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“Hurt right down the middle, but alive and well”: African-American Gothic Elements in Toni Morrison’s *Home*

“Hurt right down the middle, but alive and well”: Elementos do Gótico Afroamericano em *Home* de Toni Morrison

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ABSTRACT: *Toni Morrison’s* Home *presents the story of two siblings who return to their hometown of Lotus, Georgia, after facing several traumatic episodes throughout their lives. This article aims to observe and analyze the Gothic elements presented in the novel—particularly those related to Ycidra’s trajectory. Those elements are discussed especially in their relation to the Gothic subgenre that Maisha Wester calls African-American Gothic. Methodological procedures include a brief overview of the African-American Gothic and an analysis and discussion of Gothic themes in* Home*. The results show that Morrison employs and subverts some Anglo-American Gothic topoi in order to contest and critique the identities imposed upon black people by white Gothic writers, thus offering an important revision of the genre.*

KEYWORDS: gothic Studies; African-American gothic; Toni Morrison; postcolonial Trauma

RESUMO: Home*, de Toni Morrison, apresenta a história de dois irmãos que retornam a sua cidade natal de Lotus, na Geórgia, depois de terem passado por diversos episódios traumáticos ao longo de suas vidas. Este artigo busca observar e analisar os elementos góticos presentes no livro—particularmente aqueles relacionados à história de Ycidra. Esses elementos são discutidos especialmente em sua relação com o subgênero do gótico que Maisha Wester chama de Gótico Afroamericano. A metodologia envolve uma breve apresentação do Gótico Afroamericano e a análise e discussão acerca dos temas góticos presentes em* Home*. Os resultados indicam que Morrison utiliza e subverte alguns tropos do gótico Angloamericano a fim de contestar e criticar as identidades impostas às pessoas negras por escritores góticos brancos, assim oferecendo uma importante revisão do gênero.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Estudos do gótico; gótico Afroamericano; Toni Morrison; trauma Pós colonial

Home is Toni Morrison’s tenth novel, published in 2012, and it tells the story of the Money siblings Frank and Ycidra. Dreading life in the small town of Lotus, Georgia, the two characters find different ways of leaving the place and making new lives for themselves.

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Nevertheless, years after they have separately departed their hometown, Frank is ominously urged to return. In Seattle, he receives a note that reads "Come fast. She be dead if you tarry" (MORRISON, 2012, p. 8), and he immediately knows that the "she" in the letter refers to his younger sister Cee. Meanwhile, Ycidra has taken a job in the house of a white doctor named Beauregard Scott in Buckhead, just outside Atlanta.

At first, the girl admires the doctor, believing that she has landed on a great opportunity working for him. Nevertheless, the reader is quickly encompassed by the sensation that something ominous and disturbing will take place in that house. One of the first indications is the job opportunity itself, as Scott is specifically looking for an unmarried woman to be his "helper". The second one is connected to the existence of fascist and white supremacist books in the doctor's library. The sinister hypothesis which the reader is likely to be formulating is soon confirmed as they find that Scott is conducting medical experiments on Cee, leaving her sick and weak. When Frank arrives to rescue his sister, the man finds her unconscious, cold to the touch, and extremely ill.

With the help of the governess who has sent him the warning note, Frank is able to get his sister out of the house and take her back to Lotus, where the women in the community take charge of Ycidra's recovery. Eventually, the girl is nursed back to health, but she cannot have a baby due to the experiments which were conducted on her body. Cee also tells Frank that she keeps seeing a ghost around their house, and that she knows it is the child who should belong to her. Thus, we could say that the novel presents quite a few Gothic elements—but it is important to observe their particularities here.

In *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison (1993) comments on how haunted the founding American literature is. She identifies in the early American works the fear of being outcast, of powerlessness, of failing, the fear of loneliness, the fear of the absence of the so-called civilization, "in short, the terror of human freedom" (MORRISON, 1993, p. 37). In her analysis, these themes and anxieties were greatly explored through the romance formula; and the romance genre presents a tendency to tackle the subject of "darkness". As she observes, the existence of a slave population, of the "conveniently bound and violently silenced black bodies" (MORRISON, 1993, p. 38), facilitated the white American meditations on terror and freedom. In the words of the scholar,

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

> internal fears and to rationalize external exploitation was an American Africanism—a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire that is uniquely American. (MORRISON, 1993, p. 38)

Morrison (1993, p. 39) also notes that there was a conscious effort for the construction of the American as a new white man, and that this effort pervaded literature, considering that "cultural identities are formed and informed by a nation's literature". In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha (1994) examines how one people creates its sense of identity and belonging. He highlights how the idea of "many as one" is present in literature and in literary criticism, which has once valued the strength and impact of the image of a nation and of routine metaphors that relate to a national identity and life in many works of fiction. According to Edward Said (1994, p. 12), "the processes of imperialism occurred beyond the level of economic laws and political decisions", also manifesting at the level of national culture, "by the authority of recognizable cultural formations, by continuing consolidation within education, literature, and the visual and musical arts". Bhabha (1998) states that the construction of a national image results from a narrative effort. This means that the idea of a hegemonic nationality is culturally and discursively constructed. Thus, the deliberateness of the formulation of the American as a new white man involved the necessity for establishing difference. The writers of the period looked not only to Europe in order to establish such difference, but also to the native and slave population. Thus, "writers were able to celebrate or deplore an identity already existing or rapidly taking a form that was elaborated through racial difference" (MORRISON, 1993, p. 39).

Maisha Wester (2012, p. 2) comments on the Gothic as a "series of tropes and themes used to meditate upon a culture's various anxieties, particularly through discourses of Otherness". The scholar also notes that the Gothic is mutable, and that it shifts to accommodate ideals and questions of its culture. Even its Other is rarely singular and never stable, as "the Gothic Other typically condenses various cultural and national threats" (WESTER, 2012, p. 2). As she observes, one of the aspects that makes the Gothic so haunting and pervasive is the possibility that it presents for containing and condensing an apparent infinitude of discourses and threats, such as biological, cultural and national ones (WESTER, 2012).

Wester (2012) also notes that there is a tendency in the United States to repress and exclude counter narratives from its dominant narrative. As she notes, the Gothic is found precisely in the moments when "the narrative fails to cohere and the (voice of the) Other

threatens to break through" (WESTER, 2012, p. 4), thus disrupting the American logocentric history and revealing repressions and breaks.

Considering these contexts, Wester (2012, p. 2) observes that the African-American Gothic goes beyond "inverting the color scheme of the Gothic trope—blackened evil that torments and is defeated by good whiteness—to destabilizing the entire notion of categories and boundaries". According to the scholar, African American writers revisit the genre, critiquing and questioning the identities which white Gothic writers have imposed upon them, and thus reveal the "archetypal depictions of racial, sexual, and gendered others as constructions useful in the production of white patriarchal dominance" (WESTER, 2012, p. 2).

This article aims to identify and analyze Gothic elements in *Home*—especially those connected to Ycidra's tale. It also seeks to discuss how these elements are particularly linked to the Gothic subgenre that Wester (2012) has called African-American Gothic, as the novel presents a subversion of traditional white Gothic topoi and archetypes. Methodological procedures include two steps: first, a brief overview of the African-American Gothic theory is presented. Then, *Home* is analyzed and discussed in relation to its Gothic elements and the possibilities for questioning master-narratives which the genre presents.

The African-American Gothic

In *African-American Gothic: Screams from Shadowed Places*, Maisha Wester (2012) presents an overview of some key concepts linked to the Gothic and to the American Gothic. This review and analysis allows the scholar to observe and formulate the particulars of the works written by African American writers which subvert many of the Gothic topoi, offering a complication of the notions and identities once typically imposed upon them by white Gothic creators (WESTER, 2012).

Wester (2012) highlights the fact that African American writers are not the only group to appropriate the Gothic in order to convey concerns and anxieties related to their place in dominant American culture. The critic observes that since the very beginning of the genre, the Gothic has worked as a locale for contestation between normative and "nonnormative" bodies (WESTER, 2012, p. 27). As an example, Wester (2012) mentions the Southern Gothic, which she then explains as a subgenre written by a regional minority in an attempt to articulate the complexity of their relationship to the nation. According to the scholar, "Southern Gothic can

be understood as a genre that is aware of the impossibility of escaping racial haunting and the trauma of a culture that is not just informed by racial history, but also haunted and ruptured by it" (WESTER, 2012, p. 25).

Charles Crow (2017) observes that much of the Southern American Gothic is connected to slavery and its legacy. Nevertheless, the critic also notes that it is important to remember that racism is a national, not a regional issue, and that the Southern Gothic also extends to other themes. To him, the conflicted narratives that southerners have built from a history of slavery, Indian removal, rebellion, proud defeat, struggles with white supremacy, and the system of segregation are the basis of the Southern Gothic. According to him, the South's Gothic remains "a reliable, if distorted, mirror of the cultural anxieties that shape out national conversation" (CROW, 2017, p. 154).

To Wester (2012), understanding the Southern Gothic can be useful for comprehending the African-American Gothic because of its concern with history. Since the South is perceived as the location of temporal conflict, writers frequently represent it as a place where history turns in upon itself. According to Wester (2012), "Southern Gothic exemplifies a culture that is collectively haunted and disrupted by history" (p. 26).

Wester also mentions the Female Gothic as helpful to reflect on the African-American Gothic. In 1976, Ellen Moers (1978, p. 90) defined the Female Gothic as "the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic", which focuses on fear and anxieties surrounding the body, the physicality of the self, and the impetus to self-destruction. Wester (2012) notes that many Female Gothic texts address the ambivalence of women's relationship to men. She comments on how a patriarchal family may be both representative of imprisonment and horror and a guarantee of comfort and safety. In a similarly complicated position, while the patriarchs prey upon women's emotional and productive bodies, it is quite possible that the saving lover ascribes to the same problematic ideologies (WESTER, 2012). To her, it is interesting to establish a link between the Female Gothic's attempt to grapple with a complicated figuration within an oppressive society to the African American use of the Gothic in order to address their predicaments and traumas. As she puts it,

> Like women, black authors must negotiate locations within a society that problematically renders them as Other, commodity, and monster; like women, black authors turn to a genre in which their bodies have been historically overarticulated and manipulated to render them nonnormative. (WESTER, 2012, p. 27)

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Wester (2012) also notes that the African-American Gothic has as one of its main themes and concerns the horror of temporal collapse, presenting an integrated temporal system in which the past is an essential part of the present. The scholar remarks that this concept is distinct from Gothic haunting, as “it is a reconciliation that black Gothic writers strive for, and at the end of some texts, begin to articulate only after they have navigated other horrors” (WESTER, 2012, p. 27). In this sense, the African-American Gothic can be linked to postcolonial trauma studies. Stef Craps (2013, p. 37) believes that trauma theory “can and should be reshaped, resituated, and redirected so as to foster attunement to previously unheard suffering”, and that it should take into consideration the historical and social specific contexts in which trauma narratives are produced and received, “and be open and attentive to the diverse strategies of representation and resistance that these contexts invite or necessitate” (CRAPS, 2013, p. 5).

Craps (2013) then explains that racism is informed by a past that continues to interfere with the present, making the category of historical trauma inaccurate. Structural trauma is not a better option because it would imply “a constitutive feature of existence, something that must be lived with” (CRAPS, 2013, p. 32). The scholar also notes that, for disempowered groups, trauma is a constant presence. Therefore, a straightforward restoration to a pre-traumatized state of being is not possible, because such a state does not even exist. Craps (2013, p. 38) states that in order for trauma theory to become more culturally sensitive and inclusive, it needs to acknowledge the experiences and sufferings of non-Western and minority groups “more fully, for their own sake, and on their own terms”.

Wester (2012, p. 27) observes precisely that temporal collapse in African-American Gothic fiction does not work as a unified presentation of the past and the present: “rather, traumatic and destructive aspects of the past disrupt the present, threatening characters with consumption and mimetic repetition”. Often, this collapse is figurative, showing how the rhetoric behind slavery continues even now, in contemporary “progressive” America (WESTER, 2012). Craps (2013) affirms that racism may be seen as a source of insidious trauma. In “Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma”, Laura Brown (1995, p. 107) explains the concept as “traumatogenic effects left by oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit”. Based on such a notion, Craps (2013) comments on how overt racism has been replaced with more subtle, covert, and complex racist incidents that operate at cultural and institutional levels in most Western countries. Craps (2013)

assesses that one of those incidents alone may not be traumatizing, but that cumulative micro-aggressions can insidiously result in traumatization: even if each one seems too small to be a traumatic stressor, together they may amount to an intense traumatic impact.

Wester (2012) also observes that black writers around and after the Civil Rights movement are not only concerned with the ways dominant American culture tries to mask this temporal collapse, but also with the ways black memory and culture may help perpetuate it[3]. According to her,

> If American Gothic literature is concerned with the proverbial "skeleton in the closet," or more exactly, the problem of the repressed—specifically repressed histories—returning to haunt and demand recognition, then African-American Gothic is more exactly concerned with the problem of repression itself. (WESTER, 2012, p. 28)

Wester (2012) suggests that the term "appropriating" is fitting to talk about the process of black writers subverting Gothic topoi because it implies an intention to reconfigure such topoi in order to talk about black experience. In her understanding, this reconfiguration implies claim to the genre: "by reconfiguring the genre, shifting the signifiers and signified away from their meanings in the Anglo tradition, black writers introduce profound variations that make the Gothic something new" (WESTER, 2012, p. 28). As she explains,

> Black writers' determination to seize the genre, write back to it, and revise it illustrates an awareness of its perils and a will to (re)possess it and neutralize its dangers, relocating the sense of horror in the very issues of ownership and (dis)possession at play in the process of writing the Gothic. Thus, as much as Female Gothic and Southern Gothic are a part of and apart from the dominant tradition, African-American Gothic interposes a similar divergence and trajectory. (WESTER, 2012, p. 28)

One of the notions which the African-American Gothic significantly rewrites is that of the uncanny. In black literary texts, there is a tendency to replace the concept of the uncanny as the revealed hidden object and/or the returned with the moment of hiding and the process of repression: "They look at the institutions that marked them as savage, look at the reasons for the hiding, and the historical moment of silencing. Here, the uncanny are the motives, the method, and the process behind the Anglo-American trope of uncanniness" (WESTER, 2012, p. 29). Furthermore, Wester (2012) highlights the fact that politicized concepts of identity such as the black rapist, the queer Other, and the helpless and fainting woman pervade the Gothic genre. However, the same genre "proves a likewise capable means for these writers to

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[3]Toni Morrison herself often voices her concerns over relevant and traumatic episodes of African American history being repressed and forgotten, even in the works of black authors. See her interviews "Toni Morrison Talks About her Motivation for Writing" (2009) and "Home – Toni Morrison – Talks at Google" (2013).

contest and deconstruct such inscribed identities and histories" (WESTER, 2012, p. 29), thus presenting an interesting possibility for reimagining identity and history.

Home

In terms of formal structure, *Home* is composed of an epigraph and seventeen chapters. Most of them are narrated by an omniscient third-narrator who accompanies Frank's journey to rescue his sister and take her back to Lotus. There are also some chapters focused on Cee, one on Lily (Frank's girlfriend in Seattle), and one on Lenore (the Moneys' step-grandmother). Additionally, there are some italicized chapters that bring the first-person speech of Frank Money as he talks to some sort of scribe who is apparently writing his story. This structure makes it possible to infer that the omniscient third-person narrator organizing the rest of the novel is the same scribe who is recording Money's tale. This hypothesis is corroborated by the fact that some of the italicized Frank speech addresses scenes which the narrator has described to us, correcting some of his notes: "*Earlier you wrote about how sure I was that the beat-up man on the train to Chicago would turn around when they got home and whip the wife who tried to help him. Not true. I didn't think any such thing*" (MORRISON, 2012, p. 69, emphasis in the original). This passage seems to confirm that there is indeed a single narrator (the scribe) organizing the entire story.

Nevertheless, it is a lot more difficult to determine whether the scribe is indeed embellishing the tale, taking quite a few liberties, or if Frank actually contradicts himself in his recollections. The scholar Irene Visser (2014) favors the second interpretation. In her understanding, the way trauma is portrayed in *Home* works as an argument that "the retrieval of memory is a recursive process, with mistakes and rectifications, since Frank's initial remembering, even of recent events, is corrected in the course of his ongoing narrative" (p. 11). To Visser (2014), these corrections show that traumatic memories can be accessed and narrated, even if the process might be long and imprecise, needing reviewing with each retelling.

Trauma is indeed one of the central themes in *Home*. Frank is a Korean War veteran with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), presenting symptoms such as disassociation, nightmares, intrusive flashbacks, and catatonic states (KOLK, 2000). Meanwhile, Ycidra works at the house of a white doctor, serving as the subject of dangerous medical experiments which almost kill her and leave her unable to have a child. Nevertheless, traumatic

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experiences do not happen to the Money siblings exclusively in their adulthood: they have been part of their lives since they were kids, and even before that.

Frank was born in Bandera County, Texas. When he was four years old and his mother Ida was pregnant with Ycidra, their family and their neighbors had to abandon their houses and their crops because Ku Klux Klan men forced them to leave. On their journey to live with their grandfather Salem and his wife Miss Lenore, Ycidra was born. The step-grandmother saw that as a bad omen: "Being born in the street—or the gutter, as she usually put it—was prelude to a sinful, worthless life" (MORRISON, 2012, p. 44). Actually, the woman hated the fact that her house was now crowded by Ida, Luther (their father), Uncle Frank, Frank and Ycidra. Unable to throw them out, Lenore

> Chose to focus her resentment on the little girl born "in the street". A frown creased her every glance when the girl entered, her lips turned down at every drop of a spoon, trip on the door saddle, a loosening braid. Most of all was the murmur of 'gutter child' as she walked away from a failing that was always on display from her step-granddaughter. (MORRISON, 2012, p. 45, emphasis in the original)

As Luther and Ida worked two jobs and were rarely home, they did not learn of the abuse directed at their children—especially Ycidra. Lenore would underfeed her, psychologically abuse her and physically hurt the girl. The woman's disdain for the child can be linked to the notion of abjection, frequently used in Gothic literature. Wester (2012, p. 12) explains abjection as "that which is utterly denied within the self and projected onto an Other body. The abject monster, like the uncanny monster, is both horrible and somewhat familiar". The scholar also explains that in order to function within a "civil", organized society, the individual feels compelled to exorcise all that is deemed disorderly, unclean, or unlawful—all that is abject(ed) (WESTER, 2012).

Lenore seems to be a character who is—or at least tries to be—oblivious to race issues which concern herself. When her first husband, who owed a gasoline station in Alabama, was found shot dead with a note that read "Get the hell out. Now" (MORRISON, 2012, p. 86), the woman interpreted it as the result of someone wanting or envying his station. The reader, who has been exposed to other Ku Klux Klan exhibitions of violence throughout the novel, is likely to have formulated a quite different hypothesis for the murdering. Nevertheless, Lenore's blindness to her first husband's and her own race may contribute to the process of denying a part of herself and projecting it on her granddaughter, who she sees as immoral and dirty: a gutter child. In this sense, Lenore's relationship to Ycidra can be linked to the one that Morrison (1999) presents elsewhere, in her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970):

> And Pecola is somewhere in that little brown house she and her mother moved to on the edge of town, where you can see her even now, once in a while. The birdlike gestures are worn away to a mere picking and plucking her way between the tire rims and the sunflowers, between Coke bottles and milkweed, among all the waste and beauty of the world—which is what she herself was. All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed. And all of our beauty, which was hers first and which she gave to us. All of us—all who knew her—felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. […] And she let us, and thereby deserved our contempt. We honed our egos on her, padded out characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength. (MORRISON, 1999, p. 203)

Nevertheless, Ycidra finds in her brother a protector and a companion, knowing that "he would, as always, protect her from a bad situation" (MORRISON, 2012, p. 51). As they navigated from children to teenagers and their parents were able to rent a house for the family, Frank was always a calming presence for Cee, the protector who made her feel safe. The girl would always follow his advice and heed his words. However, when he left with his childhood friends to enlist in the army, Ycidra was left feeling alone and abandoned. It was then that a man named Prince showed up in Lotus, and Cee left with him, promising to return Lenore's car which Salem had lent her.

Nonetheless, Prince fooled Ycidra, taking the car and abandoning her in Atlanta. Lonely and ashamed, Cee searched for a job that would pay relatively well until she heard from an upstairs neighbor about an opportunity to work at a doctor named Beauregard Scott's house in Buckhead, just outside Atlanta. The position was for "helper", and during the interview with Scott's wife, the following dialogue takes place:

> "[…] I don't really understand my husband's work—or care to. He is more than a doctor; he is a scientist and conducts very important experiments. His inventions help people. He's no Dr. Frankenstein."
> "Dr. who?"
> "Never mind. Just do what he says and you'll be fine. Now go. Sarah will show you to your room." (MORRISON, 2012, p. 60)

This is not the only passage that feels ominous to the reader. The feeling that something very suspicious and wrong will take place in that house increases as Ycidra naively studies Scott's office: "Now she examined the medical books closely, running her finger over some of the titles: *Out of the Night*. Must be a mystery, she thought. Then *The Passing of the Great Race*, and next to it, *Heredity, Race and Society*" (MORRISON, 2012, p. 65). The first title is the autobiography of a spy who infiltrated the Gestapo. The second one presents a theory of Nordic superiority, and the last title is also connected to eugenics—the idea that it is possible to improve humanity by allowing only some people to produce offspring. Eugenics is one more word which Cee does not possess the reference for: "How small, how useless was

her schooling, she thought, and promised herself she would find time to read about and understand 'eugenics'" (MORRISON, 2012, p. 65, emphasis in the original). To amplify the suffocating sensation that sinister events will soon take place, Ycidra and Sarah (the housekeeper) have the following dialogue as they eat honeydews in the kitchen:

> Cee lifted the third one, then stroked its lime-yellow peel, tucking her forefinger into the tiny indentation at the stem break. "Female," she laughed. "This one's a female."
> "Well, hallelujah." Sarah joined Cee's laughter with a low chuckle. "Always the sweetest."
> "Always the juiciest," echoed Cee.
> "Can't beat the girl for flavor."
> "Can't beat her for sugar."
> Sarah slid a long, sharp knife from a drawer and, with intense anticipation of the pleasure to come, cut the girl in two. (MORRISON, 2012, p. 66)

The image of a girl being cut in two can be linked to the medical experiments which Beauregard Scott starts conducting on Cee. They debilitate the girl so much that it prompts Sarah to risk her job and send Frank a letter asking him to go to Buckhead:

> What she didn't know was when he got so interested in wombs in general, constructing instruments to see farther and farther into them. Improving the speculum. But when she noticed Cee's loss of weight, her fatigue, and how long her periods were lasting, she became frightened enough to write the only relative Cee had an address for. (MORRISON, 2012, p. 112)

When Frank arrives, the housekeeper lets him in through the back door. Nevertheless, the man is eventually spotted by Scott: "The doctor raised the gun and pointed it at what in his fear ought to have been flaring nostrils, foaming lips, and the red-rimmed eyes of a savage. Instead he saw the quiet, even serene, face of a man not to be fooled with" (MORRISON, 2012, p. 111). Nevertheless, the barrel is empty, and with Sarah's help, Frank manages to rescue his unconscious, weak, feverish sister. As they leave, Scott feels relieved, realizing that there was no theft or violence, "just the kidnapping of an employee he could easily replace" (MORRISON, 2012, p. 112).

Wester (2012, p. 24) observes that the "African American body […] exists as the threatening object both within the national body but like the disdained bodily fluids disassociated from dominant society". As Wester (2012) explains, this threat to white identity is exactly the place where minority bodies are rendered abject. We can see very clearly that Scott despises Ycidra's body, even as he studies it. He is interested in eugenics, in "purifying" America, thus discarding the bodies of minorities. His repulse is accompanied by his fear: Ycidra's fertility presents the possibility of miscegenation, one of the greatest sources of anxiety in the American Gothic (WESTER, 2012). It is also interesting to note that Scott

looks at Frank in absolute fear, ready to find the "black savage". Instead, he sees a calm, determined man; an image which still terrifies him and makes him pull the trigger. Here, Morrison is both subverting notions related to the black rapist/aggressor/savage and showing that the absence of monstrosity is destabilizing to Scott. If this Other, this "not-me" is not the monster it is supposed to be, then on what differentiation can I base my "pure" identity?

As Frank manages to take Ycidra back to Lotus, the girl is placed under the care of Miss Ethel Fordham and the other women in the community, who "handled sickness as though it were an affront, an illegal, invading braggart who needed whipping (MORRISON, 2012, p. 121). The women use different recipes for soups, infusions and potions. When Cee gets stronger, they consider that the final stage of healing should involve sun-smacking, "which meant spending at least one hour a day with her legs spread open to the blazing sun. Each woman agreed that that embrace would rid her of any remaining womb sickness" (MORRISON, 2012, p. 124). In addition to this strong belief in their own rituals and customs, the women show contempt and dismissal for Western medicine:

> Later, when the fever died and whatever it was they packed into her vagina was douched out, Cee described to them the little she knew about what had happened to her. None of them had asked. Once they knew she had been working for a doctor, the eye rolling and tooth sucking was enough to make clear their scorn. And nothing Cee remembered—how pleasant she felt upon awakening after Dr. Beau had stuck her with a needle to put her to sleep; how passionate he was about the value of the examinations; how she believed the blood and pain that followed was a menstrual problem—nothing made them change their minds about the medical industry. (*Home* 121-122)

The medical industry is not the only white institution which is met with suspicion and scorn by the Lotus community. Trying to make sense and reintegrate memories from his past, Frank asks Salem and the other man in Lotus about the place where some white farmers used to have horse and dog fights, he learns of a horrible story. Once, a black man and his father were forced to fight each other. Only one of them could leave the improvised ring, and only when the other had been killed. After being forced to murder his father, the son—Jerome—escaped to Lotus and sobbed while he told the people in town about what had happened. The women in the community collected some money for him, while the men gave him a few sets of clothes and a mule which he could ride, since they all knew that "'if the sheriff had seen him dripping in blood, he'd be in prison this very day'" (MORRISON, 2012, p. 139). Thus, neither white medicine nor white police offer comfort or security to black people. As Wester (2012) observes, the uncanny in the African-American Gothic is represented by the

institutions that marked them as savage. The uncanny here is the process, the motives, and the method employed by the Anglo-American topos of uncanniness.

With their determination, the women in Lotus are able to heal Cee—physically and psychologically: "two months surrounded by country women who loved mean had changed her" (MORRISON, 2012, p. 121). Through the physical, emotional, and psychological support which Ycidra receives from the women in the community, the girl is able to become stronger and wiser. In a moment filled with "the demanding love of Ethel Fordham, which soothed and strengthened her [Ycidra] the most" (MORRISON, 2012, p. 125), Fordham tells the girl:

> "See what I mean? Look to yourself. You free. Nothing and nobody is obliged to save you but you. Seed your own land. You young and a woman and there's serious limitation in both, but you a person too. Don't let Lenore or some trifling boyfriend and certainly no devil doctor decide who you are. That's slavery. Somewhere inside you is that free person I'm talking about. Locate her and let her do some good in the world." (MORRISON, 2012, p. 125-126)

As Cee's healing progresses and she learns with the teachings of the women in Lotus, she also starts questioning the notion that white Western knowledge is the only valid knowledge. This questioning allows her to finally understand Beauregard Scott as a man who abused and used her:

> As usual she blamed being dumb on her lack of schooling, but that excuse fell apart the second she thought about the skilled women who had cared for her, healed her. Some of them had to have Bible verses read to them because they could not decipher print themselves, so they had sharpened the skills of the illiterate: perfect memory, photographic minds, keen senses of smell and hearing. And they knew how to repair what an educated bandit doctor had plundered. If not schooling, then what? (MORRISON, 2012, p. 128)

This process can be linked to one of the themes that Wester (2012) identifies in the African-American Gothic: the acceptance of the "grotesque" and decision to flee the insanity and cruelty of the "civilized" world. In the white "respectable" civilization, Frank has to ride segregated buses, eat only at black restaurants, and face micro-aggressions daily. In the "civilized" world, Cee becomes the subject of medical experiments which almost kill her. In contrast, they have the community of Lotus, where nurturing and respect present a much more desirable scenario, separated from the "civilized" white America.

Furthermore, Cee's journey is very interesting to observe. When she tells Frank that she cannot have children because of the experiments that were conducted on her, the girl cries and her brother tries to hush her, telling her not to cry. Nevertheless, the woman refutes this approach to her pain: "I can be miserable if I want to. You don't need to try and make it go

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away. It shouldn't go away. It's just as sad as it ought to be and I'm not going to hide from what's true just because it hurts" (MORRISON, 2012, p 131). Thus, we can infer that Ycidra does not see her body as monstrous because of her infertility: Scott is the true monster, because he has done this to her. By the time Cee and Frank move back into their old house, the woman is determined to respect herself and to never need rescuing again. She believes that she can find a way to earn a living, and she wants to discover what it is that she loves in the world, and how she can dedicate herself to such a passion. Thus, Morrison subverts the role of her heroine as "the fainting and helpless woman" (WESTER, 2012, p. 29). During her childhood and adolescence, Cee is naïve, scared, and needs constant protection from her brother. Nevertheless, by the end of the novel, she becomes a determined, brave woman, ready to find her place in the world.

Inspired by his sister's bravery, Frank finally becomes able to face a memory which he had been repressing throughout the telling of his story to the scribe: it was not a soldier he knew, but he himself who had shot and killed a Korean girl who offered him sexual favors for food: "*I have to say something to you right now. I have to tell the whole truth. I lied to you and I lied to me. I hid it from you because I hid it from me [...] I shot the Korean girl in her face. I am the one she touched. [...]I am the one she aroused*" (MORRISON, 2012, p. 133, emphasis in the original). Thus, as Ycidra sees the ghost of a little girl around their house as the daughter who will not be born to her, Frank believes it to be the kid that he shot in Korea. As he has now finally faced this traumatic event and truth, he realizes that he still needs to do something about the earlier traumatic memories from his childhood: the secretive, unceremonious burial of a black man, witnessed by two young siblings. At this point in the narrative, Frank has deduced that the body likely belonged to Jerome's father. He then takes Cee and a quilt she had knitted and recovers the remains of the body. The siblings involve the bones and skull in the quilt and bury it by a sweet bay tree, "split down the middle, beheaded, undead" (MORRISON, 2012, p. 144).

It is very interesting to see that Frank can only move on from his personal trauma once he has also faced the collective African-American trauma of slavery and its legacy. The expulsion from their home in Texas by Ku Klux Klan men, the parricide which worked as amusing spectacle for white men, the segregation and racist micro-aggressions which he has faced throughout his life, all work as stressor events which have disrupted his sense of self. Thus, when Frank and Ycidra reflect on the harm done to them during their lives and decide to offer Jerome's father a dignified burial, they subvert the notion of the uncanny (WESTER,

2012). It is not about what is repressed as they dig the man's grave; it is about the process of repression, the motives and processes employed by white America in their erasure and demonization of African Americans. Here, Morrison (2012) contests and deconstructs the identities historically inscribed upon black bodies (WESTER, 2012), showing the siblings' healing and feeling proud as Frank stares at the tree which reflects their own journeys:

> *I stood there a long while, staring at that tree.*
> *It looked so strong*
> *So beautiful.*
> *Hurt right down the middle*
> *But alive and well.*
> *Cee touched my shoulder*
> *Lightly.*
> *Frank?*
> *Yes?*
> *Come on, brother. Let's go home.* (MORRISON, 2012, p. 147, emphasis in the original)

Final considerations

This article has sought to demonstrate how Toni Morrison's *Home* displays aspects of the African-American Gothic, a subgenre which is deeply concerned with exploring a side of the history of the United States of America, whose identitary discourse has attempted to hide away. American literature has employed great efforts in outlining its identity through difference, and thus has constructed black people as one of the many Others which oppose and consequently define the national white imagery. As previously noted, Wester (2012) describes the African-American Gothic's concern with the horror of temporal collapse, which demonstrates how past and present are irrevocably connected; such notion has been widely explored by postcolonial and trauma theories. The pain and suffering brought on by oppression carry over through time. People and cultures cannot simply move on from the violence of slavery and colonialism, for the consequences they bring make up the present.

Thus, the horror in *Home* springs from a series of historical events that deeply affect these individuals' life experiences. The systematic race violence to which the Money siblings have been exposed since childhood seeps through every aspect of their journey, and its constant, cruel intent is to eradicate the African American existence. The horror comes from the impending threat of erasure: of being ditched in a hole, of being denied bodily autonomy, violated, and deprived of offspring. The re-burial of Jerome's father's corpse is an act of reclaiming and resisting the erasure of black history and identity. Morrison subverts Gothic

topoi by exposing the terrifying, systematic institutions which deem black lives and black bodies disposable. Those fears, as Wester (2012) expertly describes, are core characteristics of the African-American Gothic.

Through the character Lenore, Morrison further explores the concepts of abjection, and the ways which it applies to the “self” of marginalized people – as the woman despises her granddaughter for the very same features Lenore herself carries. Frank’s attempts to steer away from the small Lotus and its marginalized status lead him to yet another violent environment, which leaves him traumatized. Ycidra’s body is cut open and violated, essentially objectified, in experiments which target her uterus and reproductive abilities – arguably, removing her choice to create and bear children. It is only through a reconnection with their place of origin and black culture that the siblings are able to find healing – moving away from “civilization” (which is proved to be a monstrous dwelling) and Western science. Thus, Morrison presents the preservation of a shared culture and history as the hope of resisting the horrors of erasure and repression.

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