel, in its quotation from Paul, also conjures up. Indeed, in one early review of the book, the reviewer records the contents of a pilgrim's "note" "on a wall of a slave castle off the coast of West Africa," which locates precisely this link between the number 60 million and the other number it perhaps conceals: "who will tell of our Holocaust?" the pilgrim asks; and the reviewer responds by suggesting that Morrison's novel might just be this telling.<sup>12</sup> But, so much larger than the number it recalls and followed by the explicit claim "and more," Morrison's number seems less to want to remember this other number than to displace it.

Of course, even before one disputes this act of displacement, one must immediately grant what Morrison's novel also so powerfully reveals in this moment of its abrupt

confrontation with recent Jewish history: that by capitalizing the non-specific word holocaust, Jewish survivors of the second world war may well have seemed (to Christians and Muslims, at least) to be appropriating all holocausts to themselves, magnifying its own genocide into a claim of "and more" (Holocaust and holocaust, we might say, sound the same, but, after the second world war, they signify very different realities.) This is a charge which has certainly been levelled against the Jewish people. It has been registered in numerous histories of the Holocaust, which have tended, increasingly, to take account of, if not actually to emphasize, its non-Jewish victims. Indeed, in Morrison's own reference to the Holocaust, in Song of Solomon, Morrison specifically refers to the Gypsies, as well as to the Jews, as the victims of Nazi savagery. As the black radical activist Guitar explains to the much milder, politically unawakened Milkman: "there are no innocent white people, because everyone of them is a potential nigger-killer, if not an actual one... You think Hitler surprised them? You think just because they went to war they thought he was a freak? Hitler's the most natural white man in the world. He killed Jews and Gypsies because he didn't have us. Can you see those Klansmen shocked by him? No, you can't" (p. 156).

If Morrison did no more than remind us of the way in which the Jewish Holocaust has tended to occlude all other holocausts and to repress, within its own telling of the story, the victimization of others within its own Holocaust as well, then, while we might want to quarrel with the way in which the text

doesn't quite do justice to the legitimate differences among holocausts or of individuals within a single holocaust, nonetheless, we would have to read Morrison's comment as a gesture toward sympathy and community. In aligning Africans, Gypsies, and Jews as the victims of fascist oppression and terror, Guitar's statement creates a community of the oppressed, across racial, religious, and ethnic barriers. Indeed, Guitar's comment picks up a statement concerning the persecution of the Jews which Morrison made much earlier in her career, in The Bluest Eye. But then a fatal swerve in the argument occurs. This swerve shifts the Jews from the position of powerlessness to the position of power. It forces not only their reabsorption into the camp of the white enemy, but transforms them into the special antagonists of the African American, who him/ herself becomes the victim of Jewish power, not only in the post-war period but from the beginning of Judeo-Christian history, right back to the moment when Isaac and Ishmael parted company. For if Gypsies and Jews were both, in Guitar's statement, equally victims of Nazi genocide, only the Jews, according to Guitar's historical narrative, subsequently elevated themselves to a position of power.

Trying to justify to Milkman his membership in the Seven Days, an organization dedicated to the murder of randomly chosen white people, in direct response and proportion to the white murder of blacks, Guitar compares the situation of blacks in America with that of Jews in Europe during and after the Holocaust: "What I'm doing ain't about hating white people. It's

about loving us. About loving you. My whole life is love. ... When those concentration camp Jews hunt down Nazis, are they hating Nazis or loving dead Jews?" The difference between blacks and Jews, however, which legitimates the difference between the post-Holocaust Jewish response and the contemporary black one is that, while the Jews, in Guitar's view, had power, African Americans do not. In response to Milkman's accusation that whereas Jewish Nazi hunters arrested and tried guilty people in a court of law, the Seven Days execute innocent people with their bare hands, Guitar responds: "Where's the money, the state, the country to finance our justice? You say Jews try their catches in a court? Do we have a court? Is there one courthouse in one city in the country where a jury would convict them?" (pp. 160-61).

What is fascinating about Guitar's account of Jewish Nazi-hunters is that the dissimilarity it claims between the African American and Jewish situations is hardly what Guitar imagines it to be. Not only did the courts in Europe not try the majority of Nazi war criminals (and, when they did try them, the sentences were almost never commensurate with the crimes), but Jewish Nazi-hunters, realizing this, set upon a course of action not so very different from that of the Seven Days. Not that the Jewish Nazi-hunters set out to kill innocent people, but they did, on more than one occasion, take justice into their own hands; and they did conceive a plot (ultimately foiled by other Jews) to poison the drinking water in a major German city.<sup>13</sup> Guitar is probably not acquainted with these facts of Holocaust history. Nor is



there any reason that he should be. What is, however, to be laid at Guitar's feet is his willingness to imagine that a group of people, as powerfully brutalized as the Jews during the second world war, could have risen (and so immediately) from the ashes of destruction wholly intact, wholly avenged, wholly victorious. Six million people have been exterminated; hundreds of thousands of refugees--the entire Jewish population of Europe--are rendered homeless; and Guitar can see only Jewish power, Jewish "money," and a Jewish "state." The words "country" and "state" cannot be separated from the problematical relationship today between the African American and Jewish American communities concerning the state of Israel, while the attribution of power to the Jewish state might be reconsidered in 1991 in the context of the recent Gulf war, in which Jewish lives were very much, once again, put at stake.

Conflating post-Holocaust survivors with contemporary Israelis, not to mention with contemporary American Jews (indeed conflating with each other happily assimilated and strong American Jews with Jewish Israelis), Guitar, I suggest, fabricates an image of Jewish power which moves the Jews out of the arena of the oppressed into its opposite camp. This move casts its shadow, not only on contemporary events (such as the founding of the State of Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict), but on the whole history of Jewish oppression, the major figure of which is, of course, the same figure as it is for African Americans: slavery. Indeed, the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt is a major metaphor in much nineteenth-century and early

twentieth-century black writing and thinking about black slavery. But, while slavery and slavery, Holocaust and Holocaust, may sound the same, they are, Morrison's book informs us, utterly different.

Of course, Guitar does not speak for Morrison. His is only one of many judgments rendered in the book. Indeed, it is likely that Morrison intends us to reject Guitar's program of blind justice as thoroughly as she wishes us to reject the Uncle Tomish assimilationism of Dr. Foster and Macon Dead. Nonetheless, the book imparts more than a small measure of respect for Guitar's position. Guitar voices some harsh but important truths about racial balance in America; and his program of action, however brutal, carries with it the force of deep and not unreasoning conviction. More importantly, however, Morrison constructs the novel around a central act of displacement not so different from what Guitar and the Seven Days engage in, both in terms of their actual program of violence and in terms of the philosophy Guitar voices. And Morrison's displacement, here as in Beloved, displaces the very same nation which so preoccupies Guitar.<sup>14</sup> This forges an uncomfortable unity between Guitar's sentiments and the strategy of the novel.

If the history of Jewish - Christian relations has taught us anything, and as the history of black - white relations emphatically reconfirms, to displace one history with another, one people with another, one suffering with another, only serves to perpetuate human suffering in this world. Do Morrison's novels of cultural displacement recognize this? do they express

their aversion of white Jewish/Christian culture in order, absolutely and irrevocably, to assert their anterior autonomy; or do they express their aversion in order to engage the white Christian/ Jewish world and reintroduce an interrupted dialogue of cultures? And if the novel does serve to reopen a dialogue, on more equal terms of mutual respect, is there still, perhaps, a net loss in Jewish-African American relations which will not be wholly supplied by the novel's aversive return (on different terms) to white (Christian and Jewish) society? Is this a price that we can afford or that we want to pay? Or is it, given African American and American Jewish history, a price from which we cannot turn away?

When, at the end of the book, Milkman and Guitar lock in their murderous embrace, and the narrator comments that it does "not matter which one of them would give up his ghost in the killing arms of his brother," the logic of Guitar's position of racial violence and that of the antitypological autonomy which Milkman discovers become fused, or, perhaps more accurately, confused, and its dangerous implications unleashed, to the mutual destruction/salvation of all concerned. In representing what is very clearly--potentially at least--an act of painful, heart-rending, and wholly unnecessary fratricide and by expressly refraining from saying which brother, if either, survives this conflict, the book confesses the dangers of its own strategies--which it acknowledges to be strategies of fratricide. But it declares that strategy to be unavoidable.

In this way, the book holds out the possibility of a new

order of communal relations. If embraces, even between brothers, may be murderous, might it not prove more prudent for all concerned to turn aside from each other, at least temporarily, in order precisely to avert such mutually destructive violence? But, how, then, and on what terms, would we ever return to one another? The novel, which concludes in potentially deadly suspended animation, will not say. But isn't this, then, to insist that the reader--whether he or she is white or black or Jewish or Christian or Muslim--must say, and thus, in the very act of saying, return to conversation and dialogue? For, as I suggested earlier, Morrison knows what all twentieth-century African American novelists must know, that her readers will indeed be multiethnic, multiracial, multinational; and that the secret agenda of her text, its strategy of autonomy and displacement, will thus quite openly be revealed, for everyone to see. For the white (and especially Jewish) reader unreservedly to embrace Morrison's message might well prove foolishly self-destructive. But there is no turning away from the powerful challenge it issues. How, then, might the white (and especially Jewish) reader respond to this text? In what kind of conversation might he or she embrace Morrison's book? and to what end?

Race relations and unforgiving friendships in the fiction of Grace Paley

In her third and most recent collection of short stories, Grace Paley subtly but specifically responds to Morrison's Song

of Solomon-- the "song of beginnings" of the "Son of Jake," as Paley calls it (p. 203; cf. p. 185)-- and takes up the conversation it initiates. Indeed, Paley acknowledges (as she had done earlier in "The Long-Distance Runner"--the culminating short story in her second volume of stories, Enormous Changes at the Last Minute) that African American culture has liberated American Jews to recover their own lost cultural origins; that in the twentieth century, Jewish Americans think themselves back to their ethnic identity through the experience of black people in America. Thus, in "Zagrowsky Tells," one of the most compelling stories in Later the Same Day, Paley attempts a reconciliation between the American Jew and the African American. She does this through both granting and qualifying Morrison's major claim in Song of Solomon. Paley agrees with Morrison that, not only are African and Hebraic culture linked at their origins, but that African culture may well have preceded Hebraic culture and been displaced by it. But she objects vigorously to what her story clearly identifies as an unwarranted attack in Morrison's novel against recent Jewish history. That is, Paley grants Morrison her holocaust by insisting on her own.

If Morrison's strategy in Song of Solomon is displacement, Paley's in "Zagrowsky Tells" is appropriation. In the manner in which most of Paley's fiction is constructed, Paley would yield room for other voices, other laments, all of which, collectively, constitute for her the fabric of American society. And yet, if Morrison's method of displacement in the final analysis yields accommodation, precisely because of the openness of its secret

aggression against white and white/Jewish society, Paley's agenda of integration keeps secret what it is which likely provoked Morrison's hostility in the first place: the unacknowledged aggression implicit in essentially all integrative acts, however nobly motivated. For in the integration of cultures presented in Paley's story, African American culture is not so much supplied a place in which to exist as it is absorbed, incorporated, into the Judeo-Christian tradition. Paley would submerge the differences between white and black in a sense of shared humanness; she would, as it were, secret them within the apparent fullness of multiracialism of America, as if such multiracialism guaranteed the equal distribution of power in America. This is the appropriation of culture, not its accommodation.

"Zagrowsky Tells" centers around a confrontation between Zagrowsky and the heroine of a good number of interrelated Paley stories, Faith Darwin. It tells the story not only of the immigrant Jewish Zagrowsky's rather beautiful and poignant relationship with his illegitimate black grandson but also of Zagrowsky's own (earlier?) racism, which had occasioned Faith and her friends to picket Zagrowsky's pharmacy. Essentially, this is a story of race relations in America, a story about how issues of race do and do not fit into our lives:

She [Faith] says to me ... Well, where does Emanuel fit in?

He fits, he fits. Like a golden present from Nasser.

Nasser?

O.K., Egypt, not Nasser--he's from Isaac's other son, get

it? A close relation. I was sitting one day thinking, Why? why? The answer: To remind us. That's the purpose of most things.

It was Abraham, she interrupts me. He had two sons, Isaac, and Ishmael. God promised him he would be the father of generations; he was. But you know, she says, he wasn't such a good father to those two little boys. Not so unusual, she had to add on.

You see! That's what they make of the Bible, those women: because they got it in for men. Of course I meant Abraham. Abraham. Did I say Isaac? Once in a while I got to admit it, she says something true. You remember one son he sent out of the house altogether, the other he was ready to chop up if only heard a noise in his head saying, Go! Chop! (pp.166-67)

There is no mistaking Zagrowsky's cynicism in this passage, his continuing resistance to and resentment of having a black grandson (illegitimate, to boot). At the same time, however, there is no denying the fundamentally moral recognition which Zagrowsky's musings also express. This is his awareness that the originating forefather of his people was all-too-willing to send one son into exile and to sacrifice the other. Thus, his black grandchild reminds him of an idea contained within the scriptures themselves but which we often forget: that biblical history (within the Old Testament, and, we might add, in the relationship between Old Testament and New as well) is the history of doublings and repetitions which (depending on how you view them) either do or do not recognize the relatedness which binds

brothers and cousins in the community of humankind. The aptly named Emanuel (faith in God), in other words, represents the fact of human relatedness, of our joint origins in a single God and a single ancestry: a single story, which has become painfully divisive and disjointed, one side of the family (male or female, black or white, Jewish, Christian, or Muslim) in opposition to and isolation from the other side. Thus, "In a few days, the rabbi came. He raised up his eyebrows a couple times. Then he did his job, which is to make the bris. In other words, a circumcision. This is done so that child will be a man in Israel. That's the expression they use. He isn't the first colored child. They tell me long ago we were mostly dark. Also, now I think of it, I wouldn't mind going over there to Israel. They say there are plenty black Jews. It's not unusual over there at all" (LSD 171). Thus, Zagrowsky discovers his relationship to his grandson through the covenant they share and which, he realizes, they have always shared.

Let me say immediately, that the other response to racism which the story presents--the response of Faith and her friends, which is to picket Zagrowsky's store--is as problematic as Zagrowsky's. Indeed, the relation of African Americans to Jews is also a cause for reflection and concern:

Let me ask you, if I did you so much good including I saved your baby's life, how come you did that? You know what I'm talking about. A perfectly nice day. I look out the window of the pharmacy and I see four customers, that I seen at least two in their bathrobes crying to me in the



middle of the night, Help help! They're out there with signs. ZAGROWSKY IS A RACIST. YEARS AFTER ROSE PARKS, ZAGROWSKY REFUSES TO SERVE BLACKS. It's like an etching right here. I point out to her my heart. I know exactly where it is.

...

I tried to explain. Faith, Ruthy, Mrs. Kratt--a stranger comes into the store, naturally you have to serve the old customers first. Anyone would do the same. Also, they sent in black people, brown people, all colors, and to tell the truth I didn't like the idea my pharmacy should get the reputation of being a cut-rate place for them. They move into a neighborhood ... I did what everyone did. Not to insult people too much, but to discourage them a little, they shouldn't feel so welcome.

...

. . . .

In the subway once she [my wife] couldn't get off at the right stop. The door opens, she can't get up... She says to a big guy with a notebook, a big colored fellow, Please help me get up. He says to her, You kept me down three hundred years, you can stay down another ten minutes. I asked her, Nettie, didn't you tell him we're raising a little boy brown like a coffee bean. But he's right, says Nettie, we done that. We kept them down.

We? We? My two sisters and my father were being fried up for Hitler's supper in 1944 and you say we?" (p. 159).

I do not cite this rather long passage in order to point out how classically it represents the phenomenon of racism--the excuses the racist brings to his defense, the way in which victim becomes victimizer, and so on. Rather, I quote it to show how it figures forth a complexity of indebtedness and responsibility, which Faith, the liberal Jewish Civil Rights activist, and the African American man-in-the subway, cannot quite grasp. The fact is that Faith and her friends do owe Zagrowsky a debt which they cannot simply forget in the process of paying off another debt; indeed, as Zagrowsky's comments concerning his wife remind us, Jewish Americans bear a special burden in relation to other Jews (both American and non-American). Therefore, not only might the obligation of the Holocaust survivor to African Americans be different from the obligations of other Americans, but American Jews have a double or triple responsibility (mirroring the multiple responsibilities of African Americans), to African Americans, Jewish Americans, and Jews. For this reason, slogans and accusations and indiscriminate political activism (like that of Faith and her friends or of the black man on the train) are in no way adequate to the challenge of community. For as the play of words in this passage so deftly suggests, debts and responsibilities do not all function within the same sphere of reference: keeping people down in history and not helping them up from seats are simply not the same kinds of things, and just as Zagrowsky is going to have to get behind the words of the "big colored fellow" with the "notebook" (of grievances perhaps?) to understand where his words are coming from, so the black man, and

Faith, and her friends, are going to have to get behind the events of Jewish history which motivate Zagrowsky's words and deeds.

Thus, Paley's story demands, of Faith and her readers, a consciousness of Jewish history along side their consciousness of black history. But it is precisely this consciousness of the untranslatability of one set of historical terms into another, one set of moral responsibilities into another, which makes Zagrowsky's own response to his grandson problematical. For consenting to raise a little brown baby the color of a coffee bean, Zagrowsky will go no further than (as it were) helping someone up from his seat. And this is just as non-conducive to communal relations as keeping the white Jewish woman down, which (paralleling Faith's picketing of the pharmacy) confuses the personal and the socio-political dimensions of experience, not to mention one responsibility with another. Thus Jew and black turn away from each other, refusing to see the other's legitimate distress, refusing to acknowledge the different responsibilities each bears to his own group and the collective responsibility they also share to each other.

Though Zagrowsky has no difficulty accepting his black grandchild as his, he is still, on some level, a white Jewish racist. Indeed, Zagrowsky's way of acknowledging his relationship to the child confirms the very strategy of white culture exposed in Morrison's novel: he renders Emanuel's black origins invisible. For all his apparent racial difference, Emanuel is after all a Jew, not so very different from other

Jews. Thus, Zagrowsky repeats the white Christian and Jewish move which posits Judaism and Christianity as higher evolutions of culture, rendering black culture unnecessary. The problem with Zagrowsky's response to African Americanism is thus similar to Guitar's problem with the Jews: in the first instance, Zagrowsky, like Guitar, widens the circle of community, incorporating others in the arena once defined by self. But this gesture--which is in itself a powerfully positive expression of a well-conceived moral desire--is no way dissolves the border separating self and other. Rather, it simply rearranges it, thus leaving other, unspecified individuals still on the outside. Nor does it in any way respect the legitimate anger which the formerly excluded outsider might feel and which might well lead him or her not to want to (re)enter the circle of community thus defined. Indeed, thinking through Zagrowsky's comments, especially with Morrison's Song of Solomon in mind, makes one consider the recent Ethiopian aliyah (immigration) to Israel in relation to the charges of racism which have surrounded Zionist history. The names of the two operations--Operation Moses and Operation Solomon--indicates a clear and positive race consciousness on Israel's part, alluding, as they do, to Moses's black wife and Solomon's black lover. What remains unaccounted for in the Jewish response to black Jews? black others? non-black others? What, then, do we make of the willingness of New York City's Mayor Dinkin to pose for publicity photographs surrounded by Ethiopian Israelis?<sup>15</sup>

What Zagrowsky's response does not allow for on the part of

African Americans (including his own grandson), which he allows for himself in his response to African American anger, is precisely what Morrison's Song of Solomon also expresses: anger and an unwillingness to forgive. "Forgive you?" Faith's friend Cassie responds, when Faith acknowledges her remissness in addressing the problems of lesbian women. "She laughed. But she reached across the clutch and with her hand she turned my face to her so my eyes would look into her eyes. You are my friend, I know that, Faith, but I promise you, I won't forgive you, she said. From now on, I'll watch you like a hawk. I do not forgive you" ("Listening," p. 211). The reconciliation which Paley here imagines depends, to some important degree, upon the possibility of not forgiving, of not yielding to the desire to integrate into a single family of homogeneous individuals (in the same story, which is the concluding story of the volume, Faith and Jack do forgive each other: what happens between men and women, the story suggests, is not the same as what happens between other socially/ racially/ sexually unlike individuals). Whatever the cultural accommodation which is evolving out of this volume, it allows for, even encourages, expressions of anger and resentment. "I do not forgive you" are the concluding words of the story, of the book, of the three-volume series of short stories which constitute Paley's career to date. These are awesome words to stand in final verdict on interpersonal relations in America. They are no less fierce than the potentially fratricidal embrace which concludes Morrison's Song of Solomon; yet they are no less an embrace.

Witnessing, watchfulness, and the clamor for a kiss in Cynthia Ozick's The Shawl and Toni Morrison's Beloved

"From now on, I'll watch you like a hawk," Cassie warns Faith. Like Emerson's sentence in "Self-Reliance," which provides the center of Cavell's reevaluation of Emerson--"Self-reliance is [the] aversion [of conformity]"--the statement "From now on, I'll watch you like a hawk" (to paraphrase Cavell) declares the issue between these two women always joined, so that, turning away from Faith, Cassie is turning toward her; indeed, she is turning Faith toward herself, in an unblinking, eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation--based on anger and recrimination--, on which their future relationship depends (one thinks here as well of the importance of face-to-face contact in two other Paley stories: "Faith in the Afternoon" and "Conversation with my Father").<sup>16</sup> No loving embrace between sisters is this; indeed, as I have begun to suggest, it is more like the murderous embrace between brothers which concludes Morrison's Song of Solomon. Watchful of Faith, Cassie will make Faith watch her step; indeed, watching Faith, she will cause Faith to watch her. She will make Faith see her as she really is, even as she will render her society an object of her own scrutiny. This is an open declaration, which carries with it a not-so-concealed threat. There is no secrecy here, no retreat into invisibility.

If African American literature and culture, in the views of critics like Baker and Gates, have, in the past, contained

secrets from their white audiences, Toni Morrison's most recent novel, Beloved, publishes in large and unmistakably angry strokes the accusations of African American culture against white America. Like Cynthia Ozick's two-story work, The Shawl, Morrison's Beloved resurrects the past, literally reincarnating it in the present. In an almost literal way, these books witness the past (see, again, Song of Solomon, p. 334). They conjure it before our very eyes, for all and any to see. Thus, they convert the world into a witness, which cannot (in these stories) help but see the painful contours of African American and Jewish history. There are no secrets here.

Or are there? What each of these powerful stories of historical remembering dramatizes is how the past--with its expressions of recrimination and anger and with its confessions of guilt and devastating loss--cannot remain bodily visible within the present. For what happens in both of them is that the resurrected past, in possessing the present, almost destroys it.<sup>17</sup> Thus, in both of these books, in the final moments, the "beloved" resurrected daughter must be banished, however painful this is for the mother to whom the ghost of the dead daughter has returned, however much this "disremembering" as Morrison calls it, risks rendering the mother's loss silent and secret once again. "Magda, my beloved, don't be ashamed," Rosa pleads with the dead daughter: "Butterfly, I am not ashamed of your presence; only come to me, come to me again, if no longer now, then later, always come. These were Rosa's private words; but she was stoic, tamed; she did not say them aloud to Magda....She took the shawl

off the phone. Magda was not there. ... Magda was away" (p. 71). In a similar fashion, the final chapter of Beloved insists (no fewer than three times) that this was not a story to pass on, concluding thus: "By and by all trace is gone, and what is forgotten is not only the footprints but the water too and what it is down there. The rest is weather. Not the breath of the disremembered and unaccounted for, but the wind in the eaves, or spring ice thawing too quickly. Just weather. Certainly no clamor for a kiss. Beloved. (pp. 337-38).

I cannot here launch a full-scale analysis of these two works, which bear powerful internal affinities to each other (some of these internal connections include the fact that in both stories it is a mother who conjures the lost daughter, who is herself positioned in competition against a living sister/cousin, to whom the mother also bears some responsibility; in both stories the mother is implicated in the death of the daughter and therefore feels not only devastation and loss, but guilt as well; in both the mothers are victims of scientific analysis--in both stories indicated by the reference to a tree; in both the number three figures prominently; and, last but not least, in both books a reconciliation between the mother and a man occasions the final disappearance of the ghost and the affirmation of getting on with the business of the living). What is important to me, here, is that both of these novels conclude in acts of apparently necessary, healthful, forgetting, even as both of them are initially generated by previous acts of forgetting. Indeed, Beloved, which follows "Rosa" by several years and which is, as I



have noted, dedicated to "60 million and more," may well evidence a particularly acute anxiety concerning the forgetting of African American genocide as the Jewish Holocaust once again seems to threaten to overwhelm and possess the imagination of the American public. Rosa's own racism, clearly marked in Ozick's text, but also not an insurmountable obstacle in the reader's sympathy for her, would certainly have proved extremely troubling to Morrison. Similarly, the <sup>ye</sup>publication of "Rosa" in The Shawl in 1990 may well bespeak an urgency on the part of Ozick to reassert the presence of the "beloved Magda" of Holocaust memory.

Might we, then, not think of these works, which are poised painfully between memories which possess and a disremembering which annihilates all over again, allowing the memories of others to possess and displace them, and which keep, as they do, each other suspiciously, perhaps even angrily, in view--might we not think of these as texts not so much of witnessing (which implies remembering as resurrecting) but of watchfulness, where such watchfulness contains the idea, as in Paley's story, of protecting and accusing as well. A quality of watchfulness, I suggest, hovers over the endings of both of these books. "Not there," "away," Magda has not vanished into oblivion. Rather, she is relocated in an elsewhere, not so very far from here and now, perhaps no more than the touch of a shawl or a phone call away. And her mother will remain vigilant to the end, mindful of when and where the call, the touch, might come. Likewise, "the wind in the eaves" and the "spring ice thawing too quickly," threatening all-too-easily to become "just weather," keep us in

mind of how we must keep listening for what "certainly" could not be but of course is nothing other than a "clamor for a kiss." Thus watching and waiting, these texts guard the inner sanctum sanctorum where their memories reside, simultaneously protecting them from violation and yet keeping them from neglect.

Indeed, as Morrison's text issues in its own clamor for a kiss, in the final, painfully isolated and suspended word, *Beloved*, which concludes the text, the novel makes present what is also inseparably part and parcel of the watchfulness of the grieving mothers in both her and Ozick's novels: that making visible one's pain, confessing not only how difficult it is (and dangerous) to keep the past alive but how much such conjuring depends upon other people's also willingness thus to witness the past, one risks more than being ignored and disremembered. One risks precisely the opposite: being embraced, one's clamor for a kiss comprehended and responded to. This sympathy might not be everything we want it to be ("My listener says to me, Right, Iz, you did the right thing. What else could you do? I feel like smacking her.... who asked her?--Right, Iz"--"Zagrowsky Tells," p. 170). But we cannot tell our story, we cannot witness the past, without placing ourselves in the potentially murderous/potentially loving arms of our brothers and sisters. The secret clamor for a kiss is what (alongside their accusations) both Ozick's The Shawl and Morrison's Beloved, publish to view.

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"You know how that old story ends," muses Paley's Faith Darwin in "The Story Hearer," "--well! With those three

monotheistic horsemen of perpetual bossdom and war: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam... Just the same... before all that popular badness wedged its way into the world, there was first the little baby Isaac. ... before he was old enough to be taken out by his father to get his throat cut, he must have just lain around smiling and making up diphthongs and listening, and the women sang songs to him and wrapped him up in such pretty rugs" (LSD 143-44). Might she not then conceive the child who will indeed save the world? The story entitled "At That Time, or The History of a Joke" concerning the immaculate conception, alongside Jack's accusation, matching Faith's against the F/father, that Isaac "should not have been allowed [by his mother] to throw all that sand at his brother" (p. 144) reenforce our sense--confirmed as well as Morrison's and Ozick's novels of resurrection--that salvation (the forgiveness of a forgiving God) is not the name of the game in America. Nor is it hope (Faith's sister) or even grace (her author). There is for Paley no rewriting history in order to make it come out better, in order to make it come out right:

So, with the sweetness of old forgiving friendship, he took my hand. My dear, he said, perhaps you only wish that you were young again. So do I. At the store when young people come in waving youth's unfurled banner HOPE, meaning their pockets are full of someone's credit cards, I think: New toaster! Brand-new curtains! Soft convertibles! Danish glass!/ I hadn't thought of furniture from the discount store called Jack, Son of Jake as song

of beginnings. But I guess that's what it is--straw for the springtime nest.... Perhaps, he continued if we start making love in the morning, your body will be so impressed and enlivened by the changes in me that it will begin again all its old hormonal work of secreting, womb cleaning, and egg making. / I don't believe it, I said. Besides, I'm busy, you know. I have an awful lot to do. ... So we lay down beside one another to make a child, with the modesty of later-in-life, which has so much history and erotic knowledge but doesn't always use it.(pp.203-6).

For Paley it is too late for a song of beginnings. Therefore, if human society is going to reproduce itself it is going to have make use of the history and erotic knowledge it possesses and go on from there. For this reason, what concerns Paley in her fiction is the Jewish African American EMANUEL, which is for her another word for F/faith. Such faith is emphatically not the unquestioning acceptance of tradition (the "old story"). Rather it is the belief that we can discover how religion, race, and gender "fit in" to our lives, or, more precisely, that we can discover our relationship to them and, through that relationship, our relationship to each other. This amounts to an acceptance of the business of living, of the going on of life: "Life is going on," says Zagrowsky; "and life don't have no opinion."

What does the mutual accomodation of cultures look like in a set of texts by African and Jewish American women writers? It certainly seems less like a loving embrace than a guarded

stalemate, more like witnessing as watchfulness than as a sharing of intimacies. And yet what this process of cultural accommodation yields is nothing less than, in Morrison's words, the capacity to ride the air, the capacity, in other words, to survive the nothing, which like the weather at the end of Beloved or like the blazing hot inferno of Florida in The Shawl, at every moment threatens to dissolve both our individual and our cultural specificities and memories. This nothing is everthing that divides us. It is everything that sustains us.

The mutual accommodation of cultures in America is, I suggest, the consequence of the aversive, transgressive, relationships Americans discover with each other. This accommodation, which is founded upon acts of displacement, perpetuated by competition and disagreement; and characterized by an attitude of jealous watchfulness, permits not simply codes of cultural difference or even magnificent but largely defused gestures of dissent, which, in the final analysis, secretly conspire in the consensus of American culture. Rather it permits the direct, unmitigated, and often vitriolic expression of anger and rage, even of the threat of withdrawal from the body politic. And so permitting them, it averts the dissolution of American culture, which thus depends, however painfully and precariously, upon our willingness to brave the dangers of nothing more and nothing less than an aversive embrace, a clamor for a kiss. That embrace, that clamor, I suggest, were always already already in the Song. What, then, is this watchfulness of the literary tradition itself--black, white, Jewish, Christian--which

ceaselessly turns us toward it and makes us listen?

## NOTES

- 1 I am thinking here, in particular, of Cavell's recently published Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990), especially the essay entitled, "Aversive Thinking"; and Wolfgang Iser's forthcoming study REF forthcoming
- 2 I will be using the following editions of these works and will cite page numbers within my text: Toni Morrison, Song of Solomon (NY: Signet, 1977); Beloved (NY: Signet, 1987); Grace Paley, Later the Same Day (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1985); and Cynthia Ozick, "The Shawl," The New Yorker 56 (May 26, 1980), 33-34 and "Rosa," The New Yorker 59 (March 21, 1983), 38-71--republished as The Shawl (NY: Vintage, 1990).
- 3 This is Sollor's major thesis in Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture (NY: Oxford UP, 1986).
- 4 Bercovitch puts forward this thesis most clearly in his recent work on The Scarlet Letter and the subject of American ideology: "Hawthorne's A-Morality of Compromise." Representations 24 (1988): 1-27; "The A-Politics of Ambiguity in The Scarlet Letter." New Literary History 19 (1988): 629-54; and "The Problem of Ideology in American Literary History." Critical Inquiry 12 (1986): 631-53. Bercovitch's work is collected in his forthcoming The Office of the Scarlet Letter.
- 5 Houston A. Baker, Jr. Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984) and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism (NY: Oxford UP, 1988). In The World of Our Fathers (NY: Harcourt, Brace, Janovich, 1976),

Irving Howe presents a similar theory about Jewish humor, which expressed "a certain disdain for gentiles who, without having the faintest notion what [the jokes meant] still ... laughed" (p. 570).

6 The book-length study I am now completing on Engendering Romance: Women and Men and the Hawthorne Tradition contains a lengthy discussion of Ellison's Invisible Man as well as of Morrison's Song of Solomon and Beloved, and Paley's three volumes of stories.

7 Much of the criticism on Song of Solomon has focused on the novel's recovery of a black past which empowers contemporary African Americans to perpetuate their own cultural heritage. Cynthia A. Davis's "Self, Society, and Myth in Toni Morrison's Fiction," Contemporary Literary<sup>ture</sup> 23 (1982), 323-42, is a powerful exposition of this thesis, which focuses on "the power to name, to define reality and perception" (p. 323). Other important essays in this direction include: Joseph T. Skerrett, Jr.'s "Recitation to the Griot: Storytelling and Learning in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon," in Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition, ed. Marjorie Pryse and Hortense J. Spillers (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985), pp. 192-202, who focuses on the folklore elements in the book and the necessity for people to tell themselves stories about the past; Dorothy H. Lee, "The Quest for Self: Triumph and Failure in the Works of Toni Morrison," in Black Women Writers 1950-80: A Critical Evaluation, ed. Mari Evans (Garden City, NY: Anchor Doubleday, 1984), pp. 346-60; "Genealogical Archaeology or the Quest for Legacy in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon," in Critical Essays on



Toni Morrison," ed. Nellie Y. McKay (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1988), pp. 105-14; and Susan Willis, "Eruptions of Funk," Specifying: Black Women Writing the American Experience (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 83-109. See, also, Kimberly W. Benston's "I yam what I am: the topos of un(naming) in Afro-American Literature," in Black Literature and Literary Theory, ed. ~~Houston~~<sup>Gale</sup> A. Baker, Jr., pp. 151-72.

8 References to the biblical text are to the standard King James version. Morrison is quite correct to object to the slighting of the implications of "black" in this passage. According to the Anchor bible, commentators have consistently attempted to "mitigate the blackness" by retranslating the text--Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, ed. Marvin H. Pope (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), p. 307-- Doubleday is the press for which Morrison worked for many years. Pope's commentary on the connotations here of blackness go on for some time, covering, among others, Rashi and his problems with the passage, and including the following, fascinating passage:

In another connection, however, Rashi overcomes his melainophobia and goes to some trouble to demonstrate that black is beautiful. In Num. 12:1 Miriam and Aaron rebuked Moses for marrying a negroid (Cushite) woman. (The term Cushite is still used in modern Israeli Hebrew with derogatory and racist overtones. [I do not agree with this; quite the contrary, the term kushi is a term of endearment.] YHVH himself came to Moses's defense .... The divine reaction to Moses' choice seemed sufficient endrosemment and Rashi concluded that "this teaches us that

everyone acknowledged her beauty, just as everyone acknowledges the blackness of Cushites. ... The unprejudiced rendering "black and beautiful" is understandably favored by persons who value their own blackness, real or imagined. The Black Jews of Harlem, the Commandment Keepers, under the leadership of Rabbi Wentworth A. Matthew who claims descent from Solomon and the Queen of Sheba [who is black], maintain that Ham and Shem were black, and only Japheth, ancestor of the Gentiles, was white. Jacob also was black because he had smoother skin. Solomon was black because he says to in Song of Songs 1:15 ... ignoring the clear indication of the Hebrew that the speaker is feminine. (pp. 308-09).

Pope also discusses black Madonnas and black goddesses, among other things; but while he discusses "The Song of Songs and Women's Liberation," he does not discuss the "Song" and African Americanism.

9 Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary, ed. Edward F. Campbell, Jr. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975). p. 173; Campbell discusses the variant spellings of Salmah and Salmon on pp. 171-72.

10 I have discussed the widespread appearance of this motif in American literature in Fiction and Historical Consciousness: The American Romance Tradition (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989) and will be discussing it again, in different ways, in my current project on Engendering Romance.

11 Quoted in Walter Clemons, "A Gravestone of Memories," Newsweek (September 28, 1987), p. 75.

12 Marcia Anne Gillespie, "Out of Slavery's Inferno," Ms., 16 (1987), p. 68. Though the word "holocaust" is of course non-specific, Holocaust, with a capital "H", has come to refer to the Nazi extermination of the Jews. In "Site of Memory," Morrison remarks that "No slave society in the history of the world wrote more--or more thoughtfully--about its own enslavement"--William Zinsser, ed. Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), p. 109.

13 For a thoroughly fascinating account of this portion of Holocaust history, see Michael Elkins, Forged in Fury (Corgi: London, 1971, esp. pp. 252-55).

14 In his review of the book, reprinted in Critical Essays on Toni Morrison, ed. McKay, pp. 30-32, Samuel Allen notes that "the Weimaraner dogs, Horst and Helmut, in the decaying house of the grandfather's murderers, suggest but fall short of the name of the Munich beer-drinking song" (p. 31). This might constitute another quasi-allusion to the Holocaust, reappropriated to the story of African American history.

15 In this context, one must invoke the recent writings of Marc Shell, in particular "The Family Pet" in Representations 15 (1986), 121-53 and "Marfanos (Pigs), or From Coexistence to Toleration," Critical Inquiry 17 (1991), 306-35, where Shell examines the fluctuating lines defining kin and kind and ~~the~~ traces the consequences of universalist and particularist definitions of group for inter-ethnic/inter-religious relations.

16 I am here appropriating Cavell's statement in relation to Emerson that: "'Self-reliance is the aversion of conformity' figures each side in terms of the other, declares the issue

between them as always joined, never settled. But then this is to say that Emerson's writing and his society are in an unending argument with one another--that is to say, he writes in such a way as to place his writing in his unending argument (such is his loyal opposition)--an unending turning away from one another, hence endlessly a turning toward one another"--"Hope against Hope," in Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome, p. 138; see again the essay "Aversive Thinking," in the same volume. The two Paley stories I mentioned are contained in her second volume of stories, Enormous Changes at the Last Minute.

17 I have discussed this aspect of Beloved at length in an essay entitled "Absence, Loss, and Making Space for Community in Toni Morrison's Beloved." See, also, Deborah Horvitz's "Nameless Ghosts: Possession and Dispossession in Beloved," Studies in American Fiction 17 (1989): 157-68.