

## ABSTRACT

AUDI, EVELYN LOUISE. Exile, Home, and Identity in Toni Morrison. (Under the direction of Jon Francis Thompson.)

The purpose of the research has been to develop a theory of identity that addresses Toni Morrison's treatment of home as a metaphor for self-identity, not just an idealized locus in the past. One application of this theory has been explored in the novel *Tar Baby* in which Morrison addresses the predicament of homelessness in relationship to African-American love relationships. Another application of this theory deals with the problem of being at home in a cultural and psychological sense and being at home in a physical and bodily sense. In both *Beloved* and *Tar Baby*, Toni Morrison reveals that these considerations are indivisible. There is also the consideration that *Beloved* reveals Morrison's theory on writing the female black body in response to the treatment of that body in historical documents. For Morrison the black female body is peripheral either in previous slave narratives or in historical master narratives. Thus, for Morrison, a theory of self-identity necessitates a recognition that cultural and bodily identity are inseparable from notions of home and together these elements give insight into self-identity, self-direction and self-fulfillment.

**EXILE, HOME, AND IDENTITY IN TONI MORRISON**

by

**EVELYN LOUISE AUDI**

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
North Carolina State University  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

**ENGLISH**

Raleigh

2000

**APPROVED BY:**

---

Chair of Advisory Committee

Evelyn Audi was born in Lincoln, Nebraska in 1974. She received her B.A. from St. Olaf College where she learned how to eat lutefisk. She is the author of several collegiate term papers including “Here We Go Again: Last Minute Essay on Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*” and “An Inebriated Response to Godel’s Incompleteness Theorem.” She has also written stories for the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Nebraska--Lincoln. Her work there includes “The Infamous Misspelling of Clytia Chambers’ Name” published in the 1998 College Annual Report. She now resides in Raleigh, North Carolina where she lives with her two coffeemakers. This is her first Master’s thesis.

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Introduction.....	1
1. The Search for Identity <i>Tar Baby</i> .....	5
2. Identity and Bodily Reclamation in <i>Beloved</i> .....	29
3. Conclusion.....	48
4. Bibliography and Works Cited.....	51

## **Introduction**

Toni Morrison has often been regarded as the foremost American literary voice for both pre-slavery and post-slavery African-American culture. In her work she addresses the position of the African-American person in the contemporary world. She is especially concerned with the way that African-American individuals and communities are expressive or silenced within a dominant culture which historically has been intolerant of racial difference. It is for this reason that Morrison is often asked why she writes “about race” or if she will ever not write “about race,” in her literary work. One response she has given, is to ask, “Who doesn’t write about race?” For Morrison, to write “about race” is not a matter of parading her characterizations as a way to depict essential traits and universal experiences of African-Americans as a unified people. It is admitting that race determines, if not how one perceives the world, then at least how one is perceived by the world.<sup>1</sup> For Morrison race is inextricable from the question of what it means and how it feels to be an individual in a particular time and place.

In all her work there is some element of intertextuality—often a combination of African proverbs and Biblical allusions—that functions in the exploration of a character’s

---

<sup>1</sup>Anthony Appiah in his essay “Race” suggests that, in literary study in particular, “however mythical the notion of race seems to be, we cannot deny the obvious fact that having one set of heritable characteristics—dark skin, say—rather than another—blonde hair, for example—can have profound psychological, economic, and other social consequences, especially in societies where many people are not only racialists but racists”(285).

identity within the troubled context of his or her relationship to community. Her use of such appropriated narratives make her an especially useful writer to explore the way that language can construct the way we understand the world. The focus on lineage in her narratives functions to reveal what about an individual or communal conception of home—cultural or even psychological—limits or liberates an individual or community. All of Morrison’s novels take up the question of where a character’s original “home” is, what ancestral “roots” are and how such an “origin” shapes identity. This thesis will argue, then, that in Morrison’s texts, the idea of home is determinative in relation to the self. It will show how, in two representative novels, there is at least one character whose desire to go home is inextricable from the desire to fulfill the self in some way. So for Morrison, home becomes a metaphor for self-identity, self-fulfillment, and self-direction rather than functioning as a purely idealized locus in the past.

Morrison, then, wants to understand identity: its formation and potential, its determinants and crises, and its intimate connections to the notion of home and the dilemma of exile. In Morrison’s novels the African-American experience includes the legacy of exile from West Africa. She presents the predicament that home both is and is not America; it is and is not Africa. In Morrison, home—and here I mean the entire range of cultural determinants—is fictive but determinative. Ancestry is both a myth about and determinant of the self. And so the question of “Who am I?” and the terms in which it is answered are complicated by the questions “Where am I?” and “Where am I from?” In this way Morrison shares the concerns of writers like Salman Rushdie, who also views home as both fictive and determinative. For Rushdie, writers—in particular, exiles and emigrants—

are haunted by their past; they want to look back to find “where they came from” and how it bears on who they are. “But,” Rushdie says, “if we look back, we must also do so in the knowledge--which gives rise to profound uncertainties--that our physical alienation from [our homeland] almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the place that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands...of the mind” (10). For both writers, novels are creations that construct “imaginary homelands” and yet they are also crucial sites for the exploration of identity. In *Beloved* the female body is “the place that was lost” for Sethe and so, exiled from it, as it is in part her home, Sethe must re-create her body as an “imagined homeland.” In *Tar Baby*, the problem of exile lies in the between-ness of the island, as it is no character’s “home;” everyone who lives there is out of place.

*Tar Baby* uses a Caribbean island to exemplify the social structures of colonization, a process of “unhomming.” But because the islanders it focuses on are Americans *Tar Baby* can comment on what elements of colonization exist not just for the literally colonized but also for the psychologically colonized. Moreover, *Tar Baby* looks at the specific consequences, both spiritual and practical, of refusals of and concessions to Western ideas and practices and how those consequences construct the idea of home. *Tar Baby* is especially concerned with the way that the recovery of “home” or resolution to “homelessness” influences and informs African-American identity and love relationships.

A reading of *Tar Baby* benefits from understanding the socio-historic context of the Caribbean. A postmodern reading of *Beloved* is even more apparently intertextual. The a-linear narrative, the shifts in points of view and the experimental prose can all be seen as

betraying the dis-jointedness and fragmentation of characters living in-between slavery and freedom, neither entirely at home nor entirely in exile. The problem in *Beloved* is whether or not the African body, particularly the female body, can reclaim, re-imagine or even recreate itself as an intimate home, and thereby overcome slavery's claim of it as an instrument of work; and in doing so, redefine such a crucial determinant of identity.

Both novels confront us with questions like these: What elements do we draw upon when we feel at "home" either in our bodies or elsewhere? When we say we feel at home somewhere do we mean we necessarily look the same as the people around us? That we speak the same language or dialect? That we eat the same food? Dress the same way? What does it mean to feel at home and to be at home? In relation to questions like these, this study reveals something important about both *Tar Baby* and *Beloved*. It is that who I am is inseparable from where I feel at home.

Chapter one will explore the notion of home and its place in the search for identity, mainly in the context of *Tar Baby*. Here geographic, cultural, and ideological aspects of the search are primary. Chapter two will explore the notion of home in a different but related way, with particular emphasis on the role of the body as the most basic aspect of the self with which one must be at home if one is ever to overcome the exile and self-alienation that have scarred the African-American community.

## **Chapter 1**

### **The Search for Identity in *Tar Baby***

Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* uses a Caribbean island to exemplify the social structures of colonization, a process of un-homing. But because the islanders it focuses on are Americans *Tar Baby* shows that elements of colonization exist not just for the literally colonized but also the psychologically colonized. Moreover, *Tar Baby* looks at the specific consequences, both spiritual and practical, of African American refusals of and concessions to Western ideas and practices. Morrison, in all her work, scrutinizes the influence of mainstream culture, especially on the lives of African-American women. In *Tar Baby* that the character Jadine Childs, a fashion model, unconsciously understands that the cost of modeling means undermining her racial identity and sensitivity, illustrates Morrison's criticism of investing an identity entirely in a culture that has been historically intolerant of African -American participation. And yet, *Tar Baby* also suggests, through the character Son Green, that for an African-American to identify only with the past, with one's ancestral "roots," is also a kind of death, because it means one has no future but only the idealized past as the locus for identity. So, *Tar Baby* reveals the problem of this "in between-ness" for Jadine and Son; that home is not Africa nor can it, wholly, be mainstream American culture. It is a problem of homelessness and so if identity is to be fulfilled in the novel, for either Jadine or Son, then "home" must be recognized as at once mythical and determinative. But there is no prescription for either character's recovery of "home" or resolution to "homelessness." The novel illustrates that both characters feel unfulfilled and their desire to fulfill themselves can be explained as a desire to "go home."

Thus, there is the suggestion, in this novel and, I would argue, in all of Morrison's novels, that for a character to understand who "I" am is inseparable from where "I" feel at home." These themes just referred to—identity, home, race and place—will be the main subject of this chapter. I begin with race.

That we regard particular races as necessarily belonging to particular regions of the world links race to place, to location. For example, we categorize such that Asian people are "from" Asia, African people are "from" Africa and so forth. When we talk about people in this way one of the assumptions is that people naturally feel at home in the place that they are "from." We associate race with home and more specifically with nationalism. In *Tar Baby*, the conflict felt by two characters, Jadine Childs and Son Green, is complicated because of the tensions between different conceptions of their identity. Home is linked to self-identity and if the notion of home is limited to its perception as necessary to sustaining that sense of self then we are not seeing through a perspective that includes those for whom "home" is a construction. *Tar Baby* illustrates the way that such discourses as those centering around race and nationality operate as determinants of identity that can be in critical tension with one another within the larger context of the notion of home. It is crucial, for Morrison, that home is not a simple form of refuge. In this context, it is useful to give an example of just how home is problematic for Morrison.

I often both use and hear the expression, "I feel at home here." This statement implies that the speaker is away from home but that there are, nevertheless, certain elements that comprise "home" such that one can feel "at home." Most of us operate under the assumption that the notion of belonging, of having a home and a place of one's

own are necessary for our existence. In so far as the word ‘home’ connotes the private sphere of shelter, comfort, nurture and protection, home can be regarded as one of the basic needs for survival. It is, after all, where we receive our food, take shelter and even where we store our clothing. Yet for all of its seemingly straightforward and invitingly positive connotations, home is a notion fraught with ideological underpinnings. These determinants of identity can oppose one another in such a way that an individual feels a conflict within herself or himself. This conflict is not necessarily an indication that determinants ought to be unified. Morrison is extremely critical of the idea that an African-American “heroine” or “positive black” should be “already unified, coherent and stable” (McDowell 78). However, the extent to which Jadine is conflicted–feeling she is a successful capitalist, a literal and a “cultural orphan” and yet clearly aware of her African-American ancestry (and afraid of it)–should, for Morrison, be re-established as varied determinants that enable her strength of individuality rather than conflicted fragments that trouble her identity.

Morrison’s work suggests that one way people feel at home is to feel that they are unified within themselves by the various determinants of their identity and that those determinants work in accord with a collective sense of themselves as part of their larger community. *Tar Baby* explores the problems that emerge when home is not an entirely comfortable notion. Briefly, the novel centers on six characters who live and/or work on an estate, l’arbre de la croix, on “Isle des Chevaliers.” The owners of the estate, Valerian

and Margaret Street, are wealthy white Americans who are living there in exile.<sup>2</sup> For Valerian, that exile is self-imposed for he is a retired candy manufacturer and is going through a mid-life crisis. His wife despises the island and, in many ways, her husband as well; for her the exile is externally imposed. With them are their housekeeping staff, Sydney and Ondine Childs an African-American couple from Philadelphia for whom their respective jobs are butler and housekeeper/cook is a dignified responsibility. Jadine Childs, their orphaned niece and, crucially, the Streets' protegee, is staying on the island as well in between her modeling work; work that has her living between Paris and New York. As an orphan, Jadine had been under the care of her Uncle and Aunt but early in her teens, Valerian decided to take her under his wing and finance a Paris education for her that ultimately enables her to establish a successful modeling career. For Jadine, too, the island is a place of escape, a kind of "home-base" where she comes to re-group and decide the next step in her career. For none of these characters is the island a native homeland. The only characters for whom it is are the Streets' grounds staff, Gideon and Therese, to whom the rest of the household refer as "Yardman" and "Mary."

Son Green is not initially a member of the household but after he is discovered on the estate Valerian invites him to stay and he becomes one. He is an African-American

---

<sup>2</sup>The description "white" is unsatisfactory to me. I am using it to refer not only to the Caucasian race but to the particular values of Western colonial ways of thinking. "White" is, here almost a euphemism for the beliefs, values and assumptions (e.g. economic profit, racial hierarchy) that are characteristic of colonial discourse.

“stow-away” who has hopped from place to place since he murdered his wife Cheyenne in their hometown of Eloie, Florida. He clandestinely follows Jadine and Margaret from a ferry onto the estate where he hides out in Margaret’s closet stealing food and watching Jadine sleep until he is discovered by Margaret, who takes one look at him crouching amidst her clothing and shoes, his dreadlocks, “overpowering, like bundles of long whips” and is convinced that he is there with the sole purpose of raping her. Son’s presence in the house—he arrives early on in the novel—stirs up identity problems for each character. Homeless and jobless he is a kind of foil to the hard-working Ondine and Sydney who find him an “insult to the race.” For Jadine, he acts as a catalyst for an identity crisis in terms of her race and what constitutes it. Moreover, Son introduces his knowledge of the past to Jadine, who has lost that link.

When Son meets Jadine, he considers her “white” despite the color of her skin. In a slightly different example, the character Margaret Street has been exiled from her place of birth and childhood, though admittedly not with the grave implications had she been exiled by a government or by a civil faction. Still, she provides an example of the way that exile can be domestic, it can occur within a person’s “homeland.” By contrast, Jadine Childs is an example of an African-American who does not identify herself primarily in terms of her African heritage or by the place where she was born but by her success in her modeling career; she thinks of herself as an “authentic” individual—self-sufficient, self-confident, self-satisfied—until she meets Son. His sexual and spiritual attractiveness to her, despite the fact that he exists outside of and away from everything that Jadine identifies herself with, calls her identity determinants into question. Suddenly Jadine finds herself haunted by

“ghosts” of her African ancestry and of her more immediate past. She had been living as if in accord with her race, her gender, her motherlessness; but Son’s presence causes her discomfort, fragmentation. Through Jadine, Morrison explores what happens to the identity of a person who is an orphan both literally and culturally, who is, essentially, homeless.<sup>3</sup>

I do not mean to imply that any individual or country ought to be wholly unified but here I want to emphasize the complexity of the way that determinants of identity operate in relation to the notion of home and homeland. *Tar Baby*,—in particular its depiction of the relationship between Jadine and Son—illustrates the problem of what happens when a person is homeless; what happens when “home” to one person is a site of oppression, conflict and dependence to another.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>The phrase “cultural orphan” comes from Marilyn Mobley’s essay “Narrative Dilemma: Jadine as Cultural Orphan in Toni Morrison’s *Tar Baby*,” in *The Southern Review* (761).

<sup>4</sup>Edward Said, in his essay “On Palestinian Identity,” expresses the idea that one of the most problematic things about landless people is the question of how to exist in the world, how to “map” your coordinates when you are transplanted by force. For Said, when even those who share your “homeland” and heritage are of different factions it is even more difficult to know what, of your culture, you preserve and what you abandon to the dominant culture you are transplanted to (“Imaginary Homelands,” 171).

The novel makes use of the Caribbean as a paradigmatic context for identity crises. Because there are not “natives” of the Caribbean region the question of whose home these islands really are is an especially complex one. In so far as nativism is related to how one identifies one’s home and nature of that home, that there are no “original” inhabitants of the Caribbean indicates the idea that all nativism is possibly entirely fictive, or at least that much of its value is constructed historically and socially. For example, that Guadeloupe failed to achieve political and economic stability makes the tragic exile of many of its citizens even more complicated because they do not have a physical location to be homesick for, let alone return to.

That *Tar Baby* takes place in the Caribbean context adds an intriguing complexity to exploring the question of how identities are formulated and with what consequences. Anne Malena maintains the view that the Caribbean sphere, because of its “multifarious relations of mimesis, resistance, syncretism and rupture with native, African, Asian and European cultures” (5) makes it a particular site for exploring dilemmas of fragmented identities, particularly for women. In keeping with this idea Malena presents, *Tar Baby* takes up the problem at what price does an individual who is searching for a home also seek to formulate a collective identity. For Jadine Childs the collective identity as one of the many professional women in the modeling world is more important to her than, for example, finding her biological mother or recovering ancestral “roots.” It is more difficult to discern whether Morrison presents Son as a character who ultimately resists cultural assimilation. “Home” for Jadine and Son is not the same location or the same concept. Through these characters and their relationship to one another *Tar Baby* illustrates that

identity formulates itself in relation to home and homelessness. In other words, *Tar Baby* seems to suggest that in asking the question “Who Am I?” one cannot avoid asking “Where Am I?” What I mean by this is that, for Morrison, “home” is metaphor for self-identity and self-fulfillment rather than an idealized locus in the past that, once “found” ensures refuge.

Within this context, a brief look at the colonial history of the Caribbean is useful. In 1760 when colonial settlers in Guadeloupe and Martinique wiped out the Caribbean natives and brought in slaves from West Africa to work on sugar cane plantations, physical appearance was at the center of the bloodbath in which one “race” seized another in the name of empire, economics and essence. The relevance to *Tar Baby* here is that the thinking behind what the genocide in 1760 was based upon the underlying assumption that a person’s race is essential to a characteristic of personhood when in fact, whether or not a person is one race or another is not in itself enough of an essential criterion from which to draw a general inference about a person or persons who is considered a member of that race. To say that a person is essentially, “African,” or “black” eradicates difference among individual Africans. *Tar Baby* takes up this problem in its depiction of Jadine and Son whose different ways of seeing and experiencing their African heritage prevent them from ultimately being able to stay together in their love relationship.

It seems to me that Jadine and Son present the struggle of homelessness for African-Americans who, in terms of “origin,” have been transplanted by force to America rather as were the West African slaves who were forced into Guadeloupe in Martinique. The question of their “origin” is complicated. The myth of the “Isle des Chevaliers” the

Island of Horseman is, arguably, a reference to the slaves who were brought there and worked for three centuries. Their oppression, and now the dependence of the Caribbean islands on Western political and economic strength have taken their toll on both the individual and the collective psyche of the population. That toll is a kind of legacy that Son sees as a necessary determinant of identity. By contrast it is her participation in the economy that Jadine feels gives her strength and “authenticity.”

Jadine and Son are searching for self completion, for a way to feel unified with their surroundings or at least feel that they have a distinct way of feeling themselves as individuals who are also part of a larger community and/or culture. This text is especially relevant to an exploration of the dilemmas of “home” because the characters each deal with the problems of a fragmented self.

Before I proceed further, I want to establish what I mean by referring to the self as unified or fragmented. It is arguable that the various determinants of identity including race, class, gender and possibly religion, ethnicity and language can operate in harmony with one another; that is that each determinant is compatible such that the individual does not feel irreconcilable tensions between them. By contrast there are many instances in which an individual does feel the determinants of her or his identity at odds with one another. For example, in so far as Jadine identifies herself as African-American, her race is a determinant of her identity. Rather crudely put, but put in a way that is no way unfaithful to Morrison, Jadine’s skin color is imbued with certain cultural expectations from herself, from the larger African-American community she is part of (in her case, her Aunt Ondine and Uncle Sydney and Son Green) and from the culturally dominant “white”

community that she lives in both in New York, in Paris and on the island. The latter is represented by the economic dominance of her patron's Valerian and Margaret Street. Jadine feels that, as an educated African-American woman, she has access to many of the material luxuries that, in the Caribbean, have traditionally been marked as privileges representative of white culture: wealth, estate ownership and high-fashion (clothing, cosmetics, fur coats). This text explores Jadine's participation in two cultures and illustrates the extent to which she is torn between them. She is torn between the world of her patrons, the Streets, whose patronage has enabled Jadine to become financially self-sufficient (comfortably so) her ancestry which includes the very people who were enslaved by imperialism and brought to the Caribbean islands from West Africa.

The complexities and tensions of nativism, origin, assimilation and nationalism are all at work in post-colonial discourse, in the discourse of "home." As I mentioned earlier, the notion "home" implies a place where one, ideally, is comfortable among those with similar experiences, traditions and possibly races. But again for many people there are places where home has been forced, home is restricted, home is non-existent or at best fraught with tension. *Tar Baby* depicts two crucial aspects of the way that race relates to the problems of identity, specifically assimilation and nationalism. One is the possibility that the racial hierarchies that have empowered colonial and neo-colonial modes would not exist without physical determinants of identity such as skin color which is defined in contra-distinction to "white."<sup>5</sup> *Tar Baby* seems undecided about whether or not there

---

<sup>5</sup>Anthony Appiah raises the question of whether or not there are certain characteristics that are necessary and sufficient to be a member of a particular race ("Race" 287).

necessary and sufficient characteristics for someone to be a member of a certain race, be they physical or cultural. This idea is reflected in the accusation that we sometimes hear when people say somebody who is “black on the outside” acts “white on the inside.” This idea of a way to “act” white or black is explored in *Tar Baby* and implies that being identified as a certain race has to do with the values one lives by as much as by physical characteristics.

For example, when Son first visits Jadine’s room after he has been discovered in the closet, it is also the first time that they are alone together. He sees the copies of *Elle* magazine on her bed and realizes that she is on the cover. As he looks through them he traces over the pictures of her and tells her that he prefers to look at them than at her standing before him since they “are not moving.” He also looks around her entire room. He is agitated by the sealskin coat laid out on her bed, her silk robe and gold-thread slippers. These textured items are, like Jadine, desirable to Son. He is irritated in this scene because he desires her sexually and she resists him but more crucially because he is afraid he will desire her culturally; that is “he knew that at any moment she might talk back or worse, press her dreams of gold and cloisonne and honey-colored silk into him and then who would mind the pie in the basement of the church?” (120). For Son, Jadine’s dreams are representations of what he associated with distinctly “white” cultural values that give primacy to material dreams of wealth and prosperity over the spiritual “realities” that Son idealizes, the distinctly black “reality” of church-basement theology. For Son, Jadine “acts white” even though she is African-American because of her participation in white mainstream culture and her appropriation of capitalism to her own end of financial

success.

It is not only because of her wealth and her values that Son aligns Jadine with, for example, Margaret Street, and therefore with another race altogether. Both Jadine and Margaret accuse Son, independently, of hiding out on the estate with the sole intent of rape. When Jadine confronts him she and Son argue: “Rape? Why you little white girls always think somebody’s trying to rape you?” Jadine “was startled out of fury. ‘I’m not...you know I’m not white!’” (121). Here, *Tar Baby* suggests non-physical characteristics of race. Son idealizes his own conception of race and wants Jadine to embody that idealization also. He wants Jadine to have dreams and goals to be what he considers the quintessential black American woman, a woman who dreams steadily about yellow houses with white doors which women opened and shouted Come on in, You Honey You! And the fat black ladies in white dresses minding the pie table in the basement of the church and white wet sheets flapping on a line, and the sound of a six-string guitar plucked after supper while children scooped walnuts up off the ground and handed them to her (113).

Just as Son wishes for Jadine to embody what he feels is the “authentic” black American woman, Jadine wishes for Son to clean himself up, literally, get educated, get a job and to share her dream of “beating the system at its own game.” Jadine sees success entailing capitalism and institutionalized education. She is appalled at Son’s refusal to go to school or to try to find a job, not to mention that he has no social security number. And yet she too fears that his refusal to be inside the system will influence her. She aligns him with a kind of wildness and incivility that she sees as represented purely in his physical appearance; “here, alone in her bedroom where there were no shadows, only glimmering

unrelieved sunlight, his hair looked over powering, like bundles of long whips or lashes that could grab her and beat her to jelly. And would. Wild, aggressive, vicious hair that needed to be put in jail. Uncivilized, reform-school hair. Mau Mau, Attica, Chain-gang hair” (121). In this passage, that Jadine sees Son’s hair as “uncivilized” and that she sees it, literally, reflected in her bedroom mirror suggests that her perception is in terms of “images.”<sup>6</sup>

Certain characters in *Tar Baby* are given a token physical trait that not only distinguishes them physically from other characters but provides clues into the politics of physical appearance. One example is that when Margaret Street speaks, her speech is accompanied by descriptions of what expression is carried in her “blue-if-it’s-a-boy” eyes.

<sup>7</sup> Her eyes are never mentioned without that particular description of them. Similarly, when Valerian, her husband, thinks of her it is always “principal beauty of Maine;” a reference to her having won a beauty contest—due in part to her having “skin as delicate as the shell of a robin’s egg and almost as blue” (55)—before he “rescued” her from her

---

<sup>6</sup>Jadine’s desire to “reform” and “control” Son’s hair could also be interpreted as her own fear of racial repression. In Morrison’s essay “Romancing the Shadow” she explains from a historical perspective why African-Americans are disparaged and relegated to a marginal position in American literary discourse. For Morrison, those who immigrated to America were repressed and in order to be free from this fear of repression, and in their search for freedom, they projected fear onto the blackness of African-Americans, who become “the surrogate selves” of previously repressed white people (*Playing in the Dark* 46-7). Jadine’s subconscious anxiety about assimilation and racial repression support the idea that she reflects her fears onto Son.

<sup>7</sup>In exploring the significance of this particular description it is tempting to draw parallels to Morrison’s earlier work *The Bluest Eye* in which Morrison makes use of a black girl’s yearning for white skin, blond hair and blue eyes to illustrate the destruction of this Western beauty ideal. It is arguable that in so far as Margaret is the effective “first-lady” of the l’arbe de la croix estate she does represent the Western beauty ideal.

small hometown and the tiny trailer she still thinks of as her “home.” The reference to Margaret by her “blue-if-it’s-a-boy” eyes emphasizes in Margaret what marks her as an American icon of Western beauty. This is significant because despite the nature of such a status Margaret’s physical beauty has no status or consequence on the island. Ondine refers to her as “machete head” in reference to her coif.

By contrast to her husband Valerian, Margaret is exiled on the island against her will. Valerian, significantly named after the herb made from dried roots, revels in his voluntary transplant. For Valerian, the exile is an escape from the United States, where class distinctions, in the 1980s when the novel takes place, are increasingly erased. Even though Margaret can enjoy a leisurely lifestyle on the estate, in which she does share ownership with Valerian, she still despises both the estate and the island. As a result of that hatred and of Margaret’s extreme homesickness she physically abused Michael when he was a toddler. Early in the novel it is apparent that Ondine had seen Margaret repeatedly abuse Michael by pricking him with a pin needle as he sat on the floor playing. Julia Emberley argues that Margaret’s violence reflects her inability to be assimilated into the materialistic, wealthy and so-called “high” culture that Valerian values in their household. That she uses a pin-needle, a kind of icon for female domesticity, supports Emberley’s view. Margaret’s perversion of domesticity amplifies that assimilating from one set of cultural modes to another is problematic, even though Margaret is not presented as conflicted by her racial identity the way that Jadine is. That Margaret cannot be at home either in her home town in Maine, where she was despised by her peers because she was

beautiful, in Philadelphia, where she and Valerian first lived or on the island suggests that in *Tar Baby* that home is problematic even for those, such as Margaret, whose status would appear to provide the consolation of wealth. By this I mean that Morrison does not presume that the notion of home is only problematic for African-Americans. While she is sympathetic to Margaret, Morrison does not present Margaret as an “innocent victim” of her circumstances. Rather, Morrison characterizes her as both an example of the epidemic of homelessness on the island and an example of a cultural invalid. That is, where Jadine uses her appearance to productive ends, Margaret is so homesick and has so little sense of where or who she wants to be that she breaks down and abuses her baby sons. Margaret’s characterization suggests that not all problems of assimilation and of homelessness are identical. In addition, Jadine and Margaret also suggest difference in the politics of physical appearance; here Morrison illustrates the complexity of physical appearance. *Tar Baby* presents situations in which idealized female beauty can work in favor of women but also can destroy a life; she refuses to provide a set formula for either how a beauty ideal is ultimately destructive, as it is for Margaret, or for how a beauty ideal can enable a woman to be, at least financially and physically, independent.

That Jadine’s educational and professional success is largely dependent on the places that she lives—Paris and New York—illustrates the extent to which Jadine’s, unlike Son’s, self-identification gives primacy to where she *is* over where she’s *from*.<sup>8</sup> Jadine’s

---

<sup>8</sup>In Said’s *After the Last Sky*, the central problem of identity is marked by the condition of exile that means Palestinian identity exists without Palestine. For Said, exile means the problematic conflation of home and self, so that the felt loss of the former tends to yield a sense of loss to the latter. In *Tar Baby*, Jadine and Son deal with much the same problem in so far as

ambivalence as to what importance to give what Therese calls her “ancient properties,” her African-American ancestry, is reflected by her insecurity about her “white,” “European,” boyfriend Ryk; “What if it isn’t me he wants, but any black girl who looks like me, talks and acts like me, what will happen when he finds out that I hate ear hoops, that I don’t have to straighten my hair, that Mingus puts me to sleep, that sometimes I want to get out of my skin and be only the person inside—not American—not black—just me?” (48). That Jadine ultimately returns to Paris to be with Ryk reveals Jadine’s desire for unification with mainstream culture. Jadine cannot exist without feeling there is the possibility of a unified self, an essential, as Jadine expresses, “just me” void of conflicted identity determinants. Because Jadine desires unification she is ambivalent about the parts of herself that she feels are in conflict. Her fear of losing one over to the other literally consumes her throughout the novel. She is haunted in various ways. One is by the memory of an encounter with a striking woman in brightly colored clothing that resembles clothing worn in some African countries. When Jadine and this “woman in the canary yellow dress” lock gazes in the market, the woman spits at Jadine and Jadine cannot let go of the memory. It leaves her feeling “more than loneliness.” Later in the novel, when Jadine begins to fall in love with Son, she is haunted, quite literally, by a kind of chorus of women’s voices and by visions of these women. These incidents operate in *Tar Baby* to illustrate Jadine’s anxiety over race and nationality.

---

African -Americans and Africans “native” to the Caribbean were transplanted “where they are” by force. Where Jadine and Son are “from” is at once Africa and America but neither place “originally.”

Early in the novel, Jadine's obsessive recollection of the encounter at the super market in Paris—on the eve of a dinner party she was throwing to celebrate a contract with the Parisian *Vogue* magazine—is revealed. At the market, Jadine is struck by a woman she comes across in the dairy section:

The vision itself was a woman much too tall. Under her long canary yellow dress Jadine knew there was too much hip, too much bust. The [modeling] agency would laugh [this woman] out of the lobby, so why was she and everybody else in the store transfixed? The height? The skin like tar against the canary yellow dress? The woman walked down the aisle as though her many-colored sandals were pressing gold tracks on the floor. Two upside-down V's were scored into each of her cheeks, her hair was wrapped in a gelee as yellow as her dress...She had no arm basket or cart. Just her many -colored sandals and her yellow robe. The woman leaned into the dairy section and opened a carton from which she selected three eggs... (45).

The color yellow, here, symbolizes Jadine's struggle with assimilation. Whenever Jadine recalls this occurrence she thinks of the woman as “the woman in the *canary yellow* dress.” That the woman’s dress is yellow, her sandals track gold and her hair wrapped up in a yellow gelee reflects Jadine’s fear of assimilation. That is, Jadine’s success has, for her, meant circumscribing a racial identity . This is not to argue that through Jadine’s character Morrison is asserting that no one who is African-American ought to take part in anything that could now or has in the past oppressed African Americans. What I do see Jadine’s character presenting is the identity conflict that she feels herself agitated by the presence of a kind of nationalist Other represented first by this woman and later Son. When Jadine sees this woman she is overcome by her beauty; Jadine describes her as “that woman’s woman—that mother/sister/she; that unphotographable beauty”(46). Jadine recognizes the direct contrast between her own photographable beauty and this woman’s

“unphotographable beauty.”

The “woman in the canary yellow dress” represents what Jadine cannot ultimately resolve within herself; the color yellow operates as a code for Jadine’s conflict between desire for and fear of the Other.<sup>9</sup> Jadine is “distressed,” “attracted” and “repulsed” by “the woman in the canary yellow dress.” *Tar Baby* quite clearly depicts this woman as the primordial Other who resists the materialist and consumerist modes that have become her very livelihood. For example, Jadine overtly points out that the woman’s physical characteristics do not fulfill the institutionalized standards of beauty set by the European modeling agency with whom Jadine has signed. That the woman’s skin is “like tar” emphasizes her blackness, an emphasis that Jadine is undecided about for herself. Most crucially is that the woman has no shopping cart. She merely places three eggs between her earlobe and shoulder and carries them up to the till. When she and Jadine meet gazes, Jadine is caught by the woman’s gaze, one that embodies the primordial discourse of the Other that Jadine both desires and fears;

Jadine followed [the woman’s] profile, then her back as she passed the store window—followed her all the way to the edge of the world where the plate glass stopped. And there, just there—a moment before the cataclysm when all loveliness and life and breath in the world was about to disappear—the woman turned her head sharply around to the left and looked right at Jadine. Turned those eyes too beautiful for eyelashes on Jadine and, with a small parting of her lips, shot an arrow of saliva between her teeth down to the pavement and the hearts below.

---

<sup>9</sup>“Yellow,” here, echoes the “yellow” operating in “The Yellow Wallpaper.” I think that Morrison appropriates this exemplary 19<sup>th</sup>-C. text, one that significantly initiated the ongoing conversation about women and restricted space, not only in terms of women vs. the patriarchy but also in terms of restricted spaces imposed on “foreigners” in Europe and America and that posit ethnic and racial categorization. Rosemary George and Susan Lanser argue that “the yellow woman behind the wallpaper who distresses, attracts and repulses the white narrator is the Other in a nationalist discourse” (George 32).

Actually it didn't When you have fallen in love, rage is superfluous; insult impossible. You mumble "bitch" but the hunger never moves, never closes. It is placed, open and always ready for another canary-yellow dress, or other tar-black fingers holding three white eggs (46).

Jadine's desire for this woman, that she has "fallen in love" with, can be read as Jadine's desire for a mother. The egg imagery suggests that the woman has some maternal connotations. More specifically the language describing this woman suggests her to be derivative in a way that Jadine is not; that is, she represents a kind of primordial African mother. It would follow, then, that Jadine's desire for this woman could be an indication of homesickness. I think it is in part "home" that Jadine desires in this woman. With that in mind one could read the woman's animation, her spitting at Jadine, as a kind of reverse cleansing; a means of jolting her out of her self-deception. More pointedly, it is more than merely Jadine's conflicted feelings towards this woman that indicate, through these two characters, the problem of assimilation in the text. That the woman spits at Jadine can most critically be read as the animation of the Other who is disturbed by Jadine whose clothing and appearance reflect a kind of transcendence of her ancestry.

In *Tar Baby*, then, "the woman in the canary yellow dress" embodies Jadine's confusion and fear of racial and national ideology.<sup>10</sup> Jadine's fear is further illustrated through her desire to represent "blackness;" she acts as a gazer in much of the novel. For example, she wants to "tame" the wildness of Son's hair when he first arrives at L'arbe de la Croix, she is preoccupied with cleanliness and she takes photographs and does sketches

---

<sup>10</sup> Again, I think it is useful to look at George and Lanser's argument that the color yellow in "The Yellow Wallpaper" signifies anxiety about and fear of a culture that is preoccupied with race as the foundation of character and a culture that is desperate to maintain Aryan superiority in the face of massive immigration. "Yellow" also signifies mass anxiety about the "yellow peril," yielding such legislation as the Chinese Exclusionary Act of 1882 (Lanser 425).

as hobbies. Jadine studied formal art and art history in college. In so far as she appropriates Western modes of thought on the island she captures her artistic subjects in a kind of supremacist gaze. When Jadine visits Eloé, Son's hometown, she takes photos of some of the young children there. She recreates the anthropologist/native binary that regards the "native" other as a specimen, an artifact, an object of the anthropologist's gaze. Through Jadine, *Tar Baby* presents a somewhat revised version of the gaze; one in which a woman has the power of surveillance over the man. It is especially notable because of the love relationship between Jadine and Son. At the same time, however, Morrison eludes the possibility of a wholly feminist reading of *Tar Baby* because Jadine, as the gazer, does not ultimately seduce or consume Son despite her position of social and economic power over him.

It is significant that the love relationship between Jadine and Son does not act as a locus of identity reconciliation or as an appropriated "home" for either character. That their love relationship disintegrates, and it is unclear whether they will ever reunite, exemplifies Morrison's refusal to participate in the traditional romantic notion that a love relationship necessarily unifies two individuals. The amatory discourse in *Tar Baby* instead suggests that Jadine's and Son's respective identity problems surpass the romantic notion that "we can be a home for each other." This refusal is significant because it furthers the idea that, in *Tar Baby*, home is ultimately a fictive notion. Moreover, that *Tar Baby* refuses this characteristic of nineteenth amatory discourse implicitly refuses its consequent master narrative that defines home in terms of empire and hegemonic modes of thinking.

The impossibility of a union between Jadine and Son is also foreshadowed when Jadine and Son are alone in the house for the first time. They take a picnic to the beach and Jadine takes her sketch pad and charcoal to draw Son. In the following passage, Son notices that she averts her eyes when she passes by the respective “poor” and wilderness sections of the island (181).

She took her pad and a stick of charcoal and walked toward the trees, wishing once more that she had genuine talent in her fingers. She loved to paint and draw so it was unfair not to be good at it. Still she was lucky to know it, to know the difference between the fine and the mediocre, so she’d put that instinct to work and studied art history—there she was never wrong (182)

In this passage Jadine takes part in representation; that is she operates within the modality that assumes the possibility of objective reality. Here, *Tar Baby* depicts the extent to which Jadine is conflicted by her identity as an artist educated by Western institutionalization and her identity as an African-American whose own ancestral art history has been devalued by Western intellectuals. That she “loved to paint and draw” representative works amplifies her membership in a Western-dominated discourse community that takes pleasure in the quest to capture and represent realities. That Jadine attempts to draw Son shows her struggle “to know the difference between the fine and the mediocre...there she was never wrong.” That she ultimately cannot draw Son, that Son is unrepresentable presents yet another conflict of identity that Jadine is discomforted by; “the woman in the canary yellow dress” is, like Son, “unphotographable.”

Sight is crucial both as a sense and as a metaphor in *Tar Baby*. Sight as “the gaze” sight as the means by which we discern racial difference and sight as a metaphor for an alternative point of reference for conceiving “home.” Morrison makes use of myths about

the link between sightlessness and insight through the character Therese.

Just as Jadine seeks to catch reality and later specifically Son, in her gaze is further complicated when she herself is caught in and by a gaze. In so far as Jadine represents the complexities of post-colonial assimilation her foil is Son who represents black nationalism. It is arguable that just as she seeks to represent him, it is his black nationalism that embodies the gaze she is caught by. A crucial moment is when Jadine and Son are leaving on their picnic together. Son went to go and get the car while Jadine wanted to walk for a little while longer on her own:

Jadine stepped through some bushes that looked like rhododendron and onto the mossy floor...She grabbed the waist of a tree which shivered in her arms and swayed as though it wished to dance with her. She struggled to lift her feet and sank an inch or two farther down into the moss-covered jelly. The pad with Son's face badly sketched looked up at her and the women hanging in the trees looked down at her (182)

These “swamp women,” as Jadine calls them represent the mythical women of the Caribbean whose exploitation is harmed by Jadine’s participation in Western capitalism. When the “swamp women” first see Jadine they “were delighted when first they saw her, thinking a runaway child had been restored to them. But upon looking closer they saw differently. This girl was fighting to get away from them” (183). Later in this passage, the women become “arrogant” when they see Jadine trying to get away from them. They know of their “exceptional femaleness; ...that the first world of the world had been built with their sacred properties; that they alone could hold together the stones of pyramids and the rushes of Moses’s crib...they wondered at the girl’s desperate struggle down below to be free, to be something other than they were” (183).

Metaphorically, at least, this chorus of women rapes Jadine. When Son sees her,

“she was crying a little and cleaning her feet and legs with leaves. The white skirt showed a deep dark and sticky hem and hung over the door of the jeep. She was in halter and panties” (183). This rape suggests that Jadine has also been “raped” by Western culture in so far as that culture, to a large extent, is forced upon Jadine by Valerian. I don’t see that this scene is a seduction because Jadine “struggled to lift her feet” when the trees “wanted” to dance with her. She is apparently trying to escape but cannot do so.

It is significant that there is not resolution for Jadine or for Son, though possibly more so for the latter. Their quest for finding a cohesive identity complicates their own relationship and means that their relationship is upset by many conflicts and dilemmas. *Tar Baby* admits a crucial paradox; that our racial and ethnic derivation and therefore our original homelands are mythical. And yet, because we all have sight we have constructed racial categories based, ultimately, from that sense then we cannot entirely ignore the “where we are” and the “what we are” as aspects of our identities. *Tar Baby* exposes that it is impossible to be a unified self; and yet at the same time it exposes what aspects of our identities are fictive (race, ethnicity, even beauty, and especially class/ wealth).

The novel ends with two different kinds of outcomes as to the recognition or denial of racial derivation as a major determinant of identity. That the end of the story has Son going into the forest to, possibly, become one of the blind horsemen and thus part of the myth signifies more than just a simplistic notion that “truth” about oneself necessarily possible if one can transcend the material, in this case that he loses his sight and must “feel” his way back toward ‘L’arbe de la Croix,’ “transcends” his status in the material world as homeless, jobless and thus essentially ineffectual in terms of citizenship (he still

has no social security number). Yet, *Tar Baby* is not positing that Son goes “home” because he embraces his “ancient properties” but Jadine does not because she flies to Paris to be with Ryk. Morrison does not present Son as having done the “right” thing by returning to the island and Jadine as doing the “wrong thing” by returning to Paris. After all, it is Jadine who, one can guess, will easily flourish financially in her Paris life. Son, instead, runs toward the woods “Lickety-Split.” Neither is wholly free and both are still in search of an identity that makes them “at home.”

## **Chapter 2**

### **Identity and Bodily Reclamation in *Beloved***

As we have seen, *Tar Baby* looks at the geographical and domicile dimensions of home and exposes them as fictive but determinative in terms of a character's self-direction and self-fulfillment. In Chapter One, I suggest that it is significant that for the African-American community "home" is a dilemma and a problem rather than being a simple form of refuge.

This chapter will extend my analysis of the metaphor of home for self-identity and self-fulfillment to Morrison's treatment of that metaphor in *Beloved*. This will be accomplished by clarifying three connected aspects of the body conceived as home: narrative, pleasure and audience. What I mean here is that, in the novel, for Sethe's body to be transformative from enslaved to a homed body, for it to be fulfilled, means that it must first be translated into a text; that is as a space for narrative, and as a site of pleasure which is enabled by audience. Together these elements work to transform the body from a site of abuse and guilt to one of agency and self-love. I will argue that Morrison sees self-definition and self-fulfillment as necessary for transformation of the body into a home and that both are only possible through relationship to others.

In *Beloved*, as in *Tar Baby*, home is a metaphor for resolution of the tension between self-identity and self-exile. For Morrison, to recover the self from slavery means to recover the "home" that has been lost. In *Beloved* that home is the black female body. Where self-definition is often derived from a home-country or a home-land, for Morrison,

that function of it has moved to the body. Due to the legacy of slavery, in *Beloved* this emphasis on the body reveals that it is the body, not an idealized geographical place, that must be reclaimed to be a home. In other words, the female body, for Morrison, must become a site of the crucial aspects that we associate with the notion of home such as privacy, self-definition and self-expression. But the body also becomes itself the physical place that stands in for the idealized locus often yearned for in terms of a “mother-country” or “mother-land.” Prior to a new self-definition, Sethe’s maimed and scarred body is, in a sense, “unfit” to live in because it has not been established as a place where identity is recognized in any positive way. Until she can “open the shades” so to speak, of her own veiled memory and remember her life-story, she can’t recover her self-identity and her body remains maimed and her identity remains wounded. What I mean here is that transformation from a state of exile to a state of being at home begins with remembering events that have taken place and then *re-imagining* them.<sup>11</sup> For Morrison, *Beloved* is very much a narrative that seeks to express and expose slavery where previous slave narratives euphemized and “veiled” those horrific experiences. So for Sethe’s body to be a home to

---

<sup>11</sup> Salman Rushdie and Cornel West also speak in terms of the relationship between memory and imagination. For Rushdie, “The remaking of alternative realities of art, including the novel of memory, becomes politicized...And the novel is one way of denying the official, politicians’ version of the truth” (“Imaginary Homelands” 14). For West, political resistance to domination is rooted in a subversive memory—the best of one’s past without romantic nostalgia (*Race Matters* 30).

her is not so much a question of “fixing” or healing her body, but of re-imagining it. In terms of narrative, this means that the act of telling her story in her own words enables Sethe to reclaim her identity and recover her body from slavery.

In *Beloved*, Morrison emphasizes that Sethe’s bodily transformation does establish the scarred body as a site of pleasure as opposed to an instrument of work. Morrison re-imagines Sethe’s body as actively narrating history rather than merely being its passive object or victim. Her body is activated when it is desired maternally or sexually. When Sethe’s body is touched attentively or lovingly, she speaks about her past rather than just remembering it silently. But what is most important in this exchange between pleasure and narrative is that it is only when her body is desired that Sethe can re-define the horrible events in her past. For example, when Paul D. touches the scar on her back, Sethe “smells the stolen milk again and the pleasure of baking bread” (18). She is not here defined by slavery. By a contrast, when the ghost Beloved—who at one point tries to strangle Sethe—asks about Sethe’s mother, Sethe does not speak out loud what she is remembering, namely an incident when her mother slapped her so that Sethe would not be afraid to see her hanged. Sethe does not tell Beloved what she is remembering, which is “something privately shameful that had seeped into a slit in her mind right behind the slap on her face (61). Moreover, before Paul D. lives at 124, Stamp Paid recognizes that 124 is filled with “the thoughts of the women of 124, unspeakable thoughts, unspoken” (199). When Paul arrives, Sethe is able to speak those “unspeakable thoughts,” but it is only when her body is desired that she can both speak about horrible events in her past and sense pleasurable

ones at the same time. She is able to “remember things because the last of the Sweet Home men was there”(18). Here we see Morrison’s emphasis on the importance of alterity to achieve self-definition. For Morrison, one must feel that her body is valued in order to recover her identity. In *Beloved*, we see this recovery through Sethe’s relationship with Paul D. With him, she begins to see herself as a “free,” relatively unrestrained mother and lover. In these moments, the body can be transformed into a site of pleasure and also memory. For Morrison, then, narrative and pleasure, become crucial ways that the body can be a kind of home. So long as her body is integral to her narrative, then that function of home—personal expression, private language, self-fulfillment—is serviced by the body. What I want to emphasize here is that “home” is usually associated with the private as contrasted to the public. For example, domestically speaking, we think of home as the place where our most intimate selves can seek solace from the outside world. A place where we can sink into our own forms of personal expression, even speak in our “own” playful and affectional language and feel physically and emotionally comfortable in way that we cannot, necessarily, in the public world of work and social obligations. For Sethe’s body to be a site of personal, private expression and of physical comfort transforms it from the object of public “ownership” and inflicted physical discomfort.

For Morrison, neither narrative nor pleasure is possible without a loving other; significantly, that other may be either an individual or a community. In *Beloved*, Paul D is the first person that Sethe interacts with intimately—physically and emotionally—outside the immediate context of Sweet Home. Although they worked there at the same time, they did

not really know each other nor were they friends or lovers. Similarly, the Bluestone community is the first community Sethe lives in that is “free.” The Bluestone community is also comprised largely of former slaves, although there are some “white” people who live in neighboring areas. The importance of alterity, then, for Morrison is that it can take a social or communal as well as an individual form. Sethe exemplifies how the communal form of alterity is crucial for Morrison. To regain ownership of the female body and for Sethe to re-imagine her body in her own terms means to reclaim her sense of self-definition; yet that identity cannot be conceived without understanding it in the context of the larger African-American community. The community provides the unique resources of others whose histories include slavery. That is, the immediate African-American community is not only a possible resource for empathy; more importantly, the community can provide Sethe with access to her past and as such, provides a kind of communal and almost familial reference for personal identity. Thus, paradoxically, self-definition is achieved through relationship to others.

In her treatment of self-definition, it is crucial for Morrison to rewrite the events of slavery and history from a black female perspective. This is because she is committed to “authenticating and reconstructing” ( Mori 21) the history of African-Americans who were both forbidden access to literacy and were overlooked by mainstream historians. In her essay “The Site of Memory,” Morrison discusses her concern that slave narratives lack any mention of the interior life of slaves. In the narratives she studied, “whenever there was an unusually violent incident or a scatalogical one, or something excessive, one finds the writer taking refuge in the literary conventions of the day...over and over, the writers pull

the narrative up short with a phrases such as, ‘But let us a drop a veil over these proceedings too terrible to relate...’” (Morrison 90). “Moving that veil aside” (90) is what is vital for the black female voice to emerge in slave narrative. And part of what moving that veil requires, in *Beloved*, is the recognition of the female body as what, by nature of its ability to bear life, carries history.

This historiographic content is part of the narrative aspect of the body. That is, *Beloved* reveals that the female body is an active and pliable inscription of discourses; the female body takes its characters mainly from the discourses in which it figures. One example of these discourses is the discourse of home, involving “what (place) is mine,” “where I am,” and “what I live with.” Another discourse in which the female body figures is the discourse of race that recognizes the “racialized” body as the product of cultural and historical processes, not of necessarily genetically determined physical “differences.” Yet another example is the discourse of gender that emphasizes the female body as irreducible to a reproductive subject. Therefore, the female body is not a merely neutral and determinate configuration of color, shape and gender. Because the female body is potentially life-bearing, it also literally carries what ultimately comprises histories. Denver’s river-birth illustrates this point in so far as her birth marks the first-born “freedom child” in the novel. After Denver is born,

Spores of bluefern growing in the hollows along the riverbank float toward the water in silver-blue lines. [They are] hard to see unless you are in or near them, lying right at the river’s edge when the sunshots are low and drained. Often they are mistook for insects—but they are seeds in which the whole generation sleeps confident of a future (84).

That this passage occurs directly after Denver’s birth emphasizes that it is the female body

that crucially is the conduit for a “whole generation confident of a future.” Although this may seem obvious, what Morrison emphasizes in this passage is that the black female body is, particularly, “hard to see” in history. Sethe’s narrative involves her body as much as giving birth to Denver but, as Morrison suggests, it is “hard to see” because the individual slave narrative is, historically, most often overshadowed by the consideration of slavery reduced to a single event. As the previous passage suggests, Sethe’s body is more clearly seen as *historical* if we are “in or near” her *story*, “lying right next to” her story.<sup>12</sup> This illustration is one way that Morrison reveals the female body as itself a historical text rather than merely the subject of one. That is to say, the female body has historically been more often considered as the passive subject of historical texts rather than itself historically textual. Morrison’s concern is not only that the female body but the black female body be understood as historical rather than essential. In this context, an understanding of the body in post-colonial terms is useful. Many post-colonial critics have looked at the ways in which the forces of imperial, supremacist powers operate on and through peoples’ bodies. Bill Ashcroft suggests that one way the body is a site for representation and control is the emphasis on visible “signs of difference when manifested in skin color, hair type and facial features such as eye shape or nose shape” (183). In keeping with Ashcroft’s argument, the ways in which people are perceived tend to control how they are treated, and physical differences are crucial in these constructions. Therefore,

---

<sup>12</sup>The idea of placing stories next to each other is a central one in *Beloved*. This theme recurs throughout the novel. Paul D. puts his story next to Sethe’s to emphasize Morrison’s idea that the African-American experience must not be universalized but recognized as individual and yet paradoxically reliant on the larger community for the individual narrative to be expressed.

for Ashcroft and, crucially, for Morrison,

although such ‘differences’ do not...indicate the existence of sub-groups within a single human species...they become prime means of developing and reinforcing prejudices...either for economic reasons or to control indigenous populations in colonial possessions by emphasizing their difference and constructing them as inferior” (184).

Morrison’s depiction of Sethe presumes an understanding that the black female body has been established as the extreme other in terms of physical characteristics such as skin color, hair and facial features. For example, Schoolteacher tells his nephews to write down Sethe’s “human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don’t forget to line them up” (193). The emphasis on “characteristics” is what Sethe overhears of that conversation and when she asks Mrs. Garner what a “characteristic” is, Mrs. Garner says that “A characteristic is a feature. A thing that’s natural to a thing” (195). This passage illustrates that for Morrison, for the female body to defy the consideration irreducible to any single or group of characteristics then it has to be inscribed and re-inscribed by the subject in her own terms. Thus for Morrison, to fashion a home “out of” the body requires its transformation from a text inscribed by oppressive discourse, illustrated here by Schoolteacher, to personal inscription. To establish Sethe’s body as a site of pleasure rather than being only an object of incarceration is one way that Morrison accentuates the pliability and thus transformative possibility of the black female body. Transformation is not possible without placing her scar in the context of pleasure, and that in turn, requires the power of narrative. Narration, both telling her own stories and having stories told to her, enable Sethe in two ways. To speak her own stories and to hear, for example, Amy’s or Nan’s stories is pleasurable to Sethe in and of itself. To hear stories told for her also

subverts the derisive and exclusive use of language by Schoolteacher. In other words, for those who have been excluded from institutionalized education and most significantly, made subject to what Morrison calls white supremacist “language of surveillance,” then personal narration becomes the means to replace oppressive language with the transformative, and thus, possibly emancipatory language of personal narrative.

In *Beloved*, one key example of the transformative power of narration is the comfort and pleasure to Sethe, evoked through Amy’s storytelling. Her stories enable Sethe’s survival just after she escapes from Sweet Home; “While the white girl talked the baby slept. Not one butt or kick...It was the voice full of velvet and Boston and good things to eat that urged her along and made her think that maybe she wasn’t, after all, just a crawling graveyard for a six-month baby’s last hours” (33-4). Amy’s stories and her singing not only enable Sethe to keep going toward the river and Stamp Paid, her stories also, ultimately, enable Sethe to give birth despite her badly bruised and lacerated body. Sethe’s body as the subject of discourse between two sympathetic people changes its meaning. That is, for Morrison, the speaker creates meaning. Amy and Sethe’s speech change Sethe’s body from being “repulsive” to being pleasurable and worthy of having pleasure. When Amy actually touches Sethe’s body she establishes it as a site of pleasure for the first time since Sethe is away from Sweet Home; “Amy rearranged the leaves for comfort and knelt down to massage [Sethe’s] swollen feet again...Sethe never expected to feel another thing in this world, so when she felt toes prodding her hip it took a while to come out of a sleep she thought was death. She sat up...while Amy looked at her back”

(82). That Amy's touch feels so good to Sethe despite badly lacerated back and calloused feet affirms the black female self. Here, Morrison amplifies that pleasure is, itself, an affirmation of the self in so far as it makes life worthwhile for the self as apposed for somebody else and it is this kind of bodily affirmation that Sethe needs to reclaim her body.

Sethe's relationship with Paul D., "the kind of man who could walk into a house and make the women cry" (17) re-establishes her body as a site of pleasure. After she tells him about how she was raped,

His body an arc of kindness, he held her breasts in the palm of his hands. He rubbed his cheek on her back and learned that way her sorrow, the roots of it; its wide trunk and intricate branches. Raising his fingers to the hooks of her dress, he knew without seeing them or hearing any sigh that the tears were coming fast...none of which Sethe could feel because her back skin had been dead for years. What she knew was that the responsibility for her breasts, at last, was in somebody else's hands" (17-8).<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> This passage echoes the Creole proverb *Tetees pas janmain trop loud pout lestomaque* (However heavy a woman's breasts, her chest is always strong enough to carry them). The saying evokes the burden of the woman's role in sustaining life and yet her strength to persevere. That Paul D. plays a critical role in alleviating this burden suggests a necessary male/female complimentarity that idealizes Sethe and Paul's love relationship. It also, arguably, idealizes the heterosexual union. Despite this, I think that Paul's gesture in this scene retains the importance of a loving other to reclaiming African-American female identity in the novel. In a sense Sethe needs to start with reclamation of her body with Paul D's help before she would be able to construct an identity entirely independent of a love relationship; and I think this is crucial to Morrison's conception of African-American female subjectivity.

That the scar is so “intricate” with “branches” and “roots” emphasizes it as an historiographic inscription. That Paul D. re-establishes Sethe’s body as a site of sexual pleasure where the last men to mark her sexually were Schoolteacher and his nephews *replaces* the violent inscription with a loving one; one that enables her narrative voice. The scar carries further symbolism as it becomes the occasion for Sethe to re-inscribe the unspeakable events of the rape. The scar symbolizes the writing of the female body that Sethe herself can perform as she tells her own story to Paul. Her interpretation of what happened to her critically emphasizes what she experienced and how she experienced those events. Her body, then, is transformed from a passive site of violence to an active site of narration.

That Paul D. establishes her body as a site of pleasure through his exploration of her scar enables Sethe to open up her memories to him. She reinscribes the events that lead to her scar by telling them in her own words; she replaces Schoolteacher’s ink with her own self-inscribed textual body. It is notable that Schoolteacher records in writing how his nephews brutally steal Sethe’s milk. For Aoi Mori, “Sethe’s milk and Schoolteacher’s ink symbolize the cost of the documentation written by Schoolteacher who abusively prevents Sethe from recording her own voice, literally depriving her of ink” (Mori 83). The ownership of ink not only raises the question of who documents history, but also of who inscripts the black female body. Not only as her lover but as her audience, Paul is the occasion for Sethe to inscribe her body in her own words, with her own imagination.

I have been discussing the connections among narrative, pleasure and alterity and Morrison’s conception of the body as a space of home. These elements appear again and

differently in Sethe's crucial emancipation from the infanticide. The infanticide is especially important in this context because it presents a situation that places love in opposition to physical preservation. That is to say that the infanticide presents a situation in which Sethe has to almost doubly reclaim her body from slavery. In so far as she has shared her body with her baby, to kill her in order to "put her where she would be safe," and "to save her from a fate worse than death," is at the price of annihilating a part of her own body. So, the act of killing the baby is also one that "un-homes" Sethe. The following passage reveals the ironic coincidence between the sacrificial destruction and the violent destruction of the body in the novel:

Inside [the shed] two boys bled in the sawdust and dirt at the feet of a nigger woman holding a blood soaked child to her chest with one hand and an infant by the heels in another. She did not look at them; she simply swung the baby toward the wall planks, missed and tried to connect a second time, when out of nowhere—in the ticking time the men spent staring at what there was to stare ate—the nigger boy, still mewing, ran through the door behind them and snatched the baby from the arch of its mother's swing. Right off it was clear, to Schoolteacher especially, that there was nothing there to claim (149).

This passage reveals that for Morrison, slavery pits love against physical preservation. In this dynamic, for example, Sethe's effort to claim her baby's body and reclaim her own rights, as a mother, necessitates that she deny her children to Schoolteacher. That is, keeping her children from Schoolteacher asserts her maternal authority over him and yet the only way she can, with certainty, successfully prevent him from taking them from her is to act so extremely as to frighten him out of his "control" over her and over them. But, again, this denial means that Sethe exiles a part of herself from her body when she kills the baby with her own hands.

That she does kill the baby with her own hands can itself be read as a kind of

distorted “laying on of hands.” That is, when Baby says to “love your flesh...love it hard,” Sethe misinterprets this to love her baby so much that she terminates it to keep it from being in anybody else’s hands. That the infanticide is by Sethe’s own hands means that even though she tries to resist Schoolteacher by terminating her baby, her love for her children is, as Paul D. says, “too thick.” She takes Baby’s message literally, but in destroying her child, she also maims her own body in so far as she does destroy a part of her physical, and also emotional, self. That Paul D. establishes her body as a site of pleasure even after he knows what she has done to her child ultimately aids her in banishing the baby ghost. His acceptance of the very body that both destroyed a life and was itself, in part, destroyed, eventually exceeds Sethe’s guilt. But Sethe’s sens of identity remains maimed by her memory of what her body has done, what it was capable of doing. So for Morrison, narrative becomes a way of not being destroyed by the opposition of love against physical preservation, which can also be described as a kind of “horrific love;” love that is made perverse by the perverse dynamics created by slavery.

For Morrison, in order to reclaim the body from horrific experiences, even horrific memories, one has to remember the event repeatedly in order to re-invent it in one’s own words. For example, when Sethe tells Paul D. what really happened to her baby, she begins to re-member and re-assemble her body not as an instrument of violence but “an arch” of maternal protection. That her swing is “an arch” suggests that, even though the infanticide is violent, it reflects the same maternal curvature that “cradles” a baby to sustain it and protect it from the external world. Paul D.’s love is not enough to help her do this. For Morrison as for Cornel West, to survive such incidents of slavery, such as

extreme possessiveness or “too thick love,” one requires the collective support from the larger community who offers, what Cornel West describes as “the best of black nationalist movements” (30) that is, “loving yet critical affirmation of black humanity” (30).

Sethe’s ultimate reliance on her community for affirmation and on, specifically, Paul D., to re-imagine her body, is a reliance that goes beyond the pleasures of belonging to a community that can conceive that community as “home.” For Morrison, being a member of an affirming community is not by itself a formula for establishing a sense of home. In *Beloved*, the importance of alterity to achieve self-definition is necessary for that self-definition but it is not more important for self-definition than conceiving the black female body as a kind of home. Others enable Sethe’s ability to express herself and to feel valued (to feel that her body, in particular, is valued) but, crucially, for Sethe self-definition still requires her body become the main locus for self-identity.

The Clearing brings together the elements of narrative and pleasure to inscribe the black body with what Baby Suggs calls “imagined Grace.” For Baby, what this is, is Grace that is conceived by whoever imagines it regardless of their nature; that is, Grace needn’t be bestowed by a divine being. The Clearing is a “buzzing house where Baby Suggs loved, cautioned, fed, chastised and soothed [the Bluestone community]...Strangers rested there while children tried on their shoes. Messages were left, for whoever needed them...Talk was low and to the point” (87).<sup>14</sup> That Baby tells her Clearing audience that “the only

---

<sup>14</sup>The Clearing also acts as a subversive *terra nullius*; that is, the blank spaces of early European maps. In post-colonial terms the Clearing can be read as a reconception of the open and inviting space into which the European imagination can project itself and into which the European (usually male) explorer must penetrate. As such, a *terra nullius* invites cultural superscriptions onto spaces already occupied by so called primitive peoples. Early maps often

grace they could have was the grace they could imagine” means that grace, for Morrison, depends upon re-imagining the body in one’s own terms, upon an individual conception of one’s own body as pleasurable and powerful, and thus worthy of celebration. The Clearing illustrates the possibilities for bodily transformation. Her body can be what she imagines it to be; it needn’t remain inscribed by Schoolteacher’s “ink” or by the memory of infanticide. The Clearing is the occasion for the past to be recalled, abolished and replaced by new truths about the black body. Namely, that the black body is lovable, playful and sacred. This rich paradox, that the body is both playful and sacred, lovable and hated, is for Morrison the only conception of the black body that ensures it is irreducible; that is that slavery denies the black body such complexity by reducing it to a configuration of color and an instrument of work. For Morrison that the only grace possible is “the grace you can imagine,” contrasts with the traditional conception of spiritual grace as necessarily bestowed, granted by a higher being. It is significant that Morrison’s notion of grace here is imagined by the individual and affirmed by the community:

Here, in this 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...Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face...You got to love it, you...This is flesh I’m talking about here (88).

The body is the central character of this passage. The “flesh that weeps, laughs...and

---

labeled those spaces as belonging to “the sub-human” African or Aboriginal “savages” (Ashcroft 32).

dances on bare feet” is a social and communal affirmation of the body as aesthetic, boundless, expressive and playful. The movement in The Clearing is crucial because it is a site in which Sethe and others get comfortable with their bodies not only by expressing them through unrestrained movement, but also by getting social affirmation of, almost performing, their movements for each other. In this passage, Morrison shows that these movements symbolize that self-fulfillment and self-direction through are possible the affirmation and performance of the body. The Clearing brings together the necessary elements for being at home in the body. The dancing and hand-raising is pleasurable movement, the calling and even the crying are self-assertive and self-expressive. Morrison illustrates that the range, freedom and expressiveness of these movements contrasts with the constrained, limited and dictated movement of the body under slavery both literally and spiritually. The creative, imagined language about the body in this passage and the dancing itself suggest that the Clearing can be seen as itself a metaphor for the pliable female body. More importantly, though, it presents the occasion for Sethe’s body to be transformed from a site of exile to one of self-fulfillment.

For Morrison, the black female body does require such an affirmative communal site for reclamation, but even when that site is available to Sethe it is not an easy formula for reclamation. For example, social affirmation does not prevent Sethe from taking Baby’s message in The Clearing to “love your flesh...your hands...touch others with them” to an extreme manifestation of that love by committing infanticide. Therefore, it is notable that for Morrison, recovering identity from slavery is not just a question of healing the body in a formulaic or “therapeutic” sense. It is a question of obtaining and retaining a

point of reference for identity. While the meetings at the Clearing do not by themselves finally abolish the ghost, those meetings do give Sethe a point of reference to express what it is that she feels is fulfilling. The Clearing illustrates Morrison's sense of being able to re-imagine what kind of space the body can provide as a site of pleasure and narrative in the context of the Bluestone community. The Clearing is the first place, after Sethe escapes Sweet Home where she experiences:

Days of healing, ease and real-talk. Days of company: knowing the names of forty, fifty other Negroes, their views, habits; where they had been and what done...Bit by bit, at 124, and in the Clearing, along with the others, she had claimed herself. Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another (95).

Being able to express herself with "ease" and "real-talk" emphasizes that the private language associated with being "at home" is necessary to feeling self-fulfillment. Moreover, "knowing the names of..other Negroes, their views [and] habits" is for Morrison necessary to reclaim a sense of self. What I mean here is that Sethe's access to her own past history is limited. All she remembers of her mother, a Middle Passage slave, is her small, sparkly earrings and a song that she sang to Sethe. Sethe doesn't know her father at all except that he was himself a slave and somebody that Sethe's mother loved. That Sethe's "past" that her "recollections" are of Sweet Home means she does not have the anchors that the past usually gives. The Bluestone community and the Clearing, then, become the means to fulfill the ontological space that would usually be fulfilled through having full access to a past history; in other words, to having a home.

The "days of healing, ease and real-talk" that Morrison writes about in this passage also exemplify what is, for Cornel West, a "love-ethic." It is the "love-ethic" that enables

Sethe to achieve a livable distance from the infanticide. For West, “a love-ethic has nothing to do with sentimental feelings or tribal connections. Rather it is a last attempt at generating a sense of agency among a downtrodden people...Self-love and love of others are both modes toward increasing self-valuation and encouraging political resistance in one’s community” (30). The love ethic is what makes possible the fulfillment of the need of the black body for self definition; thus it enables bodily reclamation. Because it is the black female body, in *Beloved*, that feels the threat of annihilation then it is the black female body that, for Morrison, must be reclaimed and recovered. By enabling expression it also contributes to overall self definition that is achieved through the development of the sense of home. The love ethic has made possible the reclamation of body and the body is crucial to self-definition.

For Morrison, self-direction entails an established sense of the self within the larger African-American community because that community’s affirmation is a way of preserving the body over time, especially where slavery has ensured its absence, not only through the threat of physical harm, but also through the textual absence of the black body in historical documents. A related example of this in *Beloved* is that although Sethe feels that she has claimed ownership of herself in the Bluestone community, it is not until she can really see herself in terms of the larger African-American community that Beloved is finally abolished. The body is important here because it is as a site of pleasure and narrative that community sustains the black female body. In other words, while Sethe’s sense of belonging in her own body after slavery is primary to her sense of belonging in the larger post-slavery African American community, the latter is still necessary to

sustaining self-definition and self-fulfillment.

For Toni Morrison, the reclamation of the body is crucial to sustained post-slavery self-identity; pleasure and narrative function in the development of awareness of one's embodied self and the body's relation to the notion of home. The act of reclaiming the body through a loving other or through a communal "love-ethic" refuse the bodily, and especially scarred, inscriptions inflicted by slavery or any dominating group. Sethe's character exemplifies Morrison's idea that it is by these means the African-American woman can establish identity through her body and begin to feel at home.

### **Conclusion**

In her interview with Nellie McKay, Morrison states, "I'm interested in survival—who survives and who does not, and why—and I would like to chart a course that suggests where the dangers are and where the safety might be" (420). That survival, for Morrison, as exemplified in *Tar Baby* and *Beloved* in part depends on the discovery that the notion of "home" is really a metaphor for the fulfilled ontological space that enables self-identity. In *Tar Baby* neither Jadine nor Son find a place where they are "at home" both individually and communally. As we have seen in *Beloved*, the communal space is integral to a fulfilled self. For Morrison, it is the African-American community—the neighborhood—that, crucially, enables self-definition and self-direction.

The fulfillment of this ontological space—which is in part an emptiness created by slavery and alienation—is a response to the problem of exile. This is not just an African-American problem. It is present in other literatures of exile. In Rushdie, for instance, we

find a similar problem for those exiled from the Islamic culture they can no longer abide. One question that Morrison's texts raise is the question of women in exile. Though Morrison reveals that home is a problem for anyone in exile her texts emphasize that it is especially a problem for African-American women, who are doubly marginal, by culture and by gender.

Morrison's attention to the ways in which difference is inscribed on the bodies of black women puts in relief the problematic "gap" in self-identity; that is to say for Morrison racial intolerance means that African-Americans, especially women, must recover an identity that has been undermined by mainstream culture. This dimension is pursued in Morrison's consistent emphasis on the role of the body in self-identity. Here, the African-American experience differs from that of people who are not made to feel different in their *bodily* identity. For Rushdie, for example, feeling at home in his body is not a problem the way it is for Morrison's characters, especially Sethe or Pecola Breedlove. Thus, the issue arises as to the role the body plays, as distinct (from psychological elements) in creating a sense of "home." But perhaps even more important is that this study reveals that Morrison undertakes the project of re-imagining the black female body in literature; this is a project done in the service of anyone who has inherited the legacy of the black body as despised.

This study reveals Morrison's novels as creations that themselves construct "imaginary homelands." In Morrison the novel becomes a space for exploring identity and fulfilling homesickness. Moreover, in Morrison the metaphor of home is also a crucial way of establishing difference. That is, survival, for Morrison, depends upon recognition that

race, though culturally and perhaps even spiritually determinative, is fictive. As discussed earlier, race cannot alone configure an identity and so for Morrison, identity must involve a multitude of determinants. Personal narrative is often the way that Morrison's characters come to recognize the various aspects of their identities as strengths of individuality rather than conflicted fragments of a self.

Narrative is, for Morrison, an occasion not only to order and reorder the events that have happened or are taken to have happened. Narrative is the means for imagining and re-imagining African-American identity. Morrison's characters come to fulfill an identity through the experience of places that feel like home or resistance to places that are not, even must not, be home. The novels discussed here suggest the variable nature of both "the home" and "the African-American self." But in these novels, as in all of Morrison's work, there is a community, often a neighborhood, that relieves exile as itself a kind of space in which feeling at home is both recognized and sustained.

## Selected Bibliography and Works Cited

- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. "Race" in Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin Eds. *Critical Terms for Literary Study* Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990. 274-88.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, Eds. *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. London: Routledge, 1998
- Deane, Seamus. "Imperialism/Nationalism" in Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin Eds. *Critical Terms for Literary Study* Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990.354-69.
- Emberley, Julia. "A Historical Transposition: Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* and Franz Fanon's Post-Enlightenment Phantasms." *Modern Fiction Studies* 45:2 (Summer 1999) 403-31.
- Griffen, Farah Jasmine. "Textual Healing: Claiming Black Women's Bodies, the Erotic and Resistance in Contemporary Novels of Slavery." *Callaloo* 19:2 (1996) 519-536.
- Hawthorne, Evelyn. "On Gaining Double-Vision: *Tar Baby* as Diasporan Novel." *Black American Literature Forum* 22:1 (Spring 1988) 97-107.
- Jablon, Madelyn. "*Tar Baby*: Philosophizing Blackness" in *Approaches to Teaching the Novels of Toni Morrison*. MLA: 1997. 73-7.
- Latortue, Regine Altagrace. "Francophone Caribbean Women Writers and the Diasporic Quest for Identity: Marie Chauvet's *Amour* and Maryse Conde's *Heremakhonon*" in Newson, Adele and Linda Strong, Eds. *Winds of Change: The Transforming Voices of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars*. New York: Peter Lang, 1998.
- Malena, Anne. *The Negotiated Self: The Dynamics of Identity in Francophone Caribbean Literature* NY: Peter Lang, 1999.
- McKay, Nellie Y., ed. *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison*. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1988.
- Mori, Aoi. *Toni Morrison and Womanist Discourse* NY: Peter Lang, 1999.
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. New York: Plume, 1987.
- . *Tar Baby*. New York: Plume, 1981.

- . “The Site of Memory” in *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*. Ed. William Zinsser. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.
- . *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* Cambridge: Harbard University, Press, 1992.
- . “Nobel Lecture 1993” Rpt. in Nancy Peterson Ed. *Toni Morrison: Critical and Theoretical Approaches* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1994. 267-275
- Rushdie, Salman. “Imaginary Homelands” in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981-1991*. New York: Viking, 1991. 9-22.
- Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism* NY: Alfred A. Knopff, 1993.
- Trinh, Min-Ha. *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.
- West, Cornel. *Race Matters* Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.