

# Grotesque Desires : Clashes and Fusion between Incompatible Elements in Toni Morrison's Works

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Grotesque Desires:  
Clashes and Fusion between Incompatible Elements  
in Toni Morrison's Works

by  
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## Introduction

“THE GROTESQUE IS A PLAY WITH THE ABSURD” (Kayser 187).

Is Toni Morrison a writer who writes the grotesque? In order to answer that question, we have to think about what the grotesque is as a beginning. Although even general readers will easily associate Toni Morrison with the word (Toni Morrison’s works are filled with the “uncanny,” “horrificing,” or “obscene” images, which is the meaning of the word for everyday use; for example, Morrison’s first novel is a story of a girl who is raped by her father and becomes insane, and in *Beloved*, the most famous one, appears a ghost girl who is killed by her mother because she thinks that death is better than to live as a slave<sup>1</sup>), the study of the grotesque in the works of Morrison has been strangely neglected by critics. One of the reasons for this lack of studies in this field is ambiguities and difficulties concerning the definition of the term. Alyce R. Baker, one of few critics who has studied the grotesque in Morrison’s works, accentuates the fact that it is impossible to define the meaning of the word “grotesque” because of its slipperiness.

After she refers to some studies exploring the history and the various aspects of the term, however, Baker correctly describes characteristic of the grotesque: (1) “[a]s an aesthetic form in literature, the overarching characteristics of the grotesque is *disagreeing diametrics*”; (2) “[b]ecause of the confusion of reality versus unreality and the real world versus the supernatural, the grotesque is closely linked with *the concepts of magical realism and the gothic*”; (3) “[s]ometimes readers, and even characters, experience and respond with *paradoxical feelings*, that is co-presence” (Baker 4-5, emphasis mine). Although I

agree with Baker's definition of the term, which I will apply to this paper, her conclusion is open to objection. Baker concludes that Toni Morrison creates the grotesque (Baker takes the suicide at the beginning of *Song of Solomon* as an example) so that "readers are able to have a better understanding of institutional racism and sexism against, in particular, black women" (11). According to Baker, "[t]hrough her disabled characters, Morrison shows how African Americans have lost their roots; how Western ideologies have negatively impacted the black community; and how racist and sexist social, cultural, educational, and political systems have prevented or reduced African Americans' opportunities and degraded their mythic knowledge, their bodies and their overall sense of value" (13-14). As Baker points out, it is true that Morrison's depicting the grotesque has a political aspect, which aims to speak "unspeakable things," that is, the suffering of the black people and to condemn the institution oppressing them. Nevertheless, if we stay only within the context of African-American culture when interpreting Toni Morrison's works, we cannot grasp their complexities which can be approached from various angles, nor explain their power to attract many readers from various cultures. Added to this, Baker commits a serious mistake that reduces Morrison's works to novels of protest.

On the other hand, Susan Corey, another critic who argues the aesthetics of Morrison in view of the grotesque, defines the term as "a multi-faceted aesthetic phenomenon that enables the artist to disrupt the familiar world of reality in order to introduce a different, more mysterious reality" (Corey 31). In her study on *Beloved*, Morrison's best and most "grotesque" novel in my opinion, Corey adopts theories of both Mikhail Bakhtin and Wolfgang Kayser and suggests that "Morrison sustains a dialectical tension between these two modes of the grotesque,

not allowing her fiction to rest in either one” (36). It is likely that Corey’s definition is appropriate to discuss not only *Beloved* but also other Morrison’s novels; in addition, she truly analyzes two sides of the grotesque. When Corey says “[l]ike other grotesques, *Beloved* is a contradictory figure—positive and negative, attractive and repulsive” (37), for example, she seems to give a good account of the character’s inscrutableness. The problem with Corey’s criticism is, however, that she ends in listing a number of possibles of grotesque in order to divide them into two groups (positive/negative), while the problem of what the “new meaning” “the dialectical tension” creates stays unclear.

Although I have raised the problem with Corey’s essay, Wolfgang Kayser’s idea of the grotesque which Corey argues is worth quoting directly because it can be applied to the works of Toni Morrison to a considerable degree. Kayser’s description of the nature of the grotesque illustrates its exorcistical power as follows:

But where the artistic creation has succeeded, a faint smile seems to pass rapidly across the scene or picture, and slight traces of the playful frivolity of *capriccio* appear to be present. And there, but only there, another kind of feeling arises within us. In spite of all the helplessness and horror inspired by the dark forces which lurk in and behind our world and have power to estrange it, the truly artistic portrayal effects a secret liberation. The darkness has been sighted, the ominous powers discovered, the incomprehensible forces challenged. And thus we arrive at a final interpretation of the grotesque: AN ATTEMPT TO INVOKE AND SUBDUE THE

## DEMONIC ASPECTS OF THE WORLD. (Kayser 188)

Added to this, his definition of the term which I quoted at the beginning has much in common with Morrison's attitude toward writing. Here we have three meanings of "Playing in the Dark," the title of Morrison's essay in which she explores how the existence of African-Americans heightens the imagination of American literature: (1) writing of white-male authors of the canon of American literature whose imagination was awakened by black people; (2) Toni Morrison's investigation as to the mechanism of the first; and (3) writing of Morrison as a novelist who aims at expressing "the absurd things" in her works (although in the essay she is mainly concerned with the first two). In fact, the last hidden meaning of (3) which is easily overlooked suggests Morrison's strategy to introduce readers to an unfamiliar reality by using the grotesque in her works. In this case, "the dark" means not an "Africanist," Morrison's word for a stereotyped image of black people, but, as Kayser points out, the inner part of human heart which Morrison gauges fixedly in her works.

To enumerate every example of the grotesque in the novels of Toni Morrison would only be tedious for the reader. It is almost impossible to do so because of the wide sense of the word. If we extract only one symbolic meaning as a whole from those examples, we will make an error of reducing Morrison's complicated works to a simple form. Therefore, it is necessary for me to restrict my main object of study in this paper to the "grotesque desire," while I will deal with characters or situations if necessary. It is because I believe that the grotesque desire is an essential and unique characteristic of Morrison's works which has not been closely examined. I will use the term "grotesque desire" to

refer to one's strong wish to have physical relationships with somebody or something; to put the matter simply, it means bodily desires such as destructive impulses, insatiable appetites, or sexual drives. We see those violent impulses when Cholly rapes Pecola, Claudia breaks a doll into pieces, Consolata drinks Deacon's blood, or Florens hits a hammer on the blacksmith. The most grotesque desire appears when Beloved fuses together into one with Sethe.

The purpose of this work is to investigate the mechanism through which the grotesque threatens the established social order in Morrison's works. The important function of the grotesque desire is to destroy the boundary of binary oppositions and to stir up the unrest of readers because of its rejection of their common knowledge. When Morrison writes that a parent kills or rapes his or her child "from love," the paradox is grotesque, and we cannot judge the action of the character by our moral standards. The grotesque desire cannot be qualified as "right" or "wrong" because it subverts the diametric categories such as good/evil, life/death, love/violence, animal/human, or black/white. The strategy is based on Morrison's confident belief that those fictional categories according to stereotyped ideas should be condemned (although she often adheres to writing biological divisions between sexes as we shall see later).

While the mechanism in which the grotesque crosses the boundary of meanings is quite original in Morrison, its function itself is typical in the history of the grotesque, which has been explored by critics so far. This performance can be derived from its origin. It is a well-known fact that the word "grotesque" comes from "grotto," caves which were discovered in the sixteenth century in Italy. On the murals of it appear abnormal combinations of humans, animals and plants, depicting the world in which "the natural order of things has been subverted"

(Kayser 21). Here, we see a remarkable coincidence between Morrison and the historical idea of the grotesque; that is, we find grotesque desires in Morrison's novels when a character acts not like a human but rather like an animal.

The important point to note is that a "black" writer, Toni Morrison is writing so-called animalistic characteristics of a black character (although the fact is that it is not "animalistic" because the classification is disabled through the function of the grotesque). In order to consider the significance of her brave attempt, it is necessary for us to first have a historical perspective about the contemptuous depictions of black people as animals. Now we see the second reason why there have been only a few studies of the grotesque in Morrison's works: it is because of the tendency to avoid relating black people with the "grotesque" for fear of causing a racial problem. We must draw attention to the fact that blackness is given the same meaning as evil and that black people are compared to "mindless" animals such as monkeys. Many African-American writers have attempted in vain to deny the animal image of black people, drawing attention to "intellectual" blacks and dealing with no grotesque aspects at all. While such writers were ultimately absorbed into the dominant value system, Morrison's emphasis on the savage quality of characters shows her indomitable defiance of the negative image of stereotypical "grotesque" people (especially women), which is created in the minds of white men or white women or (possibly) black men. Morrison's writing the grotesque can be a countermeasure against the schoolteacher's cruel act of listing "animal characteristics" of slaves in *Beloved*.

With these points in mind we can look at another important aspect of the grotesque desire in Morrison's works; namely, the repetitive motif of a female character's longing for oneness with her loved one. The desire is "grotesque" in the

sense that it is so fierce as to swallow the other person and to erase the boundary between self and the other. In her interview with Dana Micucci, Morrison says that “[t]he search for love and identity runs through most everything I write” (Micucci 278). To be more specific, “the search for love and identity” deals with the problem of how to form one’s self in the relationships with the other. In Morrison’s novels, a character’s profound love for the other destroys both her partner and herself because she cannot have strong sense of self due to her psychological dependence on the other.

The point I wish to emphasize is that Toni Morrison is a writer who explores what is called the “universal” problem of the relationship between self and the other through the use of the grotesque. Before entering into her creative activities, Morrison has already dealt with the problem of self in her master’s thesis in 1955. Her thesis “Virginia Woolf’s and William Faulkner’s Treatment of the Alienated” is a study of those two authors’ ideas of solitude; that is to say, she explored the function of the psychological distance between characters in the novels of Woolf and Faulkner. Later in the first part, I shall try to give a more precise account of Morrison’s exploring the difference between two authors’ attitudes toward alienation. Although little attention has been given to the essay itself, the thesis is the starting point of Toni Morrison’s career as a writer because the problem of relationships with others is at the base of all of Morrison’s works.

Critics must be careful if they say that Toni Morrison explores the “universal” problem of self and refer to an interracial connection between Woolf or Faulkner and Morrison, who is always conscious of herself as an African-American writer. However, her works attain “universality” not only in the paradoxical sense that “[the novels are] specifically about a particular world”

(LeClair 124) like Faulkner as Morrison mentions, but also in the sense that the pursuit for identity is not a Western criteria but (though I might be misunderstood for saying this) the eternal theme of all novels.

The first part, entitled “The Intertextual Connection with Woolf and Faulkner,” will demonstrate how Morrison is influenced by the two authors whom she dealt with in her master’s thesis. In the thesis, Morrison concludes that they figure out answers to the problem of alienation opposite to each other: Woolf uses it as a means of withdrawal from other people, while Faulkner attaches importance to “the old virtues of brotherhood, compassion and love” (“Virginia” 3). Morrison’s sympathy with Faulkner will be illustrated when we compare *Mrs. Dalloway* with *Sula* and *Absalom, Absalom!* with *Song of Solomon* in the view of the grotesque desires of characters of each novel. Although Clarissa Dalloway in *Mrs. Dalloway* tightens the boundary of self and the other through vicarious suicide, Sula’s solitude, giving an incentive to desire others, can be a countermeasure against the binary oppositions. On the other hand, Rosa Coldfield in *Absalom, Absalom!* conceives the repressed desire for men which carries the potential for subverting social norms of gender like Pilate in *Song of Solomon*. In this part, we also deal with the representation of the homosexual bond between women, another theme which Morrison shares with Woolf. We can say that Morrison’s idea of female friendship shifts toward reconciliation from her second *Sula* to the eighth *Love*, although we will not deal with *Love* in this work.

In the second part, “In Pursuit of Coherent Self: Female Characters as Wild Birds,” we will discuss how Morrison’s female characters have lost their grotesque nature of wildness, and how they retrieve it in order to obtain a strong sense of self. It is a mistake to think that the metaphor of a bird, appearing when

a heroine commits a violent act, represents the negative views about the wild nature of women. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola, whose feathers are lost forever at the end of the story, cannot recover a coherent self; however, Sethe in *Beloved* gains strength when she hears the bird inside of herself spread its wings, while Florens in *A Mercy* finally flies away into the wilderness in her mind. It must be noted that the symbolic representation of a bird is important because it boldly declares both her physical and mental independence beyond control: Florens gains fighting strength to knock down men on the one hand, and on the other, psychological strength to manipulate her own language. Here I will mainly deal with three of Toni Morrison's works: her first novel *The Bluest Eye*, her fifth *Beloved*, and her ninth *A Mercy*, which includes the theme of double-defined wilderness.

The last part, "Ravenous Women: Representations of Eating," will examine the function of eating as one of the grotesque desires which obscure the division set according to the social norm. We may say that representations of eating are closely related to cooking, especially if the writer is a mother preparing the food for her family. In her thirties and forties, Morrison was a single mother who raised two children on her own; to put it concretely, she was the sole breadwinner for the family who worked both as an editor and as a teacher, spending much time in taking care of her children and doing household work. She explained the way she managed her writing and family life as follows: "[w]hen I sit down to write I never brood. I have so many other things to do, with my children and teaching, that I can't afford it. I brood, think of ideas, in the automobile when I'm driving to work or in the subway or when I'm mowing the lawn. By the time I get to the paper something's there—I can produce" (Watkins 43). Considering that she also says that her favorite place is the kitchen, however,

it is likely that cooking is not only an obligation to her but something she gets satisfaction from. In fact, Morrison vividly depicts women chatting in the kitchen, a cooking mother singing the blues, an original recipe for boiled eggs and the details of attractive dishes in her works.

More noteworthy is Morrison's strategic use of eating, which is different from feminist writers who simply write meals or eating as a characteristic of women. In *Paradise*, for example, when she is five years old, Seneca is left alone by her mother (although she pretends to be an older sister of Seneca) with dishes on the table:

Jean, her [Seneca's] sister, would be coming back anytime now, because dinner food was on the table—meat loaf, string beans, catsup, white bread—and a full pitcher of Kool-Aid was in the refrigerator. . . . She drank milk, ate potato chips, saltines with apple jelly and, little by little, the whole meat loaf. By the time the hated string beans were all that was left of the dinner, they were too shriveled and mushy to bear. (*Paradise* 127)

In the way elaborate dishes for a girl go bad indirectly shows the cruelty of a mother's action of leaving an infant alone, her ambivalence toward her child between affection and neglect, and the child's own confusion and sadness. Added to this kind of effective use of the motif of eating, in this work we will especially deal with female characters who have enormous appetites which cross the border between diametrical opposites. The fourth novel *Tar Baby* and the seventh *Paradise* come within the scope of this chapter.

We are not concerned here with Morrison's tenth novel *Home* and the latest *God Help the Child*, which were published after I drew up this program of study. It is also outside my scope to deal with the sixth *Jazz* and the eighth *Love*, because of the lack of grotesque motifs in these two works.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The fact is that not only the main themes of novels, which I took as remarkable examples, but also details are often grotesque in Morrison's works. Readers will probably have unpleasant feelings when they have to face an old, Native American pedophile, a female body burning to death, a pregnant mother attempting to eliminate her unborn child, or a number of physical abuses of women, children, and slaves. In addition, Morrison does not hesitate to give detailed descriptions of vomiting, excretion or menstruation.

Part 1

The Intertextual Connection  
with Woolf and Faulkner

## Chapter 1

### “In A World Where Things Fall Apart”: The Boundary of Self in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Sula*

#### 1. Introduction

A good place to start is to explore an important connection between Morrison and Virginia Woolf. A close look at *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Sula* will reveal that Morrison revises *Mrs. Dalloway* in *Sula*: in *Sula*, Morrison gives the heroine of the novel the grotesque desire which transfers the boundary between self and the other, which Clarissa Dalloway does not have in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Toni Morrison, who is still an active writer at the age of eighty-six in April 2017, earned a master's degree at Cornell University over sixty years ago when she was twenty-four years old. Although critics commonly accept that Morrison was concerned with the works of Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner in her master's thesis, little attention has been given to the essay itself. What has to be noticed is, however, that the thesis is an important resource for information about Morrison's motive for writing novels. That is to say, “Virginia Woolf's and William Faulkner's Treatment of the Alienated” is the starting point of Toni Morrison's career as a writer who is greatly interested in the problem of the relationship of the self and the other.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate how Morrison develops Woolf's idea of isolation in *Mrs. Dalloway* eighteen years after the critique when she wrote her second novel *Sula*. Before entering into a detailed discussion of two works, I should make it clear why I choose *Sula* among Morrison's novels. The main reason is that Morrison explores the problem of alienation not in her

biographical first novel which is based on her personal experience but in the second. While little attention has been given to the interrelation between two writers,<sup>2</sup> there are enormous similarities between *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Sula*: (1) each novel is set in the 1920's after WWI; (2) a war veteran (Septimus and Shadrack) plays an important role as a heroin's (Clarissa's and Sula's) alter ego respectively; (3) in each novel a writer depicts both a homosexual bond between women with a heterosexual relationship as an obstacle; (4) each author conveys the idea of death through story. These curious similarities make it clear that while plotting *Sula*, Morrison was quite conscious of *Mrs. Dalloway*, which she was so interested in as to choose it for a master's thesis.

In her master's thesis "Virginia Woolf's and William Faulkner's Treatment of the Alienated," Morrison investigates how two writers depict the problem of "contemporary [i.e. modernist's view of] isolation" which "stems from complete disillusionment by the world and distrust of its values" ("Virginia" 2). She is concerned with *Mrs. Dalloway* in Chapter I and *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Sound and the Fury* in Chapter II; broadly speaking, she deals with how each writer represents his or her protagonist's (Clarissa Dalloway and Quentin Compson's) suicide as "the supreme act of isolation" (21). Morrison concludes that Woolf "believes that [Clarissa's] isolation has provided the means for acute self-analysis," while "Faulkner's Quentin Compson never attains self-knowledge because he is alienated and Thomas Sutpen is blinded by isolation to the point of not even recognizing his own evil" (39). I agree with Catherine Gunther Kodat's opinion in thinking that Morrison sympathizes not with Woolf but with Faulkner who "see[s] alienation as a matter of choice on the part of the individual and as a sin" (3).

Our concern is to examine how Morrison develops *Mrs. Dalloway* into *Sula* in respect of the meaning of alienation (I use the word “alienation” not in the technical sense but in the universal sense of solitude: detached from other people). By reference to Morrison’s thesis when needed, we will newly note the part in which Morrison in her own novel responds to Woolf. The crucial difference between two works is that in the former alienation functions as a means of withdrawal from others, while in the latter it gives an incentive to desire others and the driving force for breaking down the boundary between self and the other, an action which is grotesque.

Surprisingly few studies have so far been made to compare the two works, as I said earlier; for example, there are two articles on Toni Morrison from the “Third Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf” in 1993. One discusses how shell shocked WWI veterans are depicted, dealing with Shadrack and Septimus; the other claims that the two writers demonstrate the common idea of (either sexual or racial) “otherness.” The other example is Barbara Christian, who explores the two writers’ background as incentive for writing novels and their style. Lisa Williams compares *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Sula* and finds common motifs such as the character of a heroine and the concept of carnival. The problem is that these studies are limited to the approaches either from the writers’ superficial techniques or from a historical point of view. We are concerned with the two works from a different and more important point of view: their common themes such as heroine’s self-consciousness, space and its center, a homosexual bond and the concept of death. A close look at these motifs will reveal that alienation functions as a means of disintegrating binary oppositions based on a preconceived idea in *Sula*.

## 2. Heroines' Self-Consciousness

The first point to discuss is how the two heroines' personalities function in opposition in the novels. We should notice that Clarissa is seriously troubled over relationships with others because of her high self-esteem, while Sula is put outside the community and utterly indifferent not only to all the others but also to herself. As Nobumitsu Ukai points out, *Mrs. Dalloway* is a novel in which Woolf depicts "the theme of liberating oneself from the outside, which invades into the inside by overstepping the boundaries" (Ukai 165). *Mrs. Dalloway* covers one day in June in 1923, London, in which Clarissa Dalloway hosts a party of upper class people at her house. As Morrison acutely points out, Clarissa "who lives deeply within herself, is capable of acute self-analysis and self-evaluation" ("Virginia" 18), but, at the same time, she always worries about what other people think about her and suffers from emotional disorders. For example, Clarissa considers her appearance as "a narrow pea-stick figure; a ridiculous little face, beaked like a bird's" and her body as "nothing" because she no longer has sexual relationships and is incapable of having babies; to put it another way, she is not "Clarissa" herself but the "wife of Mr. Dalloway." Here we see that Clarissa internalizes the dominant values that women should have sexual relationships and have children: she cannot find meaning in herself if she becomes "invisible; unseen; unknown" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 11) to others.

In *Sula*, on the other hand, Morrison creates her heroine's personality completely opposite to Clarissa's: Sula lacks common sense and puts her own curiosity above feelings of others. Sula's intense curiosity becomes grotesque when she watches, being "thrilled" (*Sula* 147), the way her mother is burning to death: "Hannah, her senses lost, went flying out of the yard gesturing and bobbing like a

sprung jack-in-the-box” (76). *Sula* is a story of friendship between two girls and their growth from 1919 to 1965 at the Bottom, a community of black people in the state of Ohio. While Sula has a nature which Morrison calls “detachment” (“Virginia” 2) in common with Clarissa, Morrison makes Sula stay outside the community and have no ego to be protected unlike Clarissa. In contrast to Clarissa’s negative feeling about her old body, Sula says “I don’t want to make somebody else. I want to make myself” (*Sula* 92). Sula, “who could hardly be counted on to sustain any emotion for more than three minutes” (53), has developed no morality in an uninhibited childhood living only with her mother and grandmother; in addition, an episode in which Sula cuts off her own thumb in order to protect her best friend Nel gives a good account of Sula’s carelessness about her own body. We may say that the reason why Sula needs to “make [her]self” is that she has no ego to be counted on.

The point I wish to emphasize is that Sula functions as a “mirror,” which reflects the opinions of others, due to her selflessness. Sula’s birthmark on her face becomes different symbols such as a “rose,” a “snake,” or a “tadpole” depending on who sees it; in short, Sula helps ego formation of other people by being defined as something convenient for them. Moreover, Sula destroys the accepted meaning of words; the examples of this are her deviant behavior: “mutilat[ing] herself, to protect herself” (101) and her startling statement: “[m]aybe it was me [who was good]” (146) when she has had an affair with Nel’s husband. From this viewpoint one may say that Morrison makes Sula not only a psychologically independent heroine obtaining objectivity like Clarissa, but a catalyst breaking down existing prejudice based on preconceived ideas. In this sense, Sula is a grotesque character whose ambiguities reject being attached to

only one meaning.

### 3. A Place Inside the Self and Its Center

Next in this chapter, I would like to focus attention on the two authors' common motif: a heroine's inside space within herself and what it is at its center. The point to observe is that both Clarissa and Sula have an empty space inside themselves, and that space was once filled with love for a homosexual partner.

Clarissa's solitary place appears as an attic in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Clarissa goes up to the attic "like a nun withdrawing" and abdicates the role as a hostess like women "put[ting] off their rich apparel" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 33). Although she lies on a narrow bed without her best clothes, she cannot "dispel a virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet" (34). Clarissa, reading a book on a sleepless night, awakens to the fact that she disappointed her husband Richard because of her refusal of his request for sexual contacts:

Lovely in girlhood, suddenly there came a moment — for example on the river beneath the woods at Cliveden — when, through some contraction of this cold spirit, she [Clarissa] had failed him [Richard]. And then at Constantinople, and again and again. She could see what she lacked. It was not beauty; it was not mind. *It was something central which permeated; something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women together.* (34, emphasis mine)

We see, hinted in this extract, how Clarissa has trouble with her sexual

relationships with her husband. In addition, it must be noted that Clarissa rejects Richard and chooses to wear a virginity of a sheet instead due to the lack of “something central” between them.

We shall now look more carefully into what “something central” means in *Mrs. Dalloway*. In the scene a few lines after the extract above, Clarissa admits, though with some hesitation, that she has experienced “something warm” not with men but with women and that she felt “what men felt” (34). The experience is represented by words such as “a sudden revelation,” “an illumination” or “an inner meaning almost expressed” (34-35). The object of Clarissa’s fierce passion is not Richard but her girlfriend Sally Seton. Clarissa is filled with rapture when Sally kisses her; Clarissa’s feeling is expressed in a metaphor of a diamond, as can be seen in the following quotation:

The whole world might have turned upside down! The others disappeared; there she [Clarissa] was alone with Sally. And she felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it — a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked (up and down, up and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling! (38-39)

The most likely explanation of the extract is that Clarissa freshly discovers homosexual love and “something central and warm” is expressed as a figure of a “diamond.” There is evidence for the idea. The expression: “she [Clarissa] uncovered a present” corresponds with “an inner meaning almost expressed” and

the word “revelation” appears for the second time here. In short, there is “something warm” (a diamond), or rather homosexual passion, lies in the central part of Clarissa.

What is true for Clarissa is to a considerable extent true for Sula as well. Sula’s solitude is depicted as a space inside herself when she answers the question by Nel of why Sula had an affair with Nel’s husband Jude: “Sula stirred a little under the covers. She looked bored as she sucked her teeth. ‘Well, there was this space in front of me, behind me, in my head. Some space. And Jude filled it up. That’s all. He just filled up the space’” (*Sula* 144). What the passage makes clear at once is that Sula is burdened with a “space” and has a relationship with Jude in order to fill it.<sup>3</sup> It was once filled by her best friend Nel who is like the other half of Sula.

We may note, in passing, that not only Sula but also other characters, such as Nel or Eva, suffer from an emptiness, a loss of someone they love. When Nel’s husband Jude left her after the affair with Sula, Nel’s grief is described as “[n]ow her thighs were really empty” (110). That is a grief for the loss of her femininity: to put it plainly, she is sad because her thighs will no longer be filled with a penis. Another example is Eva, who, according to a rumor, sells her leg for money to support her children after her husband leaves her. She has a space in the place of a leg. In addition, when Eva sets fire to her son who is addicted to drugs due to his traumatic experience in WWI, her explanation for her cruel action is “[t]here wasn’t space for him in my womb” (71). Although Eva dreams that her son is behaving like a baby crawling back in her womb, it is not possible for her to accept her son inside herself again and to fuse together with him.

While Eva’s empty womb cannot be filled, Sula and Nel are so inseparably

connected with each other as to break down the boundary between the self and the other. Morrison deftly depicts their oneness as “[they are] two throats and one eye” (147) and the way they think alike as “they themselves had difficulty distinguishing one’s thoughts from the other’s” (83). Furthermore, I would like to emphasize the possibility of their physical contacts as well as the mental one, although Morrison denies it.<sup>4</sup> In *Sula*, there is a scene in which readers might associate with a sexual act. Let us consider the following quotation. I will quote at full length in order to show the metaphorical meaning of the act:

Sula lifted her head and joined Nel in the grass play. In concert, without ever meeting each other’s eyes, they stroked the blades up and down, up and down. Nel found a thick twig and, with her thumbnail, pulled away its bark until it was stripped to a smooth, creamy innocence. Sula looked about and found one too. When both twigs were undressed Nel moved easily to the next stage and began tearing up rooted grass to make a bare spot of earth. When a generous clearing was made, Sula traced intricate patterns in it with her twig. At first Nel was content to do the same. But soon she grew impatient and poked her twig rhythmically and intensely into the earth, making a small neat hole that grew deeper and wider with the least manipulation of her twig. Sula copied her, and soon each had a hole the size of a cup. Nel began a more strenuous digging and, rising to her knee, was careful to scoop out the dirt as she made her hole deeper. *Together they worked until the two holes were one and the same.* (58, emphasis mine)

Here, we notice, Sula and Nel's grass play is depicted with strangely increasing excitement. Prompted by "the wildness that had come upon them so suddenly" (58), two girls lying in the grass are absorbed in strange behavior: scrubbing the twig and making a hole. Considering the doubt about the inconsistency between the events before and after the scene and the teenage girls' peculiar eagerness for childish play, the most likely explanation is that in the scene of grass play Morrison uses a metaphor for a homosexual act between two girls.<sup>5</sup> Whether it really happens or not is not important here; what is important is that Morrison explores the possibility of a fusion between a heroine and her best friend not only mentally but also physically, although, unlike Woolf, she avoids direct reference.

#### 4. Heterosexual Love as an Obstacle and Longing for Oneness

We are now able to see the same pattern in the heroines' inner psyche in two novels: an emptiness in the center of the heart, which was filled with homosexual love in the past. In this section, however, we will look at the difference in what happens after the loss of each love. In short, the crucial difference between Clarissa and Sula is their way of relationship with others: while Clarissa rejects human connections, Sula tries to fill the space with other people in place of Nel.

In both of the novels, the bond between women which we have looked previously is broken by the intervention of men. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, heterosexual love is described as "something awful" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 3). To take a simple example, Clarissa's boyfriend Peter disturbs her happy time with Sally in the forest. But Clarissa chooses her title of "Mrs. Dalloway" on her own after all because she wants the "support" of men (128); she abandons her homosexual love,

and adopts herself into the system of heterosexuality by way of having a peaceful marriage with Richard. In order to patch up a marriage, however, Clarissa needs a “gulf” (131) between Richard and herself. As Peter blames her, Clarissa appears to be a perfect hostess but in fact suffers from “the death of the soul” (although this is true of Peter as well) (64). Losing the diamond of passion given by Sally, Clarissa’s body has become cold and rigid. Now Clarissa puts together the parts of incompatible emotions and makes another diamond in the center of herself:

That was her [Clarissa’s] self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the part together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing room and made a meeting-point, a radiancy no doubt in some dull lives, a refuge for the lonely to come to, perhaps; . . . (40)

Here, we notice, the diamond in the extract is different from what we have seen in section two: her rigidity as a mistress is expressed by a “diamond” in a negative connotation. It is in the center of herself, in the place a diamond of passion which warms the cold contact with others should be.

Also in *Sula*, heterosexuality interferes with heroine’s love; for example, the little boy Chicken Little interferes in the “grass play” in section two, and Jude, marrying Nel, makes her “a stump” (*Sula* 143), an object of Sula’s contempt (Sula calls a wife who clings to her husband and children “a stump”). Sula’s alienation unlike Clarissa, however, seeks for others. This is an important fact to stress. After losing Nel, whom Sula relies on both as self and the other, Sula looks for the

other half of the self to fill the empty space inside her. Sula, who has “no center, no speck around which to grow” (119), gains power and collects it in the center of herself through physical contacts with men, as seen in the following quotation:

When she [Sula] left off cooperating with her body and began to assert herself in the act, particles of strength gathered in her like steel shavings drawn to a spacious magnetic center, forming a tight cluster that nothing, it seemed, could break. (122-23)

It will be clear from the examples that Sula gains power and strength by sexual intercourse. The way in which strength gathers and forms a tight cluster in the center is quite similar to Clarissa’s making herself of pieces, but a condensation of power in Sula is only temporary and soon it breaks down. Sula, jumping down in order to gather pieces again, arrives at the center of solitude. It is useful to quote from the passage right after the extract above:

But the cluster did break, fall apart, and in her panic to hold it together she leaped from the edge into soundlessness and went down howling, howling in a stinging awareness of the endings of things: *an eye of sorrow* in the midst of all that hurricane rage of joy. There, in *the center of that silence* was not eternity but the death of time and a loneliness so profound the word itself had no meaning. For loneliness assumed the absence of other people, and the solitude she found in *that desperate terrain* had never admitted the possibility of other people. She wept then. Tears for

the deaths of the littlest things: . . . . (123, emphasis mine)

The emphasized expressions “an eye of sorrow,” “the center of that silence” and “that desperate terrain” represent an alienated space in the center of the self in which no other can exist. The place in which the word loses its meaning reminds Sula of the end of things, or rather death. From these remarks one general point becomes very clear: although both Sula and Clarissa discover the place of their own, Sula reaches at the center of the self not by rejecting the other, but by fusion and separation with one.

## 5. View of Life and Death

Finally, we must draw attention to each writer’s concept of death. Morrison’s negative opinion about Woolf’s thinking of suicide as a means of self-defense is reflected in *Sula*. While Morrison depicts the cruelty of death thrillingly, she deconstructs the meaning of it by connecting the image of disintegrating bodies not only with death but also life.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, death is described as an act of retrieving a lost passion in the center of the self. According to Morrison, Woolf thinks that suicide is “the supreme act of isolation” (“Virginia” 21); in addition, as for the relationship between Clarissa and Septimus Warren Smith, Morrison states that “[h]is insanity is an extreme of Clarissa’s detachment” (19). A close connection between the two characters is made explicit in mysterious similarities among them: their facial resemblance, the sharing of memory, the same pattern of thinking, and the fact that Clarissa inscrutably understands what happens to Septimus, whom she has never met, when he commits suicide. When Clarissa learns the bad news of

the young man who kills himself by jumping out of the window of his bedroom, she realizes clearly that he preserved something precious which people alive lose in every-day life:

A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her [Clarissa's] own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he [Septimus] had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death.  
(*Mrs. Dalloway* 202)

The expressions: “reaching the center” and “closeness drew apart” are important in this context, since they represent the idea of homosexual passion which we have looked at in the extract in section two. Clarissa has lost her love in her fictitious daily life and is now away from “an inner meaning” which she was so close to once in the past. While Clarissa cannot reach the center, Septimus arrives at the place and keeps his passion from intervention by insensitive people.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike Septimus, Clarissa makes a choice to raise her social status as Mrs. Dalloway. She feels ashamed of assuming the role of a hostess in an elegant dress at the party. However, Clarissa also remembers that she thinks about death when she, wearing a pure-white dress, is as happy as happy can be, burning with passion for Sally. Clarissa's consideration about life and death reaches its climax when she watches an old lady across the street putting the light off:

There! the old lady had put out her light! the whole house was dark now with this going on, she repeated, and the words came to her, Fear no more the heat of the sun. She must go back to them. But what an extraordinary night! She felt somehow very like him – the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living. (204)

It will be clear from this extract that while she vicariously experiences death through Septimus, imagining the way of his jumping off and hitting the ground, she realizes that her life will go on in spite of his achievement. The expressions: “fear no more the heat of the sun” is important in this context, because it means that Clarissa finally accepts one’s whole life from birth, growing old, to death, seeing before her eyes an old lady who isolates herself from the outer world, with the sounds of the Big Ben which rules over time. At the end of the story, Clarissa gets her charm back, which attracts Peter again and makes him feel “terror,” “ecstasy,” and “excitement” (213).

While in *Mrs. Dalloway* the death of Septimus happens in an instant (“[t]here he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness” [202]), Sula’s end comes after she has suffered “greedy” pain which “demand[s] all of her attention” for a long time (*Sula* 141). In *Sula*, as we have seen, Morrison explores the boundary between the self and the other; in addition to that, one can safely state that she also wrestles with the problem of death. The chapter about *Mrs. Dalloway* in Morrison’s thesis closes with her reference to Woolf’s own suicide as “a solution Virginia Woolf may well have believed in to end her life” (“Virginia” 23). Although Morrison refrained from expressing her opinion

about the matter, it can be found in *Sula* which she published eighteen years after.

Morrison's ironic solution is "National Suicide Day," which the WWI veteran Shadrack comes up with. Shadrack, who experiences the trauma of witnessing horrible deaths of soldiers on the field of battle, thinks of a ritual "National Suicide Day," considering that "if one day a year were devoted to it [death], everybody could get it out of the way and the rest of the year would be safe and free" (*Sula* 14), because it is its "unexpectedness" that he is afraid of. With all his desperate attempts, there are a lot of unexpected deaths in *Sula*; in fact, Shadrack's idea highlights a smell of death which pervades the story. Morrison, unlike Woolf, depicts a ritual suicide<sup>7</sup> and unexpected deaths that haunt characters in *Sula*. It is useful to quote from a flashback of Shadrack, who speaks to Sula in order to console her because he feels that she has the same fear of dying as him:

But when he [Shadrack] looked at her [Sula's] face he had seen also the skull beneath, and thinking she saw it too—knew it was there and was afraid—he tried to think of something to say to comfort her, something to stop the hurt from spilling out of her eyes. So he had said "always," so she would not have to be afraid of the change—*the falling away of skin, the drip and slide of blood, and the exposure of bone underneath*. He had said "always" to convince her, assure her, of permanency. (157, emphasis mine)

An imagery of "the skull beneath" which Shadrack associates with Sula in the extract produces the sinister atmosphere throughout the story. It can be said that

the emphasized expression “the falling away of skin, the drip and slide of blood, and the exposure of bone underneath,” which is derived from Shadrack’s memory of dismembered bodies of soldiers, shows Morrison’s idea of dying as the body’s breaking down into pieces. Thus we see fear of death “always” haunts Sula and Shadrack, as he says.

The description of skinning a face and baring its contents also appears to be linked to Sula’s feelings for Ajax. While Sula does not remember the name of her partner who appears in the extract in section three and feels even contempt for him, Ajax appears as Sula’s first and last love after that. An imagery of a disintegrating body is again used for expressing sexual intercourse with him, but Sula reaches not to a solitary place deep inside herself but to the center of her partner by breaking him into pieces:

*If I take a chamois and rub real hard on the bone, right on the ledge of your cheek bone, some of the black will disappear. It will flake away into the chamois and underneath there will be gold leaf. I can see it shining through the black. I know it is there. . . .*

*And if I take a nail file or even Eva’s old paring knife—that will do—and scrape away at the gold, it will fall away and there will be alabaster. The alabaster is what gives your face its planes, its curves. That is why your mouth smiling does not reach your eyes. Alabaster is giving it a gravity that resists a total smile.*

*Then I can take a chisel and small tap hammer and tap away at the alabaster. It will crack then like ice under the pick, and through the breaks I will see the loam, fertile, free of pebbles and*

*twigs. For it is the loam that is giving you that smell. . . .*

*I will put my hand deep into your soil, lift it, sift it with my fingers, feel its warm surface and dewy chill below. . . .*

*I will water your soil, keep it rich and moist. But how much? How much water to keep the loam moist? And how much loam will I need to keep my water still? And when do the two make mud?*

(130-31)

As for the description in the quotation, Maureen T. Reddy is wrong when she says that it is the murder of Ajax by Sula, since Reddy misses the positive meaning of the disintegrating body here (Reddy 4). That is to say, Sula's desire to expose the contents of Ajax creates the possibility of deconstructing the established idea like Claudia breaking a doll with blue eyes into pieces in *The Bluest Eye*. Furthermore, the description of peeling skin and baring the inside is a different version of Shadrack's image of death: "the falling away of skin, the drip and slide of blood, and the exposure of bone underneath." Although the two describe the same condition, what Sula discovers under Ajax's black skin is not a dying body but a beautiful golden leaf, alabaster, and warm loam. The fusion between running water from Sula and soil of Ajax means not death but rather life here. The oneness of the two deconstructs not only boundaries between self and the other but also binary opposition of life and death by way of depicting life with imagery of disintegrating body which is closely associated with death.

Sula's actual death appears in the following quotation:

It was as though for the first time she was completely alone—

where she had always wanted to be—free of the possibility of distraction. It would be here, only here, held by this blind window high above the elm tree, that she might draw her legs up to her chest, close her eyes, put her thumb in her mouth and float over and down the tunnels, just missing the dark walls, down, down until she met a rain scent and would know the water was near, and she would curl into its heavy softness and it would envelop her, carry her, and wash her tired flesh always. Always. Who said that? She tried hard to think. Who was it that had promised her a sleep of water always? (148-49)

What is immediately apparent in the extract is that the death of Sula is identified with her birth; to put it more precisely, while dying Sula is depicted exactly as an unborn baby which is passing down the birth canal. Sula's being in complete solitude and going down the tunnel resembles her jumping off to the "desperate terrain" in section three, but this time she reaches a womb. "A sleep of water" means a return to a womb: fusion between a mother and a child (which Eva cannot accomplish, as we have seen). We should not overlook that Shadrack's word "always" has another meaning in the extract: not death but life.

## 6. Conclusion

This chapter has been intended as an investigation of the concept of alienation in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Sula*, with Morrison's master's thesis being a starting point. It should be concluded from what has been said above, that the difference between the two works is made explicit in each writer's understanding

of the concept of boundary of self and the other: Woolf tightens it, while Morrison almost removes it. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa feels self-contempt as a wife in heterosexual society, but she preserves her own place and retrieves the passion in the past through suicide of Septimus, her alter ego. On the other hand, Sula's solitude, giving an incentive to desire others, can be a countermeasure against the binary opposition: self and the other, or life and death through her (dis)integrating.

As we have seen, each writer's view of life and death is quite different; however, there appears a common idea that a person's life goes on as a part of others after his or her death. Clarissa thinks that her presence survives after death as a part of people or nature, like a mist which spreads over trees:

Did it matter then, she [Clarissa] asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely? but that somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of the things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of people she had never met; *being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself.* (*Mrs. Dalloway* 9-10, emphasis mine)

In the same way, during the last scene in *Sula*, Nel realizes that for a long time she has missed not her husband but Sula, when she feels Sula's presence "at the tops of the trees" (*Sula* 174). A fusion between self and the other which Morrison explores comes true only after death in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I use the term "self" to refer to one's ego, although I admit a developing distrust of the concept of it in the post-modern era. When I use the word, it is supposed to be not fixed but fluid, formed by comparison with the other.

<sup>2</sup> It seems reasonable to suppose that the trend is derived from critics' overemphasis on the "blackness" of Toni Morrison (and Morrison's own hatred for being compared with other writers can be added to this, as we shall see later in next chapter).

<sup>3</sup> In *Sula*, the meaning of an empty space might have different nuances from *Mrs. Dalloway* in respect of race problem. For example, Patricia Mckee suggests a connection between an empty space and racial discrimination. Sula, according to Mckee, has a role in filling up the space in the black community. In this study, however, the main stress falls on a space as a solitude of a heroine Sula, not as a part of the black community, but as an individual.

<sup>4</sup> See Claudia Tate 157. The fuller study of homosexuality in *Sula* lies outside the scope of this paper. For a discussion of Barbara Smith's controversial essay on *Sula* as a lesbian novel, see Duvall (*Identifying* 52-62).

<sup>5</sup> About controversial scene above, John Duvall says that they "enact a kind of symbolic mutual masturbation" (66). According to Barbara Hill Rigney, on the other hand, it is "a defloration ritual, like those performed in connection with

some historical matriarchal cultures” (Rigney 90). I agree with Lorie Watkins Fulton in thinking that “Morrison metaphorically buries the potential for a sexual relationship between her two characters” (Fulton 72).

<sup>6</sup> How Septimus has suffered the agony of his secret love of Evans is a question which I want to keep beyond the scope of this present discussion.

<sup>7</sup> Although Shadrack does not kill himself like Septimus, his ritual leads to accidental death of villagers in the end of the story. Katy Ryan suggests that the accident is a communal suicide as a protest. If we accept her plausible theory, it seems reasonable to support that Morrison depicts suicide in a figurative way in *Sula*.

## Chapter 2

### Dialectical Tensions between Conflicting Values and Emotions in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Song of Solomon*

The works of William Faulkner are compared with Toni Morrison's much more frequently than Virginia Woolf's.<sup>1</sup> It is likely that critics keep exploring Morrison's connection with Faulkner because they are encouraged both by Morrison's favorable remarks on him<sup>2</sup> and by their intuition that there is something in common between the two authors (in addition, there is no doubt that the fact that Morrison dealt with the works of Faulkner in her master's thesis motivates them effectively, although her thesis has been regarded not as an important resource for her ideas about Faulkner but only as one of Morrison's personal history, in which critics find a valid reason for their studies comparing Morrison and Faulkner). To take a simple example, we find a similarity between characters in *Song of Solomon* and in *Absalom, Absalom!* Circe, a witch-like old woman who lives in her mistress's mansion out of deep hatred for her, is a composite of Rosa and Clytie because those three are "grotesque" in the same way: their fierce emotions of hatred, bizarre appearances in the creepy houses, and their roles as the (almost-ghost like) living embodiment of the past experiences of racial and sexual violence. We see that the grotesque is Morrison's newly discovered feature which she shares with Faulkner, who is generally known as a writer in this mode.

In this chapter, I will deal with William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and Morrison's *Song of Solomon*<sup>3</sup> and demonstrate that conflicts between opposing elements function as a countermeasure against dominant values, in Morrison's

words, “Master Narrative.” The fuller study of how Morrison rewrites *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* that she dealt with in her thesis into *Song of Solomon* lies outside the scope of this study, because we need to focus on the problem of the grotesque, which will be discussed through dealing with how the two writers describe the conflicts between incompatible elements.<sup>4</sup> As I said earlier in the introduction, the “clash of incompatible elements” (Corey 36) is a major characteristic of the grotesque. It is possible that the example of grotesque characters (Circe, Rosa and Clytie) shows the similarity on the outside;<sup>5</sup> however, at deeper level, the way in which a character or a meaning wavers between paradoxical feelings or theories is identical in the two novels. On one hand, Rosa Coldfield in *Absalom, Absalom!* goes back and forth between patriarchal sense of values and her desires as an individual female; on the other, Milkman in *Song of Solomon* is placed in a dilemma between “both sides of the issue,” such as sky and soil, life and death, race and individual, or love and violence. We will find out that at the base of those incompatible elements lie conflicts between men and women in *Song of Solomon*. It is also interesting to note that Pilate is a literary descendant of Rosa because of their attempts at crossing the border between sexes, although they are very different types of characters.

The important point to note is that it is possible for Morrison not to notice the similarity between Faulkner and herself (the similarity which I will discuss in this chapter), because Morrison did not mention the dilemmas of Quentin Compson or Rosa Coldfield in her master’s thesis. This is another reason why we do not explore the problem of her rewriting Faulkner’s works in hers. We will deal with the two works separately, because I believe that it will show the complicated structure of the grotesque more effectively than referring to them alternately.

## I Two Separate Rosas

### 1. Introduction

There is no doubt that one of the elements which allows William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* to be a masterpiece is the dynamics of clashes between incompatible elements which spread broadly through the work. Quentin Compson's heart-rending cry: "*I dont hate it [the South]* " (*Absalom, Absalom!* 303), penetrates the whole story, accurately expressing his ambivalent feelings of nostalgia and hatred for the South which both nurtures and restricts him.<sup>6</sup> Faulkner describes the way in which Quentin is torn between the roles of listener and narrator and between the past and the present as "two separate Quentins" (4) existing. Added to this, in *Absalom, Absalom!*, where Faulkner deals with the race problem at the center of the story, appears the crossing of the boundary between blacks and whites. Charles Etienne, a child of mixed race who is able to pass as a white because of his white skin, keeps veering back and forth between two races: he belongs neither to Judith's bed (as a white master) nor to Clytie's pallet (as a black slave) in Sutpen's house (161). While the work is full of "uncanny" images, this ambivalent situation is very "grotesque."

It cannot be denied that the character who contains the most incompatible elements is Rosa Coldfield. Her name, incurring a contradiction between "Rosa" and "Coldfield" (a flower cannot grow in the barren soil) in the first place, exposes inconsistencies inside her. Rosa's narrative, which overwhelms readers by its power, does not stay within the periphery of the novel but produces energy to create the center of it. This power of Rosa's narrative is not fully explained either by her desire to be a "mother" (Lazure) or her madness refusing to be interpreted

(Gwin).<sup>7</sup> The fact is that, in her narrative which is full of wild inconsistencies, Rosa goes back and forth between two opposites and thus generates power to move the story forward.

Our concern is to explore the mechanism in which Rosa arrives at the decision to reject gender roles by a process of fluctuating between the values of a Southern community and her desire as a female. As Morrison pointed out, Quentin sees Rosa only as “a ghost” or “a doll” (“Virginia” 32); however, she is restored to life: at last, driven by a blind desire to explore the mystery of the house of Sutpen who brought her to destruction, Rosa breaks the window by a hatchet and strikes Clytie down; at the same time her shell of forty-three years cracks and she assumes masculinity after she gets rid of her virginity figuratively.<sup>8</sup> Rosa, who crosses the border between men and women of her own will, is different from Quentin, who is still torn apart at the end of the story: she liberates herself from the bondage of conservative values of the South, which she has clung to up to that time.

## 2. Rosa's House / Rosa as a House

First of all, we have to inquire into the representation both of houses which oppress Rosa and of Rosa's body which is also expressed as a house in figurative ways. There is no doubt about the importance of the portraits of houses in *Absalom, Absalom!*: needless to say, Sutpen's mansion is a symbol of his ambitions and its desolation corresponds to his own ruining. The house is an important motif also in *Song of Solomon*, as we shall see later. Sutpen's house, as if made of “flesh” (293), “*is the house which he [Sutpen] had built, which some suppuration of himself had created about him as the sweat of his body might have*

*created, produced some (even if invisible) coccon-like and complementary shell'* (111, underline mine). Sutpen shuts his wife and children up in it and makes them unfortunate. The house covering characters like a shell is personified as an individual with its own will all through the narrative. In the same way, Rosa's house functions as a symbol of the patriarchal power which suppresses her. She confines herself to the house which is "somehow smaller than its actual size—it was of two storeys—unpainted and a little shabby, yet with an air, a quality of grim endurance as though like her it had been created to fit into and complement a world in all ways a little smaller than the one in which it found itself" (6). In a room like a tomb, Rosa expresses her hatred which has been accumulating for forty-three years.

There is good evidence to show that the restriction which is imposed on Rosa by her father is severe and that she cannot resist it in spite of her deep hatred for it. That is her inconsistent behavior when her father keeps himself closed up in the attic out of a protest against the Southern Army: Rosa brings food to him every day, while she composes poems celebrating the soldiers who will kill her father as soon as they find him.<sup>9</sup> In the first place, Rosa suffers self-denial because her mother died during childbirth (when she was born) ; added to her sense of guilt for her mother's death, she cannot forgive her father who directly causes her mother's death by having sexual relationships with his old wife and getting her pregnant, leading to Rosa's grudge against "the entire male principle" (47), in Mr. Compson's words. Rosa, caught in a double bind of hatred for her father and restraint by her father, has no option but to commit a questionable act of celebrating soldiers who will kill him, while keeping him alive.

Rosa inherits the conventions of patriarchal society from the community,

her father, and her aunt. Her aunt inspires hatred in Rosa not only for Sutpen who does not hold a big wedding as she wishes but also for her niece Ellen (Rosa's older sister) who marries him, although it seems that Ellen has no choice but to do so. Furthermore, Rosa's aunt runs away with a lover, getting out of "father's house," after remaining a virgin for thirty-five years. Her infamous act impresses a lesson upon Rosa that "a Southern lady must preserve virginity, but must lose it at an appropriate time: when she gets married with a gentleman at a young age." While Rosa internalizes "male principles," she becomes a bizarre creature which is like a man (not a girl) at the age of puberty and like a child (not an old lady) at the present time of the story, because she received neither physical nor psychological assistance of family members. It is likely that Faulkner describes Rosa's ambiguous status as her predicament unlike Morrison, who uses unfeminine characters as a strategy in her protest against dominant values. However, Rosa also becomes a countermeasure against the diametrical division between men and women in the last scene as we shall see later.

Let us now return to the house of Rosa. The house which confines Rosa is described as if it is Rosa herself; we find an example of this when Rosa heads for Sutpen's mansion with Quentin. Rosa leaves the house for the first time in a long time and carries the bundles of keys to all doors of her house. Probably, she does not have valuable articles to be stolen; besides, the locks are easy enough for children to break and some of the keys are too old to fit (142). It seems reasonable to suppose that the ridiculousness of Rosa's carrying useless keys implies her clinging to virginity: her locked womb. Furthermore, as we shall see later in the third section, Rosa's womb is expressed in a figure of house in other parts of the novel. Rosa's childhood, puberty, and adolescence are described as "womb-like

corridor” (131). The house with a corridor seems the womb of Rosa’s mother and Rosa says that she wanted to be born and get out of it in order to see the lights in the world outside. Even more important is that Rosa replaces her mother’s womb with hers and her desire to be born with the one to have sexual relationships with men. Here, we notice, the two images of the house of Rosa and Rosa as a house overlap.

### 3. A Body as a Shell / Rosa’s Shell

We noted a little earlier that Sutpen’s house is often described with the word “shell.” In this case, added to its original use of a “framework” of a building, the meaning is extended to cover the notion of a “covering” of one’s mind and “hollowness” within one’s self. The third meaning of “vacantness” also appears when characters’ bodies are described as an empty vessel; for example, after Sutpen discovers that his son Henry, a sole heir, disappears and that Sutpen’s Hundred has been lost as soon as he returned from the war, he is described as “the shell of him” (129) as if he is not there. Another example is Quentin, who has grown up listening to a lot of stories of his community. Faulkner describes Quentin’s hollowness as follows: “his very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth. He was barracks filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts still recovering, even forty-three years afterward, from the fever which had cured the disease” (7).

In particular, women in general are described as empty vessels,<sup>10</sup> such as Rosa, who refers to her own body as “airy space and scope” which will be filled with Sutpen’s ambitions (to be precise, a container for his child). Likewise Mr. Compson calls Ellen “the substanceless shell” (100) and her daughter Judith “the

blank shape, the empty vessel” which is a “joint” (95) between her brother Henry Sutpen and his best friend Charles Bon. As Minrose Gwin points out, however, while Mr. Compson keeps Ellen within the extent of his domination by describing her as a butterfly, he cannot control his narrative when he talks about Judith. We see Judith’s uncontrollability when she makes a black coachman drive a carriage at a breakneck speed at the age of six (18) and when at the age of twelve she gets a peep at wrestling men (her father and black slaves), a glimpse of which is furious enough for her older brother Henry to cry and vomit (21-22). From these examples we see that during her childhood Judith is rather masculine than feminine. However, she becomes incomprehensible to Mr. Compson when she enters “into that transition stage between childhood and womanhood” (52) and here we notice that Mr. Compson projects his fear for women in the narrative on Judith. Mr. Compson’s attempt to “pin down” (Gwin 169) Judith as well as Ellen fails, because Judith does not remain an empty vessel but appears before Mr. Compson as a strong-willed woman “if necessary even murdering the other woman” (*Absalom, Absalom!* 96) in order to make Charles Bon hers.

Not only Judith but also Rosa is described as a container of an indomitable will; however, Rosa’s body and will are torn apart by facing “the other”: Clytie. When Mr. Compson talks about the way Rosa rushes to Sutpen’s Hundred by carriage upon hearing that Henry shot Bon to death, he has doubts about why Rosa has not turned to Judith and Clytie, the only relatives she has, as soon as her father dies. Mr. Compson’s speculation that Rosa does not want to be a burden to them “only as the aunt which she actually was” (53) is probably correct. Out of the pride at being different from her miserable aunt, she avoids living with her niece and being in a humiliating situation; however, she attempts to appear not as

a burden but as a savior of the family under the will of her sister: “[p]rotect her. Protect Judith at least” (10). It is likely that for Rosa, the words of her sister give her not responsibilities but a convenient excuse to be a member of Sutpen family. Rosa rushes to the scene taking advantage of information that her nephew has killed her niece’s fiancé, using Ellen’s dying words as excuse (because it seems that Judith is in a crisis).

Rosa’s ulterior motive (possibly added to “*the pale and bloody corpse in its patched and weathered gray crimsoning the bare mattress, the bowed and unwived widow kneeling beside it*” [110], she romantically has a daydream of her giving comfort to Judith) and her determined will to see Judith as a person concerned are thwarted by Clytie, standing in front of Rosa like a wall. When Rosa faces Clytie, out of unconscious fear of “*Sutpen coffee-colored face,*” that is to say, a combination of whiteness and blackness, she expresses Clytie’s inexpressible existence: “*the face without sex or age because it had never possessed either: the same sphinx face which she had been born with.*”<sup>11</sup> The two-sidedness of Clytie tears Rosa’s inner self from her body, as she says: “*the face stopping me dead (not my body: it still advanced, ran on: but I, myself, that deep existence)*” (109).

What is more important is that Rosa averts her eyes from Clytie herself, by describing her as a vessel of Sutpen’s will. Rosa says Clytie is “*created in his [Sutpen’s] own image the cold Cerberus of his private hell*” (109), her face a “*replica of his own*” (110) and her body an instrument or tool “*(she not owner: instrument; I [Rosa] still say that) of that will to bar me from the stairs.*” Rosa was forced to reject Clytie, although Clytie is the sole person who “*did [Rosa] more grace and respect than anyone else [she] know*”(111) , by calling Rosa by name.

The reason for Rosa's rejection of Clytie is not only because Clytie is a black slave, but also because she has to admit that Judith and Clytie refuse her, if Rosa approves of Clytie's own will: Clytie keeps the outsider Rosa from seeing Judith out of consideration for Judith's feelings (and it will be apparent that Judith does not need Rosa). Wavering between sympathy and hatred for Clytie, Rosa cannot recognize Clytie as an individual with her own will. However, when Clytie's hand touches Rosa, the boundary of race and class between Clytie and herself disappears, which is a very grotesque situation, as can be seen in the following quotation:

*Because there is something in the touch of flesh with flesh which abrogates, cuts sharp and straight across the devious intricate channels of decorous ordering, which enemies as well as lovers know because it makes them both:—touch and touch of that which is the citadel of the central I-Am's private own: not spirit, soul; the liquorish and ungirdled mind is anyone's to take in any darkened hallway of this earthly tenement. But let flesh touch with flesh, and watch the fall of all the eggshell shibboleth of caste and color too. (111-12, underline mine)*

It will be clear from these examples that physical contacts dissolve the category of race and class. The breaking of the eggshell is a figure of breaking down the boundaries between Rosa and Clytie, which seemed to be absolute. This is a very grotesque situation in which the race/class system becomes invalid. Through the touch of a body, which is expressed as “*any darkened hallway of this earthly*

*tenement*,” Rosa realizes that Clytie is a person, a female, as Rosa is. That is to say, not only Judith and Clytie but Clytie and herself are, in fact, “*joined by that hand and arm which held us, like a fierce rigid umbilical cord, twin sistered to the fell darkness which had produced her [Clytie]*” (112). Rosa’s desperate cursing: “[*t*]ake your hand off me, nigger” (112) shakes off Clytie’s hand which is attempting to stop her; yet, the border between Clytie and Rosa cannot be restored, once Rosa experiences the breaking down of a shell. As Rosa’s inner cry: “*And you too?*” (112) shows,<sup>12</sup> Clytie, appearing to Rosa as an individual with will, lets Rosa know that Clytie and Judith reject Rosa of their own volition, not Sutpen’s. But in the end, both Clytie’s hand and the breaking of the shell which follows it cannot stop Rosa’s body, which becomes an empty vessel with her determined will thwarted by rejection from Judith and Clytie: Rosa’s body keeps going in vain to Judith, knowing her rejection.

#### 4. Rosa Seeking Light / Rosa as Light

Lastly in this section, we will demonstrate Rosa’s wavering between adoration and rejection of Sutpen and between feminine desires and patriarchal oppression. But before we come to that, let us pause here to look briefly at other examples of disappearing borders between characters in *Absalom, Absalom!* The border of class between Sutpen and Wash is lost in the same way as between Clytie and Rosa. Wash, an old, poor man who lives in a cabin close to Sutpen’s mansion, is disillusioned by Sutpen when he uses violent language to Wash’s granddaughter Milly, who gives birth to Sutpen’s daughter, not his son as he wishes. Although Sutpen was untouchable to Wash because he worshipped Sutpen as a god, Wash tries to touch Sutpen out of anger at his merciless

treatment of Milly. Their conversation: “ [s]tand back. Don’t you touch me, Wash.’ —‘I’m going to tech you, Kernel ’ ” (151) implies that physical touch invalidates not only deification but also the class system.

In addition, it is notable that “[w]ar is supposed to be dissolution of class system,” as Kouich Suwabe points out (385). Wash, who was not allowed to approach to the front door of the house (that reminds us of the fact that Sutpen is rejected from coming to the front door of a rich man’s house during his childhood, which summons his motivation to rise from the gutter), comes inside it because women need male hands (*Absalom, Absalom!* 149). More important than this is that three women, Rosa, Clytie and Judith become one “as though [they] were one being, interchangeable and indiscriminate.” Rosa narrates that there is “*with no distinction among the three of us of age or color but just as to who could build this fire or stir this pot or weed this bed or carry this apron full of corn to the mill for meal with least cost to the general good in time or expense of other duties*” (125). It is interesting to note in the abnormal situation in which only one’s ability matters in order to survive the war, three women observe the mountain code which “measure[s] [a person] by lifting anvils or gouging eyes or how much whiskey you could drink then get up and walk out of the room” (183), which Sutpen followed in the place he is from. Rosa feels that she belongs to Sutpen’s house by forming a trinity with Judith and Clytie and by fulfilling a role in doing household chores.

But the return of Sutpen, a patriarch of the family, deprives Rosa of the reason to stay at Sutpen’s Hundred. Since Rosa does not want to become a burden as an aunt as she was before, marriage with Sutpen will probably give her an excellent chance to be a member of a Sutpen’s in a very natural way. In addition, it

seems that Rosa gazes at Sutpen, a war-hero, with an adoring eye, although her favorable comment to him is limited to “[o]h, he [Sutpen] was brave” (13). Rosa, who either hides or denies the fact that she feels affection for him, says that “*I stayed there [Sutpen’s house] and waited for Thomas Sutpen to come home. Yes. You will say (or believe) that I waited even then to become engaged to him; if I said I did not, you would believe I lied. But I do say I did not*” (124) ; however, it is not to be denied that Rosa waits for him because she has a liking for him (although it is not certain whether she “waited even to become engaged to him” or not). In fact, the engagement with Sutpen satisfies Rosa’s desire to be gazed at and sought as a female by a man, adding to the desire to be a member of the Sutpen family.

Rosa’s desire to bloom in full glory as a female is expressed in the figures of a seed and a chrysalis, which appears before she tries to talk about, though in uncertain terms, her feelings of love of Charles Bon, her niece Judith’s fiancé. Rosa says that her flower of femininity does not bloom at the age of fourteen but that there is a seed sleeping inside her. Let us consider the following quotation:

*But root and urge I do insist and claim, for had I not heired too from all the unsistered Eves since the Snake? Yes, urge I do: warped chrysalis of what blind perfect seed: for who shall say what gnarled forgotten root might not bloom yet with some gloved concentrate more globed and concentrate and heady-perfect because the neglected root was planted warped and lay not dead but merely slept forgot? (115-16)*

Here, we notice, Rosa insists that she is one of the sisters of Eve and that she has a seed which is now sleeping but is going to blossom soon if only fertilized properly. The quotation is important because it shows how deep her desire to grow up to be a woman, being neither a child nor a woman by half measure. We may say that the figure of urge and seed expresses her desire to have physical relationships with men and to carry a child as a female.

There is another piece of evidence to support the idea: followed by the descriptions of the seed, Rosa's body is portrayed both as a fetus in a womb and as a pregnant woman, as I said before. Withdrawing into "a lightless womb," Rosa is like an unborn baby, but on the contrary, she becomes a woman with child, enduring pains of pregnancy: "*I gestate and complete, not aged, just overdue because of some caesarean lack, some cold head-nuzzling forceps of the savage time which should have torn me free, I waited not for light but for that doom which we call female victory which is: endure and then endure, without rhyme or reason or hope of reward—and then endure*" (116). It is a paradox that pregnant Rosa carries not a new life, but herself, one who missed the chance to grow up as a woman. We see that a pregnant body waiting to have a caesarean operation implies a shell of a womb and that Rosa is in agony about an inner conflict over her grotesque desire, which cannot be accomplished.

Although Rosa's love of Bon, who is incorporeal to her, plants a seed of desire into her (it is interesting to note the expressions: "*[t]here must have been some seed he [Bon] left, to cause a child's vacant fairy-tale to come alive in that garden*" [117-18]), Rosa only vicariously experiences romantic feelings by following Judith or by making a wedding dress for her. But the important point to note is that the actual experience of being gazed at, touched by a hand and

proposed to by Sutpen, the man of her dreams, makes Rosa, still a child seeking for light at the age of twenty-one, as well as at fourteen, a light that flashes upon Sutpen. When Rosa narrates: “*as if the barnlot, the path at the instant when he came in sight of me had been a swamp out of which he had emerged without having been forewarned that he was about to enter light*” (131), she replaces herself with the sun which she has been longing for. In fact, Rosa notices that Sutpen does not love her but uses her in order to realize his ambition. Her complicated feelings about marriage with him can be seen in the following quotation:

*But it was not love: I do not claim that; I hold no brief for myself, I do not excuse it. I could have said that he had needed, used me; why should I rebel now, because he would use me more? but I did not say it; I could say this time, I do not know, and I would tell the truth. Because I do not know. He was gone; I did not even know that either since there is a metabolism of the spirit as well as of the entrails, in which the stored accumulations of long time burn, generate, create and break some maidenhead of the ravening meat; ay, in a second's time; —yes, lost all shibboleth erupting of cannot, will not, never will in one red instant's fierce obliteration.*

(131-32)

The extract shows that insightful Rosa correctly perceives Sutpen's hidden agenda immediately after she feels that she is being looked at by him. Rosa's confusion: “*I do not know, and I would tell the truth. Because I do not know*”

describes that after forty-three years it is still incomprehensible for Rosa that Sutpen inhumanly attempts to marry her only if she gives birth to a male child and that she was engaged with such a cruel man once, although briefly. It will be clear from the extract that Rosa's conflict is expressed with a figure of "creating and breaking the hymen." Here we see that Rosa is wavering between several values and emotions: (1) between her longing for marriage with Sutpen and rejection to be a sacrifice of his ambitions; (2) between a desire to have physical touch with men as a female and hatred for sexual intercourse (as we have seen before, Rosa originally bears a grudge against "the entire male principle" which cause her mother's death); (3) between obligation to lose her virginity and hesitation to do so (it is possible to interpret her desperate cry: "*some blind desperate female weapon's frenzied slash whose very gaping wound had cried 'No! No!' and 'Help!' and 'Save me!'*" (132) as her fear of being deprived of her virginity).

But in the end, Rosa contents herself with Sutpen's proposal (that happens before hearing his insulting suggestion which Rosa cannot tell to Quentin). The propose of "*[t]hat minute's exchanged look in a kitchen garden, that hand upon my head in his daughter's bedroom*" (132) is romantic enough for Rosa to accept it. On one hand, she says that: "*O furious mad old man, I hold no substance that will fit your dream but I can give you airy space and scope for your delirium*" (135-36) and is adequately aware that both his recklessness to plan to have another son in order to revive the Sutpen family and her own miserableness to offer an empty space, that is, her womb, to carry his child. But on the other hand, conversely, Rosa cannot help but repeat the phrase "*I was that sun*" (135); that is to say, she treats herself as a sacred light instead of worshiping Sutpen as

a god. We can say that she experiences the second birth, getting out of the dark womb by being light by herself. However, as soon as she finally comes into being, she confines herself again in the house of shell because of Sutpen's rejection. Rosa has been wavering between madness and serenity for forty-three years.

## 5. Conclusion

It follows from what has been said that Rosa is always torn between two opposite emotions or values, first through oppression by her father and her aunt, secondly through rejection by Clytie and Judith and the following breaking of the eggshell, and thirdly through propose and insult by Sutpen. Rosa maintains her hatred for Sutpen, and the accumulated hatred becomes ardent desire to watch the end of the Sutpen family. And at the end of the story when Rosa arrives at Sutpen's house with Quentin, who hesitates to break and enter it, she says, "I'm going inside." "Give me the hatchet" (294) and comes into her own, showing the strength for the first time in her life. This scene is important not only in the sense that she figuratively loses her virginity, but also in the sense that Rosa becomes masculine at last, in spite of the fact that she has been longing for femininity for a long time. When Clytie says the same words and holds Rosa's arm in exactly the same way as forty-three years ago, she "turned on the step and struck Clytie to the floor with a full-armed blow like a man would have, and turned and went on up to the stairs" (295) this time. At that moment, Rosa touches Clytie by her own hand, thereby getting out of the house of shell, not with an empty vessel but with a body via her determined will, transferring the categorical division between men and women. Rosa's body, which has kept going as I mentioned at the end of section two, finally arrives at the goal after forty-three years. The breaking down of the

shell following physical contact does not stop her again and Rosa experiences the third, true birth. We can say that the way in which Rosa moves from a grotesque situation (in which she wavers between conflicting values and emotions) to another grotesque (which obscures the division between sexes) is exactly like the grotesqueness of Milkman Dead in Morrison's *Song of Solomon* as we will see in the next section.

## II Without Ever Leaving the Ground, She Could Fly

### 1. Introduction

While Faulkner's Rosa overcomes her inner conflicts when she chooses to be a man by her own free will, Morrison's Milkman cannot attain masculinity without the sacrifice of women. Morrison's third novel *Song of Solomon*, which is dedicated to her "Daddy," is a challenging work in which Morrison for the first and only time (except for her tenth *Home*) explores the masculinity of a male protagonist. It is surely a "radical shift" ("Forward" XII) from *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*, that are written from female points of view. Motivated by the death of her own dearly loved father, Morrison writes a "genuinely autobiographical" (Duvall, *Identifying* 72) novel, which is based on the actual life of her maternal grandfather John Solomon Willis. However, the transition from female voice to male one does not necessarily mean that the novel should be approached from male points of view; rather the important point is that it is concerned with the recovery of masculinity *through the conflicts between men and women*.

While it is difficult to attach only one meaning to the "flight of Solomon," the main subject of the novel, because Morrison makes it ambiguous in the frame

of myth on purpose, the epigraph most clearly demonstrates that we should approach the problem from two points of view: from the fliers (men) and from those left (women). The epigraph bears a double meaning as follows:

*The fathers may soar*

*And the children may know their names*

Here, we notice, children grow without knowing their fathers (only their names might be told to their children if mothers let them know) because they leave by themselves. It is a praise for fathers who bravely free themselves from slavery; at the same time, it is also a reproach for leaving their wives and children on the ground, abandoning their responsibilities as a member of family. Left behind mothers have to raise children on their own.

In a sense, the motif of men's running away from nagging women is counted as one of "traditional" in American novels, which Leslie Fiedler satirically describes as "books that turn from society to nature or nightmare out of a desperate need to avoid the facts of wooing, marriage, and child-bearing" (Fiedler 25). In spite of the fact that Morrison is neither a white nor a male author, her protagonist Milkman is definitely a Fiedlerian character in the sense that he cannot develop desirable relationships with women as an adult man (and his homosocial connection with his best friend Guitar can be added to this). In *Song of Solomon*, women's characteristic of restricting men's freedom is expressed through misogynistic view of Guitar. I will quote at full length as follows:

"And black women, they want your whole self. Love, they call it,

and understanding. 'Why don't you *understand* me?' What they mean is, Don't love anything on earth except me. They say, 'Be responsible,' but what they mean is, Don't go anywhere where I ain't. You try to climb Mount Everest, they'll tie up your ropes. Tell them you want to go to the bottom of the sea—just for a look—they'll hide your oxygen tank. Or you don't even have to go that far. Buy a horn and say you want to play. Oh, they love the music, but only after you pull eight at the post office. Even if you make it, even if you stubborn and mean and you get to the top of Mount Everest, or you do play and you good, real good—that still ain't enough. You blow your lungs out on the horn and they want what breath you got left to hear about how you love them. They want your full attention. Take a risk and they say you not for real. That you don't love them. They won't even let you risk your own life, man, your *own* life—unless it's over them. You can't even die unless it's about them. What good is a man's life if he can't even choose what to die for?" (*Song of Solomon* 222-23)

We see, hinted at in the extract from Guitar's complaining about black women, how possessive the love of a (black) woman can be, wanting to own the other person she loves. It is likely that Morrison attaches a desire for exclusive possession of the loved other not to men but to women; for example, in *Sula*, when Sula, a selfless heroine who is indifferent to other people, falls in first love with Ajax, she begins to wait for him and wants to be the sole object of his love, which causes him, a free spirit, to run away from her. Here, we see that Morrison

explores the problem of “owning” oneself and the other person whom he or she loves, which is a dilemma of deep love, a characteristic which Morrison attaches to her female characters. We shall come back to this problem later.

Male voices, however, do not always dominate the story in *Song of Solomon*; in fact, Morrison’s female characters are not only “monsters of virtue or bitchery, symbols of the rejection of fear of sexuality” (Fiedler 24) but also rise in revolt against the patriarchal oppression of women. An example of this is the angry words of Lena, one of two older sisters of Milkman. When Milkman tells their father that another sister, Corinthians, is secretly meeting a poor man in order to part the two lovers, Lena confesses her accumulating hatred for her father and brother in acid tones:

“Where do you get the *right* to decide our lives?”

“Lena, cool it. I don’t want to hear it.”

“I’ll tell you where. From that hog’s gut that hungs down between your legs. Well, let me tell you something, baby brother: you will need more than that. I don’t know where you will get it or who will give it to you, but mark my words, you will need more than that” (*Song of Solomon* 215).

If we notice that a penis is a phallic symbol of patriarchy, we will find out that Lena’s referring to his penis as a “hog’s gut” plainly shows her biting criticism for patriarchy of her family. The extract above is an important scene in which Lena expresses her true feelings for the first and only time in the story and creates a potential for the decline of patriarchal authority by making a fool of its symbol,

using the figure of the hog's gut.

Thus, now we understand that the protagonist Milkman gets into a difficult predicament: he is caught up in a struggle between men and women. When his father and mother make him listen to different versions of their past, he does not know which he should believe, his father's or mother's. In this sense, Milkman is "separated" between "Father's narrative" and "Mother's narrative," like Rosa is separated between patriarchal oppression (of Father's) and female desires (of Mother's). Viewed in this light, the common understanding that *Song of Solomon* is a Bildungsroman in which a young black man acquires his sense of self through finding strong connection with his ancestor takes on another aspect; that is to say, the novel is a story of feminized protagonist who recovers masculinity by finding out that he belongs to his *fathers*.

The purpose of this section is to explore conflicts between diametrical opposite values in *Song of Solomon*, which lead to Milkman's recovering masculinity in the end. With struggles between men and women being at the base, various factors clash in the story; the way in which values goes back and forth between two opposites, arriving at neither one is what I call grotesque. While we concentrated on the conflicts within one character (Rosa) in *Absalom, Absalom!*, confrontations between binary oppositions in the story, involving several characters are our objects of study with Morrison: the conflicts between fathers and mothers, femininity and masculinity, race and individual, love and violence, hunting and wilderness, and flying and being earth bound. The ambiguities in those motifs make *Song of Solomon* a masterpiece by Morrison in basically a similar way to *Absalom, Absalom!*

## 2. Father / Mother

First of all, we have to inquire into the conflicts between Milkman's father and mother in the Dead family, which is the main cause of Milkman's dilemma. In the town in the State of Michigan, Macon Dead, junior who is called Milkman is born into a rich family, the father of which earns a lot of money by renting houses. His father, Macon Dead, senior is a person shunned by neighbors because of his greediness. As a landlord, he collects rent from poor black people mercilessly and does not care about their difficult circumstances. Morrison depicts the middle-class sense of values of Macon in a sarcastic utterance. One of examples of this is Macon's habit of carrying keys in his pockets. He carries all the keys of houses which he owns in his pockets and feels calm because those keys are evidence of his wealth. When Macon wanted to marry a daughter of the only black doctor in the town as a proof of his success at the age of twenty-five, he managed to ask for the doctor's permission to keep company with his daughter, because "two keys in his pocket" kept him from "float[ing] away at the doctor's first word: 'Yes?'" or "melt[ing] like new wax under the heat of that pale eye" (22). For Macon, the two keys in his pocket prove that he is "a colored man of property" and that he is appropriate to marry the daughter of the most respected black man in the town. However, readers will find out that Macon's belief that "the magic had lain in the two keys" (23) is a fallacy; in fact, the doctor wants to get rid of his daughter, whose affection for her father has become annoying and is inappropriate (which means sexual). The point is that the keys have no magic power at all; on the contrary, they emphasize the futility of Macon's adhering to his property in an ironic way.

One may say that Macon Dead, senior is not ashamed of his arrogance and

mercilessness to neighbors and his own family members in the same way as Thomas Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom!*, whom Morrison criticizes in her master's thesis as "blinded by isolation to the point of not even recognizing his own evil" ("Virginia" 39). However, Morrison opens up possibility of displaying Macon's humanity when Macon feels lonely, seeing his ghostly houses, as follows:

Scattered here and there, his houses stretched up beyond him like squat ghosts with hooded eyes. He didn't like to look at them in this light. During the day they were reassuring to see; now they did not seem to belong to him at all—in fact he felt as though the houses were in league with one another to make him feel like the outsider, the propertyless, landless wanderer. It was this feeling of loneliness that made him decide to take a shortcut back to Not Doctor Street, even though to do so would lead him past his sister's house. (*Song of Solomon* 27)

In the extract, we see that the houses that are the symbol of his wealth are portrayed as something sinister just as the Sutpen house in *Absalom, Absalom!* But as Lorie Watkins Fulton points out, there is a difference between the two: while Sutpen does not realize his sinful acts in his life at all, Macon feels slightly uneasy about his deeds and visits his sister's house to find solace from seeing three women singing, behaving as they like. Macon finds out that those three enjoy peace and freedom harmoniously, which does not exist in the Dead family.<sup>13</sup>

With the exception of the episode above, Macon is always a repressive patriarch; in addition to the two keys, another example of his adhering to his

property concerns his car. Macon drives the big Packard on Sunday afternoon because “it was a way to satisfy himself that he was indeed a successful man” (31). It is necessarily for him to show off his car, another evidence of his wealth, but the fact that “the Packard had no real lived life” (33) is accentuated in a series of negative sentences, such as “[h]e [Macon] hailed no one and no one hailed him. There was never a sudden braking and backing up to shout or laugh with a friend. No beer bottles or ice cream cones poked from the open windows. Nor did a baby boy stand up to pee out of them” (32). We may recall that Morrison describes Macon’s car in the same technique in which she depicts the misery of the Breedlove family in *the Bluest Eye*.<sup>14</sup> The point I wish to emphasize is that the same nature of unhappiness is given to the two families, Deads and Breedloves, although they are just the opposite (the rich and the poor); that is, in Morrison’s novels readers will find happiness not in material property but in the human heart.

Then we will explore the distressful situation in which Macon’s wife, Ruth, is in as a wife and mother in the Dead family. Due to her husband’s cruel treatment of her, she cannot nurture self-respect and is starved of love from others. In the Dead family, Macon’s abuse of the power as a patriarch causes anxiety to his wife and his daughters (“[s]olid, rumbling, likely to erupt without prior notice, Macon kept each member of his family awkward with fear. His hatred of his wife glittered and sparkled in every word he spoke to her. . . and his wife, Ruth, began her days stunned into stillness by her husband’s contempt and ended them wholly animated by it” [10-11]). It must be noted that “the large water mark” (11) on the table in the house of Dead fills two roles at one and the same time for Ruth. On one hand, it shows that the feelings of husband and wife are

miles apart, because it always reminds Ruth that her husband rejects her arrangements of driftwood in spite of her efforts to fill the vase which is placed to hide the watermark. After Ruth removes the vase, the exposed water mark reminds her of her husband's coldness. However, in a peculiar way, the unpleasant feeling makes her feel that she lives not in a dream but in a real life. It is interesting to note that Macon's rejection is expressed by his complaints about Ruth's cooking. It is likely that Morrison expresses the lack in confidence of her female characters through their being incapable of cooking. When Ruth tells him how beautiful she thinks the driftwood, "[h]er husband looked at the driftwood with its lacy beige seaweed, and without moving his head, said, 'Your chicken is red at the bone. And there is probably a potato dish that is supposed to have lumps in it. Mashed ain't the dish'" (12). Because her mother died early and did not teach her how to cook, Ruth cannot find pleasure in supplying food for her husband and feel a sense of fulfillment as Macon's wife, because he takes for granted that a wife satisfies her husband by cooking.

Since she fails to fill the role of Macon's wife, Ruth derives her pleasure from other roles: as a daughter of a father and as a mother of a son. Her incestuous relationships with her father and her son is accompanied not only by psychological love but also by physical touches. "One of her two secret indulgences" (13) which keeps her life tolerable is to visit secretly at midnights the cemetery in which her father was buried. When Milkman follows her and finds out her secret habit, she tells him that her father is the only person who ever cared about her:

“. . . because the fact is that I am a small woman. I don't mean little; I mean small, and I'm small because I was pressed small. I

lived in a great big house that pressed me into a small package. I had no friends, only schoolmates who wanted to touch my dresses and my white silk stockings. But I didn't think I'd ever need a friend because I had him [Ruth's father]. I was small, but he was big. The only person who ever really cared whether I lived or died . . ." (124).

The way in which Ruth is crushed in a suffocating house reminds us of Rosa Coldfield in *Absalom, Absalom!*, but the difference between the two is their attitude toward their father: Rosa hates her father, while Ruth adores hers. Ruth's desire for him becomes grotesque when she lies down with her father's dead body being naked. Although Milkman cannot believe his father's story about his mother's necrophiliac act at first, we may say that Macon is under no illusion about his wife's abnormal love of her father since not only Macon but also her father notices it when he finds "the ecstasy that always seemed to be shining in Ruth's face when he [Ruth's father] bent on kiss her—an ecstasy he felt inappropriate to the occasion" (23).

The other one of her secret indulgences is to nurse his son, who is big enough that "his legs dangling about to the floor" (13), during her husband's absence. Ruth's nursing is depicted as if it were a sexual act:

In late afternoon, before her husband closed his office and came home, she [Ruth] called her son to her. When he came into the little room she unbuttoned her blouse and smiled. He was too young to be dazzled by her nipples, but he was old enough to be

bored by the flat taste of mother's milk, so he came reluctantly, as to a chore, and lay as he had at least once each day of his life in his mother's arms, and tried to pull the thin, faintly sweet milk from her flesh without hurting her with his teeth.

She felt him. His restraint, his courtesy, his indifference, all of which pushed her into fantasy. She had the distinct impression that his lips were pulling from her a thread of light. (13)

The purpose of this quotation is to show that Ruth's nursing of her son, who is too old for mother's milk, is a kind of child abuse and can be interpreted as a mother's seduction of her unwilling son. Starving of affection, instead of her husband, she seduces her son, whom she was given by her last sexual intercourse with her husband. Furthermore, if we regard Ruth's nipple as a penis and her milk as sperm in a figurative sense, we can say that there is a reversal of sexes between the two: the rape of feminized son by a masculinized mother. Although that might be a slightly exaggerated way of putting, it is obvious that Milkman suffers trauma from being nursed for his mother's sexual pleasure, as we shall see later.

It is likely that his mother's distorted affection for Milkman plants in his mind a vague fear of women. On one hand, he takes over his father's role as the head of family by knocking him down and he tends to think little of feelings of women, taking it for granted that they serve him, which his sister Lena blames him for by using a figure of a hog's gut as we have already seen. But, on the other hand, he fears women, though unconsciously. In fact, his masculinity is seriously damaged both by his mother's nursing and by his shameful nickname "Milkman," which is imposed on him because of her infamous act (Freddie the janitor finds out

the scene and makes it widely known<sup>15</sup>). Milkman's recurring dream serves as evidence of this fear; that is, in the dream, what chases after him is a witch:

He [Milkman] had had dreams as a child, dreams every child had, of the witch who chased him down dark alleys, between lawn trees, and finally into rooms from which he could not escape. Witches in black dresses and red underskirts; witches with pink eyes and green lips, tiny witches, long rangy witches, frowning witches, smiling witches, screaming witches and laughing witches, witches that flew, witches that ran, and some that merely glided on the ground. (239)

Although Milkman attempts to escape from creepy witches in the dream, when he sees a "real witch," Circe (not only her appearance but also her name shows that she is one of the witches) in the house of Butler, the killer of Milkman's grandfather, he comes to her and holds her voluntarily. I need to quote the following scene at full length because it is essential to show Milkman's inner conflict:

So when he [Milkman] saw the woman at the top of the stairs there was no way for him to resist climbing up toward her outstretched hands, her fingers spread wide for him, her mouth gaping open for him, her eyes devouring him. In a dream you climb the stairs. She grabbed him, grabbed his shoulders and pulled him right up against her and tightened her arms around him. Her head

came to his chest and the feel of that hair under his chin, the dry bony hands like steel springs rubbing his back, her floppy mouth babbling into his vest, made him dizzy, but he knew that always, always at the very instant of the pounce or the gummy embrace he would wake with a scream and an erection. Now he had only the erection. (239)

Immediately before he catches the sight of Circe, after he vomits because of the terrible smell of animals (it is the smell of Circe's dogs), he is tempted by "a sweet spicy perfume" "[l]ike ginger root—pleasant, clean, seductive" (239) and goes inside the house. The tempting smell leads Milkman to the realization of his horrible dream, but he climbs the stairs this time, not running away. Paralyzed in fear of castration, the embrace of the witch gives him an erection, contradictory to his fear.

Unlike with his mother, Milkman's relationships with his father are not so complicated. Like many other characters of Morrison, his sense of inferiority is expressed as a physical defect. To be concrete, Milkman cannot stand straight since one of his legs is shorter than the other, and he is so ashamed of his deformity that he struts so as not to make others notice it. Although Macon is a perfect model of a grown man for Milkman, he gives up trying to emulate him because of his leg; on the contrary, he tries to "differ from him [his father] as much as he dares" (63) in his life-style. A major turning point both for Milkman and for the narrative comes at the time in which he knocks down his father, after his father hits his mother. At first, the event seems to be a standard procedure of struggles between a father and a son, the traditional theme of stories in every

form (“[j]ust as the father brimmed with contradictory feelings as he crept along the wall—humiliation, anger, and a grudging feelings of pride in his son—so the son felt his own contradictions. There was the pain and shame of seeing his father crumple before any man—even himself [68]”). But situation changes when Macon confides the reason for his contempt for his wife to Milkman. “Father’s narrative” is about his mother’s incestuous connection with her father, which resurrects Milkman’s traumatic memory of his mother’s nursing. In his memory, he wants his mother to look at him but she does not; in addition, her love of him, which seemed to be natural to that day, disappears.

After listening to his father’s stories about his mother and his grandfather, Milkman becomes suspicious about her behavior, which he has not cared about at all before. Following Ruth going out furtively at midnight, Milkman finds out “her secret indulgence” of talking to her father’s grave. On their way home, Milkman has to listen to “Mother’s narrative” this time. According to Ruth’s version of their past, his father takes his grandfather’s life by throwing away his medicine, which is the fact Macon did not want to share with Milkman. To Milkman’s painful surprise, Macon attempts to kill not only his grandfather but also Milkman before he is born. It can be said that Macon tries to eliminate two men (although one of which is not born yet) whom his wife loves (will love) more than her husband. Although Ruth does not tell her son what Macon did in order to get her to abort in detail,<sup>16</sup> the fact that his own father attempted to kill him is shocking enough for Milkman to sink into his “eagerness for death” (120) more and more.

The point to observe is that the battle between Ruth and Macon over their son is compared to the ones between “Indians and cowboys” as follows:

He [Milkman] became a plain on which, like the cowboys and Indians in the movies, she [Ruth] and her husband fought. Each one befuddled by the values of the other. Each one convinced of his own purity and outraged by the idiocy he saw in the other. She was the Indian, of course, and lost her land, her customs, her integrity to the cowboy and became a spread-eagled footstool resigned to her fate and holding fast to tiny irrelevant defiances. (132-33)

The extract is important because it plainly shows the characteristic of the conflicts between mother and father in *Song of Solomon*. Ruth, whose son is almost taken away from her by Macon before he is born, is compared to the Indian who lost their land, while patriarchal Macon to the cowboy, the conqueror. What is important here is that neither cares about the land, Milkman, who is caught up in a struggle between his parents. Both of them justify themselves by laying bare their feelings, winning him to his or her side, not paying attention to how he feels about their deep conflicts.

As the last name "Dead" implies, Milkman is a pitiful protagonist in the sense that everyone (his father Macon, his sister Lena, his girlfriend Hagar, his best friend Guitar) except his mother Ruth and his aunt Pilate attempts to take his life. In the first place, he is born on the day Robert Smith, a life insurance agent, commits suicide. Since his jumping off from the roof surprises pregnant Ruth and stimulates labor earlier than the scheduled date, we can say that his birth is closely connected with death. Milkman's desperate yearning to fly in the sky comes not only from his grandfather Solomon but also from Robert Smith, another ancestor who flies into air in order to kill himself.

### 3. Gun / Knife

The conflicts between men and women, which bind Milkman firmly, are depicted as the contrast between a gun and knife in other parts of the novel. Like Milkman, who is absorbed by the idea of death but does not commit suicide (it seems that Milkman is a passive protagonist until his leap at the end of the novel), there is another male character, Henry Porter, who tries to jump off the roof and kill himself like Robert Smith did at the beginning of the story. But it is doubtful as to his seriousness about carrying out his plan, because he attempts to attract people's attentions and tells them to bring him a woman to have sex with before he dies. Porter's empty threat ("I want to fuck! Send me up somebody to fuck! Hear me? Send me up somebody, I tell ya, or I'ma blow my brains out" [25]) does not frighten the women who have iron nerves, so Porter gives up using a gun and pulls out his genitals instead of the gun: "[s]truggling to get the right angle, he [Porter] was suddenly distracted. He leaned his shotgun on the window sill, pulled out his penis and in a high arc, peed over the heads of the women, making them scream and run in a panic that the shotgun had not been able to create" (25). It must be noted that Porter's using his penis as a weapon against women is symbolic way of exaggerating his masculinity to the women who look down on him, although it fails. Unable to act out a desire to have a sexual intercourse with women, he resorts to ludicrous behavior lacking masculinity: urination, as a replacement of ejaculation.

Although Porter's gun is not a menace for women, to carry a gun is supposed to be a privilege only to men in *Song of Solomon*. Women, inferior to men in physical strength, have knives, instead of guns, in order to protect themselves and their children. A strong woman who has a knife and protects her

daughter and granddaughter is Pilate. Her lifestyle is beyond the dominant values: her clothing is unique (a long black dress, sailor's cap, no stockings, and men's shoes); added to this, she establishes a maternal household, refusing to submit to the marriage system. As the head of the family, she earns a living by home brewing. Having a stout, tall figure like a man, she shows physical strength as well when a man hits her daughter Reba. Although everybody in the neighborhood knows that Pilate will do anything to protect her family, the man who hits Reva is a newcomer. After "jab[bing] it [the knife] skillfully, about a quarter of an inch through his shirt into the skin" (93), she tells him how a mother feels when her children gets hurt. We see that Pilate has unusual strength which other mothers do not have, but she speaks for them, who are oppressed by men.

Unlike Pilate, her granddaughter Hagar fails to use a knife and attack a man who hurts her. Hagar has been having relationships with Milkman for fourteen years, but Milkman is not serious enough to marry her and damps her mercilessly. Although desperate Hagar stalks him and attempts to kill him with a knife, she cannot strike it on Milkman. Milkman, wishing her death without doing anything himself, only curses her while she is standing with the knife in her hand, at a loss: " 'if you keep your hands just that way,' he said, 'and then bring them down straight, straight and fast, you can drive that knife right smack in your cunt. Why don't you do that? Then all your problems will be over.' He patted her cheek and turned away from her wide, dark, pleading, hollow eyes" (130). Here, we see that when Milkman attacks Hagar with violent words, the knife becomes his weapon instead of hers, which hurts her femininity (her vagina) as a phallic symbol of Milkman. Since Hagar is deprived even of a knife, which seems to inferior to a gun in the first place, one of the conflicts between men and women,

that is, between Milkman and Hagar, ends in a victory of a man.

#### 4. Love / Violence

Although as we have seen in *Song of Solomon* we find recurrent clashes between men and women, we should not overlook that there is love of each other at the base of their conflicts. But when both Robert Smith and Henry Porter declare their love of all others before attempting suicide, the meaning of “love” is problematic because the love for the human race is a slogan which a secret society “the Seven Days” invents in order to justify their violent acts. “The Seven Days” is an underground organization which Robert Smith, Henry Porter, and Milkman’s best friend Guitar join. It comprises seven black men who take revenge for the murder of black people in the same way white people kill the victims. Guitar’s fanatic belief that white people are naturally evil is problematic, since he regards one’s race not as skin color but as decisive cause of one’s personality. While he calls white people the “unnatural enemy” (156), he justifies his violence by saying “[w]hat I’m doing ain’t about hating white people. It’s about loving us. About loving you. My whole life is love” (159). His love of a whole race is a dangerous idea which leads to the disappearance of the division between individuals, which black people have suffered as ex-slaves. Guitar’s idea of race as one single entity contradicts their aspiration for one’s individual name in the novel.<sup>17</sup>

We may note, in passing, that Henry Porter recovers his masculinity when he stops loving all people as a member of the Seven Days and starts to love a woman as an individual. In the scene which we have examined, he attempts to kill himself (although he is drunk and not serious) because he is tired of killing white people and of performing his dangerous mission as a member of criminal

organization without having intimate relationships with women (the society forbids them to do so in order to keep their secrets). But by falling in love with Corinthians, one of Milkman's older sisters, he chooses to love her instead of a whole race. The physical relationship between Porter and Corinthians recovers not only his masculinity but also her self-respect:<sup>18</sup>

Corinthians looked down at him. "Is this for me?" she asked.

"Yes," he said. "Yes, this is for you."

"Porter."

"This is . . . for you. Instead of roses. And silk underwear and bottles of perfume."

"Porter."

"Instead of chocolate creams in a heart-shaped box. Instead of a big house and a great big car. Instead of long trips . . ."

"Porter."

". . . in a clean white boat."

"No."

"Instead of picnics . . ."

"No."

". . . and fishing . . ."

"No."

". . . and being old together on a porch."

"No."

"This is for you, girl. Oh, yes. This is for you" (200).

Their conversation in the extract appears to be a romantic exchange of words before they have sexual contact for the first time, but we need to remind ourselves of other two extracts, the ones about a “hog’s gut” and Porter’s urination, in order to understand what it means. As we have seen, Lena’s calling a genital organ of a man a “hog’s gut” expresses her fierce anger about the structures of a patriarchal society which has tortured her sister Corinthians and herself, but she does not know that it is also this “hog’s gut” which salvages her sister from self-contempt by being loved by a man as a person. Here, we see the conflicting situation in which Corinthians is oppressed by a “hog’s gut” and also rescued by it. Furthermore, Porter recovers his masculinity, too, which is seriously damaged when he tries to display his strength as a man by urinating in desperation. At that time, his penis was surely a “hog’s gut,” but it changes into something meaningful both to Corinthians and himself which is able to heal her psychological wounds. What makes this healing possible is not love for all but love for a woman as an individual.

On the other hand, Guitar’s love of race is closely connected with the problem of possession, which is another theme of *Song of Solomon*. After Guitar’s complaint about women quoted at the beginning of this section, Milkman asks him why he worries in the first place about the colored women despite his criticism. Guitar’s answer is highly sexist: “[b]ecause she’s *mine*” (223). For Guitar, to love a woman means to own her; for example, he has a great affection for his family, which Milkman does not have, but he cares about them because they *belong to him*.

Not only Guitar but also female characters, Ruth and Hagar confuse love with possession. When two women confront each other over Milkman, Hagar

declares that “[h]e [Milkman] is my home in this world” and Ruth answers back: “and I am his [home]” (137). These lines mean that Hagar loves him so much that she belongs to him, while his mother Ruth says that her son Milkman belongs to her, because she gave birth to him and nurtured him as a mother. What has to be noticed is that Morrison expresses one’s deep love of the other as a desire to possess the loved one.<sup>19</sup>

The person who is liberated from the love as possession is Pilate, an important character in the novel. I find her important because she is a grotesque character who stands on the borderline of opposite values, between men and women, life and death, or soil and sky. Her stout figure and physical strength is like a man’s as we have seen; in addition, the fact that she has no navel shows that she “has achieved a special purchase on patriarchal forms of social organization” (Duvall, *Identifying* 92). Furthermore her view of life and death is very unique in the sense that she considers that it is the person’s free will that decides one’s death:

“You think people should live forever?”

“Some people. Yeah.”

“Who’s to decide? Which ones should live and which ones shouldn’t?”

“The people themselves. Some folks want to live forever. Some don’t. I believe they decide on it anyway. People die when they want to and if they want to. Don’t nobody have to die if they don’t want to” (*Song of Solomon* 140).

Pilate is a typical female character of Morrison, one who inherits the legacy from African-American mothers and stands outside of the Western dominant sense of values. More noteworthy is that the ambiguity of her ideas becomes a countermeasure against restrictions of binarism, in a different way than which the selfless heroine Sula does.

As John Duvall correctly points out, Pilate (her name implies she is another pilot) is a mentor of Milkman. She teaches him that “flying is a state of being rather than a physical act” (Duvall, *Identifying* 96) and Milkman realizes the lesson when he finds out that “[w]ithout ever leaving the ground, she could fly.” Pilate’s dying words: “I wish I’d a knowed more people. I would of loved ’em all. If I’d knowed more, I would a loved more” (*Song of Solomon* 336) will be very important if we compare them with the suspicious love of the Seven Days: “I love ya all.” While Guitar and other members of the organization regards “love for all” as an excuse of possession and violence, Pilate’s love “transcends self and self-love (Duvall, *Identifying* 96) and love as possession. Although Macon tells his son to own himself as a grown man, it is a mistake of Macon to think that a decent man should “possess” property, including himself. Pilate, on the other hand, teaches Milkman that it is futile to try to own somebody, including oneself. Her all-encompassing love is grotesque because it absorbs others into herself so that the division between the self and the other disappears. It is likely that chewing things is act of love for her, although it is not literal act of eating, which dissolves the boundary of self and the other. In *Song of Solomon*, the grotesque nature of eating is not fully described yet, but Morrison develops the theme later in *Paradise* as we shall see later in chapter six.

## 5. Hunting / Wilderness

Lastly, we will examine the conflicts between men and women in view of the contrast in hunting and wilderness. While Milkman recovers his integrated sense of self through hunting in the woods, his former lover Hagar's hunting of Milkman fails. That is to say, the hunts are men's privilege (it is a matter of course because only a man has a gun, a weapon for hunting, as we have seen), although women are supposed to be the object of hunting, or rather, they are wilderness itself, which men try to conquer through their hunting.

While Pilate was born wild and grew in the woods, literally, her granddaughter Hagar has a wilderness inside her mind. But before turning to a closer examination of Hagar's inner wilderness, a few remarks should be made concerning the nature of the relationship between Milkman and her. She and Milkman have kept each other's company for as long as fourteen years, and Hagar, who was not serious at the beginning, gets absorbed in their relationship. In spite of the fact that Milkman left her, she loves him deeply to the extent that she "looked for a weapon and then slipped out of her house and went to find the man for whom she believed she had been born into the world." Without Milkman, her body becomes nothing for her as follows: "[n]othing could pull her mind away from the mouth Milkman was not kissing, the feet that were not running toward him, the eye that no longer beheld him, the hands that were not touching him" (*Song of Solomon* 127). We can say that Hagar lacks a strong sense of self because of her psychological dependence on the other. As we have seen, Hagar's love is the same as Guitar's, in the sense that she gives the right of ownership of oneself into the hands of the one she loves; to put the matter simply, she wants the other to own herself. The point to observe is that the problem of ownership develops into the

one of the distance between self and the other, which we mainly deal with in this work. The strong love of Morrison's female characters turns into the desire to possess the other or be possessed by the other; finally, it becomes grotesque enough to get rid of the boundary between self and the other, fusing into one. Hagar's desire does not reach that stage: she "give[s] dominion of [one]self to another," which is "a wicked thing," according to Florens' mother. (*A Mercy* 165)

Hagar dies a disappointed woman unlike Florens, who abandons her blind love by following her mother's advice in the end; however, Hagar has an inner wilderness like Florens in *A Mercy*. We can assume that since her childhood, it is affection from others that Hagar has been "hungry" (*Song of Solomon* 48) for (Morrison only writes that Hagar is hungry not for food), in spite of her mother and grandmother's constant devotion to her. After being rejected by Milkman, her desolate mind is compared to the wilderness, which shows that Hagar's despair causes a natural disaster in her mind; in addition what is important is that in the wilderness inside herself, she also has a predator, which she "hadn't the least bit of control over" (136). She says that she does not want to kill Milkman at all, but she cannot stop the predator inside her. It is said to be a shark or an anaconda which brings down the prey and swallows it whole. It is possible that Hagar's "anaconda love" (137) implies her desire to assimilate Milkman into herself and become one without the boundary between them. It is interesting to note that as well as the metaphor of a predator, Hagar's intent to murder Milkman is expressed in figure of a witch, a bride, a queen or a courtesan who is going to kill a man.<sup>20</sup> The fact is that Hagar's fierceness, which is compared either to violent animals or to various types of female killers, provides further evidence for Milkman's fear for women, as well as a nursing mother and witches in his dream.

However, the predator which lurks in the wilderness of Hagar fails to hunt Milkman: she cannot kill him and dies in despair (the last time she saw him, he says deprecatory words as we have seen). That is to say, in *Song of Solomon*, female predators are overpowered by hunters and her wilderness is a place in which men hunt with guns in their hand. Furthermore, Milkman recovers his integrated sense of self through the ritual of hunting in the woods in the last part of the novel. When Milkman runs away from home to the small valley town, called Shalimar, in Virginia, in order to find a relative on the paternal side, he takes part in a hunt with villagers. At first he pretends to act tough with men who Milkman thinks harbor ill feeling toward him because of his showing off his property; however, during the hunt in the sacred wilderness, suddenly he realizes that he is responsible for not only the villagers' attitudes toward him, but also for others' attitude including his parents and Hagar. It is likely that to be alone in the wilderness has mysterious effect which makes Milkman a new person:

Under the moon, on the ground, alone, with not even the sound of baying dogs to remind him that he was with other people, his self—the cocoon that was “personality”—gave away. . . . There was nothing here to help him—not his money, his car, his father's reputation, his suit, or his shoes. In fact they hampered him. . . . His watch and his two hundred dollars would be of no help out here, where all a man had was what he was born with, or had learned to use. And endurance. Eyes, ears, nose, taste, touch—and some other sense that he knew he did not have: an ability to separate out, of all of things there were to sense, the one that life

itself might depend on. (277)

Here, we notice, the word “personality” is used to refer to almost the same meaning of “property,” which hampers him in fact. The important ability to sense, which Claudia in *The Bluest Eye* has almost instinctively, is what Milkman lacks and it is necessary for him to realize his lack through the ritual of hunting in order to attain manhood.

In the following scene, through hearing the voices of hunters, called “before language,” that were also used in ancient days when hunters communicated with animals on an equal basis, Milkman empathizes with Guitar and understands that the woods, hunters, and killing are “what Guitar had missed about the South” (278). Immediately after his full understanding of Guitar, however, Guitar appears and attempts to choke the life out of Milkman, which Milkman escapes by a hairsbreadth.<sup>21</sup> The following success in the hunting, that is, the death of a prey, a bobcat, makes a striking contrast to the surviving of Milkman. To put it another way, while Guitar fails in his hunt for Milkman, Milkman’s hunting ends successfully because of Guitar’s failure. On his way back to the town, Milkman does not limp anymore and feels that he belongs to the earth: “like his legs were stalks, tree trunks, a part of his body that extended down down down into the rock and soil, and were comfortable there—on the earth and on the place where he walked” (281). Milkman, who “knelt in his room at the window sill and wondered again and again why he had to stay level on the ground” (10) during his childhood, conversely feels at one with the ground and discovers a strong sense of self. To be a part of the earth implies that he is connected to his ancestors; that is to say, he retrieves a sense of himself as an individual through a

sense of paradoxically, in a sense, belonging to his ancestors.

We should not overlook that a dismemberment of the bobcat, after the hunting, functions as Milkman's initiation. Morrison describes the process of the dismemberment minutely, inserting Guitar's words into it, as follows:

Omar sliced through the rope that bound the bobcat's feet. He and Calvin turned it over on its back. The legs fell open. Such thin delicate ankles.

*"Everybody wants a black man's life."*

Calvin held the forefeet open and up while Omar pierced the curling hair at the point where the sternum lay. Then he sliced all the way down to the genitals. His knife pointed upward for a cleaner, neater incision.

*"Not his dead life; I mean his living life."*

When he reached the genitals he cut them off, but left the scrotum intact.

*"It's the condition our condition is in."*

Omar cut around the legs and the neck. Then he pulled the hide off.

*"What good is a man's life if he can't even choose what to die for?" . . . .*

They turned to Milkman. "You want the heart?" they asked him. Quickly, before any thought paralyze him, Milkman plunged both hands into the rib cage. "Don't get the lungs, now. Get the heart."

*"What else?"*

He found it and pulled. The heart fell away from the chest as easily as yolk slips out of its shell.

*“What else? What else? What else?”* (281-82)

I would like to discuss the extract from three different points of view. Added to the literal meaning of the butchering of the animal, that is, to show Milkman the burden of responsibility for taking a life as a grown man, I consider important implications of a figure of the dismemberment of the bobcat. First, the bobcat is Milkman himself: he experiences the disintegration of the self vicariously through breaking down the body parts of the bobcat. As the bobcat is taken down to pieces, Milkman’s sense of self disappears, which is an inevitable process for the discovery of a new self he experiences in the woods as we have seen. He takes out the heart of the bobcat by himself, which is a symbolic act because it implies the death of old Milkman, whom members of his family (except his mother), his girlfriend, and his best friend want to kill. His “eagerness for death” dissipates and he chooses life through the vicarious death of the bobcat.

Secondly, the bobcat is Guitar. John Duvall suggests that from the outset Guitar is described as “a cat-eyed boy” (7), “so that the bobcat’s death and subsequent butchering at King Walker’s gas station take on a special significance. . . . Each cut rends another hole in the fabric of Guitar’s patriarchal world picture” (Duvall, *Identifying* 89). If one starts by thinking of the bobcat as Guitar, as Duvall does, it helps to explain the odd style in the extract in which the scene of the butchering alternates with the words of Guitar. Added to this, the theory accounts for the contrast between Guitar, the bobcat, and Milkman, the peacock. Finishing the dismemberment, when Milkman asks the hunters what

they are going to do with the bobcat, their answer is very simple: “[e]at him!” (*Song of Solomon* 283). This conversation reminds us of the ones when Guitar finds a peacock during his planning to steal gold with Milkman:

The peacock opened its tail wide. “Let’s catch it. Come on, Milk,” and Guitar started to run toward the fence.

“What for?” asked Milkman, running behind him. “What we gonna do if we catch him?”

“Eat him!” Guitar shouted. (178-79)

It is obvious that Milkman is compared to the peacock, which cannot fly because “all that jewelry weighs it down” (179). We can say that while Guitar’s attempt to catch and eat it fails, making the peacock soar away, Milkman dismembers the bobcat, cutting out its genitals and taking out the heart, becoming psychologically independent of his mentor Guitar. That the killing and butchering happen immediately after Milkman’s escape from Guitar’s attack intensifies the idea that the successful hunter and the survivor is Milkman, not Guitar.

Thirdly, the bobcat is Hagar. Although we cannot say that it is more plausible than the other two explanations which I already argued, I would like to emphasize the third possibility, because it implies another conflict between a man and a woman, which I mainly deal with in this section. During Milkman’s trip, Hagar dies of sickness, being at the nadir of her fortunes due to Milkman’s complete rejection of her. Although Milkman learns to “engage in reciprocal relations with women” (Duvall, *Identifying* 91) from experience in the South,<sup>22</sup> it is too late to save Hagar, or it would be better to say that Milkman needs to kill

Hagar in order to be transformed. As I have mentioned before, Milkman has harbored a fear of women unconsciously because of his mistrust of his mother. In order to get back his masculinity, which is damaged so deeply as to be called a “hog’s gut,” it is necessary for him to kill the predator in Hagar’s mind and to conquer the wilderness inside her as a hunter. That is to say, in order to overcome his fear for femininity, which is symbolically expressed as a chasing witch in the dream (we may recall that also Hagar is compared to a witch who commits infanticide), he kills the bobcat/Hagar as a sacrifice. We see that the violent words which Milkman uses in order to hurt Hagar, which I quoted at the end of section two, are fulfilled when he dismembers the bobcat as Hagar.

## 6. Conclusion

It follows from what has been said that in *Song of Solomon* the conflicts between men and women are expressed through clashes between diametrical opposites. The protagonist Milkman is placed in a dilemma in a double sense: between his father and mother; between a sense of superiority to women, holding patriarchal ideology, and his unconscious fear of them. With these points in mind we will be able to regard *Song of Solomon* as a story in which a feminized Milkman retrieves his masculinity through the ritual of a hunting. In addition, it is possible to say that Milkman, who has narrowly escaped death many times, retrieves his life. However, even the division between life and death blurs when Milkman makes a suicidal leap in the last scene of the novel. It is important fact to stress that he dares to jump into the valley *after* he realizes that flying is a state of mind and that a person need not to leave the ground as Pilate showed him; that is to say, after learning the existence of “both sides of the issues”: life

and death, men and women, love and violence, race and individual, or soil and sky, the flight of Milkman transfers the division between diametrical viewpoints.

While we did not deal with *The Sound and Fury*, in which, according to Morrison, Faulkner depicts the suicide of Quentin Compson as “the supreme act of isolation” (“Virginia” 21), we need mention here only that Morrison attaches to Milkman’s suicidal leap a different meaning in *Song of Solomon* from Quentin’s, although the two protagonists are situated in similar situations in the sense that both are torn between conflicting values and emotions, as Rosa is. The crucial difference is that Morrison chooses to depict the suicide of Milkman as an ambiguous act on the borderline between life and death, or rather, a grotesque act which crosses the division between the two, unlike Quentin whose suicide functions as a means of withdrawing into himself. In this study the main stress falls on the similarity between *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Song of Solomon*, and between Milkman and Rosa, not Quentin. First, in both works we find the same structure in which values or emotions are so unstable that they always waver between two opposites (the first grotesque). Furthermore, the epiphanic scene of Rosa’s opening the window and knocking down Clytie is equivalent to the one of Milkman’s flying in the sense that they extricate themselves from a dilemma by destroying the division between diametrical values at the very end, which is their arrival at another grotesque.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> There are a number of critics who deal with Morrison and Faulkner; to give some of them, John Duvall, Carolyn Denard, Andrea Dimino, Philip M. Weinstein, Catherine Gunther Kodat or Lorie Watkins Fulton. Although those critics are

from various races, we may recall Barbara Christian's critical comment that white critics put Morrison into the frame of Western tradition out of involuntary racism. (Christian 21)

<sup>2</sup> For example, Morrison attended the Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference in 1985 and made comment about Faulkner's attitude toward writing as such: "there was something else about Faulkner which I can call 'gaze.' He had a gaze that was different. It appeared, at that time, to be similar to a look, even a sort of staring, a refusal-to-look-away approach in his writing that I found admirable" (Fowler and Abadie 297). It is likely that the characteristic of Faulkner which Morrison praises can be applied to Morrison herself. We are certain that the works of Faulkner "influence" Morrison's; however, due to her strong self-consciousness as a writer, she desires to be the sole one and does not like to be compared with other great authors. For example, in her interview with Nellie McKay, she also says that "I am not *like* James Joyce; I am not *like* Thomas Hardy; I am not *like* Faulkner" (McKay 152).

<sup>3</sup> My selection of works is based on Morrison's master's thesis for the second time. As I mentioned in the introduction, in her master's thesis Morrison appreciates Faulkner's attaching importance to "the old virtues of brotherhood, compassion and love" ("Virginia" 3) in *Absalom, Absalom!* That morality is what Morrison deals with in her third novel *Song of Solomon*. But more noteworthy is that the other similarity between the two works lies deeper, as I will show later.

<sup>4</sup> Lorie Watkins Fulton explores how Morrison rewrites *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Sound and the Fury* into *Song of Solomon* based on her own analysis in the master's thesis in 1955. Although the study of Fulton is interesting, arguing Morrison's revisions in detail, the question arises: why Morrison needed to revise

those two works if she shares the same view about solitude (did Morrison want to express the same idea in different way?), which needs further consideration. This chapter concentrates on the similarity between the two works from different points of view: from the structural similarity in which two contradictory values clash in each work, while I will deal with the common motifs that appeared in the master's thesis if necessary.

<sup>5</sup> As for the comparison between *Song of Solomon* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, Susan Willis and Nancy Ellen Batty point out common motifs in those two. Willis deals with the same structure of the female household of Judith, Clytie or Rosa and Pilate, Reba or Hagar (Willis 62-63); in addition, Batty points out the similarity between Circe and Clytie (Batty 84-89), which I mentioned earlier.

<sup>6</sup> According to Morrison, however, “[h]is well-known answer is Faulkner’s way of providing us with the key to Quentin’s predicament. . . . His reply, ‘I don’t hate it!’ shows his acceptance of Rosa Coldfield’s loyalty to the South as more valid than his father’s negativism” (“Virginia” 28).

<sup>7</sup> The reassessments of Rosa Coldfield were begun by critics such as Sally R. Page or Elizabeth Muhlenfeld, and many of these are enthusiastic about interpreting Rosa from positive aspects. These days, Olivia Carr Edenfield suggests that Rosa discovers meaning in the role of “aunt” and Amanda R. Gradisek points out Rosa’s dressmaking as an activity which is beyond oppressing gender/class system. In addition, Erica Plouffe Lazure understands the aim of Rosa’s narrative is to create of her story and bequeath of it to next generation. Lazure persuasively presents her views through relating the representations of birth or seduction with Rosa’s desire to be a “mother.” But the common problem with those criticisms is that they tend to make Rosa’s complicated narrative simple.

<sup>8</sup> Koichi Suwabe points out the importance of the scene, in which Rosa opens the “door” to the “reality” and grows as a heroine. (Suwabe 448)

<sup>9</sup> Rosa’s writing poetry is also her opposition to her father who forbids Rosa even to see the soldiers. For a discussion of Rosa’s composition of poems, see Edenfield.

<sup>10</sup> Minrose Gwin refers to the fact that Faulkner often associates women with “vessels” (Gwin 172).

<sup>11</sup> In this scene, Sugimori points out both Clytie’s whiteness and Rosa’s confusion, from the fact that Rosa takes Clytie for Henry for the first place. (Sugimori 11)

<sup>12</sup> The Rosa’s words “*And you too?*” has been interpreted to be said to Clytie, but I am against the interpretation, because I think that they are directed to Judith, not Clytie. The reason of this is that Rosa’s notice immediately before the words in dispute: “*I [Rosa] cried—perhaps not aloud, not with words. (and not to Judith, mind...)*” (*Absalom, Absalom!* 112) can be understood as Rosa’s paradox: that Rosa’s voice cannot reach to her conversation partner, which is Judith (in fact, as to the cursing words toward Clytie, Rosa says that both know the fact that the words are not directed to each other, as if the house itself speaks).

<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that three women, Pilate, Reba, and Hagar’s unrestricted way of eating contrasts with the one of the Dead family, which we will see later. While “[n]o meal was ever planed or balanced or served. Nor was there any gathering at the table” (*Song of Solomon* 29) in the household of three women, Macon takes a domineering attitude toward his wife, a cook, and Ruth has a sense of inferiority in cooking in the Dead family.

<sup>14</sup> Morrison describes the furniture in the Breedlove family in a series of sentences starting “no,” accentuating the lack of their cherished memories:

No one had lost a penny or a brooch under the cushions of either sofa and remembered the place and time of the loss or the finding. No one had clucked and said, “But I *had* it just a minute ago. I was sitting right there talking to . . .” or “Here it is. It must have slipped down while I was feeding the baby!” No one had given birth in one of the beds—or remembered with fondness the peeled paint places, because that’s what the baby, when he learned to pull himself up, used to pick loose. No thrifty child had tucked a wad of gum under the table. No happy drunk—a friend of the family, with a fat neck, unmarried, you know, but God how he eats!—had sat at the piano and played “You Are My Sunshine”. . . (*The Bluest Eye* 35).

<sup>15</sup> We can say that the role of Freddie corresponds to the one of Wash Jones in *Absalom, Absalom!* It is likely that Freddie is a more faithful servant of Macon than Wash, who eventually kills his master Sutpen, but Freddie carries out revenge on Macon, who looks down on him, by spreading an ugly rumor of his wife and son and his son’s shameful nickname.

<sup>16</sup> Morrison describes Macon’s cruel attempts in detail: “[t]hen the baby became the nausea caused by the half ounce of castor oil Macon made her [Ruth] drink, then a soapy enema, a knitting needle (she inserted only the tip, squatting in the bathroom, crying, afraid of the man who paced outside the door), and finally, when he punched her stomach (she had been about to pick up his breakfast plate, when he looked at her stomach and punched it), she ran to Southside looking for Pilate” (*Song of Solomon* 131).

<sup>17</sup> It is apparent that the naming is an important theme in the novel; for example, John Duvall says that *Song of Solomon* is “obsessed with names and naming . . . including the potential of names to subvert white authority” (Duvall, *Identifying* 74). But to argue this point would carry us too far away from the purpose of this work. We need mention here only that one’s name is depicted as an important part of an individual, which, I argue, contradicts Guitar’s idea of race as a whole (because the idea leads to making light of an individual).

<sup>18</sup> Corinthians is one of Milkman’s older sisters, who cannot work nor marry due to her empty pride in her social status and high academic qualification. It is no doubt that she is one of victims of patriarchal society; however, she attains a strong sense of self through relationships with Henry Porter, a poor man whom her father thinks does not suit her.

<sup>19</sup> Later in *Beloved*, Morrison develops the problem of possession into Sethe’s arrogance as a mother who owns her children and tries to kill them. Sethe commits the same mistake which is at the base of the system of slavery: that a person owns the other.

<sup>20</sup> Morrison uses her fertile imagination when she creates those metaphors as follows:

The calculated violence of a shark grew in her [Hagar], and like every witch that ever rode a broom straight through the night to a ceremonial infanticide as thrilled by the black wind as by the rod between her legs; like every fed-up-to-the-teeth bride who worried about the consistency of the grits she threw at her husband as well as the potency of the lye she had stirred into them; and like every

queen and every courtesan who was struck by the beauty of her emerald ring as she tipped its poison into the old red wine, Hagar was energized by the details of her mission. (*Song of Solomon* 128)

<sup>21</sup> In this scene, it is possible for Guitar to loosen the cords because of his hesitation about taking a life of his best friend Milkman. We cannot say for certain whether Guitar hesitates or not then, but it is clear that “he [Guitar] put the rifle on the ground” (337) when he confronts Milkman face to face in the end of the story.

<sup>22</sup> Here Duvall refers to Milkman’s relationship with a woman named Sweet: “[h]e [Milkman] soaped and rubbed her [Sweet] until her skin squeaked and glistened like onyx. She put salve on his face. He washed her hair. She sprinkled talcum on his feet. He straddled her behind and massaged her back. She put witch hazel on his swollen neck. . .” (285).

Part 2

In Pursuit of Coherent Self:  
Female Characters as Wild Birds

## Chapter 3

### A Disintegrating Story: The Circles of Violence in *The Bluest Eye*

#### 1. Introduction

Next in this part, we will explore the function of the grotesque desires which Morrison's female characters harbor in the depth of their minds. Chapter three covers Morrison's first novel *The Bluest Eye*, in which a tragic heroine's (Pecola) grotesque desire to seek for blue eyes makes her insane. I regard her desire as grotesque because it creates a grotesque body (blue eyes on a black face) which crosses the barrier between races. But Pecola is not a heroine who is strong enough to cross the barrier; that is to say, the grotesque desire of Pecola does not supply the driving force to break down the boundary between races, since at the base of the desire lies a fixed idea: a longing for whiteness and contempt for blackness.

As a result, the story of Pecola (as well as other members of her family) loses coherence and breaks into pieces exactly in the same way as the sentences of the "Dick and Jane" textbook, which Morrison skillfully quotes at the beginning of each chapter in the novel, has lost their meaning. Morrison deftly describes Pecola, holding her incoherent body and mind, as a bird which cannot fly: "[e]lbows bent, hands on shoulders, she flailed her arms like a bird in an eternal, grotesquely futile effort to fly" (*The Bluest Eye* 204). Her grotesqueness implies an ambiguity concerning the emotions which it conveys to readers: they probably feel ambivalent feelings toward Pecola: both disgust and pity.

We can say with reasonable certainty that it is Pecola's father, Cholly, that

makes her the bird which cannot fly, through his rape of her. But Cholly is also a victim of racial violence, and he has accumulated his shame and anger inside himself; in short, his rape of his daughter is both an explosion of his rage and a completion of his ejaculation which was suspended by the malicious eyes of white men during his first sexual experience. In this chapter, we will demonstrate the mechanism of this chain reaction of violence and the source of Pecola's grotesque desire. In *The Bluest Eye*, it is likely that in this dead-end situation in which violence begets violence, a physical contact does not function as a means of recovery as in Morrison's fifth novel *Beloved*, which we will deal with in the next chapter.

## 2. The Loss of the Funkiness

We will begin by considering the definition of the "funkiness" as one of grotesque natures of wildness. Morrison explains what she means by the word "funkiness" in her first novel *The Bluest Eye*. A black woman named Geraldine, who learns how to please white men, represses the funkiness, which for her is only an obstacle to assimilate into the mainstream of "white" society. Let us consider the following quotation.

Here they [sugar-brown girls] learn the rest of the lesson begun in those soft houses with porch swings and pots of bleeding heart: how to behave. The careful development of thrift, patience, high morals, and good manners. In short, how to get rid of the funkiness. The dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of the wide range of human emotions.

Wherever it erupts, this Funk, they wipe it away; where it crusts, they dissolve it; wherever it drips, flowers, or clings, they find it and fight it until it dies. (83)

The word “funkiness” is important in this context, since Morrison depicts it as an essential factor to recovering the original self of an African-American woman. When numerous scholars have attempted to demonstrate how vital the funkiness is, they refer to African sensitivity, which is an ordinary definition derived from *The Bluest Eye*. For example, Susan Willis points out that Morrison’s “eruptions of funk” function “to shake up and disrupt the sensual numbing that accompanies social and psychological alienation” and “to permit a reversal of domination and transform what was once perceived from without as ‘other’ into the explosive image of a utopian mode” (Willis 61).

Willis’s explanation of the funkiness as a countermeasure against the dominant social system agrees with my view of the grotesque desire in Morrison’s novels. As can be seen in the following quotation, when Pecola’s mother, Pauline is motivated by the funkiness of desire, it is possible for her to disintegrate dominant white values. The richness of her sexual relationship with her husband Cholly is described through her acute sensibility:

*He [Cholly] puts his thing in me. In me. In me. I wrap my feet around his back so he can't get away. His face is next to mine. The bed springs sounds like them crickets used to back home. He puts his fingers in mine, and we stretches our arms outwise like Jesus on the cross. I hold on tight. My fingers and my feet hold on tight,*

*because everything else is going, going. I know he wants me to come first. But I can't. Not until he does. . . . Not until he has let go of all he has, and give it to me. To me. To me. When he does, I feel a power. I be strong, I be pretty, I be young. (The Bluest Eye 130)*

The extract is Pauline's reminiscences about her happy days with Cholly in the past, when she was able to be strong, pretty, young, absorbing all that Cholly has. We can see that both emotional and physical gratification of her is eloquently expressed by the present form of the verbs. And when she becomes "*strong enough, pretty enough, and young enough to let him make [her] come*" (131), the sensual pleasure of Cholly's ejaculation and her orgasm are described in the figure of a rainbow as follows:

*I begin to feel those little bits of color floating up into me—deep in me. That streak of green from the june-bug light, the purple from the berries trickling along my thighs, Mama's lemonade yellow runs sweet in me. Then I feel like I'm laughing between my legs, and the laughing gets all mixed up with the colors, and I'm afraid I'll come, and afraid I won't. But I know I will. And I do. And it be rainbow all inside. And it lasts and lasts and lasts. (130-31)*

As Willis acutely points out, in the scene above, "Morrison defamiliarizes the portrayal of sensual experience. Adjectives become substantives, giving taste to color and making it possible for colors to trickle and flow and, finally, to be internalized like the semen of an orgasmic epiphany" (Willis 45-46). In addition to

this, I would like to lay special emphasis on the function of sexual intercourse as a means of recovering one's "coherent" self, as hinted at in this extract. Here, we notice the word "rainbow," a patchwork of colorful images of past scenes, representing Pauline's experiencing of a coherent self.

Furthermore, if we pay attention to the figure of "*Jesus on the cross*" in the first of the two extracts above, we will find out that it can be an antithesis to "*My Maker*" (131), which Pauline relies on as a savior for her in her religious fantasy in order to retreat from harsh realities of her life. However, after she loses such funkiness of desire and five senses as mentioned above, she cannot notice that her own "Jesus" lies in her happy memories in the past. Her recovery lasts only briefly; she internalizes a doctrine of physical beauty. As a result, violent, or at least negative, images of sexual relationships haunt the story entirely.

### 3. Fragmented Body Images of Stereotyped People

Morrison's first novel *The Bluest Eye*, the idea of which she has long been nursing up to the age of thirty-nine, is based on her own experience during her childhood. When one of her friends, a black girl from the elementary school, told a girl Morrison that she wanted blue eyes, Morrison "looked around to picture her [the girl] with them [blue eyes] and was violently repelled by what [she] imagined she [the girl] would look like if she had her wish" ("Afterword" 209). It seems reasonable to suppose that since "Morrison's youth and adolescence were largely free of race consciousness" (Duvall, "Naming" 239), it was possible for young Morrison to "be violently repelled" by the far-fetched idea of her friend. It was necessary for Morrison to explore the problem of the standard of beauty and "racial self-loathing" ("Afterward" 210) in her first attempt to write a novel, while

later in the second and the third, she has started to tackle with the problem of the distance between self and the other in earnest in relation to Woolf and Faulkner, as we have seen in part one.

*The Bluest Eye* is a tragedy of an eleven-year-old black girl, Pecola Breedlove, who believes that her ugliness is equal to her blackness. Because of the lack of the love of her family, Pecola suffers from total self-contempt, which becomes contempt for blackness. She wishes for the blue eyes of white girls as a symbol of beauty, so that she can gain love. Pecola is an unfortunate girl in the sense that almost all people around her except for the members of the MacTeers: Claudia, a double of the author,<sup>1</sup> her sister Frieda, and their mother Mrs. MacTeer, along with three prostitutes who are nice to Pecola but are not close enough to help her out of her difficulties, despise her as ugly. Her own family members are no exception, for they plant a sense of inferiority in her mind by not loving her. Her parents Cholly and Pauline are also absorbed into a white value system and despise their blackness. Morrison adopts a strategy of using extracts from a textbook of elementary English grammar, “Dick-and-Jane,” where appears a white wealthy middle-class family. The textbook displays white people’s sense of values, which is thrust upon black people. In this novel, the text is fragmented into pieces by Morrison’s hand, with the purpose of showing the meaninglessness of white standards for black people.<sup>2</sup>

The point I want to make in this chapter is that each story about self-loathing characters in *The Bluest Eye*—especially one of Pecola, Pauline, and Cholly—is respectively broken into pieces, because physical contact between them ends in violence and leads to self-denial. In *The Bluest Eye*, we are shown the portraits of dismembered bodies; bodies of colored characters who implicitly follow

the aesthetic doctrines of racists seem to fall to pieces because of uncertainty about their sense of self. They perpetuate the racial stereotype of blackness as inferiority and attempt to assimilate into a white-oriented society, removing their funkiness as if a black stain. The tragic heroine of the novel, Pecola Breedlove, provides the first example. When she watches her parents' quarrel and fight as usual, "she struggle[s] between an overwhelming desire that one would kill the other, and a profound wish that she herself could die" (43). Since neither happens, covering her head with the quilt and feeling sick in the stomach, she makes her disappear piece by piece and dissolves into nothing in her imaginative world. The following is an often quoted passage in the novel:

She [Pecola] squeezed her eyes shut. Little parts of her body faded away. Now slowly, now with a rush. Slowly again. Her fingers went, one by one; then her arms disappeared all the way to the elbow. Her feet now. Yes, that was good. The legs all at once. It was hardest above the thighs. She had to be real still and pull. Her stomach would not go. But finally it, too, went away. Then her chest, her neck. The face was hard, too. Almost done, almost. Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left. (45)

It is likely that the way in which each of Pecola's body parts disintegrates one by one implies her precarious sense of self. She wants to erase her eyes, too, but cannot do so because she cannot easily escape from what she sees in front of her: the reality of her parents' fight and her own miserable situation to be with them. Furthermore, after her father Cholly rapes her, Pecola's mind is completely

separated from her body under a daydream of the bluest eye at the end of the novel (it is ironical that the only love shown to her is nothing but violence).

In the same situations as Pecola, characters who uphold the “white is beautiful” standard symbolically lose some of their body parts. The bodies of stereotyped people are expressed effectively in the words of either a storyteller, Claudia, who is outside such dominant sense of values, or the author herself. A storekeeper, Mr. Yacobowski, who does not even try to look at Pecola because her ugly blackness means nothing to him, is another example: “his lumpy red hand plops around in the grass casing like the agitated head of a chicken outraged by the loss of its body” (49). Claudia’s classmate Maureen Peal “ran down the street, the green knee socks making her legs look like wild dandelion stems that had somehow lost their heads” (73), after she said that Claudia and Frieda are ugly “blacks,” in spite of the fact that she herself is a black person. Claudia is almost instinctively aware of the danger entailed by the existence of Maureen, when she describes Maureen as such: “[a] high-yellow dream child with long brown hair braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back” (62).

Most of all, Pauline is a good illustration of fragmented body images. Her life begins to crumble as she loses her front tooth:

And then she [Pauline] lost her front tooth. But there must have been a speck, a brown speck easily mistaken for food but which did not leave, which sat on the enamel for months, and grew, until it cut into the surface and then to the brown putty underneath, finally eating away to the root, but avoiding the nerves, so its presence was not noticeable or uncomfortable. Then the weakened

roots, having grown accustomed to the poison, responded one day to severe pressure, and the tooth fell free, leaving a ragged stump behind. But even before the little brown speck, there must have been the conditions, the setting that would allow it to exist in the first place. (116)

Morrison's accurate description of "a speck" "eating away to the root" without being noticed represents a process of Pauline's self-destruction, which comes from her self-hating obsession with a standard of physical beauty. Like Beloved, who is afraid of falling to pieces when she loses her tooth, Pauline feels like she loses everything along with her front tooth. What is important to notice is that the loss of a tooth, a disintegrating image of a body, is a metaphor for a collapsing self and is a paraphrase of Pauline's inconsistent life stories. She later tries to "put all the pieces together, make coherence where before there had been none" (126), but fails. Cholly's experiences in the past are similarly expressed in pieces. Morrison, who believes in the impact of music upon literature, skillfully transfers its force into her works. She writes: "the pieces of Cholly's life could become coherent only in the head of a musician" (159). Nonetheless, Cholly's dangerous freedom is only temporal and his pieces are always in danger of disintegrating. The stories of characters whose bodies are falling to pieces lose coherence like extractions from a textbook.

While many characters lose their body parts as a result of the lack of self-dependence (I use the term "lack of self-dependence" in the sense that they cannot think or feel on their own because they depend on the dominating value system), the other self of Morrison, Claudia, is a girl with such a keen sensitivity

that she has difficulty in fulfilling the expectations of adults when they give “a big, blue-eyed Baby Doll” (20) to her as a Christmas present. It is interesting to observe that Claudia is true to her five senses and “*physically* revolted” (20, emphasis mine) by a doll’s “looking” or “touch.” She cannot understand why “all the world” says it is lovable and takes the doll apart in order to discover the secret of its charm:

I had only one desire: to dismember it [the doll]. To see of what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me, but apparently only me. Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs—all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl treasured. (20)

Here, we notice, the passage contrasts with the one in which Pecola makes her body piece by piece, as we have seen at the beginning of this section. On one hand, Pecola, who believes that everybody takes his or her eyes away from her and hates her due to her ugliness, namely blackness, tries to discover the secret of the ugliness, looking in the mirror. On the other hand, Claudia tries to discover the secret of the charm of the doll, by dismembering not her but the doll itself. It should be made clear that Claudia’s dismembering the body of a doll has the opposite meaning to the disintegrations which I have already discussed in earlier parts of this section. Although characters mentioned above assimilate into “all the world,” “Master Narrative” in Morrison’s phrase, Claudia’s aggressive behavior is an attack against the social norms for aesthetics. In other words, she deconstructs

the Master Narrative in the same way as Morrison does when she changes the quotation from the textbook into a mass of words. What has to be noticed is the grotesqueness of Claudia's desire to take the doll apart: (1) at one level, the scene is an appalling sight of a black girl destroying a "pretty" doll of a white girl; (2) at a deeper level, it makes the diametric division between beauty and ugliness ambiguous.

Furthermore, I would like to emphasize that what Claudia really wants for a Christmas gift is another illustration of her accurate senses. She wants to *feel* something rather than to "have anything to own, or to possess any object" (21):

The real question would have, been, "Dear Claudia, what experience would you like on Christmas?" I could have spoken up, "I want to sit on the low stool in Big Mama's kitchen with my lap full of lilacs and listen to Big Papa play his violin for me alone." The lowness of the stool made for my body, the security and warmth of Big Mama's kitchen, the smell of the lilacs, the sound of the music, and, since it would be good to have all of my senses engaged, the taste of a peach, perhaps, afterward. (22)

Claudia's desire to gratify her five senses is the antithesis of Pecola's wish for the bluest eye. Claudia's funkiness of her senses is important, considering that insensitive black people lose their identity. When Claudia is "humiliated" by "the absence of dirt," after she is coerced into bathing in order to dress up for the Christmas party, "the irritable, unimaginable cleanliness" (22) which she

instinctively fears of is the “white” cleanliness without the “funkiness,” as we have seen in the section one.

Pecola, Cholly, and Pauline, however, internalize dominant values and do not arrive at the conclusion that “I am my best thing” as Sethe does in *Beloved*. Soaphead Church is a good example which explains the reason for the fragmentation of the Breedloves: the ancestors of Soaphead Church have clung tenaciously to the white strain introduced by a British slaveholder (they are originally Native Americans) and consequently have come to bear the worst characteristics of their white masters. More noteworthy is that after he is abused by his father and deserted by his wife, he hates to have physical contacts with anybody: “[i]n any case, his [Soaphead Church’s] cravings, although intense, never relished physical contact. He abhorred flesh on flesh” (166).

Another example is Geraldine, who, as we have seen, gets rid of the funkiness and experiences no more pleasure in sexual relationships than does Soaphead Church. Geraldine also hates to touch her husband or to be touched by him during a sexual contact as follows:

She [Geraldine] stiffens when she feels one of her paper curlers coming undone from the activity of love; imprints in her mind which one it is that is coming loose so she can quickly secure it once he is through. She hopes he will not sweat—the damp may get into her hair; and that she will remain dry between her legs—she hates the glucking sound they make when she is moist. When she senses some spasm about to grip him, she will make rapid movements with her hips, press her fingernails into his back, suck

in her breath, and pretend she is having an orgasm. (84)

What the passage makes clear at once is that Geraldine makes a decided contrast to Pauline when she feels a “rainbow” inside her, as we have seen. Since Geraldine is trying hard to achieve the dominant standard of beauty, she regards sensual pleasure as an obstacle to fulfill her goal, in the same way her twisted hair which needs to be straightened by paper curlers every night is nothing but an obstacle for her.<sup>3</sup> The point is that the two of them, both Geraldine and Soaphead Church, who assimilate into racial stereotypes and detest physical contact with others, represent self-loathing, fragmented characters of *The Bluest Eye*. For having physical contact as a means of love can lead to an acceptance of self and make pieces coherent. In *The Bluest Eye*, however, physical relationships are only violence because rapists’ love is nothing more than self-centeredness.

#### 4. Violent Gazes and Interruption of Cholly’s Explosion

Our concern will be to further explore the form of violence in *The Bluest Eye*. Despite the fact that during the 1940s, in which the story is set, there are still many cases of physical violence such as lynching, Morrison focuses not on physical but rather on mental violence as the theme of the novel. Ann Folwell Stanford observes very truly that “[r]acist society scarcely needs weapons other than the psychological tools if this kind of seeing that demands allegiance to white Euro-American standards of beauty and power” (Stanford 91). Our concern is to examine how white people “look at” black people as a form of mental violence. Although a large number of studies have been made on the function of white people’s discriminating gazes upon black people in *The Bluest Eye*, critics mainly

focus on Pecola and fail to grasp various illustrations of the violent nature of gaze throughout the entire novel. Pursuing that question, we will reach the core of the difficult problem of the novel: how to interpret Cholly's rape of his daughter Pecola. It is in fact, I argue, an explosion of hatred for white people's humiliating looks that had been developing inside himself. The most likely explanation for Pecola's disintegration is that Cholly's hatred, which is maintained for many long years, bursts (or explodes) inside Pecola and leads to her falling to pieces when the rape occurs.

With this point in mind we are now ready to consider how white people's gazes affect characters including three Breedloves, Pecola, Cholly and Pauline, whom I have mainly dealt with in *The Bluest Eye*. We will begin with a simple observation of Pecola, who is "the vacuum" for Mr. Yacobowski, because her blackness is worth nothing to look at: "[t]he distaste must be for her [Pecola], her blackness. All things in her are flux and anticipation. But her blackness is static and dread. And it is the blackness that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes" (49). After being denied by his racially discriminating gaze, Pecola internalizes a socially accepted idea about the worthlessness of a dandelion, which she had thought beautiful before the event. It can be said that the beauty which Pecola found in the dandelion is the key to be free from the dominant values and self-denial, but Mr. Yacobowski thwarts the potential by his violent gazes toward her. The insulting attitude of him stirs up anger, but Pecola cannot sustain it. She is not able to make a substitution of fury for humiliation as a method of self-defense, as Cholly, Geraldine's son Junior, other bullies, or even Claudia does.

While white people look away from Pecola, they cast their lustful eyes on

Cholly and humiliate him. Before turning to our main point, we must first draw attention to the indigent circumstances of Cholly. Despite the fact that Cholly, who does not make any efforts to control his feelings or desires, is sometimes called a hero,<sup>4</sup> he is rather a villain in the sense that he directs his pent-up frustration against people who are weaker than himself, black women, and children, in order to assert his power and manliness. He has suffered various traumas during his childhood, such as desertion by his mother, death of his aunt, who acted as his foster mother, an interruption of his first sexual experience, and refusal by his father. His “godlike state” (160) can be explained by Cholly’s substitution for the ideal image of a father: a black god upholding a watermelon, or rather, the world.<sup>5</sup> After he was rejected by his real father and disappointed in the father’s misery, Cholly takes his place as a false god.

Of all his traumatic events in the past, the point I wish to stress is that Cholly’s first sexual experience was violently interrupted by two armed white men. Before the event, Cholly and his girlfriend Darlene eat the unripe grapes and “Darlene’s white cotton dress was stained with juice” (145), which suggests the romantic expectations of their first sexual contact. However, the event that follows is not what we have expected: when Cholly elicits pleasure from physical intercourse with Darlene, white hunters shine a flashlight on Cholly, laugh at him, and coerce Cholly and Darlene into coupling before their lewd eyes:

Their bodies began to make sense to him [Cholly], and it was not as difficult as he had thought it would be. She [Darlene] moaned a little, but the excitement collecting inside him made him close his eyes and regard her moans as no more than pine sighs over his

head. Just as he felt an explosion threaten, Darlene froze and cried out. He thought he had hurt her, but when he looked at her face, she was staring wildly at something over his shoulder. He jerked around.

There stood two white men. One with a spirit lamp, the other with a flashlight. There was no mistake about their being white; he could smell it. Cholly jumped, trying to kneel, stand, and get his pants up all in one motion. The men had long guns. (147)

In the scene that follows the extract, “Cholly began to simulate what had gone on before” under threats, but “[h]e could do no more than make-believe” and “[t]he flashlight wormed its way into his guts and turned the sweet taste of muscadine into rotten fetid bile” (148). I would like to lay special emphasis on what the white men’s violent act means for Cholly: a loss of “sense” which “their bodies began to make” and a frustration of an “explosion.” Cholly’s explosion, an ejaculation in a literal sense, fails ignominiously through the curious eyes of white men. I consider the word “explosion” also in its metaphorical meaning: that is, a release of an accumulating hatred. His energy, which fails to explode and has no exit, accumulates inside himself and grows into hatred until he pours it into Pecola.

Let us now attempt to extend the observation of an influence of the mind on the body when blacks are racially oppressed. It is clear to many that there is a close interaction between body and mind; the researches of modern scientists, such as David Morris, have thrown new light on the subject. Morris shows in full detail that the pain of the mind and body are inseparable, and that the agony a person experiences in his mind also affects his body. We can see that Morrison

highlights this indissoluble connection in *The Bluest Eye*: for example, the sight of terrible fights between her parents is enough to turn Pecola's stomach. Cholly is another example; he has a toilet accident after he was refused by his father. The most typical example to show the equivalence between mental suppression and its physical counterpart is an episode regarding furniture in the Breedloves' house. The furniture causes a physical reaction: "an increase of acid irritation in the upper intestinal tract, a light flush of perspiration at the back of the neck as circumstances surrounding the piece of furniture were recalled" (36). A sofa represents Cholly's humiliation when it is thrust upon him in spite of his complaints about a crack. Cholly's manliness is lost, with his eyes pleading and testicles tightening. The sofa awakens humiliating memories in the mind of Cholly and, like a guard, interferes with physical activities such as sleep or sex:

Like a sore tooth that is not content to throb in isolation, but must diffuse its own pain to other parts of the body—making breathing difficult, vision limited, nerves unsettled, so a hated piece of furniture produces a fretful malaise that asserts itself throughout the house and limits the delight of things not related to it. (36-37)

It is important to note that the sofa in this extract functions in the same way as the eyes of two white hunters do when Cholly's explosion is suspended. Cholly internalizes the gaze of white people, which causes psychological—almost physical—trauma and controls his body (the trauma is "almost physical" in the sense that the gaze interferes with Cholly's physical activities).

Pauline is another example of a black person who suffers white people's

violence through their contemptuous gaze. Her childbirth is exhibited to many people and stereotyped as a painless animal. Richard Wertz and Dorothy Wertz refer to the fact that during the 1940s, expectant mothers were classified into several categories according to race:

Classification sometimes affected medical treatment, particularly for pain. Staff persons expected different types of patients to respond differently to pain. *A common belief was that women from certain racial or ethnic groups made more noise but suffered less pain and hence needed less analgesia or anesthesia than women from other groups.* (Wertz and Wertz 169, emphasis mine)

Following the quotation is Pauline's monologue from *The Bluest Eye*, in which she overcomes an irrational superstition about black women's callousness:

*When he [an old doctor] got to me [Pauline] he said now these here women you don't have any trouble with. They deliver right away and with no pain. Just like horses. The young ones smiled a little. They looked at my stomach and between my legs. They never said nothing to me. . . . I hurt just like them white women. Just 'cause I wasn't hooping and hollering before didn't mean I wasn't feeling pain. What'd they think? That just 'cause I knowed how to have a baby with no fuss that my behind wasn't pulling and aching like theirs? Besides, that doctor don't know what he talking about. He must never seed no mare foal. Who say they don't have no pain?*

*Just 'cause she don't cry? 'Cause she can't say it, they think it ain't there? If they looks in her eyes and see them eyeballs lolling back, see the sorrowful look, they'd know. (The Bluest Eye 124-25)*

Although Pauline experiences the humiliation of her private, sexual activity, viz. delivery, being into the show, she cannot express her pain in the presence of white people because they deprive her of words. White people who have acquired the high status of doctor do not speak to a black woman, Pauline, but instead turn their contemptuous eyes on her, for they do not see her as a human equal to them. The importance of her protest against their scornful attitudes cannot be overemphasized. She absolutely insists that she is a human being bearing up under the same bodily pain as white women. It would be better say that she does not internalize a white dominant value but opposes it. With all her efforts, however, she ends up being absorbed into the standard of physical beauty, after she thinks her newborn baby ugly and refuses to love it.<sup>6</sup>

## 5. Pecola as an Outlet for Hatred

Now that we are sure that a sense of racial inferiority, which is internalized through the violent looks of white people, undermines black people, the next step is to explore the mechanism in which violence begets violence. The fact is that the smoldering anger of humiliated blacks is directed toward black women and children. Especially a black girl, Pecola, is at the bottom of a hierarchy and absorbs all “waste” (205), which black people dump on her. Not only adults but also children find an outlet for their fury in Pecola. Black boys sacrifice her to their “fiery cone of scorn” (65) for blackness of themselves:

They [a group of boys] seemed to have taken all of their smoothly cultivated ignorance, their exquisitely learned self-hatred, their elaborately designed hopelessness and sucked it all up into a fiery cone of scorn that had burned for ages in the hollows of their minds—cooled—and spilled over lips of outrage, consuming whatever was in its path. They danced a macabre ballet around the victim, whom, for their own sake, they were prepared to sacrifice to the flaming pit. (65)

There is nothing that helpless boys can do about unreasonable racial discrimination. Their self-contempt and anger are blended into the fiery cone, spilling over Pecola, whom they felt superior to. Morrison powerfully depicts their inward anger using a striking metaphor of an erupting volcano.

Added to this, Geraldine and her son Junior provides another example of the cycle of violence. Geraldine, who feels repulsion toward physical contacts, as we have seen, does not love her son, although she takes good care of him physically as such: “Geraldine did not allow her baby, Junior, to cry. As long as his needs were physical, she could meet them—comfort and satiety. He was always brushed, bathed, oiled, and shod. Geraldine did not talk to him, soothe him, or indulge him in kissing bouts, but she saw that every other desire was fulfilled.” After Junior notices that the sole object of Geraldine’s love is neither his father nor himself but the cat, “he learned how to direct his hatred of his mother to the cat, and spent some happy moments watching it suffer” (86). The important point to note is that Junior’s hatred of his mother is not directed to her, the immediate cause of his ill feeling, but to the cat, which cannot speak up its feelings and is

weaker than him.

By way of a diversion from the lack of love of his mother, Junior also bullies girls and Pecola becomes his target one day. On her way home, he successfully entices Pecola into his house and makes her cry by throwing the cat onto her face, an effective action which causes damage both Pecola and the cat he intensely hates. But when he notices that the cat becomes fond of Pecola, his anger bursts out:

Junior, curious at not hearing her [Pecola's] sobs, opened the door, and saw her squatting down rubbing the cat's back. He saw the cat stretching its head flattening its eyes. He had seen that expression many times as the animal responded to his mother's touch. "Gimme my cat!" His voice broke. With a movement both awkward and sure he snatched the cat by one of its hind legs and began to swing it around his head in a circle. . . .

Still screaming, Pecola reached for Junior's hand. She heard her dress rip under her arm. Junior tried to push her away, but she grabbed the arm which was swinging the cat. They both fell, and in falling, Junior let go the cat, which, having been released in mid-motion, was thrown full force against the window. It slithered down and fell on the radiator behind the sofa. Except for a few shudders, it was still. There was only the slightest smell of singed fur. (90-91)

It is obvious that Junior has been accumulating his anger for the cat, since it has

been the sole object of his mother's love. Then in the extract, he explodes his anger when he sees the cat reacting to Pecola, "stretching its head flattening its eyes," in the same way as to his mother. The reason for his violent act is that the sight reminds him of lack of his mother's love and that the cat attracts attention even of Pecola. As a result, Junior succeeds in killing the cat, shifting the blame for what happened onto Pecola, another victim for his violence.

In fact, Pecola is in the same situation as Junior, in the sense that she is not loved by her mother and that something or someone else, a white girl in Pecola's case, monopolizes her mother's love (we can see that Pauline loves a little white girl of the house in which she works as a maid more than her real daughter Pecola). However, Pecola cannot convert her dissatisfaction into the anger and direct it against the white girl, the object of her mother's love, as Junior kills the cat. Instead, she turns her hatred against herself: she feels self-contempt for her ugliness, that is, blackness, which she assumes is the reason why she is not loved and wishes for the blue eyes of the white girl.<sup>7</sup>

Cholly also directs his hatred toward black women and children so that he can have the advantage of the others and pretend not to have noticed his powerlessness. When he was coerced into having sexual intercourse by white hunters, he developed his hatred not toward the hunters but toward a victim, Darlene:

Sullen, irritable, he cultivated his hatred of Darlene. Never did he once consider directing his hatred toward the hunters. Such an emotion would have destroyed him. They were big, white, armed men. He was small, black, helpless. His subconscious knew what

his conscious mind did not guess—that hating them would have consumed him, burned him up like a piece of soft coal, leaving only flakes of ash and a question mark of smoke. He was, in time, to discover that hatred of white men—but not now. Not in impotence but later, when the hatred could find sweet expression. For now, he hated the one who had created the situation, the one who bore witness to his failure, his impotence. The one whom he had not been able to protect, to spare, to cover from the round moon glow of the flashlight. (150-51)

The word “hatred” or “impotence” is important in this context (“impotence” implies his sexual dysfunction) in order to understand how Cholly’s mind works for self-protection. Even if he directs his hatred toward original enemies, he is helpless against white men with guns. He felt guilty for not protecting Darlene from the lustful eyes of whites; however, his guilt is turned into a destructive impulse to kill her, who shares the misery (after the hunters disappeared, it is said that Cholly “wanted to strangle” [149] Darlene). Although after many traumatic experiences Cholly has achieved a freedom to do what he likes according to the feelings of the moment, the fact is that his energy of hatred toward white people has failed to explode and seeks an outlet.

The next vent for his anger is his wife, Pauline: “[s]he [Pauline] was one of the few things abhorrent to him that he could touch and therefore hurt. *He poured out on her the sum of all his inarticulate fury and aborted desires.* Hating her, he could leave himself intact” (42, emphasis mine). After growing up, Cholly is still one of many helpless black people in a racist society, and his hatred cannot find “a

sweet expression.” We can be fairly certain that one of his “inarticulate fury and aborted desires” is experienced when an explosion (ejaculation) is shamefully interrupted by white men.

In the rape of Pecola, however, he ends by exploding his hatred, which has been developed inside himself for a long time. When Cholly comes home drinking, he sees Pecola washing dishes in the kitchen:

Then he [Cholly] became aware that he was uncomfortable; next he felt the discomfort dissolve into pleasure. The sequence of his emotions was revulsion, guilt, pity, then love. His revulsion was a reaction to her [Pecola’s] young, helpless, hopeless presence. Her back hunched that way; her head to one side as though crouching from a permanent and unrelieved blow. Why did she have to look so whipped? She was a child—unburdened—why wasn’t she happy? The clear statement of her misery was an accusation. He wanted to break her neck—but tenderly. Guilt and impotence rose in a bilious duet. (161)

Cholly’s emotion toward Pecola follows the same course of the one toward Darlene: he again feels guilty for not keeping Pecola from whites’ harm, which is symbolized by “the round moon glow of the flashlight.” After he feels an impulse to break the neck of his daughter, who represents his impotence, Pecola’s behavior reminds him of Pauline and provokes sexual desire.

What the passage above makes clear at once is that Morrison is caught in a dilemma of whether to emphasize the violent aspect of rape or to express

Cholly's love of his daughter. The author seems to have come up with the solution to the problem: she intimately describes Cholly's background before the event and repeatedly depicts his directly-opposed feelings for Pecola in the scene, such as "break her neck—but tenderly" or "hatred mixed with tenderness" (163). It is apparent that readers will be in the grotesque situation: they do not know how to respond to the event, since the boundary between love and violence is erased.<sup>8</sup>

Having observed the ambivalence of Cholly's rape of Pecola, we are now able to see why the rape, a violent impulse blended with love, occurs. It is because Cholly, who is obsessed with the white people's humiliating gaze, cannot help committing rape on his daughter in which his ambivalent feelings toward his daughter show themselves. For example, Laurie Vickroy has made several important statements as an analogy between Cholly's traumatic past and the rape of Pecola.<sup>9</sup> My study, however, gives weight to the violent aspect of the act, since I believe that there is a crucial difference between the two events: the fulfillment of an explosion in the latter. Although Cholly feels hatred *blended with a tenderness*, what he poured into Pecola is consequently the seeds of hatred (sperm in a literal sense). Claudia narrates the tragic event as such: "[h]e, at any rate, was the one who loved her enough to touch her, envelop her, give something of himself to her"; however, "the something of himself" is in fact seeds not of love but of hatred. The reason that "his touch was fatal, and something he gave her filled the matrix of her agony with death" (206) is that something does not germinate in the womb of Pecola, since it is the seeds of hatred, which were originally planted in Cholly's mind by white men. Violence is changed into a different form—from white men's contemptuous gazes toward a black man to a father's rape of his daughter—and repeats itself. The important point to note is that a hierarchical system of race

and gender lies at the roots of this circle of violence.

## 6. Conclusion

It should be concluded, from what has been said above, that in *The Bluest Eye* violence causes a chain reaction, with the result that characters disintegrate and their stories fall to pieces. I noted at the beginning of this chapter that in their sexual relationship in the past, what Cholly gives to Pauline is not “fatal” but healing love. Although it acquires importance when we consider that Cholly fills Pecola with death, Pauline’s funkiness of desire and senses are lost forever, so that desire and physical contact end in violence.

“The total damage” done to Pecola by the rape by her father is described as follows:

She [Pecola] spent her days, her tendril, sap-green days, walking up and down, up and down, her head jerking to the beat of a drummer so distant only she could hear. Elbows bent, hands on shoulders, she flailed her arms like a bird in an eternal, grotesquely futile effort to fly. Beating the air, a winged but grounded bird, intent on the blue void it could not reach—could not even see—but which filled the valleys of the mind. (204)

Here, we notice, “the blue” means not only the color of a white girl’s eyes which Pecola has always craved for during the novel, but also the one of sky to which she never reaches with her wings broken. Although, in order to underscore the tragic ending, Morrison ominously expresses the sky as “the blue void” on the last scene

in *The Bluest Eye*, we will find the successful flights of female characters in *Beloved* and in *A Mercy*, as we shall see later in chapter five.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> It seems reasonable to suppose that Morrison's own family is the model for the MacTeers in the novel. There appear another two families, the Breedloves and Geraldine's family, both of which are compared with extracts from the textbook.

<sup>2</sup> Morrison changes a paragraph into a mass of run-on letters, as can be seen in the following:

Hereisthehouseitisgreenandwhiteithasthereddooritisveryprettyhe  
reisthefamilymotherfatherdickandjaneliveinthegreenandwhitehou  
setheyareveryhappyseejaneshewantstoplaywhow  
illplaywithjaneseethecatitgoesmeowmeowcomeandplaycomeplayw  
ithjanethekittenwillnotplayseethemothermotherisverynicemother  
willyouplaywithjanemotherlaughslaughmother . . . .(*The Bluest  
Eye* 6)

Morrison divides it into seven parts and places each of them at the beginning of the section, which is related to the contents of the sentences; for example, the part "HEREISTHEHOUSEITISGREENANDWHITEITHASAREDDOORITISVERYPRETTYITISVERYPRETTYPRETTYPRETTY" (33) corresponds to the story of the house of Breedlove and its furniture.

<sup>3</sup> As to a connection between Geraldine's obsession with her hair and her antipathy to physical contacts, Susan Willis states that "[r]epression manifests

itself in the fastidious attention given to tomorrow's Caucasian-inspired coiffure and the decathexis of erogenous stimulation" (Willis 49).

<sup>4</sup>In her interview with Morrison, Claudia Tate says that "Cholly [*The Bluest Eye*], Ajax [*Sula*], and Guitar [*Song of Solomon*] are the golden-eyed heroes. Even Sula has golden flecks in her eyes. They are the free people, the dangerously free people." Morrison's reaction to this remark is as follows: "[t]he salt tasters. . . . They express either an effort of the will or a freedom of the will. . . . They are the misunderstood people in the world" (Tate 164-65).

<sup>5</sup>We may say that the breaking open of a watermelon is symbolically depicted. A fatherless child, Cholly, holds in mind the scene in which a father majestically distributed a watermelon among his children, as follows: "[t]he father of the family lifted the melon high over his head—his big arms looked taller than the trees to Cholly, and the melon blotted out the sun. . . . Cholly felt goose pimples popping along his arms and neck. He wondered if God looked like that. . . . And now the strong, black devil was blotting out the sun and getting ready to split open the world" (*The Bluest Eye* 134). It is likely that after internalizing the gaze of white people and being rejected by his own father, Cholly discards his belief in "the black devil."

<sup>6</sup>Although Pauline is prepared to love the baby after the birth, she rejects it when she notices its ugliness, or it may be nearer the truth to say that she cannot help thinking it as ugly, since she has internalized the white gaze under which she was delivered the baby: "[a] right smart baby she was. I used to like to watch her. You know they makes them greedy sounds. Eyes all soft and wet. A cross between a puppy and a dying man. But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly" (126).

<sup>7</sup> Instead of her miserable friend, Claudia feels anger about the humiliating situation in which Pecola is in (Claudia's original anger for "the blue-eyed girl" and the fact that the girl becomes frightened at the sight of them (black girls) is added to the reason of her violent impulse): "[w]hen she [a little white girl] saw us [Claudia, Frieda and Pecola], fear danced across her face for a second. She looked anxiously around the kitchen. 'Where's Polly?' she asked. The familiar violence rose in me. Her calling Mrs. Breedlove Polly, when even Pecola called her mother Mrs. Breedlove, seemed reason enough to scratch her" (108).

<sup>8</sup> Keith E. Byerman also notices the grotesqueness of the scene as follows: "Pecola's reaction is to substitute the sweet world of Shirley Temple for her own bitter one. She escapes, but we as readers cannot. We are left in a state of the grotesque. On the one hand, we are repulsed by Cholly's action and sympathetic to his victim. On the other, we have been made to see that he is himself a victim of the society that condemns him. . . . Both of these responses, repulsion against the action and attraction to the actor, are mutually necessary for the grotesque to work in this scene" (Byerman 6-7).

<sup>9</sup> Vickroy takes a psychoanalytic approach to explaining a mechanism of Cholly's projecting his fear on Pecola: "[h]is [Cholly's] pessimistic attitudes toward life, himself and his capacity to love return to this traumatic context, and he loses the ability to approach life or his daughter positively. One way for him to rid himself of his fears is to project them onto Pecola, and in part he tries to destroy those fears by raping her" (Vickroy 96).

## Chapter 4

### “Touch Me on the Inside Part”:

#### Physical Contact as a Means of Recovery in *Beloved*

##### 1. Introduction

In *The Bluest Eye*, the main characters Pecola, Cholly, and Pauline fail to have a sense of coherent self, and once that is understood, we are in a better position to evaluate Morrison's progress as a writer in her fifth novel *Beloved*: characters are given chances to get back the funkiness of their senses and desire which was once lost. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the process for the recovery of the self: physical contact is converted into a means of self-affirmation in *Beloved*, unlike in *The Bluest Eye*, in which case they end in violence.

However, in *Beloved* appears much more various forms of violence than in *The Bluest Eye*, since, in the former, Morrison focuses on “slavery,” the institutional violence, which justifies acts of physical violence against slaves. We see that characters come back from the brink of destruction at the very end of the story; that is to say, there is a dramatic turnabout: while in *Beloved* there are many illustrations in which physical contact takes the form of a violent action against black people and leads to their self-denial, it holds the possibility of self-approval at the same time. This may sound paradoxical, but ex-slaves feel a strong sense of self through consensual intercourse *because* they have had a traumatic experience of being raped in the past.

The best account for this turnabout can be found in Baby Suggs' words in the Clearing. Baby Suggs, a heroine Sethe's stepmother, whose slave life “busted

her legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb and tongue” (*Beloved* 87), tells ex-slaves to love their flesh piece by piece:

“Here,” she [Baby Suggs] said, “in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don’t love your eyes; they just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face ’cause they don’t love them either. *You* got to love it, *you!* . . .” (88) .

Through loving their every part of the body “piece by piece” as Baby Suggs says, ex-slaves, who cannot hold one’s selves and therefore one’s bodies disintegrate from humiliating experience as slaves, recover one’s coherent selves. To have a physical relationship with a partner is to love one’s flesh; it is an attempt to get back one’s body, which was once lost by white masters’ inhuman abuse of slaves, such as rape, whipping, or taking the bit.

I would like to emphasize that *Beloved*, a supernatural figure, who collectively carries such an enormous burden of the agonies of slaves, is the most grotesque character in all of Morrison’s novels, because of her ambiguousness. That is to say, readers do not know what role *Beloved* assumes in the story, positive or negative, because she constantly fluctuates between two opposites, as

Susan Corey argues. In the first place, in the novel *Beloved*, we see the grotesque situation of slavery, in which a human owns another human as his or her property; in addition, it begets another grotesque: Sethe's infanticide, which is completely beyond our ability to judge whether it is right or wrong. Under the grotesqueness of slavery, Sethe is in the predicament in which she has no other choice but to kill her beloved daughter; as a result, she repeats the evil practice of slavery by thinking that she owns her children. This unbroken chain reaction of violence (a different form from one in *The Bluest Eye* which we have seen) can be broken only by exorcising Beloved, an existence which is symbolic of the suffering not only of the baby which Seth has killed but also of every slave who was tortured.

We must draw attention to the fact that what makes Beloved a grotesque character is not only her two-sidedness, which Corey mainly argues as we have seen in the introduction, but also her desire for her mother, which is so deep as to erase the division between self and the other. It is likely that Morrison managed to write/speak "the unspeakable things," that is, the unimaginable violence of slavery, by using an extraordinary grotesque figure of Beloved. Her greediness endlessly grows bigger and bigger, since there is no reconciliation between the mother killer and her child the victim, in the same way in which there is no way for ex-slaves to accept their traumatic pasts, which Beloved takes on her shoulders as her burden.

Beloved's grotesque desire to "join" her beloved mother fails (or succeeds in a sense), taking the place of her mother and absorbing all she has. It makes Sethe almost insane and Beloved herself becomes a devilish character which tortures Sethe. However, it is noteworthy that Beloved accomplishes her desire to

want the other person to touch her on “the inside part” through physical contact with Paul D, her mother’s partner. Immediately before being exorcised by a band of singing women from Sethe’s neighborhood as a devil, we see that *Beloved* recovers her beautiful body as a pregnant mother. This is an important fact to stress, which we shall see later in the latter part of this chapter.

## 2. The System, Forms, and Influence of Sexual Violence under Slavery

Before turning to a closer examination of the positive function of physical contact, I would like to make remarks concerning a physical contact as violence, in order to show how dramatic the turnabout which I will deal with is. A good point to start is how slave women became outlets for white men’s sexual desire from historical point of view. In *Beloved*, Morrison confronts the problem of slavery in the United States in the late 1800’s, when a strict sexual morality, called Victorianism, controlled white people’s attitudes toward sexual matters. As Stephen Kern acutely points out, European loose sexual morality in 1700’s has changed over to strict one during the early 1800’s. It compelled men at that time to refrain from frequent sexual activities, which, it claimed, had a bad influence on their health; to put it more concretely, men were supposed to be under the restrictions not only due Christian morality but also due to “scientific facts” in those days that sexual intercourse weakened their bodies and caused serious disease (which turned out to be wrong later as a matter of course<sup>1</sup>).

Judging from the historical background above, it is not denied that sexual acts between a husband and a wife were considerably restricted during the period.<sup>2</sup> A question now arises: how white men satisfied their sexual desire if they did not have much opportunity to have sexual life with their wives. It is possible

that one direct answer for this is prostitution, but in order to understand the situation in *Beloved*, we need to focus on another possibility: slavery.

While prostitution was an economic institution based on money exchange (there was tacit agreement here that the labor was worth paying money), slave women (men) were never a seller of their labor because they were already the property of white masters. This could be applied not only sexual labor but also any type of it under slavery. As an example of this, we can cite an interesting case of Paul D from *Beloved*, which shows how impossible for a slave to earn his money. During his wandering journey after he was emancipated all of a sudden, Paul D sees the man who has attended the war and complains that “they had been paid less than white soldiers.” Paul D was “so impressed by the idea of being paid money to fight he looked at the private with wonder and envy” (269) at that time; however, he himself had a chance to get money in exchange for an easy work as follows:

Then came the miracle. Standing in a street in front of a row of brick houses, he [Paul D] heard a whiteman call him (“Say there! Yo!”) to help unload two trunks from a coach cab. Afterword the whiteman gave him a coin. Paul D walked around with it for hours —not sure what it could buy (a suit? a meal? a horse?) and if anybody would sell him anything. (269)

The word “miracle” acutely describes how Paul D is surprised when a whiteman gives him a coin. Up to that moment, Paul D was not supposed to get money, since whatever he earned belonged to his owner, as well as he himself did. Following the

event in the quotation above, Paul D makes purchases with his own money for the first time in his life:

Finally he saw a greengrocer selling vegetables from a wagon. Paul D pointed to a bunch of turnips. The grocer handed them to him, took his one coin and gave him several more. Stunned, he backed away. Looking around, he saw that nobody seemed interested in the “mistake” or him, so he walked along, happily chewing turnips. Only a few women looked vaguely repelled as they passed. His first earned purchase made him glow, never mind the turnips were withered dry. (269)

We see that Paul D thinks several coins as more valuable than only one coin, since he cannot understand the value of money. Although it is possible that “withered dry” turnips imply Paul D’s bleak future, Morrison illustrates his joyful experience almost comically (it is one of a few description of hope in the heavy atmosphere in the work) as a whole.

Let us now return to the problem of sexual assaults of slave women. As well as Paul D in the example above, after the Emancipation Proclamation in *Beloved*, we see that some ex-slave women earn money by their sexual labor, such as “the Saturday girls working the slaughterhouse yard” (203) or Sethe selling her body in exchange for the letters “Beloved” on her dead child’s gravestone. As slave women, however, Baby Suggs, Ella, Sethe, or Stamp Paid’s wife Vashti do not get even a position of a prostitute and cannot escape being raped by white men. It is no doubt that the money system lies behind the “institutional rape” (Brownmiller

168) of slave women.

Sexual abuses of black women can be found many times in *Beloved*; for example, Sethe suffers the trauma of having been held down and sucked of her breast milk by nephews of her master, which is a brutal assault both on her femininity and on maternity. Sethe also experiences the humiliation of an act of prostitution as I mentioned earlier. At that time, it is said that she suffers not only from the act itself but also from the lustful eyes of engraver's son who is standing by their side. Other examples are Baby Suggs, who is forced to sleep with a black man who was taken to her cabin by her master ("[a]nd he [Mr. Garner] didn't stud his boys. Never brought them to her cabin with directions to 'lay down with her,' like they did in Carolina, or rented their sex out on other farms" [*Beloved* 140]), and Ella, a leading woman of black community around Sethe's family, who is locked up in a room and constantly raped by a white father and a son.

In addition, Stamp Paid's wife, Vashti, is forced to have sexual relationships with their young master for almost a year. Stamp Paid talks about the anger and humiliation of a slave man who cannot protect his wife from their lustful master as follows:

"I never touched her [Vashti] all that time. Not once. Almost a year. We was planting when it started and picking when it stopped. Seemed longer. I should have killed him. She said no, but I should have. . . . I also thought she [the wife of the young master] might stop it, but it went right on. Till one morning Vashti came in and sat by the window. A Sunday. We worked our own patches on Sunday. She sat by the window looking out of it. 'I'm back,' she said,

‘I’m back, Josh.’ I looked at the back of her neck. She had a real small neck. I decided to break it. You know, like a twig—just snap it. I been low but that was as low as I ever got” (232-33).

In the extract, we see that Stamp Paid’s (he changes his original name Joshua into “Stamp Paid,” immediately after the incident in the extract, since he thinks that he has suffered enough to pay whatever his debt is) anguish is so despairing that he almost kills the master or his wife in order to escape from it. Stamp Paid suffers since he can do nothing but endures patiently without disobeying the master.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, a slave man himself can be a victim of sexual violence, as the example of Paul D shows. After he fails to kill a merciless master, he is sent to Alfred, Georgia, where he is chained up with forty-five slave men all together and is shoved into the box which is set in the ditches. When they come out of the box in the morning, white guards capriciously compel slave men to do sexual acts.<sup>4</sup> No matter how humiliating and miserable it is for slave men to submit silently to white men’s insult, they have only two choices between to endure it and to be killed after disobeying it. These two examples of Stamp Paid and Paul D shows that not only slave women but also slave men suffer from sexual violence of white masters and cannot hold their masculinity.

Finally in this section, we will consider the problem of incessant pregnancy of female slaves’ as a result of sexual violence.<sup>5</sup> As Jacqueline Jones points out, “[e]arly in the nineteenth century, in areas of the Upper South, fertility levels among slave women neared human capacity. A woman whose fertile years spanned the ages of eighteen to forty-five, for example, might conceive thirteen

children and spend ten years of her life pregnant and almost the whole period nursing one child after another” (Jones 35).<sup>6</sup> In *Beloved*, Baby Suggs provides an example of these successive pregnancies of female slaves. She is forced to sleep with a black man whom her master takes to her cabin, as we have seen before; added to this, she experiences unwanted pregnancy when a white man breaks his promises: “[she] couple[d] with a straw boss for four months in exchange for keeping her third child, a boy, with her—only to have him traded for lumber in the spring of the next year and to find herself pregnant by the man who promised not to and did” (*Beloved* 23). Like Baby Suggs who gave birth to eight children by six men, slave women never get free from pain of childbirth, impregnated both by white men and by black men. This is not only because white men found outlets for their sexual desires in slave women as we have seen, but also because slave owners wanted to extend their property by causing pregnancy to their female slaves.<sup>7</sup>

There is a further point which needs to be clarified: how a slave mother feels toward her baby which is fathered by a man who has raped her. In *Beloved*, we meet slave women who reject their children due to her hatred for their fathers; for example, Sethe’s mother, who is raped many times by white men, abandons her children. A slave woman named Nan emphasizes the fact that Sethe is the only child whom her mother accepts: “she [Sethe’s mother] threw them all away but you. The ones from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names, she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around. Never. Never. Telling you. I am telling you, small girl Sethe” (62). We can see that, for Sethe’s mother, not to put her arms around white men

and to reject their children is only way to offer her resistance without being killed by them.

Also Ella, who has a painful experience being locked up by white men as I mentioned above, rejects her child, that is, an undeniable evidence of her suffering. She calls the rapists, a father and a son, “the lowest yet,” and leaves a new-born baby without nursing (“[s]he had delivered, but would not nurse, a hairy white thing, fathered by ‘the lowest yet.’ It lived five days never making a sound” [258-59]). In these examples of unwanted pregnancy of female slaves, we find a grotesque situation of slavery: a rapist sows the seed of hatred in a female slave, and the seed, a child, grows in a mother’s womb in spite of her antipathy for its father and itself. And the mother has to endure the labor pain (the antipathy might make the labor more unbearable than the usual), only to abandon it.

### 3. Fragmented Bodies and the Recovery of an Integrated Self

Having observed the forms of sexual violence and the suffering of slaves which appear in *Beloved*, one can then go on to consider that the bodies of the characters of the novel disintegrate, and they close their hearts as consequences of their traumatic experiences. As we have seen in *The Bluest Eye*, also in *Beloved* characters’ precarious sense of self creates their fear of disintegration of bodies. Denver and Beloved are notable examples. The story of the novel opens with Paul D’s visit to 124, a house of Sethe and her daughter Denver, which a baby spirit has haunted for eighteen years. After Paul D drives away the spirit, it comes back to them as a figure of woman. Although Denver has not lived as a slave as her parents did, she also suffers from her painful past: her true mother once tried to kill her. Both an escape of her brothers and a death of her grandmother mean that

they left her alone with her horrible mother (she cannot get rid of the fantasy of her mother's killing her<sup>8</sup>). Denver is a solitary girl, who perversely derives a comfort from the existence of the ghost, possibly as another victim of her mother's violence (although Denver survived unlike Beloved). After she comes back in human form (so Denver believes), Denver is so heavily dependent on Beloved that she becomes over-possessive about her. When Denver loses sight of Beloved in the darkness in the cold house, in which Beloved was killed by Sethe under the cold sunlight of August, Denver feels as if her body has melted into nothing:

If she [Denver] stumbles, she is not aware of it because she does not know where her body stops, which part of her is an arm, a foot or a knee. She feels like an ice cake torn away from the solid surface of the stream, floating on darkness, thick and crashing against the edges of things around it. Breakable, meltable and cold. . . . Now she is crying because she has no self. Death is a skipped meal compared to this. She can feel her thickness thinning, dissolving into nothing. She grabs the hair at her temples to get enough to uproot it and halt the melting for a while.

(122-23)

From the expression "she has no self," we see that Denver's sense of self lies not in her own being but in another person, Beloved. The loss of her sister is unbearable for Denver to the extent that "death is a skipped meal compared to this," since she cannot hold her traumatic past without a support of her. Denver's absolute dependence on Beloved prevents Denver from relying on herself and intensifies

the uncertainty of her existence, as we see in the extract above.<sup>9</sup>

Beloved is also afraid of her body's falling into pieces; her sense of self is so unstable that she thinks her body has started to disintegrate with the loss of a tooth as a start:

Beloved looked at the tooth and thought, This is it. Next would be her arm, her hand, a toe. Pieces of her would drop maybe one at a time, maybe all at once. Or on one of those mornings before Denver woke and after Sethe left she would fly apart. It is difficult keeping her head on her neck, her legs attached to her hips when she is by herself. Among the things she could not remember was when she first knew that she could wake up any day and find herself in pieces. (133)

Beloved's fear of splintering into pieces constantly clutches her heart (it seems to be stronger than Denver's because of her ghostly presence). The first thing one notices is that she always needs someone by her side to stop her from disintegrating. We can say that, in *Beloved*, the writer accentuates the importance of the bond between self and the other, in which she finds a possibility to keep the unstable self from breaking down into pieces. It is likely that, in an extreme situation under slavery, some of which we have explored in section one, not the alienation but a sense of solidarity is Morrison's answer to the problem of how to establish one's self, which Morrison presents more clearly than in the other works which we have dealt with.

Furthermore, tortured characters unconsciously lose or consciously get rid

of the funkiness of their five senses or feelings. Examples abound. Sethe has been numb to color after she killed her baby (the last color she saw was “red baby blood” and “pink gravestone chips,” “after that she became as color conscious as a hen” [38-39]). In addition, Sethe is insensitive to pain, having “a tree,” namely a terrible scar from having been beaten with a whip: her back skin is “dead” and does not feel “the hurt [it] ought to” (18). Also Denver has suffered a hearing difficulty for fear of hearing a truth about her mother’s infanticide. Some of ex-slaves choose not to love; for example, Ella “consider[s] love a serious disability” (256) and tells Sethe, “[d]on’t love nothing” (92). More noteworthy is the case of Paul D, who controls his feeling and does not love much because his heart will be broken when his loved ones are destroyed by white people: “[t]he best thing, he knew, was to love just a little bit; everything, just a little bit, so when they broke its back, or shoved it in a croaker sack, well, maybe you’d have a little love left over for the next one” (45). Paul D’s cautious attitude toward love is in contrast to Sethe’s “too thick” (164) love, which tragically results in her murdering her daughter. Paul D runs away from Sethe, unable to bear her grotesque love (we call Sethe’s violent love “grotesque” since it incurs a contradiction that she “kills” her daughter because she “loves” her, as I mentioned before). We can recognize from these examples that characters’ callousness can be defined as a scheme for self-defense.<sup>10</sup> However, characters who are insensitive to pain cannot recover a sense of integrated self. Amy Denver, a white girl who helps Sethe deliver her fourth child on her escape from Slave State, embodies a truth in *Beloved*: “[a]nything dead coming back to life hurts” (35).

Another form of self-defense is to pretend “amnesia,” that is, to repress the painful past in the depth of one’s mind, which will overflow if one is off guard. In

her interview with Bonnie Angelo, Morrison refers to the fact that not only the characters in *Beloved* but also all citizens in the United States (including herself), do not want to remember the tragic past of slavery.<sup>11</sup> If we keep these things in mind, we will notice a double meaning of a phrase in the epilogue: “[t]his is not a story to pass on” (275). For one thing, the sentence says that these stories are so full of agony that people cannot bear the pain of telling or hearing it (in this case “pass on” means “hand a story down from generation to generation”); what is more, it also suggests the very contrary: we have to keep in mind these sorrowful stories (in that “pass on” has the same meaning as “forget”).

Therefore, we can say that *Beloved* is a story which focuses on the process of the recovery from amnesia, that is, a struggle to face and “pass on” the painful memories in the past. Before turning to a closer examination of the function of physical contact, I would like to make a few remarks concerning storytelling, because it can be a method for healing in the same way as physical contacts. There is no doubt about the interrelation between narrative and physical contact in *Beloved*: for example, Betty Jane Powell observed very truly that the fragmentation of characters’ stories and bodies is inextricably connected, and that not only a narrative but also a physical intercourse is indispensable for reaching a coherent self: “in a search for self-definition, stories, like corporeal bodies, must be gathered together and eventually lie together, so that both a narrative and a physical intercourse take place” (Powell 149). Her thesis may be appreciated in two points: (1) to define “a coherent self” as a fusion of fragmented stories *and* body parts and to show an indissoluble connection between the two; (2) to grasp in the whole story the wide range of illustrations of physical contact in which fragments merge together.

As Powell supposes, it is likely that physical contact does not function as a means for self-affirmation without narrating one's painful memories. The sexual intercourse between Sethe and Paul D is an example of this. Their passion is described by the unique hand of Morrison: immediately after they have a reunion after eighteen years, which begins the story, "[n]ot quite in a hurry, but losing no time, Sethe and Paul D climbed the white stairs" and Sethe remembers how desire works: "how blindness was altered so that what leapt to the eye were places to lie down, and all else—door knobs, straps, hooks, the sadness that crouched in corners, and the passing of time—was interference" (*Beloved* 20). When Paul D "held her breasts in the palms of his hands" (17), Sethe feels that "the responsibility for her breasts, at last, was in somebody else's hands" (18); however, after the act, both of them are deeply disappointed with each other that Sethe remembers the words of Baby Suggs: "a man was nothing but a man" (22)<sup>12</sup> and Paul D feels disgust at her breasts and the scar on her back, which appeared very attractive to him before.<sup>13</sup> Here, we notice, physical contact between the two does not function as regaining one's coherent self, since they are not ready to accept their painful pasts and keep one's partner from disintegrating. Sethe feels that Paul D's hand lightens her burdens of breasts, that is, her responsibility to protect her children on her own as a mother; however, it lasts only briefly. After the event, Sethe faces the dilemma of whether to count on Paul D or not, only to be rejected by him when he knows the fact of Sethe's killing her child.<sup>14</sup>

However, in the female household without relying on men, Sethe starts to talk about her pasts, encouraged by the existence of her daughter's ghost, who Sethe thinks understands why Sethe had to kill her beloved daughter. We can say that narrating her story was a necessarily process for Sethe's recovery, because

when Paul D, who are also tormented by his painful memories, comes back to Sethe, in exactly the same way at the beginning the story (“not quite in a hurry but losing no time” [270]), he is able to gather the pieces of Sethe finally. Before he helps bathing Sethe by rubbing the parts of her body, she feels a fear of falling apart: “[t]here’s nothing to rub now and no reason to. Nothing left to bathe, assuming he even knows how. Will he do it in sections? First her face, then her hands, her thighs, her feet, her back? Ending with her exhausted breasts? And if he bathes her in sections, will the parts hold?” (272). As Sethe’s fear implies, Paul D’s scrubbing her body probably makes her feel that she breaks down into pieces; however, the disintegration and the pain it entails is necessary for healing, since feeling pain means their recovery from callousness and amnesia. That is what Amy Denver says, when she massages in order to soften Sethe’s pain in her feet that are badly injured on her way to escape. Here, we see that Morrison presents the funkiness of senses or emotion as a means for having strong sense of self for the second time in *Beloved* (as she did in *The Bluest Eye*). Furthermore, she again represents the theme of both the disintegrating of self and the other who prevents it. The idea of interrelationship between self and the other which helps form coherent self can be epitomized by Sixo’s narrative for her lover: “[s]he is a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order. It’s good, you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind” (272-73). From these examples, we can say that, in *Beloved*, Morrison seeks a way for regaining an integrated self in relationship with the other, as I said earlier.

#### 4. A Touch on the Inside Part of Self

Next in this section, I need to investigate the function of physical contact in a new light: as an act to access the inside part of the self. So far, we have seen how both narrative and corporal relationships form opportunities for seeking a coherent self; in addition, I will develop the idea further: it is possible for the two to function as a recovery because the acts are to touch “the inside part of self,” in which characters bury the pieces of their painful memories in the past. Here is how it works: characters put the lid on the box of their memory and keep it inside of their minds. To narrate their own respective pasts is to get into the inside part; as a result characters accept themselves and put their pieces together. The point I want to make is that a physical (or sexual, we may say) contact also provides access to the inside part and functions as a means of recovery. Narrative and corporal touch work through the same mechanism: characters approach their inner minds either mentally or physically.<sup>15</sup>

Let us begin by considering a conversation between Sethe and Paul D. After Paul D has driven the baby ghost out of the house,<sup>16</sup> he interferes in the standoffish relationship between mother and daughter:

“Maybe I should leave things the way they are,” she [Sethe] said.

“How are they?”

“We get along.”

“What about inside?”

“*I don’t go inside*” (45-46, emphasis mine).

These words of Sethe, “I don’t go inside,” represents the characters’ defensive

attitudes in *Beloved*. They do not go into an inner part of their mind since it is in this place that memories of their traumatic experience are buried. I will take three examples to illustrate what is in the inside of characters' hearts. Denver "spent all of [her] outside self loving Ma'am so she wouldn't kill [her] . . ." (207). Paul D, the only man who survived a calamity at Sweet Home, lodges in his chest "the tobacco tin" (113), into which his painful recollections are put. Sethe's husband Halle goes mad from the sight of Sethe's being raped by their master's nephews. Paul D explains that Halle cannot chop the agony down since it injures him *inside*. We see that their painful experience is gnawing at the center of their mind, which seems to tear into pieces at any moment.

Our next concern is to demonstrate that *Beloved* attempts to take her integrated body (the expression may not be suitable in the sense that she is an aggregate of numerous, nameless slaves) through being touched on the inside part of herself. Before doing so, however, I would like to ask one other question: "who is *Beloved*?" It seems reasonable to consider this through three possible theories; she is either: (1) a ghost of Sethe's dead daughter; (2) a spirit of a black girl who was brought from Africa to America through the middle passage; (3) a slave girl who was placed under confinement and suffered sexual abuse from a white man (this theory is based on a remark of Stamp Paid, a male ex-slave: "[*Beloved*] [w]as a girl locked up in the house with a whiteman over by Deer Creek. Found him dead last summer and the girl gone. Maybe that's her. Folks say he had her in there since she was a pup" [235]. This is one of the possibilities, if less likely than others, that Morrison poses in the novel). As to the first and the second, there are several reasons to support these possibilities. Some of the reasons for regarding *Beloved* as a ghost of Sethe's daughter are, for example, Sethe's breaking water before

Beloved appears in front of them, the identification of her name with an inscription on a tombstone, Beloved's scar on her neck, or her memories which only Sethe cherishes. The fact that Beloved bears the characteristics of babies (such as her taste for sweaty things or her broken English) and that she appears right after Paul D runs the spirit of a baby out of the house may be added to this list of evidence. From Beloved's remarks, however, it is apparent that she also has the recollections of a female slave who was crammed on a slave ship and experienced hellish suffering. The main reason for the second is the repetition of words (diamond or iron circle) as a hint of her having journeyed along the middle passage; in addition, her long monologue is all about this. Furthermore, we may notice, in the epigraph of the book, Morrison declares that *Beloved* is a requiem for "Sixty Million and more," those who lost their lives during the middle passage from Africa to America. Here, we have to say that Morrison apparently attaches more than two meanings to the existence of the character Beloved; as a result, it seems that individual characteristics of Beloved are indistinguishable from other ones, which she acquires as a representative of suffering slaves, as I said before.<sup>17</sup>

There is one other thing that is interesting for either the first or the second; the following quotation shows clearly that Beloved is a thing "on the other side" (241). Right before Beloved appears, people on their way to a carnival smell the domed rose on a fence:

Up and down the lumberyard fence old roses were dying. The sawyer who had planted them twelve years ago to give his workplace a friendly feel—something to take the sin out of slicing trees for a living—was amazed by their abundance; how rapidly

they crawled all over the stake-and-post fence that separated the lumberyard from the open field next to it where homeless men slept, children ran and, once a year, carnival people pitched tents. The closer the roses got to death, the louder their scent, and everybody who attended the carnival associated it with the stench of the rotten roses. (47)

What is immediately apparent in this extract is that the fence is a metaphor for a boundary line between the dead and the living; for example, the dying roses which give off a strong scent remind us of the slaves who died an awful death, “[t]he people of the broken necks, of fire-cooked blood and black girls who had lost their ribbons” (181). In the quotation above lies a weird premonition that one of them, a spiteful spirit, will come back beyond the border. Added to this, it is interesting to note that *Beloved* appears on a carnival day; according to Mikhail Bakhtin, the carnival upsets the social order and offers an opportunity for viewers to change. As Susan Corey points out, “it is a fitting prelude to the arrival of *Beloved*, who disrupts the lives of Sethe and her family and opens them to the possibility of change and renewal” (Corey 38). Here we are able to see the grotesqueness of *Beloved* not only because of her ambiguities but also because of her possibilities to blur the divisions between diametrical values unclear, which I call the grotesque in particular in this study.

Furthermore, it is interesting to draw attention not only to the question of who *Beloved* is but also what her function in the novel is. In fact she functions as a catalytic agent in the story: characters have an opportunity to face their inner selves through *Beloved*. Denver, for example, reconstructs a story of the past with

Beloved: “Denver was seeing it now and feeling it—through Beloved. . . . The monologue became, in fact, a duet as they lay down together . . .” (78). In addition, she pries Paul D’s tobacco tin in the chest open, or gives Sethe chances to narrate her painful past after she is released from the burden of telling it, because Sethe thinks that her dead daughter knows all and forgives her. Our concern is, however, not to find any definitive answer to the question but rather to recognize a deliberate ambiguity about the meaning of the existence of Beloved. In fact these considerations themselves are preliminary to a further issue; how such a supernatural being as Beloved makes an attempt to recover her coherent self through the corporeal relationship as a human being with a female body.

For an explanation of Beloved’s grotesque desire, one must clarify the meaning of her soliloquy. It is difficult to decipher, since it is composed in fragmented memories of Beloved and we do not know when and where the events described have happened. Another problem is whether it is a real event in this world or a supernatural occurrence in another world. The poetry will not make sense if we accept that every event actually happens, as Elizabeth House does in her theory. But if we read it carefully enough to put the pieces together, a picture of hell on a slave ship appears and supplemental information regarding events before and after the middle passage is given. The monologue may be divided into four stages accompanied each time by her frustration; first Beloved sees a woman picking flowers; she cannot go to help her because “the clouds of gunsmoke” (214) are in the way. Secondly, on a slave ship Beloved loses the woman “with [her] face” (211), possibly her mother figure, who kills herself by jumping into the sea not being able to stand any more suffering on the slave ship. The fact that white men do not push but she rather goes in of her own free will emphasizes Beloved’s

despair to be deserted by her.

Thirdly, when Beloved is standing in the rain, it seems that a white man commits sexual abuses of Beloved:

I am standing in the rain falling    the others are taken    I  
am not taken    I am falling like the rain is    I watch him eat  
inside I am crouching to keep from falling with the rain    I am  
going to be in pieces    he hurts where I sleep    he puts his finger  
there    I drop the food and break into pieces    she took my face  
away

there is no one to want me    to say me my name (212)

The expression “he hurts where I sleep” or “he puts his finger there” suggests physical abuse to readers; the suggestion is supported by other of Beloved’s remarks on the experience, such as “[o]ne of them [the men without skin] was in the house I was in. He hurts me” (215), or “[g]hosts without skin stuck their fingers in her and said beloved in the dark and bitch in the light” (241). Suffering the abuse and left behind by a mother-like woman, Beloved feels as if her body falls to pieces. Her fear for disintegration intensifies her desire to “join” with a loved one.

The fourth stage of the soliloquy is when Beloved tries to join the woman with her face under the bridge:<sup>18</sup>

I am looking for the join    I am loving my face so much    my  
dark face is closer to me    I want to join    she whispers to me

she whispers I reach for her chewing and swallowing she  
 touches me she knows I want to join she chews and swallows  
 me I am gone now I am her face my own face has left me  
 I see me swim away a hot thing I see the bottoms of my feet  
 I am alone I want to be the two of us I want the join (213)

The question now arises, “what is ‘the join’?” In order to solve the problem what is important here is that Beloved clings to the woman’s face.<sup>19</sup> The most likely explanation of why Beloved mysteriously insists that the woman’s face is Beloved’s own is that Beloved loves her mother too greedily to distinguish between her mother and herself (added to this, Beloved is confused probably because her face resembles her mother’s). Her eager desire to join with her mother is a wish for a fusion, that is to say, the loss of her individuality. For better or worse, Beloved fails to join: the woman does not join with Beloved but chews and swallows her. Or it would be better to say that the fusion is completed in a sense since the woman absorbs Beloved, in which Beloved feels fear for losing sense of self. Here, we see that Beloved’s grotesque desire for her mother is so fierce that it erases the division between self and the other; however, it is likely that Morrison does not find a solution of obtaining integrated self in this grotesque situation, while it is depicted as an idealized limit which a mother and a daughter can reach.

While Beloved, a motherless daughter, attempts a fusion with a mother and fails, she achieves her desire to join in another way: via physical contact with a man. After Beloved comes to 124 with a female body, her pent-up frustration at having been left alone seems to be partly worked out; Beloved expresses her pleasure: “Sethe sees me see her and I see the smile. . . it is the face I lost she is

my face smiling at me    doing it at last    a hot thing    now we can join” (213). However, her hunger for integration is not gratified by Sethe’s smile and it is turned toward Paul D. It is important to keep in mind that Beloved desperately wants to overlap another in “the way the turtles had” (116). The following quotation is significant in understanding what Beloved craves. Beloved is staring at turtles in rapt attention:

Behind her [a turtle] in the grass the other one moving quickly, quickly to mount her. The impregnable strength of him—earthing his feet near her shoulders. The embracing necks—hers stretching up toward his bending down, the pat pat pat of their touching heads. No height was beyond her yearning neck, stretched like a finger toward his, risking everything outside the bowl just to touch his face. The gravity of their shields, clashing, countered and mocked the floating heads touching. (105)

From a grotesque yearning for the turtles embracing each other tightly, she says to Paul D, “I want you to touch me on the inside part and call me my name,” and “she hoist[s] her skirts and turn[s] her head over her shoulder *the way the turtles had*” (116, emphasis mine). A physical fusion, which cannot be realized with a mother, is accomplished with Paul D. Taking into consideration her despairing “there is no one to want me” (212), to touch on the inside part is for Beloved a way of maintaining the unstable self and keeping it from falling to pieces. As we have seen, at a deeper level touching one’s inner place has also a psychological meaning: to share one’s traumatic experiences, relieve one’s loneliness, and be

loved by one's partner. Beloved makes an attempt at recovery in the physical action of touching the inside part.

Beloved's having sexual intercourse with Paul D results in her pregnancy. We may say that the evil aspect of it is emphasized in the novel; her conception is an indisputable evidence of her betrayal of her mother by having a sexual relationship with her mother's lover; that is to say, it embodies an incestuous taboo: sex between a pseudo-father and his daughter (although Sethe pretends not to notice it). Beloved becomes bigger and bigger, as if she gets fatter on the vitality of Sethe.<sup>20</sup> The two bodies are depicted as making a contrast: "[t]he bigger Beloved got, the smaller Sethe became; the brighter Beloved's eyes, the more those eyes that used never to look away became slits of sleeplessness." And they replace their roles at the end: "[t]hen it seemed to Denver the thing was done: Beloved bending over Sethe looked the mother, Sethe the teething child, . . ." (250). Here, Beloved's desire to want her mother's face is realized not in a fusion, which we have seen in her soliloquy, but instead by taking the place of her in a wicked way.

However, Beloved's pregnancy not only bears these negative aspects, but also has another important meaning: the recovery of her body. Beloved gets a beautiful body of a pregnant woman when black women come together in order to exorcise her. They find not an evil spirit but the Holy Mother instead as follows:

The singing women recognized Sethe at once and surprised themselves by their absence of fear when they saw what stood next to her. The devil-child was clever, they thought. And beautiful. It had taken the shape of a pregnant woman, naked and smiling in

the heat of the afternoon sun. Thunderblack and glistening, she stood on long straight legs, her belly big and tight. Vines of hair twisted all over her head. Jesus. Her smile was dazzling. (261)

It will be clear from the quotation that Madonna-like Beloved gets an integrated body as a mother, as Sorrow in *A Mercy* becomes “Complete” when she delivers a baby girl. To sum up, Beloved, raped by a white man and having fear of falling to pieces, recovers her coherent self through the process of a non-violent physical contact and pregnancy as a result of it. As Kayser describes the nature of the grotesque, Beloved is a literary device of the grotesque in order to “INVOKE AND SUBDUE THE DEMONIC ASPECTS OF THE WORLD” (Kayser 188) as we have seen also in the introduction of this thesis. Beloved has to be “subdued” for everybody’s sake, but we must not forget that, in the exorcism ritual above, appears another grotesque: we do not know whether Beloved is a devil or an angel at the very end.

Let us now look at the corporeal relationship between Beloved and Paul D from a different angle: from Paul D’s point of view. It seems reasonable to support the stance that the act is not a consensual one because Beloved coerces Paul D into obedience and he cannot resist her mysterious power. The conduct seems to be far from recovery; in fact, it produces a sinister atmosphere in the same way as Beloved’s pregnancy does. Trudier Harris observed that Beloved absorbs all Paul D’s vitality, the evil nature of which can be compared to “a witch, a ghost, a devil, or a succubus” (Harris 131). It is true that Beloved stands in contrast to Pauline in *The Bluest Eye*, the latter of whom sucks up all Cholly has and gains strength without doing harm to Cholly. However, despite the fact that Harris looks at the

negative features of sexual intercourse between Beloved and Paul D and that she regards it as the revenge of the demonic Beloved, I would like to emphasize the positive side of the act as a means of recovery for both a woman and a man. For Paul D, to touch the inside part of Beloved means to touch his own inner self. Inside himself, where a red heart used to be, now lies a tobacco tin which contains his painful memories. Although “nothing in this world could pry it open” (*Beloved* 113), Beloved, someone in the other world, breaks it open:

She [Beloved] moved closer with a footfall he didn't hear and he didn't hear the whisper that the flakes of rust made either as they fell away from the seams of his tobacco tin. So when the lid gave he didn't know it. What he knew was that when he reached the inside part he was saying, “Red heart. Red heart,” over and over again. Softly and then so loud it woke Denver, then Paul D himself. “Red heart. Red heart. Red heart” (117).

An access to one's inside accompanies an agonizing pain: “[h]is tobacco tin, blown open, spilled contents that floated freely and made him their play and prey” (218). But it is necessary to bear the pain for one's recovery.

While Paul D detests having had physical contact with Beloved, as if it had been a nightmare of coupling with a demon, he reminisces fondly about it after she disappears; Paul D accepts the fact that his desire for Beloved is actually “a life hunger”:

In daylight he can't imagine it in darkness with moonlight seeping

through the cracks. Nor the desire that drowned him there and forced him to struggle up, up into that girl like she was the clear air at the top of the sea. Coupling with her wasn't even fun. It was more like a brainless urge to stay alive. Each time she came, pulled up her skirts, a life hunger overwhelmed him and he had no more control over it than over his lungs. And afterward, beached and gobbling air, in the midst of repulsion and personal shame, he was thankful too for having been escorted to some ocean-deep place he once belonged to. (264)

Here, we notice that “the sea” or “the ocean” in this extract has a double meaning: the negative image of the sea in which a man drowns and tries to escape from on one hand; on the other, the maternal ocean in which a man is born. Again Beloved as the Holy Mother appears: her inside part is, in fact, an “ocean-deep place,” a womb of a mother. A metaphor of Beloved as an ocean holds a deep meaning if we consider that she has been deprived of all water on the middle passage: drinking water, tears, sweat, and urine. Madonna-like Beloved herself goes back to the sea in order to recover all kinds of water she has once lost, planning on rebirth as a daughter at the same time.

## 5. Conclusion

We have observed in this chapter that ex-slaves attempt to recover their coherent selves through physical contact with others, which functions as a means of recovery from disintegration in *Beloved*. Although they have once lost the five senses for self-defense, their desire to be touched on the inside gives them an

opportunity to feel pain again. It is important to bear in mind that to be touched on the inside part is supposed to be a grotesque situation, in which the other enters a domain of self, overstepping the boundary between self and the other. While Morrison depicts the fusion between a mother and a daughter, in which the division between the two disappears, as a critical state of self, we can say that Morrison finds a remedy for trauma of ex-slaves in physical contact with the other, which is another grotesque in the sense that it also blurs the boundary of self.

At the end of the story, Sethe's dead pieces of the body will come alive if Paul D touches them in the way Baby Suggs did, when Sethe barely escaped from a slave life at Sweet Home to her step-mother's house. Paul D decides to "put his story next to hers [Sethe's]" (273) because he is assured that Sethe puts his pieces together and that their pieces make "the quilt patched in carnival colors" (272). Beloved, who fails to fuse with her mother, recovers her integrated body through sexual intercourse with Paul D, her quasi-father. Their relationship can be compared with the one between Pecola and Cholly in *The Bluest Eye*. The tragic rape of a daughter by a father in *The Bluest Eye* has been sublimated into the seduction of a father by a daughter in *Beloved*.

While *Beloved* is the very embodiment of insatiable desire of black people who want to be loved, Morrison creates a beautiful harmony between desire and the five senses, using the metaphor of a corn. After having a disappointing sexual act, Sethe and Paul D, lying on the bed together, respectively think back to Sethe and Halle's first sexual experience in the cornfield at Sweet Home. Their reminiscences intersect with each other at corns, as an erotic symbol of their desire:

Looking at Paul D's back, she remembered that some of the corn stalks broke, folded down over Halle's back, and among the things her fingers clutched were husk and cornsilk hair.

How loose the silk. How jailed down the juice.

The jealous admiration of the watching men melted with the feast of new corn they allowed themselves that night. . . .

The pulling down of the tight sheath, the ripping sound always convinced her it hurt.

As soon as one strip of husk was down, the rest obeyed and the ear yielded up to him its shy rows, exposed at last. How loose the silk. How quick the jailed-up flavor ran free.

No matter what all your teeth and wet fingers anticipated, there was no accounting for the way that simple joy could shake you.

How loose the silk. How fine and loose and free. (27)

Here, we see that men including Paul D eat a corn instead of Sethe, the object of their desire which cannot be satisfied. It is apparent that the corn is compared to a body of a girl and the process of peeling to a sexual act. The purpose of this quotation is to compare it with the scene of Sula's peeling the skin of Ajax in *Sula* or Milkman's dismembering the bobcat in *Song of Solomon*, both of which I closely analyzed in this study. In a similar way in which Sula reaches the center of Ajax or Milkman takes the heart of the prey, the disintegration of the corn symbolizes the act to touch the inside part of the other. In *Beloved*, Morrison depicts this grotesque desire either to be reached the center of self by the other or to reach the

center of the other not as negative impulse: as an incentive for recovery of self.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In addition, women were placed under restraint more firmly than men; according to this moral standard, women were not supposed to have sexual desire like men. Baby Sugg's protest about unfair discrimination against slave women: "[s]laves not supposed to have pleasurable feelings on their own; their bodies not supposed to be like that" (*Beloved* 209) could also be applied to white women, in the sense that they were also sexually repressed under the Victorian preconceived idea against female sexuality, although it is a total fallacy to suppose that white women experienced the same hardship as slave women.

<sup>2</sup> The poets, Robert Browning and Elizabeth Browning provide an example of this. Kern refers to the fact that the husband and the wife had never seen each other without any clothes on, although they wrote passionate poems of love and were regarded as a good model of happy marriage. I will not assert that a loving couple has to be always sexually active, but we must not forget that they were sexually restricted probably because of Victorian sense of values.

<sup>3</sup> Jacqueline Jones acutely points out how humiliating the situation in which a slave husband is when his wife is forced to have sexual relationships with their master as such: "[r]egardless of the circumstances under which their womenfolk were sexually abused, black men reacted with deep humiliation and outrage, a reaction that at least some slaveholders intended to provoke. One Louisiana white man would enter a slave cabin and tell the husband 'to go outside and wait 'till he do what he want to do.' The black man 'had to do it and he couldn't do nothing 'bout it. (This master 'had chillen by his own chillen')'" (Jones 37-38).

<sup>4</sup> Morrison depicts the cruelty of white guards as such: “ ‘Breakfast? Want some breakfast, nigger?’ ‘Yes, sir.’ . . . Occasionally a kneeling man chose gunshot in his head as the price, maybe, of taking a bit of foreskin with him to Jesus” (*Beloved* 107-08).

<sup>5</sup> Although Sethe has a “happy marriage” with her husband Halle (it is said to be “the amazing luck of six whole years of marriage to that ‘somebody’ son who had fathered every one of her children” [*Beloved* 23]), she gave birth to children in succession and experiences unexpected pregnancy, which makes it difficult to carry out the escape plan: “[t]hey [Sweet Home men] only have to wait through the spring. But. Sethe was pregnant in the spring and by August is so heavy with child she may not able to keep up with the men, who can carry the children but not her” (223).

<sup>6</sup> While slave women did not have a way to escape repetitive pregnancy, white women were, on the other hand, able to protect themselves under the strict sexual morality. According to Kern, “[a] good case could be made that the Victorians’ sex ethic was reasonable in light of the dangers of venereal disease and the limited knowledge of and access to contraceptive techniques” (Kern 153).

<sup>7</sup> Added to this “economic significance of the American slave population’s natural increase,” Jones refers to the fact that it was necessarily for a female slave to show her fecundity in order to protect herself: “[e]ach new birth represented a financial gain for the slaveholder, but it was welcomed in the quarters as a ‘social and familial’ fact. Some young girls had their first child out of wedlock, an event that was socially acceptable to the slave community. It also proved functional to a girl’s family since masters were less likely to sell a woman who early demonstrated her fecundity; young people in their late teens and early twenties

were prime candidates for sale if an owner needed the cash” (Jones 35).

<sup>8</sup> Denver’s fear for mother is depicted as the daydream of Sethe’s cutting her head, that is, another representation of a disintegrating body. Denver indulges in reveries in which her mother cuts off her head and braids her hair: “[s]he [Sethe] cut my head off every night. . . . Her pretty eyes looking at me like I was a stranger. . . . After she does it I lie there for a minute with just my head. Then she carries it downstairs to braid my hair. . . . I want to go to sleep but I know if I do I won’t wake up. . . . The scary part is waiting for her to come in and do it” (*Beloved* 206).

<sup>9</sup> The meaning of the self for Denver, however, changes when she realizes from the words of a black boy, Nelson Lord, that she herself is to be taken care of. When harmonious atmosphere of the household changes and her mother gets weakened because of *Beloved*’ persecuting, Denver makes up her mind to step out into the world out there and get the job, as the only one to be relied on of all three women:

Somebody had to be saved, but unless Denver got work, there would be no one to save, no one to come home to, and no Denver either. *It was a new thought, having a self to look out for and preserve.* And it might not have occurred to her if she hadn’t met Nelson Lord leaving his grandmother’s house as Denver entered it to pay a thank you for half a pie. All he did was smile and say, *“Take care of yourself, Denver,”* but she heard it as though it were *what language was made for.* (252, emphasis mine)

An ordinary greeting, “take care of yourself” has a deep meaning for Denver: it

leads her to self-identification, as meaningful as the words of Paul D for Sethe: “[y]ou your best thing” (273). The way in which Denver restores strong sense of self is different from the ones through physical contacts, which I mainly deal with.

<sup>10</sup> Another example can be found in slave men’s attitude toward life. Morrison depicts how they abandon their hope for life, using unique metaphors on her own: “[m]ore than the rest, they killed the flirt whom folks called Life for leading them on. . . . The successful ones—the ones who had been there enough years to have maimed, mutilated, maybe even buried her—kept watch over the others who were still in her cock-teasing hug, caring and looking forward, remembering and looking back” (109).

<sup>11</sup> To quote a famous phrase, “it is about something that the characters don’t want to remember, I don’t want to remember, black people don’t want to remember, white people won’t want to remember. I mean, it’s national amnesia” (Angelo 257).

<sup>12</sup> Sethe develops distrust for men, because she also has a bitter experience of having been betrayed by her husband Halle, who disappeared on the day when they were planning to escape. After sharing information with Paul D, however, Halle turns out to be having lost his mind when he witnessed a horrible scene in which his wife was sucked her breast milk by nephews of their master, which is another, more cowardly betrayal for Sethe, since he did not come to help her.

<sup>13</sup> We see a complete change in Paul D’s attitude toward Sethe’s body in the following quotation: “[o]ut of the corner of his eye, Paul D saw the float of her breasts and disliked it, the spread-away, flat roundness of them that he could definitely live without, never mind that downstairs he had held them as though they were the most expensive part of himself” (*Beloved* 21).

<sup>14</sup> Although Paul D blames Sethe’s “animalistic” behavior by saying, “[y]ou got

two feet, Sethe, not four” (165), Paul D himself is ashamed of “fuck[ing] cows” (20), being not able to repress his excessive desire in his youth. We can say that, in *Beloved*, Morrison seems to lay emphasis on either violent or sexual behavior of slaves to the extent that we call it “animal-like” in a sense, which can correspond to the ones of violent acts of white people. It is Morrison’s adamant attitude toward writing the grotesque of slavery, in which she does not glorify suffering slaves but rather expresses forthrightly tortured desire of slaves under violence of slavery.

<sup>15</sup> In *Sula*, as we have seen in chapter one, similar situations can be found when Sula finds a complete solitude at the center of herself or she breaks down Ajax to find a golden leaf at the core of him. In either case, through physical intercourse, Sula reaches to the inside part of self or the other, which is a key to ego-formation.

<sup>16</sup> Trudier Harris interprets the confrontation between Paul D and Beloved as “a male/female conflict” (Harris 129). According to Harris, “[w]hen he [Paul D] enters the house haunted by Beloved’s ghost, it becomes the enveloping enclosure of the vagina; the vagina dentata myth operates as Paul D *feels* the physical threat of the house” (128).

<sup>17</sup> Critics have expressed their opinions about the identity of Beloved, that is, whether she is a ghost of Sethe’s dead daughter (or a spirit of slaves in a broader sense) or a human being. While some of them agree to leave her ambiguities, Elizabeth House opposes the supernaturalness of Beloved and insists that she is “simply a young woman who has herself suffered the horrors of slavery” (House, “Toni Morrison’s Ghost” 117). However, considering the fact that Morrison is attracted by a supernatural world (Morrison shows this tendency more clearly after *Beloved*, especially in *Paradise*), Trudier Harris is correct in saying that

“Morrison has drawn no final lines between the planes of life and death” (Harris 131) and “has well prepared her readers . . . for complete suspension of disbelief in the human and natural worlds” (128).

<sup>18</sup> Although House refers to the bridge as “an inland bridge” or “the ship’s bridge” (House, “Toni Morrison’s Ghost” 120), I suppose it can be an imagery of the place between the dead and the living, which fits into the air of fantasy of the scene in the water.

<sup>19</sup> Morrison sometimes uses a face of a character as an important motif of image of the self; for example, in *Sula*, after suffering from hallucinations in which his body parts become enormous, Shadrack returns to his senses when he sees in the toilet water a reflection of “a grave black face,” which is “so definite, so unequivocal” (*Sula* 13).

<sup>20</sup> Trudier Harris, who reads *Beloved* as a story of “the male/female clash,” considers that Sethe’s motherhood is “another symbol of authority almost masculine in its absoluteness.” According to Harris, “Beloved’s war against Sethe . . . can be read from one perspective as a further attack against masculine privilege, against the power over life and death that is stereotypically identified with males or with those masculine mother/goddesses” (132).

## Chapter 5

### Into the Wilderness Inside Herself: The Journey Toward Freedom in *A Mercy*

#### 1. Introduction

In *Beloved*, we have explored how characters retrieve their coherent selves through getting to the inside part of themselves, in which their traumatic memories are hidden. In *A Mercy*, which is our main object of study in this chapter, we find a deep wilderness on the inner part of a heroine Florens. She inherits the wilderness from her foremothers, Eva, Hagar or Sethe; however, Florens accomplishes what they could not: to walk into the wilderness inside herself and achieve independence of mind. In an experimental attempt to write the inhuman acts of slavery in *Beloved*, Morrison finds a way for recovery in the bond between self and the other, especially in heterosexual love relationships; in addition, the grotesque desire of *Beloved* becomes enormous to the extent that it wants to fuse into one with her beloved mother, which is the closest relationship between self and the other. Here, we see that Morrison has closed a chapter in the matter of relationship between the two categories, which she has explored in her works including *Beloved* so far. While, on one hand, after *Beloved*, especially in *Paradise* and *Love* and *A Mercy*, the author tends to emphasize the solidarity between women against men; on the other, she also searches for a way to have a strong sense of self not in the bond with the other but in self-reliance.

In view of the problem of grotesque, in *A Mercy*, appears the process in which a role of “the grotesque” in the most general sense of the word, which is “uncanny, creepy, or abnormal,” is imposed upon black people. Under this

dominating sense of values, a wild characteristic of a black person is one of the grotesque which shows his or her inferiority. However, as we will see, inner wilderness of Florens can be the second, more important grotesque: it has possibility to overturn the dominant values by crossing the border between the diametrics.

A good point to start is to mention a historical context in which the work came out: on November 11, 2008, one week after Barack Obama's election, Morrison's ninth novel, *A Mercy*, was published and used as a means for the expression of critics' political agenda in comparison with the "post-racial" age of Obama.<sup>1</sup> Although Morrison herself gives an account of its "pre-racial" situation,<sup>2</sup> *A Mercy* is not pre-racial in the sense that "direct, equalitarian confrontations" (Berlin 55), to borrow Ira Berlin's phrase, is only temporary, even in the novel. That is to say, *A Mercy*, set in the later part of the seventeenth century, focuses on the process of racialization and the impact of it. The important point to note is how the outer world imposes its prejudiced views on a black girl, Florens, that black people are wicked. The incident transforms her from an innocent girl into a ferocious bird<sup>3</sup> and she flies into the wilderness of her own at the end of her journey.

Before it is possible to enter into a detailed discussion of the concept of the wilderness, I should make it clear what I intend by such expressions as "wilderness" or "wildness." We will begin by considering Elaine Showalter's explanation of wilderness. In "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," Elaine Showalter makes reference to the "wild zone" of women's culture. Her theory derives from the definition of Edwin Ardener, who suggests "a model of the cultural situation of women" (Showalter 261). As Ardener acutely pointed out, ". . .

[w]omen constitute a *muted group*, the boundaries of whose culture and reality overlap, but are not wholly contained by, the *dominant (male) group*” (261). It is through this wild zone that some feminists have brought hope of creating a male-free culture, because they have believed that the wild zone is a place outside the dominant male culture, a place where women can write in their own language.<sup>4</sup>

Critics must be careful when adopting Showalter’s idea of wilderness in order to understand the works of Toni Morrison, who is always conscious of herself both as a woman and as an African-American at the same time. Showalter’s definition, however, offers the key to an understanding of wilderness which is mysteriously depicted in *A Mercy*. The only (and crucial) difference is that Morrison’s version implies not only intellectual independence (like Showalter’s), but also females’ physical characteristics, which males in their society attempt to repress: Florens literally walks into the woods and becomes wild.

This chapter is intended as an investigation of the grotesque meaning of wilderness in *A Mercy*. For this purpose, I would like to draw attention to the complicated scene in which Florens, the heroine, having become as enraged as a wild eagle, hits her lover with a hammer. Many scholars believe that her brutal act (the blacksmith is dripping blood before Florens leaves him alone with an injured boy) is only an act of irrational violence, which is deeply rooted in slavery.<sup>5</sup> Yet these critics leave the central problem untouched: the incident brings about dramatic change in Florens.

I would like to focus attention on a quotation from Florens’ soliloquy in the latter part of the novel. The critics, which I have mentioned above, cannot account for her indomitable will to survive, as can be seen in the following quotation:

I am become wilderness but I am also Florens. In full. Unforgiven.  
 Unforgiving. No ruth, my love. None. Hear me? Slave. Free. I last.  
 (*A Mercy* 159)

Here, we notice that Florens proclaims her independence from others' sense of values. If readers interpret her remarks to mean that she is desperate about her becoming violent, they will fail to grasp an inviting possibility for her resistance. The fact is that Florens achieves "freedom" by turning wild, which is, under the dominant value system, supposed to be the act of "a slave" conversely. We can say that her wilderness is grotesque not because it is "irrational violence" but because it disintegrates categories defined by stereotypical ideas about race or gender.

I will deal especially with Florens' journey, during which she gets racialized and reaches her inner wilderness. A flight as an eagle is a means not only for self-defense, which Florens inherits from her mother, but also for subversion of dominant values: (1) to be a black is to be wild (villagers); (2) to be wild is to be a slave (blacksmith).

Before turning to *A Mercy*, I would first like to draw our attention to *Beloved* in which a slave mother, Sethe, a "ferocious hawk," kills her daughter with a saw. The similarity between Sethe and Florens offers the key to an understanding of the wild bird images, not as violent animals under slavery, but as women with their wings retrieved. Although Sethe's attempt to subvert the definition fails under slavery, with the result of her child being murdered, Florens takes over the role and achieves the goal of her resistance.

## 2. Wilderness as a Planted Jungle

First of all, before entering the discussion of the resistance of Morrison's heroines to the definitions given by ruling class, it is necessary to inquire into how absolute they are in *Beloved*. The following quotation shows that there is no way to resist the slave holders as definers. Sixo, one of the male slaves at Sweet Home, talks back to his owner, schoolteacher, when he eats a shoat. He takes advantage of the fact that he himself is one of the owner's possessions, only to fail:

“You stole that shoat, didn't you?”

“No. Sir.” Said Sixo, but he had the decency to keep his eyes on the meat.

“You telling me you didn't steal it, and I'm looking right at you?”

“No, sir. I didn't steal it.” . . .

“What is it then?”

“Improving your property, sir.”

“What?”

“Sixo plant rye to give the high piece a better chance. Sixo take and feed the soil, give you more crop. Sixo take and feed Sixo give you more work.”

Clever, but schoolteacher beat him [Sixo] anyway to show him that definitions belonged to the definers — not the defined.  
(*Beloved* 190)

Here, we see, Sixo outwits his master by using tact to expose a contradiction of

slavery in which a human owns another human. Schoolteacher has to employ violence against Sixo's witty comment, which disregards his master's authority as a definer. This quotation shows that slavery is a system in which a master provides a definition and a slave is supposed to fit this definition perfectly. In the extract above, only a careful reader can see into the secret background of the slave system in *Beloved*: the system in which the white people are the definers and the black people are the defined. Another example to show the defining nature of slavery is Paul D's doubt that his manhood lies not in himself but in his master: "Garner called and announced them men—but only on Sweet Home, and by his leave. Was he naming what he saw or creating what he did not? . . . Oh, he [Paul D] did manly things, but was that Garner's gift or his own will?" (220). Here, we see, Paul D finally finds out that his master is a definer who is able to decide that Paul D is a man or not. Under this system of slavery, Paul D, a slave, cannot have a sense of self because there is no way to judge whatever he does depends on his free will or his master's.

Through the definitive mechanism of slavery, "blackness" is given the same meaning as "barbaric" and black people are categorized into groups of animals, in contrast to human white people. It is apparent that the division between a black and a white is made according to a stereotypical idea about race. Furthermore, black people's animal nature is regarded as an evil characteristic that is inherent in their barbaric race. Needless to say, I use the word "animal" in the sense of a negative characteristic of "uncivilized" people, which is defined in the dominant value system. In view of the prejudice about this wildness, let us now consider an ex-slave Stamp Paid's refutation. He insists that brutal nature does not originate in black people themselves, but rather has been implanted by

white people:

Whitepeople believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle. Swift unnavigable waters, swinging screaming baboons, sleeping snakes, red gums ready for their sweet white blood. In a way, he thought, they were right. The more coloredpeople spent their strength trying to convince them how gentle they were, how clever and loving, how human, the more they used themselves up to persuade whites of something Negroes believed could not be questioned, the deeper and more tangled the jungle grew inside. But it wasn't the jungle blacks brought with them to this place from the other (livable) place. It was the jungle whitefolks planted in them. And it grew. It spread. In, through and after life, it spread, until it invaded the whites who had made it. (198-99)

There is a suggestion here that slave owners, who treat their slaves as if they are animals, are in fact animals themselves, because of their barbaric behavior. Or perhaps it would be more correct to say that white people, who abuse black slaves inhumanly, project their own brutality on the abused slaves. It is clear that a wild nature, which is depicted as "screaming baboons" or "sleeping snakes" is thought to be a negative characteristic which is imposed by others.

It seems reasonable to suppose that the theory about the transplanted wilderness accounts for other examples from *Beloved*. For one thing, a bit, which is an instrument of torture, "put[s] a wildness where before there wasn't any" (71).

Another, more elaborate, example is the scene in which Sethe shows her brutality by wanting to attack the white boy in front of her. Her violent impulse is expressed in peculiar words such as “a *something* came up out of the earth into her—like a freezing, but moving too, like jaws inside” (31). Considering that Sethe is raped and whipped by white boys right before the event, perhaps it is correct to say that Sethe’s “jaws inside” or “a *something*” is not her inherent nature, but a jungle which has been planted by white people. We see that, in *Beloved*, Morrison expresses an idea of implanted wilderness in order to blame inhuman abuse of black people under slavery.

However, we should notice that Sethe’s infanticide cannot be easily reduced to a brutal act which is committed because of an implanted jungle. Although Sethe does not have a chance to show her animal-like strength to a white boy (the person whom Sethe tries to attack is not a white boy, but a white girl helping Sethe), she has a second chance to put her ferocity into action. Stamp Paid thinks back to how quickly Sethe moves, as if she were a hawk, when she snatches her children in order to kill them:

*So Stamp Paid did not tell him [Paul D] how she [Sethe] flew, snatching up her children like a hawk on the wing; how her face beaked, how her hands worked like claws, how she collected them every which way: one on her shoulder, one under her arm, one by the hand, the other shouted forward into the woodshed filled with just sunlight and shavings now because there wasn’t any wood. (157, emphasis mine)*

It is difficult to interpret the metaphor of a hawk, because what it means depends on how one understands Sethe's infanticide. While a sympathy for her makes the hawk a symbol of motherly love, a careful reader will notice that the vicious image of the hawk in the extract is too ominous to represent a loving mother. Judging from the examples which we have dealt with above, it is tempting to say that the image of a predatory bird comes from the jungle, which is planted in Sethe by inhuman abuse from slave holders.<sup>6</sup>

However, Sethe's wings do not have to signify the brutal nature as a negative characteristic of black people that is transplanted through slavery. In short, her flight as a mother bird is an attempt to cross the border between an animal and a human, by flying into the wilderness inside herself, as Florens does in *A Mercy*. In fact, it is apparent that Sethe's humiliating experience in which her animal characteristics were listed inevitably leads to infanticide. The main reason for this connection is that we find the same descriptions of hummingbirds in those two scenes: when she finds out that schoolteacher tells his pupils to write down her animal characteristics, Sethe's disturbance is depicted as follows: "[m]y [Sethe's] head itched like the devil. Like somebody was sticking fine needles in my scalp" (193); on the other hand, when she tries to kill her children, her violent impulse is expressed in the same metaphor of the beaks of hummingbirds: "she [Sethe] heard wings. Little hummingbirds stuck their needle beaks right through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings" (163). If we consider the connection between the two events, we will find the same meaning in Sethe's infanticide and Florens' killing her lover: a resistance against dominant values which regard them as an animal by showing an "animal" characteristic in order to fight for freedom. The crucial difference between the two heroines, however, is

that Sethe, an arrogant mother, fails to achieve freedom unlike Florens by committing a serious error, internalizing the notorious system of slavery: in thinking that she owns her children as a slaveholder does his slaves. Although Sethe as a hawk fails to fly into the wilderness inside herself, that is, “a place outside the dominant culture,” Florens succeeds in subverting the definitions by attacking “the blacksmith,” who stands as a symbol of the power of the definer.

### 3. A Mother Eagle with Broken Wings

It may be worth pointing out, in passing, that Eva, a character from *Sula*, who burns her son to death, is also depicted in the novel as large birds, such as a hawk or a heron. Or we may recall that Hagar from *Song of Solomon*, who loves Milkman so fiercely that she attempts to murder him, has an anaconda in the wilderness of her mind. While in Morrison’s works we meet various animal figures which have different meanings respectively, predatory birds appear in violent scenes such as murder. My central concern about Florens as an eagle and Sethe as a hawk, above all, acquires importance, since those images appear in crucial events in each story. It is important to bear in mind that all women, including Eva, who evoke predatory bird images commit violent acts against those whom they love. One cannot conclude, however, that the raptor images simply represent destructive maternal love. Before turning to the problem of Florens, in this section I will examine the myth of a mother eagle in *A Mercy*, an allegory for conflict between men and women.<sup>7</sup>

In *A Mercy* appears a symbolic myth of an eagle, being knocked down by a man. A crucial difference between Sethe (or Eva) and the mother bird in *A Mercy* is that it does not bring harm to her baby birds, but protects them from evils. The

storyteller is Lina, who is devoted to Florens like a mother at Jacob's farm, and "[t]hey had memorable nights, lying together, when Florens listened in rigid delight to Lina's stories" (*A Mercy* 59). Their great favorite is a tale of a mother eagle who is fierce and protective of her young, but defenseless against humans:

One day, ran the story, an eagle laid her eggs in a nest far above and far beyond the snakes and paws that hunted them. . . . *At the tremble of a leaf, the scent of any other life, her frown deepens, her head jerks and her feathers quietly lift. Her talons are sharpened on rock; her beak is like the scythe of a war god.* She is fierce, protecting her borning young. But one thing she cannot defend against: the evil thoughts of man. (60, emphasis mine)

The first thing that is apparent here is how similar the expressions of the bird are to the ones of Sethe in section one, although they are poles apart in the way they act. While the most likely explanation of the myth is that it is an allegory of European colonization in the New World,<sup>8</sup> another explanation for the story lies a little deeper. That is to say, it stands for the sexual subjugation of the female by the male. It is noteworthy that the eagle's world is invaded by a man who attacks her with a stick, a symbol for the menace of men. The tale expresses the difficult situation of women in *A Mercy*: their wings taken away, the women have lost their freedom and become the slaves of men.

In *A Mercy*, we are shown the conflict between male and female through their approaches to nature. While men try to keep nature under his control, women worship it; or it may be nearer to the truth to say that they are nature

itself. For example, for Jacob Vaark, a white settler who tries “to bring nature under control” (47), a golden fog of the new continent, blocking his way, is something mysterious he has to conquer: “[u]nlike the English fogs he had known since he [Jacob] could walk, or those way north where he lived now, this one was sun fired, turning the world into thick, hot gold. Penetrating it was like struggling through a dream. . . . It was only after he reached the live oak trees that the fog wavered and split. He moved faster then, more in control but missing, too, the blinding gold he had come through” (7-8). Here, we see Jacob’s ambivalent feelings toward mother nature: while he conquers the sacred fog by his masculine force by “penetrating” it and has a dream of “a ground house of many rooms rising on a hill above the fog” (33), he “misses” it which embraces him like mother’s womb.

By contrast, women pay their respects to nature and live with it. Lina, a Native American woman who works with Florens as a slave at Jacob’s farm, provides an example. She is attracted by the mystic power of fire, in spite of the fact that it has completely burned down her village: “[f]ire. How quick. How purposefully it ate what had been built, what had been life. Cleansing somehow and scandalous in beauty. Even before a simple hearth or encouraging a flame to boil water she felt a sweet twinge of agitation” (47). Another example is Rebekka, Jacob’s wife, who cherishes conflicting emotions toward water. On the long voyage toward New World, she talks to sea water as if it were a human:

There was nothing in the world to prepare her [Rebekka] for a life of water, on water, about water; sickened by it and desperate for it. Mesmerized and bored by the look of it, especially at midday when the women were allowed another hour on deck. Then she talked to

the sea. “Stay still, don’t hurtle me. No. Move, move, excite me. Trust me, I will keep your secrets: that the smell of you is like fresh monthly blood; that you own the glove and land is afterthought to entertain you; that the world beneath you is both graveyard and heaven” (71).

We can say that Morrison often uses the imagery of water as a representation of femininity (as can be seen in *Beloved*). In doing so, it is likely that Morrison carefully avoids to attach only one meaning to it (the same observation can be applied to the imagery of fire here); in the extract above, water (and also fire) both nurtures and tortures humans. That is to say, we see that the antithetical concept of life and death lies in nature at the same time. Women in *A Mercy* understand the twofold characteristics of nature and try to coexist together with it.

In addition, in a soliloquy of Rebekka, we will find a description of the sexual subjugation of the female by the male, as well as the myth of a mother eagle. Rebekka has no choice but to be a servant, a prostitute or a wife, and chooses to be a wife, since it seems to be the safest choice. On a journey by ship from England to America in order to marry a man who has purchased her, Rebekka enjoys the company of the “exiled, thrown-away women” (80). Women at the bottom of the social pyramid can luxuriate in a feeling of freedom: “[p]erhaps they [the women] were blotting out, as she [Rebekka] was, what they fled and what might await them. Wretched as was the space they crouched in, it was nevertheless blank where a past did not haunt nor a future beckon. Women of and for men, in those few moments they were neither. . . . For them, unable to see the sky, time became simply the running sea, unmarked, eternal and of no matter”

(83). In the extract above, appears a temporal men-free community “the running sea” creates, in which miscellaneous women of all sorts and conditions are liberated from obligations imposed in a male-dominant society. But the blank interval lasts only briefly; as soon as they land at a port, they again become “women of and for men.”

Furthermore, women living for men fail to establish intimate maternal relationships. In the myth of a mother eagle, a child is violently separated from its mother by a traveler. A baby bird that hatches from one of the eggs is Florens, who has “mother hunger” (61) as an orphan. Her overwhelming sense of loss is expressed as images of her disintegrated self. Although an orphan Sorrow becomes “Complete” (132) as an integrated self when she has a daughter, Florens cannot prevent herself from breaking into pieces.

#### 4. Florens’ Experience of Being Expelled

Having observed the conflict between men and women and noticed the position of women, one can then go on to consider the process of Florens’ journey of her life from an innocent slave girl to an independent woman in the wilderness. Florens is a black slave girl of Jacob Vaark, who accepts her as the payment of a debt. Not knowing her mother’s unexpressed intention to protect Florens from their lascivious master by sending her away, Florens is convinced that her mother prefers her brother and deserts her. Some years later Florens falls in love with the blacksmith, who comes to Vaark’s farm to make a gate of Jacob’s new house. When her mistress Rebekka is dying from smallpox, Florens starts a dangerous journey to the blacksmith who can give Rebekka treatment.<sup>9</sup> Her strong motivation to arrive at the destination is due to her love of the blacksmith, rather than her wish

for her mistress' recovery. However, in spite of her fulfilling the desire to meet him again, she knocks down him who rejects her as her mother did in the past and goes back to the wilderness.

What is important for an understanding of Florens' wild nature is her three "expels," in Florens' words, in which somebody exiles her from where she is staying. First, her mother abandons Florens (although she misunderstands her mother's feeling). From that time on, Florens has been obsessed with the delusion of her mother holding her brother's hand. Rejection by her mother so deeply hurts Florens that she lapses into self-contempt, which is expressed as a dream in which she has no face: "I [Florence] dream a dream that dreams back at me. . . . I notice I am at the edge of a lake. . . . I want to put my face deep there. I want to. What is making me hesitate, making me not get the beautiful blue of what I want? I make me go nearer, lean over, clutching the grass for balance. . . . Right away I take fright when I see my face is not there. Where my face should be is nothing" (135-36). We see that Florens' precarious sense of self due to "mother hunger" (61) is represented by the fear for the loss of her face.<sup>10</sup> Immediately after the scene above, a phantom of her mother with her brother appears again. As a result of her trauma of being deserted by her mother, Florens becomes "the docile creature" (144) with "that combination of defenselessness, eagerness to please and, most of all, a willingness to blame herself for the meanness of others" (150). It is likely that she reproaches herself for her mother's leaving her and her sense of guilt makes it difficult to build reciprocal relationships with others.

Secondly, Florens is expelled from Widow Ealing's cottage, where she has been sheltered during the journey. It is because she is unjustly suspected of being the Black Man's (or Devil's) minion on account of her black skin. The following

extract describes a scene in which white people in the hamlet strip Florens naked and inspect her body for the physical signs that she is a devilish creature. As Sethe's body parts are sized up by a measure and her animal characteristics are listed, Florens is treated as if she were a feral creature such as a bear, a dog or a snake:

Eyes that do not recognize me [Florens], eyes that examine me for a tail, an extra teat, a man's whip between my legs. Wondering eyes that stare and decide if my navel is in the right place if my knees bend backward like the forelegs of a dog. They want to see if my tongue is split like a snake's or if my teeth are filing to points to chew them up. To know if I can spring out of the darkness and bite. (112-13)

This quotation shows how the mechanism of racialization works by the gaze of another in *A Mercy*. Having lived among the slaves with various colors, Florens has not been aware of racial difference; however, villagers' merciless eyes make Florens have a sense of racial inferiority for the first time. In addition, the villagers attempt to combine her newly given inferiority with bodily features besides her skin color in the extract above. Attention should be drawn to the fact that their anti-foreign attitude toward physical differences leads to discrimination here.

The violent eyes of villagers impose their one-sided view on Florens that black people are evil. Through the painful experience, Florens, who internalizes the dominating standard, cannot keep herself from shrinking and falling apart:

Inside I [Florens] am shrinking. I climb the streambed under watching trees and know I am not the same. I am losing something with every step I take. I can feel the drain. Something precious is leaving me. I am a thing apart. With the letter I belong and I am lawful. Without it I am a weak calf abandon by the herd, a turtle without shell, a minion with no telltale signs but a darkness I am born with, outside, yes, but inside as well and the inside dark is small, feathered and toothy. Is that what my mother knows? Why she chooses me to live without? Not the outside dark we share, a minha mae and me, but the inside one we don't. Is this dying mine alone? Is the clawing feathery thing the only life in me? (113)

Here, Florens' darkness spreads not only to the outside but also to the inner side of her mind. The experience in the hamlet exposes her own inferiority complex caused by her mother's apparent rejection of her. Florens suspects that her mother was wary of her daughter's inner darkness, which her mother did not have.

The question now arises: what does the "inside darkness" mean in the above quotation? Remembering our discussion in section one, it seems plausible to suppose that it is a jungle planted through the humiliating experience of being regarded as an animal. If one pays attention, however, to "the clawing feathery thing" in the inner darkness, one will realize that the bird is Florens herself, who is like the deserted chick from the story of a mother eagle. Consequently, Florens' inner darkness is not a negative characteristic that is imposed by white people; it

is instead the wildness which Florens inherits from her eagle mother.

## 5. The Awakening of the Wild

Lastly, I will examine the process in which Florens releases a bird which lives in the inside part of her mind. The final rejection is from her lover, the blacksmith, who expels her from his house. After the dreadful experience in the village, Florens finally arrives at the blacksmith's. While the blacksmith goes to Vaark's farm in order to give Rebekka treatment, Florens injures Malaik, a little boy who lives with the blacksmith, for fear that the blacksmith chooses not her but the boy as her mother did in the past. Witnessing the scene, the blacksmith tells Florens that she contents herself with the life of a slave because "[her] head is empty and [her] body is wild" (139) and because she completely depends on him without having a sense of independence. Florens claws back to keep the little bird from dying:

You [blacksmith] alone own me [Florens].

Own yourself, woman, and leave us be. You could have killed this child.

No. Wait. You put me in misery.

You are nothing but wilderness. No constraint. No mind.

You shout the word—mind, mind, mind—over and over and then you laugh, saying as I live and breathe, a slave by choice.

On my knees I reach for you. Crawl to you. You step back saying get away from me.

I have shock. Are you meaning I am nothing to you? That I

have no consequence in your world? My face absent in blue water  
 you find only to crush it? Now I am living the dying inside. No. Not  
 again. Not ever. Feathers lifting, I unfold. The claws scratch and  
 scratch until the hammer is in my hand. (139-40)

For an understanding of the controversial scene above, we need to connect the incident in the quotation with the other two expels, which we have seen in the section three. The bird inside Florens is already dying after she experiences her mother's refusal and the villager's imposing a definition of her as an animal. Now she unfolds her feathers for the first time, resolved to protect herself from any more attacks.

The second expel is to define Florens' blackness as wildness by white people; the third is to define Florens' wildness as one of a slave's by a black man. Those experiences impose on Florens a sense of values that consolidate her position at the bottom of the social pyramid which is based on racism/sexism. According to the blacksmith, Florens' unrestrained passion for him is a kind of slavery in itself and, in effect, condemns her to live outside of civilized life in a wilderness of her own making. However insightful the blacksmith may be, he cannot foresee Florens' eventual liberation as an eagle. That is, for Florens, the wilderness she experiences in her slavery is not an end but a means for achieving freedom. Recall our earlier example in the introduction of this chapter in which Florens proclaims her liberation from the bondage of the dominating values. Let me stress again that Florens' flight is not a sudden explosion of rage but an overturning of the false dichotomies between human and animal, free person and slave according to the stereotyped view. For Florens, wilderness is neither a

jungle which is planted by white people nor a synonym for a slave: it is a place in her mind in which she retrieves freedom with the wings of her mother. Florens grows from a slave girl who is dependent on others to a liberated woman who owns herself.

It may be worth pointing out that Florens' dramatic change can be told by Scully, another character from the novel, who can view a person objectively. When he sees Florens walking home from the blacksmith's, he makes remarks about Florens' drastic change such as "the docile creature they knew turned feral" (144) or "she looks less like a visitation than a wounded redcoat, barefoot, bloody, but proud" (146). As a matter of course, it can be said that Florens and her mother arrive at a mutual understanding in the sense that Florens ceases to "give dominion of [herself] to another," which her mother says to be "a wicked thing" (165).

## 7. Conclusion

What I have tried to show in this chapter is that Florens' flight in *A Mercy* is a subversion of the conventional definition of wildness as a synonym for non-human slave. Florens flies across the border between an animal and a human, or a slave and a free person, which is formed according to preconceived ideas, so that she dissolves those categories. Her attempt comes not only from her mother, a hawk which protects her; moreover, she takes over the task from Sethe, who has no other choice than to kill her daughter. Thus we see a violent, "grotesque" climax of the novel, in which a heroine beats her lover to death becomes another grotesque at a deeper level: to blur the boundaries between the two opposites. In fact, Florens is Morrison's first heroine who accomplishes independence from

others, to be more specific, from men, and feels strong sense of self on her own. Florens were fiercely obsessed with her lover and thought herself “nothing” when he rejected her exactly like Hagar in *Song of Solomon*; however, the crucial difference between the two is that Florens ends her dependence on the other and realizes to “own oneself” through liberating her inner wilderness (we may notice that Hagar’s wilderness is conquered by Milkman, as we have already seen in chapter two).

As for the idea of wilderness, it is noteworthy how it figures differently in Morrison’s works. Wilderness can be both a jungle planted by others (as we saw in *Beloved*) and a strength with which a heroine takes flight with her own wings. Interestingly enough, the image of the eagle takes on a new aspect. In *A Mercy* the official symbol of the United States is made to stand more for the oppressed than for the might of the nation.

I have not dealt with the problem of Florens’ language in this chapter, but lastly it is interesting to note that another meaning lies in a large-winged bird image of Florens: it is also understood to represent her gaining the ability to speak in her own language exactly as Showalter’s definition of the wilderness. In *A Mercy*, the narrative of Florens plays a critical role, which occupies more than one-fourth of the entire novel, being inserted between the stories of other characters. At the end of the story, we find that her stories are written on the wall of the house which her former lover built. Although Florens’ feathers close “[f]or now” (156), the words of a memoir fly away instead:

These careful words, closed up and wide open, will talk to themselves. Round and round, side to side, bottom to top, top to

bottom all across the room. Or. Or perhaps no. Perhaps these words need the air that is out in the world. Need to fly up then fall, fall like ash over acres of primrose and mallow. Over a turquoise lake, beyond the eternal hemlocks, through clouds cut by rainbow and flavor the soil of the earth. (159)

The beautiful landscape in which the Florens' words fly across as if it were little birds is what is lost when a traveler colonizes America in the myth of the mother eagle. That is to say, Florens rewrites the words of a violent colonizer: "[t]his is mine" (60). The point is that her strong, candid narrative shows that to manipulate her own language which flies out of the father's house by its own is an essential constituent of her independence.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Useful information on a close connection between the presidential election and reviews of the book is given by Jessica Wells Cantiello. According to Cantiello, Morrison's "unprecedented endorsement" of the president accentuates the tendency in which the work "has become coupled with that event [the election] through reviews, interviews, and public 'conversations' that Morrison gave in a number of major cites" (Cantiello 165).

<sup>2</sup> Morrison states that she "wanted to separate race from slavery to see what it was like, what it might have been like, to be a slave but without being raced; where your status was being enslaved but there was no application of racial inferiority" (Jennings 645).

<sup>3</sup> It is of note that Morrison introduces the bird image not literally but

metaphorically. As is often the case with her, Morrison uses the metaphor of a bird as a technique for expressing female characters' self. In this chapter, I deal with Florens as an eagle (and Sethe) in comparison with wildness. As we shall see later in section one, a metaphor of a raptorial bird produces an aesthetic effect in representing bloody violence.

<sup>4</sup> I would here like to draw attention to Showalter's cautious attitude: she provides a warning against the radical feminists' romantic view of the wilderness as the "undifferentiated universality of texts" and insists that feminist critics should aim at "the tumultuous and intriguing wilderness of difference itself" (Showalter 267).

<sup>5</sup> Their claim depends on the fact that Florens' separation from her mother in slavery transactions warps Florens' personality. Jean Wyatt, for example, claims that "her [Florens'] capacity to read the meaning of others' words is partially disabled" (Wyatt 128) and that "[c]ondensed in the eaglet image is the rage of the orphaned child at being forsaken" (139). However, Wyatt's theory of the scene does not account for Florens' achieving freedom after the event.

<sup>6</sup> As a matter of course, Sethe's behavior is not accepted by other people, especially men, and is classified into an animal characteristic. Her partner, Paul D, blames Sethe for behaving like an animal and says that "[y]ou got two feet, Sethe, not four" (*Beloved* 165).

<sup>7</sup> The struggle between sexes is a prominent motif of Morrison, which I have paid close attention to in this work. We can say that while Morrison tends to cross-racial idea in her later works as I mentioned, the difference and discord between men and women becomes more and more emphasized.

<sup>8</sup> The idea comes from the fact that the storyteller Lina is a Native American. She has a traumatic experience of having seen soldiers "circle[d] the whole village [of

hers] with fire” (*A Mercy* 45) in order not to spread an infectious disease outside the area. We should note that Morrison carries transracial ideas about women in later works of hers (particularly in “Recitatif,” *Paradise*, and *A Mercy*); therefore, the tale of separated mother and child can be understood not for specific race but for every woman. In *A Mercy*, there are many cases in which Morrison creates a sense of solidarity of various types of women different in race or status.

<sup>9</sup> While we are informed of the location of Jacob’s household (seven miles from Milton, Massachusetts), it is a complicated task to predict the trail of Florens (and the location of the hamlet or blacksmith’s residence), which lies outside the scope of this paper.

<sup>10</sup> As I mentioned in chapter five, one’s face is an important motif which is concerned with a character’s sense of self. As Beloved wants her mother’s face, it is likely that maternal love is closely connected to the imagery of the face.

Part 3

Ravenous Women:  
Representations of Eating

## Chapter 6

### Eating as a Means of Subverting Social Systems

In part two, we investigated the representations of wild birds in Morrison's first (*The Bluest Eye*), fifth (*Beloved*), and ninth (*A Mercy*) novel and noticed that she achieves the transition from Pecola, through Sethe, to Florens: from a little bird which cannot fly because of her grotesque desire making her insane, to a ferocious hawk whose grotesque wilderness crosses the border between diametric oppositions set according to the dominant value system. In this part, we will demonstrate how eating, one of the wild natures of Morrison's female characters, functions as a means of invalidating the social systems of class, race, or gender. It is also notable that, as *Beloved's* desire for her mother becomes so grotesque as to fuse with the other, when Consolata "eats" Deacon in *Paradise*, the division between self and the other blurs, and Deacon, out of a fear from being eaten, feels that the other oversteps the boundary and invades the inner part of himself. While Morrison allows Florens to achieve independence from a man in her ninth novel, in her seventh, *Paradise*, we need to return to the subject of the boundary between self and the other which becomes ambiguous through the act of eating, which signifies an intense desire for the other. In the first place, we can say that eating (or an appetite which lies at the base of eating), is a grotesque act in the sense that it is an instinctive and animal-like characteristic of humans. But we will find the second use of the grotesque also in this chapter: to deconstruct the dominant social values. In the fourth work *Tar Baby*, which I will briefly deal with before *Paradise*, we will examine the function of meals that shakes the power relationships, while we focus on the specific act of eating in *Paradise*.

Before entering the discussion of *Tar Baby*, I need to mention the ambivalent characteristic of eating or cooking in Morrison's fictions: it acquires both positive and negative meanings. Morrison is a writer who describes many scenes of cooking or eating in her works,<sup>1</sup> and she seems to enjoy writing them. However, as well as other novels by feminist writers, in Morrison's, cooking can be both a privilege and a duty for women; that is to say, it can be a source of female strength and, at the same time demand vassalage of women to men through their obligation to serve food to their masters. We can say that a kitchen is a place of female communication and also a cage; in addition, women who are confined in the kitchen as cooks are not supposed to have pleasurable feelings in eating by themselves. However, because of this confinement, when women eat voraciously, eating reveals its grotesque nature and there is a reversal of the usual orders as can be seen in *Tar Baby* and *Paradise*.

## I The Christmas Dinner Which Upsets the Social Orders of Class, Race, and Gender in *Tar Baby*

In *Tar Baby*, in which appear several clashes between races, sexes or classes through a romantic relationship between a black couple (Jadine and Son),<sup>2</sup> characters are divided into the specific groups of those three categories; for example, Jadine, the heroine of the novel, a light-skinned black, highly educated in Paris, aims for her financial and psychological independence from men, while the top character is Valerian Street, a retired president of a sweets company and a master of his wife and black servants. What I try to show in this section is that through the grotesque function of eating, this power structure becomes unstable

and the tables are turned in favor of the oppressed (it is interesting to note that it happens on the dinner “table”). That is to say, when “white folks and black folks” “sit down and eat together” (*Tar Baby* 210), which according to Son should not happen, a meal functions as a means of upsetting social orders.

Morrison chooses as the setting for the story of *Tar Baby* a Caribbean island, called Isle des Chevaliers, in which a white old man of great wealth, Valerian Street, moves after retirement and conquers its wilderness by destroying natural environments. Although it seems that Valerian controls nature and keeps it in order, the Caribbean wilderness has an influence on the husband and wife; for example, Jadine finds “flecks of menace” in quarrels between the two, which used to be “the tiffs of long-married people who alone knew the physics of their relationship.” Jadine supposes that the reason for this lies in the place: “the wilderness creeping into Valerian and Margaret’s seasoned and regulated arguments, subverting the rules so that they looked at each other under the tender light of a seventy-year-old chandelier, brought by Valerian’s father in celebration of his wife’s first pregnancy, lifted their lips and bared their teeth” (68). Morrison uses an odd contrast between a chandelier, a symbol of wealth, and animal-like expressions of the two, lifting the lips and baring the teeth. As we have seen in chapter five, although it is said that “the wilderness creeps into” people, the fact is that the wilderness discloses a wild nature inherent in them, which is usually hidden behind their masks of sophistication.

Although the creeping wilderness implies the approaching chaos, the power relationships between a husband and wife, or a master and servants are still maintained by the system of eating in the house of Street; that is to say, Valerian has control of the house as an eater over his servants, a black couple,

Sydney and Ondine Childs, who are supposed to serve food as a butler and a cook. We can say that the problem of eating occupies an important position in *Tar Baby*, not only because Morrison opens the story with a scene of a meal, following a symbolic swimming scene of Son and a description of a wild jungle of the island, but also because key conversations in the island always take place during meals (it seems that Morrison attaches meanings to those scenes intentionally). A symbolic act for the story is Valerian's sitting "in the December sunlight watching his servant pour coffee into his cup" (16). Their conversation is taking place when Valerian eats and his butler, Sydney, serves his food. Valerian often complains about the food Sydney offers; for example, he tells Sydney that the cook, Ondine (a wife of Sydney), should stop mixing Postum with coffee and serving croissants. Also, Margaret, the wife of Valerian who is twenty years old younger than him, complains about the menu Sydney and Ondine offer. Out of pride in herself as a mistress, Margaret says that "I am not a cook and I never have been. I don't want to see the kitchen. I don't like kitchens" (25), which is a deliberate insult to their cook Ondine, who was once a good friend of Margaret until her son Michael was born. As the words of Valerian: "[n]obody ever sees a cook eat anything" (188) show, Ondine is not supposed to enjoy her meals by herself but is always under the obligation of cooking for other people, including her husband. We see that Ondine stands at the lowest of the four people, Valerian, Margaret, Sydney and her, because even her husband stands as an advantage over her by urging her to serve him quickly.<sup>3</sup>

However, Margaret's words of insult to the cook Ondine are also a false display of power, since Ondine (and Sydney) has secret revenge on her masters by controlling what they eat and serving the foods they do not like. When Margaret

makes a complaint about a pineapple which she does not like and says: “[t]hey tell *us* what to eat. Who’s working for who?” (23), her words bring about a truth about an eater’s inconvenience and a cook’s latent power. There is no doubt that Ondine has full knowledge of her masters’ likes and dislikes, so when Margaret rejects the pineapple and requests a mango, Ondine’s purpose is not to satisfy her mistress but to irritate her, which is fulfilled (Ondine’s hostile feelings for Margaret are clearly expressed in the novel). Furthermore, the conflicts arise not only between masters and servants, but also between husband and wife over eating. Valerian is always in a position of power over Margaret by looking down on his wife, who cannot enjoy her meals because of her worries both about weight gain and about committing a blunder on the dining table due to a sudden attack of dementia.

While there are conflicts between the four people over eating as we have seen, the balance of power is barely maintained because they accept their roles as an eater or a servant, staying in each one’s domain (for example, in the dining room for Margaret and the kitchen for Ondine). However, the appearance of Son, a hungry, wild eater, in whose eyes other people find “[s]paces, mountains, savannas” (158), changes the whole aspect of the situation; that is to say, the domination of a master through the system of eating cannot be sustained, because the master’s authority as an eater is undermined by Son’s hungriness. Son, a black fugitive who has accidentally killed his wife, jumps out of the ship in which he smuggles himself and arrives at Valerian’s house, *L’Arbe de la Croix*. In spite of his low social status, Son is always an eater in the house; for example, before Margaret finds him hiding in her closet, Son keeps eating stocks of chocolates, and Valerian even invites him to a dinner as soon as Son appears before them, which shows profound disrespect for Sydney, who has never sat at the table with his master

(added to this, everybody except Valerian is afraid of Son, which is a natural reaction when people find a shabby stranger lurking in their house). Following the intrusion of Son, “the chocolate eater” (104), the orders concerning eating in the house of Street start disintegrating. When Margaret insists that she will cook the Christmas dinner by herself for her son Michael, Ondine does not like her mistress’s caprice of the moment, because her whim does not mean that she will be released from the kitchen even temporarily, but rather has her troubles increased by Margaret’s interference (and it will be Ondine who glosses over mistakes if Margaret fails).

On Christmas day, after the members of the house notice that neither one of the guests including Michael, whose visit Margaret has been looking forward so much to, appears, Valerian suggests that “all sit down and have the dinner among [them]selves” (195). Therefore, all six people in the house, Valerian, Margaret, Sydney, Ondine, Son, and Jadine, sit together at the dining table and serve themselves the foods Margaret cooked with the help of reluctant Ondine. The dinner continues almost smoothly except for sullen Ondine, who is expected to thank Margaret for liberating her from kitchen.<sup>4</sup> However, when Valerian tells that he fired two servants (Gideon the gardener and Therese the laundry woman) because he witnessed them trying to steal apples, Ondine accuses him for not telling her of the dismissal because she waited for them to come in vain and had to take charge of extra chores instead of them. Not only Ondine, but also Sydney and Son become angry about Valerian’s high-handedness (Sydney, because of Valerian’s slight to his wife and himself, and Son, because of Valerian’s atrocious treatment of the fired servants who were very kind to Son). What is important here is that their quarrel over fired servants and stolen apples becomes worse

when they bring up a matter of cooking. Son aggravates Valerian's anger by blaming his wife for pretending to be a cook: "[t]wo people [Gideon and Therese] are going to starve so your wife could play American mama and fool around in the kitchen" (205). Added to this, Valerian speaks about Ondine contemptuously by referring to her just as a cook: "[s]o what? All of a sudden I'm beholden to a cook for the welfare of two people she hated anyway?" Ondine's response to this insult: "I may be a cook, Mr. Street, but I'm a person too" (207) exposes Valerian's cruelty by which he thinks that it is not necessary for him to treat his cook equally. In Ondine's keen reproach to Valerian, appears her increasing frustration at having been looked down on as a cook for years.

However it is not Valerian but Margaret who makes Ondine's accumulating anger explode by defending her. Ondine finds Margaret's attitude intolerable, because Ondine feels that "having caused all the trouble, now she [Margaret] was pretending that Ondine was the source of the dispute" (207). Losing all restraint, Ondine pours out her resentment against Margaret and Valerian as follows:

"I'll tell it. She [Margaret] wants to meddle in *my* kitchen, fooling around with pies. And *my* help gets fired!"

"*Your* kitchen? *Your* help?" Valerian was astonished. . . .

Ondine was fuming now. "The first time in her life she tries to boil water and I get slapped in the face. Keep that bitch out of my kitchen. She's not fit to enter it. She's no cook and she's no mother."

Valerian stood up. "If you don't leave this room I'll . . ." It was

the second time he ordered a dismissal and the second time it held no force. . . .

“You don’t work here anymore,” he said.

“Oh, yeah? Who’s going to feed you? *Her?*” She pointed up table at Margaret. “You’ll be dead in a week! and lucky to be dead. And away from her” (207-08).

The conversation in the extract is important (we may notice that in *Tar Baby* Morrison uses conversations, especially during the meals, in essential scenes) because it depicts a crucial moment in which Ondine the cook turns out to be an influential person behind the scenes and Valerian the head of the house is forced from power; in other words, it can be said a rebellion of a cook and a fall of an eater. Ondine places the fact under Valerian’s nose: that she, who is relegated to the lowest position in the house as a cook, keeps her masters alive by letting them eat. Her adherence to the kitchen shows her pride as “the woman in this house” (209) and she shuts Margaret out from *her* kitchen, insisting that she is neither a cook nor a mother.

The reason why Margaret does not fit into the role of a mother, in addition to the one of a cook, comes to light in Ondine’s remark which follows the extract above. After grappling with Margaret, Ondine divulges a secret which she has kept to herself for thirty years, about Margaret’s ill-treatment of her son Michael (“[s]he [Margaret] stuck pins in his [Michael’s] behind. Burned him with cigarettes. Yes, she did, I saw her; I saw his little behind. She burned him!” [208]). Due to Ondine’s disclosure of Margaret’s sin in the past, characters (and also readers) find out another reason why Ondine has been criticizing Margaret when

she acts like a good mother, cooking an apple pie for her son for the Christmas dinner. Nobody in the room follows Valerian's order to call the police when two women start to fight (this is the third time his order is ignored); furthermore, the information that his wife abused their child without being noticed by him makes Valerian so desperate that he completely loses his dignity, while, with her past now shared with her husband, Margaret's "beautiful face was serene" (209). It must be noted that what makes the subversion possible is those three changes concerning matter of eating: Margaret's intrusion into Ondine's kitchen, the reversal of the roles of a cook and an eater, and the dinner at the same table.

After the Christmas dinner, it is apparent that there was a reversal of roles both between a master and butler and between a husband and wife. Margaret keeps talking about what she did to Michael and her feelings at that time in details to her husband who does not want to hear it. When she uses the word "delicious" to describe her evil act, that is, a "pin-stab in sweet creamy flesh" of her baby (231), Margaret's tortured appetite for her son makes her appear a witch-like wicked woman. When Valerian, utterly exhausted from his wife's forcing him to share her past, finds "the lines, the ones the make-up had shielded brilliantly" (239) on Margaret's face, Margaret, revealing her real nature, stands at advantage over her husband who has treated her with contempt for as long as thirty years. In addition, we can say that Sydney, as well as Margaret, achieves control over Valerian when he assists with meals for him who has been weakened by the events during and after the dinner. Sydney also encourages his master to wear sandals which he has rejected and drinks his wine without permission. Furthermore, we may notice that the women, Ondine and Margaret, reestablish former sisterly relations after the dinner. Margaret visits Ondine's kitchen and

tells her true feelings that she wanted Ondine to stop her evil act in the past, and that she now wants to form close friendship with Ondine again. It must be noted that Margaret's suggestion: "[l]et's be wonderful old ladies. You and me" (241) acquires sinister meaning that the two women will relish the power over Valerian (and Sydney perhaps) and will outlive their husbands, who are about twenty years older than themselves.

It should be concluded, from what has been said above, that, in *Tar Baby*, by a cook's getting out of the kitchen and eating together with her masters, eating functions as a means to overturn the power relationships. We will see that, in *Paradise*, Morrison develops this grotesque function of eating into a more complicated form: a driving force to fluidize the gender system and even to blur the division between self and the other.

## II The Functions of Hunting, Eating and a Kitchen in *Paradise*

### 1. Introduction

Morrison's seventh novel *Paradise*, which was her first work after winning the Nobel prize and commanded public attention, has been an object of criticism because of its schematic view about gender. We see that *Paradise* focuses on conflicts between various categories, such as races, generations, or religions; in particular, the conflict between the sexes is apparently most prominent theme in *Paradise*. In this sense, we can say that Louis Menand is correct when he calls the novel "The War between Men and Women." Furthermore, if we consider that the winners are women at the end of the novel, Dinitia Smith's criticism that it is "her [Morrison's] most overtly feminist novel" can be true. In fact, the author

highlights the bond between women who are not limited to any particular race in the novel, while the racial identity of women is hidden from the eye of readers intentionally (in *Paradise*, she carefully avoids giving information concerning the race of Convent's women, as Morrison did once in "Recitatif").

However, if we read *Paradise* carefully, we will find that it is not a simple story which depicts women as the victims and men the perpetrators ("feminist martyrs, like the witches of Salem" and "almost uniformly control freaks or hotheads" [Kakutani]). This section is intended as an investigation of the function of eating in *Paradise*, which expresses the battle between men and women as a complicated, rich, and fluid power struggle: to eat or to be eaten. As we have already seen, Morrison often depicts meals or cooking and uses the representations of foods in her works; in particular, in *Paradise*, the problem of eating is at the center of the novel. An example of this is "Oven," which bears an important meaning in *Paradise*: it was once a community kitchen as a symbol of the town of Ruby, but now it loses the function as the town declines and is even a bone of contention (people are arguing about the meaning of the description of it). In spite of the fact that the matter of eating is uniquely prominent in the work, critics have not paid attentions to it. In addition, the research about the theme in other works of Morrison tends to oversimplify the foods as symbol and cooking as a means for healing.<sup>5</sup>

The important point is that eating has two opposite possibilities: it can function as a means of supporting patriarchy by binding women in the kitchen as cooks, as in *Tar Baby*, but when women start to eat, their appetites overturn the division of roles in "hunting" in which men are superior as hunters who hunt women as their prey. That is to say, eating can be a means to deconstruct the ideas

about gender that are thrust upon women.

Before it is possible to enter a detailed discussion of the problem of eating in *Paradise*, we must try to clarify our central conception of “eating,” which needs to be approached carefully. Maggie Kilgour points out the contradictory nature of the act of eating as follows:

The relation between an inside and an outside involves a delicate balance of simultaneous identification and separation that is typified by the act of incorporation, in which an external object is taken inside another. The idea of incorporation, upon which I will be focusing, depends upon and enforces an absolute division between inside and outside; but in the act itself that opposition disappears, dissolving the structure it appears to produce.  
(Kilgour 4)

The extract above is important because it clearly expresses a unique, grotesque feature of the act of eating. It is apparent that eating cannot occur without the clear division between the subject of eating and the object being eaten. However, as Kilgour suggests, during the eating process, the object is absorbed into the inside of the subject; as a result, the division between self and the other, which is an essential prerequisite to an act of eating, becomes unclear.<sup>6</sup> Considering this paradoxical characteristic of the act of eating, the appearance of eating women rather shakes the foundation of the binary oppositions by blurring the distinction between a subject and an object, than simply overturn the male-dominating system.

Furthermore, we need to regard an act of eating not as a biological mechanism of universal human beings, which obliterates the difference between sexes, but as a highly gendered behavior. That is because the issue of women's eating is closely related with their roles as a mother or a wife, who feeds her family and has sexual relationships with her husband. We will see that it is an effective measure to consider the issue of eating in *Paradise* in view of gender.<sup>7</sup>

The purpose of this section is to argue the act of eating not as a simply healing method, but as a complex phenomenon which makes the power relationships fluid in connection with hunting, cooking and sexuality. The patriarchy in *Paradise* is a system which is supported by the division of roles: a hunter/a prey, an eater/a cook, and a rapist/a rapee, all of which is maintained by the conflict between an eater and an eaten, including a figurative meaning. The social system of patriarchy, in which men maintain their power as subjects of eating, becomes grotesquely unstable when women start eating by themselves.

## 2. The Patriarchalism Which Permeates in the Town of Ruby

The main setting for the story in *Paradise* is Ruby, a fictional all-black town in the State of Oklahoma, in which eating activities intensify the ruling system of patriarchy.<sup>8</sup> Ruby is a highly exclusive community, which dark blacks established after being deeply humiliated both by white people and light-skinned black people. Inhabitants in Ruby are proud that their women are "free and protected" (*Paradise* 8) from outside violence; therefore, when a white stranger passing through the town sexually harasses town girls, his act is expressed as "this most militant of gestures" and doing "as much serious damage to colored folks as he can" (13). Here, we see that the dignity of black men depends on the

chastity of black women. In addition, the town is so safe that a woman can walk around at midnight alone: “A hiss-crackle from the side of the road would never scare her because whatever it was that made the sound, it wasn’t something creeping up on her. Nothing for ninety miles around thought she was prey” (8). In the extract, appears an imagery of hunting, in which a man, rapist, is depicted as a predatory animal and a woman as a prey. These two examples of the safety of women in Ruby show that men outside the town endanger women in Ruby and that town’s men are supposed to “protect” them.

The outside menace to the women in Ruby appears in the description about the kitchen. The following extraction is reminiscences of the older generations, who established the town and founded the Oven for common use. They were glad of the completion of the Oven, their own kitchen, since black women’s work in white people’s kitchen suggested a risk of being raped by white masters:

They [the Old Fathers] were proud that none of their women had ever worked in a whiteman’s kitchen or nursed a white child. Although field labor was harder and carried no status, they believed the rape of women who worked in white kitchens was if not a certainty a distinct possibility—neither of which they could bear to contemplate. So they exchanged that danger for the relative safety of brutal work. It was that thinking that made a community “kitchen” so agreeable. (99)

The important point to note in the extraction is that women’s work in the kitchen

to serve foods to their masters is closely connected with being sexually harassed by them. Black women in Ruby have escaped from the kitchens of white “masters” in the past, but they still work in the kitchen of black “husbands” and are under the obligation to offer foods and their bodies to them. To put it in a slightly exaggerated way, black women’s subordinate position remains, even if its form changes from “slavery” to “domesticity.” In this restraining function of a kitchen in Ruby, we will find a mechanism of patriarchy: to protect women from the outside and to deprive them of their freedom inside. In this sense, we see that men’s belief in women’s safety, that is, the belief that they are “free and protected,” contains a contradiction between the two ideas: “free” and “protected.”

What has to be noticed is that Ruby’s women who are under the obligation to serve foods cannot resist their husbands. The example of this servitude is an extract from a narrative of Soane, a wife of Deacon, one of the leaders of Ruby. It is useful to quote from Soane’s monologue when she is waiting in the kitchen for her husband’s return from hunting, which is followed by the scene after Deacon’s returning home:

“Look out, quail. Deek’s gunning for you. And when he comes back he’ll throw a sackful of you on my clean floor and say something like: ‘This ought to take care of supper.’ Proud. Like he’s giving me a present. Like you were already plucked, cleaned and cooked” (100).

Shooting well that morning had settled him and returned things to the way they ought to be. Coffee the right color; the right temperature. And later today, quail without their brains would

melt in his mouth. (107)

It will be clear from those extracts that there is a complete contrast between Soane, who is reluctant to cook a hunted quail, and her husband Deacon, who, being satisfied with his victory in hunting and drinking coffee which is well prepared according to his preference, is going to eat the quail which is cooked by his wife. We should notice that hunting in this quotation functions as a means of letting out Deacon's pent-up feelings, which suggests the assault (a disastrous event in which Convent's women were shot to death by Ruby's extremists) on the Convent in a sinister way. Furthermore, a quail which is shot dead and eaten by Deacon can signify not only Convent's women, who will be shot to death by assailants including Deacon, but also Soane, who is an object to be "eaten" in the sense that she satisfies her husband's appetites and sexual desire (here I use the term "appetites" to refer to one's desires for foods, which is distinguished from sexual desire). When her twin sister Dovey is worried that she cannot cook good foods to gratify her husband, Soane says to her jokingly: "[i]f he [Dovey's husband Steward] is satisfied in bed, the table won't mean a thing" (82); however, as the extracts above show, it is important for a wife to satisfy the appetites of her husband, including his sexual desire. It seems reasonable to suppose that the reason why we cannot find any description of women's own eating in *Ruby* is that Morrison accentuates rather their obligation to fulfill the needs of her husband as a wife, than their eating. That gives a striking comparison to the Convent's women whom we deal with next.

### 3. Eating Women in the Convent

The Convent, another stage of the novel, which is seventeen miles apart from the town of Ruby, is a deserted mansion which missionary sisters once used as a dormitory of Native American girls. Now only Consolata remains behind in the place, and four other women take up residence there one by one as the story goes. These four women, who respectively have the experience of being sexually repressed in the outer world, are released from men's dominion after arriving at the Convent. The important point to note is that their trauma and the healing of it are expressed through their matters of eating.

The good place to start is considering a Morrison's irony that the pious sisters use the mansion, which was once used for an obscene motive, as a convent, that is, a religious, sexually strict place. Although the women are without men in the Convent, both in the house and in its furniture lies a symbolic meaning: that their bodies can still be outlets of men's desire. In spite of sisters' efforts to remove them, indecent furnishings remain everywhere in the house, such as "the female-torso candleholders," a painting of "the nursing cherubim," "the nipple-tipped doorknobs," or a faucet of "the brass male genitalia" (72). More noteworthy is a picture of "Saint Catherine of Siena," who serves her breasts on a plate. The picture is important as "a food porn," which depicts women's bodies as foods in order to appeal to men's appetites/sexual desire. It is interesting to note that Saint Catherine of Siena, who was famous for her small eating, is depicted as "an eaten woman" who satisfies others' desire. When Gigi, one of four women living in the Convent, notices that K.D., a boy from Ruby, is tempted by the sight of her breasts, she cannot enjoy the boy's desire for her as she usually does, because, without intending to, she compares the woman in the painting to herself.

Saint Catherine, “[a] woman. On her knees. A knocked-down look, cast-up begging eyes, arms outstretched holding up her present on a platter to a lord” (74) makes Gigi think that she has also tried to please men by offering her body to them. Although Gigi, at first sight, seems to have favorable relationships with men unlike other women in the Convent, the fact is that she cannot satisfy her hunger in those relationships, which explains her uncontrollable envy for “the eternal desert coupling” (64).<sup>9</sup> In a similar way, other women’s trauma appears as their eating problems. The suppression of emotion by Senaca, who was abandoned by her mother as I have mentioned in the introduction, is expressed in connection with vegetarianism, and Pallas’ rejection of her own body, due to her traumatic experience of being raped by strangers in the course of wanderings after her mother tempted her boyfriend, appears as overeating and starving herself in turn. However, after they feel safe and comfortable in the Convent, the women start to eat compulsively as if they are trying to assuage their ravenous hunger for love. It is likely that their feeling and gratifying their appetites help them accept themselves as those who were severely abused in the outer world.<sup>10</sup>

Next, our concern is Mavis, whose identity is intricately connected to her eating. We see that she is controlled by a violent husband, Frank, through eating, from her remarks about how she killed her children when she left them in the car is somehow all about her cooking. The following extraction is Mavis’ telling about the incident to a reporter; her story begins with a statement about “the Spam,” which a reporter thinks is inappropriate for telling the tragedy of the death of her babies:

“He [Frank] didn’t want the Spam. I mean the kids like it but he

don't so. In this heat you can't keep much meat. I had a whole chuck steak go green on me once so I went and took the car, just some weenies, and I thought, well, Merle and Pearl. I was against it at first but he said—" . . . .

"They wasn't crying or nothing but he said his head hurt. I understood. I did. You can't expect a man to come home from that kind of work and have to watch over babies while I go get something decent to put in front of him. I know that ain't right" (22-23).

The extract above is important because it relates Mavis' guilt for killing her babies with her sense of inferiority as a wife who cannot cook well. She thinks that she is responsible not only for serving appropriate meals to her husband who comes home after his work but also for taking care of her newborn babies while shopping for supper and cooking, both of which are very stressful for her. It is likely that Mavis makes an excuse for her negligence as a mother, by explaining in details about arrangements for her husband's dinner, that is, how she was devoted to her duty as a wife.

Mavis' husband also sexually abuses her by treating her like a doll, "Raggedy Ann" (26), during a sexual act; added to this, when she feels paranoid that she is being punished by her husband and other children for killing the babies by accident, Mavis leaves their house and seeks refuge in her mother Birdie's house. In her kitchen, Mavis, being released from her obligation to serve meals to her family, feels so enormous an appetite that she eats even the remains on Birdie's plate. But Birdie rejects Mavis, who seems insane to her because she

insists that her children attempted to kill her. On the other hand, the meal Mavis eats at the Convent contrasts to the one in her mother's house. Feeling safe in the Convent's kitchen, Mavis finds a potato which is cooked for her by Connie very delicious; in addition, Mavis finds pleasure in cooking for the first time, after Connie pays her a compliment to her hands as "perfect pecan hands" (42). After the incident, Mavis starts to enjoy both eating and cooking. At the end of the story when Mavis meets again her daughter, Sal, and they have a meal together at a restaurant, Sal says to her mother who keeps talking about the menu: "I don't want to talk about food" (313). However, for Mavis, eating is a very important matter, which shows her drastic change: she is not "the old Mavis" (171) anymore when she has confidence in herself to choose what she wants to eat.

Furthermore, Mavis' emotional development can be found not only in the reversal from the eaten to the eating, but also in the blur between the two categories, which is a very grotesque situation. The following quotation is a description of a dream of Mavis on the day she arrives at the Convent, which bears importance in order to consider her self-consciousness:

The lion cub that ate her up that night had blue eyes instead of brown, and he did not have to hold her down *this time*. When he circled her shoulders with his left paw, she willingly let her head fall back, clearing the way to her throat. Nor did she fight herself out of the dream. *The bite was juicy*, but she slept through that as well as other things until the singing woke her. (48-49, emphasis mine)

From the expression “this time” on the second line in the extract above, we see that Mavis has the same dream repeatedly, but that this is her first time to stop fighting and to “willingly” let a lion bite her throat. The interesting point to note is that there is an inconsistency between the two behaviors of Mavis: between her finding pleasure in eating as an eater after being released from the responsibility as a cook, and her surrender to the lion in the dream to be eaten. In addition, the shift in the viewpoint implies that not the lion but Mavis herself eats and tastes the meat of her. The point is that, in Mavis’ dream in the extraction, there is confusion between an eating subject and an eaten object, which deconstructs the meaning of eating as an aggressive act of giving an eater authority under the patriarchal system. From that time on, Mavis has the same dream except that a lion is transformed into a man, which seems to reflect her repressed desire. Here, we see a very grotesque condition, that is, a disorder in which the divisions between two categories merge: not only between the subject and the object of desire, but also between appetites and sexual desire.

Similarly, in Consolata’s case, we see that the act of eating functions as a means of deconstructing diametrical divisions, when she drinks her lover, Deacon’s blood. Consolata, a pious Catholic, falls in love for the first time with Deacon, Soane’s husband and one of the Morgans, an influential family in Ruby. But their relationship does not last long. The incident which causes the breakup appears in the extract as follows:

The poison spread. Consolata had lost him [Deacon]. Completely. Forever. His wife might not know it, but Consolata remembered his face. Not when she bit his lip, but when she had hummed over

the blood she licked from it. He'd sucked air sharply. Said, "Don't ever do that again." But his eyes, first startled, then revolted, had said the rest of what she should have known right away. Clover, cinnamon, soft old linen—who would chance pears and a wall of prisoner wine with a woman bent on eating him like a meal? (239)

In the quotation above, we see an important scene which depicts Consolata's desire and Deacon's rejection of it through the act of eating. We have to consider why Consolata's drinking blood of Deacon has such a crucial meaning for him as to make a decision to leave her.

First, we consider the meaning of the incident from Consolata's point of view. She feels so fierce a desire for Deacon that she says "he and I are the same" (241), which implies her longing for oneness with him. More noteworthy is that from her desire to fuse with him, Consolata drinks his blood. Here, it is useful to quote from Kilgour in order to consider the connection between her desire and her act of eating. Kilgour explains a case of two lovers, who "can never be satisfied" and "dissatisfaction leads not to the acceptance of limitations but to a longing that becomes cannibalistic and ends in the total union of the two bodies" (Kilgour 8). If we apply Kilgour's theory here, for Consolata, to "eat" her lover means to incorporate him into herself and become one. In this sense, when Consolata says: "Dear Lord, I didn't want to eat him. I just wanted to go home" (240), the idea of "home" which she wants to return by assimilating the part of her lover into herself can be not only her hometown but also "a nostalgia for total unity and oneness" (Kilgour 5), which I treat in this project as a grotesque state without the division between self and the other.

On the other hand, it is likely that Deacon does not want oneness and feels fear at being eaten by Consolata unconsciously. For Deacon, in spite of his love for her, Consolata is still an alien race with green eyes and yellow skin, which should never be mixed with his black purity. Therefore, Deacon rejects Consolata when she attempts to cross the border between them and makes an invasion into his side for assimilation. Such is an outline of diversity/possibility of the act of eating in the Convent. All these things make clear that, behind the assault of the Convent, lies the threat of women who eat to men of Ruby, although at the subconscious level.

#### 4. Hunting Men

In view of the matter of eating, the assault on the Convent acquires a new meaning: that is, men's retrieving their authority to eat and women's counterattack. The assault, which is carried out by nine men, extremists of Ruby, thinking that depravity among Convent's women ruins their town, ends in murdering all five women in the Convent (although Morrison makes the life or death of the women ambiguous at the end of the novel). I lay special emphasis on the fact that the assault is described as hunting at a metaphorical level; for example, in the novel, women are compared to various animals, such as a doe, eagle, bird, or buzzard, while the men looking around for prey with a gun in their hands are exactly like hunters. When Pallas, after being raped and wounded psychologically, arrives at the Convent, the safety of the place is described as follows: "[t]he whole house felt permeated with a blessed malelessness, like a protected domain, free of hunters but exciting too" (*Paradise* 177). However, "a protected domain" is threatened by a sudden intrusion of hunters.

Furthermore, we can associate the representations of hunting with power relations concerning eating: eating men and eaten women. It is useful to quote from a scene of men's eating steaks immediately before the assault, which can be interpreted in a symbolic way. According to Carol Adams, who refers to meat eating as a patriarchal act,<sup>11</sup> the assailants' meat eating can acquire a new meaning: to exercise paternal rights. The following extract depicts what happens after men unusually drink alcohol in order to soothe their nerves before the assault:

When they [the men] returned, drenched, to the shed they found themselves lighthearted and suddenly hungry. Sargeant suggested beefsteaks and went in his house to get what was needed to feed the men. Priscilla, his wife, heard him and offered to help, but he sent her back to bed, firmly. The scented rainfall drummed. The atmosphere in the shed was braced, companionable, as the men ate thick steaks prepared the old-fashioned way, fried in a piping hot skillet. (282)

In the extract above, men, noticing that they are "suddenly hungry," cook and eat beefsteaks, in a relaxed mood without women. The meat eating in the quotation functions not only as a sinister premonition of success of their hunting in the Convent, but also as a means of reaffirming their roles as hunters and eaters.

However, the actual assault does not end in one-sided hunting, since, as we have already seen in the section two, Convent's women do not remain eaten objects. When men break into the house, they are engulfed in the atmosphere of

foods which fills the place; moreover, they are so overwhelmed by the foods that one of the men unconsciously uses the figure of the butter in order to express his own hatred for the women.<sup>12</sup> And two men, searching for the women in the huge kitchen, find luxurious foods, which women who do not need men cook only for themselves. The following extract depicts a scene in which one of the assailants drinks a whole pitcher of milk:

He moves to the long table and lifts the pitcher of milk. He sniffs it first and then, the pistol in his right hand, he uses his left to raise the pitcher to his mouth, taking such long, measured swallows the milk is half gone by the time he smells the wintergreen. (7)

His abnormal act, drinking a lot of milk with a gun in his hand, suggests that he is trying to regain the initiative in eating. But, by incorporating milk, a symbolic food of women, into himself, his stand as a subject gets more ambiguous despite his intentions. That is a very grotesque situation in which the division between subject and object, or between self and the other blurs.

Added to this, at the end of the novel, Morrison depicts women's counterattack against the assailants, which does not appear at the beginning of the novel (the event is described in two divided parts, both at the beginning and at the end of the novel). We can say that it has a symbolic meaning that they have a fight in the kitchen, where women attack the enemy fiercely using a frying pan, hot soup, a butcher knife as weapons.<sup>13</sup> While, in a way, the hunters seem to succeed in their hunting by using guns in the end, they do not get a chance to use their well-prepared weapons: "rope, a palm leaf cross, handcuffs, Mace and

sunglasses” (3) and what Morrison describes is only the way of women’s counterattack, not men’s hurting them.

As a result, it is likely that the men cannot retrieve their authority to eat, which Deacon notices at the end of the assault. When he sees Consolata for first time in twenty years, he finds that “[t]here is blood near her lips,” which “takes his breath away” (289). The reason why he is startled is that the sight reminds him of Consolata’s drinking his blood and his fear for being eaten by her in the past. Even if men keep fighting over the initiative in eating with “eating” women, it is impossible for them to stay as subjects, once the act of eating shows its grotesque mobility.

## 5. Conclusion

The purpose of this section is to investigate the representation of eating in *Paradise* and its function to overturn the power system of patriarchy. As we have seen in section one and two, the act of eating functions to intensify gender roles in the town of Ruby on one hand; on the other, in the Convent, it has a possibility to destroy existing values. Furthermore, as we have dealt with in section three, when women, who cook not for men but for themselves to eat, and men, who feel fear for women’s eating, fight over the initiative in eating, the division between subject and object gradually becomes unclear.<sup>14</sup>

So far, we have seen how *Paradise* depicts dynamic power relations through representations of eating. “The War between Men and Women” in the novel cannot be reduced to a fixed way of thinking about sexism, as some critics say. In fact, *Paradise* discloses the social system of patriarchy, which is sustained by men’s authority to eat, but is destroyed by conflicts between men and women

about who is the eater and the eaten. The point is that the division becomes unclear by the act of eating, which makes the story of *Paradise* rich and fluid.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> As the example of Seneca which I quoted at the beginning of this thesis shows, Morrison skillfully uses the representations of foods in her works. Another example of this is *Pecola*, out of lack of mother's love, empties a bottle of milk and eats candies, or *Beloved* whose greedy desire for Sethe is expressed as her limitless hunger for sweets.

<sup>2</sup> In the preface of *Tar Baby*, Morrison herself says that she uses a folktale at the base of the clash of the lovers: “[s]he (the rabbit) snares him (the tar figure); he knows it, yet compounds his entanglement while demanding to be freed. A love story, then. Difficult, unresponsive, but seducing woman and clever, anarchic male, each with definitions of independence and domesticity, of safety and danger that clash” (“Foreword” XIII). It should be also noted that *Tar Baby*, in which Jadine's struggle over the acquisition of her femininity is at the center, is dedicated to female members of Morrison's family, while the third *Song of Solomon* is to her father and deals with the problem of masculinity. The fuller study of the problem of femininity in *Tar Baby* lies outside the scope of this study, because we need to concentrate on how the meal changes the relationships between four people at the house of Valerian, except Jadine and Son in this section.

<sup>3</sup> We should notice that Jadine stands on the boundary between the Streets and the Childs, between masters and servants. On one hand, she sits on the same table with Margaret and Valerian, who gives financial assistance to Jadine; on the other, she also has her meal in the kitchen with Sydney and Ondine, her uncle

and aunt.

<sup>4</sup> One of the reasons for Ondine's displeasure is the high-heels which aggravate the pain of her feet, that are always painful because she keeps standing during the cooking. The high-heels, a Christmas gift from Jadine to Ondine, show Jadine's indifference to the hard work of her aunt as a cook. Although Ondine and Sydney act as parents to the orphan Jadine, she never understands their difficulties as servants nor tries to let them lead a comfortable life. Son's blame for Jadine: "[h]er [Ondine's] feet are killing her," or "[y]ou should cook for *them* [Ondine and Sydney]" (265) truthfully points out Ondine's suffering and Jadine's ungrateful behavior. By using the explicit comparison between Ondine's abuse of her feet and Jadine's little, clean, soft feet "as though they had never been touched and never themselves had touched the ground" (186), Morrison expresses the injured feet as a representation of suffering of a repressed cook.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth House, for example, points out the contrasts between "idyllic values" and "success dreams," concerning the representations of foods in four early works of Morrison (House, "The 'Sweet Life'"); in addition, Allison Carruth explores the meaning of food economy in *Tar Baby* from an ecological point of view. Furthermore, the study of Ann Folwell Stanford is interesting in saying that the act of eating has two opposite possibilities of destruction and restoration.

<sup>6</sup> Other critics such as Elspeth Probyn or Sarah Sceats have similar opinions about the contradictory nature of eating:

But rather than taking the body as known, as already and always ordered in advance by what and how it eats, we can turn such hypotheses on their heads. In the act of ingestion, strict divisions

get blurred. The most basic fact of eating reveals some of the strangeness of the body's workings. Consequently, it becomes harder to capture the body within categories, to order stable identities. (Probyn 14-15)

Physical boundaries are clearly crucial to food and eating activities as substances pass into, and out of, the body. Uneaten food is "other," part of the world outside, but its status changes as it is taken in to the mouth, is chewed, swallowed, digested. (Sceats 1)

<sup>7</sup> When we consider the issues of women's eating in *Paradise*, it is not necessary to limit the subject of the act to "black" women. As for the association of black women with foods, one needs to be careful because of the historical context of racial discrimination. Doris Witt, for example, points out that "the rise of Black Power also contributed to the celebration of foods previously stigmatized because of their association with the slave diet" (Witt 6).

<sup>8</sup> The male-centered household in *Paradise* is unique, in the sense that it differs from the matriarchal household which is supposed to be common in African-American families. Andrew Read thinks that Morrison attempts to object to "the Moynihan Report" in *Paradise*: "[b]y locating these men in an overwhelmingly patriarchal community, Morrison contests the idea that black male violence stems from a dysfunctional African American matriarchal society" (Read 527).

<sup>9</sup> At the latter part of the story, Morrison implies Gigi's sexual relationship with Seneca, which is one of few lesbian relationships Morrison depicts in her works. It is likely that Morrison describes the bond between women (including sexual

meaning in this case) more satisfying than between men and women in *Paradise*.

<sup>10</sup> For example, when Gigi finds a funeral feast on the table after arriving at the Convent, her appetite is sharpened as follows:

Suddenly, like a legitimate mourner, she [Gigi] was ravenous.

Gigi was gobbling, piling more food onto her plate even while she scooped from it, when the woman entered without her straw hat or her glasses and lay down on the stone-cold floor. (*Paradise* 69-70)

<sup>11</sup> Adams points out the close connection of a male-dominated system with meat eating as such: “the sexism in meat eating recapitulates the class distinctions with an added twist: a mythology permeates all classes that meat is a masculine food and meat eating a male activity” (Adams 48).

<sup>12</sup> The overwhelming atmosphere of foods makes the man use an unusual expression of a food for him: “[s]hooting the first woman (the white one) has clarified it [the venom] like butter: the pure oil of hatred on top, its hardness stabilized below” (*Paradise* 4). In addition, a smell of butter implies that the men are intruding into the sphere of women.

<sup>13</sup> There is another example which shows that the women and the men battle over the initiative in eating. In the game room, in which women fight back before running into the kitchen, Morrison inserts a scene in which the frame of a picture of Catherine of Siena (I referred to it as a food porn) is broken when one of women throws it to the men (286).

<sup>14</sup> Although it lies outside the scope of this study, there is a scene in which Connie

cooks at the latter part of the novel. The recollections of four women alternate with the process of Connie's cooking (like the way in which Morrison depicts dismembering the bobcat in *Song of Solomon* as we have seen in chapter two), which corresponds with their fusion of body and mind. Here, we find a possibility of deconstruction of the diametric of body and mind through ritualistic cooking and meal.

## Conclusion

What I tried to show in this thesis is that, in the works of Toni Morrison, characters' grotesque desires function as a driving force to overturn dominant social values and to make the diametrical divisions ambiguous. Their grotesque desires, as it were, lie outside the "common sense" of readers (and probably of a writer), and we may say that this abnormality makes it possible to subvert the dominant values, which we assume to be common sense. As I mentioned also in the introduction, we must not forget that, at the base of Morrison's defiance of the dominant value system, there is her conviction that it is fabricated in favor of the majority, as she expresses in her memorable essay *Playing in the Dark* (which offers illuminating revelations about a fictional idea of "Africanist" as the antithesis of "white" America).

In part one, I demonstrated how Morrison is different from Woolf and has a similarity to Faulkner by focusing on characters' attempt at crossing the boundaries between diametric oppositions. In part two, we examined the development of the representations of wild birds in Morrison's works and arrived at the conclusion that Morrison gives the inner wilderness of heroines a new meaning, that is, not a barbaric nature but a place outside the dominant sense of values. Finally in part three, we found that Morrison allows an act of eating to be grotesque, which subverts social systems and produces dynamics of power behind conflicts between men and women.

In this study, I have not dealt with *Jazz* and *Love*, and the two latest novels of Morrison, because of the lack of the grotesque. Both in her sixth *Jazz*, an experimental work in which Morrison aims at writing a novel like an

improvisation performance of Jazz, and in her eighth *Love*, a rewriting of *Sula* in the sense that the former focuses on a reconciliation between two women, which Sula and Nel cannot effect, there is no artistic achievement of other works of hers, that shakes the foundations of readers' sense of values. Especially in the latest two works, *Home* and *God Help the Child*, we do not find Morrison's aesthetics of ambiguities; to be more concrete, a sudden settlement between a brother and a sister in *Home*, or a sharp discrepancy between a mother and a daughter in *God Help the Child* does not produce grotesqueness in which meanings become obscure. However, these exceptions do not throw doubt on the fact that Morrison is a writer who confronts the dominant value system resolutely through the grotesque.

Out of the various conflicting values which we dealt with in this work, however, we should notice that the ones between self and the other, and between sexes are especially important in the sense that Morrison always struggles over the problem of how to form, or erase, the boundaries between those categories in her works. While Morrison opposes to the idea of gender as social norms of women and men (M'dear in *The Bluest Eye* or Pilate in *Song of Solomon* are notable examples of transgender figures), she keeps on writing biological traits of women, such as pregnancy, childbirth, or child rearing, as something which women cannot escape from. We can see that, for Morrison, this dilemma is closely connected with another one between the acquisition of a strong sense of self and the longing for oneness, that is, the disappearance of the self.

Therefore, our research in this work can be put another way in view of Morrison's struggles with the problem of the boundary of self through the conflicts between men and women as such: Pecola in the writer's first work loses her

coherent self, trapped in the circles of violence, and it is notable that Cholly, who does not fulfill his responsibility as a “father” but only wields his authority as one, delivers the decisive blow to her. In Morrison’s second and third works, protagonists make progress in finding his or her self. While Sula finds a fluid self through her grotesque desire to fuse with the other, that is, “the other half of the self” who is in the same position of the oppressed as a woman, Milkman, at the sacrifice of his lover, gets out of the dilemma of conflicting values and attains a state of enlightenment concerning the sense of self, which does not always need the definite division from the other. In the fifth *Beloved*, known as a masterpiece, appears the fusion between a mother and daughter, that is, a complete disappearance of the boundary of the self, which comes to a tragic end by betraying devilish nature of the daughter. The mother finally discovers her coherent self with the help of her lover, whom she once refused to rely on. And, through the seventh *Paradise* in which a heroine’s attempt to become one with her lover by the act of eating fails because of his complete rejection, a heroine of Morrison’s ninth *A Mercy* finally achieves her independence from a man. From this viewpoint, one may say that Morrison explores the way to have a sense of self by expressing characters’ grotesque desires for the other (the two people are often caught up in the conflicts between men and women) and the failure of it. They are always in the dilemma between being independent of the other and fusing with the other.

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