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

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

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Introduction

Toni 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.

> In short, [they learn] how to get rid of the funkiness. *The dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of the wild 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. (*The Bluest Eye* 83, emphasis mine)

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 attempts have been made by scholars to demonstrate how vital the funkiness is, it refers to African sensitivity, which is an ordinary definition derived from *The Bluest Eye*.

In addition to the general idea of funkiness discussed, I shall extend the word to cover the notion of desire and of the wild nature of black women. The purpose of this paper is to investigate how Morrison's female characters have lost their funkiness of perceptivity, desire (sexual desire will mainly be discussed), or wild nature, and how they retrieve these things in order to obtain a strong sense of

self. 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 Florence in *A Mercy* finally flies away into the wilderness in her mind. Here I will mainly deal with Toni Morrison's first novel *The Bluest Eye*. We will thereby be able to examine the first stage of funkiness, in which it is lost and will not be recovered.

I. Fragmented Body Images of Stereotyped People

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. 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,[1] 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,[2] with the purpose of showing the meaninglessness of white standards for black people.

The point I want to make in this paper 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

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[1] It seems reasonable to suppose that *The Bluest Eye* is an autobiographical novel, based on Morrison's experiences in her childhood. Her own family is the model for the MacTeers in the novel.

[2] Morrison changes a paragraph into a mass of run-on letters, as can be seen in the following: "Hereisthehouseitisgreenandwhite…" (*The Bluest Eye* 6)

violence and leads to self-denial. As can be seen in the following quotation when they are motivated by the funkiness of desire, it is possible for them to gain strength by having sexual relationships:

> *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. . . . 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. . . . And it be rainbow all inside.* (130-31)

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. It 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. Here, we notice the word "rainbow," a patchwork of colorful images of past scenes, representing Pauline's experiencing of a coherent self. Her recovery, however, lasts only briefly; she internalizes a doctrine of physical beauty and loses such funkiness of desire and five senses as mentioned above. As a result, violent, or at least negative, images of sexual relationships haunt the story entirely.

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. She believes that everybody takes his or her eyes away from her and hates her due to her ugliness, namely blackness; therefore, she dissolves into nothing and makes her disappear piece by piece 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)

Pecola's mind is completely separated from her body under a daydream of the bluest eye at the end of the novel; this occurs after her father Cholly rapes her (it is ironical that the only love shown to her is nothing but violence). 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. We shall return to the subject later.

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 (although she is also proud of her "high-yellow"(62) skin color and her rich parents).

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. . . . 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,[3] 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 a lack of self-dependence (I use the term "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. She cannot understand why "all the world" (21) says it is lovable and takes the doll apart:

> 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

[3] Morrison expresses her wish to "write like a good Jazz musician." See *Toni Morrison: Conversations* 224-27.

> that had escaped me, but 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)

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 chapter. 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 Master Narrative in the same way as Morrison does when she changes the quotation from the textbook into a mass of words. 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." What she really wants for a Christmas gift is another illustration of her accurate senses. She wants to *feel* something rather than to "possess any object" (21):

> "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.

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 and Geraldine are good examples which explain 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: "In any case, his [Soaphead Church's] cravings, although intense, never relished physical contact. He abhorred fresh on fresh" (166). Geraldine, as we have seen, gets rid of funkiness and experiences no more pleasure in sexual relationships than does Soaphead Church. The point is that the two of them, 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.

Ⅱ. 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 "racist 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.[4] Pursuing that question, we will reach the core of the most 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.

[4] Agnes Suranyi covers knowledge concerning the main critiques. See Suranyi.

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" (48) for Mr. Yacobowski, because her blackness is worth nothing to look at. 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. The insulting attitude of Mr. Yacobowski 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 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, 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.[5] 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. When Cholly elicits pleasure from physical intercourse with Darlene, white hunters shine a flashlight on Cholly, laugh at him, and coerce Cholly and his girlfriend Darlene into coupling before their lewd eyes:

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[5] A fatherless child, Cholly, holds in mind the scene in which a father majestically distributed a watermelon among his children.

> *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. . . . There stood two white men. One with a spirit lamp, the other with a flashlight. . . . The men had long guns. (147, emphasis mine)

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.[6] 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. Some examples are in *The Bluest Eye*; 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.

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[6] See Morris.

Cholly's manliness is lost, with his eyes pleading and testicles tightened. 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[7] and controls his body.

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.* (Werts and Werts 169, emphasis mine)

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

> *When he [a little 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.*

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[7] The trauma is "almost physical" in the sense that the gaze interferes with Cholly's *physical* activities.

> *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. . . . He must never seed no mare foal. . . . '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.* (125)

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.

III. 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 corn" (65) of scorn 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 pot. (65, emphasis mine)

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

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. . . . 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.* (151, emphasis mine)

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

struggle her,[8] who shares the misery. 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: "She [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. . . . *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, emphasis mine)

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

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[8] After the hunters disappeared, Cholly "wanted to struggle" (*The Bluest Eye* 149) Darlene.

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).

Having observed the ambivalence of Cholly's rape of Pecola, the next step is to explore 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 his daughter in which his ambivalent feelings toward his daughter show themselves. My study, however, gives weight to the violent aspect of the act. Laurie Vickroy has made several important statements as an analogy between Cholly's traumatic past and the rape of Pecola. Vickroy takes a psychoanalytic approach to explaining a mechanism of Cholly's projecting his fear on Pecola. But we must not forget that a crucial difference between the two events is 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: "He, at any rate, was the one who loved her enough to touch her, envelop her, give something of himself to her"(206); however, "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 because 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.

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 paper 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.

Let us, for the moment, consider the other work of Toni Morrison; the same observation in this paper applies to Morrison's second novel, *Sula.* In *Sula* (which was published in 1973, three years after *The Bluest Eye*) an atmosphere of death pervades the whole story and has not cleared at the ending. Sula is an isolated black woman independent from everything: she does not follow social morals and is exiled from the black community. Sula's rebirth means death at the same time; in fact, an ominous image of a skull under skin constantly haunts Sula throughout her lifetime. Shadrack, who has witnessed the horrible sight of the disintegration of human bodies in war, the ultimate form of violence, tells Sula that death is always with her and that she does not have to be afraid of it:

> 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. (*Sula* 157, emphasis mine)

A repeated image of death as the peeling off of skins can be defined as a fragmentation of a body, which I have already discussed fully in the earlier parts of this paper.

In her sexual relationship with Ajax, however, Sula discovers not a skull but warm soil; in other words, a life under his black skin:

> *If I take a chamois and rub real hard on the bone, right on the ledge of your cheekbone, some of the black will disappear. . . .*

> *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 water your soil, keep it rich and moist, But how much? How much water to keep the loam moist? And 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)

The same observation as with Pauline's rainbow applies to the quotation above: Sula's fear of disintegration from death fades only temporally through her physical contact. A fusion of Ajax's earth and Sula's water is a harmonious image of life, just as Pauline's pieces are assembled into a rainbow. These two examples from *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* develop more fully in Morrison's fifth novel, *Beloved*. It seems reasonable to say that in *Beloved* physical contact can be converted from violence into a means of self-discovery.

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