"Chokecherry Tree(s)": Operative Modes of Metaphor in Toni Morrison's "Beloved"

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IN HER ESSAY "The Site of Memory," Toni Morrison points out that to trace the inner lives of former slaves presupposes a "literary archeology" (112) that excavates memories from within. As part of an oral culture, these memories generate an archive of mental images and metaphors. They punctuate the psychological matrix that constitutes the unconscious and therefore operate from within the psyche. Not unlike the operations of Freudian dreamwork, the "memories within" can only be translated into text by figuratively encoding and decoding the flow of the unconscious. This process of translation, however, cannot uncover a complete or total truth locked in metaphor. On the contrary, translation establishes metaphor as a contested and multi-accentuated textual space as the memories—which constitute a symbolic net of metaphors—are always already culturally and historically coded even before they enter the subconscious. Morrison emphasizes that "these 'memories within' are the subsoil of my work. But memories and recollections won't give me total access to the unwritten interior life of these people. Only the act of the imagination can help me" (111). Imagining or writing the interior lives of others (that is, the unspeakable and the repressed) also presupposes that the writer must balance her own unconscious desires and memories with the necessity to access the unconscious of others. In this sense, the "act of the imagination" becomes a precarious act of language, constantly holding in suspense the danger of speaking for the Other while envisioning the various palimpsests of individual and collective memories. The specific figurative orchestration of Morrison's

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texts by way of metaphor, I suggest, provides access to the interior lives of her novels' characters.

In *Beloved*, Morrison's fifth novel, the process of imagining and remembering involves a constant shifting and manipulation of language, images, and literary form. A critical textual analysis of Morrison's novel, however, cannot rely on conventional taxonomies of rhetorical figures such as metaphor, irony, metonymy, or allegory, but instead must interrogate the definitions and applicability of those tropes within the context of postcolonial writing and theory. I propose to examine then how a specific metaphor prompts and shapes Morrison's text. The reader encounters the "chokecherry tree" first when Sethe, the female protagonist of the novel, mentions it as a "tree" to Paul D. She literally carries this tree on her back. Here, the narrative "subsoil" of Morrison's novel surfaces in the two images of the "tree" and the "haint," which Sethe articulates almost in the form of a riddle: "I got a tree on my back and a haint in my house, and nothing in between but the daughter I am holding in my arms" (15). Though it may be impossible to solve this riddle, a theoretical consideration of how metaphors are historically and culturally inscribed and subsequently de-scribed or divested within postcolonial discourse, can provide an entrance into both Sethe's riddle and Morrison's text.

An exemplary reading of "the chokecherry tree" as what I will term "divested" and "performative" metaphor, will elucidate how the metaphor of the "chokecherry tree" operates performatively in different narrative contexts. A performative reading of metaphor not only contests the conventional notion of metaphor as a trope of substitution and resemblance but also its presumed function to generate a dualistic and cohesive identity.[1] This essay argues then that the continuous yet displaced repetition of the "chokecherry tree" metaphor contests historically and politically prescribed matrices of essentializing and totalizing modes of identity-formation. Rather, Morrison's metaphor suggests performative modes of identification that insist on permanent reinventions and recombinations of presumed identities through their cultural and historical particularities. As such, the "chokecherry tree" becomes a textual field that undoes the coercive norms of

binary identity constructions through its simultaneous inscriptions of African-American history, race, gender, slavery, white ethnicity, and black communal practices. In order to conduct a reading of *Beloved* that locates the various configurations of Morrison's metaphor in a postcolonial rhetoric of performative subject-formation, I will begin with an etymological outline of "the chokecherry tree," and continue with a theoretical contextualization of metaphor in postcolonial discourse.

The chokecherry tree, whose fruit is poisonous and astringent, mainly occurs in the former American centres of slavery, Virginia and the Carolinas, where it is also called black chokecherry. This indicates a specific location, and therefore history, to which the metaphor refers. Furthermore, the deceptive quality of the chokecherry tree and its connotation of blackness link it to at least three thematic issues of the novel. First, the nominal specification of the tree indicates that blackness is not natural but constructed as threat, as something that cannot be trusted, something that deviates from the norms of nature. Second, the image indicates the perils of making judgments based on outer phenomena, and of disregarding the complexity of nature which cannot be grasped in generalizing terms.[2] Third, from a different angle, the chokecherry tree implies the self-protective qualities of deception, encoding or masking, to use analogous terms, since these qualities not only provide a strategy to resist cultural representation and domination, but also generate communicative and perfomative modes that subvert the master code.[3]

Although such a wide field of semantic connotations may at first seem contrived, it also indicates the palimpsestic[4] structure of memory, which in turn provides the reservoir for the rhetorical "subsoil" of Morrison's text. By making visible the fragmented and palimpsestic texture of memory, Morrison's use of metaphor avoids totalizing the historical experience of slavery. On the contrary, her palimpsests of memory serve to break through the totalizing visions of dominant historiography. I suggest that the palimpsestic configurations of metaphor in *Beloved* work as a textual and rhetorical displacement similar to what Chantal Zabus calls "relexification." Both metaphor in a postcolonial context and relexification are a form of "transcodage . . . charac-

terized by the absence of an original" (106). Yet, while in Zabus's study the process of "relexification" results from the "African palimpsest," that is, the layering and coincidence of colonial and indigenous African languages, Morrison's metaphor is not generated from a direct translation process of overlapping lexical features but from a transcoding of memories into narrative space. Thus, the metaphor reciprocally produces and is produced by the narrative structure of Morrison's novel so that the metaphor comes to encapsulate the different and associated meanings of the "chokecherry tree." The image, for instance, anticipates Paul D's account of slavery when he had his tongue held down by an iron bit. It refers to Sethe's excessive and murderous mother love, and to Beloved's attempt to choke Sethe in the clearing to satisfy her desperate and possessive longing for love and expiation. By excavating and transcoding the palimpsestic structure of cultural and historical memory through language, Morrison's metaphor textually mediates the necessity and pain of unstrangling and connecting the different voices of the past.

In an interview with Claudia Tate, Morrison explains how she works with and through language in her novels:

> I try to clean the language up and give words back their original meaning, not the one that's sabotaged by constant use, so that "chaste" means what it meant originally. . . . I try to do that by constructing sentences that throw such words into relief, but not strange words, not "large" words. . . . If you work very carefully, you can clean up ordinary words and repolish them, make parabolic language seem alive again. (Interview 165)

This process of cleansing does not reject rich and metaphorical language use. Instead, Morrison refers to a manoeuvring of language which foregrounds the historically and ideologically inscribed and circulated connotations of "ordinary words" through metaphor. In other words, while "ordinary words" have been "sabotaged," in Derridean terms, through the wear-and-tear effect of metaphor, their concomitant value inscriptions can also be decoded and rearticulated through metaphor. Rather than implying an essentialist notion of language, Morrison's strategy of repolishing the "original meaning" of words seeks to reinvigorate and appropriate language on both her own and

historically specific terms. "To clean up ordinary words," then, not only follows the detour of metaphor,[5] but also rearticulates the historical traces and various semantic entrances which words and, more specifically, nouns acquire in processes of denomination and designation.[6] The notion of an original meaning, therefore, signifies a dissolution of dominant or presumedly "ordinary" inscriptions of metaphor and returns the image to a formerly marginalized cultural and historical context by which it was initially shaped.

But the function of metaphor goes beyond the process of retrieval, for metaphors also work as strategical markers of a necessarily political cultural belonging. Morrison points out that "it is the way words are put together, the metaphors, the rhythm, the music—that's the part of the language that is distinctly black to me when I hear it" (*Conversations* 96). The sensual character of those markers—metaphors, rhythm, music—seem to participate in what Edouard Glissant describes as a linguistic and historical "return to the point of entanglement" (26) where a collective memory was lost in the ruptures and displacements of the Middle Passage and slavery. To "'dig deep' into this memory" involves to follow "the signs . . . picked up in the everyday world." In a postcolonial context, the use of language, and specifically of metaphor, Glissant argues, in agreement with Morrison, "traces the historical break and wreckages left behind and thrust forward" (64).

To rearrange language, however, is not merely a linguistic act, but also a political move, since in classical rhetoric metaphor also functions as a trope of persuasion. "The relationship between logic and rhetoric, between grammar and rhetoric," Gayatri Spivak observes, "is also a relationship between social logic, social reasonableness, and the disruptiveness of figuration in social practice" (187). What Spivak indicates is that the usage of figurative language in political and social discourses shapes, if not determines, the attitudes of the participants in those discourses. As Raymond W. Gibbs argues, metaphor is "a form of thought with its own epistemological functions" that provides "much of the foundation for our understanding of culture" (122). It "can indeed significantly change people's attitude toward various po-

litical and social topics" (145). The American political and military rhetoric to promote the Gulf War, for instance, was drenched in metaphors taken from national American sports, so that both a public debate could be avoided and populist national emotions of unity and strength could be mobilized. In this respect metaphor constructs the claim of Western hegemony to imagine a totalizing form of nationality through the production or, as Chomsky puts it, the manufacturing of national consent.

Thus Morrison's strategy to clean the language of its historical luggage is by no means an aesthetic experiment of form, but disrupts dominant social and political practices of representation. But how precisely can language be manipulated in order to change social and cultural meaning? In *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison specifies that language must be "freed up . . . from its sometimes sinister, frequently lazy, almost always predictable employment of racially informed and determined chains" (xiii). In *Beloved*, this is achieved by "the chokecherry tree," a compound metaphor. That is to say, it is not the "tree" with all its preinscribed racial connotations that constitutes the semantic focus of the metaphor; rather, the "chokecherry tree," in its specific cultural, historical, and geographical location, becomes the site for processes of semantic transcodage.

Through specifying and literalizing the signifier "tree," it becomes possible to interrupt the circulation of the metaphor "tree" in its various genealogical, biological, and other concepts. During this process, the signifier splits into monads of historically and culturally determinable meanings. Simultaneously, the signified is divested of its former value inscriptions which initiates the transcoding of both metaphor and memory into a postcolonial narrative. The previous signified, then, is not obliterated but put under erasure or, to use Morrison's word, cleansed.[7] I suggest calling the modified metaphor a divested metaphor. To put it otherwise, a metaphor, consisting of a tenor (the signified, or subject to which a metaphoric word is applied) and a vehicle (the signifier, that is, the metaphoric word itself), usually changes its meaning by altering the tenor. But in the case of the "chokecherry tree," it is the change of the vehicle that generates new meaning. This is not to say that in postcolonial

discourse meaning is primarily generated through the signifier; this runs the risk of perpetuating modes of representation based on physical phenomena. Rather, the vehicle and signifier function strategically as a textual trigger to demarcate the fissures of historical "entanglement[s]." This understanding of metaphor also corresponds to Morrison's notion of gaining access to the past by "rememory" because it is precisely the vehicle of a metaphor that, as Gibbs argues, "faciliate[s] memory to the extent that [it] evokes vivid mental images" (133). So recalling mental images by means of metaphor involves two important operative modes of metaphor. First, metaphor reactivates the subconscious long-term memory so that a choked up history can enter the cultural text. Second, metaphor, as Glissant indicates, "struggles against time in order to reconstitute the past" (145) and enables "a kind of future remembering" (144), which is similar to Morrison's notion of "rememory"[8] and aims at a dissolution of what Chantal Zabus calls the "infernal binarity" (174) that also inhabits metaphor.

Thus the previously inscribed connotations of the vehicle are not fully erased but echo in the reader's mind and simultaneously visualize the Derridean trace of metaphorical effacement. At this particular point, where old and new inscriptions intersect, metaphor produces its property of creative doubleness: the echoes of the image "tree" and its simultaneous distortion and modification by "chokecherry" cause a culturally and literary disruptive effect. This dissolves the concept of metaphor as identity since "tree" is not substituted for but supplemented by "chokecherry tree." Instead of aiming at cohesion and totalization, Morrison's metaphor emphasizes fragmentation and cultural difference as a marker of the text as well as of subjectivity. The process of dissolution also puts into question the received structural division of metaphor into vehicle and tenor as the metaphor simultaneously undergoes an act of literalization and performativity through repetition. This does not necessarily mean that metaphor in the context of postcolonial writing functions as catachresis, as Spivak argues. On the contrary, a metaphor such as the "chokecherry tree" can advance multiple referents "from [a] postcolonial space" (60), but those refer-

ents are plural and are markers of difference. Indeed, the use of metaphor in Morrison's text extrapolates various referential meanings from a specific yet heterogenous, cultural, and historical text.

The "chokecherry tree" does not operate as a dialectical process either. Instead, because of their contiguity and concurrent distance, the two compound nouns of the metaphor, separately or together, retain their disruptive notion of doubleness throughout the text. This space of doubleness and ambivalence, which resides in between the alienation of the tenor and the emptying of the vehicle, generates cultural difference. More specifically, the constant repetition of the metaphor, including the various memories and functions of trees pertaining to each character of Morrison's novel, simultaneously reiterates the dominant inscriptions of the metaphor. In *Beloved*, this form of repetition produces a transgressive space in which the binary code of metaphor is performatively dissolved and rearticulated. Here, metaphor acts performatively rather than rhetorically. The perfomative configurations of metaphor in *Beloved*, I suggest, operate similar to the concept of performativity developed by Judith Butler in order to negotiate the production of gender identities. She argues that "performativity appears to produce that which it names, to enact its own referent. . . . [T]his productive capacity of discourse is derivative, a form of cultural iterability or rearticulation, a practice of resignification, not creation ex nihilo" (107). Thus the function and property of metaphor in Morrison's text is to enact and "name [one's] own referent" beyond any notions of orginality. The "chokecherry tree" prompts the narrative of *Beloved* in a performative mode which enables the constitution of both gender and race identifications.

By playing out different variations of the metaphorical theme, the metaphor of the "chokecherry tree" serves as an important organizing element on the structural or compositional level of Morrison's novel. On the one hand, it creates what Homi Bhabha calls a social and "interpersonal reality . . . that appears within the poetic image as if it were in parentheses." That interpersonal reality depicts a relation that is "aesthetically distanced, held

back, and yet historically framed" (17). In this way, metaphor generates and frames the relationships of the novel's characters. Furthermore, the repetition of the image functions as a structural element in the novel that effects narrative obscurity, that is to say, sites of narrative ambiguity, by marking a textual site of intervention that resists the reader's complete conquest of the text. As such, Morrison's text is structurally and rhetorically firmly located in the experience of slavery and resistance. The metaphorical texture of Morrison's novel depicts slavery as what Glissant calls "a struggle with no witnesses from which we perhaps have aquired the taste for repeating words that recall those rasping whispers deep in our throats, in the huts of the implacably silent world of slavery" (161). In opposition to the slave owner who violently constructed a visible and transparent world, *Beloved* in general, and the metaphor of the "chokecherry tree" in particular, "seek out obscurity, that which is not obvious," to claim a communal right "to a shared obscurity" (161).

To break through the "silent world of slavery" also entails a project Morrison pursues in "The Site of Memory." The composition of her fictional texts often departs from an image or a metaphor[9] which enables the articulation of a counter-memory or narrative. In contrast to writers such as Simone de Beauvoir and James Baldwin, Morrison emphasizes that, in her writing,

> the image comes first and tells me what the "memory" is about. . . . [T]he images—the remains, so to speak, at the archeological site—surface first, and they surface so vividly and so compellingly that I acknowledge them as my route to a reconstruction of a world, to an exploration of an interior life that was not written and to the revelation of a kind of truth. (114-15)

If the image comes first and develops the "memory," then the image prompts the text and moves into the text. This reversed movement from metaphor to memory and text distinguishes Morrison's use of metaphor from the dominant structuralist and poststructuralist approach to metaphor.

We may recall that in the context of Lacanian post-structuralist theory, a metaphor, by substituting one signifier for another, strives to transgress the boundaries of specific or preinscribed meanings. The signifier merges into the signified and thereby

dissolves the hierarchical relation between signifier and signified in order to disclose the signified of the signifier. Thus, Lacan concludes that "the symptom is a metaphor, whether one likes it or not" (175).[10] This focus of epistemological interest on the signified, however, implies the existence of a hidden and original truth as metaphor stands in for something that is to be retrieved. This theoretical approach cannot answer how and under which specific conditions the signifier has been shaped and claimed in the first place.

In contrast, the continuous repetitions[11] of "the chokecherry tree" trace how the metaphor has been shaped differently. Here the metaphor does not exclusively operate as a symptom for a regressed past or a disintegrated identity. By mediating and modifying the signifier of the metaphor so that the "chokecherry tree" can be simultaneously read as gallows, iron-maze, Brother, aspen, roses of blood, the functions of metaphor eschew an easy classification into cause and effect. Metaphor instead is simultaneously inscribed with the loss of subjectivity and the subsequent process of rearticulating and performing the different sites of identification. For metaphor to operate as a symptom would furthermore presuppose that the body can still function as the primary matrix for the configuration of the unconscious.

In the context of postcolonial theory and writing, however, the physical and psychological dispossession of the black body not only designates the most violent consequence of slavery but also denotes the ambivalent locus for the production and reproduction of colonial desire, fantasy, and fetishism. Metaphors that are engendered at those cross-sections of colonial psychology must be psychologically and culturally hybrid formations rather than symptoms which merely designate the possibility to retrieve what has been substituted or misplaced. As a corollary, the body alone can no longer count as the unequivocal agent of processes of identity formation but as a contested archive of memories and desires. It does not seem surprising, therefore, that Morrison's text posits various forms of identifications that are narrated through the multiple configurations of a metaphor or an interlinked field of metaphors. Metaphor, seen from this perspective, designates an unfinished process of collective becoming.

Both aspects, the consequences of a historically dispossessed body and the notion of a collective becoming, converge in the "chokecherry tree" as the physical inscription of slavery on Sethe's back and its various readings by the members of the community Sethe lives in. It is an inscription, featured as an uncanny physical omnipresence experienced by individual characters of the novel. By being invisible—thus obscure—to Sethe, the "chokecherry tree" is not only written on her back, but also inscribed on those who experienced the dispossession and marking of their bodies during slavery. In the course of both black and white history, the mutilation and dispossession of the black body have become what Morrison calls "the unspeakable." In the novel, Sethe's own mutilation repeats her mother's disfiguration through slavery. Thus, the "chokecherry tree" functions as a form of memory, which, in the words of Bhabha, constitutes an "anteriority—a before that has no a priori(ty)—whose causality is effective because it returns to displace the present, to make it disjunctive" (177). In other words, the oxymoron is of a literal metaphor: the physically inscribed "chokecherry tree" connects Sethe to her mother whom she had disremembered in the present because the memory was unbearable.[12] Textually the loss of the body figures as the loss of the signifier so that the "chokecherry tree" connotes both the absence of metaphor as identity, that is, the body, and the need for a performative and "cleansing" act of metaphorization that marks this absence as difference.

Based on a narrative polylogue among a specific social and cultural community, the metaphor of the "chokecherry tree" can simultaneously operate as a divested and performative metaphor. The various narrative perspectives on the "chokecherry tree" help to dissolve the binary division of metaphor by multiplying preinscribed signifiers, such as tree or body, and thereby making space for alternative discourses of those signifiers. In that respect, Morrison's metaphor functions as a configuration of a postcolonial rhetoric of intervention because the divested metaphor participates in the process of reinscribing different social and cultural values and is grounded in a specific history.

The performative aspects of metaphorization in Morrison's texts are further emphasized through the production of sound

or verbal images so that the reader interacts with the text, similar to the oral tradition of communal storytelling. In an interview with Charles Ruas, Morrison explains the performative aspects of her writing:

> I want to break away from certain assumptions that are inherent in the conception of the novel form to make a truly aural novel, in which there are so many places and spaces for the reader to work and participate. . . . I don't want to close it [the novel], to stop the imagination of the reader, but to engage it in such a way that he fulfils the book in a way that I don't. I try to provide every opportunity for that kind of stimulation, so that the narrative is only part of what happens. . . . I would like to . . . try to put the reader into the position of being naked and quite vulnerable . . . in order to engage him in the novel. (108-09)

To write a novel in this performative mode also means to create a visual archive of mental images. Metaphors are not only cognitive principles of organizing thought, but also generate and reproduce internalized stereotypes and common-sense images. In reverse, metaphors can then be used to formulate a counter-discourse. As such, the metaphor of the "chokecherry tree" produces cultural difference and intervenes in the chain of stereotypical representation. In postcolonial theory, however, the productive use of metaphor has been widely ignored or overlooked for obvious reasons. Bhabha, for instance, avoids the precarious subject of metaphor by means of a dialectical move sublimating metaphor and metonymy into the more general "image." While simultaneously conceiving the properties of metaphor in structuralist terms (that is, as transferring and displacing identity), Bhabha does not question the defining categories of metaphor themselves. Referring to the image of identity, he remarks that

> the image . . . marks the site of an ambivalence. Its representation is always spatially split—it makes *present* something that is *absent*—and temporally deferred: it is the representation of a time that is always elsewhere, a repetition. . . . The image is at once a metaphoric substitution, an illusion of presence, and by that same token a metonym, a sign of its absence and loss. (51)

Although Bhabha, given his poststructuralist signature, conceives of the image as a sign that is always already inscribed by

doubleness or ambivalence, his notion of the image ultimately perpetuates the Jakobsonian binary of metonymy and metaphor with their respective properties of displacement and substitution. It is possible to argue, however, that the representation of the image is not only set in displaced time but that repetition, as a performative act, is itself a functional constituent of metaphor. To argue that metaphor generates and demarcates cultural difference depends on what theoretical properties of metaphor are emphasized. If naming by means of repetition and difference as a prerequistion of resemblance delineates the focus on a theory of metaphor within postcolonial discourse, metaphor begins to function as a site of postcolonial intervention.

To consider repetition as a communal polylogue that is prompted by a shared but different experience of various characters, as the narrative operating modes of the "chokecherry tree" suggest, makes repetition comprehensible as both the performance of what the metaphor names and of productive conflict. Maintaining a (post)structuralist notion of the image as "metaphoric substitution" also implies that an image is merely the symptom of a displaced cause. But as I have argued, Morrison's metaphor can be read as the cause or the naming of what it refers to. Strategically considering metaphor as cause, instead of a symptom, also corresponds to the severe criticism Benita Parry expresses in respect to Bhabha's theory. In his theoretical approach, she argues, "no input of social tension and contradiction [is] required to render enunciation indeterminate" (11). To suggest a concept of metaphor in the context of postcolonial theory then should not only rely on interaction and allow for conflict and tension to be generated but must also consider the cultural and historical particularities in which a metaphor occurs.

Despite Bhabha's ambiguous stance towards the narrative and political merits of metaphor, his notion of a narrative and national double-space and time provides a further theoretical device for a rethinking of metaphor. In "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," he argues that in contrast to the pedagogical discourse of the state, which perceives people as objects, "the performative intervenes in the

sovereignty of the nation's *self-generation* . . . the performative introduces a temporality of the 'in-between' through the 'gap' or 'emptiness' of the signifier that punctuates linguistic difference" (299). By simultaneously moving in dislocated time and precisely by performing the "emptiness of the signifier," metaphor functions as a "residual and emerging practice" (299) of cultural pressure and difference. As a palimpsest of memory, metaphor unfolds its transgressive properties in the double-space of the pedagogical (that is, the imposed cultural inscription of the signifier) and the performative. In the context of Morrison's novel, however, the pedagogical—the divesting aspects of metaphor—and the performative acts of repetition and naming cannot be as easily divided since both function simultaneously. The remainder of this essay attempts a reading of the "chokecherry tree" which outlines the metaphor's operations of inscribing, divesting, and performing its own various referential fields.

The image of the "tree" introduces a power discourse that constructs blackness as racial and cultural essence and inferiority (as I have noted earlier). On the one hand, the "tree" indicates the burden and physical mark Sethe has to bear. Although the reader does not yet know that the "tree" is a scar of slavery, as a sign of physical mutilation the tree recalls the lynching of black people, particularly the lynching of Sethe's mother. On the other hand, the image of the "tree" denotes a genealogical metaphor that has been historically inscribed by Western literature, science, and philosophy. In this respect, the image of the "tree" reflects an ideological pattern of exclusive and patriarchal values, which are constituted and safeguarded in the image of the family-tree. Based on the notion of originality, purity, and blood, family genealogies have been traditionally constructed as a cohesive and linear unity of white and male descent. Apart from its connotation of family lineage, the tree depicts the Christian genesis metaphor which Charles Darwin used and transformed into the "Tree of Life" in order to formulate his theory of natural selection. The paradigm of Darwin's theory, however, gave rise to the empirical sciences and in particular to pseudo-scientific race ideologies.

In the context of the novel, those ideologies gain specific significance in the character of "Schoolteacher," the new planta-

tion overseer. After the death of the "liberal" slave-owner Garner, Schoolteacher not only runs the plantation "Sweet Home" with brutal violence but also dehumanizes the slaves by abusing them as a living proof for his pseudo-anthropological research. The slaves of "Sweet Home" are subdued to complete visibility and therefore control. Their bodies, and most specifically Sethe's pregnant body, become the site of dispossession. The symbolical loss of Sethe's body through torture and the theft of her "mother-milk" denotes the loss of subjectivity and, therefore in narrative terms, the absence of metaphor as identity. In fact, the experience of slavery is literally inscribed on her body through the scars she retains from Schoolteacher's torture. By means of a pseudo-empirical objectivity, Schoolteacher legitimates his racist ideology of white supremacy, so that for him the debasement of the black slaves to an animal-like state becomes a necessary precondition for the construction of his own humanity and self-image. Thus, the dominant inscription of the metaphor "tree" comes to convey pure family lineage and pseudo-race sciences. The "tree" implies the two basic concepts by which black women were ideologically constructed by means of a binary codification of "true white womanhood"[13] and the "black female breeder." To maintain power, the plantocracy depended on the glorification of white motherhood, which in turn depended on the violation of black motherhood.

As a mythological metaphor, the "tree" also connects the underworld and heaven. It depicts the path along which the spirits of the invisible world return to and take leave from the world. This connects Sethe to her dead daughter Beloved and hints at the possessive and desperate relationship between the two. Thus, the "tree" and the "haint" are thematically linked. The "haint" refers both to the haunting spirit in the house and to the cause of the ghost's presence. The latter can be explained etymologically since "haint" designates, first, hatred, a mean wretch; second, a fenced, enclosed area that is saved from consumption; and, third, a contraction of have not. The "baby's venom" (3), which haunts Sethe's house, therefore embodies a site of disremembering because it is fenced off from Sethe's memory. In other words, the gap between the "tree" and the "haint" signifies that Sethe is

caught in the dilemma of needing to forget and to remember. She seems psychologically paralysed, and subsequently haunted by the pain and the guilt of the past which makes it necessary for her "to keep the past at bay" (42). To disremember constitutes the "have not," that is to say, a minus in her memory, which again has shaped her psychological make-up and is compensated for by the intense relationship to her shy and overprotected daughter Denver. Placed in a spiritual context, the ambivalent significations of "tree" are increased as they participate in both the repression of the unconscious and the overspill of a past that cannot be contained. In this respect the metaphor of the "tree" elucidates a point of entanglement in Sethe's specific history to which she needs to return.

Due to his different relationship to trees, Paul D, like Sethe, a fugitive slave from "Sweet Home," takes Sethe's riddle—the "haint" and "the chokecherry tree"—in a rather literal sense. By asking her, "What tree on your back? Is something growing on your back? I don't see nothing growing on your back" (15), he creates an ironical distance between the metaphorically laden image of the tree and its literal meaning. At this point the metaphor of the "tree" inaugurates Bhabha's "interpersonal reality" as a form of "held back" yet "historically framed" interpretation of the image. When Sethe answers, "[i]t's there all the same" (15), she clarifies that invisibility or absence determines the present state of existence to a large extent. But more than that, her answer signifies the "social reality" of gender difference in slavery. The history of black women and their sexual dispossession by white men during slavery continued to be the "unspeakable unspoken" (Morrison) shame that remained historically silenced even after the abolition of slavery. The atrocities of slavery, however, need to be articulated in a form of obscurity. Morrison's novel conveys this obscurity in the form of a metaphor or palimpsest of memory that is inscribed on Sethe's back yet not directly accessible to her.

The opposition of the "tree" and the "haint" metaphor as well as Paul D's question alienates the signifier from the imperially inscribed signified of the "tree." This disrupts the interaction between the vehicle and the tenor of the metaphor. As I have

explained earlier, by modifying the relation between these two constituitive elements of metaphor, different sets of meaning can be produced. When Sethe specifies that the tree on her back is a chokecherry tree, she also articulates the alienation between the signifier and the signified as well as the relationship between literalizing and metaphorizing. The "chokecherry tree" is divested of its former colonial and hegemonic inscriptions while simultaneously those inscriptions have been literally turned into the physical mark of slavery on Sethe's body. But, as a literal materialization of slavery, "the chokecherry tree" must undergo a further metaphorization through the multiple readings of the novel's characters. In this way, Morrison's text uses metaphor as an enabling narrative strategy for postcolonial intervention. Now, metaphor no longer inscribes the past as an unchangeable truth but rewrites it as a polyvocal and perfomative narrative. Metaphor, the body, the process of writing and reading become an instance of simultaneity emphasized by the impending narrative repetition of the "chokecherry tree." Morrison's metaphor, therefore, forms what Rey Chow calls "a coeval, co-temporal structure of representation at moments of cultural crisis" (43).

Paradoxically enough, the metaphorical description of her lashed and bleeding back was given to Sethe by the white girl Amy. Running from slavery and bordering on death while being in an advanced pregnancy, Sethe had reached a point of utter existential crisis which she survived only through Amy who also helped her to give birth to Denver. Sethe recalls Amy's interpretation of her ripped-open body, when she tells Paul D:

> Whitegirl. That's what she called it. I've never seen it and never will. But that's what she said it looked like. A chokecherry tree. Trunk, branches, and even leaves. Tiny little chokecherry leaves. But that was eighteen years ago. Could have cherries too now for all I know. (16)

At first, this description strikes the reader as a euphemism and a distorted representation generated through the eyes of a white woman. In fact, the image engages in the discourse of representation, but it does so in a highly ambivalent way. Through the violent signature of slavery, Sethe is deprived of self-definition and self-representation. Her body consequently provides the matrix of representational projection. But if Sethe's struggle for

motherhood is considered as an act of resistance, courage, and determination, then she still maintains subjective agency.[14] The image of the "chokecherry tree" translates this ambiguity into the text.

In *Beloved*, subjectivity turns out to be a fragmentary, though shared, reading performance. The novel inaugurates a simultaneous process of divesting and performing the physical inscription on Sethe's back through the repeated but different readings of the "chokecherry tree" by Sethe, Amy, Baby Suggs, and Paul D but not by Denver and Beloved. Being trapped in guilt and longing for a forgiveness which she is not able to accept, Sethe's interpretation of the "chokecherry tree," set in the narrative present tense, implies a detachment from her body and to a certain extent a fatalistic surrender to this physical inscription of a collective and yet individual history on her back. According to her, the "tree" could "have cherries too now for all [she] know[s]" (16). Because Beloved and Denver were not present at the time of Sethe's escape, they have to rely on the story as Sethe remembers it. Amy's description of Sethe's mutilated back may therefore not be reliable because the real event is "something only Sethe knew because she alone had the mind for it and the time afterward to shape it" (78). The "chokecherry tree" then cannot be regarded as a purely heteronomous representation projected by a white girl but rather as a rearticulated and constantly retold version of history which retrospectively—though only partially—returns historical agency to the former victim. Accordingly, Amy's description of the "chokecherry tree" is introduced by a sudden shift of the narrator's perspective into Sethe's interior voice by whose recollections Amy is characterized as an Ariel-like creature, half-slave, half-master, mediator or traitor, full of tales and songs, and, in a strangely care-free manner, filled with her own struggle for independence.

Despite their differences, both women create their own story of survival and healing. Thus Amy is able to recognize Sethe's tortures and paints the verbal image of the "chokecherry tree" that encodes an otherwise unbearable past and present condition at a moment when both must forget in order to survive. Since this narrative passage resembles the fragmented structure

of a dream and is also told from Amy's "dreamwalker's" (79) perspective, Amy herself has turned into a residual image or palimpsest of memory in the course of Sethe's mediation. Now, the "chokecherry tree" may be read as an encoded and condensed metaphor that provides access to Sethe's psyche and to the text. From this perspective, Amy is able to represent or even name Sethe's history, since she does so in a literally healing[15] manner without equating her own suffering to Sethe's. She tells her,

> It's a tree, Lu. A chokecherry tree. See, here's the trunk—it's red and split wide open, full of sap, and this here's the parting for the branches. You got a mighty lot of branches. Leaves, too, look like, and dern if these ain't blossoms. Tiny little cherry blossoms, just as white. Your back got a whole tree on it. In bloom. What God have in mind, I wonder. I had me some whippings, but I don't remember nothing like this. (79)

The painful physical language Amy employs to project the image brings vividly to mind the atrocities of female enslavement, the dispossession of the female body and its sexual exploitation.[16] In contrast, the image of flowing sap and blossoming flowers implies birth and life-maintaining forces rather than surrender to the pain. But the trunk is split, signifying the doubling and divesting process of the metaphor. Simultaneously, Amy's metaphor encompasses a performative act in so far as the connotations of birth name the literal birth of Denver for which Amy acts as a midwife. Birth, in both the literal sense and that of becoming conscious of the past, may therefore be an act that cannot be achieved by one person alone or by assuming a solid and cohesive subjectivity. In this context, giving birth is achieved collectively by two women and involves the recognition of the historical and psychological fragmentation of subjectivity.

The horrible beauty of language, which characterizes the image of the "chokecherry tree," also recalls Sethe's bewilderment upon remembering the natural environment of "Sweet Home":

> [S]uddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes, and although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty. . . . Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world. It shamed her—remembering the wonderful soughing trees

> rather than the boys. Try as she might to make it otherwise, the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forgive her memory for that. (6)

Again, by delineating a delusory landscape of serenity and peacefulness, the trees as metaphorical images display their palimpsestic inscription of metaphor and memory. They refer to both Sethe's feeling of guilt at having disremembered the past. Embodied in the beauty of the sycamores and in the ubiquity and inescapability of the past, the trees, in this scene, actually signify gallows.

Sethe's memories seem to be caught in the uncanny play of the familiar and unfamiliar, that is, in the memory of landscape. According to Freud the "uncanny" conveys the familiar which has become alienated through the process of repression but recurs via the compulsion of repetition. The uncanny features in Sethe's double perception of the landscape,[17] which opens up the path to her unconscious and thus relates the terrible memory of both the trees of the landscape and the scars of slavery to the discourse of terror and the Sublime.[18]

Opposed to the imperial Sublime, the actual terror of the "slave sublime" results from the familiarity of a landscape scattered with dead bodies hanging from trees. This memory can neither be erased nor harmonized. But the tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar constitutes a site of conflict which disrupts the notion of the Sublime. Apart from that, Morrison's text draws a different landscape. Here nature is peopled and trees in particular have anthropomorphic faculties. Both the metaphorical double inscription of trees and the literalization of the aestheticizing terror of the Sublime through the material reality of lynching divest dominant metaphors of the Sublime, such as towering and dark trees, and expose their hitherto acknowledged inscriptions of hegemonic aesthetics of "high culture" that constructed a white, imperial identity. Uncannily, the divesting character of the tree metaphors in Morrison's novel reveal how much the construction of an imperial aesthetics depended on its underlying text of blackness. In retrospective, the literalization of the Sublime makes evident that the terrors and crimes of slavery could be effectively sublimated into an

almost erotic frisson induced by the aesthetic terror of the Sublime and experienced by the metropolitan art spectator. Simultaneously, the underlying black text, that is, the black experience of slavery, could be erased from the dominant historiographies of the times.

Further performances and divesting readings of Morrison's metaphor occur in Baby Suggs's adoption of the metaphor of the "chokecherry tree," and in the story of Paul D's odyssey reappropriates nature as a site of cultural difference. In another flashback within the narrative, Sethe is nursed back to life by Baby Suggs, who, upon seeing Sethe's back, "frowned and looked at her daughter-in-law bending toward the baby. Roses of blood blossomed in the blanket covering Sethe's shoulders. Baby Suggs hid her mouth with her hand. . . . wordlessly the older woman greased the flowering back" (93). Although this passage adopts Amy's reading of Sethe's mutilation, Baby Suggs herself does not reinterpret it. Instead, she acts and heals. This, however, is neither a "ritual" (Henderson 69) nor does it symbolize that black women are exclusively the discursive subject of others because they themselves "have no voice" (69), as Mae G. Henderson suggests.

On the contrary, keeping in mind that Baby Suggs is the only legally freed slave in the text, she is a preacher with a powerful voice within the black community. She acts as the keeper of an oral tradition and, most important, as a keeper of the body. Thus assuming that "the chokecherry tree" is not a fixed and exclusively imposed representation, Baby Suggs's adaptation of the image might also suggest a refusal to be victimized. Above all, however, it signifies that the operative modes of the "chokecherry tree" metaphor are located on the border between writing and speech as the multiple and different readings of the metaphor signify. In the clearing, Baby Suggs preaches the need to love and touch the body in order to restore it to one's own sense of self, which indicates why Sethe's mutilation is shaped as an image of nature. The metaphor bears witness to the fact that, in the context of slavery, nature and trees were not only protective but also spiritual sites with self-reliant and healing powers. In her essay "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Pres-

ence in American Literature," Morrison remarks that to her "trees have always seemed feminine" (225). Baby Suggs may then be seen as what Morrison elsewhere calls a "gathering wom[a]n," a "wom[a]n who know[s] medicine and roots, [a] root-worker" ("Out of Sequence" 81). So the "chokecherry tree" negotiates a concept of black femininity that cannot be easily subsumed under the assumption that black women are totally deprived of their voices.

The difference of black gender conceptions is also present in the character of Paul D. His relationship with women is defined by their common experience of slavery rather than by a binary opposition of male versus female. The blurring of gender boundaries results from an incommensurable process of emasculation due to slavery but also harbours the possibility of mutual emancipation. However, after Paul D sleeps with Sethe, he transfers his inner fears and efforts to keep the past in the "tobacco tin lodged in his chest" (113) into a rejection of Sethe's body. What he had first perceived as "the decorative work of an ironsmith" (17) is now something "he could definitely live without" (21). Sethe's "chokecherry tree," which, in his own life, translates into the "ironmaze" (21) of slavery, brings back shame and humiliation. He tries to throw back Sethe's image into the literary and psychological quarry, and wants to put his story *instead* of hers when he observes that

> the wrought-iron maze . . . was in fact a revolting clump of scars. Not a tree, as she said. Maybe shaped like one, but nothing like any tree he knew because trees were inviting; things you could trust and be near; talk to if you wanted to as he frequently did since way back when he took the midday meal in the fields of Sweet Home. (21)

Paul D's metaphor of the "wrought-iron maze" expresses his own experiences of slavery and denies the narrative undecidedness inherent in the metaphor of "the chokecherry tree." At this stage of the novel, Paul D's own repressed and guarded history leads him to look for an unequivocal and empirical reading of Sethe's back which, in turn, perpetuates his and Sethe's lack of agency. Had he realized the correspondence between his own positive vision of trees and the metaphor of "the chokecherry tree," he could have "rememoried" the past towards a necessary, though temporary, forgetting.

Paul D calls the tree at Sweet Home, which is also a secret meeting place for the other slaves, "Brother" (21). It is precisely this account of "Brother" which best delineates Paul D's relationship with Sethe. Neither Sethe nor Paul D has yet come to terms with the past, the fear of loss, and the stifling inner and outer violence that condition their lives. Only by exploring their own separate lives and by always holding in reserve the life they share can they create a future. This process of self-apprehension depends on their interaction with their human environment, which invokes a process of repetition.

At the close of the novel, the metaphor of the "chokecherry tree" excavates more submerged fragments of Paul D's memories as the "chokecherry tree" is implicitly repeated in two related images. These two images move beyond the previous extrapolation of the metaphor's semantic field "choker," which reflects Paul D's torment, being chained and gagged after his unsuccessful escape from slavery. During the narrative's climax, Denver's, Beloved's and Sethe's voices negotiate their historically and individually linked histories, while Paul D does not participate since he can neither transform his own memories nor acknowledge that his sexual relation to Beloved is also part of his closeness to Sethe. Paul D finds himself moved out of Bluestone Road and "his tobacco tin, blown open, spilled contents that floated free and made him their play and prey" (218). Finally, he is confronted with making a decision. He becomes aware of the psychological deprivation caused by slavery which held him tightly in the grip of the past. Beyond the deprivation, he also recognizes a different aspect of his heritage embodied in the memory of the aspen and blossoms:

> Loving small and in secret. His little love was a tree, of course, but not like Brother—old, wide and beckoning. In Alfred, Georgia, there was an aspen too young to call sapling. Just a shoot, no taller than his waist. The kind of thing a man would cut to whip his horse. Song-murder and the aspen. He stayed alive to sing songs that murdered life, and watched an aspen that confirmed it, and never for a minute did he believe he could escape. Until it rained. Afterward, after the Cherokee pointed and sent him running toward blossoms, he wanted simply to move, go, pick up one day and be somewhere else the next. Resigned to life without aunts, cousins, children. Even a woman, until Sethe. (221)

By running towards the "blossoms,"[19] Paul D was unconsciously running towards Sethe's "chokecherry tree," from slavery, and his own past. He learns that his experience of emasculation has its counterpart in Sethe's dispossession of womanhood. From a black perspective, gender relations after slavery can no longer be understood in purely psychological terms. Signified by the related yet different metaphors of the "chokecherry tree" and "the blossoms," Paul D and Sethe can recognize each other as soul-mates, embedded in a sociopolitical and cultural community. This, once again, redefines the relations among nature, women, men and love.

Paul D remembers and now understands the closeness between Sixo and the Thirty-Mile Woman, whom Sixo describes as "a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order. It's good, you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind" (272-73). Sethe and Paul D decide to accommodate the past, to share it, and reconnect themselves in order to envisage a future. They are now able to relate their different lives on grounds of a common history and thereby relocate their gender position. Paul D can finally connect Sethe's "chokecherry tree" to his association of it as an "iron-maze":

> [H]e is thinking about her wrought-iron back. . . . Her tenderness about his neck jewelry—its three wands, like attentive baby rattlers, curving two feet into the air. How she never mentioned or looked at it, so he did not have to feel the shame of being collared like a beast. Only this woman Sethe could have left him his manhood like that. (273)

To "put his story *next* to hers" (273; emphasis added), Paul D has to go beyond the self-destructive, internalized violence implied by the aspen. Respectively, Sethe needs to come to terms with her self-annihilating notion of motherhood. Both Sethe and Paul D have to perform and rearticulate the signs inscribed on their bodies. Only then can they interrupt the vicious circle of violence that determines those permanent "nervous conditions" (17)[20] under which the slave/native lives.

Repetitions and reinscriptions of "the chokecherry tree" are prompted by the different but contiguous historical perspectives

and psychological locations of the characters; the metaphor is both a structuring device of the novel and an intervening force in previously established rhetorical and social discourses of power and displacement. Toni Morrison's use of metaphor suggests a radical experimentation with the concept of metaphor at large and with the possibilities of rearticulating metaphor through memory in a specifically postcolonial context. The operative modes of the "chokecherry tree," namely its performative and divesting faculties, suggest a rethinking of the familar or, as Morrison says, of the "ordinary," analytical categories of literary criticism in the context of a historically and culturally specific postcolonial rhetoric of intervention and difference. The "chokecherry tree" operates from and within transgressive textual and cultural spaces, paving a path to (rememory) the past and the future. In this respect, it may have already answered the question asked in Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, "When would I enter that light beyond metaphor?" (271).

NOTES

[1] In structuralist terms, the notion and function of metaphor—to produce a cohesive identity—refers to Roman Jakobson's essay "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances." For a discussion of metaphor as a production site of metaphysical truth through its various binary coinages in Western philosophy see Jacques Derrida's essay "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy."

[2] Interestingly enough, "choke," used as noun, compound-noun and verb, forms a polysemantic field which also includes the word "choker." "Choke" (noun and verb) does not only mean to suffocate, strangle, or kill by choking, but also refers to a temporary and partial action which deprives the victim of breath, voice, speech, or laughter. A "choke" also describes a condition of constriction that entirely obstructs movement. Additionally, it signifies something that cannot be swallowed but has become unbearable or, in Morrison's term, unspeakable. The "choker" then explicitly designates the gag, an instrument of torture, that has been used to silence and punish fugitive slaves.

[3] In this context, the chokecherry tree symbolically functions as an instance of what Bhabha calls "colonial mimicry" (86). Although mimicry also works on the basis of repetition, its effect is that of an intentional mimesis with a "difference" rather than a performative act. Furthermore, mimicry as Bhabha understands it does not refer to metaphor. On the contrary, Bhabha exclusively relates mimicry to metonomy (90) in spite of its faculties of resemblance, which depicts the classical term for the Aristotelian definition of metaphor. See also Bhabha's essay "Representation and the Colonial Text: A Critical Exploration of Some Forms of Mimeticism."

[4] For a discussion of the palimpsestic structure of metaphor, see Gérard Genette's essay "Proust Palimpsest."

[5] See Derrida's essay "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy."

[6] The process of naming is closely related to the process of metaphorization. A more comprehensive analysis of naming in Morrison's novel would require another essay. Important aspects of this debate can be found in the works of Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Derek Walcott, and Edouard Glissant.

[7] My notion of a divested metaphor borrows from Gayatri Spivak's theory of postcolonial catachreses. While Spivak employs the term catachresis in relation to political concept-metaphors, I examine how the catachresistic excess of metaphor (that is, a divested metaphor) becomes a narrative and interventive means in Morrison's novel. For Spivak's discussion of catachresis, see chapter 3 in her *Outside In The Teaching Machine.*

[8] Both "rememory" and "future remembering" happen in what Glissant calls a "transferred space" (144). Not only is the movement of transference a classical property of metaphor but Glissant himself locates this movement in language. His project of "creolization" seems to converge with Morrison's text for both shape language, as Glissant puts it, "at the edge of writing and speech" (147), searching for a synthesis of the lost collective and individual voice. Metaphor, I suggest, may be one of the bridges.

[9] Since I do not use "metaphor" in its structuralist sense (that is, as a figurative trope producing identity) but employ it in the context of postcolonial literary criticism, my use of the terms "image" and "metaphor" are closely related. I would argue that an image has functions similar to those of metaphor; the structural constitution of both may often vary according to the cultural contexts in which they occur.

[10] In contrast to Lacan's interpretation of the function of metaphor, Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire regard metaphor as a constitutive of the unconscious and locate it in the realm of the preconscious. Although they consider metaphor to be "at the root of the creation of new meaning" (156), they do not go beyond the Lacanian assumption that metaphor works as a "substitution of signifiers" (156). Luce Irigaray critically evaluates the Lacanian concept of metaphor in the context of gender construction. She considers the use of metaphor as a male strategy for female representation and containment. Metonomy corresponds to forms of female resistance and self-determination. In general, her interpretation does not question the structural substance of metaphor. However, she hints at a possible reappropriation of metaphor which presupposes a thorough philosophical and political rereading of its previous inscriptions: "and for her [the woman], metaphor will continue to work as violation and separation, except if, empty of all meaning that is already *appropriated*, she keeps open the indefinite possibilities of her jouissance" (231).

[11] In the context of the novel, repetitions are not monotonous reiterations of the same event placed in historical emptiness. The repetition of the "chokecherry tree" signifies the repetition of a shared experience, set in a double space and time of the narrative, and reshaped by the different perceptions and experiences of the characters in the novel.

[12] Sethe's mother carried a circle with a cross under her breast which marked her as a disowned slave (that is, disowned of her children and her body). When Sethe was still a child, her mother pointed the mark out to her as a sign of recognition, though later when her mother was lynched, it is impossible for Sethe to recognize the disfigured body of her mother. Apart from her mother, Sethe's daughter Beloved carries a scar around her neck. This scar, caused by Sethe in order to save her from slavery, does more than repeat Sethe's loss of mother and family. Just as Paul D's "neck jewelry" (273) testifies, the scar also indicates the marks left by iron chains on those who went through the traumatic deracination and displacement of the Middle Passage, and subsequent slavery.

13 Hazel V. Carby provides an insightful study of the polarized construction of black and white womanhood during slavery.

14 This links *Beloved* to Harriet Jacobs's autobiography *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). Carby points out that "if a slave woman attempted to preserve her sexual autonomy, the economic system of slavery was threatened: 'It was deemed a crime in her to wish to be virtuous' [Jacobs]" (55). Therefore, asserting one's motherhood and seizing a public voice by publishing novels and autobiographies not only reject imposed gender definitions but also presents forms of self-definition as well as "shape the social conditions they [black women] enter" (95).

15 "Sethe felt the fingers of those good hands lightly touch her back" (79).

16 Sethe must trade her body to get a headstone for Beloved: "the one she selected to lean against on tiptoe, her knees wide open as any grave" (5).

17 Glissant argues that in the context of the history of the Caribbean or slavery landscape "retains the memory of time past. Its space is open or closed to its meaning" (150).

18 For a recent dramatization of the slave sublime, see David Dabydeen's long poem on Turner. For a detailed discussion of the ambiguities of the Sublime in the discourse of modernity, postmodernism, and postcolonial theory, see the works of Edmund Burke, Jean-François Lyotard, Sara Suleri, David Spurr, and Tobias Doering. Two relevant points of conjunction, however, are what Dabydeen calls an "exploration of the erotic energies of the colonial experience" (10), projecting pornographical and psychological drives of the Imperial enterprise, and, I would argue, the transformative use of figurative language, claiming its own postcolonial rhetoric of intervention. At this point one might critically recall Lyotard's remark that in the idea of the Sublime "the art object no longer bends itself to models but tries to present the fact that there is an unpresentable; it no longer imitates nature, but is, in Burke, the actualization of a figure potentially there in language" (206). But in the context of postcolonial theory and with regard to Morrison's novel, this potential figure in language must be reclaimed or "rememoried" since this figure does not work outside of history. On the contrary, it depicts what was submerged by the Sublime. The novel reclaims its own rhetoric through a network of tree metaphors, investing in the code of the Sublime but simultaneously disclosing its elements of terror and representation. In analogy to Lyotard's notion of the avant-garde, then, a chief property of metaphor seems to be "to make seen what makes one see, and not what is visible"(207).

19 The "blossoms" also link slavery to the genocide of America's Native people as the other barbarous and forgotten part of American history.

20 See Jean Paul Sartre's foreword to Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth.*

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