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# 博 士 論 文

題目 Poetics and Politics of “Houses”  
in Toni Morrison’s Novels

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## 序章

モリスンは、『青い眼がほしい』の「緑と白の家」以来、家を小説における重要な舞台装置として描いてきた。その理由の一つが『青い眼がほしい』に示されている。アフリカ系アメリカ人（以下「黒人」）にとって家の所有は生存欲求の表象であり、家は黒人の生を描く上で必然的に重要な役割を果たすことになる。一方で、家の所有は「アメリカの夢」と分かちがたく結びついており、家について議論することは「アメリカの夢」の価値観を問うことにもなり、政治性を帯びてくる。モリスン自身、『暗闇に遊ぶ』の中で文学の一つの存在意義が政治性にあることを明言している。モリスンが政治性の対象としているのは、「人種問題」である。また別の場においてモリスンは、文学は啓発的でなければならないと述べている。黒人が直面している問題について啓発し、行動を促すことはまさに政治的であると言える。

本論は、作品の中で家が重要な役割を果たしている『青い眼がほしい』、『スーラ』(1973)、『ターベイベー』(1981)、『ビラヴィッド』(1987)、『パラダイス』(1997)、『ラブ』(2003)、『マーシィ』(2008)、『ホーム』(2012)を研究対象として取り上げる。作品は、出版年に従って扱うのではなく、“ハウス”と“ホーム”という観点から整理し直して論じる。モリスンは、そのエッセイ「ホーム」の中で、「家」をハウスとホームという言葉で分けて捉えており、エッセイ「ホーム」はモリスンが、アメリカ黒人の生を抑圧するハウス（以下「家」）を描きながら、一方で生を育むホームを探し求めてきたことを示している。従って、まず家の比重が高い『マーシィ』、『ターベイベー』、『青い眼がほしい』、『ラブ』を論じ、その後ホームの要素が強くなる作品を扱う。

モリスンは、「ホーム」において、ホーム像を提示しているが、それと小説で描かれるホームの間には矛盾が見受けられる。従って、ホーム像は、モリスンの芸術的、論理的能力が最大に発揮される芸術領域である小説の中でこそ追究されるべきであると考えられる。本論は、モリスンの小説の家とその政治性と芸術性に焦点を当て、アメリカ黒人が直面している問題を家がどのように表象しているのか、そしてホームとは何かを明らかにするものである。これまでモリスン文学を家に視点を置いて全体的に論じた先行研究はほとんどなく、この論文は、モリスン文学の新たな理解につながると思われる。

## I 章. 「大邸宅」に刻み込まれる「アメリカの夢」と「奴隷制」

### — 『マーシィ』

奴隷のフローレンスが文字を刻んでいるのは、建築途中で廃墟となった「大邸宅」である。「大邸宅」は移民ジェイコブ・ヴァークの「アメリカの夢」に対する強い思いを表しているが、一方「アメリカの夢」が持つ三つの問題を前景化している。一つ目はアメリカの資本主義の歴史的発展の基礎部分に奴隷制があること。二つ目はアメリカ先住民殲滅。三つ目は「アメリカの夢」が男性

本位なものであることである。「大邸宅」は、やがて火がつけられ灰となって時空を超えて飛んでいき、奴隷制言説が刻み込まれた「アメリカの夢」を伝え、新たな「アメリカ創世記」の姿を映し出すとともにアメリカの支配的価値観の問い直しが迫られるのである。

## Ⅱ章. 生を抑圧する家

### 1. 「精巧に作られたトイレ」—『ターベイベー』の「十字架館」

カリブ海の島々の中で最も美しい「十字架館」は、周りの自然と調和しているように見える。しかし、黒人文化を大切にするサンが館に闖入することによって、館が破壊的で世界中に排泄物をまき散らすアメリカ帝国主義を象徴するものであることが露わになる。サンは、温厚な篤志家である館の主人ヴァレリアンの本当の姿が利己主義者で、人種差別、階級差別者であることを暴く。しかしながら、サンは、ヴァレリアンの援助で白人文化の教育を受けたジェイディーンを故郷のエローで再教育しようとするが失敗し、逆に彼女に囚われ、ホームとして見ていた故郷エローを失うことになる。

### 2. 紛い物の家—『青い眼がほしい』

メディアが伝える物質的価値観に囚われたポーリーンの家は、あらゆるものがちぐはぐで紛い物の家であることを示唆している。自分の家に不幸と醜さしか見いだせないポーリーンは、フィッシャー家に召使いとして勤め、実際の自分の家よりも映画で見たような「大きな白い家」を自分の家として生きている。中産階級の黒人の家も、表面的な美しさの裏に醜さを隠している。ジェラルディーンは、猫だけに気を許し、子供と夫に対しては距離を置いた生活をしている。彼女が情動を抑え表面的形式的美しさに執着するのは、貧困と差別に対する恐怖の裏返しである。この作品の家は、黒人が持つ家の所有欲がアメリカの白人中産階級の価値観に取り込まれることによって生まれる悲慘さと滑稽さを露わにしているのである。

### 3. ホテルに囚われた愛—『ラヴ』の「コーギーホテル」

『ラヴ』は、『青い眼がほしい』と同じく人種差別が社会制度であった20世紀前半に人種差別を利用して成功した黒人ホテル経営者コーギーとその家族の話である。ホテルは黒人による「アメリカの夢」の実現を象徴しており羨望の対象であるが、一方で階級差別の象徴でもある。ホテルには特有の刹那的な快楽性と頹廃性がある。ホテルの維持のためにコーギーは、白人有力者のために船上で倒錯的パーティーを開かなければならない。このようなホテル環境の中で、コーギーは父権的な傲慢性、人種差別による劣等感、小児愛的な歪んだ性傾向を持つようになり、孫娘クリスティーンの友人である11歳のヒードと結婚する。そのことがクリスティーンとヒードの不仲をもたらし、コーギー死後も二人は残された住宅の相続権をめぐるヒードが死ぬまで醜い争いを続けることになる。ホテルは「アメリカの夢」という虚構にすぎなかった黒人ホテル経営者とその亡霊に翻弄された黒人女性達の悲劇を映し出すとともに黒人社会の階級の問題を前景化している。

### Ⅲ. ホームを内包する家を求めて

#### 1. 生かし殺す家——『スーラ』の「巨大な家」

餓死寸前のエヴァは、子供達を救うため列車に足を引かせて保険金をとり、「巨大な家」を建てる。この家には、下宿人、宿無し、訪問客が自由に出入りし、いつも食べ物が用意されており、ホーム的な要素を備えている。しかしながら、「巨大な家」のもとになっているのはエヴァの「生存欲求」と夫に対する「憎しみ」である。エヴァは戦争の PTSD で薬物中毒になった息子のプラムを部屋の中で灯油をかけ焼き殺す。プラムの死を望むような生き方は、エヴァの価値観を否定していたからである。エヴァは、娘のハンナが焼死した後、部屋の窓を板で塞ぐ。その窓は「巨大な家」内に自ら作り出したコミュニティーを眺め監視する場所であった。塞がれた窓は、硬直した価値観では家を得ることはあっても、そこにホームは生まれないことを示している。

#### 2. 人を招き入れる家——『パラダイス』の「修道院」

パラダイスの「修道院」は、元は公金横領者の邸宅であったが「修道院」に変わり、先住民の同化政策教育機関として利用される。それが失敗した後、「修道院」は、南アメリカの先住民コンソラータの指導の下に、社会の中で落伍者と思われる女性たちが再生する場になり、ホーム性を帯びることになる。対称的に、黒人だけの町ルビーは規律と伝統を重んじる町である。その町の「8 ロック」と呼ばれる家の男達は、崩壊しつつある黒人純血神話を守るために、孤立した「修道院」の女達をスケープゴートとして殺害する。ルビーの町は、モリスンがエッセイ「ホーム」で言及した「人種が問題にならない」安全な場所を実現することを目指した町であった。「修道院」の女性の殺害は、ルビーの町が、実は白人文化の模倣であり、黒人優越主義に基づく町になっていたことを暴露している。

### Ⅳ. 「語られていない物語」を語る家——『ビラヴィッド』の 124

赤ん坊の霊が取り憑いた家「124」は、奴隷制の真実を語る効果的な舞台である。解放奴隷のベイビー・サグズは独自の宗教指導者となり「124」は生を育む場所になる。しかしその家は住民の妬みの対象となり、セスの子殺しの一因になる。孤立した「124」には亡霊が取り憑き、ベイビー・サグズは病気となり、二人の息子は家出をする。一旦ポール D との再会で落ち着きを取り戻すが、ビラヴィッドの出現でセスは「124」に閉じこもり、ビラヴィッドと娘のデンバーとの生活の中にホームを見つけようとするが、その閉鎖空間は修羅場となる。デンバーの仲介でコミュニティーの人たちとの関係を取り戻し、地域の女性と共同で悪魔払いをした後、家は静かな物理的存在に戻る。結局、セスを救うのは、子殺しの一原因となり、子殺しの正当性を信じるセスに不寛容な態度をとり孤立に追いやったコミュニティーである。「124」は、個人が生きていくには黒人コミュニティーとの対立を超えた共闘が必要であるという厳しい現実を映し出しているのである。

### Ⅴ. ホームの探求——『ホーム』

『ホーム』は、序文にハウスを登場させながら、本文ではこれまで議論し

たような重要な役割を持つハウスは見当たらない。序文はホームが特定のハウスではなくコミュニティそのものがホームであることを示唆している。しかしながら、兄妹のフランクとシーは、退屈で、息が詰まるようなロータスの町を出て行く。フランクは、朝鮮戦争で親友の死を目撃し、自ら罪のない子供や老人を殺すという地獄のような経験をし、除隊後はPTSDに苦しんでいる。一方で、男に騙され捨てられたシーは、白人優越主義の医者の実験台になり二度と子供の産めない体になる。そのような経験をした二人は故郷を異なる眼で見ることができるようになる。二人は、コミュニティの人たちが、助けを求める者であればいつでも援助し心の傷を癒してくれることを知る。さらに、人々は、シーが精神的に成長し、兄から自立し、自分の人生を大切にできるように支援してくれる。『ホーム』において、モリスンのホーム像は実現したということができるだろう。

## 終章

ホームが、相互扶助が当たり前である地域の黒人コミュニティにあるというモリスンの結論は、あまりにもありきたりで全く新しいアイデアではないように思われる。しかしながらこれまで議論してきた大きな家が白人と黒人どちらに対しても、安全や慰めを保証せず、むしろ抑圧し破壊をもたらすことを考えれば、モリスンの考えるホームは深遠な意味を持っていることが分かる。モリスンの一見単純なホーム像は、アメリカ黒人の人生や価値観について啓発するだけでなく、資本主義社会における個人所有や個人の成功を強調する白人文化に対する異議を主張しているのである。

## Abstract

Toni Morrison has been depicting houses as important devices for her novels since the “green and white house” in *The Bluest Eye* (1970). Owning a house reflects African Americans’ desire for survival. Hence, a house plays an indispensable role when African Americans’ lives are described. Meanwhile, owning a house is entwined with the American dream. Thus, depicting houses essentially involves a discussion of the value of the American dream, which makes the houses very political. Morrison clearly states that the very nature of literature consists partly in politics in *Playing in the Dark*. Politics in her argument concerns race matters. On another occasion Morrison argues that literature has an enlightening nature. Enlightening readers on what the problems are and inspiring them to take action is definitely political.

This thesis is to treat *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* (1973), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987), *Paradise* (1997), *Love* (2003), *A Mercy* (2008) and *Home* (2012). When these novels are discussed, they are not treated in order of the dates of publication but rearranged based on a hypothesis that Toni Morrison has pursued home. Morrison differentiates between “house” and “home” in her essay “Home.” “Home” obviously shows that she has been seeking home, while depicting houses as buildings that repress African Americans’ lives. Accordingly, this discussion first treats *A Mercy*, *Tar Baby*, *The Bluest Eye* and *Love* in which a house or houses have a stronger presence, and then goes on to the novels in which more depictions of home appears.

Although Morrison elucidates what home is like in “Home,” there are contradictions between her essays and novels in terms

of home. Therefore home is examined in her novels, in which Toni Morrison shows her artistic and logical skills to the utmost. This discussion focusing on houses in Morrison's novels and their politics is to clarify how poetically the houses represent the problems and conflicts that African Americans are faced with and illuminate what home really is. Since very few of the previous studies have discussed Morrison's literature from the viewpoint of "houses," this thesis will surely lead to a new interpretation of Toni Morrison's literature.

The grand house in *A Mercy* reveals that capitalism underlying the society of America, supported by patriarchy, drives people to desire more. This results in people feeling restless, insufficient, discordant, and unhappy. The words Florens carves into the grand house serve to show her plights as an abandoned child and slave. In addition, her act of carving words into the house suggests that it is impossible to separate slavery from American history.

L'Arbe de la Croix in *Tar Baby* represents American imperialism, whose destructiveness and disruptiveness are unveiled by Son, who treasures his black culture. In addition, the presence of Son reveals the false life of the wealthy owners of the house. Son tries to reeducate Jadine, who has been greatly influenced by white culture, but he fails. He remains captivated by her and loses his hometown Eloë, which can be his home.

All the houses in *The Bluest Eye* show that African Americans, who are captivated by materialism and white culture, cannot find peace of mind there, much less their home there. The Breedloves' house full of unnecessary things shows their false and wretched life. Geraldine's beautiful house hides



the dwellers' crooked and repressed psyche—fear of poverty, disdain of their color and reverence for white culture. The beautiful Fisher house, which Pauline works in, reflects her attachment to her pseudo home. The house satisfies her desire for materialism and white culture, even if she sacrifices her own daughter for that life.

The Cosey's Hotel in *Love* emphasizes that any house or building that represents the American dream—materialistic success based on white culture—leads to family conflicts among African Americans rather than realization of home. The closed hotel, which looks ghostly, reflects the barrenness of the Cosey family's enthusiasm for the white-middle class status.

The enormous house in *Sula* represents Eva's strong desire to free her family from poverty and realize a safe haven within the house in the African Americans' community. Her murder of her own son Plum, however, reveals her intolerance of those who disregards survival, which makes Eva fail to create home in the enormous house.

The Convent in *Paradise* is a house that has almost had home within it. Consolata, a foreigner who has no proprietary rights to the convent, accepts various women who are defective in character, suffering from traumas. Consolata herself has defects, but what matters is that such imperfect women accept each other and help themselves overcome their traumas. The murder of the Convent women by black men from Ruby, however, reveals the fact that the town where blackness is treasured has imitated white culture, simply replacing white supremacy with black supremacy.

124 in *Beloved* serves as a kind of stage, on which there occurs a torturing conflict among the confined dwellers

stemming from slavery. It also serves as a medium for conveying what has been untold about slavery. The conflict in the closed house shows not only how slavery affects human souls and but also how the neighborhood African Americans' psyche contributes to the tragedy. On the other hand, it is people in the community, who deliberately disregarded the appearance of slave catchers, that rescue Sethe and Denver from the house. This shows that people cannot live without support from the community.

The community in *Home* provides Frank and Cee with home. Frank's experience on the battlefield and Cee's experience being a subject for a genetic experiment push them to the verge of death and insanity. Their struggle to pull themselves back from the precipice enables them to look at their hometown from a different perspective: they begin to recognize that people in the community are ready to help those who ask for help and to heal them of their wounds and traumas. Furthermore, they help Cee grow mentally so that she can become independent of her brother and begin to cherish her life. In *Home*, Morrison's image of home has manifested itself in a substantial way.

Morrison's conclusion that home is in a local black community where mutual aid is taken for granted is so simple that it sounds cliché, yet her home assumes a profound significance when one considers that the big houses that have been discussed do not promise white and black people safety, comfort and satisfaction; they may cause discomfort and devastation to them. Hence, Morrison's seemingly simple picture of home not only enlightens African Americans about their lives and values, but actually challenges white culture, which emphasizes individual property and success in the capitalist country.

# Poetics and Politics of “Houses” in Toni Morrison’s Novels

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## Introduction

Toni Morrison has been depicting houses as important devices for her novels since the “green and white house” in *The Bluest Eye* (1970). One of the reasons for this is indicated in the novel:

Our peripheral existence, however, was something we had learned to deal with—probably because it was abstract. But the concreteness of being outdoors was another matter—like the difference between the concept of death and being, in fact, dead. Dead doesn’t change, and outdoors is here to stay.

Knowing that there was such a thing as outdoors bred in us a hunger for property, for ownership. (*The Bluest* 15)

Owning a house not only means freeing African Americans from fear of poverty but also reflects their ardent desire for survival. Hence, the house plays an indispensable role when African Americans’ lives are described.

Meanwhile, owning a house is entwined with the American dream, the opportunity for prosperity and success through effort and diligence, which is generally thought to be given fairly to everyone in the United States. In American literature, houses are frequently emblematic of success and power as suggested by “Gatsby mansion,” “a factual imitation of some Hotel de Ville in Normandy, with a tower on one side, spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy, and a marble swimming pool, and more than forty acres of lawn and garden” (*Gatsby* 5) in *The*

*Great Gatsby* (1925) or Sutpen's "mansion," "the Spartan shell of the largest edifice in the country" (*Absalom* 30) in *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936). Thus, depicting houses, which represent the freedom from fear of poverty and the desire for survival, essentially involves a discussion of the value of the American dream, which makes the houses very political. Actually, Toni Morrison believes that literature is intrinsically political.

In *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison clearly states that the very nature of literature consists partly in politics:

When matters of race are located and called attention to in American literature, critical response has tended to be on the order of a humanistic nostrum—or a dismissal mandated by the label "political." Excising the political from the life of the mind is a sacrifice that has proven costly. I think of this erasure as a kind of trembling hypochondria always curing itself with unnecessary surgery. A criticism that needs to insist that literature is not only "universal" but also "race-free" risks lobotomizing that literature, and diminishes both the art and the artist. (*Playing* 12)

Politics in her argument concerns race matters. In her essay "Home," Morrison says, "I have never lived, nor has any of us, in a world in which race did not matter" ("Home" 3). It should be noted, however, that when she treats race matters in her novels, she never presents "whites versus blacks" conflicts as a paradigm of race matters in the United States; she describes racism as something that has infiltrated the mind of individual blacks and African American society, gnawing away at them

from the inside. It should also be noted that, although Morrison's essay seems to indicate that her novels treat only African Americans' problems, they often actually cover the lives of other races, which are essentially intertwined with those of African Americans.

On another occasion Morrison argues that literature has an enlightening nature:

It should be beautiful, and powerful, but it should also work. It should have something in it that enlightens; something in it that opens the door and points the way. Something in it that suggests what the conflicts are, what the problems are. But it need not solve those problems because it is not a case study, it is not a recipe. ("Rootedness" 58-59)

Enlightening us on "what the conflicts are, what the problems are" and inspiring us to take action is definitely political. Hence, this discussion on houses in Toni Morrison's novels focuses on how houses in her novels represent the problems and conflicts African Americans are faced with.

This thesis is to treat *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* (1973), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987), *Paradise* (1997), *Love* (2003), *A Mercy* (2008) and *Home* (2012), each of which a house, houses or "home" plays an important part in. When these novels are discussed, however, they are not treated in order of the dates of publication. They are rearranged based on a hypothesis that through writing novels Toni Morrison has pursued home<sup>1</sup> while depicting houses in her novels.

Morrison differentiates between "house" and "home" in her

essay, saying,

..., I prefer to think of a-world-in-which-race-does-not-matter as something other than a theme park, or a failed and always-failing dream, or as the father's house of many rooms. I am thinking of it as home. "Home" seems a suitable term because, first, it lets me make a radical distinction between the metaphor of house and the metaphor of home and helps me clarify my thoughts on racial construction. Second, the term domesticates the racial project, moves the job of unmaterring race away from pathetic yearning and futile desire; away from an impossible future or an irretrievable and probably nonexistent Eden to a manageable, doable, modern human activity. Third, because eliminating the potency of racist constructs in language is the work I can do. ("Home" 3)

The passage indicates that Morrison thinks it is "home" that enables us find a safe place and realize "a-world-in-which-race-does-not-matter." She argues in the following passage that, while home helps realize "a-world-in-which-race-does-not-matter," "house" functions as an institution to imprison African Americans in a world where racism dominates; a world which should be transformed:

If I had to live in a racial house, it was important, at the least, to rebuild it so that it was not a windowless prison into which I was forced, a thick-walled, impenetrable container from which no cry could be heard, but rather an



open house, grounded, yet generous in its supply of windows and doors. Or, at the most, it became imperative for me to transform this house completely. Counterracism was never an option. (“Home” 4)

She is not optimistic about the realization of a world free from race problems, though:

From Martin Luther King’s hopeful language, to Doris Lessing’s four-gated city, to Jean Toomer’s “American,” the race-free world has been posited as ideal, millennial, a condition possible only if accompanied by the Messiah or situated in a protected preserve—a wilderness park. (“Home” 3)

Although “the race-free world” seems hard to realize, Morrison never gives up pursuing it. She illustrates an image of “a-world-in-which-race-does-not-matter” at the end of the essay:

I want to imagine not the threat of freedom, or its tentative panting fragility, but the concrete thrill of border-lessness—a kind of out of doors safety where “a sleepless woman could always rise from her bed, wrap a shawl around her shoulders and sit on the steps in the moonlight. And if she felt like it she could walk out the yard and on down the road. No lamp and no fear. [...] And if a light shone from a window up a ways and the cry of a colicky baby caught her attention, she might step over to the house and call out softly to the woman inside trying to soothe the baby. The two of them might take turns

massaging the infant stomach, rocking, or trying to get a little soda water down. [...] The woman could decide to go back to her bed then, refreshed and ready to sleep, or she might stay her direction and walk further down the road—on out, beyond, because nothing around or beyond considered her prey.” (“Home” 9)

The image indicates that home is a space where people are safe and coexist with each other, helping each other, and enjoying each other’s company; the image of home is still a reflection of “contemporary searches and yearnings for social space that is psychically and physically safe” (“Home” 10), though.

Morrison’s essay “Home” obviously shows that she has been seeking home, since the time she wrote *The Bluest Eye*, because many of the houses depicted as buildings in her novels do not provide black people with home but rather serve as something to repress their life. Accordingly, this discussion first treats *A Mercy*, *Tar Baby*, *The Bluest Eye* and *Love* in which a house or houses have a stronger presence, and then goes on to the novels in which more depictions of home appear.

The picture of home presented in “Home” seems to clearly present Morrison’s image of what it is like, making further discussion appear meaningless, but that is not the case. Ironically, the same passage quoted above, starting with “a sleepless woman could always rise from her bed”—the same words and sentences—appear in *Paradise* when one of the black men who raid the Convent justifies his atrocious act, which questions the viability of Morrison’s home.

There is another case in which the picture of home her novel presents contradicts what Morrison’s essay says about

home. Morrison extends a space for home and regards the body as a space for home as well:

In no small way, these discourses are about home: an intellectual home; a spiritual home; family and community as home; forced and displaced labor in the destruction of home; dislocation of and alienation within the ancestral home; creative responses to exile, the devastations, pleasures, and imperatives of homelessness as it is manifested in discussions on feminism, globalism, the diaspora, migrations, hybridity, contingency, interventions, assimilations, exclusions. The estranged body, the legislated body, the violated, rejected, deprived body—the body as consummate home. (“Home” 5)

In “‘The Foreigner’s Home’: Introduction,” Morrison also refers to the relationship between home and the body, saying that “the most obvious and fundamental location of home is the human body—the final frontier of identity” (qtd. in Schreiber 159). Morrison’s frequent references to the body as home seem to indicate that Morrison views the body as an ultimate space for home. However, *Beloved* actually suggests that the body as “the most obvious and fundamental location of home” fails to guarantee safety. Baby Suggs gives a sermon on her philosophical and religious belief in “the Clearing,” saying, “This is flesh I’m talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved” (*Beloved* 88). But after Sethe killed her baby girl, “Baby Suggs refused to go to the Clearing because *they* had won” (*Beloved* 184).

These contradictions between her essays and novels in terms

of home suggest that Morrison's essays do not necessarily present her ultimate image of home and that the true picture of Morrison's home should be searched for in her novels, in which Toni Morrison shows her artistic and logical skills to the utmost. Hence, when houses and home in Toni Morrison's novels are discussed, how poetically they render politics is also focused on. Since very few of the previous studies have approached Morrison's literature from the viewpoint of "houses," this thesis will surely lead to a new interpretation of Toni Morrison's literature.

## Chapter I

### The America Dream and Slavery Inscribed on the Grand House in *A Mercy*

*A Mercy*, Morrison's ninth novel, begins with a slave girl's narrative, which is being inscribed on the wooden planks of the unfinished house with a nail. This beginning and episode delivers the major framework of the novel: the unfinished house represents the American dream that an immigrant and slave owner Jacob Vaark desperately tried to achieve "when the conflation of race and slavery was in its infancy" (Jennings 645) and the slave girl damages the house, embedding her narrative to the American dream. This chapter focuses on analyzing Jacob Vaark's building of "a grand house" and Florens' narrative inscribed on the walls inside the house and clarifies what *A Mercy* presents to us.

#### **"A Grand House" and the American Dream**

How Jacob Vaark gets to be engrossed in building a grand house is the process of a white immigrant, who is an independent farmer and trader, seeking success in the new world and trying to acquire high status and power.

Jacob, who was an orphan in Europe, travels to the new world, becomes a trader and gains ownership of some land thanks to his late uncle. Jacob is innately a benevolent and affectionate person. This characteristic of his may have something to do with "his orphan status, the years spent with children of all shades, stealing food and cadging gratuities for errands" (32). In fact, he shows sympathy toward a helpless young raccoon he happens to find, freeing its hind leg stuck in a

broken part of a tree. He has antagonism toward slavery: he refuses to accept a slave D'Ortega offers to him as security for the prolonged loan, for "[f]lesh was not his commodity" (22). However, he accepts the slave girl her slave mother offers to him of her own volition. Looking at the mother who is "throwing away" (34) her child, kneeling in prayer, he feels sympathy for the child, as he showed to Sorrow, another slave of his, who was just a burden to her former owner.

He is "a quick thinker" (12) and his thinking reveals his shrewdness as a trader. Jacob and Rebekka's children died one after another and the only child untouched by disease was killed, kicked by a horse. Jacob expects that the slave girl, who would be his daughter's age if she were still alive, will alleviate Rebekka's sorrow. He also calculates that "if she got kicked in the head by a mare, the loss would not rock Rebekka so" (26).

His visit to D'Ortega's mansion gives Jacob another important experience in addition to acquiring Florens. Having done a deal with D'Ortega on equal footing, he realizes the fact that what divides the landed gentry from the common people like him is "only things, not bloodlines or character" (27). Success achieved by the accumulation of wealth is a kind of value the new world offers any man, regardless of family genealogy. "He was determined to prove that his own industry could amass the fortune, the station, D'Ortega claimed without trading his conscience for coin" (28). However, how he actually amasses wealth "without trading his conscience for coin" is investing in rum production in Barbados, of which he happens to learn at the alehouse. His investment in rum production implies that he has changed from an independent settler to a capitalist.

His involvement in rum production has another connotation.

As Florens' mother experienced, slaves are forced to work under harsh conditions in Barbados. The working conditions of white indentured servants from Europe were no better than those of African slaves. "Right from the very beginning, conditions for indentured servants in Barbados were atrocious" (Jordan 179). Their hardships cannot compare with those which African slaves suffered, though. "The African's lot was a terrible one, for to be wrenched from homeland to toil for another without the comfort of even a family life is as dreadful a fate as could be imagined" (Jordan 187). Jacob sleeps, thinking that "that wide swath of cream pouring through the stars was his for the tasting," and dreaming "of a grand house of many rooms rising on a hill above the fog" (35). "[C]ream" is a metaphor of sugar juice and his thought that things in the sky are his possessions indicates his arrogance and vanity. What is more significant is that his investment in rum production is "investing indirectly in the slave trade" (Jennings 648), implying that the accumulation of wealth is deeply related to slavery.

Jacob spends the wealth he has accumulated by indirect investment in slavery building a mansion. He has already built two houses. "The second one was strong. He tore down the first to lay wooden floors in the second with four rooms, a decent fireplace and windows with good tight shutters" (43). Therefore the third one is totally unnecessary but Jacob needs it to prove that he has succeeded in the New World. Regardless of Jacob's desire for success, building a grand house as his third house raises four problems. One of them, as mentioned above, is that Jacob owes his wealth to his indirect investment in the slave trade.

The second is that a grand house symbolizes extravagance

and vanity. A grand house is, in itself, an extravagance, but he already showed his tendency to spend money purchasing unnecessary things when his wealth began to accumulate: “[a] silver tea service which was put away immediately; a porcelain chamber pot quickly chipped by indiscriminate use; a heavily worked hairbrush for hair he only saw in bed” (88). Rebecca points out that building a grand house is no more than gratifying his vanity as indicated in their conversation:

“We don’t need another house,” she told him.  
“Certainly not one of such size.” She was shaving him and spoke as she finished.

“Need is not the reason, wife.”

“What is, pray?” Rebekka cleared off the last dollop of lather from the blade.

“What a man leaves behind is what a man is.”

“Jacob, a man is only his reputation.” (88-9)

The third problem is that the American dream reflected by building a grand house has a phallogentric value. F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* and William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* treat women as people alienated from the American dream or something like tools to help men achieve success or ornaments or prizes attached to success. Discussing *The Great Gatsby* from the viewpoint of gender, Linda C. Pelzer argues that “[i]n Fitzgerald’s novel, women remain prisoners of patriarchy” (Pelzer 127). Although time and places differ, *Gatsby* and *Sutpen in Absalom, Absalom!* are alike in that they attract women by possessing grand houses. As Ellen is a means for Sutpen to have an heir, Daisy is no more than one of the



parts to constitute his American dream; for *Gatsby* women are “embodiments of an ideal for romantics” (Pelzer 127). Arnold Weinstein argues that Morrison’s works illuminate the maleness of both writers’ works, saying “Morrison works and reworks the Faulknerian material, and in so doing she makes us see ever more clearly the whiteness and the maleness of the Faulkner oeuvre” and that “capitalist fantasy of self-creation in *Gatsby* shines with privilege—both white and male—when measured against the despotic social and psychic schemes of *Beloved*” (Weinstein 266).

Though the grand house in *A Mercy* seemingly plays the same role as *Gatsby*’s mansion and Sutpen’s “Hundred” (*Absalom* 250), it has a markedly different connotation. Lenora Todaro compares *A Mercy* to *Genesis*, regarding Jacob and Rebekka as Adam and Eve, saying,

Morrison's opener—the confession of a slave girl—becomes the foundation for a creation myth: the genesis of racist America, with Adam and Eve played by the Anglo-Dutch trader Jacob Vaark and his mail-order bride, Rebekka, who arrives by boat, grateful to have escaped the squalor of London. (Todaro N.pag)

Obviously the construction of the gate evokes the Expulsion from Paradise; snakes with the tips of their tongues being flowers seem to allure visitors into the mansion.

The result was three-foot-high lines of vertical bars capped with a simple pyramid shape. Neatly these iron bars led to the gate each side of which was crowned by a

flourish of thick vines. Or so he thought. Looking more closely he saw the gilded vines were actually serpents, scales and all, but ending not in fangs but flowers. When the gate was opened, each one separated its petals from the other. When closed, the blossoms merged. (149-50)

However, it is Jacob, a man, not Rebekka, who tastes a fruit of desire, because the latter is content with her self-sufficient lifestyle in the New World. It is Jacob who expects to see a grand house over the opened gate. Morrison deconstructs the sexism inherent in the Genesis story by depicting a gate reminiscent of the Expulsion from Paradise.

The fourth problem raised by the construction of the house is brought to light by a Native American character named Lina. The building of a grand house leads to the environmental destruction of local Native lands and the decimation of the Native American population. Native Americans who appear in Morrison's other works are just given minor roles. It should be noted that Consolata, who plays an important part in *Paradise*, is an indigenous woman, but a South American indigenous person. Hence, Lina in *A Mercy* is the first woman to be given an important voice in the space of North America.

When she carries dying Jacob into the unfinished house, "Lina felt as though she were entering the world of the damned" (51). She hates the grand house because building it has destroyed nature. "The third and presumably final house that Sir insisted on building distorted sunlight and required the death of fifty trees" (43). Since Native Americans value coexisting with nature, destroying nature means destroying their lives. Destruction of nature, represented in the

construction of the grand house, is deeply related to a massive influx of immigrants from Europe. The sachem of the village where Lina was born says,

Cut loose from the earth's soul, they insisted on purchase of its soil, and like all orphans they were insatiable. It was their destiny to chew up the world and spit out a horribleness that would destroy all primary people. (54)

Although Jacob is on the verge of death, suffering from smallpox, he clings to the grand house and orders the women of the Vaark family to take him there so that he may die there. After his death, the Vaark family is ruined, so that the slaves are treated as slaves should be. Florens and Lina cannot sleep in a hammock any longer because Rebekka says, "Outside sleeping is for savages" (159). They are forced to "sleep either in the cowshed or the storeroom where bricks rope tools all manner of building waste are" (159). The expulsion of the slaves from an open space to the relative confinement of the "the cowshed or the storeroom" is ironic.

Jacob was so fixated on building the grand house that Willard and Scully, who are rented to the Vaark, believe that his ghost escapes out of his grave, walking around in the house every night. Florens actually carves words onto the wooden walls. The image of the grand house haunted by the ghost of its owner shows the latent devastation and unlimited desires hidden within the American dream.

### **A Slave Narrative Inscribed on the Grand House**

Florence, being treated outrightly as a slave by Rebekka,

who has become devoted to a religion after recovering from the disease, carves words on the grand house teeming with the unfulfilled dreams of its owner. This is reminiscent of *Beloved*, in which schoolteacher writes Sethe's characteristics in order to evaluate her commodity value. In *A Mercy* a slave transforms herself from an object defined by others into a subject who writes and defines herself. Carving messages onto the wooden walls with a nail carries an aggressive connotation, rather than just a rebellious one in that it damages and alters the American dream reflected by the grand house.

At the same time, writing letters is also a ritual which enables Florens to remember and narrate her past and overcome her trauma. Shreiber explains how to overcome trauma, saying that "people must verbalize and acknowledge personal and cultural trauma in order to mature and function in daily life" (Shreiber 107). Florens' narrative begins with her experience in which she is given to Jacob by her own mother and goes on to tell how she becomes aware of her status as a slave and how she becomes mentally independent.

Florens wore the broken shoes given by D'Ortega's wife when Jacob acquired her as partial repayment of the loan from D'Ortega. The image of a slave wearing high heels reveals that she has not recognized her status as a slave. Her failure to see herself accurately makes her believe that her mother chose her son, not her daughter. In other words, she is unable to see herself in the context of slavery. She fails to perceive her mother's true intention concealed under her seemingly horrible act. She keeps wearing the shoes until she is sixteen years old. Her psyche is similar to Sethe's in *Beloved*: Sethe asks her mistress to let her have a wedding ceremony. It means that Mr.

and Mrs. Vaark treat Florens as if she were a member of the Vaark family. While Sethe's owner Garner is an unusual planter in the neighborhood, however, Mr. and Mrs. Vaark are not an exception but ordinary settlers who represent the colony of the days. It was not until the Nathaniel Bacon' rebellion that slavery based on race developed.

Law after law deprived Africans and Native Americans of rights, while bolstering the legal position of European servants. In the space of twenty years, non-whites lost their judicial rights, property rights, electoral rights and family rights. They even lost the right to be freed if their master wanted to free them. In parallel, whites gained rights and privileges. [...] And the notion of a 'white race' was promoted. Hitherto, the English had never applied colour to distinguish race. Now white servants, whose daily condition was little different from that of Africans, were taught that they belonged to a superior people. (Jordan 212)

In "people's war" described in *A Mercy*, "[h]alf a dozen years ago an army of blacks, natives, whites, mulattoes—freedmen, slaves and indentured—had waged war against local gentry led by members of that very class" (10). This army is different from Bacon's documented army composed of whites and blacks. Actually "[Bacon] emerged as leader of the most violent settlers who favoured total extermination of the indigenous population" (Jordan 207). Morrison does not disregard historicity, but after researching historical resources, she gives free rein to her imagination and creativity when she recreates people buried in

the past<sup>2</sup>. It is true that there were free blacks in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in America, such as the blacksmith who plays an important role in *A Mercy*. What is important with Bacon's rebellion is that it led to depriving blacks of rights, and to racial slavery, which can be seen in *Beloved*, too.

Although Florens is treated like a family member by Mr. and Mrs. Vaark thanks to the primary slavery system, she is so obsessed with the idea that she was discarded by her mother that she seeks tenderness from others and is unusually eager to be accepted as indicated in the following: "However slight, any kindness shown her she munched like a rabbit. Jacob said the mother had no use for her which, Rebekka decided, explained her need to please" (96). When the blacksmith appears, she comes to believe that having sex with him proves how deeply he loves her and to depend totally on him. Florens goes so far as to think, "You are my shaper and my world as well" (71).

Rebekka, about to die of smallpox, believes in Florens' infatuation with the blacksmith. Since he knows techniques to cure people of diseases such as smallpox, she sends Florens for him. This solitary trip gives Florens a great opportunity to grow mentally. Jane, daughter of Widow Ealing, is suspected of being a demon because her eyes are askew. In order to prove that her daughter is not a demon but a human being, Widow Ealing whips Jane's thighs until they bleed. The moment villagers see a colored girl Florens, however, they regard her as a demon. This not only suggests that their definition of a demon is inconsistent, but also mirrors the age when racial slavery was starting to be established.

Florens intuitively feels that she has no other means but her white mistress to protect herself and shows Rebekka's letter to the

villagers. Suspecting that even the guarantee Florens has was written by “Lucifer” (113), they take it away to ascertain its validity. Florens thinks to herself,

Something precious is leaving me. I am a thing apart.  
With the letter I belong and am lawful. Without it I am a  
weak calf abandon by the herd, a turtle without shell, a  
minion with no telltale signs but a darkness I am born  
with, outside, yes, but inside as well and the inside dark  
is small, feathered and toothy. (115)

This implies that Florens has become aware of her status as a slave and of slavery as a system. She also feels violence growing inside her as indicated in the words “feathered and toothy.” Morrison seems to view violence as a kind of energy to help people free themselves from any form of slavery and seek their identity. It also works as a protective medium from falling prey to a dominant and destructive culture as indicated in the episode of breaking dolls in *The Bluest Eye*. Claudia breaks “a big, blue-eyed Baby Doll” (*The Bluest* 17), to “examine it to see what it was that all the world said was lovable” (*The Bluest* 19). Claudia is afraid that her violent impulse will extend toward white people:

But the dismembering of dolls was not the true horror.  
The truly horrifying thing was the transference of the  
same impulses to little white girls. The indifference with  
which I could have axed them was shaken only by my  
desire to do so. (*The Bluest* 20)

Florens' revolt against being treated unjustly leads to realization of her race. Her monologue, "The sun's going leaves darkness behind and the dark is me. Is we. Is my home"(115), indicates that she has come to acknowledge that her skin color, that is, her race, is part of her identity.

Although Florens has come to realize her social status, she is still dependent on the blacksmith for her identity. Her trauma of being abandoned by her own mother keeps her anxious to make the blacksmith concentrate all his affection on her. When she makes it to the blacksmith's, she finds out that his affection is being directed to a young boy Malaik. After the blacksmith set out to save Rebekka, leaving Malaik with Florens, Florens has a dream about her mother and brother. "When I wake a minha mãe is standing by your cot and this time her baby boy is Malaik. He is holding her hand. She is moving her lips at me but she is holding Malaik's hand in her own" (138). Her grudge against her mother and brother makes her mean to Malaik, and causes her to dislocate his shoulder and bleed his mouth, but all by accident. When the blacksmith finds Malaik lying with his mouth bleeding, he strikes Florens, criticizing her for being wild. Florens rises up against him, attacking him with a hammer. What infuriates Florens is her awareness that the blacksmith chose the boy and that she is nothing to him. Her violence against the blacksmith means that she loses her "shaper," and stops depending on others for her identity.

The blacksmith also refers to Florens "a slave by choice." (141). Morrison explains the blacksmith's view of slavery, saying that to the blacksmith "slavery as a kind of concept, rather than law" ("An exclusive interview with the Author"). It is true that for indentured whites Scully and Willard, their



wages, though they are not as much as the blacksmith's, are "enough to imagine a future" (156), but what awaits Florens in the future is the advertisement for "the sale of Florense" (155). Sorrow, who has delivered a baby with the aid of Scully and Willard, is thinking of escape, but this episode is reminiscent of Sethe, foreboding the established race slavery.

Indeed his view of slavery is conceptional, but the blacksmith and Florens' verbal exchange shows how Florens is dependent on others: "I am adoring you. And a slave to that too" (141). Carving words on the walls of the grand house, Florens says to the blacksmith in her mind, "I am become wilderness but I am also Florens. In full. Unforgiven. Unforgiving. No ruth, my love. None. Hear me? Slave. Free. I last" (161). These contradictory words, "Slave" and "Free," mean that she is fully aware of her status as a slave and that she is free of dependency on others. All the statements denote her resolute determination to live.

There is another soliloquy suggesting her transformation into an independent and mature self: "A lion who thinks his mane is all. A she-lion who does not. I learn this from Daughter Jane. Her bloody legs do not stop her. She risks. Risks all to save the slave you throw out" (160). Jane is freed from her hardship when villagers find another object for evil. She is sure of a fallacy hidden in religious beliefs by witnessing that the definition of evil changes so easily. She suspects an economic reason for the witch-hunt, saying, "It is the pasture they crave" (109).

Witchcraft can be considered to have been real in the frontier life in the 1600s as suggested in the observations:

*Seventeenth-century colonists considered witchcraft a plausible explanation for numerous phenomena, including natural disasters, the sudden death of livestock, and even a run of personal bad luck. While men could be accused of practicing the black arts, women—especially the elderly, the poor, the solitary, and those with a reputation for antisocial behavior—were considered more likely suspects when cattle died or children grew ill.* (Berkin 140)

Settlers must have encountered numerous misfortunes in the New World and wanted plausible reasons for them. The episode in Daughter Jane's house suggests that religion was not only manipulated for vulgar purposes and that immigrants' view of misfortunes contributed to the race slavery being established, for African Americans' skin color served as the most plausible reason for evils.

Daughter Jane, who is now confident of herself, dares to help Florens escape. When Florens asks Jane if she is a demon, Jane says, smiling, "Oh, yes" (114). Jane can be regarded as a demon in that her attitude toward religion could lead to a breaking of the village's social code and a disruption of social order. Florens does not realize what Jane's smile means, but she is fully aware of the fact that Jane helped her run, knowing that she was risking her life. Jane's brave and selfless action teaches Florens that women can be strong and tender enough to sacrifice themselves for others.

Florens carves the last words on the inside of the mansion: "Mae, you can have pleasure now because the soles of my feet are hard as cypress" (161). Florense will not be able to convey

her thoughts to her mother, nor will she be able to know what she has wanted to know since she parted from her mother: the reason why she was given to Jacob. However, her mother's soliloquy appears in the last chapter of the novel as if it were a response to Florens' inquiry.

Florens' mother explains what she had to endure because she was a slave and a woman when she was brought to Barbados. Her hardships she experienced on the slave ship are similar to what Beloved in *Beloved* experienced on the slave ship. Florens' mother says, "To be female in this place is to be an open wound that cannot heal. Even if scars form, the festering is ever below" (163). She anticipated that Florens would be sexually abused by Mr. and Mrs. O'rtega. She did not choose to kill her daughter in order to protect her like Sethe, but chose to abandon her to another slave owner to let her live, believing in a human's mercy. She says what she wanted to tell her daughter in giving her to Jacob:

One chance, I thought. There is no protection but there is difference. [...] I said you. Take you, my daughter. Because I saw the tall man see you as a human child, not pieces of eight. I knelt before him. Hoping for a miracle. He said yes.

It was not a miracle. Bestowed by God. It was a mercy. Offered by a human. I stayed on my knees.

In addition, she gives complex advice to her daughter:

In the dust where my heart will remain each night and every day until you understand what I know and long to

tell you: to be given dominion over another is a hard thing; to wrest dominion over another is a wrong thing; to give dominion of yourself to another is a wicked thing. (166).

Judging from how a mother would feel about abandoning her dear child, it is supposed that Florens' mother wants to say that Jacob was willing to assume the burden of accepting a human child and that she felt as if she were cutting herself into pieces, by tearing her dear daughter away from her. She also wants to tell her daughter that she must respect herself. Depending on the blacksmith, Florens was so afraid of losing him that she was under an obsession of keeping him to herself. If she disregards herself, it means that she disregards her dear person.

Lina criticized Florens, saying, "[Florens'] feet are useless, will always be too tender for life and never have the strong soles, tougher than leather, that life requires" (4). At last Florens acquires "the strong soles" and becomes independent. Although she cannot hear her mother's advice directly, her mother's strong wish that Florens would learn to respect herself and survive is granted in Florens' independence. This independence is shown by the soles of her feet "hard as cypress" (161). Florens regains dominion over herself and solidifies her determination to live despite having to face the hardships of slavery.

### **The Grand House in Flames**

In the scene of the burning mansion in *Absalom, Absalom!*, Clytie, a slave related by blood to Sutpen, and remaining loyal to Henry, her step-brother and master, sets fire to the mansion—which is already in ruins, and she and Henry burn to

death. This implies that Clytie remains captive to Sutpen's American dream. Florens' following soliloquy suggests the grand house will be set fire to by her:

Perhaps these words need the air that is out in the world.  
Need to fly up then fall, fall like ash over acres of  
primrose and mallow. Over a turquoise lake, beyond the  
eternal hemlocks, through clouds cut by rainbow and  
flavor the soil of the earth. Lina will help. She finds  
horror in this house and much as she needs to be  
Mistress' need I know she loves fire more. (161)

The idea of burning the grand house occurs to her when the house has been completely filled with her words, leaving no space for other words. She fears that the blacksmith will not have a chance to read them.

Lina has been morbidly obsessed with fire, since she witnessed soldiers burn her village which was devastated by smallpox. Florens' idea to burn the house, turn the words into ashes and spread them all over the world is based on the native folklore that Lina told Florens over and over again. The story goes: a mother eagle, trying to protect her eggs, is struck to death by a greedy human being. The end of the story is as follows:

Screaming she falls and falls. Over the turquoise lake,  
beyond the eternal hemlocks, down through the clouds cut  
by rainbow. Screaming, screaming she is carried away by  
wind instead of wing. (62)

For Lina, burning Jacob's house means destroying the object of her hate out of revenge. But for Florens it is a positive act of conveying her thoughts to the blacksmith and of spreading them widely. This differs from Clytie's self-restraining one. As Florens' soliloquy fused with Lina's folklore suggests, Florens' narrative, which will be conveyed to the farthest corners of the world, in the form of ashes, carries the narratives of Lina, her mother and those who got in touch with Florens.

What Jacob's unfinished house reflects is that the American dream that anyone can achieve high status and grasp power with hard work and money is financially predicated on racial slavery and is masculine, extravagant, and aggressive in nature. The incompleteness of the house implies that the American dream has had such faults from the beginning. By damaging the house by carving into it with a nail and filling it with her own words, Florens infiltrates it, trying to control it. The house with the American dream overwritten by a slave's voice becomes a historical monument. Moreover, soon the house will catch fire, go up in flames, turn into ashes, travel in the wind, and fall on the ground of every corner of the world. This means the grand house with its inside filled with words, transforms itself from a static house into a mobile one, assuming the characteristic of being ubiquitous. Being ubiquitous frees the house from its historical yoke and connects it to the present. Through this house, *A Mercy* calls the reader to question the cultural value of the long-standing American dream. As represented by Florens' strong will to survive, it compels the reader to remember the voices of the slaves who tried to find their identity and live strongly in spite of the hardships they faced in the days "when the conflation of race and slavery was in its infancy."

## Chapter II

### Houses Suppressing Life

#### 1. An “Elaborately Built Toilet”: the House in *Tar Baby*

Jacob’s grand house in *A Mercy* reveals the problems within the American dream that have existed since the birth of America. It also presages what American capitalism will drag people into. L’Arbe de la Croix, Valerian’s mansion in *Tar Baby*, not only reflects the white owner Valerian’s bourgeois values but also represents American imperialism. Furthermore, the text shows a cultural clash between Jadine, who has been educated in white middle-class culture, and Son, who treasures his black culture, as Karen Baker-Fletcher points out, “Son wants Jadine to live in the all black town of Eloë, where women hang sheets on the line. Jadine wants Son to seek educational and economic success” (Baker-Fletcher 36). This part of the thesis, however, focuses on Valerian’s mansion, illustrating the problems it foregrounds.

#### American Imperialism

L’Arbe de la Croix is a beautifully built house on a Caribbean island:

Of the houses built there, the oldest and most impressive was L’Arbe de la Croix. [...]

It was a wonderful house. [...] Graceful landscaping kept the house just under a surfeit of beauty. Every effort had been made to keep it from looking “designed.” [...]

They all agreed that except for the unfortunate choice of its name it was “the most handsomely articulated and blessedly unrhetorical house in the Caribbean.” (13)

The fact is, however, that by constructing such a beautiful house seemingly in harmony with nature, one needs to eliminate or negatively affect animals, plants and nature. The negative effect was so grave that “clouds and fish were convinced that the world was over, that the sea-green green of the sea and the sky-blue blue of the sky were no longer permanent” (12). The sentence “Every effort had been made to keep it from looking ‘designed’” paradoxically indicates that the house actually is artificial and that its beauty is ambivalent. It is ambivalent because it is evaluated from the viewpoint of foreigners and invaders. Unlike natural land open to animals and plants, the big house is protected by the “knobs, hinges and locks secure as turtles” (13), as is often the case with big houses. In sum, *L’Arbe de la Croix* represents imperialism, taking on colonial characteristics, though they are hidden in the beauty of the house and the surroundings. Its true qualities are revealed when Son challenges Valerian, accusing him of dismissing Thérèse and Gideon for stealing his apples.

Son, who “[has] been seeing the United States through the international edition of *Time*, by way of shortwave radio and the views of other crewmen” (169), criticizes Valerian’s exploitation of those who have provided him with sugar which has enabled him to make a fortune. His reference to the sugar trade is reminiscent of Jacob Vaark’s investment in rum in Barbados, by which he accumulates wealth without dirtying his hands. Son thinks to himself,



...[Valerian] had been able to dismiss with a flutter of the fingers the people whose sugar and cocoa had allowed him to grow old in regal comfort; although he had taken the sugar and cocoa and paid for it as though it had no value, as though the cutting of cane and picking of bean was child's play and had no value; but he turned it into candy, the invention of which really was child's play, and sold it to other children and made a fortune in order to move near, but not in the midst of, the jungle where the sugar came from and build a palace with more of their labor and then hire them to do more of the work he was not capable of and pay them again according to some scale of value that would outrage Satan himself... (208)

Son claims that bourgeois Americans like Valerian behave as law enforcers even if they are on a foreign land.

He also claims they are indifferent to how much waste they accumulate and discharge onto the earth, and criticizes their insatiable desire for materialistic wealth, referring to their houses as “elaborately built toilets”:

Would fight and kill to own the cesspools they made, and although they called it architecture it was in fact elaborately built toilets, decorated toilets, toilets surrounded with and by business and enterprise in order to have something to do in between defecations since waste was the order of the day and the ordering principle of the universe. And especially the Americans who were the worst because they were new at the business of

defecation spent their whole lives bathing bathing  
bathing washing away the stench of the cesspools as  
though pure soap had anything to do with purity. (208)

Son predicts that white culture, fueled by imperialism, is  
destined to collapse:

That was the sole lesson of their world: how to make  
waste, how to make machines that made more waste, how  
to make wasteful products, how to talk waste, how to  
study waste, how to design waste, how to cure people who  
were sickened by waste so they could be well enough to  
endure it, how to mobilize waste, legalize waste and how  
to despise the culture that lived in cloth houses and shit  
on the ground far away from where they ate. And it would  
drown them one day, they would all sink into their own  
waste and the waste they had made of the world and then,  
finally they would know true peace and the happiness  
they had been looking for all along. (209)

Jacob Vaark in *A Mercy* becomes more and more interested in  
unnecessary things as his wealth increases. Son criticizes  
Valerian for doing the same thing in a foreign land as he would  
do in America.

Furthermore, American imperialism actually kills living  
things. When Son sees Jadine's coat with "the hides of the  
ninety baby seals" (92) that Ryk sent her as a Christmas present,  
he recalls "the slaughter of whole families in their sleep" (133).  
He had probably seen such ghastly scenes in Vietnam.

## **“A Greenhouse on the Equator”**

L'Arbe de la Croix is outstandingly big, as suggested by “the kitchen, which had a look of permanence” (14), but it also suggests that their abode is temporary and unstable:

the rest of the house had a hotel feel about it—a kind of sooner or later leaving appearance: a painting or two hung in an all right place but none was actually stationed or properly lit; the really fine china was still boxed and waiting for a decision nobody was willing to make. (14)

It seems that Valerian wants to establish a comfortable home in L'Arbe de la Croix, since he has brought almost everything he loves: “some records, garden shears, a sixty-four-bulb chandelier, a light blue tennis shirt and the Principal Beauty of Maine” (14).

In spite of the big house built “on a hill high enough to watch the sea from three sides” (14), however, “he never gave the sea a thought” (14). He spends his day mostly in the greenhouse, which makes his servant Ondine mockingly say, “Anybody build a greenhouse on the equator ought to be shame” (15). All these things indicate that Valerian wants a space designed solely for himself, in which everything is under his control. Philip Page goes far enough to say, “he would like to extend his control indefinitely” (Page 120). The greenhouse embodies his desire for control. It serves as a miniature world where he can manage everything at his will, “for it was a nice place to talk to his ghosts in peace while he transplanted, fed, air-layered, rooted, watered, dried and thinned his plants” (16). As even his wife is referred to as “the Principal Beauty of

Maine,” all he wants to keep around him are objects, not anything or any one that is likely to interfere in his peaceful life. His servants Ondine and Sydney are nothing but objects that help him maintain the lifestyle he had in Philadelphia. Their beautiful niece Jadine is another one of his ornaments. Her purpose is to reflect his benevolent attitude toward blacks. An example of this is helping her graduate from college.

### **Margaret’s Trailer**

Valerian’s wife Margaret, who is called the Principal Beauty of Maine, was not cared for as much as her siblings were. This is because her parents thought she had everything thanks to her beauty. Her beauty has a capitalistic value, as “Principal” means “capital,” enabling her to marry a billionaire. But her beauty does not ensure her even a cosy home. “Margaret is victimized by the American worship of female beauty” (Page 113). She prefers the trailer she used to live in as a child to “a house bigger than her elementary school” (63) that she comes to live in after marrying Valerian, because “[in the trailer] the separateness she felt had less room to grow in” (62). Lack of care prevents her from maturing. Her new life with Valerian in the house increases her loneliness because, besides being unable to fit into high society, she has no one in the house to talk with. Valerian forbids her to mingle intimately with Ondine and Sydney, saying “she should guide the servants, not consort with them” (64). Wherever she is, she cannot have a comfortable home to settle into, as indicated by the following passage:

...she was gone and other people were where they

belonged. She was going up or down stairs; other people seemed to be settled somewhere. She was on the two concrete steps of the trailer; the six wooden steps of the hand-built house; the thirty-seven steps at the stadium when she was crowned; and a million wide steps in the house of Valerian Street. (63)

She is always outside home, feeling estranged by people around her. Thus, all she can do is to go shopping; even after she moves to the island, it is “a major part of Margaret’s life as it had always been her own” (96). As shopping is no more than an activity which only satisfies her materialistic desire, it gives her no comfort.

### **The Message from underneath the Sink**

All the above-mentioned points need to be taken into account when her abuse of her own son is thought of. Ondine discloses Margaret’s secret, saying, “She stuck pins in his behind. Burned him with cigarettes” (213). Margaret, who was not properly cared for as a child, has little idea how to treat her baby. She confesses the reason for the abuse:

And she was outraged by that infant needfulness. There were times when she absolutely had to limit its *being there*; stop its implicit and explicit demand for her best and constant self. She could not describe her loathing of its prodigious appetite for security—the criminal arrogance of an infant’s conviction that while he slept, someone is there; that he wakes, someone is there; that when he is hungry, food will somehow magically be

provided. So she told him that part that was palatable: that she could not control herself—which was true, for when she felt hostage to that massive insolence, that stupid trust, she could not help piercing it. (241)

She also admits the pleasure she felt when abusing her son, saying, “When it did happen, it was out of my control. I thought at first it was because he was crying or wouldn’t sleep. But then sometimes it was in order to make him cry, or to wake him from sleep”(242). Imprisoned in the big house without good friends to talk intimately and honestly about her personal matters with, she concentrates on her son, trying to manipulate and monopolize him.

Ondine’s attack on Margaret, meanwhile, unmaskes Valerian, who looks peaceful and innocent. Through Margaret’s detailed account, Valerian comes to realize his innocent attitude toward his family has been wrong:

He thought about innocence there in his greenhouse and knew that he was guilty of it because he had lived with a woman who had made something kneel down in him the first time he saw her, but about whom he knew nothing; had watched his son grow and talk but also about whom he had known nothing. And there was something so foul in that, something in the crime of innocence so revolting it paralyzed him. He had not known because he had not taken the trouble to know. He was satisfied with what he did know. Knowing more was inconvenient and frightening. (247).

He has lived in the world he has made up, not facing reality. That's why he has been unaware of what occurred in his house. He also admits that he deliberately dismissed the true message from his son:

Made up the information he was waiting for. Preoccupied himself with the construction of the world and its inhabitants according to this imagined message. But had chosen not to know the real message that his son had mailed to him from underneath the sink. (248).

Although he admits the “sin”(248) of his innocence, he has no courage to think further; he only admits his weakness and cowardice, while acknowledging his wife’s strength: “Margaret knew the bottomlessness—she had looked at it, dived in it and pulled herself out—obviously tougher than he” ( 247). Now he sees the real Margaret, not an imaginary beauty: “[n]ot like a piece of Valerian candy, but like a person on a bus, already formed, fleshed, thick with a life which is not yours and not accessible to you” (244).

### **The House Taken over**

Margaret seems to have gotten over the obsession of her child abuse; “[t]he revelation of her guilt provides relief and release, allowing her some room to grow and some control over her life” (Page 114). Now she wants to reconcile with Ondine, but it does not seem viable since racism in the house has become evident; Margaret does not even know Ondine’s age. Margaret asks Ondine to forgive her for her silliness because of her young age, saying, “I was only nineteen. You were—what—thirty?

Thirty-five?”(246), though Ondine was actually twenty-three.

Sydney, meanwhile, knowing that Valerian has no intention to dismiss him and his wife and that their niece is leaving them, determines to stay on the island and make L’Arbe de la Croix their home. Answering his wife who says, “This is not your property, Sydney,” he says, “No, but it’s my home. If this ain’t my home, then nothing is but the grave” (291). He willingly plays his role as a good butler:

He picked up the rattan tray and, since he was a genuine Philadelphia Negro mentioned in the book of that name, he reclasped his bow tie and adjusted his cuff links before he left the kitchen and went to the greenhouse. (291)

Rebelling nature, which Sydney notices on his way to the greenhouse, seems to encourage him to take over L’Arbe de la Croix:

He noticed that the bricks that edged the courtyard were popping up out of the ground, leaning every which way. Urged, it seemed to him, out of the earth, like they were poked from beneath. Cement, he thought, is all that will keep this earth still. This place dislocates everything. (291)

Sydney opposes Valerian’s idea to leave the island, saying, “I figure we’re going to be here a long time, Mr. Street. A good long time” (296). Pretending to be an “Uncle Tom-ish” (148) servant, he takes advantage of his master’s physical disability and senile state:



“We’ll give you the best of care. Just like we always done. That’s something you ain’t never got to worry about.” He placed the arm carefully in the groove and turned the volume up high. Valerian smiled then, and his fingers dance lightly in the air. (296)

It is true that Sydney’s treatment of his master implies his revolt against white supremacy, but it is doubtful whether he and his family have found their true home in L’Arbe de la Croix. Now that their niece Jadine is gone, they have no choice but to stick to their false home with their senile master and happy-go-lucky mistress, “trying to make the best of their secondary status” (Page 121).

## **Tar Baby**

Jadine flies over to Paris, hoping she will find home there, since she has realized “New York was not her home after all” (297), much less Eloë; she thinks, “How could she make a life with a cultural throwback, she asked herself, and answered No way. Eloë. Now way” (282). She cannot free herself from white middle-class culture. She comes back to L’Arbe de la Croix to get her stuff, but Ondine believes her stuff means the sealskin coat: she wonders “if her niece would even have come to say goodbye had it not been that the sealskin coat was there” (286). Jadine, feeling a little bit guilty of her ingratitude to her aunt and uncle, suggests that they come to Paris with her, which means that they would be confined within the framework of her values. Naturally Ondine cannot accept her offer, since her niece doesn’t treasure her values and culture, Eloë’s culture.

She says to her niece:

Jadine, a girl has got to be a daughter first. She have to learn that. And if she never learns how to be a daughter, she can't never learn how to be a woman. I mean a real woman: a woman good enough for a child; good enough for a man—good enough even for the respect of other women. (287)

As Jadine, who flies “in first class” (299), cannot accept Ondine's values, she says flatly to her aunt, “I don't want to learn how to be the kind of woman you're talking about because I don't want to be that kind of woman” (288). This is Jadine's farewell to black culture.

Son is also losing his home, Eloë, being held captive to Jadine, who he refers to as “a tar baby” (278) that Valerian has made. When he realizes he has lost Jadine, he starts to see Eloë in terms of her values. Then everything about Eloë that he has believed is beautiful starts to fade:

Out came the photos she had taken in the middle of the road in Eloë. Beatrice, pretty Beatrice, Soldier's daughter. She looked stupid. Ellen, sweet cookie-faced Ellen, the one he always thought so pretty. She looked stupid. They all looked stupid, backwoods, dumb, dead... (280)

Blind Thérèse takes Son to the island where L'Arbe de la Croix is situated. The darkness, which they are rowing a boat in, reflects Thérèse wanting him to become aware of his being blind and captive to Jadine. She advises him not to go to L'Arbe de

la Croix, saying, "Forget her. There is nothing in her parts for you. She has forgotten her ancient properties" (313), but he seems unable to follow her advice, for he wants to "tell her to mind her own business" (313).

The ending of the story is as mystifying as Morrison's other works. Trudier Harris interprets the last scene as a stage where Son transforms into a person who can live in harmony with nature:

In recognizing Son as a kindred spirit, in preparing the way for his road to be easier, the trees claim him by giving him the space to claim himself. They appear patient and receptive, ready for this long-lost one who is now being returned to them. Without weeping or images of suffering, they suggest a newer, stronger future for their world. Their calmness at this point is a culminating contrast to the agitation many of their kindred have felt earlier. (Harris 149)

Philip Page also recognizes that the last scene shows Son's renewal, yet he argues that he has estranged himself from the community:

Son's "quest" thus becomes unheroic and passive, in some ways a retreat comparable to Jadine's two retreats. Son's flight into the island raises as many questions as it answers, even more so than Milkman's ambiguous leap into myth. Like Milkman's leap, Son's flight remains an idiosyncratic solution, perhaps the best option for him but an option not available to anyone else. Like Sula, his

quest is over, but not completed, for both characters realize that they have no place in the community and yet that they cannot tolerate living alone. They represent the free energy of the disruptive pariah, energy that the community cannot contain, and energy that ultimately has no worldly place. (Page 129)

There can be another interpretation: Son has not changed. He is still eager to meet Jadine. The last description of Son goes: "Then he ran. Lickety-split. Lickety-split. Looking neither to the left nor to the right. Lickety-split. Lickety-split. Lickety-lickety-lickety-split" (314). All we can imagine is Son's frantic running toward a certain object. There is no hint to his transformation besides the mist lifting and the trees stepping back, and Terese's preceding reference to blind people riding horses: "You can get free of her. They are waiting in the hills for you" (314). Since his drive to see Jadine is uncontrollable, it is hardly possible that he can forget Jadine in such a short time. Therefore we can rightly assume that he is running straight to L'Arbe de la Croix to get Jadine's address: he remains captured by the tar baby.

Occasional allusions to exuberant plants around L'Arbe de la Croix indicate that nature is rising against a devastating human folly—American imperialism. Human beings, however, still remain captive to the values of white middle-class culture, which L'Arbe de la Croix represents.

## 2 . Fake Houses in *The Bluest Eye*

## Morrison's Artistic and Political Strategy in *The Bluest Eye*

All the houses in *The Bluest Eye*, except Claudia's poor house, serve as antidotes to make black people become aware of the real condition in which they live.

Dick and Jane's happy American family in the initial primer reflects the prevalent cultural values of early 20<sup>th</sup> century United States. It starts with a reference to a house: "Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy" (1). Then all the sentences are combined without punctuations: "Here is the house it is green and white it has a red door it is very pretty here is the family mother father dick and jane live in the green-and-white house they are very happy" (1). Furthermore, all the words in the combined sentences are joined with each other : "Hereisthehouseitisgreenandwhiteithasared-dooritisverypretty" (2). The joined words in the combined sentences becomes one and the meaning of each particular word is lost. The joined words are separated into blocks of meaning and each of the blocks reappears at the beginning of the responding chapter. The joined words look as if they were waiting to be molded into different words, sentences, and, ultimately, a different story. This is Morrison's unique artistic and political strategy to deconstruct the value that the primer forces on African Americans. With the happy image of Dick and Jane's story lost, one cannot help facing the harrowing yet real, black American family life.

### The Breedloves' House

The story following the first block of the joined words begins as follows:

There is an abandoned store on the southeast corner of Broadway and Thirty-fifth Street in Lorain, Ohio. It does not recede into its background of leaden sky, nor harmonize with the gray frame houses and black telephone poles around it. Rather, it foists itself on the eye of the passerby in a manner that is both irritating and melancholy. Visitors who drive to this tiny town wonder why it has not been torn down, while pedestrians, who are residents of the neighborhood, simply look away when they pass it. (31)

Although people don't want to see the store which contains the Breedloves' house, it claims that it is still there and demands that the Breedlove family it once housed be remembered.

The incident in which Cholly rapes his daughter and makes her pregnant takes place on the first floor of the store. The inside of the Breedloves' house speaks eloquently of the family life and [shows](#) the cause of the incident:

The plan of the living quarters was as unimaginative as a first-generation Greek landlord could contrive it to be. The large "store" area was partitioned into two rooms by beaverboard planks that did not reach to the ceiling. There was a living room, which the family called the front room, and the bedroom, where all the living was done. In the front room were two sofas, an upright piano, and a tiny artificial Christmas tree which had been there,

decorated and dust-laden, for two years. The bedroom had three beds: a narrow iron bed for Sammy, fourteen years old, another for Pecola, eleven years old, and a double bed for Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove. In the center of the bedroom, for the even distribution of heat, stood a coal stove. Trunks, chairs, a small end table, and a cardboard “wardrobe” closet were placed around the walls. The kitchen was in the back of this apartment, a separate room. There was no bath facilities. Only a toilet bowl, inaccessible to the eye, if not the ear, of the tenants. (32)

This house has many metaphorical effects. The floor separated by beaverboard planks looks like a provisional abode, which prevents the family from feeling comfortable. The front room has two sofas and a piano, which appear to be strictly ornamental, only serving to satisfy the inhabitants’ materialistic desires. The dust-laden Christmas tree suggests that the family is not only untidy but also unable to enjoy being together, even though they are supposed to. The bedroom with miscellaneous objects placed around the wall highlights, again, the provisional nature of the house. A cardboard “wardrobe” closet shows their failed endeavor to possess a house with a real closet. But it is the toilet bowl that truly epitomizes their pathetic life.

Even though they have two sofas, they lack the most important and indispensable thing in the house: a bathroom. Mr. and Mrs. Breedlove moved from the south to the north in search of a better life. Perhaps they feel that they have found it since they have more furniture. Eva in *Sula* takes her sick son to the outhouse and there she realizes poverty is killing them. Though

Eva can avoid the smell of the toilet even in poverty, the Breedloves have to stand the unpleasant smells and sounds coming from the toilet. The juxtaposition of the toilet with the sofas suggests that the market economy seems to provide people with goods and items that satisfy their materialistic desires but does not necessarily provide them with truly necessary things.

Loans are another example of the issues that accompany the market economy. Allowing people to buy more than they can actually afford, loans can give the illusion of a better life. But items bought with borrowed money serve to actually increase agony. The sofa Pauline bought with such money causes her physical trauma:

Occasionally an item provoked a physical reaction: an increase of acid irritation in the upper intestinal tract, a light flush of perspiration at the back of the neck as circumstances surrounding the piece of furniture were recalled. (34)

She feels uneasy about the sofa not only because it has a gush in the fabric from the beginning, but because she has to pay for the loan every month:

If you had to pay \$ 4.80 a month for a sofa that started off split, no good, and humiliating—you couldn't take any joy in owning it. And the joylessness stank, pervading everything. [...] Like a sore tooth that is not content to throb in isolation, but must diffuse its own pain to other parts of the body—making breathing difficult, vision limited, nerves unsettled, so a hated piece of furniture



produces a fretful malaise that asserts itself throughout the house and limits the delight of things not related to it. (34-5)

The problem is that she cannot help but keep buying what is unnecessary for her and her family's life. The relationship with the few black women she meets and the movies she comes to love also prompt her to buy more things and make her take temporary jobs. This leads to her unceasing quarrel with Cholly.

### **A Fake House**

Pauline starts to work for a white family. It is ironic that the house does not give its owner's family any happiness, either. Pauline observes that they are not happy in spite of their wealth, thinking to herself, "*You'd think with a pretty house like that and all the money they could holt on to, they would enjoy one another. She haul off and cry over the leastest thing*" (117).

Despite such keen insights, Pauline cannot free herself from her craving for materialistic wealth. Movies contribute toward her indoctrination with white cultural values. This has begun with Dick and Jane's story. It teaches Pauline that a woman's happiness is brought about by a man's tenderness and care, and a good house, such as "big clean houses with the bathtubs right in the same room with the toilet" (121). Her experiences accumulated through the silver screen emotionally distance her further and further away from her family.

When she gets "a permanent job in the home of a well-to-do family whose members were affectionate, appreciative, and

generous" (124), her new illusory wealthy life begins. The Fisher house, which Pauline works in, is among "the lakefront houses" (103). The location suggests that the value of a house depends not just on its size and beauty but on the place where the house is built. Serenity and peace surround those beautiful lakefront houses:

The lakefront houses were the loveliest. Garden furniture, ornaments, windows like shiny eyeglasses, and no sign of life. The backyards of these houses fell away in green slopes down to a strip of sand, and then the blue Lake Erie, lapping all the way to Canada. The orange-patched sky of the steel-mill section never reached this part of town. This sky was always blue. (103)

The Fisher house is right before the entrance to a park and "the large white house with the wheelbarrow full of flowers" (103). Claudia and Frieda also admire the house, but regard it as "the proud house" (103), which shows their critical spirit. While it is true that the whole family—including the child—is kind and affectionate, the house has a critically negative effect on Pauline:

Soon she stopped trying to keep her own house. The things she could afford to buy did not last, had no beauty or style, and were absorbed by the dingy storefront. More and more she neglected her house, her children, her man—they were like the afterthoughts one has just before sleep, the early-morning and late-evening edges of her day, the dark edges that made the daily life with the

Fishers lighter, more delicate, more lovely. (124)

The Fisher house is the one that Pauline regards as an ideal home.

Pauline's illusion of an idyllic life is shattered when Claudia, Frieda and Pecola visit her at the Fisher house. When they enter the kitchen, they are awed by the magnificent view of the room and how well Pauline fits into it, like an ornament to the house; "Mrs. Breedlove's skin glowed like taffeta in the reflection of white porcelain, white woodwork, polished cabinets, and brilliant copperware" (105). When Pecola drops the pan, splattering blueberries in it, and burning her legs with the juice, however, Pauline knocks her to the floor. She slaps Pecola again and says, "Crazy fool...my floor, mess...look what you...work...get on out...now that...crazy...my floor, my floor...my floor" (106). She repeats "my floor" three times. This shows that Pauline views her workplace as her own possession. She does not treat her daughter's burns at all. While Pauline spits out words to Claudia, Frieda and Pecola "like rotten pieces of apple" (106), she whispers tenderly to the Fisher daughter, "Hush. Don't worry none" (106). The contrast in Pauline's two ways of speaking and Claudia's observation that "the honey in her words complemented the sundown spilling on the lake" (107), satirically reveal Pauline's fake life blended in with the wealthy Fisher family's life.

### **A Beautiful House as a Mask**

There is another beautiful house in *The Bluest Eye*: Geraldine's middle-class house. Her only son Junior, who doesn't have many friends to play with, enjoys bullying girls.

Pecola, who also has few friends, becomes Junior's easy prey. When she is invited to Junior's house, she is fascinated with its beauty:

How beautiful, she thought. What a beautiful house. There was a big red-and-gold Bible on the dining-room table. Little lace doilies were everywhere—on arms and backs of chairs, in the center of a large dining table, on little tables. Potted plants were on all the windowsills. A color picture of Jesus Christ hung on a wall with the prettiest paper flowers fastened on the frame. (87)

She is led into another beautiful room. "More doilies, a big lamp with green-and-gold base and white shade. There was even a rug on the floor, with enormous dark-red flowers" (87). But the beauty of the house is a trap. Junior throws his mother's cat in Pecola's face and enjoys watching her weep. His morbid disposition is shown when "Pecola's banging on the door increased his gasping, high-pitched laughter" (88). Junior's disposition stems from his mother Geraldine's attitude toward life.

Middle-class girls like Geraldine are born in comfortable circumstances.

Such girls live in quiet black neighborhoods where everybody is gainfully employed. Where there are porch swings hanging from chains. Where the grass is cut with a scythe, where rooster combs and sunflowers grow in the yards, and pots of bleeding heart, ivy, and mother-in-law tongue line the steps and windowsills. (80)

They make every effort to maintain their status. What is most important for them to do is to repress their emotion: “[t]he dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of the wide range of human emotions” (81). The status they want to maintain is the one equivalent to the white middle-class status. Morrison satirically describes the reason for them to go to college:

They go to land-grant colleges, normal schools, and learn how to do the white man’s work with refinement: home economics to prepare his food; teacher education to instruct black children in obedience; music to soothe the weary master and entertain his blunted soul. (81)

In other words, they learn to follow the white supremacist principles.

Geraldine tells Junior not to mingle with poor black children, referring to them as “niggers.” She says to Junior, “Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud” (85). While Junior learns to discriminate against poor black people, he feels estranged from his own mother. Geraldine shows her affection for only one living thing: “[a] cat, perhaps, who will love her order, precision, and constancy; who will be as lean and quiet as she is” (83). She occasionally has even sensual sensations when the cat nestles his body against her:

And she will accept the strangely pleasant sensation that comes when he writhes beneath her hand and flattens his eyes with a surfeit of sensual delight. When she stands

cooking at the table, he will circle about her shanks, and the trill of his fur spirals up her legs to her thighs, to make her fingers tremble a little in the pie dough. (83)

Her husband is no better than “the intruder” (84) to Geraldine. Apparently Geraldine does not love anyone in her family except the cat. This is why Junior abuses it. “As he grew older, he learned how to direct his hatred of his mother to the cat, and spent some happy moments watching it suffer” (84).

Those who abuse others are likely to have been abused at home when they were young. Ronald Barri Flowers says, “Thirty to 60 percent of abusive parents say they were abused themselves as children” (Flowers 72). Junior has already shown such a trait. He is “[a]lternately bored and frightened at home” (86). When Junior was small, “Geraldine did not allow her baby, Junior, to cry. [...] Geraldine did not talk to him, coo to him, or indulge him in kissing bouts, but she saw that every other desire was fulfilled” (84). When Geraldine finds her cat lying on the radiator, almost lifeless, Junior instantly lies to her, saying, “She killed our cat” (89). He is very clever to refer to the cat as “our cat.” It is quite likely that frightened children like Junior are used to lying to defend themselves.

The sight of Pecola makes Geraldine swear at her. She says to Pecola, “You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house” (90). Geraldine, who is quite dexterous in repressing her emotion, displays it, because she sees in Pecola what she hates and fears most: poverty. She saw poverty near the place where she was raised. She recalls:

She had seen this little girl all of her life. Hanging out of

windows over saloons in Mobile, crawling over the porches of shotgun houses on the edge of town, sitting in bus stations holding paper bags and crying to mothers who kept saying “Shet up! [...] The end of the world lay in the their eyes, and the beginning, and all the waste in between. (89)

She believes her repressed life is the opposite of the poor life, providing her with a beautiful house and helping her remain safe. The contrast Pecola observes between Geraldine’s stinging words and her beauty in the beautiful house strips Geraldine of her mask and reveals her true nature:

Pecola backed out of the room, staring at the pretty milk-brown lady in the pretty gold-and-green house who was talking to her through the cat’s fur. The pretty lady’s words made the cat fur move; the breath of each word parted the fur. Pecola turned to find the front door and saw Jesus looking down at her with sad and unsurprised eyes, his long brown hair parted in the middle, the gay paper flowers twisted around his face. (90)

Pecola’s glance at Jesus makes him look helpless and absurd. Jesus is nothing but an ornament to the house, too.

Furthermore, Junior’s father is indifferent to his family. Junior once comes home after being beaten by a group of poor black girls. “His mother was upset. His father just kept on reading the *Lorain Journal*” (86). They have a beautiful house but not a happy home as Trudier Harris points out:

Cleanliness to the point of blandness, houses made into artifacts rather than comfortable abodes, and children who become possessions to be pointed out are just a few of the pitfalls of the middleclass status Morrison depicts; if there are any virtues in being middle class, she does not emphasize them. (Harris 29)

### **A House that Encourages People to Live**

Whether they are middle-class houses or any other kind, the houses depicted in *The Bluest Eye* don't contribute to African Americans nurturing and enriching their lives, though they may satisfy their materialistic desires. Among these houses, however, the depiction of a house that can be viewed as home is inserted. Claudia describes her poor house, saying, "Our house is old, cold, and green. At night a kerosene lamp lights one large room. The others are braced in darkness, peopled by roaches and mice" (8). Claudia remembers the autumn when she got sick as a sweet memory. She narrates her sickness as follows:

As painful as I remember? Only mildly. Or rather, it was a productive and fructifying pain. Love, thick and dark as Alaga syrup, eased up into that cracked window. I could smell it—taste it—sweet, musty, with an edge of wintergreen in its base—everywhere in that house. [...] And in the night, when my coughing was dry and tough, feet padded into the room, hands repinned the flannel, readjusted the quilt, and rested a moment on my forehead. So when I think of autumn, I think of somebody with hands who does not want me to die. (10)



In spite of her suffering, her house makes her feel that sickness is “productive and fructifying.” It can be said that her house is a home which helps nurture their life.

Claudia’s parents are not depicted as ideal, though. Her father described as a Vulcan who guards their house from the cold of the winter, is also a person who believes that “a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured” (18). Her mother complains loudly and consistently about loss of milk, insinuating that the thief is Pecola. But, unlike Geraldine, she does not kick out the girl that the county has placed in their care. Claudia’s mother pacifies her anger and frustration by singing a song in the end. Despite their human defects, their house lets people live. A house in which every family member wants each other to live potentially becomes a home to nurture their lives. The theme of a house that helps people live is pursued in *Sula*, too. *The Bluest Eye* shows a possibility of home to nurture African Americans’ lives, while it is critical of the houses, particularly big houses, which reflect the lives of the black Americans who are infected with white middle-class culture.

### **3 . Love Imprisoned in a Hotel: the Cosey’s Hotel in *Love***

The hotel mentioned in L’s narration at the beginning has already been closed, and almost all the estate called “Cosey’s Resort” sunk under the sea with only the hotel left. “*You can find the prettiest shells right up on the steps, like scattered petals or cameos from a Sunday dress, and you wonder how they*

*got there, so far from the ocean*" (5). It seems as if someone were visiting the ruined hotel to decorate it. The hotel can be regarded as a mirror image of Cosey's tomb and of Cosey himself, for L's ghost is visiting Cosey's tomb at the end of the story. The way this hotel endures natural disasters like hurricanes so arrogantly and proudly suggests that Cosey still has an influence on people in this world. In fact Cosey's wife, Heed, despite a reclusive life, is watched by Cosey's portrait on the third floor of the big house the exterior of which is similar to "a church" (12). Its appearance of "a church" implies that Heed is still mourning Cosey's death. As it is also referred to as "a jailhouse" (12) by Sandler, it indicates that Heed is still captive to Cosey.

Heed and Cosey's granddaughter are in conflict with each other over Cosey's legacy. Heed breaks into the hotel with the intent of faking another will to dissolve the enigmatic nature of the will which L actually made up. Heed is betrayed and killed by Junior, who is supposed to help her. The incident suggests that she cannot free herself from the hotel until she dies.

Cosey's Hotel is so influential that those related to it remain obsessed with it. Therefore, the third part of "Chapter II" analyzes the text by focusing on the hotel, aiming to demonstrate that Love foregrounds the issue of class in African American society.

### **Money Soaked in Blood**

Bill Cosey's father Daniel Robert Cosey, commonly known as "Dark", amassed capital, which enabled Bill to start running a hotel. Dark saved a large amount of money by serving the police as "*a Courthouse informer*" (66) under the Jim Crow laws.

In other words, Dark compounded black people's blood and sorrow into money. Even just helping the police catch a black "thief" is a betrayal to the black society. But to earn money Dark also sacrificed those black people who contributed to improving the living conditions of their race. There are two reasons why Dark kept serving whites while betraying black people: one is that he was a money worshiper and the other is that money gave him power as indicated in the following:

*Well paid, tipped off, and favored for fifty-five years, Daniel Robert Cosey kept his evil gray eye on everybody, For the pure power of it, people supposed, because he had no joy, and the money he got for being at the beck and call of white folks in general and police in particular didn't bring comfort to him or his family. [...] He worshiped paper money and coin, withheld decent shoes from his son and passable dresses from his wife and daughters, until he died leaving 114,000 resentful dollars behind. (66)*

Dark is considered to be a privileged person among black people since money and power are what most of them lack, but Dark has power only over their society suppressed by white supremacy and racial segregation: that is, he is nothing but an ass in a lion's skin. It should be noted that Dark serves as a middle-class black role-model for his son Bill Cosey, a black entrepreneur and the hotel owner of "Cosey's Hotel and Resort." Bill follows his father's way of making the most of racial segregation to maintain wealth and power, though he tries to do everything in an opposite way.

## A Hotel for Bourgeois Blacks

James M. Mellard points out that before 1930, when Bill Cosey bought a hotel from a white person, there was a black entrepreneur: “a black entrepreneur named Gilbert Faustina opened for African Americans a swimming resort on Mobile Bay along the Alabama Gulf Coast” (Mellard N.pag). As seen in *Beloved*, *Paradise* and *A Mercy*, Morrison predicates her imagination on historical documents when writing a historical novel. In *Love*, too, Morrison creates Bill Cosey based on her knowledge of such an early black entrepreneur as Gilbert Faustina, which strengthens the reality of Bill Cosey and enhances the novel’s message to its readers.

Bill Cosey starts managing a hotel with his father’s blood-soaked money. In contrast to his father’s austere and miserly way of life, Bill seeks joy in his job. This stems from a traumatic experience when he was helping with his father’s job and it resulted in the taking away of a father of a small girl “raggedy as Lazarus” (43). Accordingly, “[h]is pleasure was in pleasing” (31). The hotel provides him with an appropriate environment to achieve his goal of enjoying life:

*The son decided to enjoy his share. Not throw it away, exactly, but use it on things Dark cursed: good times, good clothes, good food, good music, dancing till the sun came up in a hotel made for it all. (66)*

A hotel has two purposes: one is to provide customers with a temporary abode and a transient life as implied by the act of staying; the other is to let customers enjoy the pleasures of life. “Cosey’s Hotel” is a place where men and women enjoy drinking,

dancing to jazz, and having momentary affairs. In a society where racial segregation is a harsh reality, the pleasures that Cosey's Hotel provides customers with are temporary but extravagant:

*But it had to be special: evening dress in the evening; sport clothes for sport. And no zoot suits. Flowers in the bedrooms, crystal on the table. Music, dancing, and if you wanted to, you could join a private card game where money changed hands among a few friends—musicians, doctors who enjoyed the excitement for losing what most people couldn't earn. Mr. Cosey was in heaven, then.*  
(101)

"The best good time this side of the law" (31), the motto of the hotel, sarcastically indicates bourgeois blacks' privileged but perilous unsteady life. Although bourgeois blacks discuss social issues, the hotel is nothing but a safe haven, which helps them forget the grim realities:

Cosey's Resort was more than a playground; it was a school and a haven where people debated death in the cities, murder in Mississippi, and what they planned to do about it other than grieve and stare at their children. Then the music started, convincing them they could manage it all and last. (33)

Cosey did not build the hotel but bought "a broke-down 'whites only' club" (100), which a white had run. Changing the hotel for whites into a hotel for blacks seems to connote an

elimination of white supremacy, but actually the hotel has no such aggressive nature. The hotel accommodates only bourgeois blacks; that is, a hotel for whites was changed into a hotel for bourgeois blacks, symbolizing class distinctions among black Americans. After all, the hotel for blacks is conditioned by the Jim Crow laws as indicated by the words "this side of the law." Guests have to be "*first lieutenants and brand-new mother,*" "*young schoolteachers, landlords, doctors, businessmen*" (4), who have "a position, an accomplishment" (24). Lower-class blacks can enter the hotel as employees but cannot stay there as guests. They are not allowed to book rooms at the hotel even if they have saved enough money. Cosey is adept at getting along with local blacks, while keeping an appropriate distance from them and maintaining his privileged status.

Cosey didn't mix with local people publicly, which is to say he employed them, joked with them, even rescued them from difficult situations, but other than at church picnics, none was truly welcome at the hotel's tables or on its dance floor. Back in the forties, price kept most neighborhood people away, but even when a family collected enough money to celebrate a wedding there, they were refused. Pleasantly. Regretfully. Definitely. The hotel was booked. (39)

It is apparent that Bill Cosey has a sense of class distinctions, showing a discriminatory attitude against low-class blacks. But he plays an important role in the history of African Americans, for he becomes a pioneer figure representing the black businessmen who succeeded regardless

of the common notion of black people that they should be poor.

*It comforts everybody to think of all Negroes as dirt poor, and to regard those who were not, who earned good money and kept it, as some kind of shameful miracle. White people liked that idea because Negroes with money and sense made them nervous. Colored people liked it because, in those days, they trusted poverty, believed it was a virtue and a sure sign of honesty. Too much money had a whiff of evil and somebody else's blood. Mr. Cosey didn't care. He wanted a playground for folk who felt the way he did, who studied ways to contradict history. (101)*

It should not be neglected that Cosey's Hotel serves to undermine the validity of the grand narrative of history in America.

While Cosey makes the most of racial segregation, he helps local people by using money and his relationship with the authorities, which helps him maintain his social status as a local wealthy celebrity. His generous attitude toward local people contributes to appeasing the anger of blacks who attack the hotel as a symbol of class distinctions during the Civil Rights movement. When a kid throws a bucket of offal on him, he says calmly, referring to his financial aids to them, "Hey, Bella. Afternoon, Miss Barnes. Good to see you, George; got that truck running yet?" or "How you doin', Pete? Your girl still in college?" (147).

If Cosey is to maintain his status as a capitalist, the American capitalistic economy must be strong and stable. Referring to bell hooks' view of class, Lee Yu-cheng observes:

The black bourgeoisie came into existence during the days of racial segregation when a small group of blacks were needed to mediate between black and white people. They were what bell hooks calls “mediators.” (Yu-cheng 29)

Yu-cheng’s following observation on black elites who appeared after the Civil Rights movement explains the roles that Cosey, a black capitalist, plays in the local area:

These privileged African American elites have benefited from the identity politics of the Sixties, and their success stories have been purposely singled out by the white ruling class as examples of the American dream coming true. (Yu-cheng 30)

Cosey’s Hotel is what poor blacks feels proud of and makes them dream of success in the capitalist economy;

It was enough to know Bill Cosey’s Hotel and Resort was there. Otherwise, how to explain the comfort available nowhere else in the county, or the state, for that matter. Cannery workers and fishing families prized it. So did housemaids traveling to Silk, laundresses, fruit pickers, as well as teachers in broken-down schools; even visiting ministers, who did not hold with liquor-fueled gatherings or dance music—all felt a tick of entitlement, of longing turned to belonging in the vicinity of the fabulous, successful resort controlled by one of their own. A fairy



tale that lived on even after the hotel was dependent for its life on the people it once excluded. (40)

The psychological effect Cosey's Hotel has on local blacks is the very job of a mediator.

Cosey builds his kingdom whose castle is Cosey's Hotel on "this side of the law." "Mr. Cosey was royal; L, the woman in the chef's hat, priestly. All the rest—Heed, Vida, May, waiters, cleaners—were court personnel fighting for the prince's smile" (35). However, this kind of hotel environment makes Cosey arrogant and despotic. When he goes fishing with Sandler, Cosey, while watching some living worms in the belly of a catfish, says, "If you kill the predators, the weak will eat you alive" (40). Although Cosey tries to live a life in contrast to that of his father, he ends up defending his capitalist values to keep successfully running the hotel. What is worse, he justifies white supremacy and racial segregation as Dark did.

In order to benefit from predators, however, he has to pay a painful price. He has to not only give bribes to whites in power in the town but hold a perverted party on the boat: "the counterfeit world invented on the boat; the real one set aside for a few hours so women could dominate, men would crawl, blacks could insult whites" (109). It is possible to say that this perverted sort of play aims to make white men reconfirm their privileges as whites and men. Every time Cosey holds a party on the boat, he becomes painfully aware that he is helpless and subservient to whites in the white-dominated society, even if he is a prince on "this side of the law." Cosey shows his weakness to Sandler, saying, "Do you know that every law in this country is made to keep us back?" (42)

## **Pedophilia and Incest**

Although management of the hotel gives Cosey power, he has to entertain influential whites in the town in order to maintain it, which makes him feel that his status as a patriarch is constantly threatened. Furthermore, his son who he doted on and carefully raised is already gone. Mellard points out:

Nonetheless, the persistent attachment to Celestial signifies that Cosey is a subject of narcissistic drive more than he is the socially acceptable, socially responsible subject of desire. The drive transforms him into a primordial father of the cruel superego. (Mellard N.pag)

It is likely that his management of a successful hotel has contributed to the formation of his narcissistic disposition. Whether it is innate or learned, he needs a person whom he can control at his pleasure. Cosey's marriage to Heed, an eleven-year-old girl, must be considered in this context.

Cosey, older than Heed's father, gives him "two hundred dollars" (191) and gets permission to marry Heed. It likely would have been much easier for Cosey to get one of the Johnson's daughters who "were thought to be mighty quick in the skirt-raising department" (137) than purchasing goods; in a sense Cosey has purchased Heed.

The relationship between Cosey and his young bride starts with his sexual abuse of her: "[h]e touches her chin, and then—casually, still smiling—her nipple, or rather the place under her swimsuit where a nipple will be if the circled dot on her chest ever changes" (189). This episode shows his perverted

sexual disposition: pedophilia. Furthermore, his masturbation in Christine's room reveals the sexual desire he has for his granddaughter: a desire for incest. Cosey confesses to Sandler that the reason for marrying Heed is purely sexual:

But he remembered Cosey's dream-bitten expression as he rambled on about his first sight of Heed: hips narrow, chest smooth as a plank, skin soft and damp, like a lip. Invisible navel above scant, newborn hair. Cosey never explained the attraction any other way, except to say he wanted to raise her and couldn't wait to watch her grow. (146)

From the beginning, the hotel is a facility that encourages people to be sexually more active. Christine, who has a seemingly matrimonial relationship with Fruit, a civil rights movement leader, acquiesces in his affairs with other women. Affairs are common scenes in Cosey's Hotel, where Christine was raised. Christine recalls,

She of all people, queen of seduced husbands, understood, having grown up in a hotel where the tippy-toe of bare feet, the rustle behind the equipment shed, the eye-blaze of one female guest aimed at another had been everyday stuff. (163)

It is no wonder that the environment of the hotel, his patriarchal power and his perverted entertainment for local influential whites develop in him a desire to raise a girl into a woman that he wants her to be and put it into practice. The

result is that, by using his power, Cosey sexually abuses little Heed, who marries him because she innocently wants to be with Christine.

L thinks that it was in 1942, when Cosey married Heed, that Cosey's Hotel & Resort began to go downhill. It was also the time when the relationship between Heed and Christine began to deteriorate. Her marriage to Cosey prevents Heed from developing herself. This is shown in her appearance at the wedding ceremony where she was made to wear "the oversize wedding gown" (58). When Junior met Heed for the first time, "she had something of a little-girl scent: butter-rum candy, grass juice, and fur" (22). Heed has not grown up, nor has she developed herself. After marrying Cosey, Heed was strictly trained in language and such, but did not become a bourgeois lady, remaining a "false" (145) lady. Desiring to become a real lady, however, she cannot help becoming a "frowning woman always on the lookout for a slight, a chance to find fault" (146). She remains a "false" lady, which is uncovered by Junior. "Junior smiled. The woman pronounced 'resume' with two syllables" (23).

On the other hand, Cosey's marriage to Heed has a great impact on Christine's life, destroying their relationship. The effect already began to appear when Cosey masturbated in Christine's room. This means that he needs her to satisfy his sexual desire. In fact, the picture of the wedding ceremony shows that Cosey's attention is directed toward Christine rather than his bride Heed. Christine was so shocked by her grandfather's act in her room that she vomited all that she had eaten in the morning. Christine is also a victim of Cosey's sexual abuse.

Cosey's marriage to Heed deprives Christine of two things. One of them is her dear friend Heed. Christine had been lonely before she met Heed, partly because her mother didn't allow her to mingle with lower-class children. In spite of her mother's instruction, they become so close to each other that [t]heir hair has been quartered into four braids so they have identical hairstyles" (188). The other thing Christine has lost is Cosey himself. Christine lost her father when she was small. Perhaps Cosey served as a surrogate father for Christine. After he married Heed, however, she was sent to a dormitory school. When she had a quarrel with Heed after coming back, Cosey ordered her to leave home. Christine is further traumatized from feeling that she was abandoned by his grandfather, even if her situation is not so serious as Sethe in *Beloved* or Florens in *A Mercy*. The trauma distorts Christine's life. After she left home, she met men one after another and she still thinks that her best time was "her kept-woman years" (82) with Dr. Rio, who was sixty years old when she met him. As Junior, who was deserted by her father when she was small, seeks comfort in the portrait of Cosey, Christine felt happy when she was with a father-like old man, because he served as a substitute for Cosey.

The feud between Heed and Christine continues until Heed dies. It is "in Christine and Heed's postmortem embrace" (Wardi N.pag) that they reconcile with each other. What they compete for is Cosey's legacy, which has an important connotation. Christine and Heed dispute over his legacy as if Cosey's love is reflected in it, being uncertain who the "sweet Cosey child" (77) in the will signifies. This shows that both Christine and Heed are obsessed with money in the same way Dark and Bill Cosey were.

## May, a Slave to the Hotel

According to L, Billy Boy's wife May was the hotel's "slave" and "[h]er whole life was making sure those Cosey men had what they wanted" (100). She was the daughter of a poor minister, who Billy Boy found himself, taking his father's advice. Being "a devoted, not calculating, girl, [...] [May] was not only impressed with the hotel but also showed signs of understanding what superior men require" (100). May resembles middle-class girls like Geraldine in *The Bluest Eye*, although she doesn't have to learn to take care of bourgeois blacks. Billy wanted to marry a woman who he could control at his will, as his father did. Billy Boy grew up to become a man who deserves to inherit Cosey's Hotel. Evidently the hotel represents patriarchy.

May started behaving strangely in 1955. In August, 1955, Emmett Louis Till was brutally murdered at the age of 14 by two white men in Mississippi. This incident made May believe that challenging whites would give them a reason to close the hotel. She "was convinced that civil rights destroyed her family and its business" (6). Desegregation made it unnecessary for bourgeois blacks to come all the way to Cosey's Hotel. In addition, female guests in the 1960s abhorred the smell floating from the cannery. "This was around the time the world decided perfume was the only smell the nose was meant for" (6). While blacks had been gaining their rights, materialism had been pervading black society. It is vital to tactfully handle social change and changes in customers' tastes. What Cosey does, however, is to blame "smell" for the business slump, saying, "The fish smell had turned his resort into a joke" (6) and change

his dwelling from the hotel to a big house like “a church” as if he submitted to customers’ groundless claims that the cannery smell spoils their enjoyment at the hotel.

In place of her stepfather who “*lost interest*” (6), May is convinced that she is the only person who can protect the hotel from enemies. Cosey’s Hotel has saved May “*from the live death of poverty, the Negro kind May was familiar with*” (134). Poverty is the second scariest thing following “*disapproving white folk*” (134) for her. May’s fear of poverty is parallel to Geraldine’s in *The Bluest Eye*.

In “Toni Morrison’s Quarrel with the Civil Rights Ideology in *Love*,” Neelakantan and Venkatesan focus on May and say that the essay “seeks to frame Morrison’s *Love* as a critique of the American Civil Rights movement that had a devastating impact on the successful pre-World War II black community” (Neelakantan and Venkatesan N.pag). May’s appearance, which looks ridiculous, disproves their argument, though, as the following sentence shows: “Her ghost, though, helmeted and holstered, was alive and gaining strength” (80). It is noteworthy that the excerpt points out the male-centered nature of the Civil Rights movement. It is obvious, however, that May’s ridiculous appearance ridicules the bourgeois status reflected in the hotel she desperately protects from her illusory enemies. May, who “wanted whatever [Cosey] wanted” (182), is also captive to the hotel.

### **Captive to Capitalism**

Yu-cheng explains bell hooks’ view of the relationship between class and race or gender as follows:

The social structure and historical development of the United States do not encourage Americans to talk about class. Problems of class are more often than not subsumed by those of race and gender and not properly and adequately addressed. (Yu-cheng 27)

It is true that *Love* deals with race and gender as important themes, but it should not be dismissed that it reveals the class discrimination, self-estrangement, and corruption inherent in African American society based on the capitalist system.

At the end of the story, Christine and Heed talks as follows:

We could have been living our lives hand in hand instead of looking for Big Daddy everywhere.

He was everywhere. And nowhere.

We make him up?

He made himself up.

We must have helped. (187)

Heed and Christine are not the only people who have contributed to making “Big Daddy” of Cosey, but Cosey himself seems to have lost himself in keeping up the performance of a successful businessman. It is the ghost of Celestial, a prostitute, who used to have a scar on her face, that L’s ghost speaks to at the grave site. Cosey’s original will mentions “*leaving everything to Celestial*” (198). Even at a perverted party on the boat, Celestial is a woman who “stayed aloof, sober, slightly chiding” and “[d]eftly warding off advances” (109). What is noteworthy is that Celestial at the grave sight has no scar on her face. The scar in her face challenges the values of the



capitalist society in which beauty is also a commercial value. After death, Celestial seems to have been liberated from this.

Cosey has established an image of himself as a successful businessman: a person who society can both respect and be in awe of in that he can maintain the hotel. His successful management of the hotel, however, causes him to lose his true self and become captive to the hotel. His love does not go beyond the framework of the hotel. Even if Celestial had inherited the legacy, the hotel would have been no more than a building “*as a reminder of why she was not permitted to mount its steps but was the real sport of a fishing boat*” (199). Cosey is liberated from the shackles of the hotel when he dies and is able to love Celestial with all his heart, who makes him say, “You can live with anything if you have what you can’t live without” (110).

*The Bluest Eye* ends with the following accusation against African American society and everyone in it who has contributed to bringing about Pecola’s tragedy:

This soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear, and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live. We are wrong, of course, but it doesn’t matter. It’s too late. At least on the edge of my town, among the garbage and the sunflowers of my town, it’s much, much, much too late. (*The Bluest* 204)

*The Bluest Eye* focuses on race and refers to class issues as seen in the description of Geraldine. *Love* focuses on class issues inherent in African American society, featuring a bourgeois black businessman. Cosey’s hotel mirrors the bourgeois blacks

who have contributed to the American capitalistic economy and have become unable to nurture love.

## Chapter III

### Seeking a House which Contains Home

The houses in *Tar Baby*, *The Bluest Eye* and *Love* serve to suppress African Americans' lives. Only Claudia's house serves as a home in which the whole family wants her to be alive when she is seriously sick. This chapter treats *Sula* and *Paradise*, in each of which a house seem to serve as home, and discusses the possibility of a house containing home.

#### 1.A House which Lets People Live and Die: the Enormous House in *Sula*

##### Eva's Enormous House

The "enormous house" (30) Eva has built by herself is so big that it seems to represent not only freedom from poverty but also the American dream.

Deserted by her husband, Eva and her children are on the brink of starvation. What is worse, her son, Plum, becomes constipated and looks to be in great pain. She takes him to the outhouse and saves him by taking out something stuck in his bowels. After Plum stops crying, her being alone with her beloved son in the dark outhouse filled with stench raises a question in her mind:

And now that it was over, Eva squatted there wondering why she had come all the way out there to free his stools, and what was she doing down on her haunches with her beloved baby boy warmed by her body in the almost total darkness, her shins and teeth freezing, her nostrils

assailed. She shook her head as though to juggle her brains around, then said aloud, “Uh uh. Nooo.” (34)

Eva took her son out to the outhouse following the custom of using the outhouse when excreting, but she becomes aware that if she continues living by custom, she and her children will all die soon.

Her experience in the outhouse pushes her to take extraordinary action. She leaves her three children with Mrs. Suggs and returns fifteen months later with “a new black pocketbook and one leg” (34) and starts to build a big house. Rumor has it that she stuck her leg under a train to collect insurance or sold it to a hospital for \$10,000. Schreiber seems to have a view similar to the rumor:

As the matriarch of that family, Eva is led by her trauma—her husband BoyBoy's abandonment and dire poverty—to the desperate acts of leaving her three children under the age of five for eighteen months and sacrificing her leg for the lifetime insurance she collects to support her family. (Schreiber 86)

Whatever she did, it is certain that she did what exceeds conventional standards of behavior to earn enough money to build a big house, for she was a black woman in 1895, in which, according to Eva, “[n]iggers was dying like flies” (68). She turns the capitalist economy to her own advantage, selling part of her body as a commodity and earning a greater amount of money than any black person could have expected.

## An Enormous House as a Community Center

The enormous house Eva builds seems to be poorly designed and hardly organized as suggested in the following:

Sula Peace lived in a house of many rooms that had been built over a period of five years to the specifications of its owner, who kept on adding things: more stairways—there were three sets to the second floor—more rooms, doors and stoops. There were rooms that had three doors, others that opened out on the porch only and were inaccessible from any other part of the house; others that you could get to only by going through somebody's bedroom. The creator and sovereign of this enormous house with the four sickle-pear trees in the front yard and the single elm in the back yard was Eva Peace, who sat in a wagon on the third floor directing the lives of her children, friends, strays, and a constant stream of boarders. (30)

Although the house appears to be a mess, the proliferation of rooms, doors, stairways and stoops differentiates Eva's enormous house from those that reflect the white middle-class values seen in Geraldine's house in *The Blues Eye*. It reflects Eva's view of life; she does not repress her emotion or "funkiness" like Geraldine. It is also noteworthy that the house accepts various kinds of people such as strays and boarders, unlike Cosey's Hotel.

Nel, who lives in a middle-class house, has the same feeling about her own house as Junior, Geraldine's son, and feels more comfortable with Eva's house.

Nel, who regarded the oppressive neatness of her home with dread, felt comfortable in it with Sula, who loved it and would sit on the red-velvet sofa for ten to twenty minutes at a time—still as dawn. As for Nel, she preferred Sula's woolly house, where a pot of something was always cooking on the stove; where the mother, Hannah, never scolded or gave directions; where all sorts of people dropped in; where newspapers were stacked in the hallway, and dirty dishes left for hours at a time in the sink, and where a one-legged grandmother named Eva handed you goobers from deep inside her pockets or read you a dream. (29)

Nel's observations about Eva's house suggest that the enormous house contains the nature of home in it: food is always abundant and available; the door is always open to anyone; educational materials and chances are always available. The reason why Nel is so attracted by Eva's house lies in Nel's mother Helene.

### **Escape from "the Sundown House"**

After marrying Wiley Wright, Helene lives "in a lovely house with a brick porch and real lace curtains at the window" (17). She is analogous to Geraldine in *The Bluest Eye* in many ways. Helene enjoys "manipulating her daughter and her husband" (18). Geraldine orders her son not to mingle with low-class boys. She has an unusual attitude toward her husband when she has sex with him:

She hopes he will not sweat—the damp may get into her

hair; and that she will remain dry between her legs—she hates the glucking sound they make when she is moist. When she senses some spasm about to grip him, she will make rapid movements with her hips, press her fingernails into his back, suck in her breath, and pretend she is having an orgasm. (*The Bluest* 82)

Helene does not care even if her husband has to stay away from his house for a long time due to his job as a cook on one of the Great Lakes lines. In addition, “[a]ny enthusiasms that little Nel showed were calmed by the mother until she drove her daughter’s imagination underground” (18). Helene tries hard to repress her emotions as Geraldine works hard to get rid of “[t]he dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of the wide range of human emotions” (*The Bluest* 81).

Helene represses her emotions, too, because she fears “funkiness,” which she believes leads her to poverty and racial discrimination. She was born as a daughter of a Creole whore who worked in “the Sundown House.” Her grandmother “raised her under the dolesome eyes of a multicolored Virgin Mary, counseling her to be constantly on guard for any sign of her mother’s wild blood” (17). When she was called “gal” by a white conductor on the train, traveling back to her grandmother’s house, “[a]ll the vulnerabilities, all the old fears of being somehow flawed gathered in her stomach and made her hands tremble” (20). “The Sundown House,” which is associated with “her mother’s wild blood” and racial discrimination in the south, causes her to feel she is flawed, inflicting a lasting trauma on her, as suggested in the sentence “The red shutters [of the Sundown House] had haunted both Helene Sabat and her

grandmother for sixteen years” (17). That’s why she feels relieved, “thinking that she had indeed come far enough away from the Sundown House” (19).

Helene also shares white middle-class cultural values with Geraldine. Nel has a broad flat nose like her father. Although Helene is grateful that “the child had not inherited the great beauty that was hers” (18), she always tells Nel to pull her nose so that she can make it look better like whites. Hoping to change physically, which is the same desire as Pecola’s, shows their desire to transform themselves into whites.

### **The House that Lets People Live and Die**

It is ironic that Nel shows her desire to flee from her house into which her mother had escaped from the Sundown House. Eva’s house seems to have everything her house lacks. Indeed Eva’s house is so accommodating that they don’t expel Tar Baby, who frequently cannot pay his rent. Tar Baby, who looks white, is “intent solely on drinking himself to death” (40). In addition, Eva adopts three children. As Eva saved her family from poverty, the enormous house seems to accept other people and sustain them. Actually, however, the house turns out to be a place that gets her family killed.

Eva burns her son Plum to death in his room. Eva’s murder of Plum reveals what underlies the building of the enormous house. Eva’s only son Plum had been addicted to drugs since he came back to the United States after fighting in the First World War. Her eldest daughter Hannah questions her about the reason for murdering her own son. Eva answers her question, saying,



“He give me such a time. Such a time. Look like he didn’t even want to be born. But he come on out. Boys is hard to bear. You wouldn’t know that but they is. It was such a carryin’ on to get him born and to keep him alive. Just to keep his little heart beating and his little old lungs cleared and look like when he came back from that war he wanted to git back in. After all that carryin’ on, just getting’ him out and keepin’ him alive, he wanted to crawl back in my womb and well...I ain’t got the room no more even if he could do it. There wasn’t space for him in my womb. And he was crawlin’ back. Being helpless and thinking baby thoughts and dreaming baby dreams and messing up his pants again and smiling all the time. I had room enough in my heart, but not in my womb, not no more. I birthed him once. I couldn’t do it again. He was growed, a big old thing. [...] I done everything I could to make him leave me and go on and live and be a man but he wouldn’t and I had to keep him out so I just thought of a way he could die like a man not all scrunched up inside my womb, but like a man.” (71)

Although Eva repeats her fear of being raped by her own son, it is possible to simplify her reason for killing her son in the following way: Eva wants her son to live and grow up to be a man, but he seems to refuse to live up to her expectations. Plum’s way of life contradicts Eva’s values: enjoying a life free from poverty and having strength to make it possible. Her angry response to Hannah’s accusation that she didn’t play with her children shows how proud Eva is of having freed themselves from poverty. She argues:

“Play? Wasn’t nobody playin’ in 1895. Just ’cause you got it good now you think it was always this good? 1895 was a killer, girl. Things was bad. Niggers was dying like flies. Stepping tall, ain’t you? Uncle Paul gone bring me *two* bushels. Yeh. And they’s a melon downstairs, ain’t they? And I bake every Saturday, and Shad brings fish on Friday, and they’s a pork barrel full of meal, and we float eggs in a crock of vinegar...” (68)

When she was about to explain the reason for murdering Plum, “even on this hottest of days in the hot spell, Eva shivered from the biting cold and stench of that outhouse” (71). Her fear of poverty still haunts her. That’s why Eva gets mad at Hannah for accusing her of neglecting her children.

Moreover, Plum’s way of life also contradicts Eva’s view of men. When her husband BoyBoy returned to see her and laughed at her lost leg with his new wife, “it hit her like a sledge hammer” (36). After that her hatred toward him makes her live on:

Hating BoyBoy, she could get on with it, and have the safety, the thrill, the consistency of that hatred as long as she wanted or needed it to define and strengthen her or protect her from routine vulnerabilities. (36)

Eva shares a profound hatred for men with Pauline in *The Bluest Eye*: “[h]olding Cholly as a model of sin and failure, [Pauline] bore him like a crown of thorns, and her children like a cross” (*The Bluest* 124). We know how Pauline escapes into a

fake life in the white family's house. As the "consistency of that hatred" suggests, Eva's hatred for men always stays with her.

In spite of her hatred for men and the act of breaking with tradition by sacrificing her leg to gain money, however, Eva still maintains a traditional view of women's role, which keeps her captive to patriarchy as suggested in the following:

With other people's affairs Eva was equally prejudiced about men. She fussed interminably with the brides of the newly wed couples for not getting their men's supper ready on time; about how to launder shirts, press them, etc. (42)

When Sula comes back to the enormous house after a long absence, she has an argument with Eva. To Sula, saying, "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself," Eva says, "Selfish. Ain't no woman got no business floatin' around without no man" (92). This argument is analogous to the one between Jadine and Ondine in *Tar Baby*. Eva's hatred for men and prejudice in favor of them combine to make her expect too much of her son. But he doesn't cherish the life she sacrificed herself to save, neither does he grow up to be a man who will take responsibility for sustaining his family. But why does she kill Plum, yet let Tar Baby live?

Eva remains indifferent to other people, as long as they are under her control. "Because [Tar Baby] was no bother, ate little, required nothing, and was a lover of cheap wine, no one found him a nuisance" (40). Deweys seem as if they were her pets. What she does first when she adopts each of them is to ignore his name and start calling him "dewey." Although they are

different from each other, they are deweys. In slavery it was common for slave owners to deprive Africans of their own names and give them slave names. Even slaves had separate names, though. At Garner's plantation in *Beloved*, three slaves share Paul as their names, but they have at least A, D and H added to Paul respectively. Eva's seemingly benevolent act results in abusing children and making them love "nothing and no one but themselves" (38). The enormous house has made Eva arrogant and selfish.

In contrast to them, Plum, who is related to Eva by blood, threatens Eva's life psychologically, hoping to "crawl back in [her] womb." Therefore, she decides to cut Plum from her life. Readers who know about Shadrack's horrifying experience on the battlefield may wonder why Eva doesn't ask her son what he experienced there and how he felt about it. Harris says, "She never considers rehabilitation for her son; the effrontery of his misuse of his life is sufficient for her to take it" (Harris 75). She does not think beyond her values: freedom from poverty is all that counts. Eva's enormous house is a place that lets people live but not one that nurtures life.

## **The Closed Window**

Eva proves her love for her family when Hannah is engulfed in flames. She throws herself out of the window, trying to cover her daughter's body with her own. She carries out again her resolution to sacrifice herself to save her children. She does not succeed, however, and Hannah burns to death. After the incident, Eva boards up the window of the third floor, which she used to come to in her contraption and watch the community she created within the enormous house. After BoyBoy left her the

second time, she already retreated to her bedroom. Boarding up the window means her seclusion from the world. Hannah's death is "the perfection of the judgment against her" (78). She could not save two of her children, making the enormous house just a retreat.

On the other hand, the boarded-up window makes Sula feel safe. She sends Eva to an old folks' home and secures sovereignty over the enormous house. Sula is actually most akin to Eva in that she is free from any conventions. Sending old people to an old folks' home contradicts the black community's conventional way of treating old people:

White people didn't fret about putting their old ones away. It took a lot for black people to let them go, and even if somebody was old and alone, others did the dropping by, the floor washing, the cooking. (164)

Her dispositions and how they are developed are described in detail in the following:

Sula was distinctly different. Eva's arrogance and Hannah's self-indulgence merged in her and, with a twist that was all her own imagination, she lived out her days exploring her own thoughts and emotions, giving them full rein, feeling no obligation to please anybody unless their pleasure pleased her. As willing to feel pain as to give pain, to feel pleasure as to give pleasure, hers was an experimental life—ever since her mother's remarks sent her flying up those stairs, ever since her one major feeling of responsibility had been exorcised on the bank of

a river with a closed place in the middle. The first experience taught her there was no other that you could count on; the second that there was no self to count on either. She had no center, no speck around which to grow. (118)

“The first experience” is that she killed Chicken Little by accident. The second one is that she heard her mother talk about her and say, “I just don’t like her” (57). After wandering around, she comes back to Eva’s house, and becomes aware that she has not achieved anything; she has pursued herself but has not found herself. She has to keep pursuing her experimental life with no end in it.

Her relationship with Ajax seems to moor her, but Ajax, who does not like to be restrained by anything, senses that Sula wants to possess him and leaves her for his own pursuit of himself. Like Sula’s upbringing, he was raised by her mother, with “the absolute freedom she allowed them (known in some quarters as neglect) and the weight of her hoary knowledge” (126). Her loss of Ajax affects her badly: “[h]is absence was everywhere, stinging everything, giving the furnishings primary colors, sharp outlines to the corners of rooms and gold light to the dust collecting on table tops” (134). She acknowledges that her pursuit of making herself has not gotten her anywhere. She thinks to herself, “There aren’t any more new songs and I have sung them all. I have sung all the songs there are” (137).

The boarded-up window tells her that she does not need to go further and can stop her pursuit of making herself:

And looking at those four wooden planks with the steel rod slanting across them was the only peace she had. The sealed window soothed her with its sturdy termination, its unassailable finality. (148)

Her last pursuit, however, is to know how people die. She has already taken “more medicine” (146), which means she is prepared to die, committing suicide.

Sula is gone and Eva is at the old folks’ home. Tar Baby and the deweys died in “the tunnel they were forbidden to build” (161). The enormous house Eva built to save her children and let other people live is now left desolate. The desolate enormous house suggests that the possibility of integrating home into a big house is lost, making Eva’s values infertile. It also suggests that Sula’s experimental life, which excludes people around her, has born no fruit but her endless pursuit itself.

## 2.A Beckoning House: the Convent in *Paradise*

Perhaps it is convenient to focus on men living in the African-American town Ruby, when analyzing *Paradise* as Davidson does:

This essay will focus on the Ruby-centered narratives in *Paradise*, which focus on the patriarchy and emphasize a rigidly controlled communal historiography predicated on the subordination of the individual to the group. (Davidson 356)

This essay, however, focuses on the Convent, which men from Ruby assault. The Convent, situated seventeen miles from Ruby, serves as more than a scapegoat for the decline of male seniors' authority over Ruby, transforming its historical and social roles. This is in contrast to Ruby, where senior black men try to maintain it as it has been, serving as a home for the weak. Hence, this essay's argument follows the social and political transformations of the Convent, which was originally built as a house by an embezzler.

### **“The Embezzler’s Folly”**

The Convent used to be “a mansion” built deep in the interior of America. The plan of the mansion is as follows:

Fright, not triumph, spoke in every foot of the embezzler's mansion. Shaped like a live cartridge, it curved to a deadly point at the north end where, originally, the living and dining rooms lay. He must have believed his persecutors would come from the north because all the first-floor windows huddled in those two rooms. Like lookout. The southern end contained signs of his desire in two rooms; an outsize kitchen and a room where he could play rich men's games. Neither room had a view, but the kitchen had one of the mansion's two entrances. A veranda curved from the north around the bullet's tip, continued along its wall past the main entrance, and ended at the flat end of the ammunition—its southern exposure. Except from the bedrooms no one in the house could see the sun rise, and



there was no vantage point to see it set. The light, therefore, was always misleading. (71)

The peculiar plan of the mansion shows its two major characteristics. One is its defensive aspect, which shows the embezzler's concern about being discovered. Fear makes people aggressive and, accordingly, the embezzler's mansion takes the form of a weapon or a fortress. The other major characteristic is its extravagance, which reflects the embezzler's pride and vanity. The latter can be seen in the unfinished mansion in *A Mercy*, which represents the American dream. In addition, the mansion in *Paradise* reveals an undeniable truth about the American dream: it needs an audience; it demands the owner of a mansion to show it off to as many people as possible.

He must have planned to have a lot of good-time company in his fortress: eight bedrooms, two giant bathrooms, a cellar of storerooms that occupied as much space as the first floor. And he wanted to amuse his guests so completely they would not think of leaving for days on end. His efforts to entertain were no more sophisticated or interesting than he was—mostly food, sex and toys. After two years of semi-covert construction, he managed one voluptuous party before he was arrested, just as he feared, by northern lawmen, one of whom attended his first and only party. (71)

The urge to show off his property blinds the embezzler to the danger of being caught. Unaffected by whoever may come to live there, the embezzler's mansion still shows traces of his

American dream.

### **A Convent with Carnal Desires Oozing out**

After the mansion is converted into a convent, the nuns work hard to erase every trace of pleasure—particularly, traces of carnal desires embedded in the mansion. The mansion is akin to the Cosey's Hotel in that it focuses on making visitors and dwellers feel pleasant. In spite of the nuns' efforts, however, the extravagance, vanity and hedonism inherent in the mansion cannot be completely eliminated.

The enormous size of the kitchen suggests that the mansion is as big as a fortress or a castle: "[t]he kitchen is bigger than the house" in which assailants from Ruby were born and "[t]he table is fourteen feet long" (5). Gigi easily finds the traces of the embezzler's sexual desires here and there in the Convent:

Then she discovered the traces of the sisters' failed industry. The female-torso candleholders in the candelabra hanging from the hall ceiling. The curls of hair winding through vines that once touched faces now chipped away. The nursing cherubim emerging from layers of paint in the foyer. The nipple-tipped doorknobs. Layabouts half naked in old-timey clothes, drinking and fondling each other in prints stacked in closets. A Venus or two among several pieces of nude statuary beneath the cellar stairs. She even found the brass male genitalia that had been ripped from sinks and tubs, packed away in a chest of sawdust as if, however repelled by the hardware's demands, the sisters valued nevertheless its metal. Gigi toyed with the fixtures, turning the testicles

designed to release water from the penis. (72)

Religion and human desires coexist in one house with the former repressing the latter. This queer combination reflects the nuns' way of living—their emotions and desires repressed, which Consolata epitomizes.

Consolata, who is often called Connie, is one of the three street children who were “kidnapped” (223) by Mary Magna. Although the other two children were placed in an orphanage in Puerto Limon on their way back to America, Mary Magna took Consolata to the Convent, “for by then she had fallen in love with Consolata” (223). She suffered sexual abuse when she was nine years old. “Consolata was not a virgin. One of the reasons she so gratefully accepted Mary Magna’s hand, stretching over the litter like a dove’s wing, was the dirty poking her ninth year subjected her to” (228). When she was ill after being vaccinated, however, Consolata had a pleasant experience similar to Claudia’s in *The Bluest Eye*:

The violent illness that followed she remembered as pleasant, because while she lay in the children’s ward a beautiful framed face watched her. It had lake-blue eyes, steady, clear but with a hint of panic behind them, a worry that Consolata had never seen. It was worth getting sick, dying, even, to see that kind of concern in an adult’s eye. Every now and then the woman with the framed face would reach over and touch Consolata’s forehead with the backs of her knuckles or sooth her wet, tangled hair. (224)

Therefore, Consolata works hard to live up to Mary Magna's expectations;

For thirty years Consolata worked hard to become and remain Mary Magna's pride, one of her singular accomplishments in an lifetime of teaching, nurturing and tending in places with names the nun's own parents had never heard of and could not repeat until their daughter pronounced them. (224)

But despite all her efforts to follow the path Mary Magna shows her, Consolata betrays her. When she is thirty-nine years old, she happens to meet a twenty-nine-old black man named Deek. Watching Deek displaying his masculinity, she feels purely sensual sensations:

Sha sha sha. Sha sha sha. A lean young man astride one horse, leading another. His khaki shirt was soaked with sweat, and at some point he removed his wide flat hat to wipe perspiration from his forehead. His hips were rocking in the saddle, back and forth, back and forth. Sha sha sha. Sha sha sha. Consolata saw his profile, and the wing of a feathered thing, undead, fluttered in her stomach. (226)

It is noteworthy that the metaphor of a bird is used to imply sexual sensations. The image of a bird often signifies violence in Morrison's novels, as shown in Florens' soliloquy, "I know the claws of the feathered thing did break out on you because I cannot stop them wanting to tear you open the way you tear me"

(*A Mercy* 160). Morrison seems to use birds or feathery things as metaphors to signify everything related to emotion or “funkiness” (*The Bluest* 81).

It is also important to note that Consolata’s sexual sensations are evoked by remembering her culture:

As Consolata watched that reckless joy, she heard a faint but insistent Sha sha sha. Sha sha sha. Then a memory of just such skin and just such men, dancing with women in the streets to music beating like an infuriated heart, torsos still, hips making small circles above legs moving so rapidly it was fruitless to decipher how such ease was possible. (226)

Mori Aoi points out that the sound “Sha sha sha” and the dancers’ movements suggest that the dance is “the Brazilian samba” (*African-American History* 27). Consolata has lived a religious life with her emotions repressed, but they are not eliminated, still lingering somewhere deep in herself, as she cannot completely eliminate “a beauty Mary Magna said had to be eliminated at once” (225). The sound or feeling of “Sha sha sha” also signifies Consolata’s emotions slithering up from within her and becoming conscious. Consolata’s remembering of her culture shows that repressing human emotions leads to the deprivation of one’s culture—a culture tied closely to them.

The relationship between Consolata and Deek is described as primal and natural as indicated in the following: “[o]ut here where wind was not a help or threat to sunflowers, nor the moon a language of time, of weather, of sowing or harvesting, but a feature of the original world designed for the two of them” (229).

However, this basic heterosexual relationship ends suddenly because Consolata lets her emotions rein too freely. She bites Deek's lips and licks blood, which frightens him and makes him feel ashamed of their relationship:

An uncontrollable, gnawing woman who had bitten his lip just to lap the blood it shed: a beautiful, golden –skinned, outside woman with moss-green eyes that tried to trap a man, close him up in a cellar room with liquor to enfeeble him so they could do carnal things, unnatural things in the dark; a Salome from whom he had escaped just in time or she would have had his head on a dinner plate. (279)

A woman who enjoys the taste of a man's blood not only reminds Deek of a witch, but also threatens Ruby's patriarchal social system. Deek thinks that "he saved himself" (246), by breaking up with Consolata.

In contrast, Consolata explains her reason for licking his blood to herself, saying, "I just wanted to go home" (240). Licking his blood is evidently part of Consolata's physical expression of sexual desire, which is the outburst of her passion. In addition, "go home" signifies remembering her innate nature, her culture, and people who she knows well—remembering her identity. Therefore, losing her tie with Deek means losing her chance to discover her identity.

### **An Institution for the Assimilation Project**

The original purpose of the establishment of the Convent was to educate Native American girls and eventually integrate them into white culture. Accordingly, the original name of the

Convent is “CHRIST THE KING SCHOOL FOR NATIVE GIRLS” (224). However, the project is destined to fail, for, historically, Native American children were coerced to live and study at boarding schools situated far away from their reservations:

Assimilationists argued that the task of “civilizing” Indian children would be easier and lapses into tribal ways less likely if students stayed away from their homes and relatives until their education was complete. (Child 13)

It comes as little surprise that this “assimilation” program led to the destruction of their culture and economy. Child goes on to say,

Ironically, policies and practices of the assimilation years dismantled the economies of self-sufficient people who had for generations successfully educated their children in the cultural knowledge, values, and economic tradition best suited to the integrity of the woodland environment. (Child 11)

The Native Americans living at the Convent are taught about Catholic beliefs and other white cultures so that they can forget their culture. In the dinning room converted into a schoolroom, “stilled Arapaho girls once sat and learned to forget” (4). Despite the government’s expectations and the nuns’ cooperation to convert Native American children into Christians, ridding them of their culture, it turns out that Native Americans’ family ties are so strong that the government finds

it very hard to achieve their goal. They resist in their own way: running away.

Penny and Clarissa, the last two Native American girls at the Convent, are gone before they are transferred to “the Correctional” (238). Running away from boarding schools was quite common among Native American children:

Runaways were frequently considered hard-working students who were well behaved at school, and their first desertions often caught school officials by surprise. Fifteen-year-old Martin from Lac du Flambeau, Wisconsin, became a chronic deserter from Flandreau, although the superintendent acknowledged that the “boy is quite well behaved when he is in school.” Nevertheless, within a single year Martin had been discovered in Elkton, South Dakota, in Wilmar, Pipestone, and Minneapolis, Minnesota, and in Chicago, Illinois. Girls were just as inclined to running away as boys, and one year the matron at Flandreau reported that Mary Badboy had the distinction of holding “the run away record for the year.” (Child 89)

Running away can be considered as a kind of resistance to their culture being eroded. Penny and Clarissa “lived to get out of that place” (231). Like Martin, they are “models of penitence,” but they want to visit “the Indian and Western Museum” (241) when all the households make a trip to Middleton. Those Native American children seem to have maintained their attachment to their family and culture. While they behave as good students, they preserve their identity. For them, the nuns who contribute



to the government's project to assimilate Native Americans into their white culture are "the enemy out to ruin their lives" (232).

It is Penny and Clarissa, however, that help Consolata have an affair with Deek, because they regard Consolata as "a confederate" (231). This conspiracy is another kind of resistance against the rigid teachings of Christianity to repress human emotions. Their observations of Consolata's affair with Deek show that they have maintained their independent attitude toward learning: "[t]hey regarded her behavior as serious instruction about the limits and possibilities of love and imprisonment, and took the lesson with them for the balance of their lives" (238). They also show their honesty when they borrow money from Consolata. After they have run away, they send a money order to Consolata. By depicting them preserving their identity toughly and wisely, Morrison depicts Native American girls as people who have not succumbed to the Assimilation Project designed to deprive them of their culture.

## **A Haven**

While Native American girls are running away, the Convent comes to serve as a haven for women: miscellaneous women, who have experienced some kind of trauma, visit or come to live in the Convent:

Only women. Never men. For more than twenty years Lone had watched them. Back and forth, back and forth: crying women, staring women, scowling, lip-biting women or women just plain lost. [...], women dragged their sorrow up and down the road between Ruby and the Convent. They were the only pedestrians. Sweetie

Fleetwood had walked it, Billie Delia too. And the girl called Seneca. Another called Mavis. Arnette, too, and more than once. And not just these days. They had walked this road from the very first. Soane Morgan, for instance, and once, when she was young, Connie as well. Many of the walkers Lone had seen; others she learned about. (270)

All the women, from Ruby or elsewhere, have sorrow in common. They benefit by coming to the Convent in one way or another, but there is a difference in their attitude toward the Convent. They can be categorized into two groups: one is those who are helped by the Convent but remain critical and scared of the Convent women; the other is those who are saved by the Convent and come to accept the women living there.

Sweetie Fleetwood is so obsessed with keeping her bedridden babies alive that she takes care of them almost without sleeping or leaving the house for a long time:

For six years she slept on the pallet near the cribs, or in bed with Jeff, her breath threaded, her ear tunnel ready, every muscle braced to spring. She knew she slept because she dreamed a little, although she couldn't remember what about. But it was getting harder and harder to watch and sleep at the same time. (126)

Extremely exhausted, she fears she would fall asleep, wondering, "who would watch her babies then" (125). To stay awake, she gets out of the house. On the way to nowhere in particular, she meets company, who makes her think, "I am

walking next to sin and wrapped in its cloak” (129). Perhaps she thinks that leaving her babies unattended is a sin. When she enters the Convent, she sees Convent women as “hawks” (129) that are thinking of pecking Sweetie and her company. In spite of her rude view of the Convent women, they attend to her, killing her fever with “so many blankets” (129). Sweetie does not thank them, but thanks God, instead. She believes God protects her from these “hawks.”

Her craving for a healthy baby makes her dream of a crying baby who calls for her attention. Her babies in real life do not make any sound; “[a]ll of her children were silent” (130). This makes her angry. For Sweetie, the two Convent women remain hawks and “demons” (130) till they take her back to her house. It is quite noteworthy that birds are associated with evils in the eyes of a woman from this rigidly structured patriarchal society, while the image of a bird is associated with emotion or “funkiness” in the eyes of the oppressed black girls in *The Bluest Eye* and *A Mercy*. When Sweetie sees her husband, she says, “They made me, snatched me” (130). In a patriarchal society, it is a wife’s job to bear children who succeed the house. Sweetie cannot give birth to healthy babies, which means she has not fulfilled her duty. This self-reproach drives her to sacrifice herself to take care of her sick babies all the time. On the other hand, her fatigue becomes unbearable, hence she escapes to the Convent so that she can blame the Convent women for her neglect of duty, though they accept her, give her a place to rest in, and relieve her fatigue.

Likewise, Arnette takes advantage of the ill fame of the Convent. Arnette, who had sex with K.D. at fourteen, becomes pregnant. She visits the Convent, where Consolata delivers her

baby. Thinking “they kept her baby and told her it was stillborn” (275), Arnette later visits the Convent to “hunt down a dead baby” (180). The fact is that “[s]he didn’t want it” (180). She wants to get rid of the baby, for having sex and becoming pregnant goes against the moral and religious code of the patriarchal society. She tries to abort the baby herself:

What she did not know until labor began was that the young mother had been hitting her stomach relentlessly. [...] But the real damage was the mop handle inserted with a rapist’s skill—mercilessly, repeatedly—between her legs. With the gusto and intention of a rabid male, she had tried to bash the life out of her life. And, in a way, was triumphantly successful. The five-or six-month baby revolted. Feisty, outraged, rigid with fright, it tried to escape the battering and battered ship that carried it. The blows to its delicate skull, the trouncing its hind parts took. The shudders in its spine. Otherwise there was no hope. Had it not tried to rescue itself, it would break into pieces or drown in its mother’s food. So he was born, in a manner of speaking, too soon and fatigued by the flight. But breathing. Sort of. Mavis took over. Grace went to bed. Together Consolata and Mavis cleaned his eyes, stuck their fingers in his throat, clearing it for air, and tried to feed him. It worked for a few days, then he surrendered himself to the company of Merle and Pearl. (250)

Morrison’s unrelenting description of the abortion and the baby’s agony foregrounds Arnette’s inhumanity: “the mother

was gone, having never touched, glanced at, inquired after or named him” (250). Her frantic attempts to get rid of the baby also illustrate how greatly Ruby pressures her to observe its rigid social code.

While in college, Arnette realizes that she is infatuated with K.D.: “[s]he believed she loved him absolutely because he was all she knew about her self—which was to say, everything she knew of her body was connected to him” (148). Just as Florens in *A Mercy* depends wholly on the blacksmith, Arnette cannot find herself without depending on a man. Marriage is very important for her life, since she is captive to the patriarchy of Ruby, which depends on the social system for its persistence. Billie Delia knows that “any girl who got pregnant in Ruby could count on marriage, whether the boy was eager or not, because he still had to live near her family and with his own” (152). What the Fleetwood and Morgan families want from the wedding is the possibility of having an heir to both families. They believe this ensures the preservation of Ruby. Although Arnette will be aware of “what was and would always be missing” later (149), she succumbs to the conventions of Ruby. Many of the people in Ruby regard the Convent as a cursed place. But she regards the Convent as nothing but a convenient place, a place where she can ditch her baby at and a place to blame everything on.

Unlike Sweetie and Arnette, Billie Delia, who hated Gigi, “the strange-looking girl” (152), at first, changes her view of the Convent after taking refuge there. After she has a quarrel with her mother, she flees to the Convent. She stays there “for two weeks and one day” (202). What makes Billie stay there so long is the Convent women’s attitude toward her:

They had treated her so well, had not embarrassed her with sympathy, had just given her sunny kindness. Looking at her bruised face and swollen eyes, they sliced cucumber for her lids after making her drink a glass of wine. No one insisted on hearing what drove her there, but she could tell they would listen if she wanted them to. The one called Mavis was the nicest and the funniest was Gigi. (308)

They are friends and comrades, who share their sorrows and ordeals. What makes Billie different from Sweetie and Arnette is her unique position in Ruby's social fabric: she is treated as a pariah.

When Billie was three years old, she enjoyed horseback riding with the help of Mr. Nathan Dupres. One day, she was so excited that she could barely stand to wait for the horse to come. When she saw Mr. Nathan Dupres and his horse coming, "she pulled down her Sunday panties before raising her arms to be lifted onto Hard Goods' back" (151). This event marked the end of her innocent childhood. Her mother, who is a teacher, whipped her. To make matters worse, teasing began. She couldn't ride the horse any more. In spite of her virginity, people "tookd her for the wild one" (151). Thus, Billie becomes a pariah or an outcast. Her social status as a pariah, however, enables her to develop her own self. She is the only one to tell Arnette that "there [is] any other way to think of herself" (148) rather than depend on K.D.

Her mother Pat becomes aware of the mistreatment of her daughter after Billie leaves her hometown.

Pat knew that had her daughter been an 8-rock, they would not have held it against her. They would not have seen it for what it was—only an innocent child would have done that, surely. [...] But the question for her now in the silence of this here night was whether she had defended Billie Delia or sacrificed her. And was she sacrificing her still? The Royal Ease in her hand as she ran up the stairs was there to smash the young girl that lived in the minds of the 8-rocks, not the girl her daughter was. (203)

Pat, being captive to the patriarchal society of Ruby, which values bloodline most, then realizes that she has not truly seen her daughter as she is.

Soane Morgan is another person to makes friends with the Convent women. Soane becomes particularly close to Consolata. Scout, one of Soane's sons, is almost killed in a traffic accident and Consolata saves him. Soane was truly a Ruby woman committed to her town when she first came to see Consolata first. When she found out about her husband's affair with Consolata, she visited the Convent to ask her to stop meeting her husband so that her husband would be able to focus on building Ruby, saying, "Listen to me. He can't fail at what he is doing. None of us can. We are making something" (240). However, she was not aware of the true nature of what they were making, nor was her husband:

A backward noplac ruled by men whose power to control was out of control and who had the nerve to say who could live and who not and where; who had seen in lively, free,

unarmed females the mutiny of the mares and so got rid of them. (308)

The town of Ruby behaves the way Eva's enormous house in *Sula* does: the house which lets people live and gets them killed.

Her attitude toward Consolata changes after the car accident her two sons are involved in. Consolata "stepped in" (245) and helped Scout regain his energy. Although they used to be on bad terms with each other, Soane's love toward her son as a mother is so overwhelming that she forgives Consolata and does not care about what Consolata did to her son, which Consolata herself deems as "devilment" or "evil craft" (246) and which men in Ruby hold responsible for their attack on the Convent. Soane comes to see the Convent women as they are, so that she invites them to Arnette and K.D.'s wedding party, though the Convent women turn out to be unacceptable from the viewpoint of Ruby.

Lone belongs to one of the 8-rock families and does not need help by the Convent's help. She saves Consolata when she faints in the garden. She was an adopted child, stolen as Consolata was. In addition, she "practices" (244), which is regarded as evil by people in Ruby. She works as a mentor for Consolata, encouraging Consolata to use her hidden power to save people. She seems to have her own way of believing in God; she says, "You need what we all need: earth, air, water. Don't separate God from His elements. He created it all. You stuck on dividing him from His works. Don't unbalance His world" (244). Therefore, she does not have any prejudice against the women in the Convent. Rather she has something in common with the Convent women, which seems to be bizarre in terms of Ruby's



cultural standards.

### **A Home for Misfits**

For the women of Ruby, the Convent serves as a haven or a shelter where they can stay temporarily, however they may view the house. For the women coming from outside, however, the Convent becomes their permanent abode:

Over the past eight years they had come. The first one, Mavis, during Mother's long illness; the second right after she died. Then two more. Each one asking permission to linger a few days but never actually leaving. Now and then one or another packed a scruffy little bag, said goodbye and seemed to disappear for a while—but only a while. They always came back to stay on, living like mice in a house no one, not even the tax collector, wanted, with a woman in love with the cemetery. (222)

It is Consolata that attracts them back to the Convent. All the women living in the Convent psychologically rely on Consolata. She has something about her that makes people calm and comfortable. When Seneca brings Pallas to Consolata, Pallas, who has been deeply depressed, instantly trusts her, which Seneca has not expected:

But Connie was magic. She just stretched out her hand and Pallas went to her, sat on her lap, talk-crying at first, then just crying, while Connie said, "Drink a little of this," and "What pretty earrings," and "Poor little one, poor, poor little one. They hurt my poor little one. (173)

In actuality, Consolata doesn't always welcome them, however; "more and more she wanted to snap their necks" (222). She finds them intolerable in many ways: "the badly cooked indigestible food, the greedy hammering music, the fights, the raucous empty laughter, the claims" (222). She cannot tolerate "the drift" in particular:

Not only did they do nothing except the absolutely necessary, they had no plans to do anything. Instead of plans they had wishes—foolish babygirl wishes. Mavis talked endlessly of surefire moneymaking ventures: beehives; something called "bed and breakfast"; a catering company; an orphanage. One thought she had found a treasure chest of money or jewels or something wanted help to cheat the others of its contents. Another was secretly slicing her thighs, her arms. Wishing to be the queen of scars, she made thin red slits in her skin with whatever came to hand: razor, safety pin, paring knife. One other longed for what sounded like a sort of cabaret life, a crowded place where she could sing sorrow-filled songs with her eyes closed. (222)

When Morrison writes about individuals in terms of their relationships with others, she is realistic, depicting all of them as those who have some defects, even if they are depicted as benevolent people. What counts is that others feel comfortable and accepted by those individuals. All these women, who may be losers or social misfits and lack subjectivity, feel that way when they are at the Convent with Consolata.

Mavis, who is the first to come and stay at the Convent, went out shopping, leaving her twin babies in the car with the windows closed. They later suffocated to death in the intense heat. When she gives an interview to a news reporter, her behavior is odd. She worries about her children abusing her during the interview rather than show remorse for her “negligence” (21). In fact, her daughter “Sal pinched her, hard” (21). Mavis believes her three children despise her: “Billy James spit Kool-Aid into Mavis’ plate” (25). She is afraid that her children are thinking of killing her, after she hears her husband and children joke about her husband’s unfolded shaving razor placed by Sal’s plate: “she knew Frank would let the children do it” (25). Later Mavis tells her mother, “I’m saying they are going to kill me” (31). Her incessant concern about her husband’s mood suggests that he has abused her for a long time: “Mavis woke with a start of terror, which dissolved quickly into familiar fright” (25). She was in hospital four times for childbirth, but she was hospitalized fifteen times. It is suspected that she was hospitalized because of her husband’s domestic violence eleven times. Several years later her husband is to molest Sal, his daughter. Sal says to her resurrected mother, “He’d get drunk and try to bother me, Ma” (314). Mavis’ worry has become paranoia: when she has sex with her husband, she knows that her three children are watching them “behind the door, snickering” (26).

This couple is pitifully foolish. Their Cadillac shows the husband’s foolishness:

because its owner had to borrow a lawn mower every couple of weeks; because its owner had no screens in his

windows and no working television; because two of his six porch posts had been painted white three months earlier, the rest still flaking yellow because its owner sometimes slept behind the wheel of the car he'd traded in—all night—in front of his own house. (28)

Mavis is no better than her husband: “the women, who saw Mavis driving the children to the White Castle wearing sunglasses on cloudy days, flat-out stared before shaking their heads” (28).

She steals her husband's Cadillac and flees to her mother, but after finding her mother calling her husband, she steals her mother's money and is again on the road. Her trip to the West reminds her of the thrill she felt when she took the Rocket ride as a kid. She is not innately scared and foolish. Escape from her family gives her a chance to regain herself.

Her accidental visit to the Convent greatly changes her life. When she comes back to the Convent after a month's absence, Consolata welcomes her wholeheartedly, saying, “I missed you” (76). For Mavis, who fears her whole family, Consolata is her only family—a family who loves her and instructs her about anything, because “Connie would know” (172). Therefore, she thinks to herself, “I've been here almost three years, and this house is where we are. Us. Not [Gigi's]” (76). The Convent is the house that enables her to regain and nurture herself. Even Gigi, who disrupts Mavis' composure, serves as a person who Mavis can take her anger out on. Mavis actually enjoys fighting with Gigi:

Pounding, pounding, even biting Gigi was exhilarating,

just as cooking was. It was more proof that the old Mavis was dead. The one who couldn't defend herself from an eleven-year-old girl, let alone her husband. The one who couldn't figure out or manage a simple meal, who relied on delis and drive-throughs, now created crepe-like delicacies without shopping every day. (171)

As Morrison's other novels show, violence serves to free a person from what represses his or her life. It is evident that Mavis has found her home in the Convent.

Gigi doesn't know where her mother is, with her father on death row and her boy friend in prison. She has only a grandfather left. She becomes involved in civil rights movements, but no one except Mikey acknowledges her seriousness. She seems lacking in perseverance. In spite of her aggressiveness toward Mavis and mean attitude toward Seneca, Gigi does not approve of her own way of life. Left alone in the bathtub, she says to herself,

No, you stupid, stupid bitch. Because you weren't tough enough. Smart enough. Like with every other goddamn thing you got no staying power. You thought it was going to be fun and that I would work. In a season or two. (257)

She teases K.D., making him lose his temper, but she has hardly experienced such things as "his availability and adoration" (256) so far. Paradoxically, since she has no confidence in herself, she inflicts violence on Mavis. Gigi may enjoy fighting with Mavis because she realizes that Mavis feels it pleasant. On the other hand, she suffers from a traumatic event wherein she

saw a boy bleeding while she attended a demonstration. For her the image of demonstrations is absurd like the one of war, such as Shadrack's image of war in *Sula*.

Seneca is much like Florens in that she is always concerned about how others feel about her.

They didn't like each other at all, so Seneca had equalized her smiles and agreeableness. If one cursed and joked nastily about the other, Seneca laughed. When the other rolled her eyes in disgust, Seneca shot her an understanding look. Always the peacemaker. (131)

She was literally abandoned by her mother Jean, who Seneca believes is her sister when she was five years old. She reproaches herself for her mother's disappearance, thinking to herself, "if she did everything right without being told, either Jean would walk in or when she knocked on one of the apartment doors, there'd she be! Smiling and holding out her arms" (127). Her feeling of being abandoned has dominated her life since then. In addition to worrying about how other people view and treat her, she has developed self-hatred and self-injurious behavior, lacking subjectivity. It is quite possible to say that people who have been abandoned are unable to respect themselves or be confident in themselves.

Seneca has never decided on anything on her own until she starts to "follow a coatless woman" (138). This act of her own will partly stems from an experience that she had when she was left alone in the apartment. The coatless woman, who is actually Sweetie, reminds her of "the crying woman," (127) who she happened to see at the window on the fourth day after she was

deserted by her mother. Seneca's self-pity and self-reproach are reflected in her sympathy for Sweetie; she accompanies Sweetie to the Convent. She has another similar experience that overwhelms her when she visits the mother of her boy friend who is in prison. After Seneca leaves the mother who criticizes her son harshly, she happens to hear the mother sobbing, which drives Seneca to panic. She feels that when her mother abandoned her, her mother was deeply sad and this was Seneca's fault.

She still carries the letter her mother left for her. "But it was the letter, safe in her shoe, that made leaving with the caseworker for the first of two foster homes possible" (128). For her survival she depends on the vague trace of love felt in the letter with the indecipherable words. Without the letter, her frail self would shatter into pieces.

The fourth woman to come and stay at the Convent is Pallas, a sixteen-year-old girl. In spite of her comparatively rich life, she has suffered from bulimia since elementary school. Her bulimia seems to have resulted from her "irresponsible" (254) artist mother living apart from her and her father. After Pallas falls in love with Carlos, a school janitor and sculptor, she takes him to her mother's. There, she lives happily until finding out about her mother and Carlos' betrayal:

months of marveling at the spectacular scenery outside her mother's windows; months of eating wonderful food; months of artist talk among Dee Dee's friends—all kinds of artists: Indians, New Yorkers, old people, hippies, Mexicans, blacks—and months of talk among the three of them at night under stars Pallas thought only Disney

made. (168)

Pallas runs away from her mother's house because she was betrayed by her mother, who she had wanted to live with, and Carlos, who she had entirely placed her confidence in, since "Carlos had never commented on her weight," and "he liked her anyway—chose her, made love to her" (178).

Billie Delia happens to find Pallas suffering from morning sickness and takes her to the Convent. From her own experience, Billie says to Pallas, "Anyway you can collect yourself there, think things through, with nothing or nobody bothering you all the time. They'll take care of you or leave you alone—whichever way you want it" (176). Pallas, who has truly lost all the people that she could trust, finds home in the Convent:

The whole house felt permeated with a bliss malelessness, like a protected domain, free of hunters but exciting too. As though she might meet herself here—an unbridled, authentic self, but which she thought of as a "cool" self—in one of this house's many rooms. (177)

The male-dominated society has prevented them from finding themselves. Pallas goes back to her father, only to run away again and come back to the Convent, probably because her father only blames others for her daughter's misconduct, "pursuing a lawsuit against the school for its lax and endangering environment, not to speak of its criminally inclined employees" (254), without reconsidering his relationship with his daughter.



## **An Institution for Therapy**

After Mary Magna dies, Consolata has no claim to the Convent; she is nothing but a squatter.

When Mary Magna died, Consolata, fifty-four years old, was orphaned in a way she was not as a street baby and was never as a servant. [...] She had no identification, no insurance, no family, no work. Facing extinction, waiting to be evicted, wary of God, she felt like a curl of paper—nothing written on it—lying in the corner of an empty closet. They had promised to take care of her always but did not tell her that always was not all ways nor forever. (247)

The Convent transforms from the symbol of the embezzler's dream and pride to the institution for the Assimilation Project and then to the haven for all the sad women. Now the Convent is not Consolata's house any more, which makes her position unstable. Consolata feels the same feeling as Florens feels after losing Rebekka's letter: Florens thinks to herself, "With the letter I belong and am lawful" (*A Mercy* 115). Consolata is not the owner of the house but a foreigner who just stays at the Convent, like Mavis, Gigi, Seneca, and Pallas. Even if it is another's house, however, it has become a haven for them. She serves as a kind of forgiving mother. This is what the other women need to regain their sense of self, but they stop there. They continue to behave impulsively and do not further develop themselves. They just dream about their futures without substantially doing anything. Consolata responds to their unconscious needs.

After Consolata orders the other Convent women to follow what she instructs them to do, the Convent assumes another role: a space for group psychotherapy<sup>3</sup>. Consolata orders them to lie down naked on the floor they have scrubbed clean. They lie the way they want to:

Seneca lay on her stomach at first, then changed to her back, hands clasping her shoulders. Pallas lay on her side, knees drawn up. Gigi flung her legs and arms apart, while Mavis struck a floater's pose, arms angled, knees pointing in. (263)

Consolata outlines each body's silhouette and begins to talk. She not only talks about her past but presents her own philosophical view of human existence:

"My child body, hurt and soil, leaps into the arms of a woman who teach me my body is nothing my spirit everything. I agreed her until I met another. My flesh is so hungry for itself it ate him. When he fell away the woman rescue me from my body again. Twice she saves it. When her body sickens I care for it in every way flesh works. I hold it in my arms and between my legs. Clean it, rock it, enter it to keep it breath. After she is dead I can not get past that. My bone on hers the only good thing. Not spirit. Bones. No different from the man. My bones on his the only true thing. So I wondering where is the spirit lost in this? It is true, like bones. It is good, like bones. One sweet, one bitter. Where is it lost? Hear me, listen. Never break them in two. Never put one over the other.

Eve is Mary's mother. Mary is the daughter of Eve." (263)

Apparently Consolata has found her own religion, even though the other Convent women do not understand the meaning of her speech. Perhaps what Consolata means is that bones are nothing but inorganic matter without the spirit dwelling in them, but that the spirit does not exist without bones housing it. Consolata uses bones to mean the primal component of a human being; using bodies might cause listeners to imagine men or women, evoking a culturally added image. It is also conjectured that Morrison wants to differentiate Consolata's religious view of human beings from Baby Suggs's belief in bodies: Baby Suggs in *Beloved* tells people to love their bodies, despite later seeing her daughter-in-law kill her own daughter and discovering that her religious beliefs are futile.

The women's outlined lying bodies framed by the lines drawn by Consolata takes the place of chairs, which are used in ordinary group psychotherapy sessions. One after another, they talk and share everything that they are consciously or unconsciously thinking. They first share Mavis's dream:

They enter the heat in the Cadillac, feel the smack of cold air in the Higgledy Piggledy. They know their tennis shoes are unlaced and that a bra strap annoys each time it slips from the shoulder. The Armour package is sticky. They inhale the perfume of sleeping infants and feel parent-cozy although they notice one's head is turned awkwardly. They adjust the sleeping baby head then refuse, outright refuse, what they know and drive away home. They climb porch stairs carrying frankfurters and

babies and purse in their arms. Saying, “They don’t seem to want to wake up, Sal. Sal? Look here. They don’t seem to want to.” (264)

Pallas’s dream speaks of her being raped by strangers:

They kick their legs underwater, but not too hard for fear of waking fins or scales also down below. The male voices saying saying forever saying push their own down their throats. Saying, saying until there is no breath to scream or contradict. (264)

Gigi’s dream goes that “[e]ach one blinks and gags from tear gas, moves her hand slowly to the scraped shin, the torn ligament” (264). Seneca says, “Runs up and down the halls by day, sleeps in a ball with the lights on at night. Folds the five hundred dollars in the foot of her sock” (264). Once again they share Pallas’s dream, “Yelps with pain from a stranger’s penis and mother’s rivalry—alluring and corrosive as cocaine” (264).

This bizarre kind of group psychotherapy shifts to the next stage: art therapy<sup>4</sup>. Pallas, whose mother is a painter, suggests that they paint the body outlines on the floor. They paint and talk about the added drawings and paintings:

First with natural features: breasts and pudenda, toes, ears and head hair. Seneca duplicated in robin’s egg blue one of her more elegant scars, one drop of red at its tip. Later on, when she had the hunger to slice her inner thigh, she chose instead to mark the open body lying on the cellar floor. They spoke to each other about what had

been dreamed and what had been drawn. Are you sure she was your sister? Maybe she was your mother Why? Because a mother might, but no sister would do such a thing. Seneca capped her tube. Gigi drew a heart locket around her body's throat, and when Mavis asked her about it, she said it was a gift from her father which she had thrown into the Gulf of Mexico. Were there pictures inside? asked Pallas. Year. Two. Whose? Gigi didn't answer; she simply reinforced the dots marking the locket's chain. Pallas had put a baby in her temple's stomach. When asked who the father was, she said nothing but drew next to the baby a woman's face with long eyelashes and a crooked fluffy mouth. They pressed her, but gently, without joking or scorn. Carlos? The boys who drove her into the water? Pallas gave the crooked mouth two long fangs. (265)

Given bloodless food and water by Consolata, the Convent women gradually transform and so does the Convent:

A neighbor would notice more—a sense of surfeit; the charged air of the house, its foreign feel and a markedly different look in the tenants' eyes—sociable and connecting when they spoke to you, otherwise they were still and appraising. But if a friend came by, her initial alarm at the sight of the young women might be muted by their adult manner; how calmly themselves they seemed. (265)

Conoslata's group therapy is successful; "unlike some people in

Ruby, the Convent women were no longer haunted” (266).

## **Reborn**

Although they are murdered by the Ruby men, who are haunted by the shadows of their ancestors and mythology, the Convent young women appear in front of their families and prove that they have overcome their traumas and have become able to form good relationships with them. Like Morrison’s other novels, *Paradise* is open-ended, leaving it unknown whether the women are resurrected or become ghosts. One clue to the answer is what Lone repeats when they leave the Convent with the bodies lying: “A lot of work” (292). Lone might have stepped in and resurrected them. However, what matters is that the young women have started a new life without being agonized by their past. Now that they have changed themselves and gained the ability to see people from other perspectives, they might see them differently and perhaps even realize their families have been concerned for them and loved them. The Convent has transformed into a home to heal hurt women and nurture life.

Every Convent woman can now talk maturely with her family. Gigi meets her father Manley Gibson, who has just been reprieved. Pallas visits her mother, Dee Dee, and knows that Dee Dee loves her daughter because she is painting her, although her mother, strangely, has trouble speaking. Mavis meets her daughter, Sally, at a restaurant and knows that Sally was also mentally suffering when she was mean to her mother. Sally says, “I was scared all the time, Ma. All the time. Even before the twins” (314). Sally realizes that her mother “sneaked back to get a peek at [her]” (314). Seneca also realizes that Jean,

her mother, has been concerned about her since she left her to go on with her life. The women are reborn in the solitary house.

### **A Town that Destroys a Home**

The Convent has transformed in accordance with historical changes and the people who come to live there, as Kearly points out:

The Convent itself is a transition from once a hedonistic mansion filled with pornographic sexual objects converted into a mission for Native American girls to be given religious instruction as well as provide the sisters who want to convert others the means to find their own salvation. (Kearly 14)

The Convent actually does not belong to Consolata, but it serves as a home that lets the hurt women express themselves freely. It helps them find themselves, overcome their traumas, become truly independent from any mental fetters and develop good relationships with others including their families. In contrast, men in Ruby, particularly the 8-rock men, the descendants of the Ruby's founding fathers, who "control every essential aspect of the town, from the general stores to the banks" (Davidson 356), try to maintain their town as it is.

To the men of Ruby, the Oven, placed in the center of the town, symbolizes not only their historical agony but also their primal desire to survive. An oven is essentially indispensable and central to a home. The Oven used to be close to anybody and belong to everybody as Reverend Misner says,

In 1910 there were two churches in Haven and the All-Citizens Bank, four rooms in the schoolhouse, five stores selling dry goods, feed and foodstuffs—but the traffic to and from the Oven was greater than to all of those. No family needed more than a simple cookstove as long as the Oven was alive, and it always was. Even in 1934 when everything else about the town was dying; when it was clear as daylight that talk of electricity would remain just talk and when gas lines and sewers were Tulsa marvels, the Oven stayed alive. (15)

Over time, however, it loses its original role and becomes just an authoritative symbol which the 8-rock men make use of to preserve their authority. That is why young people in Ruby target it for criticism. Kearly points out its symbolic evil role as follows:

The Oven is made into a static symbol worth more than the very people who use it, a symbol people will die for rather than a symbol that can be changed so that people won't have to die. True to the warnings of Deuteronomy and Corinthians, once the Oven becomes an idol of worship, the community around it begins to crumble. (Kearly 11).

Regardless of the Morgans' desire to "preserve the status quo" (Davidson 356), Ruby changes in many ways. The booming economy after the Korean War and the civil rights movements has not only a psychological impact on young people but also brings about "an increase in bounty" (89) in Ruby, which helps



improve their living conditions and gives them more time for leisure, driving them to possess more. Women compete to excel in making their gardens beautiful, which is far from their primal desire to survive:

The dirt yards, carefully swept and sprinkled in Haven, became lawns in Ruby until, finally, front yards were given over completely to flowers for no good reason except there was time in which to do it. [...] The women kept on with their vegetable gardens in back, but little by little its produce became like the flowers—driven by desire, not necessity. (89)

The flow of money into the town results in an economic disparity. Deek, one of the Morgan twins, possesses “the biggest house in Ruby” (100). Steward locks his house, which makes Dovey furious. For her, “bolting the house as though it were a bank too” (90). “Dovey was sure theirs was the only locked door in Ruby” (90). Although Dovey wonders what he is afraid of, it is quite natural that a person who has more wealth than the others comes to fear being robbed of it. A class hierarchy is emerging, though it is still vague.

In addition to the patriarchy and class hierarchy, there is one more thing they want to preserve: pure blackness. Ruby is originally the name of the Morgan twins’ sister, who became seriously sick and was refused medical treatment by all the hospitals because of her skin color. Therefore, the name of the town built solely for black people carries the connotation of hatred for whites. It makes them stick to their color. That pure blackness makes Ruby, which was built to protect black people

from any threat by whites, becomes an exclusionary town. Their attitude toward race is understandable so long as they accept everybody in the town regardless of how black they are. But their insistence on their pure blackness becomes fanatical when they exclude people who are not purely black. They still maintain their grudge against fair-skinned colored men who “the Disallowing came from” (195). The 8-rock men refused to help Pat’s mother because they “despised Daddy for marrying a wife with no last name, a wife without people, a wife of sunlight skin, a wife of racial tampering” (197). “Skin color trumps morality every time in Ruby” (Davidson 365). Davidson points out that “Patricia realizes that as certain families have married outsiders and brought in lighter skinned blacks, they have been quietly removed from the reenactment—written out of the town’s 8-rock history” (Davidson 366). It is evidently racism predicated on their grudge against the non-black people. Schreiber explains what the 8-rock men do, saying,

They reinscribe the voice of white culture, reversing the hierarchy of color but preserving class status, failing to separate their own desire from that of their fathers, who themselves re-created an exclusionary world. (Schreiber 52)

One of the raiders of the Convent deplores Ruby is less safe, because of “a slack or sloven woman” (8). His lamentation is followed by a passage in “Home,” which is already referred to in the “Introduction” of this thesis, starting with “a sleepless woman could always rise from her bed, wrap a shawl around her shoulders and sit on the steps in the moonlight.” It is probable

that the image of the community shown there reflects Morrison's view of home: "a-world-in-which-race-does-not-matter." Then, in *Paradise*, such home is supposed to be Ruby, an exclusionary town, which is based on patriarchy, hierarchy, racism and sexism. The aforementioned man's lamentation suggests that the reason the 8-rock men kill the Convent women is to keep Ruby safe. The fact is, however, that they kill the women to protect their own interests; they sacrifice the outsiders to maintain "the status quo," keeping the other people except the 8-rock men subordinate to them. Davidson argues:

Ruby's elders have converted the narrative of the Disallowing into political dogma, an ideology that allows them any measure of terror or violence so long as it defends (what they deem) the town's common interests. (Davidson 360)

Even if they succeed in eliminating a threat to their society, it is difficult to find home there except a suffocating and repressing community.

The Convent has transformed into a home which accepts the weakest women and helps them metamorphose into independent people, though they have no proprietary rights to the house. Ownership has little to do with whether a house can function as home. The violence inflicted on the Convent by the 8-rock men foregrounds the patriarchy, hierarchy, racism and sexism of Ruby, the black town; its construction is energized by the hatred and grudge against anyone besides them. As Eva's enormous house in *Sula*, whose extension feeds on Eva's hatred against BoyBoy, fails to function as home, so does Ruby. The

8-rock men's murder of the Convent women reveals another terrifying truth in that the 8-rock men have tried to imitate what whites have done to people different from them. Kearly points this out, saying, "The attempt by the men to try to base community on pure blackness was preceded by European settlers trying to base America on notions of pure whiteness" (Kearly 13). In *Paradise*, which begins with the sentence, "They shoot the white girl first" (3), the reverse occurs. Non-black people become victims, which forces whites to have the perspective of the oppressed. This is another political strategy of Morrison's in *Paradise*.

People in Ruby have built a town on their own. But it has failed to function as home in spite of "the 8-rock men's yearning for a safe home in the African American history of dislocation, terror, and the recurrent 'disallowing'" (Grewal 45). What is worse, the 8-rock men have destroyed an emerging home in the Convent. It is true that the Convent has served to heal the Convent women, but it is now left desolate as indicated by "a faded red chair" lying on its side at the Convent garden, in contrast to "unconquerable growth" (305) of plants. Aoi Mori argues that the garden has a positive implication, alluding to the resurrection of the Convent women: "[t]hough chaotic and devastated, it suggests rebirth and the creation of a new generation, hinting at the possibility of resurrection and hope" ("Silence" 73). As far as the discussion on home is concerned, however, the fact that they have lost their home and have been driven out of the Convent counters Mori's argument. As their existence is ambiguous now, so are their abodes. Rev. Misner refers to home as "a real earthly home" (213). Grewal interprets Misner's argument regarding home as follows: "[p]erhaps

Misner is asking the congregation to imagine what it would be like to feel naturally and completely at home within themselves in this world” (Grewal 44). With their existence and abodes ubiquitous, the Convent women have assumed the role of spreading their messages, like Beloved, who is driven out of 124 in *Beloved*. But their ambiguity also indicates that the healing and nurturing power of the Convent is confined within the premise, since it is a solitary house, far away from other communities.

## Chapter IV

### A House Telling an Untold Story: 124 in *Beloved*

Compared with the houses in Morrison's other novels, "124" in *Beloved* is unique in that it serves as a stage for the narratives of slavery: what occurs there shows the history of slavery in America, not in a historian's way but in an artist's way. 124 also suggests what is needed to create home.

#### ***"Sixty Million and more "* and "124"**

Upon first opening the book, the first words to come into view are figures: "*Sixty Million and more "* and then "124." "124" is the house where Sethe's infanticide occurs. This numerical naming of the house has a political implication related to the words "*Sixty Million and more.*" This figure is the number of "black Africans who never even survived the trip to slavery" (Kramer 68). There is a reference to Hiroshima in *Home*: "After Hiroshima, the musicians understood as early as anyone that Truman's bomb changed everything and only scat and bebop could say how" (*Home* 108). We are liable to be indifferent to figures or nuclear bombs as long as they are distant and abstract. The above reference to Hiroshima suggests that an artist's sensitivity and imagination is needed to understand what really happened under the mushroom cloud. Likewise, "124" and "Sixty million and more," which are impersonal and abstract, require the reader to think hard about the figures, and to imagine what happened in the house and what happened to each person of those sixty million people.

The story begins with the sentence, "124 WAS SPITEFUL,"

which gives the impression that the house is alive and has its own identity. Then the following phrase, “Full of a baby’s venom” gives the sense that the house is haunted. “124” immediately unveils itself, pushing the reader to look squarely at the unveiled house and see what is happening inside. The haunted house soon leads to Sethe’s infanticide and then, even if the reader is not highly imaginative, he or she will be dragged into the appalling world of slavery. This experience helps “*Sixty Million and more*” come to be viewed differently. Sixty million stops being just a number. Each of the sixty million becomes more personified—taking on a body and soul. This is one of Morrison’s artistic-political strategies in *Beloved*.

### **From a Home to an Isolated House**

As the first few pages of the book show, the haunted house does not provide the dwellers with home. The two sons, who were almost killed by their mother, are gone, “leaving their grandmother, Baby Suggs; Sethe, their mother; and their little sister, Denver, all by themselves in the gray and white house on Bluestone Road” (3). Their grandmother, Baby Suggs, lies in bed as if she were already dead; “[s]uspended between the nastiness of life and the meanness of the dead, she couldn’t get interested in leaving life or living it, let alone the fright of two creeping-off boys” (3). After the death of Baby Suggs, only Sethe and Denver are left with the ghost of the murdered baby. They believe the ghost is their daughter and sister. They try to commune with her in the house alienated from the neighbors; “[o]utside a driver whipped his horse into the gallop local people felt necessary when they passed 124” (4). This haunted house, however, has not always been like that. In fact it has been

transforming.

124 still belongs to an abolitionist, Edwin Bodwin, who rents it to Baby Suggs for free in exchange for her doing housework at his house. The Bodwin family left the house and moved to the city. The house might have been considered ominous, probably because “women died there: his mother, grandmother, an aunt, and an older sister before he was born” (259). Later it was rented to “a succession of black tenants; the area around Bluestone Road becomes a black community” (Schmudde 411). After Baby Suggs provisionally becomes the owner of the house, 124 assumes the role of home like Eva’s enormous house, “where a pot of something was always cooking on the stove” (*Sula* 29) before she kills her own son:

Before 124 and everybody in it had closed down, veiled over and shut away; before it had become the plaything of spirits and the home of the chafed, 124 had been a cheerful, buzzing house where Baby Suggs, holy, loved, cautioned, fed, chastised and soothed. Where not one but two pots simmered on the stove; where the lamp burned all night long. Strangers rested there while children tried on their shoes. Messengers were left there, for whoever needed them was sure to stop in one day soon. Talk was low and to the point—for Baby Suggs, holy, didn’t approve of extra. “Everything depends on knowing how much,” she said, and “Good is knowing when to stop.” (86)

The house functions not only as a home that feeds, heals and nurtures life but also as an Underground Railway station that helps runaway slaves from the South. Furthermore, the house



serves as a community center where people share news and exchange ideas on political matters: “they assembled to catch news, taste oxtail soup, leave their children, cut out a skirt” (249).

Baby Suggs preaches her unique sermon to people in the community in the Clearing:

“Here,” she said, “in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don’t love your eyes; they’d just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face ‘cause they don’t love that either. *You* got to love it, *you*! And no, they ain’t in love with your mouth. Yonder, out there, they will see it broken and break it again. What you say out of it they will not heed. What you scream from it they do not hear. What you put into it to nourish your body they will snatch away and give your leavins instead. No, they don’t love your mouth. *You* got to love it. This is flesh I’m talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest and to dance; backs that need support; shoulders that need arms, strong arms I’m telling you. And O my people, out yonder, hear me, they do not love your neck unnoosed and straight. So love your neck; put a hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up. And all your inside parts

that they'd just as soon slop for hogs, you got to love them. The dark, dark liver—love it, love it, and the beat and beating heart, love that too. More than eyes or feet. More than lungs that have yet to draw free air. More than your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize.” (88-9)

This belief, which stems from her antagonism toward slavery, is a belief in the body that houses the soul. Although this “flesh” religion helps give people the freedom to express their emotions and heal their traumas, however, it does not protect them from slavery.

Focusing on the “124” house and giving a detailed description of it, Schumudde writes “Baby Suggs tries to make 124 a safe house with only one door behind that gate ‘so if you want to get in 124 you have to come by her’” (Schumudde 412). Baby Suggs serves as a local preacher and leader in the community. However, the house is no more her possession than her family is. Indifferent to the Fugitive Slave Law, which was passed in 1850, she herself breaks her own rule of “Everything depends on knowing how much,” by giving a feast to ninety people. Surprisingly, the delicious feast eventually leads to feelings of bitterness and resentment from the people at the party.

Ninety people who ate so well, and laughed so much, it made them angry. They woke up the next morning and remembered the meal-fried perch that Stamp Paid handled with a hickory twig, holding his left palm out against the spit and pop of the boiling grease; the corn

pudding made with cream; tired, overfed children asleep in the grass, tiny bones of roasted rabbit still in their hands—and got angry. [...] 124, rocking with laughter, goodwill and food for ninety made them angry. Too much, they thought. Where does she get it all, Baby Suggs, holy? Why is she and hers always the center of things? How come she always knows exactly what to do and when? giving advice; passing messages; healing the sick, hiding fugitives, loving, cooking, cooking, loving, preaching, singing, dancing and loving everybody like it was her job and hers alone. (136-7)

Schumudde argues that, in spite of Baby Sugg's wish, 124 fails to become a safe house, saying, "Morrison's revisioning myth conveys the historical truth that, while the Fugitive Slave Law was the law of the land, there could be no safe house, no way to close the door or gate on the horrors of slavery" (Schumudde 412). Baby Suggs not only tries to block the path to slavery but also shuts down a means of escape by boarding up the back door of the house that leads to the kitchen outside. It is noteworthy that Sethe kills her baby in the storeroom, originally the kitchen outside, cut off from escape. What Baby Suggs really has to do is to brace herself for the worst-case scenario and be wary of the slave catchers. Perhaps she is over-confident because everything seems to have been going so well.

April Lidinsky presents her interpretation of the somatic and psychological effect of Baby Suggs' preach on listeners:

Baby Suggs Calls her community to move beyond those proprietary models of identity that slavery has literally

trained into their bodies. Using the dialogic model of call-and-response prayer, she moves them to “listen”(209) their bodies into new forms of somatic literacy, enabling them to retrain their habits of being, gesture by gesture. The effect of this is to redirect slavery’s “vertical” flow of power, which segregates and dichotomizes not just master and slave, but all individuals. Redirecting power “horizontally,” or dialogically, enables these characters to be moved—somatically, emotionally, spiritually—to invent shifting collectives of differences. (Lidinsky 194)

The feast that the people in the community enjoy at 124 contradicts the new relationship among them that Baby Suggs’ preaching in the Clearing leads them to. Therefore, “124, rocking with laughter, goodwill and food for ninety made them angry.” Since Baby Suggs herself does not approve of extra, it is quite natural that people in the community feel anger, thinking, “Too much.” It is certainly possible that they sense that “slavery’s ‘vertical’ flow of power” is returning with a hierarchy emerging in the community.

In “‘The Foreigner’s Home’: Introduction,” Morrison argues that “the most obvious and fundamental location of home is the human body—the final frontier of identity” (qtd. In Schreiber 159). However, Baby Suggs’ religion, a belief in the body, has not provided her and Sethe with home. Ironically Sethe tries to save her children by destroying their bodies. Baby Suggs’ unorthodox view that one can think and imagine independently from the Christian creed contributes to Sethe’s infanticide:

She did not tell them to clean up their lives or to go

and sin no more. She did not tell them they were the blessed of the earth, its inheriting meek or its glory-bound pure.

She told them that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine. That if they could not see it, they would not have it. (88)

“Flesh” has taught Baby Suggs how wonderful it is to be liberated from slavery. “Flesh,” free from slavery, has liberated “heart.” Hence, she cannot accept such a religion like Christianity, which disregards flesh, as something she can believe in and depend on; she cannot help but create a new religion, whose rites are held in the Clearing, not the church. Thus, Baby Suggs’ preaching contradicts one of the master narratives, Christianity.

Baby Suggs’ preaching has freed Sethe from the Christian belief that one cannot kill himself or herself. It has also let her freely imagine a place where she will be able to live happily with her children: “a place where you could love anything you chose—not to need permission for desire—well now, *that* was freedom” (162). This place, however, is in the other world as suggested by the following description of Sethe’s response to the slave catchers:

Simple: she was squatting in the garden and when she saw them coming and recognized schoolteacher’s hat, she heard wings. Little hummingbirds stuck their needle beaks right through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings. And if she thought anything, it was No. No. Nono. Nonono. Simple she just flew. Collected every bit of

life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. Over there. Outside this place, where they would be safe. And the hummingbird wings beat on. (163)

In Morrison's novels, birds are often associated with violence, which helps Florens in *A Mercy* become independent and helps Mavis free her emotions. Unlike them, Sethe directs her violence against her own children to take them all "to the other side where [her] own ma'am is" (203).

Meanwhile, Sethe's infanticide is a fatal blow to Baby Suggs: "[a]ll she had left was her heart and they busted it so even the War couldn't rouse her"(209). Baby Suggs admits her defeat and failure to provide her family with home:

Baby Suggs, holy, believed she had lied. There was no grace—imaginary or real—and no sunlit dance in a Clearing could change that. Her faith, her love, her imagination and her great big old heart began to collapse twenty-eight days after her daughter-in-law arrived.(89)

Baby Suggs advises Sethe to stop fighting, saying, "Lay em down, Sethe. Sword and shield. Down. Down. Both of em down. Down by the riverside. Sword and shield. Don't study war no more. Lay all that mess down. Sword and shield"(86). All she can do is to express her hatred for whites, saying, "Those white things have taken all I had or dreamed, [...] and broke my heartstrings too. There is no bad luck in the world but whitefolks"(89).

After Sethe's infanticide, 124, haunted by the ghost of her baby, stops functioning as home, destabilizing the family's life. 124 itself starts to behave like something that has its own will. Sethe and Denver know that all they can do is conditioned by "what the house [permits]" (4). "Together they waged a perfunctory battle against the outrageous behavior of that place; against turned-over slop jars, smacks on the behind, and gusts of sour air" (4).

Denver was so little when Sethe tried to murder her children that she doesn't remember what happened in the storehouse and has no idea what people in the community think of her mother. Her curiosity leads her out to "Lady John's house-school" (103). This school helps her obtain knowledge, but it also teaches her something she doesn't want to know: her mother's infanticide. Before learning of her mother's infanticide, she was not interested in the ghost in 124. "Then it began to irritate her, wear her out with its mischief" (103). Her self-confinement in the house begins then. In addition, the frightening knowledge she obtains at Lady John's school robs her of hearing for two years. Two years later, her hearing suddenly comes back, making her hear the baby ghost crawl up the stairs.

The return of Denver's hearing, cut off by an answer she could not bear to hear, cut on by the sound of her dead sister trying to climb the stairs, signaled another shift in the fortunes of the people of 124. From then on the presence was full of spite. Instead of sighs and accidents there was pointed and deliberate abuse. (104)

These two years of her hearing loss and its sudden return mean that Denver has lived in her confined imagination, fixated on her mother's atrocious act, and that this enables the image of the dead baby to form and appear to her in real life. Now that she confines herself to 124, the baby ghost is her only companion. The more fixated on the ghost the women become, the more the presence of the ghost strengthens—this dynamism of human relations can be seen in their life with Beloved.

The women pay too much attention to an uncanny existence. They disregard their family and this brings about a lot of stress among them. Denver realizes why her brothers ran away; she does not “agree with Sethe that they left because of the ghost” (103). She thinks that they were afraid of their mother. Another reason for their running away is indicated by the following sentence: “Buglar and Howard grew furious at the company of the women in the house, and spent in sullen reproach any time they had away from their odd work in town carrying water and feed at the stables”(104). They couldn't endure her grandmother, mother, and sister's attitude toward the ghost and life itself.

Baby Suggs dies in distress, totally defeated by white supremacy. After Sethe's infanticide, she completely loses interest in life except color: “[h]er past had been like her present—intolerable—and since she knew death was anything but forgetfulness, she used the little energy left her pondering color. (4) Encouraging ex-slaves to love their flesh as “an unchurched preacher”(87), Baby Suggs seems to have helped strengthen the solidarity of the community. But now she is rejected by and isolated from the community, a community which were jealous of her and her family. Those who enjoyed the feast at 124 blame Baby Suggs and Sethe for being too



extravagant. Their meanness that follows allows the slave catchers, led by schoolteacher, to find where Sethe and her children are hiding. This description of the community's contribution to the infanticide is not referred to in the article in *The American Baptist* in 1856, which Morrison got an idea for *Beloved* from. It is totally Morrison's creation. The community's attitude toward Sethe's infanticide brings about a conflict between the two sides.

Regardless of "a town full of disgust" (5), Sethe seems to believe that her act can be justified because "[t]hey ain't at Sweet Home" and "[s]choolteacher ain't got em"(168). She thinks that she has shown her love for the dead baby and says, "No more powerful than the way I loved her" (4). She prostituted herself to the engraver to have seven letters, "Beloved," engraved on the headstone. Imprisoned in 124, however, all Sethe does is to alternately blame herself for what she did to her daughter and to try to justify it by believing that she sacrificed herself for her:

Not only did she have to live out her years in a house palsied by the baby's fury at having its throat cut, but those ten minutes she spent pressed up against dawn-colored stone studded with star chips, her knees wide open as the grave, were longer than life, more alive, more pulsating than the baby blood that soaked her fingers like oil. (5)

### **Intrusions into 124**

Paul D's involvement in Sethe's life reveals that she has lived as if she were in prison. "Emotions sped to the surface in

his company. Things became what they were: drabness looked drab; heat was hot. Windows suddenly had view”(39). Paul D makes Sethe temporally believe in the possibility of starting a new life with a man. Held by Paul D from the back, Sethe sheds tears which she has held back for many years and feels something soft coming from his gaze;

Soft. It felt soft in a waiting kind of way. He was not judging her—or rather he was judging but not comparing her. Not since Halle had a man looked at her that way: not loving or passionate, but interested, as though he were examining an ear of corn for quality. Halle was more like a brother than a husband. His care suggested a family relationship rather than a man’s laying claim. (25)

Sethe’s loving attitude toward Paul D, however, means that she has started to think of herself. As Denver observes, “I think the baby got plans,”(37) Beloved suddenly appears as if she were mad at Sethe for wanting her own happiness. Paul D and Beloved’s intrusion into the isolated house starts to disrupt the relationship between the ghost and the living people and causes their narratives to combine and sometimes clash with each other.

Sethe is still not free from the fake home Mr. Garner gave her at Sweet Home:

It never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too. Fire and brimstone all right, but hidden in lacy groves. Boys hanging from

the most beautiful sycamores in the world. It shamed her—remembering the wonderful souging 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)

Paul D tells Sethe about what happened to Halle, him and the other slaves after they failed to run away: “Halle’s face smeared with butter and the clabber too; his own mouth jammed full of iron” (96). The news is necessary for Sethe to look squarely at the true picture of Sweet Home, however excruciating it may be. She also learns that her husband Halle watched her being raped by schoolteacher’s nephews from the loft without doing anything to stop them. Although Halle’s weakness makes Sethe mad, it helps shatter her belief in masculinity, which Sweet Home also taught her about.

The knowledge she gains from Paul D agonizes Sethe: “[l]oaded with the past and hungry for more, it left her no room to imagine, let alone plan for, the next day”(70). She wishes she were crazy like other people, and then realizes that women cannot allow themselves to go crazy; they have to take care of their children. She remembers that “her three children were chewing sugar teat under a blanket on their way to Ohio and no butter play would change that”(70). Paul D tells her about his realization that he had when he saw Mister, a rooster, looking at Paul D:

“Mister was allowed to be and stay what he was. But I wasn’t allowed to be and stay what I was. Even if you cooked him you’d be cooking a rooster named Mister. But

wasn't no way I'd ever be Paul D again, living or dead. Schoolteacher changed me. I was something else and that something was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub."(72)

Paul D's narrative drives Sethe almost crazy, shattering her sweet memories of Sweet Home into pieces.

Beloved also makes Sethe recall what she has long forgotten. She wants to monopolize Sethe's affection, because she believes that Sethe is the mother who deserted her. Beloved craves so insatiably for Sethe's affection that "Sethe was licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved's eyes"(57). Her attitude toward Sethe disrupts the relationship between Sethe and Paul D. As Arnold Weinstein says, "Beloved is referring to a real past, rich with horrors of its own: slave ship, abandonment, sexual abuse" (Weinstein 281), Beloved was captured with her mother by slave catchers somewhere in Africa and, carried on a slave ship, saw her mother commit suicide, and ended up as the captive of a white person. It seems as if time stopped for Beloved when her mother dived into the sea filled with dead Africans. Beloved describes how Africans were brought to America to become slaves. Her narrative combines with Sethe's narrative to make the history of slavery vivid and multilayered.

Beloved asks Sethe about the earrings that Mrs. Garner gave to her the day after Sethe and Halle married. Beloved becomes interested in Sethe's hair and asks, "Your woman she never fix up your hair?" (60) This question makes Sethe remember what she has repressed in her mind, her mother; Sethe cannot help doing irrational things, such as folding a sheet many times. Beloved serves as "a psychological catalyst"

(Krumholz 397) for making Sethe recall her past: “she was remembering something she had forgotten she knew”; “[s]omething privately shameful that had seeped into a slit in her mind right behind the slap on her face and the circled cross”(61). Sethe remembers Nan, who took care of Sethe, telling her that her mother was taken to America by a slave ship and then raped by the white crews on the ship many times. Her mother threw away all the babies she had through those rapes. Sethe may have inherited from her mother fits of rage, one of which she shows in the storehouse.

Beloved also makes Denver tell her what she has heard about her birth. Encouraged to talk, Denver lucidly pictures how Sethe brought her to life through the aid of Amy Denver:

Now, watching Beloved’s alert and hungry face, how she took in every word, asking questions about the color of things and their size, her downright craving to know, Denver began to see what she was saying and not just to hear it: there is this nineteen-year-old slavegirl—a year older than herself—walking through the dark woods to get to her children who are far away. She is tired, scared maybe, and maybe even lost. Most of all she is by herself and inside her is another baby she has to think about too.  
(77)

She likes her narrative but at the same time she hates it because “it made her feel like a bill was owing somewhere and she, Denver, had to pay it.”(77) It must be the poor white girl that Denver feels she owes to—later she repays the bill by saving Bodwin, a white abolitionist, from her mother who

mistakenly believes he is schoolteacher and tries to thrust an ice pick into him.

Whatever effect her new knowledge and revived memories have on her life, Sethe feels good to have a person she can share her pain with; “she wanted him in her life” (99). Her stories combine with Paul D’s, so that they carry them together.

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

Sethe is now trying to psychologically bury the dead baby who she has kept in mind and to “launch her newer, stronger life with a tender man”(99). Her decision to start anew makes her feel as confident as when she arrived at 124. This is indicated in the following sentences: “There was no question but that she could do it. Just like the day she arrived at 124—sure enough, she had milk enough for all” (100).

After Sethe begins to live a new life with Paul D, their love toward each other seems to be deepening. On the other hand, Beloved becomes so jealous and furious over their relationship that “SHE MOVED HIM” (114). Paul D feels uncomfortable in 124 but doesn’t know why. He keeps changing bedrooms until he comes to know he is “being prevented” (116) from staying in the house. In spite of his claim, however, he is sexually attracted by Beloved’s “shining” (64). Sethe believes that “Beloved had been locked up by some whiteman for his own purposes, and never let out the door” (119). Hence, Beloved is adroit in manipulating a

man into having sex with her. Then it is possible to say Paul D has unconsciously been waiting for Beloved to come to have sex with him. He tries to resist temptation, though, because he considers it to be a sin:

If he trembled like Lot's wife and felt some womanish need to see the nature of the sin behind him; feel a sympathy, perhaps, for the cursing cursed, or want to hold it in his arms out of respect for the connection between them, he too would be lost. (117)

He associates his weakness with Lot in *the Bible* and regards succumbing to temptation as womanish. This means he has not yet freed himself from the master narrative of Christianity and that of masculinity. When he has sex with Beloved, he shouts, "Red heart," which signifies his emotion that he has long repressed in his mind and also regards as his weaknesses. His resistance to temptation also means resisting a different image of himself which schoolteacher forces on him as shown in the sentence, "His strength had lain in knowing that schoolteacher was wrong"(126). Schoolteacher told him that "they were only Sweet Home men at Sweet Home"(125). Paul D still wants to believe that "of all the Blacks in Kentucky, only the five of them were men" (125). What is worse, he realizes that he is controlled by Beloved, a young woman:

If schoolteacher was right it explained how he had come to be a rag doll—picked up and put back down anywhere any time by a girl young enough to be his daughter. Fucking her when he was convinced he didn't want to.

Whenever she turned her behind up, the calves of his youth(was that it?) cracked his resolve. But it was more than appetite that humiliated him and made him wonder if schoolteacher was right. It was being moved, placed where she wanted him, and there was nothing he was able to do about it. (125)

Beloved's temptation makes Paul D's self image shatter into pieces. In order to get rid of every bit of the value system Sweet Home imprinted in Paul D, Beloved's interference with the relationship between Sethe and Paul D is definitely necessary.

Sethe and Paul D break up when Paul D asks Sethe to tell him about the woman in the newspaper clipping which Stamp Paid has handed to him. For the first time, Sethe begins to confide to a person about her infanticide. Paul D seems to listen honestly to her and understand the truth behind the atrocious act:

Perhaps it was the smile, or maybe the ever-ready love she saw in his eyes—easy and upfront, the way colts, evangelists and children look at you: with love you don't have to deserve—that made her go ahead and tell him what she had not told Baby Suggs, the only person she felt obliged to explain anything to. Otherwise she would have said what the newspaper said and no more. Sethe could recognize only seventy-five printed words (half of which appeared in the newspaper clipping), but she knew that the words she did not understand hadn't any more power than she had to explain. It was the smile and the upfront love that made her try. (161)



The passage above shows the reason why Morrison places more importance on imagination rather than the written sources: Sethe intimates that the newspaper article does not convey what really happened to her and what she had in mind. Hence, what she confides to Paul D, walking around him, is of critical importance.

The deep meaning of freedom that causes Sethe to commit infanticide and that neither the media nor abolitionists are aware of or interested in is now being revealed. Simon Malpas explains the task of “the postmodern historian or writer of finite history,” saying,

the task of the postmodern historian or writer of finite history is not simply to make up new stories but to interrogate the universal assumptions of our contemporary power structures, to challenge their explanatory schemes and make room for different voices to emerge. (Malpas 99)

The newspaper clipping may be an important source to make up a traditional account of slavery, but we have to question who wrote it and for whom it was written. Paul D says to himself,

Because there was no way in hell a black face could appear in a newspaper if the story was about something anybody wanted to hear. A whip of fear broke through the heart chambers as soon as you saw a Negro’s face in a paper, since the face was not there because the person had a healthy baby, or outran a street mob. Nor was it

there because the person had been killed, or maimed or caught or burned or jailed or whipped or evicted or stomped or raped or cheated, since that could hardly qualify as news in a newspaper. It would have to be something out of the ordinary—something whitepeople would find interesting, truly different, worth a few minutes of teeth sucking if not gasps. (155)

Sethe's confession to Paul D is supposed to serve as psychotherapy for her. On the contrary, Paul D criticizes her for what she did to her daughter. It is a hard blow for her. Although she had "buried all recollection of them and luck,"

Paul D dug it up, gave her back her body, kissed her divided back, stirred her rememory and brought her more news: of clabber, of iron, of rooseters' smiling, but when he heard *her* news, he counted her feet and didn't even say goodbye. (188)

Now that Paul D has deserted Sethe, she can turn to no one but Denver and Beloved and confines herself to 124 with them.

### **The Isolated House for "Rememory"**

After Paul D leaves, 124 is a haunted house again. 124 is "LOUD" (169) now. Before Paul D came, it represented Sethe's repressed self. Now it represents her disintegrating self, which is on the verge of schizophrenia. Sethe has decided to take Baby Suggs' advice, "lay it all down," which means that she has succumbed to white supremacy, giving up her narrative of the infanticide. Sethe takes Beloved and Denver to a frozen creek

and they skate on it, sharing two pairs of skates. Their laughter sounds hollow and pathetic. The three-time inserted sentence “Nobody saw them falling”(174) symbolizes their closed life and predicts they are falling. Sethe starts to concentrate her love on Beloved, associating everything about her dead daughter with Beloved: the song Sethe made up and sang to her children, for example. The serenity surrounding Sethe adversely suggests isolation, defeat, submission and resignation as seen in the following sentences: “With that, she gathered her blanket around her elbows and ascended the lily-white stairs like a bride. Outside, snow solidified itself into graceful forms. The peace of winter stars seemed permanent” (176). It is easy to imagine how cruel it is for a person, after having given up his or her own happiness for a long time, to be given a chance to live a happy life only to have that hope snatched away. The suffering of a victim of slavery has no end, and confining themselves to 124 adds to their suffering.

Sethe is late for work for the first time in sixteen years. She doesn't care because “[t]he world is in this room”(183). She is making home in 124, even if it is playing house. She gives up facing her past. She says to herself:

I don't have to remember nothing. I don't even have to explain. She understands it all. I can forget how Baby Suggs' heart collapsed; how we agreed it was consumption without a sign of it in the world. [...] I can forget that what I did changed Baby Suggs' life. No Clearing, no company. Just laundry and shoes. (183-4)

Thus she tries to forget everything about her infanticide, but

paradoxically, her efforts to forget the past make her recall the past after all. This is devastating for her, for all the things about Sethe's infanticide suddenly come to her mind. This means she has to face the past without reconstituting it. All she can do is to devote herself to Beloved, who she believes has resurrected. Her monologue continues:

I can forget it all now because as soon as I got the gravestone in place you made your presence known in the house and worried us all to distraction. I didn't understand it then. I thought you were mad with me. And now I know that if you was, you ain't now because you came back here to me and I was right all along: there is no world outside my door. I only need to know one thing. How bad is the scar? (184)

Try as she may, however, the past mercilessly comes back. She begins to think about white people, then she recalls what black neighbors told her; "[s]he didn't want any more news about whitefolks; didn't want to know what Ella knew and John and Stamp Paid, about the world done up the way whitefolks loved it" (188). Although she talks to Beloved in her mind, "Thank God I don't have to rememory or say a thing because you know it" (191), she recalls what happened after schoolteacher came. She confesses to Beloved, "This is the first time I'm telling it and I'm telling it to you because it might help explain something to you although I know you don't need me to do it"(193). Thus after all she is clarifying the process that led to the infanticide and the reason for it, through talking to Beloved. Regardless of her determination to forget everything and focus

her life on Denver and Beloved, she continues to “rememory” her past without being aware of it. This “rememory” also helps her get rid of the discourse of Sweet Home that Mr. Garner has inscribed in Sethe. A happy memory of her life with children at Sweet Home dissolves into a frightening memory of schoolteacher who beat Sixo “to show him that definitions belonged to the definers”(190) and measured her body and recorded “her human characteristics” and “her animal ones” (193). Now she knows that Halle buttered his face and Sixo was burned alive. The atrocity of slavery overwhelms her. She can only find a place to protect herself in her reclusive life with Beloved and Denver.

Sethe’s “rememory” deepens and recalls her mother. Sethe’s fixation on milk can be traced back to the loss of her mother. She says, “There was no nursing milk to call my own. I know what it is to be without the milk that belongs to you; to have to fight and holler for it, and to have so little left”(200). She elucidates the trauma she suffered after her mother was burned alive, with her memory of Mrs. Garner blurring into the memory of her own mother:

But I wasn’t too nasty to cook their food or take care of Mrs. Garner. I tended her like I would have tended my own mother if she needed me. [...] And I would have stayed after that except Nan snatched me back. Before I could check for the sign. It was her all right, but for a long time I didn’t believe it. I looked everywhere for that hat. Stuttered after that. Didn’t stop it till I saw Halle. (200-201)

Sethe confesses her weakness and her true feelings she had when she buried her beloved baby:

When I put that headstone up I wanted to lay in there with you, put your head on my shoulder and keep you warm, and I would have if Buglar and Howard and Denver didn't need me, because my mind was homeless then. I couldn't lay down with you then. No matter how much I wanted to. I couldn't lay down nowhere in peace, back then. Now I can. I can sleep like the drowned, have mercy. She come back to me, my daughter, and she is mine. (204)

This confession implies that she wanted to die with her dead daughter and that now she can give up fighting and die. It also shows that the responsibility that she had to take as a mother and woman has added to her suffering she has had as a slave.

It is not just Sethe who is "loud," but Beloved and Denver also talk. Beloved recalls her past in her unusual way. Her monologue gives a graphic description of slave trade:

I AM BELOVED and she is mine. I see her take flowers away from leaves she puts them in a round basket the leaves are not for her she fills the basket she opens the grass I would help her but the clouds are in the way. [...]

All of it is now it is always now there will never be a time when I am not crouching and watching others who are crouching too I am always crouching the man on my face is dead his face is not mine his mouth smells sweet but his eyes are locked

[...] those able to die are in a pile I cannot find my man  
the one whose teeth I have loved a hot thing the little hill  
of dead people a hot thing the men without skin push  
them through with poles the woman is there with the face  
I want the face that is mine they fall into the sea which is  
the color of the bread she has nothing in her ears If I had  
the teeth of the man who died on my face I would bite the  
circle around her neck bite it away I know she does not  
like it ...(210-1)

Beloved's monologue has no punctuations and is grammatically insufficient, which hinders understanding if the passage is read in a cursory way. It serves to make her monologue so mystifying that one feels as if they are in the other world. From a realist's point of view, she speaks that way because she lacks literacy, having been confined by white people for a long time.

After Beloved's monologue, there follows a lyrical dialogue among the three women. Sethe and Beloved begin first:

Tell me the truth. Didn't you come from the other side?  
Yes. I was on the other side... (215)

Then, the dialogue between Denver and Beloved follows:

We played by the creek.  
I was there in the water... (215)

In the end, they all respond to each other, as if they were singing a polyphonic song:

I waited for you  
You are mine  
You are mine  
You are mine (216)

124 is not just “loud,” filled with voices to tell the atrocity of slavery but it produces artistic sounds including discords. The ending part of the dialogue, however, sounds ominous. They claim each other, trying to possess each other. Their dialogues have enabled them to “rememory” the past, but, unlike Consolata’s group therapy, they do not help them get over their traumas and form good relationships with others, as long as they confine themselves to 124, claiming each other.

Sethe is so absorbed in games with Beloved that she begins to be late for work and eventually gets fired. As Sethe does not look for another job, they consume everything from money to food. Indifferent to imminent destitution, Beloved and Sethe decorate the house with flowers, which indicates they are going insane. Since Beloved “imitated Sethe,” “it was difficult for Denver to tell who was who”(241). Then Beloved’s accusations torture Sethe, who just asks Beloved for forgiveness. Their life deteriorates to the extent that “[i]f the whitepeople of Cincinnati had allowed Negroes into their lunatic asylum they could have found candidates in 124”(250). Sethe and Beloved are on the verge of lunacy. Obviously Beloved is reenacting what happened in the slave ship:

Sometimes she screamed, “Rain! Rain!” and clawed her throat until rubies of blood opened there, made brighter by her midnight skin. [...] Other times Beloved curled up



on the floor, her wrists between her knees, and stayed there for hours. Or she would go to the creek, stick her feet in the water and whoosh it up her legs. Afterward she would go to Sethe, run her fingers over the woman's teeth while tears slid from her wide black eyes. (250)

In their lunatic world, Sethe is always subject to Beloved, for "Sethe was trying to make up for the handsaw; Beloved was making her pay for it" (251).

### **Stamp Paid's Debt to 124**

Stamp Paid, who interprets the voices he hears at 124 as the ones of "[t]he people of the broken necks, of fire-cooked blood and black girls who had lost their ribbons," tries to add his voices to the "roaring" in the house (181). Stamp Paid regrets causing Sethe and Paul D to break up and thus causing 124 to revert back to a haunted house, wondering,

if some of the "pride goeth before a fall" expectations of the townsfolk had rubbed off on him anyhow—which would explain why he had not considered Sethe's feelings or Denver's needs when he showed Paul D the clipping. (171)

He remembers having to endure having his wife raped by his master's son, since her wife asked him to do nothing to stop the son;

Born Joshua, he renamed himself when he handed over his wife to his master's son. Handed her over in the sense

that he did not kill anybody, thereby himself, because his wife demanded he stay alive. Otherwise, she reasoned, where and to whom could she return when the boy was through? With that gift, he decided that he didn't owe anybody anything. Whatever his obligations were, that act paid them off. (184)

In spite of this "debtlessness," he didn't become "rambunctious" (185) he became an underground railway conductor, helping slaves run away. He said to them, "You paid it; now life owes you" (185).

What pushes Stamp Paid to visit 124 once again, after giving up his first attempt to do what he has not done for almost eighteen years, is the smell of the ribbon "knotted around a curl of wet woolly hair, clinging still to its bit of scalp"(180). Stamp Paid knows slavery has not disappeared, still rampaging around the country in 1874.

Eighteen seventy-four and whitefolks were still on the loose. Whole towns wiped clean of Negroes; eighty-seven lynchings in one year alone in Kentucky; four colored schools burned to the ground; grown men whipped like children; children whipped like adults; black women raped by the crew; property taken, necks broken. He smelled skin, skin and hot blood. The skin was one thing, but human blood cooked in a lynch fire was a whole other thing. The stench stank. (180)

Perhaps he associates the murdered girl with the ribbon on with the one who Sethe killed. He thinks he has "another debt" (184)

he owes Sethe and Denver. In spite of his determined effort to open the door of 124 in a roaring of voices, however, the women inside don't respond to the calling from outside any more, for "[Sethe] opened the door, walked in and locked it tight behind her" (198).

### **Reconnecting 124 to the Community**

Eventually though, someone in the house has to open the door to the outside world. Hunger subdues 124's loudness and now 124 is quiet, because they are hungry and tired. Seeing her mother spitting up something she has never eaten, Denver decides to protect her mother from Beloved rather than protect Beloved from Sethe killing her. Denver goes out to the outside world, thinking,

Whatever was happening, it only worked with three—not two—and since neither Beloved nor Sethe seemed to care what the next day might bring (Sethe happy when Beloved was; Beloved lapping devotion like cream), Denver knew it was on her. She would have to leave the yard; step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help. (243)

Denver's decision involves the people in the community in what is happening in 124. She visits Lady Jones first. She says to Denver, "Well, nobody needs a reason to visit" (247). Denver's coming to see a person itself is of significance. Lady Jones gives some food to her and then other people follow Lady Jones, leaving food at 124. Through receiving food and visiting the benefactors for gratitude, Denver starts building a relationship

with the neighbors. This discussion on houses started with a reference to poverty that underlies African Americans' desire to possess their houses. Lack of food, which is one of the three components of poverty, helps Denver reconnect 124 to the community and "the key to sustenance is in links to others, to communities" (Jesser 327).

While the women in 124 recall their past, adding to their suffering, people in the community come to remember their relationship with 124;

All of them knew her grandmother and some had even danced with her in the Clearing. Others remembered the days when 124 was a way station, the place they assembled to catch news, taste oxtail soup, leave their children, cut out a skirt. One remembered the tonic mixed there that cured a relative. One showed her the border of a pillowslip, the stamens of its pale blue flowers French-knotted in Baby Suggs' kitchen by the light of an oil lamp while arguing the Settlement Fee. They remembered the party with twelve turkeys and tubs of strawberry smash. One said she wrapped Denver when she was a single day old and cut shoes to fit her mother's blasted feet. Maybe they were sorry for her. Or for Sethe. Maybe they were sorry for the years of their own disdain. Maybe they were simply nice people who could hold meanness toward each other for just so long and when trouble rode bareback among them, quickly, easily they did what they could to trip him up. In any case, the personal pride, the arrogant claim staked out at 124 seemed to them to have run its course. They whispered,

naturally, wondered, shook their heads. Some even laughed outright at Denver's clothes of a hussy, but it didn't stop them caring whether she ate and it didn't stop the pleasure they took in her soft "Thank you." (249-250)

A simple "Thank you" pleases the neighbors and encourages them to continue their aid to her. Their involvement in 124 through food giving enables them to reflect on their attitude toward the house.

The power of words also strengthens Denver's resolve to be involved in the outside world. She begins to think of herself during her exchange with Nelson Lord:

It was a new thought, having a self to look out for and preserve. And it might not have occurred to her if she hadn't met Nelson Lord leaving his grandmother's house as Denver entered it to pay a thank you for half a pie. All he did was smile and say, "take care of yourself, Denver," but she heard it as though it were what language was made for. The last time he spoke to her his word blocked up her ears. Now they opened her mind. (252)

To get a job, Denver explains to Janey, a servant at the Bodwins', everything that is really happening in 124. Although Janey is still critical of Sethe, her memory of Baby Suggs makes her help Denver find a job at the Bodwins' and spread the news about 124 to the other colored women quickly. What is happening in 124 reaches Ella, an influential woman in the community.

Ella also recalls her nasty past through learning of Beloved

torturing Sethe in 124. Just as *Beloved* was, Ella was locked in a room by a father and son for their pleasure. She measures any atrocity against her experience in the locked house:

Her puberty was spent in a house where she was shared by father and son, whom she called “the lowest yet.” It was “the lowest yet” who gave her a disgust for sex and against whom she measured all atrocities. A killing, a kidnap, a rape—whatever, she listened and nodded. Nothing compared to “the lowest yet.” She understood Sethe’s rage in the shed twenty years ago, but not her reaction to it, which Ella thought was prideful, misdirected, and Sethe herself too complicated. When she got out of jail and made no gesture toward anybody, and lived as though she were alone, Ella junked her and wouldn’t give her the time of day. (256).

Ella, who is “a practical woman” (256), believes that people have to live on, whatever their lives are. Although, like Janey, she cannot forgive Sethe’s prideful attitude toward people in the community, she cannot allow the past to beat the present, nor can she allow the dead to kill the living:

Whatever Sethe had done, Ella didn’t like the idea of past errors taking possession of the present. Sethe’s crime was staggering and her pride outstripped even that; but she could not countenance the possibility of sin moving on in the house, unleashed and sassy. Daily life took as much as she had. The future was sunset; the past something to leave behind. And if it didn’t stay behind, well, you might

have to stomp it out. Slave life; freed life—every day was a test and a trial. Nothing could be counted on in a world where even when you were a solution you were a problem. (256)

Ella and the twenty-nine women who agree to Ella's plan to "stomp it out" arrive at 124 and they remember their young days when they spent there: "[y]ounger, stronger, even as little girls lying in the grass asleep" (258). While they pray, Ella recalls her excruciating days with the father and son:

She remembered the bottom teeth she had lost to the brake and the scars from the belt were thick as rope around her waist. She had delivered, but would not nurse, a hairy white thing, fathered by "the lowest yet." It lived five days never making a sound. The idea of that pup coming back to whip her too set her jaw working, and then Ella hollered. (258)

Their collaboration of "rememory" produces "a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees"(261). It helps redeem Sethe, for "[i]t broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash"(261).

The unbearable memories have tortured Sethe, but those memories force her to run out and connect herself with the women hollering. The moment she sees a white man riding toward her house, she recalls schoolteacher and rushes out to kill him. Again she hears the sound of birds, but this time directs her violence against a person who seems to threaten their daughters' life. Her attempt to kill a white man to keep

her beloved child alive results in recreating her past and liberating her from lunacy and imminent death and, ultimately, her fixation on her infanticide. Watching Sethe dashing into the crowd makes Beloved recall the scene in which her mother drowned herself in the sea, and leave 124. Losing her home, Beloved later appears here and there like a ghost, carrying “a story to pass on” (Epilogue) about slavery. Philip Page argues:

While they are isolated they are haunted by their pasts, first by the inanimate ghost of Beloved and then by the animate Beloved, who can only be exorcised by the combined action of Sethe, Denver, and the community, actions that reintegrate 124 Bluestone with the neighborhood. (Page 136)

Although their actions seem coincidentally combined, what causes them to act are all the collective memories related to 124 and slavery.

### **A Possibility of Home outside 124**

After the incident, the house looks quiet as if it reflected Sethe’s mind, which is blank, free not only from her slave narrative but also from her children; Denver says to Paul D, “I think I’ve lost my mother”(266). Having nothing left, Sethe seems to be waiting for her death to come, lying on Baby Suggs’ bed with her eyes fixed on the window. She thinks to herself, “This little place by a window is what I want” (272). It is reminiscent of Sula, who feels comfortable, looking at the closed window, before dying. Controlled by Beloved, and rejecting Sethe, Paul D also has lost everything: his peace of mind as well



as confidence in his masculinity. In order to start making home together, however, both of them had to free themselves from everything related to Sweet Home, which has a fake image of home.

Sethe remembers that Paul D is “the kind of man who can walk in a house and make the women cry” (272). After hearing Sethe say, “She was my best thing,” referring to Beloved, Paul D thinks, “There are too many things to feel about this woman” (272). Woidat points out that “Sethe’s scars and swollen feet enhance rather than diminish her dignity: her beauty lies in her exceptional ability to endure” (Woidat 187). Then Paul D remembers what Sixo told him about his feelings for the Thirty-Mile Woman:

She is 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)

Now he thinks to himself, “Only this woman Sethe could have left him his manhood like that. He wants to put his story next to hers”(273). This suggests that they are ready to work together to make a new start on an equal footing. 124 is going to be sold, which means Sethe and Paul D must leave the house, the last thing leading to slavery, losing their shelter. However, as Stamp Paid says, “Any number’ll take him in” (186), the community is ready to accept them. Sethe and Paul D will walk out of 124 and make home together in the community, supported by their neighbors.

## Chapter V . Pursuit of Home in *Home*

Morrison has depicted houses mainly as places that induce suffering, destruction, tensions, conflicts, and violence. This changes in *Home*. The theme of her latest novel is lucid: the pursuit of home. The preface to the novel suggests that home lies in the community, not in a particular house:

Whose house is this?  
Whose night keeps out the light  
In here?  
Say, who owns this house?  
It's not mine.  
I dreamed another, sweeter, brighter  
With a view of lakes crossed in painted boats;  
Of fields wide as arms open for me.  
This house is strange.  
Its shadows lie.  
Say, tell me, why does its lock fit my key?

The other house that “I” dreamed of is reminiscent of the Fisher house in *The Bluest Eye*. The sadness and pain that Pecola experiences in the Fisher house, which has a beautiful view of a lake, may still linger in the reader’s mind. The big houses in her other novels have shown that they repress life rather than nurture it. Meanwhile, this “strange” house mirrors the home Morrison describes in her essay “Home” and in *Paradise*: “the concrete thrill of border-lessness—a kind of out of doors safety” (“Home” 9). “Border-lessness” tested in *Paradise*, however, does

not lead to home. It turns out that the home is confined within the closed community, which ironically contains big houses such as Deek's house and excludes different people. In *Beloved*, however, Morrison seems to have reached the conclusion that the community is indispensable for realizing home even if it sometimes works adversely. In fact, Sethe and Paul D are supposed to leave 124 and search for their home in the community. This chapter will analyze the home Morrison has reached after a long pursuit, following Frank and his sister Cee's life.

### **Loathsome and Suffocating Hometown**

Frank and Cee respectively live far away from their hometown Lotus, which they do not wish to return to. Why do they dislike their hometown?

First they were abused by her step-grandmother Lenore when they were young:

Because Mama and Pap worked from before sunrise until dark, they never knew that Miss Lenore poured water instead of milk over the shredded wheat Cee and her brother ate for breakfast. Nor that when they had stripes and welts on their legs they were cautioned to lie, to say they got them by playing out by the stream where brambles and huckleberry thorns grew. (43-4)

Lenore believes that she is superior to other black people in the town. This is because, thanks to the insurance money she received after her husband was murdered, she owns a house and two cars. But in fact, "Lenore's house was big enough for two,

maybe three, but not for grandparents plus Pap, Mama, Uncle Frank and two children—one a howling baby” (44-5). Afraid of having to live alone, she gets married to Selma. Her privileged status, which she believes she has, makes her feel all the more miserable because of Selma’s family. That’s why she takes it out on Frank and Cee—particularly the latter: “[o]ver the years, the discomfort of the crowded house increased, and Lenore, who believed herself superior to everybody else in Lotus, chose to focus her resentment on the little girl born ‘in the street’” (45). A slight disparity in materialistic wealth distorts Lenore’s personality. Neither Frank nor Cee remembers their parents; Frank’s parents worked so hard to sustain their family that they had no time to take care of their children, just like Eva in *Sula* when her children were younger.

Another reason for their dislike of Lotus is its nature of Lotus. “Lotus was separate, with no sidewalks or indoor plumbing, just fifty or so houses and two churches, one of which churchwomen used for teaching reading and arithmetic” (46). Cee felt suffocated by watching eyes in the town; “[w]atched, watched, watched by every grown-up from sunrise to sunset and ordered about by not only Lenore but every adult in town” (47). Morrison has already written about the suffocating nature of a small town in *Tar Baby*. Left alone in one of the rooms at Aunt Rosa’s house, Jadine always feels watched by women. After staying in Eloë for several days, she feels it unbearable to keep staying there, thinking,

Eloë was rotten and more boring than ever. A burnt-out place. There was no life there. Maybe a past but definitely no future and finally there was no interest. All

that southern small-town country romanticism was a lie, a joke, kept secret by people who could not function elsewhere. (*Tar Baby* 264)

Although Jadine is a sophisticated woman from an urban city, Frank has a similar feeling about his hometown:

*In Lotus you did know in advance since there was no future, just long stretches of killing time. There was no goal other than breathing, nothing to win and, save for somebody else's quiet death, nothing to survive or worth surviving for. If not for my two friends I would have suffocated by the time I was twelve. They, along with my little sister, kept the indifference of parents and the hatefulness of grandparents an afterthought. Nobody in Lotus knew anything or wanted to learn anything. It sure didn't look like anyplace you'd want to be. Maybe a hundred or so people living in some fifty spread-out rickety houses. Nothing to do but mindless work in fields you didn't own, couldn't own, and wouldn't own if you had any other choice. (83)*

Suffocation and boredom seem to be what local small communities have in common. It should also be noted that Frank points out lack of ambition and proprietary desire among people in the community.

On the other hand, the small town has a positive aspect. After the Moneys rent a house, they come to notice generosity and mutual help common among residents:

Everybody in the neighborhood, except Lenore, was stern but quickly open-handed. If someone had an abundance of peppers or collards, they insisted Ida take them. There was okra, fish fresh from the creek, a bushel of corn, all kinds of food that should not go to waste. One woman sent her husband over to shore up their slanted porch steps. They were generous to strangers. An outsider passing through was welcomed—even, or especially, if he was running from the law. Like that man, bloody and scared, the one they washed up, fed and led away on a mule. (46)

Still, young people cannot stand boredom, suffocation or watching eyes always hovering around in the community.

## **Hell on Earth**

Frank leaves Lotus, joining the army with his best friends, while Cee, tricked into getting married to Prince, leaves Lotus with him in the car Lenore lets her use. Atlanta, which they come to live in, seems to promise Cee a lot, but actually it turns out to be no more than a fantasy for her:

Cee looked forward to a shiny life in the city where—after a few weeks of ogling water coming from the turn of a spigot, inside toilets free of flies, streetlights shining longer than the sun and as lovely as fireflies, women in high heels and gorgeous hats trotting to church two, sometimes three times a day, and following the grateful joy and dumbfounded delight of the pretty dress Prince bought her—she learned that Principal had married her for an automobile. (49)

Convenience, cleanliness and materialistic wealth are characteristics of city life, contrasting with the boredom, suffocation and deprivation in a rural community. Loneliness, however, takes the place of neighbors' constant attention and concern.

Cee has been mentally dependent on her brother and misses him since "[h]e would, as always, protect her from a bad situation" (51). It seems as if Frank were her father;

If Frank were there he would once more touch the top of her head with four fingers, or stroke her nape with his thumb. Don't cry; the fingers; the welts will disappear. Don't cry; Mama is tired; I'm right here. But he wasn't there or anywhere near. (53)

She is defeated and depressed, feeling as if her body were shattering into pieces. "She was broken. Not broken up but broken down, down into her separate parts" (54). When she hears her mother died, she returns to Lotus hesitantly. At the funeral, Lenore calls her "Thief, fool, hussy" (50). "When Cee got back to the city, she swore never to go back there" (50). Indeed, she didn't return any more, "even when Pap died of a stroke a month later" (50).

She has no choice but to try and find a good job to save money. Her only friend finds her a new job. In this novel, a big house only appears when Cee visits Dr. and Mrs. Scott, who looks like "the queen of something who belonged in the movies" (60): "a large two-story house rising above a church-neat lawn" (58) and "the kitchen—much, much bigger and better equipped

than the one at Bobby's" (58). Cee follows the custom that slaves or inferior people do: she goes around to the back door. Here in this beautiful house a terrible experiment on humans has been carried out by Dr. Beau, who is "a heavyweight Confederate" (62). "*Out of the Night*," "*The Passing of the Great Race*," and "*Heredity, Race and Society*" (65) on the bookshelves suggest that he is an ultra, white supremacist. Dr. Beau's two daughters are in the hospital, since "[t]hey both have great big heads," suffering from "Cephalitis" (63). Perhaps it can be said that Dr. Beau and Mrs. Scott have made a consanguineous marriage to keep their posterity genetically pure, as seen among 8-rock people in *Paradise*. The word "eugenics" (65) that Cee feels it necessary to study means "the study of methods to improve the mental and physical characteristics of the human race by choosing who may become parents" (Oxford Dic). The doctor's handicapped daughters may be a result of his belief in the white people's dominant genes.

Cee's room, which is "spotless, narrow, and without windows" (62), is like a prison cell. Ironically she feels superior to Lenore, thinking about her poor bed:

When she pulled the sheets back she giggled at its silk cover. So there, Lenore, she thought. What you sleep on in that broke-down bed you got? Remembering the thin, bumpy mattress Lenore slept on, she couldn't help herself and laughed with wild glee. (63)

Sarah's anticipation to enjoy the juicy melon they call "the girl" foreshadows the torture Cee will experience; "Sarah slid a long, sharp knife from a drawer and, with intense anticipation of the



pleasure to come, cut the girl in two" (66). Nobody or no description explains what Dr. Beau does in detail but it seems true that he is examining Cee's womb with a certain experimental purpose in mind. It is symbolic that not only Cee's body but also the seeds of the next generation are ravaged. Dr. Beau's act deprives her of not only her womb but also home for the future generation. Faced with his evil scheme, Cee is helpless and fragile and unable to protect herself alone. This questions Baby Suggs' belief in "flesh" in *Beloved*.

Frank also has horrifying experiences on the battlefield, which are similar to Shadrack's in *Sula*. Morrison's description of battlefields is so vivid, grotesque and absurd that no reader can entertain the idea that war carries any justice. Frank has two horrifying experiences which keep torturing him even after returning to the States.

First, he witnesses the deaths of his two best friends, Mike and Stuff. Mike dies in his arms:

By the time medics got there, the urine on Mike's pants had frozen and Frank had had to beat away pairs of black birds, aggressive as bombers, from his friend's body. It changed him. What died in his arms gave a grotesque life to his childhood. (97).

As for Stuff, Frank has to help "Stuff locate the arm twenty feet away half buried in the snow" (98). They are "meat" (99) now, but they are not numerical figures, but humans. Frank keeps thinking, "But I know them. I know them and they know me" (99). Death visits his friends so unexpectedly and absurdly that Frank cannot comprehend it. Like a walking headless body that

Shadrack witnesses on the battlefield, “the arm twenty feet away half buried in the snow” conveys the atrocity of war. No one in the story expresses protest against war, but Morrison’s artistic description of war’s grotesqueness works more effectively than any explicit anti-war action.

Frank has another atrocious and traumatic experience on the battlefield. He kills a Korean girl who offers to fellate him. In fact, however, he has manipulated this memory, making him believe the guard killed her instead of him. The girl reminds him of him and his sister “*trying to steal peaches off the ground under Miss Robinson’s tree*” (94). Her death overlaps Stuff’s death; Stuff lost one of his arms when it was blasted and after the girl was shot, “[o]nly the hand remains in the trash, clutching its treasure, a spotted, rotting orange” (95). What is more, the girl makes him face his weakness and evilness:

*How could I let her live after she took me down to a place I didn’t know was in me?*

*How could I like myself, even be myself if I surrendered to that place where I unzip my fly and let her taste me right then and there?* (134)

He is destined to keep blaming himself for what he did and could not do in Korea:

Why didn’t you hurry? If you had gotten there sooner you could have helped him. You could have pulled him behind the hill the way you did Mike. And all of that killing you did afterward? Women running, dragging children along. And that old one-legged man on a crutch hobbling at the

edge of the road so as not to slow down the other, swifter ones? You blew a hole in his head because you believed it would make up for the frosted urine on Mike's pants and avenge the lips calling mama. Did it? did it work? And the girl. What did she ever do to deserve what happened to her? (21)

After he is discharged, his life is a mess. He cannot help relying on alcohol to drown the memory of his best friends' deaths. He cannot straighten himself up in his daily life, nor can he push himself to find a job. Occasionally his memory of the war makes him behave insanely. Lily, who he temporarily lives with, makes him forget his experiences on the battlefield. His attachment to her, however, is "medicinal, like swallowing aspirin" (107).

## Homecoming and Recuperation

Unlike the returned soldiers, Shadrack and Plum in *Sula*, Frank is depicted as a murderer as well as a victim. War makes any soldier a victim and murderer, which leads to his attitude toward life, "Stay alive" (76). What makes him change is Sarah's letter saying, "She be dead" (34). The thought of his sister's death reminds him of his dead best friends:

*The letter said "She be dead." I dragged Mike to shelter and fought off the birds but he died anyway. I held on to him, talked to him for an hour but he died anyway. I stanchd the blood finally oozing from the place Stuff's arm should have been. [...] No more people I didn't save. No more watching people close to me die. No*

*more.*

*And not my sister. No way.*

*She was the first person I ever took responsibility for. Down deep inside her lived my secret picture of myself—a strong good me tied to the memory of those horses and the burial of a stranger. Guarding her, finding a way through tall grass and out of that place, not being afraid of anything—snakes or wild old men. (103)*

His love toward his sister and good image of himself reflected on her lead him and Cee back to their hometown, which provides them with safety. His sister, people in the community of Lotus and Lotus itself are to function as home, which Schreiber often uses as a key word in her essay:

A concept of home as connected to memory and nostalgia functions to fulfill a lack and helps from a sense of self by providing a past and a positive self-concept. In this way, home provides safety and guards against trauma. (Schreiber 27)

After he rescues Cee out from Dr. Beau's den, he feels satisfied not only with the successful rescue of his sister but also with a rescue without violence: "[m]ixed in with his fear was the deep satisfaction that the rescue brought, not only because it was successful but also how markedly nonviolent it had been" (114). He killed many enemies and civilians to avenge his best friends but it didn't help him get over his trauma.

In contrast to their return to their birthplace, Frank's ex-girl friend Lily goes ahead with her new life. On the path

toward her success, an economic success, she thinks, "In Frank Money's empty space real money glittered. Who could mistake a sign that clear? Not Lillian Florence Jones" (82). Morrison's balanced view of people never allows her work to be biased in favor of a particular group of people, leaving the choice to the reader. Harris points out that, in Morrison's works, "there is always room for equivocation" (Harris 116).

Frank suffers from his PTSD. His sister is dying with her womb ravaged by an ultra white supremacist doctor. The homecoming of those who have respectively experienced a kind of hell on earth begins to reveal Morrison's image of home. After putting Cee in Ethel's care, Frank begins to discover his hometown. It is blessed not with materialistic wealth, but with nature and life.

There were no sidewalks, but every front yard and backyard sported flowers protecting vegetables from disease and predators—marigolds, nasturtiums, dahlias. [...] Had these trees always been this deep, deep green? [...] The nephew's bare feet swayed; the uncle's left boot tapped out the beat. Color, silence, and music enveloped him.

This feeling of safety and goodwill, he knew, was exaggerated, but savoring it was real. (117-8)

When he sees cotton fields sprawling, he thinks, "Like all hard labor, picking cotton broke the body but freed the mind for dreams of vengeance, images of illegal pleasure—even ambitious schemes of escape" (118). Back in his parents' house, he finds what he had hidden when he was young: along with

Cee's two baby teeth, "his winning marbles: a bright blue one, an ebony one, and his favorite, a rainbow mix" (120). This kind of memorabilia reconnects him to his past; his healing process is working.

In the meantime, the two months that Cee spends healing provide her with education for life. Cee, "surrounded by country women who loved mean" (121), has changed. Morrison views being mean as part of the human character, which sometimes serves people better than gentleness; "[t]hey didn't waste their time or the patient's with sympathy and they met the tears of the suffering with resigned contempt" (121). They teach her the value of her life and advise her to be always vigilant, saying, "Who told you you was trash?" and "Misery don't call ahead. That's why you have to stay awake—otherwise it just walks on in your door" (122). Later Ethel adds:

"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."

During the next step of healing, they teach her quilting. It is not only a means of helping Cee express herself through creating something, but also a cultural education to teach her the tradition of quilting. It is a way in which she can participate in a communal activity and learn how to survive a plight:

“[i]gnoring those who preferred new, soft blankets, they practiced what they had been taught by their mothers during the period that rich people called the Depression and they called life” (122). They advise her to know the difference between some evil which should be regarded as “incorrigible” and some evil which can be “mitigated” (124). Cee observes their way of life and discovers the disciplines and religious beliefs that underlie it:

There was no excess in their gardens because they shared everything. There was no trash or garbage in their homes because they had a use for everything. [...] Laziness was more than intolerable to them; it was inhuman. [...] Sleep was not for dreaming; it was for gathering strength for the coming day. [...] Mourning was helpful but God was better and they did not want to meet their Maker and have to explain a wasteful life. They knew He would ask each of them one question: “What have you done?” (123)

Quoting the story about the goose and the golden eggs, Ethel criticizes Lenore’s greed and arrogance, saying, “I always thought a dead goose could make at least one good meal. But gold? Shoot. That was always the only things on Lenore’s mind. She had it, loved it, and thought it put her above everybody else. Just like the farmer” (125). It is not certain whether their treatment of leaving Cee in the sun with her legs spread open for one hour is medically effective and valid, but it is certainly true that “the demanding love of Ethel Fordham” (125) contributes to her final cure.

In order to grow as a human being after being cured, she has

to be independent of the brother who has overprotected her. She refuses his offer to buy her a refrigerator, saying, "What we need with a cold box? I know how to can and anything else I need I go outside and pick, gather, or kill it. Besides, who cooks up in here, me or you?" (127). The things she learns from Ethel and the other women tell her to be free from materialistic desire. She used to be "eager to please" (128) like Florens in *A Mercy*. But now Frank notices her change, thinking,

This Cee was not the girl who trembled at the slightest touch of the real and vicious world. Nor was she the not-even-fifteen-year-old who would run off with the first boy who asked her. And she was not the household help who believed whatever happened to her while drugged was a good idea, good because a white coat said so. (127)

Cee is free from white culture now, thanks to Ethel and the other women who help her. She realizes that she should not blame her dumbness on her lack of schooling, thinking about "the skilled women who had care for her, healed her"; "they had sharpened the skills of the illiterate: perfect memory, photographic minds, keen senses of smell and hearing" (128).

She reaches the conclusion that thinking makes it possible for her to save herself;

So it was just herself. In this world with these people she wanted to be the person who would never again need rescue. Not from Lenore through the lies of the Rat, not from Dr. Beau through the courage of Sarah and her brother. Sun-smacked or not, she wanted to be the one



who rescued her own self. Did she have a mind, or not? Wishing would not make it so, nor would blame, but thinking might. If she did not respect herself, why should anybody else? (129)

In *Paradise* Billie Delia is thought to have advised Arnette to think by herself, saying that “there was any other way to think of herself” (*Paradise* 148), but Arnette did not listen. In contrast, Cee has begun to think by herself. She accepts the fact that she will not be able to have children. She says to Frank, “I can be miserable if I want to. You don’t need to try and make it go 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” (131). Quilting helps her endure sorrow. Her altered attitude toward life changes her brother’s attitude toward life as well.

Frank admits that he has been lying to himself by grieving over his dead friends; he thinks, “*My mourning was so thick it completely covered my shame*” (133). Cee’s reference to “*a baby girl smile all through the house, in the air, the clouds*” pushes him to admit the truth that has been torturing him; he faces his past, saying to himself, “*I shot the Korean girl in her face*” (133). He could not admit that he was sexually aroused by “[a] *wee little girl*” (133). The girl might have been used to performing fellatio on American soldiers for food. It is another evil aspect of war that official documents, history textbooks, and other such things fail to describe. Only artistic work can even come close.

## **A Ritual to Start a New Life**

Through mingling with men in the community, Frank comes to know the truth about the discarded body he and his sister saw

on the ranch when they were small. The owner of the ranch who had been tired of watching dogfights made a father and son fight with each other till one of them was stabbed to death. The father sacrificed himself to let his son live. As one of the men says, "All he won was his life, which I doubt was worth much to him after that" (139), it is likely that the son's experience of killing his father has been tormenting him for the rest of his life. However, the father made a choice to let his son survive. This choice is one which Sethe at the end of *Beloved* and a minha mãe at the beginning of *A Mercy* share. As Frank has already experienced, killing does not give any comfort or satisfaction but saving your beloved without killing anyone does.

Frank decides to hold a memorial service for the father. He wraps the father's bones with the first quilt that Cee has made by herself. "The quilt became a shroud of lilac, crimson, yellow, and dark navy blue" (143). The bones are now not an object but "the gentleman" (143). He and Cee carry the gentleman to "the sweet bay tree—split down the middle, beheaded, undead—spreading its arms, one to the right, one to the left" (144). They put the gentleman into the perpendicular grave at the base of the tree. Frank nails the sanded piece of wood on the tree trunk. On the wood are the following written words: "Here Stands A Man" (144). They have paid respect to the man whose funeral they feel responsible for, since the father thought more of his son's life than of his own. Frank and Cee are different from Sula and Nel in that respect. The beheaded sweet bay tree asserts its will to survive, reinforcing the value of life the father has taught them. The tree mirrors the human beings who suffer from traumas and physical injuries, but it also encourages them to go on with their lives as indicated in the

following words:

*It looked so strong  
So beautiful.  
Hurt right down the middle  
But alive and well. (147)*

After the funeral, Cee calls Frank, saying, “*Let’s go home*” (147). The words reflect their trust in the community that provides them with support and a safe place. Thanks to this, they can start a new life.

## Home

Eva in *Sula* doesn’t ask Plum about his experience on the battlefield. It seems as if Frank narrates his story on behalf of Plum. Eva judges his life as meaningless, since he is so weak to live. That’s why Sula calls Eva a “mean” person. In contrast, Lenore, who abuses Cee as a child, threatens her, who has stolen her car, but does not turn her in to the police. People in the community take care of Lenore, who has difficulty using her hands and legs, though her prideful attitude toward them has made them disgusted. Frank committed an unforgivable act on the battlefield and in addition, memories of his best friends’ horrible deaths never leave his mind. Cee has been lacerated both physically and psychologically. For all the harrowing experiences and memories, they all decide to live on and start new lives based on the values they have discovered in the community. The values, which are fundamentally different from those of capitalism, encourage people to treasure nature, human interaction, and their own culture and tradition. Cee’s word,

“home,” means a community in which no house needs a key to enter. It means a place where people are willing to help each other even if the one being helped is mean. What differentiates Lotus from “a utopia” is that people in Lotus are more or less defective in character. Above all it is a place where people cherish and nurture life.

## Conclusion

Houses depicted in Toni Morrison's novels can be categorized into two types in terms of their roles. One type serves to unmask the American dream—one that appears to ensure happiness for both whites and blacks, but actually oppresses their lives. The other type serves to offer African Americans a space where they can pursue the possibility of realizing home—a place in which they can find themselves and nurture life. The former type includes the grand house in *A Mercy*, L'Arbe de la Croix in *Tar Baby*, almost all the houses in *The Bluest Eye* and the Cosey's Hotel in *Love*. The latter includes Eva's enormous house in *Sula*, the Convent in *Paradise* and 124 in *Beloved*.

The grand house in *A Mercy* reveals that capitalism, underlying the society of America and undergirded by patriarchy, drives people to desire more. This results in people feeling restless, insufficient, discordant and unhappy. L'Arbe de la Croix in *Tar Baby* represents American imperialism, whose destructiveness and disruptiveness are unveiled by Son, who treasures black culture. Moreover, the presence of Son reveals the false life of the wealthy white owners of the house. Son tries to reeducate Jadine, who has been educated in white middle-class culture. But he fails, captivated by her, and loses his hometown Eloë, which can be his home. The houses in *The Bluest Eye* show that black Americans, who are captivated by materialistic wealth and white culture, cannot find peace of mind there, much less their home in that culture. The Cosey's Hotel in *Love* emphasizes that any house or building which represents the American dream—materialistic success based on white culture—leads to family conflicts and disruption rather

than realization of home. The closed hotel, which looks ghostly, reflects the barrenness of the Cosey family's enthusiasm for white-middle-class status.

Many black characters do not stay passive; they rebel against dehumanization or erasure from history, even if they are defeated or lost in their struggle for themselves. Baker-Fletcher says:

Morrison demythologizes and remythologizes the tar baby myth. *Tar Baby*, as revisioned myth reveals that a tar baby shaped by Eurocentric values cannot be a true culture bearer for the African American community. At the same time, it uncovers a more profound truth regarding tar's sacred properties in relation to black women's ancestral heritage. (Baker-Fletcher 37).

Florens aggressively engages herself in remythologizing the American dream and American history. The words that Florens carves into Vaark's grand house serve "to split open slavery's traumatic essence" (Schreiber 5), showing her plights as an abandoned child and slave. In addition, her act of carving words into the house suggests that it is impossible to separate slavery from American history.

Of the second type of houses depicted in Toni Morrison's novels, the enormous house in *Sula* reflects Eva's strong desire to free her family from poverty and realize a safe haven within the house in the African-American community. The murder of her own son Plum, however, reveals her intolerance against those who are unable to value life, which is her priority. In the end, Eva fails to realize home in the enormous house. The

Convent in *Paradise* has given birth to a kind of home in it. Consolata, a foreigner who has no proprietary rights to the convent, accepts various women who are defective in character, suffering from traumas. Consolata herself is imperfect. In spite of their defects in character, the Convent provides these imperfect women with a viable home where they can accept each other and get over their traumas. The murder of the Convent women by black men from Ruby, however, reveals the fact that the town where blackness is most treasured has imitated white culture, simply replacing white supremacy with black supremacy.

124 in *Beloved* is unique in that it serves as a medium for conveying what is untold about slavery. It also serves as a kind of stage, on which there occur torturing conflicts among the dwellers. The conflict in the closed house shows not only how slavery affects human souls and but also how the neighborhood blacks' psyche contributes to the tragedy. Paradoxically it is people in the community, who deliberately disregarded the appearance of slave catchers, that rescue Sethe and Denver from the house. This shows that people cannot live without support from the community, even if they can be mean, affecting their life adversely.

Morrison, saying "my own writerly excursions and my use of a house/home antagonism" ("Home" 5), acknowledges that there is an oppositional relationship between a house and home in her works. Big houses, besides the Convent, are not depicted in a positive light, while home is consistently pursued, whether it is implicit or explicit. In this respect, it can be said that Morrison's literature has a dichotomy, critical of big houses yet supportive of home.

The community in *Home* provides Frank and Cee with home, whereas Dr. Beau's beautiful house only emphasizes his evilness. Frank's experience on the battlefield and Cee's experience being a subject for a genetic experiment push them to the verge of death and insanity. Their struggle to pull themselves up from that precipice enables them to look at their hometown from a different perspective: they begin to recognize that people in the community are ready to help those who ask for help, as people in the community in *Beloved* do. They are ready to heal them of their wounds and help them overcome their traumas. Furthermore, they help Cee grow mentally so that she can become independent of her overprotective brother and begin to cherish her life. Morrison's idea of home, one that seems to have begun forming while writing *Paradise*, has manifested itself in a substantial way.

It can be argued, however, that Morrison has reached a simple and easy conclusion: that home exists in a local black community, which treasures life, mutual aid, ancestors, tradition, and history—that is, black culture. Since Lotus has much in common with other local communities that have been discussed, such as Eloë, Morrison's home seems to present no new value to readers. On the contrary, white culture based on American capitalism and Imperialism, which people in America have valued, is ostensibly colorful, complicated, and sophisticated. It promises people success, mostly materialistic wealth, which Lily is supposed to pursue. Yet, the big houses that have been discussed do not promise whites and blacks safety, comfort and satisfaction. They cause discomfort and devastation to them. Hence, the seemingly simple picture of home that Morrison presents in *Home* not only enlightens



African Americans about their lives and values, but actually challenges white culture, which emphasizes individual property and success in the capitalist country.

## Notes

1. Home is used as a singular noun, in accordance with Morrison's usage of the word in "Home," unless it signifies something specific or tangible,
2. Morrison's attitude toward writing historical backgrounds in her works is shown in her conversation with Darling Marsha on the historicity of *Beloved*:

I did research about a lot of things in this book in order to narrow it, to make it narrow and deep, but I did not do much research on Margaret Garner other than the obvious stuff, because I wanted to invent her life, which is a way of saying I wanted to be accessible to anything the characters had to say about it. Recording her life as lived would not interest me, and would not make me available to anything that might be pertinent. I got to a point where in asking myself who could judge Sethe adequately, since I couldn't, and nobody else that knew her could, really, I felt the only person who could judge her would be the daughter she killed. And from there *Beloved* inserted herself into the text... (Darling 248)

3. According to the Columbia Encyclopedia, group psychotherapy is:

a means of changing behavior and emotional patterns, based on the premise that much of human behavior and feeling involves the individual's adaptation and response to other people. It is a process carried out in formally

organized groups of three or more individuals who seek change, whether their problem is alcoholism, overeating, or poor social skills. The composition of a group may be heterogenous or homogeneous with reference to the age of the members or the type of problem. The therapist may be directive or nondirective, allowing the group to set their own agenda for discussion. The group becomes a "sample" of the outside world, reproducing conditions of interpersonal relationships; its members jointly participate in observing personal motivation and styles of interaction. They also participate in attempting new behaviors and dealing with the consequences of such behaviors, with the intended result that they will eventually be able to employ these behavior patterns outside the group.

4. Martina Schnetz explains how art therapy leads patients to attain "new relationships and ways of being in the world":

Patients had many ways to reflect upon their process and their relationships to others including reviewing the images created during the group. This review was part of a dialogical process that was sensitive to and inclusive of somatic resonances, the symbolic, transformative process of images, as well as verbal group discussions. Using the dialogical image/word approach in art therapy allowed individuals to work on exploring the pictures on a verbal level with the group and the therapist in a way that propelled the transformative process into the symbolic realm of the images. Within this approach, patients could

pick freely which art materials to use and how to use them. They could choose what kinds of lines, shapes, and colors to employ. They could also choose how much they would allow the process to unfold on an unconscious level through explorational play or how much to guide it on a conscious, cognitive level through planning and working with the emerging image. The extent to which patients used each approach contributed to how they were able to modulate their feelings and influenced the unfolding of the healing flow for the individual as well as for the group as a whole. Thus, through the dialogical image/word process, group members were able to let the images created by the group influence their experience and then, in turn, to let this experience shape new relationships and ways of being in the world.

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Graduate School of Language and Culture Doctor's Thesis Correction Chart

言語文化 博士論文 修正・訂正 正誤表

Title 論文題名	Poetics and Politics of “Houses” in Toni Morrison’s Novels トニ・モリスンの小説における「家」の芸術性と政治性
Name 氏 名	YAMANO Shigeru 山野 茂

Page 頁	Line 行	Before Correction 修正前	After Correction 修正後
Contents		I . The America	I . The American
9	2	The America	The American
65	5	that [t]heir hair	that “[t]heir hair
71	8	seem	seems
82	7	“The first experience”	The second experience
82	8	The second one	The first one
85	14	a mansion to show	a mansion show
86	8	pleasant	pleased
87	28	sooth	smooth
90	2	rein	reign
98	23	tookd	took
102	15	wanted	and wanted
106	14	her sister when	her sister, when
108	16	bless	blessed
179	3	convent	Convent
180	23	Imperialism	imperialism
182	5	tangible,	tangible.