

Université de Montréal

Faulkner Revisited:

Narrating Property, Race, Gender and History in William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*, Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, and Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*

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Résumé

Ma thèse est une étude comparative entre William Faulkner, Toni Morrison et Gloria Naylor. Elle me permet d'explorer comment les protagonistes males construisent leur identités en se référant à la possession matérialiste et en se basant sur la subordination de la femme, qui est une autre forme de possession, afin de consolider leur masculinité. Dans leurs textes respectifs, *Go Down, Moses*, *Song of Solomon*, et *Mama Day*, les trois auteurs, malgré leur différences culturelles et même littéraires, partagent l'idée que l'identité, l'histoire, et la vérité ne sont que des construits culturels et sociales. On se basant sur la théorie de Judith Butler et d'autres théoriciens poststructuralistes et contemporains, ma thèse reflète qu'il n'y a pas d'identité « naturelle » ou de réalité objective. La perception identitaire n'est qu'une illusion imaginaire et idéologique ou le sujet ne fait que répéter et performer le discours de son environnement. Faulkner, Morrison, et Naylor basent leurs œuvres sur le thème de la liberté. Ils explorent comment, à partir de leurs corps, leurs caractères se conforment ou bien se détachent de l'idéologie qui confine leurs identités sexuelles, raciales et sociales. En critiquant, non seulement l'identité' mais aussi l'histoire, ma thèse montre que les trois écrivains détruisent la perception que la vérité est objective surtout dans les documents historiques. Ainsi, la vérité devient qu'une forme de distorsion qui consolide une certaine idéologie.

Ma thèse montre que les trois auteurs mettent en valeur la voix de la femme Afro-Américaine. Elle joue le rôle d'une médiatrice pour les protagonistes males. Elle rejette le discours matérialiste et sexiste. Cette voix féminine représente le thème de l'amour et la survie de sa communauté noire et la résistance raciale. La femme Afro-

Américaine préserve la culture Africaine à travers son attachement à la tradition orale et à la connaissance intuitive.

En se basant sur la tendance subversive de l'art et de la littérature postcoloniale qui est promulguée par les théories de Henry Louise Gates, Paul Gilroy, W. E. B Du Bois, James Clifford et Arjun Appadurai, je montre qu'à travers Toni Morrison et Gloria Naylor, le texte de Faulkner reste logocentrique et essentialiste dans sa vision hiérarchique de l'identité raciale et sexuelle. Morrison et Naylor se référant au mythe de l'Africain volant afin de justifier qu'il n'y a pas d'identité fixe et stable, donnant ainsi la voix à une identité hybride et fluide.

En se basant sur l'article, « Parler en Langues » de Mae Gwendolyn Henderson, ma thèse explore comment en réécrivant d'autres textes, Gloria Naylor déconstruit non seulement Faulkner, mais aussi le sexisme qui demeure résident dans le texte de Toni Morrison. L'histoire de Willow Springs se base sur le mythe féminin d'une ex esclave Sapphira Wade, qui en étant volatile, son histoire et son identité résistent toute forme de catégorisations. En étudiant l'hybridité dans la culture Afro-Américaine, ma thèse montre que le Sud qui est décrit dans l'œuvre de *Mama Day* est plus hybride que celui de Faulkner et Morrison.

Mots clés : hybridité, performance, construction, histoire, identité, transgression, liberté, race, class, sexe, imitation, possession, matérialisme, intuition, amour, orale.

Summary

My thesis explores the formation of the subject in the novels of Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*, Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, and Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*. I attach the concept of property in terms of how male protagonists are obsessed with materialistic ownership and with the subordination of women who, as properties, consolidate their manhood. The three novelists despite their racial, gendered, and literary differences share the view that identity and truth are mere social and cultural constructs. I incorporate the work of Judith Butler and other poststructuralist figures, who see identity as a matter of performance rather than a natural entity.

My thesis explores the theme of freedom, which I attached to the ways characters use their bodies either to confine or to emancipate themselves from the restricting world of race, class, and gender. The three novelists deconstruct any system of belief that promulgates the objectivity of truth in historical documents. History in the three novels, as with the protagonists, perception of identity, remains a social construct laden with distortions to serve particular political or ideological agendas.

My thesis gives voice to African American female characters who are associated with love and racial and gender resistance. They become the reservoirs of the African American legacy in terms of their association with the oral and intuitionist mode of knowing, which subverts the male characters' obsession with property and with the mainstream empiricist world.

In this dissertation, I use the concept of hybridity as a literary and theoretical device that African-American writers employ. In effect, I embark on the postcolonial studies of Henry Louise Gates, Paul Gilroy, W. E. B Du Bois, James Clifford, and

Arjun Appadurai in order to reflect upon the fluidity of Morrison's and Naylor's works. I show how these two novelists subvert Faulkner's essentialist perception of truth, and of racial and gendered identity. They associate the myth of the Flying African with the notion of hybridity by making their male protagonists criss-cross Northern and Southern regions.

I refer to Mae Gwendolyn Henderson's article on "Speaking in Tongues" in my analysis of how Naylor subverts the patriarchal text of both Faulkner and Morrison in embarking on a more feminine version of the flying African, which she relates to an ex-slave, Sapphira Wade, a volatile female character who resists fixed claim over her story and identity. In dealing with the concept of hybridity, I show that Naylor rewrites both authors' South by making Willow Springs a more fluid space, an assumption that unsettles the scores of critics who associate the island with authenticity and exclusive rootedness.

Key words: hybridity, Performance, construction, history, identity, transgression, freedom, race, class, gender, imitation, property, materialism, intuition, love, oral.

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Introduction

In his *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, Henry Louis Gates contends that African American culture has always already been hybridized. Unlike many critics, who conventionally associate the Middle Passage with the Africans' loss of cultural identities, Gilroy stipulates that this experience did not really create a "tabula rasa¹ of consciousness. Slavery in the New World, according to Gates, was "a veritable seething cauldron of cross-cultural contact," which "served to create a dynamic of exchange and revision among numerous previously isolated Black African cultures on a scale unprecedented in African history" (4). The Middle Passage, despite its atrocities, nevertheless, created an African traveler, albeit an abrupt, ironic traveler, through space and time; and like every traveler, the African, in fact, "reads a new environment within a received framework of meaning and belief" (4). Among the preserved cultural topos, Gates foregrounds the figure of the trickster, which mythically characterizes the ancient mutable Yoruba figure of Esu-Elegbara. It is qualified by its individuality, satire, parody, irony, magic, indeterminacy, open-endedness, ambiguity, sexuality, uncertainty, disruption and reconciliation, betrayal and loyalty, closure and disclosure, encasement and rupture (6). The figure of Esu has become a linguistic trope that Gates associates with the trickster. From the Yoruban Esu-Elegbara, the trickster morphs into the African American "Signifying Monkey," whose very name is an oxymoron which combines both the art of mimicry, or imitation of forms and themes, and the art of critical revision or subversion.

¹ The notion of tabula rasa ("clean slate" or "blanket tablet") is a term which was first employed by Aristotle, then, by the empiricist philosophers, like David Hume and John Locke, implying that the mind is an originally blank or empty recorder on which experiences leave their marks.

As opposed to the eighteenth and nineteenth century Western misrepresentation of African art, imitation within African American culture is not a neutral mimicry of the canon without revision and originality. It does not, necessarily, reduce the talents of African American writers, artists, and poets to the status of “the mockingbird school”.² Signifying, within African American culture and art is a metaphor for deconstructionist revisions. It involves, like the mythical trope of Esu, the art of irony, parody, pastiche, and indirection (Gates 90). It is a form of repetition with difference, or, to use Gates’s statement, “a resemblance,” which is “evoked cleverly by dissemblance” (104). The art of signification is not only an art of repetition with subversion but also a middle-ground discourse, which creates “a homo rhetoricus Africanus,” allowing the black subject to move freely between two discursive universes, an art of signifying, which Gates calls, “a mode of linguistic circumnavigation” (76), a “linguistic masking, the verbal sign of the mask of blackness that demarcates the boundary between the white linguistic realm and the black, two domains that exist side by side in homonymic relation signified by the very concept of Signification” (75-76). Gates’s concept of the linguistic circumnavigation goes in tandem with Mikhail Bakhtin’s coinage of the term “heteroglossia” and with what Linda Hutcheon terms “intertextuality,” in reference to creating two (or more) discursive realms within the same text. J. Hillis Miller characterizes contemporary art and literature as “inhabited by a long chain of

² Philosophers and thinkers, in mid-eighteenth Century, like David Hume (and later Immanuel Kant and Thomas Jefferson, among scores of other commentators), proclaimed that black authors were not original in their writings. They were mere imitative. Hume, for instance, associated the black poet Francis Williams (who was educated at Cambridge university and wrote in Latin verse) with “a parrot,” who “speaks plain words,” a mockingbird poet,” “a trope which was associated with black authors generally thought to lack originality but who excelled at mimicry and at what was called mindless imitation and repetition with little revision” (Gilroy 89).

parasitical presences, echoes, allusions, guests, ghosts of previous texts” (446). In a similar fashion, Roland Barthes perceives the text as “a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, some of them original, blend and clash . . . a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of cultures” (146). Gates’ definition of the subversive tendency of the discursive amalgamation of other texts within the African American narratives echoes Bakhtin’s explanation of the narrative parody:

As in stylization, the author employs the speech of another, but, in contradistinction to stylization, he introduces into that other speech an intention which is directly opposed to the original one. The second voice, having lodged in the other speech, clashes antagonistically with the original, host voice and forces it to serve directly opposite aims. Speech becomes a battlefield for opposing intentions...

Parody allows considerable variety: one can parody another’s style as style, or parody another’s socially typical or individually characteristic manner of observing, thinking, and speaking.

Furthermore, the depth of parody may vary: one can limit parody to the forms that make up the verbal surface, but one can also parody even the deepest principles of the other speech act. (“Discourse Typology in Prose” 185-86)

Like Bakhtin’s definition of the narrative parody, African American art also succumbs to this same parodic imitation of other texts’ forms and themes in a way that the host or the original textual materials are not only imitated but also stripped of their original meanings and intents.

Taking as its main corpus William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*, Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*, my thesis provides a comparative study that analyses the channel of influence linking all of these authors in their portrayal of the subject formation of their male characters. This dissertation shows that Faulkner, Morrison and Naylor rely on the genre of the epic quest for identity, which they usually link to the concept of property in terms not only of owning material possessions, but also in terms of race and gender, and, eventually, in terms of how one's knowledge of his or her own history further affects one's perception of the self. While this dissertation deals specifically with male heroic journeys, I explore this concept of the quest, specifically, through their relationship with women characters who not only consolidate their manhood but also help them reconcile with their ancestral past.

I ground this project within Gates's theory of signifying, which helps me explore the ways both Morrison and Naylor not only imitate but also rewrite Faulkner's canonical text. I attach Morrison and Naylor's art of signifying to their revolutionary perception of identity, which becomes not only a social construct but also a fluid entity by making their male protagonist characters criss-cross the Northern and Southern regions. I demonstrate that this fluidity comes only through the agency of the female ancestral figures who are culturally moored. In this dissertation, I show that Morrison and Naylor's art of signifying is also associated with their feminist responses to Faulkner's archaic portrayal of black women. Black female characters, in *Song of Solomon* and *Mama Day*, are not only the mediators, but are also figures of transgression and transcendence. They transcend the racial and sexist discourse of their

environment. They challenge the male characters' empiricist world of property through their association with the communal love, the supernatural world, and, especially, with the oral tradition, through which both Morrison and Naylor challenge Faulkner's fixed and scriptographic history.

Faulkner, Morrison and Naylor share their concern with the regional South. Faulkner situates his fiction in Mississippi, Morrison in Shalimar, Virginia County, and Gloria Naylor in the "unmappable" Southern space of Willow Springs. The three novelists explore how these Southern spaces shape their characters' identities. These writers are also concerned with the theme of freedom, which they usually associate with their characters' struggle to escape from certain confining spaces and discourses. Faulkner attaches it to the slave spiritual song of "Go Down, Moses," which becomes the title of his novel. Morrison associates freedom within her African American background through her reference to the myth of the "Flying African." Naylor, in a fashion similar to Morrison, attaches it to the same African myth and to the metaphor of the bridge, which links Willow Springs to the mainland.

Critics who study Faulkner-Morrison's works on identity often neglected the "symbolic" or the discursive dimension of subject formation. Save for Thadious Davis, they usually embark on the natural and biological differences among the characters' bodies without contextualizing the discursive and the ideological agenda behind the binarist construction of the "naturalness" of these bodies in legitimizing racial and gendered relationships. My contribution in this thesis is to politicize racial and gendered distinctions as forms of cultural constructs and, to use Judith Butler's words,

as types of “citational” performances. Like many scholars³ who have worked on Faulkner and Morrison, I attach the male protagonist’s perception of identity to the theme of property, which is associated with the materialistic owning of things and with the theme of race and gender, but from a Butlerian perception. In so doing, I show that what connects these culturally and racially distinct authors is their common belief in the discursive construction of identity, which is no longer considered as a natural given, but a cultural construct, which bodily performs the established racial and gendered discourses that are conventionally based on the processes of discursive divisions and difference. In so doing, I stress the images of the characters’ bodies, which are the vehicles through which gendered and racial discourses are inscribed, internalized, and, finally, corporeally prescribed. In effect, I frame this argument with references not only to Judith Butler, but also to Michel Foucault, whose theories, in *Discipline and Punish* and in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” foreground the importance of the body and its relationship to its specific cultural environment. In delineating identity as an act of bodily performance, I also refer to Laura Mulvey’s

³ Leslie Goss Erickson, in *Re-Visioning of the Heroic Journey in Postmodern Literature; Toni Morrison, Julia Alvarez, Arthur Miller, and American Beauty*, embarks on Joseph Campbell’s mythical approach to the heroic journeys in classical literature. Using the mythical stages a classic hero comes across throughout his or her journey, Erickson associates Milkman’s subject formation with the concept of property, which is associated with race, class, gender, and the material ownership of objects. Patrick Bryce Byork, in *The Novels of Toni Morrison: The Search for Self and Place within the Community*, reads the black subject formation of Milkman Dead and his father in terms of subjugating black women in order to consolidate their manhood. Both characters foreground their position as black middle-class men to further assert their voices in the racist culture they live in. In *The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison: Modernist Authenticity and Postmodern Blackness*, John N. Duvall makes a comparative study between Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses* and Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*. Duvall introduces the common metaphor of the doe in both novels as a trope for African American women who are acted upon by both white and male characters to consolidate their manhood. Thadious Davis, in *Games of Property*, further theorizes all of Faulkner’s characters in *Go Down, Moses* within the discourse of property, but from a more revolutionary perspective wherein identity becomes a cultural process.

essay on “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in portraying men’s voyeuristic perception and reification of women.

In dealing with the concept of “construction” I show, in a similar vein, that truth, as it is epitomized in the mainstream historical documents, which invade, specifically, Faulkner and Naylor’s respective novels, are also cultural constructs and mediations, which, like the concept of race and gender, is part of the process in the construction of the subject, which usually affects the male characters’ vision of the world and the self. In deconstructing the conventional belief in the objectivity of the racial representation in the mainstream history, I frame my argument in reference to Toni Morrison’s long essay, *Playing in the Dark*, to Hayden White’s work on “The Historical Text as a Literary Artifact,” to Donald E. Pease’s *National Identities and Post-Americanist Narratives*, to Colette Guillaumin’s book on *National Identities and Post-Americanist Narratives* and, finally, to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s critique of the discourse of Enlightenment, in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. All these writers and theorists corroborate a common idea: that history, like race and gender, is a mere discursive fabrication of a particular ideology.

The three novelists, despite their racial, gendered, cultural and ideological differences, are concerned with the marginalized and absented voices that lurk behind the mainstream western canon. These authors all refer to what Toni Morrison calls the voice of “the discredited,” which refers not only to African Americans in general but black women in particular. Faulkner, Morrison, and Naylor focus on the role of black women in interfering with the male characters’ quests. They associate them with the concept of rootedness in that they incarnate African American values, especially when

it comes to their belief in the magical and supernatural world, which subverts the patriarchal world of concrete facts and reason. Black women are also associated with the oral and intuitionist modes of knowing, which, as opposed to the “scriptographic” history, resist closure and occasion collective and disputable versions of truth. The belief in magic, the supernatural and the oral world and word becomes the basic feature which characterizes African American women who reject the materialistic patriarchal world of property as an instance of western effacement and a form of neo-slavery. Mollie, in Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses* rejects her husband’s obsession with money and treasure. She is the voice of racial resistance who signifies upon Roth Edmonds, her white surrogate son, when he attempts to exclude her black family in order to affirm his white identity. As a form of racial and political resistance, Mollie sings the spiritual, “Go Down, Moses.” However, she does so in a defamiliarizing way that challenges the institutionalized legal system, symbolized by Gavin Stevens, the white lawyer who visits her. Faulkner associates black women not only with racial resistance but also with the theme of love. This is embodied in his portrayal of both Mollie, who preserves “the fire and the hearth” of her community, and Mannie, whose unexpected death causes suicidal grief in her devastated husband, Rider. By associating these black characters with the theme of love, Faulkner destroys the racist bias of the old South, wherein blacks are considered to be deprived of human emotions. Pilate, in *Song of Solomon*, and Mama Day, in Gloria Naylor’s eponymous novel, incarnate the same ancestral patterns. They are not only rooted in the ancient past, but they also protect the deracinated black subjects and integrate them into their forgotten past by

telling them stories of their familial genealogies and by teaching them the importance of communal love which transcends the empiricist world of property.

Many critics, who studied the portrayal of black women in the novels of Faulkner and Morrison, stress their reconciling roles in bridging the gap between the past and present. They are portrayed only as bridges, fictional tools and vessels within the black male character's initiation and quest. My contribution in this dissertation is not only to foreground the rootedness and the bridging power of the black women as mediators, but also to stress their racial and gendered transgression, which makes them unsubordinated characters. In so doing, I create a feminist narrative of women's quests, as well, alongside that of the male protagonists. Juxtaposing African American women novelists, like Morrison and Naylor, against the text of Faulkner, I show that despite Faulkner's concern with the language of the discredited, especially in his concern with black women, his novel, nevertheless, is "patriarchal" and racially bigoted. Black women, in *Go Down, Moses*, remain, despite their racial and gender subversion, confined within the male gaze. In rewriting Faulkner, Morrison gives voice to black women. Contrary to Faulkner's focus on male-dominated quests, and to some critics⁴ who overlook the subversive voice of women, especially in relation to Ruth and her daughters-Lena and Corinthians, I show that Morrison's female characters also demonstrate agency in their dismantling confining discourses of race, class, and

⁴ Aside from John Duvall, who associates Morrison's women with the figure of the doe, Andrea O'Reilly, in her book, *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*, makes a striking analysis in portraying the subjectivity of Ruth and her daughters in *Song of Solomon*. She associates the absence of the mother in Ruth's characterization as the source of her easy subordination to the double patriarchy of her father and husband. She also posits that Ruth's daughters, in turn, are weak because their mother is made weak. She concludes, that Ruth as an annihilated woman, functions as "an absence." Even if O'Reilly's analysis of the Dead women is valid, however, she seems to negate their agency and stress their subordination rather than their rebellious acts and thoughts.

gender. Faulkner constructs women by associating them with the animal imagery of the doe, in order to account for their submission to patriarchy. Morrison's female black characters resist their confinement and become, instead, tricksters and rebellious figures. They respond back and act in order to liberate themselves from the tyranny of Macon Dead. Like Faulkner, Morrison supplies her male protagonist with an ancestral figure. However, more than an ancestress, Pilate, in *Song of Solomon*, is a single mother, who refuses the institution of marriage. She is the figure of the drag who subverts and transgresses gender norms and establishment, a form of empowerment, which is lacking in Faulkner's characterization of Mollie. Though Mollie subverts institutionalized racism in strategic ways throughout Faulkner's text, she nevertheless remains trapped in gendered forms of behaviour and seems to willingly subjugate herself to patriarchal domination. By transcending the patriarchal world, Pilate has the power not only to change the trajectory of her life in an unconventional way, but also to challenge the empiricist worldview of her deracinated nephew, Milkman Dead.

Gates, in *The Signifying Monkey*, stresses the revisionary tendency of black writers in rewriting other black writers: "It is clear that black writers read and critique other black texts as an act of rhetorical self-definition. Our literary tradition exists because of these precisely chartable former literary relationships of signifying" (290). In portraying black female characters, I show that Gloria Naylor signifies both on Morrison and Faulkner. In her novel, the relationship between characters is less gendered. Mama Day appears to be more earthly rooted. Like Mollie and Pilate, Mama Day is endowed with the power of the supernatural world. She is not married and remains childless. Naylor does more than align women with helping men's quests.

More than Morrison, Naylor embarks on a quest into the feminine history of the Willow Springs island, associating it with the legend of the powerful ex-slave, Sapphira Wade, Mama Day's great-grandmother. Sapphira's mythic status makes her a disembodied character whose story and identity resist single interpretations. Thus, Naylor revises not only Faulkner's patriarchal and racist claim over black women, but also Morrison's patriarchal myth of Solomon, the flying African, who flees to Africa, leaving behind twenty-one children and a crying wife. If Morrison associates the myth with the male agency, Naylor associates it with the feminine figure of Sapphira, who is also capable of liberating herself from the confining space of slavery. If the body, in Morrison's novel, is an inscription of racial and gender discourses, a performative entity through which characters either assert or subvert their racial and gender identities, Naylor goes further in introducing Sapphira Wade as a decorporealized character who resists all sexist and racist claims over her body, life and identity.

Naylor, like Morrison, stipulates that African American culture and identity is fluid. In rewriting the identity quest, both Morrison and Naylor unsettle Faulkner's essentialist perception of identity, which remains gendered and racially informed. Identity, within African American culture, is hybrid, and like Gilroy's definition of African American art, it exists in the limbo between mainstream culture and African tradition. Morrison embarks on the myth of the flying African in portraying Milkman's quest for identity. His movement, or what Gilroy terms "the circumnavigation" between Northern and Southern spaces accounts for his "double-voiced" experience, which, unlike Faulkner's characters, exists outside the dichotomized conventions of race, class, and gender. However, in foregrounding the hybridity of African American

culture, Naylor, unlike Morrison, is less critical of the North. If Morrison's Michigan is portrayed as a hierarchical space, wherein characters are often divided within the paradigms of race, class, and gender, Naylor's New York, on the other hand, celebrates diversity and love. However, within this multiplicity, Naylor, like Morrison, stipulates that African Americans should not negate their African heritage, which she usually associates with the feminine, oral, and intuitionist mode of knowing. Naylor rewrites not only Morrison's North but also Faulkner and Morrison's South. Naylor's Willow Springs transcends these authors' essentialist perception of this region. Like the metaphor of the bridge, which connects Willow Springs to Georgia and South Carolina, the South is hybrid. It is rooted but also incorporates the discourse of the mainland.

Critics, such as Andrea Dimino, in comparing and contrasting Morrison and Faulkner, did not theorize the plural aspects of the black self in its African American framework and epistemology. Many scholars, who have worked on Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* and *Song of Solomon*, focus on his modernist and regional concern in analysing the subject formation of his fictional characters, which remains essentialist, hierarchical and constructively fixed. Andrea Dimino, in "Toni Morrison and William Faulkner: Remapping Culture," proclaims that Faulkner's modernism does not allow him to go beyond race and gender. As a white, patriarchal Southern writer, Faulkner epitomizes the racial and "phallogocentric" colonialist bias in associating black people with the figure of the "sambo," and with a lack of "self-restraint, honesty, dependability, purity. . . ." (211 in Dimino 46). Although the theoretical contextualization of Faulkner's logocentric vision of the subject is valid, those critics,

nevertheless, neglect the importance of the African American theoretical background and tradition from which writers such as Morrison and Naylor write. In treating the subject formation in *Song of Solomon* and *Mama Day*, my analysis focuses on some African American theories that are related to the issue of “double-consciousness” and “hybridity” in delineating the plural of the African American subject. This perception stands in contrast to Faulkner’s conventionally stable perception of identities. In so doing, I study how the movement inside the Northern and Southern spaces that characterize the trajectory of the quests performed by Milkman in *Song of Solomon* and George Andrews in *Mama Day* account for their cultural metissage. The spaces they occupy become cultural topos which inform and shape their worldviews. The multiplicity of these spaces produce transnational entities that stand in sharp contrast to Faulkner’s Ike, whose immersion in the wilderness of the Mississippi County locates him in an essentially Southern, patriarchal and racist era. In effect, I embark on Paul Gilroy’s trope of the “transatlantic ship,” James Clifford’s “Travelling Cultures,” Arjun Appadurai’s “Putting Hierarchy in Its Place,” and W. E. B. Du Bois’s concept of “double-consciousness.”

In this thesis, hybridity is not only associated with the formation of the subject, but also with the ways both Morrison and Naylor rewrite history. Despite Faulkner’s revolutionary critique of the logocentric dimension of the mainstream historical account, he, nevertheless, does not give alternative meanings to the ledgers that Ike reads. Embarking on the oral mode of knowing and mediation, Morrison and Naylor supply their male characters Milkman and George with oral forms of histories through

songs and gossips, which provide multiperspectivist and disputable versions of truth that challenge conventional stable definitions and interpretations.

My thesis will be divided into three chapters. Chapter One deals with William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*. From a Hegelian perspective, which inaugurates the introduction of this chapter, I study how identity in Faulkner's old American South is linked to the concept of property. Black and white male protagonists associate property with their vision of their empiricist selves that come only through the process of ownership. Property is also the possession of the racial lineage or race and affects also gender, wherein women's bodies in the white American and African American milieus are vehicles to consolidate the masculinity of men. The first section of this chapter provides an analysis of the male characters' empiricist identities. I focus on Ike McCaslin's Adornian and revolutionary reading of his family ledgers, which he associates with the institution of slavery. The second portion of this chapter thematizes Ike's illusion of freedom. Ike's repudiation of all forms of property and his seclusion in the Mississippi woods, however, make him a stagnant character, incapable of acknowledging the humanity of the racial Other, and of transcending gender paradigms. The third portion of this chapter studies the concepts of property, race, and gender within the local black Mississippi community. I study how the racial hybridity of Turl and his son, Lucas Beauchamp makes them transgressive tricksters. Turl manipulates the restrictions of the white law, in order to win his beloved, Tennie Beauchamp. Lucas Beauchamp sees his identity in owning property and in defending his rights to win his wife, Mollie, from his cousin, Zack Edmonds, in order to consolidate his manhood. In the fourth portion of this chapter, I foreground Faulkner's

innovative portrayal of black women. I associate Mollie Beauchamp and Mannie, the deceased black wife in “Pantaloon in Black,” with the theme of racial consciousness and love. Mollie’s love is unconditional in that it transcends racial barriers, despite the scores of critics who associate her with the stereotype of the Mammy. Her love for the black community makes her the voice of racial sensitivity who is able to challenge white Southern mores and norms. Mannie is associated with the romantic theme of love, whose death marks the collapse and the suicide of Rider, her husband. Faulkner’s emphasis on this couple’s romantic tragedy is meant to foreground his critique of the white Southern capitalist community, whose obsession with materialism and race makes them spiritually debased.

Chapter Two concerns Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*. In a fashion similar to what I do in my interpretation of *Go Down, Moses*, I associate identity, in the first part of this chapter with racial and gender performance. Like my characterization of Lucas Beauchamp, Milkman Dead and his father, Macon Dead, are obsessed with owning property, and with the subordination of black women in order to consolidate their image of manhood. In analysing gender dynamics, I foreground women’s bodies and the way they are voyeuristically constructed by the gaze of the male characters. In this section, I put into perspective the fact that gender is a matter of bodily performance. In rewriting Faulkner’s theme of freedom, I show that Morrison gives voice to her black, female characters—Ruth, and her daughters, Lena and Corinthians—who struggle to liberate themselves from Macon Dead’s obsession with socioeconomic status. As opposed to some critics who associate the disintegration and the death of Hagar, Milkman’s cousin and sometime mistress, with a heroic failure I give voice to this

character. I see her, in a fashion similar to Faulkner's portrayal of Mannie and Rider, as a character who symbolizes the theme of love and, more than that, as a mirror who unveils Milkman's failure of liberating himself from the discourse of race, class, and gender. The third section of this chapter foregrounds the agency of Pilate Dead. Pilate, like Mollie, is the voice of love, racial resistance and the mediation that bridges the gap between the Northern and Southern moral orders. However, unlike Mollie, she is an agent of gender transgression in performing, like Roth Edmonds's black mistress in *Go Down, Moses*, the role of the drag, and a traveller who transcends the geographical barrier she occupies. In doing so, I subvert Faulkner's portrayal of the black female characters, which proved to be patriarchal and racially informed.

In signifying upon Faulkner's identity quest, the last section of this chapter refers to Pilate's role in Milkman's "transgeographical" quest, a spiritual journey, which provides him with multiperspectivist accounts of his family genealogy from the black people he encounters. In analysing Milkman's subject formation, I rely on how his multiperspectivist understanding of his family genealogy, in contrast to Ike McCaslin, rejects seclusion and celebrates his commitment to and understanding of the people he abandoned and rejected. In analysing the fluidity of Milkman's journey South, I establish a dialogue between Paul Gilroy's trope of the "transatlantic ship" in his *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* with Morrison's reliance on the myth of the flying African. Milkman's journey gives him a double-voiced vision of the world which, as opposed to Faulkner's characters in *Go Down, Moses*, is uncontaminated by racial, class, and gender dichotomies.

Chapter Three analyses, similar to Morrison's novel, the hybrid subject formation of the protagonist George Andrews, which is expressed in his movement between Northern and Southern spaces. His identity quest comes only through the mediation of the black women -- particularly his wife-Cocoa, and Mama Day-her great-aunt -- who are implicitly associated with the fiction's overriding trope of the bridge. George's experience in Willow Springs, similar to that of Milkman, not only challenges his pragmatic world he was bequeathed from the North, but, in a fashion similar to Milkman, introduces him to the Days' family history. The Days' genealogy, as opposed to Ike McCaslin's logocentric and "scriptographic" ledgers, is oral and pluralistic in version, and in contrast to Morrison, is based on the feminine story of an ancestress, who transgresses racial and gendered confinement. The first part of this section portrays George and Cocoa's posthumous conversation that reveals tension of ideologies between the South, epitomized in the character of Cocoa, and the North, manifested in George. In arguing that Naylor is rewriting Morrison, I show how Naylor portrays a symbiotic, rather than a dichotomized relationship between the North and the South, culminating in the institution of marriage. Marriage, like the metaphor of the bridge, which connects the Southern island of Willow Springs to Georgia and South Carolina, reflects connection rather than conventional binarism between characters and their moral orders. Embarking on the metaphor of the bridge, the second section of the chapter theorizes the hybrid nature of Willow Springs. Unlike Morrison's South, Willow Springs remains rooted but does not negate the Western presence and influence. In studying the hybridity of the island, I refer to James Clifford's theory on "Travelling Cultures," and on Arjun Appadurai's critique of traditional anthropologies

that he develops, in his article, "Putting Hierarchy in Its Place," that stress the fixed rather than the plural aspects of non-Western cultures. Using Mae G. Henderson's theory of "Speaking in Tongues," I show how, in a fashion similar to Morrison, Naylor foregrounds the oral aspect of knowing in African American culture, but from a specifically feminist perspective. Willow Springs' history, unlike those regional histories in Faulkner and Morrison, incorporates the feminine myth of Sapphira Wade, whose oral story resists single interpretation and whose art of conjuring and the belief in the supernatural shape the moral order of the island. The third section of this chapter stresses the role of Mama Day, the direct descendant of Sapphira Wade, in initiating the heroic journey of George Andrews' journey. I focus on the image of "the hand," which, like the metaphor of the bridge, connotes the connection, rather than division, between the Western, pragmatic and empiricist vision of George Andrews, and the feminine, the supernatural, and the intuitionist world of Mama Day, which are both bridged through love in order to save Cocoa, therefore, the genealogy of the Days.

Chapter 1

Property, Race, and Gender in *Go Down, Moses*

In *Elements of the Philosophy of Rights* Hegel suggests that property provides an individual with a way of projecting his personality into the world. “The personality must have existence {Dasein} in property” (81), Hegel contends. “That a thing {Sache} belongs to the person who happens to be the first to take possession of it is an immediately self-evident and superfluous determination, because second party cannot take possession of what is already the property of someone else” (81). According to Hegel, “the concept of property requires that a person should place his will in a thing . . . and the next step is precisely the realization of this concept” (81). The thing, or what Hegel terms *Sache*, provides a person with some sort of recognition: “My inner act of will which says that something is mine must also become recognizable by others” (81). To use Thadious Davis’s words, Hegel assumes that “it is only through owning and controlling property that an individual can embody his will in external objects and begin to transcend the subjectivity of his immediate existence” (186). In explaining “the empirical self,” William James opined that

the line between what a man calls me and what he simply calls mine . . . is difficult to draw. . . .In its widest possible sense . . . a man’s Self is the sum total of all that he calls his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his houses, his wife and children. His ancestors and his friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank-account...All these things give him the same emotions. (*The Principles of Psychology* 291-93)

In other words, there is “an instructive impulse” which drives human beings to collect property, and the material collection thus made becomes with different degrees of intimacy, parts of our empirical selves (293). The goods, or rather substantial determinations, which constitute one’s own distinct personality and the universal essence of one’s consciousness, are inalienable, and one’s right to them is imprescriptible (Hegel 95). “They include not only one’s personality, but also one’s universal freedom of will, ethical life, and religion” (95). The loss of possessions produces a sense of the diminishing of personality, or what James terms “a partial conversion of ourselves to nothingness” (293). In *Go Down, Moses*, property is a problematized concept. As a discursive practice it is contingent upon the “multiperspectivist” imaginaries of the individuals according to their racial positioning in the old American South. In this miscegenated text, property is interpreted in terms of its metonymic association with the issue of race, which unveils the dynamics of the discourse of power, and creates a racial division between “the haves and have-nots.” Property is also tantamount to the problematic of gender where the female body, whatever its “racialized” form, becomes a source of validated ownership, and a mirror which consolidates the normative masculine identity of both white and black subjects within the patriarchal American South.

William Faulkner alludes to the discourse of property through the overriding impact of the McCaslin ledgers. As historical documents, they translate how the institution of slavery is, first and foremost, based on the white man’s greed for wealth manifested in the desire for property. As a result, the human body is reduced to a state of bare life, a cargo used for economic profit. The ledgers epitomize implicitly the

discourse of Enlightenment where reason, as a totalizing discourse, engages in excluding what is believed to be the abject, including black men and women. In refusing the immoral implications of the project of Enlightenment, Ike McCaslin, the great-grandson of the slave owner, Old Carothers McCaslin, juxtaposes the ledgers with the mythical wilderness, which epitomizes a romantic space free from societal constraints. As an escapist, Ike perceives the wilderness as a space of freedom from his ancestral sin. He decides to repudiate all forms of property. This decision will have a detrimental impact on his “identitarian” development. Ike’s trauma from the institution of slavery makes him incapable of assuming his responsibilities in an empiricist and “phallogocentric” society where masculinity is translated only through owning property whether in material or gendered form. Ike’s failure at the end of *Go Down, Moses* in harmonizing with the social changes surrounding him makes him a flawed character incapable of love, especially when it comes to his failed marriage, and to his incapacity to acknowledge the humanity of African Americans, the racial other.

This failure characterizes other white male characters, such as Ike’s cousin Zack, and his grandson, Roth Edmonds, who are still entrapped in the exclusionary discourse wherein both women and black men are oppressed on the basis of their race and gender. This failure is juxtaposed with the black characters’ racial ambivalence, such as that which is expressed by Lucas Beauchamp, the great-grandson of Old Carothers, and his grandson, Butch Beauchamp, the culturally deracinated black character who flees to Chicago, the urban North. Lucas and Butch’s state of “twoness” is accounted for in their attempt at asserting their masculine identity in strictly racialized and materialized terms through owning property, a western ethos that they

internalize as a form of power. Property within Faulkner's configuration of black culture and heritage, as opposed to the white moral order, is problematized because it is a form of neo-slavery and a site for cultural deracination. This rejection is performed by the role of the black female character, Mollie Beauchamp- the wife of Lucas and the grandmother of Butch-who, despite her apparent silence, preserves the "fire and the hearth" of the black family, either by interrupting her husband's material pursuit, or by pressing Gaven Stevens to make the tragic death of Butch Beauchamp public. Despite her illiteracy, Mollie writes, through the mediation of the white Southern editor, the story of the tragic life of black men in a white society that denies their humanity. Her presence signifies the black ancestral legacy and the importance of love which sustains the African American family, in contrast with the white family ties which are proven to be loveless and dysfunctional. In this respect, Faulkner associates the black family with the romantic discourse, and the white subjects with the discourse of Enlightenment, wherein the obsession with owning property is a parallel movement towards the spiritual debasement of the self. The story of Rider in "Pantaloons in Black" further epitomizes this theme.

The following chapter will explore the formation of the male subject in relation to the concept of property in the white and black Southern milieu, in terms of race and gender, and the role of black women in underlining the theme of romantic love and racial resistance. This chapter will be divided into four parts. The first section is a study of Faulkner's juxtaposition of the Enlightenment discourse of the ledgers with the romantic implication of the wilderness as a means of historicizing the whole institution of slavery. In this comparison, I will refer to Adorno's critique of the

Enlightenment discourse, wherein reason becomes an “instrumentalized” form of power that validates man’s instinctive drives for controlling nature and other races. Ike’s interpretation of the McCaslin ledgers is biblical in that he reads the institution of slavery as the white man’s transgression of the divine order of things. It also falls into the same Adornian patterns wherein truth, as Ike puts it, is a “game” that “covers all that touches the heart,” which is a “semiotic” reading of history that attests to Faulkner’s belief in the subjectivity of all discursive representations of truth. Ike’s approach to the ledgers reflects the “constructedness” of the western world and word, and how both society and cultural productions shape each other and the white subject’s moral order. This deconstructionist study of history echoes Hayden White’s critique of “historiography,” wherein history is no longer an objective and authentic reproduction of events, but an object of novelistic emplotment, subject to variations, diversions and distortions. Ike’s repudiation of Reason occasions his seclusion into the wilderness, which becomes a romanticized space of flow and freedom. Traumatized by the discourse of slavery, Ike repudiates all forms of property, including his patrimony and the whole institution of marriage. He associates the institution of marriage with the restriction of freedom, especially when his unnamed wife tried to convince him of taking back his patrimony. Marriage has, then, become a form of entrapment.

The second part deals with Ike’s reaction to race and gender. The wilderness will be treated as a world of stagnation that does not permit Ike to perform the role of a true romantic character who rejects racial and gender hierarchies. In the fourth section of “The Bear” chapter, Ike’s encounter with his black cousin- Fonsiba- and her educated black husband attests to his immersion into the racist bias of his culture. He

negates the emancipation of the black subject as a premature act of agency. In “Delta Autumn,” Ike’s confrontation with Roth’s black mistress further attests to his racist bias. The black woman becomes, in Freud’s terms, the figure of the uncanny which revives Ike’s fear of miscegenation. This fear takes two dimensions: Ike’s fear of racial mixing and his apprehension of the modern progress that celebrates the intersection of the local and the global worlds through the image of the railroad, which, according to Ike, symbolizes cultural miscegenation between Northern space and the authentic American South. The black mistress not only unveils Ike’s racism, but she also subverts his patriarchal norms in her incarnation of what Judith Butler terms, “the drag” when she penetrates Ike’s wilderness, a male-dominated space, wearing male clothes.

This failure is translated through other white characters who, like Ike, remain enmeshed in the discourses of white culture, where race and gender are considered as forms of abjections that allow the white male characters to erase and thus create their racialized and gender identities. This study includes the characters of Zack and his son, Roth Edmonds, the deputy and Gavin Stevens who are incapable of interracial rapport with the black community. In juxtaposition with this white and patriarchal world, I will devote the third part of this chapter to studying the subject formation of the black male characters such as Lucas Beauchamp, Tomey’s Turl and Rider in terms of their racialized perception of property. Relying on their racial mixing as mulattoes, Tomey’s Turl and his son- Lucas-both are figures of racial transgression. They manipulate the white system in order to assert their manhood. Their white lineage, thus, gives them access to the white world’s privilege from which they are racially excluded. Tomey’s

Turl, as a passing character, wins his lover, Tennie. Lucas, as the figure of the trickster, has access to the treasure he believes to be on Edmonds' land. He wins back his wife, Mollie, from Zack Edmonds.

The fourth section foregrounds the notable agency of black women in the Southern community. They are, unconventionally, associated with the theme of love, which is epitomized in the institution of matrimony and family ties that are valorized over the white empiricist culture. Here, the role of the African American women as the preservers of the black legacy is foregrounded. Contrary to some critiques on Faulkner's treatment of women, I will show how the author's portrayal of black women differs from his description of white female characters. Faulkner romanticizes black women. They become the agents of love, survival, and racial resistance. Mollie, for instance, does not incarnate the traditional figure of the black mammy in taking care of the white family's children. She is the embodiment of Faulkner's black nurse, Caroline Barr, to whom *Go Down, Moses* is dedicated. Her silence throughout the novel, especially in "The Fire and the Hearth," attests to her performative power in action. She signifies upon Roth's racial separation from her own black family. She interrupts the materialistic pursuit of her culturally deracinated husband. Mollie embodies the African American legacy. She is the oral consciousness, which guides the last chapter of *Go Down, Moses*, and whose chant defamiliarizes and alienates Gavin Stevens. Black women, in this particular novel, are the source of power for their individual male partners and for the black communities; the deaths of these female ancestresses entail the spiritual and physical annihilation of the black male subject. In dealing with the detrimental impact of the black women's absence, I will analyse the

“Pantaloon in Black” chapter which attests to the power of love in relation to Rider and his wife- Mannie- whose emotional interdependence underwrites the lovelessness of the Sheriff’s deputy and his wife- the white couple narrating the tale of Rider’s suicide. Their insensitivity and racialized thinking reveal the bias of Western discourse that misrepresents blacks as irrational, emotionally disordered, and subhuman. Faulkner unsettles the white couple’s racist bias by associating Rider and his wife with the theme of love.

‘There are some things He said in the Book, and some things reported of him that He did not say. And I know what you will say now: That if truth is one thing to me and another thing to you, how will we choose which is truth? You don’t need to choose. The heart already knows. He didn’t have His Book written to be read by what must elect and choose, but by the heart, not by the wise of the earth because maybe they don’t need it or maybe the wise no longer have any heart, but by the doomed and lowly of the earth who have nothing else to read with but the heart. Because the men who wrote his Book for Him were writing about truth and there is only one truth and it covers all things that touch the heart.’

And McCaslin ‘So these men who transcribed His Book for Him were sometime liars.’

And he ‘Yes. Because they were human men.’ (*Go Down, Moses* 260)

1.1 Ike McCaslin, the Ledgers, and the Wilderness

In *Go Down, Moses* Faulkner transforms his fiction into a social critique wherein the portrayal of the wilderness is a symbol not only of Isaac's romantic relationship with nature, but also an object of reflection on the inner dynamics of colonial domination. The central elements in this environmental space are Old Ben, the bear, and Sam Fathers, Isaac's surrogate father and mentor who teaches the boy the ethics of hunting, instilling reverence for nature and the "Old People." Isaac has often listened to Sam Fathers' stories "about the old days and the [Chicksaw] People whom [Sam] had not had time ever to know and so could not remember . . . and in place of whom the other[black] race into which his blood had run supplied him with no substitute" (171). Despite Sam's own admission of the difficulty of translating this unremembered past into his own lived present, "to the boy those old times would cease to be old times and would become a part of the boy's present . . . the men who walked through them actually walking in breath and air and casting an actual shadow on the earth they had quitted" (171). In "the Old People" Sam marks the boy with the blood of the first buck he hunts:

The buck lying still intact and still in the shape of that magnificent speed and bled it with Sam's knife and Sam dipped his hands into the hot blood and marked his face forever while he stood trying not to tremble, humbly and with pride too though the boy of twelve had been unable to phrase it then: *I sew you, my bearing must not shame your quitting life. My conduct forever onward must become your death;* marking him for that and for more than that: that day and himself and

McCaslin juxtaposed not against the wilderness but against the tamed land, the old wrong and shame itself, in repudiation and denial at least of the land and the wrong and shame even if he couldn't cure the wrong and eradicate the shame, who when at twenty-one he became competent he knew that he could do neither but at least he could repudiate the wrong and shame, at least in principle, and at least the land itself. (259)

As a modernist writer, Faulkner uses images that possess multiple points of reference. The image of the blood reflects racial rapacity, domination and oppression. It also excavates the world of hunting and tracking. Ike's learning to "spill the blood he loves" marks him with the achievement of mastery over nature; it distills the essential relationship of human to nature through domination (John T Matthews 35). In Ike's words, a "man had had to marry his planting to the wilderness in order to conquer it" (342). In this context to plant is to conquer nature; to cultivate a plantation is to control the wilderness; to make a profit, to commandeer labor; to exercise authority, to dominate the landless, slaves, women, and children (Mathews 35), of whom, as Roth Edmonds says, there is never a "scarcity" (339). In *Go Down, Moses*, the discourse of domination is translated in the old McCaslin ledgers, which occupy the tiny space of the plantation's commissary. They are an index to the codes of the Southern land and "society in miniature, which multiplied and compounded was the entire South" (299). They are "strong as truth and impervious as evil and longer than life itself reaching beyond record and patrimony" (299). As historical documents, the ledgers "contained a chronological and much more comprehensive though doubtless tedious [fixed, finished and unalterable] record than [Ike] would ever get from any source" (268). For Ike, they

account for the promiscuous trading of and monetization of human bodies as forms of property. They also reveal the incestuous rape of black women and the land. As written documents, the ledgers are the McCaslin' inscription of

The slow outward trickle of food and supplies and equipment which returned each fall as cotton made and ginned and sold (two threads frail as truth and impalpable as equators yet cable-strong to bind for life them whole who made the cotton to the land their sweat fell on). (256)

They are "clumsy and archaic in size and shape on the yellowed [scrawled, scarred, and cracked] pages of which were recorded in the faded hand [Ike's] father Theophilus and his uncle Amodeus during the two decades before the Civil War, the manumission in title at least of Carothers McCaslin's slaves" (265-61). In this revelatory moment, Ike functions as a "hierophant" (Wainwright 137) and historian who retraces and recreates the "xed" spaces of the material reality of the silenced subjects. He conceives of history as succeeding eras of dispossession.⁵ Ike comes to realize that property in the McCaslin ledgers refers to owning the land that the white man took from the Indians while he had no real right to it except force and deceit, corrupting Chickasaw to sell the land (Marius 182). As Joseph William Singer points out, "property and sovereignty in the United States have a racial bias. The land was

⁵ Ike relates the property of the land to a series of immoral invasions and dispossession processes, which date back to the fall of human kind from Eden: "Dispossessed of Eden. Dispossessed of Canaan, and those who dispossessed him . . . dispossessed," Ike protests. "And the five hundred years of absentee landlords in the Roman bagnios and down through Columbus until Old Carothers dispossessed Ikkemottubbe of the wilderness" (258-59).

taken by force by white people from the peoples of color thought by the conquerors to be racially inferior. The close relation of native people to the land was held to be no relation at all” (176). Singer asserts that “to all conquerors, the land was vacant. Yet it required trickery and force to wrest it from its occupants. This means that the title of every single parcel of property in The United States can be traced to a system of racial violence” (100). Acquiring the land through rapacity attests to “the long-lived American myth of ‘regeneration through violence,’ the myth of the frontier hunter who is initiated into heroic manhood by his assimilation of the mysterious knowledge and power of the beast he has learned by imitation to track and kill” (Moreland 176).

Property is not only restricted to owning the land, but it also implies the enslavement of the black body as its further extension. Ike comes to realize that his grandfather raped Tomey, his own daughter from Eunice, his slave and concubine, because “she was his property . . . she was old enough and female . . . and get a child on her and then dismiss her because she was of an inferior race” (294). Ike then realizes that Eunice drowned herself “in formal and succinct repudiation of grief and despair who had already had to repudiate belief and hope” (271). As an owned human property, Eunice had no power to protect her child from Old Carothers. The ledgers refer implicitly to how rape of the black female slaves was the white master’s institutionalized right and rite. As Hazel Carby points out, “black women’s productive destiny was bound to capital accumulation. They give birth to property and, directly, to capital itself in the form of slaves who, in turn, increase the white master’s stock” (24-25). To use Carla L. Peterson’s words, “in slavery, the black woman not only carried the physical labor demanded by plantation economy, she also performed sex work that

satisfied the slaveholder's lust as well as the reproductive labor of breeding that ensured the replenishment of his slave stock" ("Eccentric Bodies" xi)

In "The Bear" chapter, Ike's interpretation of the history of slavery is biblical, and more specifically, Miltonic in its poetic emphasis on the hierarchy and the contractual agreement between man and God (Vickery 126): "He made the first earth and peopled it with dumb creatures, and then he created man to be His overseer on the earth and to hold suzerainty over the earth and the animals on it in His name" (275). For Ike, man's happiness consists in recognizing the greatness and the limitations of his position in the divine order. By forgetting that he is at once the ruler and the ruled, man destroys that order and with it his proper relationship to god and to nature (Vickery 127). Ike claims that Man's sin is pride and the lust for power, the one preventing his relationship to God, the other to nature and other men. In either case, "the overseer becomes the tyrant, seeing himself as the measure of all things and replacing God's laws with his own. His punishment is increasing blindness to his own corruption until the game he hunts and kills becomes human" (Vickery 131). The actual enslavement of man by man marks the final horrifying destruction of the stable moral order. However, it seems to Ike that, in the midst of the fallen world, there is still the individual's redemptive act when one can resist the way and say "I am just against the weak because they are niggers being held in bondage by the strong just because they are white" (285). For Ike, God has created a new world, where man might have another chance: "this land this South for which He had done so much with woods for game and streams for fish and deep rich soil for seed and lush springs to sprout it and long summers to mature it and serene falls to harvest it and short mild winters for men

and animals” (283). The new promised continent is a Canaan, “God’s ‘American Israel,’ called out of a wicked and corrupt Old World and set apart by providence to create a new humanity and restore man’s lost innocence” (Woodward 66). In Ike’s words, the American land is a divine test where God “put them both here: man, and the game he would follow and kill, foreknowing it. . . . I believe He said, ‘So be it.’ I reckon He even foreknew the end. But He said ‘I will give him his chance. I will give him warning and foreknowledge too, along with the desire to follow and the power to slay” (349), Ike continues, “The woods and fields he ravages and the game he devastates will be the consequence and signature of his crime and guilt, and his punishment” (349). Yet this chance was not to be recognizable because evil came with the greedy settlers “from that old world’s worthless twilight” (259). They became “the men who ran the wheels for profit and established and collected taxes with and the rates for hauling it and the commissions for selling it” (283). They ironically altered the “hopeful” continent “dedicated as a refuge and sanctuary of freedom and liberty” (283) into a state of bondage where God “saw the rich descendents of slavers, female of both sexes, to whom the blacks they shrieked of was another specimen another example like the Brazilian macaw brought home in a cage by a traveller, passing resolution about horror and outrage in war and air-proof halls” (283-84).

In this biblical passage, Ike reveals what Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno deem “the dialectic of Enlightenment.” Since the eighteenth century, Western thought had confronted two contradictory stances: the first, a dedication to the search for intrinsic value and ultimate purpose—“the mythic imagination”—in which reason is devoted to transcendence, and the second, a desacralized view of the world that makes

reason instrumental in the drive for the domination of nature; “Enlightenment” (Duvenage 38). In the dialectic of Enlightenment, the individual believes either in human subjugation to nature or nature’s subjugation to the self” (*Dialectic of Enlightenment* 32). The American settlers opted for the second option where not only the natural landscape was instrumentalized but also the black human body. As Adorno and Horkheimer put it, “reason itself has become the mere instrument of the all-inclusive economic apparatus. It serves as a general tool, useful for the manufacture of all other tools, firmly directed toward its end, as fateful as the precisely calculated movement of material production, whose result for mankind is beyond all calculation” (*Dialectic* 30).

The project of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century was a reaction to the irrational myth of religious discourse, to man’s fear of the unknown (*Dialectic* 24). It theoretically promises the virtue of reason and rationality for a comprehensive progress and freedom for all human beings. Thus according to Kant, Enlightenment means that a person should free him or herself from immaturity by means of critical thinking that is reason (Duvenage 37). Yet, it practically engages into the dehumanization of the “Other” to legitimize his or her subjugation. As Walter Benjamin argues, “there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism” (256). “The curse of irresistible progress is irresistible regression” (Adorno 35-36). The discourse of enlightenment implies “the desacrilization of religion,” that Ike rejects, “a rejection of myth, the coming of age of the subject, individual rights, the autonomous use of reason, separation between subject and object, the ascendance of science, and mechanization of labour and industrial production” (Duvenage 37). It becomes the

“Prinzip der blinde Herrschaftan” (principle of blind domination), an exclusionary and “binarist” discourse which created the division between people on the basis of race, class and gender. Instead of freedom, the enlightenment discourse engendered its own prison house. It turns out to be a mere “totalitarian-scientific regularity of Enlightened reason” (Duvenage 39), a world of domination and control, of “deception” and “disenchantment,” consisting of the ruler and the ruled, where “the rulers . . . declare themselves to be the engineers of world history” (38), and where “[o]nly the ruled accept as unquestionable necessity the course of development that with every decreed rise the standard of living makes them so much more powerless” (38). In this division, the ruled perceive that “their reduction to mere objects of the administered life, which performs every sector of modern existence including language and perception, represents objective necessity, against which they believe there is nothing they can do” (38).

As a discursive practice, the Enlightenment project creates its own myth by constructing its primitive and abject counter-part as a scapegoat to legitimize its totalizing and absolute power. As Adorno and Horkheimer further put it, “The over-maturity of society lives by the immaturity of the dominated” (35). “The more complicated and precise the social, economic, and scientific apparatus with whose service the production system has long harmonized the body, the more impoverished the experiences which it can offer” (36). In an intersubjective way, “adaptation to the power of progress involves the progress of power, and each time anew brings about those degenerations which show not unsuccessful but successful progress to be its contrary” (*Dialectic* 32). With the extension of the bourgeois commodity economy,

“the dark horizon of myth is illuminated by the sun of calculating reason, beneath whose cold rays the seed of the new barbarism grows to fruition” (32). Ike is aware of the contradictory nature of the Enlightenment where the calculating reason, or what he calls “the game,” takes as its object the taming of the supposedly common land as a source of profit. Added to this is the enslavement of the black body, its free labor, providing a step towards the increase of wealth. The enslavement of the black body epitomizes how the latter is restricted to be naturalized so that the culture of progress, embodied in the McCaslin ledgers that Ike reads, can exercise power over it in order to make legitimate its use and abuse. As Adorno and Horkheimer eventually opine, “ideation is only an instrument. In thought, men distance themselves from nature in order thus imaginatively to present it to themselves-but only in order to determine how it is to be dominated” (39).

Faulkner “intertextually” includes the ledgers in *Go Down, Moses* as a testimony to his belief in the “constructedness” of history. They graphically embody a circumscribed space in “The Bear,” the most extensive chapter. They are equally located in the tiny space of the McCaslin’s shelves. The stress on the limited spaces that these ledgers occupy is a self-reflexive articulation of how language is a form of manipulation, and once again, in Ike’s view, a game that shapes in a confining way the white Southerner’s moral order when it comes to race. In reading these historical documents, Ike notices that Theophilus McCaslin, or Buck, his father, and his uncle, Amodeus McCaslin, or Uncle Buddy, have the same bad handwriting. “[T]he twins . . . were identical even in their handwriting, unless you had specimen side by side to compare, and even when both hands appeared on the same page . . . they both looked

as though they had been written by the same perfectly normal ten-year-old boy, even to the spelling” (263). Ike also notices that their father, Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin, writes in capital letters and in nouns. The sameness of the handwriting, the absence of verbs, and the capitalization of the nouns refer to the absolutist and “logocentric” dimension of the white written “History,” which, in its presumably “fixed” and “finished” dimension, conveys the totalizing perception of the racial other as inferior, and therefore, an object of domination. Graphically, the ledgers are written in fragmented temporal sequences that convey the theme of discursive distortions of events and the silencing of the slave’s voice. The ledgers as a form of instrumentalizing “ideation” not only silence the black subject, but also, in their graphological tininess, project the white man’s illusion of freedom, which comes only through the discursive fabrication of the unfreedom of the racial other. As Toni Morrison conspicuously points out, “The fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary mediation on the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly consciousness” (*Playing in the Dark* 44). Morrison further writes: “There is no romance free of what Herman Melville called ‘the power of blackness,’ . . . upon which the imagination could play; through which historical, moral metaphysical, and social fears, problems and dichotomies could be articulated” (44). The slave population offered itself “as surrogate selves for mediation on problems of human freedom, its lures and elusiveness” (*Playing* 37).

Reference to history as an instance of language game and ideation aligns William Faulkner to the poststructuralist figures who challenge traditional beliefs in the objectivity of truth imparted by the discourse of grand-narratives. Faulkner’s

graphological description of the ledgers and his positioning of Ike in the process of reading and decoding them are all self-reflexive techniques, which refer to the constructedness of truth in general. Faulkner's critique of the essentialist and fabricated dimension of the ledgers echoes Saul Friedlander's assumption that "there is an unexpungeable relativity in every representation of historical phenomena. The relativity of the representation is a function of the language used to describe and thereby constitute past events as possible objects of explanation and understanding" (Friedlander, *Probing the Limits of Representation* 37). Faulkner, prematurely, echoes Hayden White's theory on the emplotment of the historical discourse. In this discursive practice, the historian, according to White, becomes like a storyteller who must rely on the novelistic configurations of events to bring about coherence, chronology, and format wholeness to provide different meanings and interpretations of the recorded events (White "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" 1715). This process of emplotment engages the historian with act and art of sense-making, which identifies him as a member of cultural endowment (1717). History is not a mimetic reproduction of reported events. It is "a complex of symbols which gives us directions for finding an icon of structure of those events in the literary tradition" (1718). The historian's encoding of events is one of the ways that culture has of making sense of both personal and public pasts (1716), which become subsequently familiarized and grasped on the part of the reader (1717). The historian, thus, resorts to some distortions and variations (1720) because, as White points out, "history is a verbal model of a set of events external to the minds of the historian and the historical narrative does not image the things it indicates; it calls to mind images of the things it indicates in the same way as a

metaphor does” (1721). History, to use Stephen Greenblatt’s words, “tends to be monological; that is, it is concerned with discovering a single political vision, usually identical to that said by the entire literate class. . . . This vision, most often presumed to be internally coherent and consistent . . . has the status of an historical fact” (2253-54).

Ike as a character living in the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century is aware of the linguistic game, the symbolic order which fabricates and manipulates the subject’s moral order and his vision of the “Other.” First, he interprets the institution of slavery in its Darwinist and pre-symbolic order, wherein the domination of the black body is determined by the white man’s instinctive drives for conquest. These drives are, then, given legitimacy through the “instrumentalization” of language, which creates cultural productions that shape and are shaped by the discourse of the South. Ike’s belief in the illusion of truth is further accentuated when he confronts his cousin, Cass, on the writing of the bible. Like the ledgers, religion becomes a discursive practice subject to alteration and distortion since language follows the logic of Man’s drives to dominate. As he argues: “There are some things He said in the Book, and some things reported of Him that He did not say. And I know what you will say now: that if truth is one thing to me and another thing to you, how will we choose which is truth? You don’t need to choose. The heart already knows” (260). For Ike, God “didn’t have his Book written to be read by what must elect and choose, but by the heart, not by the wise of the earth because maybe they don’t need it or maybe the wise no longer have heart. . . . Because the men who wrote his Book for Him were writing about truth and there is only one truth and it covers all things that covers all truth that touch the heart” (260). The Bible becomes a man-made

truth which is mediated and re-interpreted according to the wise men's drives for conquest. In other words, those who wrote the Book for him are "liars" because "they are human beings" (260) who "were trying to write down the heart's truth out of the heart's driving complexity, for all the complex and troubled hearts which would beat after them" (260). Ike's logic of interpreting the language or the truth of the bible follows the same patterns as his interpretations of the ledgers for both discourses follow the same logic of language game. The bible, like the ledgers, becomes a symbolic instrument⁶ used by the master in order to further legitimize slavery. The wise of the earth, who are driven by the lust for conquest, cannot have direct access to truth, because truth itself is mediated and altered for specific political moves. The truth, which presumably must cover all that touches the heart in its idyllic dimension of "brotherhood," "humility," and "love," eventually becomes the truth which uncovers the dark inner side of human nature. The bible, like the ledgers, turns out to be a mere discursive instrument of domination. As Francois Pitavy points out, "the colonist's errand into the wilderness was no nostalgic search for a pagan golden age, rather the reverse—a will to establish man's dominion over nature, bountiful so as to be made subservient to man's needs" (83). This need to dominate, according to Pitavy, is

⁶ In his book, *Slavery and Social Death*, Orlando Patterson theorizes upon the constituent elements of slavery. He advocates that "Masters all over the world used special rituals of enslavement upon first acquiring slaves: the symbolism of naming, of clothing, of hairstyle, of language, and of body marks. And they used, especially in the more advanced slave systems, the sacred symbols of religion" (8-9). Ike's incredulity towards religion corroborates how religion, especially in the sixteenth Century, was used as a symbolic instrument to give legitimacy to slavery, which was based on "natural" division between the white master and the black slave. Winthrop D. Jordan has shown the direct link of religion to the institution of slavery: "From the first, then, vis-à-vis the Negro the concept embedded in the term Christian seems to have conveyed much of the idea and feeling of *we* as against *they*: to be Christian was to be civilized rather than barbarous, English rather than African, white rather than black" (qtd in Patterson 7).

“amenable to God’s manifest plan that the new land be claimed in the name of political, economic, social and spiritual progress” (83-84). Like the reductive history, which is portrayed in the McCaslin ledgers, “Christianity in America had to sever man from wild, untamed nature emotionally and spiritually, to eradicate the pagan animism of the native populations, their sense of communion with the vital spirit of a natural but unchristianized world, envisioned by the new comers to be synonymous with evil” (Pitavy 84).

Prior to his first encounter with the ledgers, Ike knows already what these documents imply, and his “scriptographic” reading of them makes him pronounce Faulkner’s moral motto that the profit-designed enslavement of the black subject is the source of the white man’s sin, the curse of the whole South. This gesture of protest, at least, prepares him to repudiate his ancestral patrimony, a cursed and ravaged land, a “whole edifice intricate and complex and founded upon injustice and erected by ruthless rapacity” which is “yet solvent . . . intact but enlarged, increased, brought still intact by McCaslin” (298). As opposed to the private McCaslin patrimony, Isaac associates the blood in the wilderness with the romantic vision of flow, transcendence, and boundlessness. As opposed to the tiny, fixed and measurable space of the McCaslin ledgers, the wilderness is “bigger and older than any recorded document:— of white man fatuous enough to believe he had bought any fragment of it, of Indian ruthless enough to pretend that any fragment of it had been his to convey” (191). The woods are “bigger than Major de Spain and the scrap he pretended to, knowing better; older than old Thomas Stupen of whom Major de Spain had had it and who knew better; older than old Ikkemotubbe, the Chicasaw chief, of whom Old Stupen had had it

and who knew better in his turn” (191). According to Ike, the Wilderness is a mythical, pre-contact and prelapsarian realm that is utterly free from the taint of civilisation and its social ills:

It was of men, not white nor black nor red but men, hunters, with the will and hardihood to endure and the humility and skill to survive, and the dogs and the bear and deer juxtaposed and relieved against it, ordered and compelled by and within the wilderness in the ancient and unremitting contest according to the ancient and immitigable rules which voided all regrets and brooked no quarter. (191-92).

The woods that Ike idealizes symbolizes an arena of “men where hunting becomes a masculine democracy and a phase of moral development . . . important to the building of character” (Brown and Carmony 67). In Ike’s view, the wilderness “was his land, although he had never owned a foot of it . . . because it belonged to no man. It belonged to all; they had only to use it well, humbly and with pride...” (261). He juxtaposes the wilderness against individualistic and materialistic Southern culture. The wilderness becomes a “carnavalesque” place of the “communal anonymity of brotherhood” (257), where Old Ben, the bear, and the dog, Lion, stand as the woods’ spectacular objects, gathering men of all walks of life, “the swamp-dwellers, the gaunt men who ran traplines and lived on quinine and coons and river water, the farmers of little corn- and cotton-patches . . . the loggers from the camp and the sawmill men . . . and the town men” (248), who come to witness and enjoy the hunting experience. What Ike discovers in the forest is “the primitive state of nature, the golden age of the wilderness where all things are held in common and where life is uncomplicated by

anything than the struggle for existence, survival” (Marius 185). The wilderness, thus, is an Edenic world that transcends all the moral complications and perplexities of a “civilized” world. Ike learns to relinquish his watch and compass, instruments which are evidence of man’s civilization, symbolic of his scientific mastery of time and space (Levins 83). In this wilderness, the romantic Ike opines that every man mirrors the omnipresent image of God. “God created man,” he says, “and He created the world for him to live in and I reckon He created the kind of world He would have wanted to live in if He had been a man-the ground to walk on, the big woods, the trees and the water, and the game to live in it” (348). The wilderness becomes a space where man can establish a harmonious and organic relationship between the self and other, between man and the natural order. Ike sees himself and the wilderness as

coevals, his own span as a hunter, a woodsman, not contemporary with his first breath but transmitted to him, assumed by him gladly, humbly, with joy and pride, from that old Major de Spain and that Old Sam Fathers who taught him to hunt, the two spans running out together, not toward oblivion, nothingness, but into a dimension free of both time and space where once more the untreed land warped and wrung to mathematical squares of rank cotton for the frantic old-world people to turn into shells to shoot at one another for both- the names, the faces of the old men he had known and loved for a little while outlived, moving again among the shades of tall unaxed trees and sightless brakes where the wild strong immortal game ran forever before the tireless belling

immortal hounds, falling and rising phoenix-like to the soundless guns.

(354)

The wilderness becomes not only Ike's engagement with the haunting past of the old people, but an organic space of eternity, transcending time. In the woods, there is no death. Two years after the death of Sam Fathers and the dog Lion, Isaac visits the grave. He reminds himself that Sam and Lion are not vanished, "but merely translated into the myriad life which printed the dark mold of these secret and sunless places with delicate fairy tracks . . . which watched him from beyond every twig and leaf" (328). Sam Fathers and Lion are not dead. They are "not held fast in earth but free in earth and not in earth but of earth myriad yet undiffused of every myriad pat, leaf and twig and particle, air and sun and rain and dew and night, acorn oak and leaf and acorn again, dark and dawn and dark and dawn again in their immutable progression and, being myriad, one" (328-329). Ike is aware of the processes of nature, the energy of life encapsulating death, translating it, restoring the vigor of their spirit to all perished things (Hoffman 148). In the midst of his reverie on the immortality of all that is mortal, Ike is interrupted by an intuitive fear: at his feet a rattlesnake slithers across the forest floor, pausing to raise his head by his knee. Confronted by this serpent, "the old one, the ancient and accursed about the earth, fatal and solidarity . . . evocative of all knowledge and an old weariness and of pariah-hood and of death," Ike, raises one hand, as Sam had done when the boy had shot his first buck, and, "speaking the old tongue which Sam had spoken that day without premeditation either: 'Chief,' he said, 'Grandfather'" (*G D M* 329-30). The snake comes to Ike as the temporary vessel embodying the spirit of Sam Fathers, his ancestor and his immortality (Hoffman 149).

As a Chickasaw totem animal of deity, it symbolizes eternity for it survives repeated sheddings of its skin (Hoffman 149). Not only is the wilderness immortal, it is also a symbiotic space of the overflow of spontaneous feelings, the expression of the Heart that has more reason than the societal Reason itself. In the wilderness, Sam Fathers and Ike know things intuitively. They do not need the man-made truth of “the wise of the earth,” “the liars,” because “the heart already knows” (260). The wilderness, eventually, frees Ike from societal obligations and worldly responsibilities. In other words, it is freedom.

1.2 Ike McCaslin, Freedom, Property, Race, and Gender

As the title of the novel indicates, Faulkner embarks on an African American slave spiritual, “Go Down, Moses.” Originally, the song epitomizes the Israelites’ yearning for freedom from the Tyranny of Pharaoh in Old Egypt. African slaves re-appropriated the song because they believed that it was very descriptive of their bonded experience in the Antebellum American South. Ike interprets freedom in his seclusion from the social world in the woods. “I am free,” Ike says to his cousin, Cass. “Yes. Sam Fathers set me free” (299-300). After his willed relinquishment of all forms of property Isaac is introduced as “a widower and uncle to half a county and father to no one . . . living in a cramped fireless rented room as a carpenter” (5). As Faulkner elucidates, “in all his life he had owned but one object . . . the narrow iron cot and the stained lean mattress which he used camping in the woods for deer or bear or for fishing” (3). Because he loved the woods, Ike “owned no property and never desired to since the earth was not man’s but all men’s, as light and air and weather were” (3).

Isaac believes that his voluntary relinquishment of all forms of property is a redemptive act of freedom from the curse and the shame of the old South. Ike considers himself to be one of God's elect: "Maybe He chose Grandfather out of all of them He might have picked," he tells Cass. "Maybe He knew that Grandfather himself would not serve His purpose because Grandfather was born too soon too, but that Grandfather would have descendants, the right descendants . . . to set at least some of His lowly people free" (259).

Ike's perception of freedom is, however, circumscribed because he cannot escape the racial codes of his environment. He cannot racially reinvent himself. He remains a white male subject constituted out of a specific social world and its ideologies. His move to negate his history merely reinscribes that history into the text for it is the always-already-remembered and to-be-remembered point of entry into his subjectivity (Davis "Trumping" 172). This racial confinement attests to the perception of Cass that the curse of whiteness is similar to "an old lion or a bear in a cage" (124). Faulkner subverts the hierarchy between bios and zoe. The white man's entrapment in his own milieu is a form of taming that dictates the actions and the will of the human subject. Faulkner uses the image of the dog-Lion-whose taming through a long period of starvation and confinement by Sam Fathers echoes the inevitable social formation of the individual. In "The Bear," Lion becomes bigger in size, a being, whose "muscles flinched or quivered to no touch since the heart which drove blood to them loved no man and no thing" (237). He learned only "endurance, the will and desire to endure beyond all imaginable limits of flesh in order to overtake and slay" (237). Ike, in a similar fashion, remains a tamed entity.

Faulkner uses both the illusion of Ike's utopian perception of the wilderness as a world of flow and the image of the tamed dog to reflect upon Ike's entrapment in the racist Southern culture he presumably escapes from. In the fourth section of "The Bear" chapter, Ike goes to search for his cousin, Fonsiba, Old Carothers' black descendant, in Arkansas in order to bequeath her one thousand dollars. "I will have to find her. I will have to," Ike introspectively says (277). "We have already lost one of them," alluding to James Thucydus Beauchamp (son of Tomey's Turl and Tennie, and the great-grandson of Old Carothers), who escaped at the age of twenty-one from the McCaslin plantation. Ike's determination to track down Fonsiba is a mere reiteration of the same ancestral sin. The escape of Fonsiba from the tamed space of enslavement is interpreted as the disruption of the process of alleviating the curse. "This whole land, the whole South, is cursed, and all of us who drive from it, whom it ever suckled, white and black both, lie under the curse (278)," Ike says to Fonsiba's husband. "Granted that my people brought the curse onto the land: maybe for that reason their descendents alone cannot resist it, not combat it-maybe just endure it and outlast it until the curse is lifted" (278). "Then your people's turn will come because we have forfeited ours. But not now. Not yet. Don't you see?" Ike shouts. Ike fails to understand that Fonsiba's gesture of leaving the old McCaslin plantation is a performative act of freedom to achieve her own autonomous self as a black woman. Ike expects that the curse of the old South must be first lifted by the whites so that the black race can be free. In interpreting the concept of freedom, Ike falls into the racist bias of the South. He negates the first act of agency for blacks, which, according to him, must be achieved only after the whites' redemptive acts. Not only does Ike negate black agency, but he

also fails to put up with the social changes of the new era which affect the old Southern race consciousness. As Fonsiba's husband puts it, "The curse you whites brought into this land has been lifted. It has been voided and discharged. We are seeing a new era, an era dedicated, as our founders intended it, to freedom, liberty and equality for all, to which this country will be the new Canaan" (279).

Ike's failure to accept the emancipation of the black race is accentuated in his gaze upon Fonsiba's husband, a "scholar" he regards with derision. The vision of the black man makes him retrospectively remember when the former first entered the McCaslin's house to marry Fonsiba. To the boy, the man was "taller than McCaslin⁷ and wearing better clothes than McCaslin and most of the other white men" (274). To his surprise, the black man defies the racial hierarchies. "He entered like a white man and stood in it like a white man . . . and talked like a white man too" (274). It seemed to the boy that Fonsiba's husband was surprisingly "mature" and "contained," an appearance which challenges his racial agenda. But even now, in his middle-age, Ike cannot escape his racial bias. The man's physical description is approached from a defamiliarizing angle. He is described as being an educated man, wearing a "lenseless spectacles" and "reading a book in the midst of that desolation, that muddy waste fenceless and even pathless and without a walled shed for stock to stand beneath" (278). Ike's vision of the black man is voyeuristic. He establishes a sharp contrast between his act of reading and his impoverished surroundings in order to degrade him. His description of the black man's wretched setting is meant to subvert his manhood, in terms of his inability to own property and to take care of his wife in material terms.

⁷ Ike's father, Buck McCaslin.

Ike's subversion reflects his contradiction, from an act of self-dispossession, as an escape from the white world's sin, to a reaffirmation of the very principle of property. "Freedom from what? From work? Canaan?" (279), Ike shouts. "What corner of Canaan?" (279), Ike asks, pointing at the empty and valueless house. "You are seeing it at a bad time. This is winter. No man farms this time of year," the estranged black husband replies (279). But Ike still insists that he cannot own a woman or be a man unless he becomes a provider in economic terms: "I see. And of course her need for food and clothing will stand still while the land lies fallow" (279), Ike sarcastically responds. The two men's conversation over property is suddenly interrupted by Fonsiba. "I'm free" (280), she says. Fonsiba's statement accentuates Ike's moral contradiction. She, ironically, echoes Ike's previous romantic vision of freedom, which he contrasted to the world of property, but, is now, reclaiming in order to destroy the agency of her black husband.

Ike's adherence to the conventional race consciousness of the old South does not allow him to be a developed fictional character. In "Delta Autumn," Carothers Edmonds (Roth), the great-grandson of the unnamed sister of Old Carothers and the son of Zack, is tied to a miscegeneous relationship with James Thucydus Beauchamp's granddaughter, and the seventy-two year old Ike's response to that miscegeny falls into the "logocentric" discourse of the Old South. He implicitly contends that inter-racial marriage is a premature issue: "Maybe in a thousand or two years in America . . . but not now!" Ike cried, "in a voice of amazement, pity and outrage: 'You're a nigger!'" (361). Isaac's frontier philosophy requires dialectics rather than the spectral neither-

nor⁸ that confronts him (Wainwright 155). He refuses to acknowledge the woman and her son, and urges her to marry a black man: ““Go back North. Marry a man in your own race,”” he says. ““That’s the only salvation for you, for a while yet, maybe a long while. We will have to wait. Marry a black man. You are young, handsome, almost white; you can find a black man who would see in you what it was you saw in him”” (268).

In this moment race, color, gender, female, flesh, sex, and miscegenation are all terms that refigure Ike’s confrontation with Roth’s mistress, who embodies, in Freud’s terms, the figure of the uncanny, “the unheimlich,” “something [which] ought to have remained [repressed], secret, hidden but has come to light ” (“The ‘Uncanny’” 933). Roth’s unnamed mistress is a visitation, the revenant, the coming of the other as “the absolute and unpredictable singularity of *the arrivant as justice*” (Derrida, *Spectres* 28). Roth’s miscegeny revives Ike’s repressed shame of his grandfather’s rape of his own slave daughter and, in a particular way, his traumatic childhood memory of his Uncle Hubert Beauchamp’s “exciting and evocative” relationship with his mulatta cook, “the illicit hybrid female flesh” (214). Ike’s reaction to miscegenation echoes that of his mother- Sophonsiba Beauchamp- when the latter was outraged by the unnameable presence of the black mistress in the Beauchamps’ white house:

The black the nameless face which he had seen only for a moment, the once-hooped dress ballooning and flapping below a man’s overcoat, the

⁸ Wainwright associates Ike’s refusal of inter-racial marriages with the traditional world of hierarchies and dichotomies. He metaphorically associates it with the metaphor of either-or structures, which stands in sharp contrast with the contemporary world of flow and the disruption of conventional hierarchies, “the spectral of neither-nor.”

worn heavy carpet-bag jouncing and banging against her knees, routed and in retreat true enough in the empty lane solitary and young-looking and forlorn yet withal still exciting and evocative and wearing still the silken banner captured inside the very citadel of respectability, and unforgettable. (*GDM* 303)

In repudiating miscegenation Ike rejects the possibility of racial equality. Property in the end is the property of the blood; white racial lineage, and the right to humanity is defined once more according to racial privilege and status (Davis 215). Ike has not been able to translate his strong moral convictions, his shame and outrage at old Carothers's treatment of slaves and kin. His reaction to the emancipation of blacks is a testimony that he is a mere "ameliorationist"⁹ rather than a Southern abolitionist. He merely tends to improve the condition of slavery rather than to eradicate its evil. "His sense of individual justice, of renunciation and expiation by withdrawal, leaves him unengaged, suspended, isolated, loveless and sexless" (Davis 215). This social conversion into a state of nothingness attests to the detrimental impact of the wilderness, which, like the image of "old lion in a cage," turns out to be a stagnant, exclusive and reclusive space, and to Sam Fathers' role in destroying Ike's life. He teaches him to be single and solitary in order to cherish freedom, at the cost of all attachments (Fowler 182). In Thornton's view:

⁹ Ike echoes the tendency of the first abolitionists who were merely preoccupied with ameliorating the conditions of slavery rather than eradicating it. In other words, they are considered as ameliorationists. As Christopher Chelsie Brown puts it "It matters a great deal, then, that the first impulses toward reform were ameliorationist rather than abolitionist or emancipationist, that activists often aimed to make slavery more humane or more Christian, not to liberate the enslaved" (28).

Though Sam has ample reverence for Nature and for the Old People, he lacks the courage to live through a changing time into the future. His unwillingness to stay in society after Jobaker's death and his 'quitting' when Ben dies are instances of a type of failure which occurs repeatedly in the novel-- the lack of regard for one's descendants, a lack of concern for those who come after. Though Isaac's character is more complex, and other factors enter in, his unwillingness to accept the obligations of his heritage stem in part from the example Sam has set for him. (352)

"Sam's inability to adjust to the changing world around him not only limits his effectiveness, but sharply affects his value as Ike's tutor" (Pinsker 38). He becomes "the scene of [Ike's] own vanquishment and the mausoleum of his defeat" (*GDM* 125). Denouncing his heritage proves Isaac's unwillingness to participate in the current of social life and to accommodate himself to a changing time. Ike's romantic nostalgia for the past does not allow him to confront and redeem the sin of the Old South. As Faulkner points out, "I don't hold to the idea of return. That once the advancement stops then it dies. It's got to go forward and we have got to take along with us all the rubbish of our mistakes and our errors. We must cure them . . . We must take the trouble and sin along with us, and we must cure that trouble and sin as we go" (qtd in Hunt 422). According to Faulkner, one "can't go back to a condition in which there were no wars, in which there was no bomb. We got to accept that bomb and do something about it, eliminate that bomb, eliminate the war, not retrograde to a condition before it exists" (422) because "if time is a [forward] and continuous thing which is a part of motion, then we have to run into that bomb again sooner or later and

go through it again” (Hunt 422). “Man’s environment,” Faulkner further asserts, “is the only thing that changes. He must change with it. He will cope with it” (*Lion in the Garden* 221). Ike’s romantic retreat into the idyllic condition of man free of social sins is a suicidal act. Despite his moral condemnation of the dehumanizing practice of slavery, Isaac remains incapable of love across racial lines. As Roth’s mistress puts it, “Old man . . . have you lived so long and you forgotten so much that you don’t remember anything you ever knew or felt or even heard about love?” (363).

Not only is Isaac incapable of interracial love, but he also ironically engages in repeating the same ancestral sin committed by Old Carothers when the latter gave one thousand dollars to his son-Tomey’ Turl- because buying off a human obligation with money was “cheaper than saying My son to a Nigger” (269). In a similar fashion, Ike gives to Roth’s mistress the old buckskin hunting horn, which General Compson had given him, and Roth’s money as a compensation for Roth’s parental disclaim. This symbolic exchange is a testimony not only of Ike’s role as a mediator who participates in the solidification of the racial lines, but also to his fall into what Richard C. Moreland terms the dilemma of innocence and irony (181). Innocence, in terms of his illusive attachment to the “unpractical” moral codes which proved to be inconclusive, and irony in the way his ambivalence to race attests to his performative rejection of interracial union with the black other. As Michael Millgate puts it, “there is a sense in which it is true of Ike that what he says is right, but what he does is wrong” (213). Ike perpetuates his ancestor’s “original repudiation” by dehumanizing the black mistress whose son remains linked to Roth in economic rather than familial and biological terms. In this scene, Faulkner implicitly introduces the theme of love as the “Second

Chance” to redeem the shame and the wrong of Old Carothers, but Ike misses the point (Powers 181). For Lyall H. Powers, “Ike is confronted by the figure who represents those whose important essential being he had earlier denied; and he is given the opportunity to ask his equivalent of ‘Domine, quo vadis?’” (182). But Ike’s reaction was to force upon her the money Roth has given to him.

Ike’s description of the “Delta Autumn woman” is as “voyeuristic” as his encounter with Fonsiba’s black husband. He is aware of the black mistress’s watching eyes, “or not the eyes so much as the look, the regard fixed now on his face with that immersed contemplation, that bottomless and intent candor, of a child” (341). But this time the gazed upon is Ike. He feels threatened and dominated. The black woman is “entering, in a man’s hat and a man’s slicker and rubber boots” (357). She thus defies him on two levels: not only does she, as a black woman, threaten the purity of the white McCaslin descendants, who are already tainted by the black blood of Eunice and her daughter, but she also threatens his patriarchal binary definition of women. Roth’s mistress enters the masculine hunting space of the wilderness in defiance with her man hat and slicker. She performs what Judith Butler terms the role of the figure of drag, which uncovers the illusion and fantasy of normative heterosexuality through its paraodic imitation (176). The drag imitates an imitation, the “myth of originality itself” (176), an imitation that mocks the notion of an original. As Esther Newton puts it: “At its most complex, [drag] says: ‘my outside appearance is feminine, but my essence inside [the body] is masculine.’ At the same time it symbolizes the opposite inversion; ‘my appearance outside [my body, my gender] is masculine but my essence inside [myself] is feminine’” (103). Roth’s black mistress not only subverts Ike’s patriarchal

perception of women, but also his dichotomized perception of race. As Diane Roberts points out, “the woman imperils both the essential binaries of race and gender by passing as white and as a man” (85).

Roth’s black mistress is from the North: “You sound like you have been to college even. You sound almost like a Northerner even, not like the draggled-tailed women of these Delta peckerwoods” (360), Ike says. In associating the unnamed black mistress with the North, the latter subverts not only his frontier philosophy of race and gender, but also excavates Ike’s adherence to the purity of the Southern cultural regionalism of Mississippi. The Northern space, which symbolizes the partial black emancipation, becomes the white Southerners’ fear of regional miscegenation. As Mark T. Decker points out, “there is more than a noble idealist or a holy fool. Instead Ike gives voice to the fears of a Southern society trapped within its own dread of cultural change that can be easily coded as contamination” (471). As Ike expresses it at the end of “Delta Autumn”: “This Delta. This land which man has deswamped and denuded and derivered in two generations so that white men can own plantations and commute every night to Memphis and black men own plantations and ride in jim crow cars to Chicago to live in millionaire’s mansions on Lakeshore Drive” (364), a place “where white men rent farms and live like niggers and niggers crop on shares and live like animals,” and where “Chinese and Africans and Aryan and Jew, all breed and spawn together until no man has time to say which one is which nor cares” (364). Ike ends his monologue in a biblical and apocalyptic tone: “The people who have destroyed [the land] will accomplish its revenge” (364). The divine punishment is the

black man's progress and the disruption of the racial lines, an interpretation which further accentuates Ike's continued racial bias.

In "Delta Autumn," we witness an atmosphere of decay: the natural space is receding. The woods are being destroyed so that people in Mississippi can travel back and forth to urban sites of miscegenation. Ike sees "a geographic, economic, and cultural miscegenation, accomplished largely by railroads and the economic networks which they both engender and represent, in which the distinct South is folded into a blurry metropolis—a metropolis in no sense Midwestern" (Decker 472). Ike rejects this racially mixed geography since it reflects a spreading socioeconomic contamination that will eventually destroy the stable boundaries of his utopian Mississippi hunting space and the regionally distinct culture of privilege that participation in the hunt represents (472). In "Delta Autumn," Ike persists in describing a receding nature: "the land across which there came now no scream of panther but instead the long hooting of locomotives: trains of incredible length and drawn by a single engine" (341). In this chaotic atmosphere,

the land had retreated not in minutes from the last spread of gravel but in years, decades, back toward what it had been when he first knew it: the road they now followed once more the ancient pathway of bear and deer, the diminishing fields they now passed once more scooped punily and terrifically by axe and saw and mule-drawn plow from the wilderness's flank, out of the brooding and immemorial tangle, in place of ruthless mile-wide parallelograms wrought by ditching the dyking machinery. (341-342)

In this scene Ike insists on his rejection of the railroads and is nostalgic for “the ancient pathways of bear and deer” (341). By rejecting the railroads, the sign of the “glocal”¹⁰ space, and the site of the subversion of the conventional barriers between “roots” and “routes,” Ike fails to acknowledge the beginning of the openness of his era. Instead, he deems the railroad as a metaphor for the commingling of Southern culture with the decadent modernity of the North. The railroad is not just a machine that creates the immediate despoliation of his beloved hunting ground. It is a form of cultural miscegenation, “a link into a network of commerce that will bring the metropolis into the rural South and the rural South into the metropolis, blending them together into an indistinct whole, just as, in Ike’s metaphor, interracial sex and its commerce between distinct others turns stable categories like black and white into one distinct whole” (Decker 476-477). The railroad stamps the South with the narrative of the tragic mulatto, the rape of the South by North, which marks the ultimate pay off for the white man’s sin.

The degradation of the natural environment in “Delta Autumn” does not simply illustrate Faulkner’s concern with the ecological and environmental space of the old South, as some critics have argued. More than that, the demise of the natural space symbolically accounts for Ike’s inwardness and his adherence to the conventionality of his white Southern roots: “the territory in which the game still existed drawing yearly inward as his life was drawing inward” (335). Ike’s pessimism on the changes of the

¹⁰ “Glocal” is a term coined by a sociologist, Roland Robertson. It means the simultaneity and co-presence of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies. “Glocalization” is a substitution for the term globalization, which is a more appropriate term in analyzing “the simultaneity and interpenetration of what are conventionally called the global and the local...the universal and the particular” (Robertson 30).

Southern landscape, thus, demonstrates his inability to escape from the racist bias and legacy revealed in his family ledgers. He remains stagnant, a state of his symbolic death. As Roth Edmonds rhetorically puts it, “Where have you been all the time you were dead?” (345). In Mark T. Decker’s words “Ike . . . allows Faulkner to create a valuable portrait of a Southern anti-modernism that generates a cogent critique of modernity but is ultimately unable to escape the use of racist metaphor to conceptualize that critique” (348). Ike’s gesture of renunciation “is ultimately futile, but futile not because of personal failure but because its logic is contaminated by the persistence of the attitudes and assumptions of the past” (348).

Ike’s reclusiveness makes him not only unengaged and loveless in relation to the racial other, but also misogynistic. He perceives that marriage, like the institution of slavery, is a form of bondage, a claustrophobic space which annihilates his freedom long experienced in the wilderness. Ike confuses the image of the wilderness with his wife’s female body (Joiner 166). He associates his entrance to the matrimonial institution with his penetration into the woods. The marriage becomes, like the wilderness, a mysterious space, “the new country,” “his heritage” (*GDM* 297), which is “out of earth . . . yet of the earth because his too was of the earth’s long chronicle, his too because each must share with another in order to become one: for that one, for that little while at least, one: indivisible, that while at least irrevocable and irrevocable” (297), that one “living in a rented room still but just a little while and topless and floorless in glory for him to leave each morning and return to at night” (297). Obviously, Ike creates the illusion of a natural space for the institution of marriage, which, like the wilderness itself, transcends the boundaries. The description of his

marital house stands as the image of the woods in miniature. Unlike the big house of Old Carothers, wherein his previously “annulated boy” father felt entrapped by his mother, Ike’s matrimonial space is as free as nature, “topless,” “wall-less,” and “floorless” (297), a realm free from all forms of property. Ike, in this empty and open rented space, reiterates his entrance to the wilderness when he has to leave behind his gun, watch, and compass, which are tokens of the civilized and mechanized world (Joiner, “The Big House” 167).

But his confusion of the natural space with the culturally produced institution of marriage is so idealistic that he cannot meet the material demands of matrimony. As Joiner points out “[m]arriage in the American society is structured on the assumption that man’s willingness to enter into this institution demonstrates his assent to individual and social responsibility” (167). Ike’s unnamed wife believes in the conventions of marriage. She accepts his commitment to his household by expecting his patrimony, and the responsibility that accompanies it. Instead of taking back his property, Ike lives in a bungalow, a “cheap” and “Jerrybuilt” hut-like structure (*GDM* 269), a wedding gift from his wife’s father, something which frees him from material responsibilities and enables him to place “the onus of property on his wife” (Joiner 168). As Davis puts it, for Ike “sexuality is burdensome precisely because it is bound up in a heritage of ownership, slavery, and property” (176). The desperation of Ike’s wife to convince her husband of the necessity of taking back his patrimony occasions her use of physical seduction, an act that, though morally valid, entraps her into a form of gendered bondage wherein she stands as the feminine and sexual “Other.” Even if this gesture

attests to her love for Ike and to her struggle for a normative marital life, Ike, however, remains haunted by the fear of bondage that this institution might imply:

“Stand up and turn your back and shut your eyes:” and repeated before he understood and stood himself with his eyes shut and heard the bell ring for supper below stairs and the calm voice again: “lock the door.” And he did so leaned his forehead against the cold wood, his eyes closed, hearing his heart and the sound he had begun to hear before he moved until it ceased and the bell rang again below stairs and he knew it was for them this time and he heard the bed and turned and he had seen her naked before. (298-99)

Though he is lured by her nakedness, the scene, nevertheless, imparts a claustrophobic atmosphere of bondage through the images of the locked door, the coldness of the wood and the sound of a throbbing beat. Ike insists on the hand which tries to capture him: “her hand moving as though with volition and vision of its own, catching his wrist at the exact moment when he paused beside the bed so that he never paused but merely changed the direction of moving, downward now, the hand drawing him . . . drawing him still downward with the one hand down and down” (*GDM* 313-314). “Promise,” she says (300), but Ike withdraws. Still, the wife does not allow him to escape. “[Her] hand [was] shifting from his chest once more to his wrist, grasping it, the arm and the hand were a piece of wire cable with one looped end, only the hand tightening as he pulled against it” (*GDM* 300). Ike sees the hand as threatening as Roth’s unnamed black mistress in performing the role of the drag queen. The hand, as a site for a physical proximity, becomes a manacle, a shackle that grabs him, and holds

him, drowning him down, holding him, and making him available for violation [the hand] of the puppet master controlling his actions and limiting his freedom to act independently (Joiner 177). The scene ends with the failure of Ike's marriage when he rejects his wife's demands: "And that's all. That's all from me. If this don't get you that son you talk about, it won't be mine": lying on her side, her back to the empty rented room, laughing and laughing" (*GDM* 300-301). Ike's retrospective response to his wife falls into the "phallogocentric" discourse of his culture. She becomes a prostitute whose use of sexuality attests to her hope of becoming the chatelaine of a plantation (Levins 88). Ike interprets the failure of his marriage as a testimony to the fact that "women hope for so much. They never live too long to still believe that anything within the scope of their passionate wanting is likewise within the range of their passionate hope" (352). "She is lost" (314), he thinks. It seems to Ike that she is the tempter, who tries to seduce him to fall into the sin of property. Therefore, she is the incarnation of evil. As Brooks puts it:

In nearly every one of Faulkner's novels, the male's discovery of evil and reality is bound up with his discovery of the true nature of woman. Men idealize and romanticize women, but the cream of the jest is that women have a secret rapport with evil which men do not have, that they are able to adjust to evil without being shattered by it, being by nature flexible and pliable. Women are objects of idealism, but are not in the least idealistic. (127-128)

The image of the hand, which pulls Ike downward, is a biblical image of the white man's fall and loss. The wife's hand, for Ike, becomes an attempt not only to

connect him to the sinful old Carothers' patrimony, but is also a trap into the procreative effect of their sexual encounter, which, not only he, subconsciously, associates with his grandfather's rape of his own slave women, but also, in turn, presupposes Ike's supplementation with a child, another form of property. Ike sees his rejection of sex and procreation as a redemptive act from Old Carothers' sin. He sees himself as "an Isaac born into a later life than Abraham's and repudiating immolation," "fatherless and therefore safe declining the altar" because "the exasperated Hand might not supply the Kid" (283). Ike's uncanny association of sex with rape and with the world of property becomes the object of his dispute with his wife and the reason for his failed marriage¹¹.

1.3 Property, Race, and Gender within the Black Southern Community

Ike's unwillingness to establish a harmonious relationship with the racial "Other," his self-dispossession, and his "lovelessness" in rejecting the whole institution of marriage stamps him with the narrative of the tragic character whose identity in an empiricist and patriarchal Southern American culture is converted into a state of nothingness. At the end, *Go Down, Moses* reflects that what determines one's

¹¹ Ike refers to the Hebrew myth of "the binding of Isaac," in which God asks Abraham to immolate his son, Isaac, on Mount Moriah. Abraham bounds his son before placing him on the alter when, suddenly, an angel of God catches his hand to stop the immolation at the last minutes, saying, "Now I know you fear God." At this point, Abraham sees a ram locked in some nearby bushes and sacrifices it, in a form of displacement, instead of his son. In referring to this myth, Ike contends that in declining the sinful hand of his wife, he protected not only himself but also the son, he was traditionally to have, from the sin of owning property, because not only the supplementation of a child is a form of property but that very property presupposes an extension of property, which is instigated by the conventional world of legacy, wherein children expect to bequeath from their parents. Instead of sacrificing himself or the son, Ike displaced immolation on the onus of the institution of marriage, which, within the myth of the biding of Isaac, becomes the image of the ram, the displaced object of sacrifice.

masculine identity is, first and foremost, one's material ownership, and one's control over the abjected "Other." As opposed to Ike's social death, Faulkner uses the technique of latent juxtaposition. He thereby creates in counterpart the heroic characters of Tomey's Turl and his wife, Tennie Beauchamp, in "Was"; their son, Lucas Beauchamp, and his wife, Mollie, in "The Fire and The Hearth," and Rider and his dead wife, Mannie, in the blues chapter of "Pantaloon in Black." These characters epitomize the black moral order wherein property is rejected and love is restored as a spiritual means for the survival of the black Southern community. Love, which is also accounted for in the institution of marriage, allows black masculinity to cohere and assert itself, which in turn leads to individual procreation and community rebirth. In portraying the characters of both Tomey's Turl and Lucas Beauchamp, Faulkner assumes that "hybridity" is a destabilizing force that enables the mulatto character to manipulate the discourse of the white culture, an act of transgressive freedom. As Ike puts it, "blacks will endure and outlast [the whites]. Their vices are aped from white men" (294). They inherited "freedom" from their ancestors, whereas "We [Whites] have never been free" (294).

In *Go Down, Moses* Terrel is a mixed race character who is the son and grandson of Old Carothers. In "Was" he escapes the McCaslin plantation to court Tennie-the Beauchamp's slave. Tomey's Turl's name signals the white society's fear of miscegenation. He is named as the descendant of his mother, Thomasina, the daughter and concubine of Old Carothers. The white McCaslins' refusal to assign him a surname is an intentional attempt to distance him, racially, from their branch of the family. Vinson states that "Terrel represent[s] the genteel avoidance of an admission of

miscegenation” (150). In Thadious Davis’ terms, “[t]he legal codes constricting Tomey’s Turl to a nonrelational positionality in regard to the McCaslin twins Buck and Buddy, are those who define a slave as property and as labor, not as human or as brother. Slave laws rest on the motivating principle of ‘undifferentiated communalism,’ which reduces all slaves to labor under the total social control of masters who own labor” (133-134). In his moment of escape, Terrell is the object of hunting. His escape coincides with Uncle Buddy’s act of chasing the tamed fox from the kitchen:

When Ike and Uncle Buck ran back to the house from discovering that Tomey’s Turl had run again, they heard Uncle Buddy cursing and bellowing in the kitchen, then the fox and the dogs came out of the kitchen and crossed the hall into the dogs’ room and they heard them run through the dogs’ room and . . . unto the kitchen again and this time it sounded like the whole kitchen chimney had come down and Uncle Buddy bellowing like a steamboat blowing and this time the fox and the dogs and five or six sticks of firewood all came out of the kitchen together with Uncle Buddy in the middle of them hitting at everything in sight with another stick. It was a good race. (4-5)

The fox eludes the dogs until Uncle Buck puts him back into the cage. Then, they went to hunt Tomey’s Turl:

He never did know just when and where they jumped Tomey’s Turl, whether he flushed out of one of the cabins or not. . . . Uncle Buck roared, . . . “I godfrey, he broke cover” . . . and Buck John’s [the horse] feet clapped four times like pistol shots . . . then he and Uncle Buck

vanished over the hill. . . .“Cast [the dogs]!” and they all piled over the crest of the hill just in time to see Tomey’s Turl away across the flat, almost to the woods, and the dogs streaking down the hill and out on to the flat. They just tongued once and when they came boiling up around Tomey’s Turl it looked like they were trying to jump up and lick him in the face until even Tomey’s Turl slowed down and he and the dogs all went into the woods together. . . .It wasn’t any race at all. (14-15)

Despite the humorous scene, this paralleled act of hunting further emphasizes the dehumanization of Terrel’s black body. Not only is he denied the white name of Old Carothers, but also in tracking him down, he becomes, like the image of the fox, the object acted upon by his brothers who are the agents and the subjects dictating and restricting his freedom. Yet, because of his elusive movement, his half-brothers, Buck and Buddy, cannot track him down. Terrel’s escape from the plantation is a repeated and ritualized action. His constant initiation of the hide-and-seek game accounts for his acquisition of a certain spatial knowledge that allows him to transcend the boundaries of the McCaslin plantation. Like the drag figure of Roth’s black mistress, Tomey’s Turl has the skill of uncovering the mask and the illusion of racial identity. If the black mistress disrupts Ike’s patriarchal world through her masculine appearance to unmask the fact that gendered identity is a mere form of performance, a “masquerade,” to use Butler’s word, Tomey’s Turl, in the same way, parodies the white discourse: he puts on the clothing of a white man and, with it, the attitudinal stance of the white masters that matches his almost white skin. Like the drag, Tomey’s Turl is a figure of transgression. The dialectic between his social condition as a slave who has run, and his individual

autonomy as the instigator of a game in which he is a major and decisive player, produces his identity (Davis 44). If Ike is introduced in a state of symbolic death, Tomey's Turl is represented in motion, in action, and thus as an agent. In escaping his half-brothers, Terrel reclaims his freedom "even though his agency is constrained by two sets of circumstances: the racist ideology informing the conceptions of "nigger" as an enslaved property; and the game strategy of silence that disallows his voicing either the motive or the desire in his behaviour (Davis 133).

Tomey's Turl resists confinement within the ideologies of race by reordering his world and reconstituting himself as empowered to act and to be a subject. He intervenes in the legal practice of dehumanization and reclassifies himself against the hegemonic ideology and structure of a slave culture. "His transgression of racially established boundaries is an intentional strategy of individual agency in which he calculates how, within the given paradigms of bondage and containment, he can most actively, and to his own desired outcome, manipulate the economic system that lays claim to his body" (Davis 120). As Thadious Davis further puts it, "Turl challenges the expectations of ownership and of possession by negotiating two incipient forms of contract: an agreement to make clear the lines and direction of his self-emancipation; and an agreement to seek out Tennie as a marital partner at the Beauchamp plantation" (121). These two form the basis for the major contracts that ultimately will not only disrupt the system of slavery but dismantle it entirely: blacks as part of the social contract of the founding of the nation and thus entitled to all of its rights and privileges, including freedom and suffrage; and blacks as persons who can enter into the legal agreement of marriage and within that contractual state establish family and legitimate

kinship bonds (Davis 122). Tomey's Turl's courtship asserts the fact that sexual desire remains resident within the black male body and that, in spite of stereotypical representations or caricatures of excessive black male sexuality, sexual expression and freedom cannot be denied to him. Unlike Ike and his white half-brothers, Tomey's Turl cannot remain in the confining social condition. Buddy and Buck are constrained to live on their father's plantation of the antebellum South, where courtship is non-existent because "ladies were so damn seldom thank God that a man could ride for days in a straight line without having to dodge a single one" (*GDM* 7). In this environment, they can behave without openly acknowledging their sexuality or the misogyny implicated in their depiction of women. If Buck and Buddy and Ike's lives lack courtship-which is one of the underlying dictates of a normative masculine identity of the old South-Tomey's Turl's pronounced sexuality, on the other hand, accentuates his gendered agency.

Terrel's son, Lucas Beauchamp, embodies the same destabilizing characteristics of the mulatto figure. In "The Fire and Hearth," Lucas Beauchamp's double kinship to the old Carothers and his position as the oldest male living on the McCaslin plantation practically enables him to manipulate the white system in order to assert his racial and gender identity, especially when it comes to his relationship with Zack Edmonds, wherein his wife, Mollie, becomes the object of domination. Zack and Lucas Beauchamp had lived as brothers. "They have fished and hunted together, they had learned to swim in the same water, they had eaten at the same table in the white boy's kitchen and in the cabin of the negro's mother" (55). Both "had slept under the same blanket before a fire in the woods" (55). But that brotherly moment is now a

thing of the past. Now Lucas is protesting against the white man's prerogative over the black man's wife. He had to protest in order to assert the manhood that the Southern heritage denied the African American (Schmitter 138). In "The Fire and Hearth" Lucas goes to take back his wife from Zack's house where she had gone six months earlier to deliver and nurse the white child, Roth Edmonds, after the death of his unnamed white mother. It seems to Lucas that Mollie, in the white man's house, performs the role of the black mammy in taking care of Zack's orphaned child. Lucas perceives that the white man's wife is replaced by his own wife who has become the white master's concubine, especially when he notices that Mollie wears the shoes of the white woman. "It was as though on that luring and driving day he had crossed and then recrossed a kind of Lethe, emerging, being permitted to escape, buying as the price of life a world outwardly the same yet subtly and irrevocably altered" (46). The presence of Mollie in Zack Edmonds' house unsettles Lucas' patriarchal order of things. Mollie, at that moment, is no longer his possession, but a shared entity with the white Zack. For Lucas "[i]t was as though the white woman had not only never quitted the house, she had never existed—the object which they buried in the orchard two days later" (46) became "a thing of no moment, unsanctified, nothing" (46). It seems to Lucas that "his own wife, the black woman, now living alone in the house which old Cass had built for them when they married keeping alive on the hearth the fire they had lit there on their wedding day and which had burned since though there was little enough cooking done on it now" (46).

Lucas confronts Zack, his white kinsman and landlord: "I'm a nigger. . . .But I'm a man too. I'm more than just a man. The same thing made your pappy that made

your grandmaw. I'm going to take her back" (*GDM* 47). In confronting Zack, Lucas uses his white male lineage to assert his manhood: "Because you are a McCaslin too," he says. "Even if you was a woman—made to it. Maybe that's the reason. Maybe that's why you done it: because what and your pa got from old Carothers had to come to you through a woman—a critter not responsible like men are responsible, not to be held like men are held" (52). He challenges Zack's racial perception that a black man cannot kill a white man out of a fear of lynching, which is another instance of the black man's systematic powerlessness: "You never thought that, because I am a nigger too, I wouldn't dare" (53). "You tried to beat," he says. "And you won't never, not even when I am hanging dead from the limb this time tomorrow with the coil oil still burning" (53). In order to further foreground his masculinity, Lucas first uses his razor, a legacy from Old Carothers McCaslin, to face "the undefended and defenceless throat" of Zack (52). Then he flung it toward the open window and asks Zack to use his pistol. In this moment it seems to Lucas that fighting with the armed white man with his naked hand is a source of masculinity. "I don't need a razor," he says. "My nikkid hands will do" (53). For Lucas fighting Zack has a double-edged purpose. First it asserts his black manhood. Second it helps him suppress the white blood of old Carothers which, despite his possessing it, nevertheless, denigrates his humanity as a black man with the right to claim his black wife. As he points out, "All I got to give up is McCaslin blood that rightfully ain't even mine or at least ain't worth much since old Carothers never seemed to miss much what he give to Tomey that made my father" (57).

The final scene ends with a sense of normativity. Zack's pistol misfired and Lucas regains his wife. In his soliloquy, Lucas "reckon[s] that [he] ain't got old Carothers's blood for nothing, after all [he] needed him and he come and spoke for[him]" (59). When he reached home in the dusk, Lucas notices that Mollie "didn't wear the white woman's shoes . . . and her dress was the same shapeless faded calico she had worn in the morning" (59). Now Mollie is his own possession. She cooks for him and performs her duty as a wife who preserves the fire in her hearth. Lucas now "breathed slow and quiet" (59). "Women," he thought, "Women. I won't never know. I don't want to. I ruther never to know than to find out later I have been fooled" (59). He, then, "returned toward the room where the fire was, where his supper waited. This time he spoke aloud: 'How to God, 'he said, 'can a black man ask a white man to please not lay down with his black wife? And even if he could ask it, how to God can the white man promise he wont'" (59). Lucas's battle over his black wife makes him pronounce a historical narrative of the black man's denial of his manhood in the white racist society. It reflects the black man's fear of the repetition of the white master's rape of his black woman during the institution of slavery. Rape of black women by the white master was a strategy to subvert the black man's masculinity. As bell hooks puts it, "Race and sex have always been overlapping discourses in the United States. That discourse began in slavery. The talk then was not about black men wanting to be free so that they would have access to the bodies of white women. . . .Black women's bodies were the discursive terrain, the playing fields where racism and sexuality converged" (57). Rape as both right and rite of the white male dominating group was a cultural norm. As hooks continues: "Rape was also an apt metaphor for European

imperialist colonization of Africa and North America” (57). “Sexuality has always provided gendered metaphors for colonization” (57). “Free countries equated with free men, domination with castration, the loss of manhood, and rape—the terrorist act re-enacting the drama of conquest, as men of the dominating group sexually violate the bodies of women who are among the dominated” (hooks 57). The intent of this act “was to continually remind dominated men of their loss of power; rape was a gesture of symbolic castration. Dominated men are made powerless (i.e., impotent) over and over again as the women they would have had the right to possess, to control, to assert power over, to dominate, to fuck, are fucked and fucked over by the dominating victorious male group” (57).

As Eugene D. Genovese assumes, “slavery not only had powerful ramifications on black men’s understanding of their masculinity but also on their perceptions of themselves in relation to their wives and families” (490). As he further points out,

The slaveholders deprived black men of the role of the provider; refused to dignify their marriages or legitimize their issues; compelled them to submit to physical abuse in the presence of their women and children; made them choose between remaining silent while their wives and daughters were raped or seduced and risking death; and threatened them with separation from their family at any time. (490)

This treatment, however, did not disappear as soon as slavery ended but continued to affect black males’ understanding of their masculinity afterward. What Lucas did in gaining back his black wife is to recover his masculinity that he wrestled from the white man by speaking up for his wife. The hearth for Lucas signifies love for Mollie,

his marriage, and most importantly, his masculinity, the possession of which has long been historically denied to black men.

Lucas Beauchamp's definition of his identity is not only restricted in gendered terms, but also in his obsession with owning property. Lucas, like his father, Tomey's Turl, enjoys a certain freedom which is tied to his racial "hybridity," a privileged state which makes him a manipulative figure capable of transgression, a trickster. He is described as "both heir and prototype simultaneously of all geography and climate and biography." He is "myriad, countless, faceless . . . intact and complete, contemptuous of all blood black, white yellow or red, including his own" (91). Instead of being at once the battleground and victim of the two strains, "Lucas was a vessel, durable, ancestryless, nonconductive, seethless, unrumored in the outside air" (81). Lucas's hybridity gives him freedom to transcend his socially imposed identity. In Cass's words, "he altered his name, making it no longer the white man's but his own, by himself composed, himself self-progenitive and nominate by himself ancestored" (208). Lucas, in a racially exclusionary society, is the unwilling dispossessed. Unlike Ike McCaslin, he perceives that property is an inscription of the hegemony of the male symbolic (Davis78). He relies on an ideology of economic self-realization. In "The Fire and The Hearth," Lucas is obsessed with the treasure buried in the McCaslin plantation, with building his bank account, with taking custody of his older brother's unclaimed bequest from his white ancestors, and with cultivating a thriving trade in corn liquor. Lucas internalizes the white definition of property. He thus negotiates power in the manner he associates with whites who own land, possess access to the laws and who, by means of that ownership, acquire power in the community and under

the institution of law (Davis 79). For Lucas money provides him manhood, economic independence, and social access. As Alan Watson states, “in a racist society, having funds makes it easier for freed slaves and their descendents to integrate into society or benefit from their socioeconomically privileged status (*Slave Law in the Americas* 131-33).

Lucas manipulates the American system because of his male lineage connected to old Carothers. But because he is black, he is denied possession of the McCaslin land. Instead, Lucas builds a secret still on Edmonds’s land. He knows that George Wilkins- his daughter’s husband- is a competitor since he, too, owns a hidden still. Lucas’s plan is to report Wilkins to the authorities in order to protect his own secret, which Lucas cannot share with his wife Mollie, “who was too old and frail for such, even if he could have trusted not her fidelity but her discretion; and as his daughter, to let her get any inkling of what he was about, he might just as well have asked George Wilkins himself to help him hide the still” (34). Lucas’s plan to destroy Wilkins’s still is to protect himself from the latter because “George was a fool innocent of discretion, who sooner or later would be caught, wherever upon for the next ten years every bush on the Edmonds place would have a deputy sheriff squatting behind it from the sundown to sunup every night” (35). In hiding the still, Lucas becomes a manipulator. He calculates the risk and the gains of his material plan. When he discovers the treasure buried in the Edmonds land, he abandons his plan to have Wilkins sent to the prison, because the latter might help him excavate the treasure. “So, George . . . was reprieved without knowing his . . . danger” (39). Lucas “even thought of taking George into partnership on a minor share basis to do the actual digging; indeed not only to do the

actual work but as a sort of justice, balance, libation to Chance and Fortune, since if it had not been for George, he would not have found the single [gold] coin” (39). In Lucas’s calculating mind, digging for the treasure at night by himself will take much time, and implies solitude. Therefore, George might be a helping partner. But he quickly dismisses this project “before it even had time to become an idea” (39). His logic is based on his privileged position:

He Lucas Beauchamp . . . who actually remembered old Buck and Buddy in the living flesh, older than Zack Edmonds even if Zack were still alive, almost as old as old Isaac who in a sense, say what a man would, had turned apostate to his name and lineage by weakly relinquishing the land which was rightfully his to live in town on the charity of his great-nephew;- he, to share one jot, one penny of the money which old Buck and Buddy had buried almost a hundred years ago, with an interloper . . . whose very name was unknown in the country twenty-five years ago. . . .Never. Let George take for his recompense the fact that he would not have to go to the penitentiary to which Roth Edmonds would probably have sent him even the law did not. (39-40)

Lucas uses his white lineage as a testimony that he is the only living male McCaslin descendant who can take advantage of the external usage of the land. In his mind, were he not subject to legal exclusion because of his race, he would, under common law, be in the direct line of inheritance from old Carothers if no lineal descendants survived (Davis 136):

Brothers were preferred to sisters, with the eldest brother inheriting all. If there were brothers, however, the sisters or their issue took equally with one another. . . . If there were no siblings or issue of siblings, the reality would be inherited by the issue of the descendants' paternal grandfather, the eldest male of the nearest degree succeeding first. All relations on the descendants' father's side were preferred, regardless of how distant, before those on the mother's side" (Shammas 160).

According to Thadious M. Davis "Lucas levels inequities of power not only by seeking social justice but rather by calling on the power inherent in a white racial ancestry" (Davis 136). For Lucas his racial mixing as the direct male descendent of Carothers makes him able to manipulate the arbitrary white law which reinforces the oppression of the black community. Even though he cannot inherit the McCaslin patrimony on the basis of his blackness, his social status, nevertheless, does not allow him to be a mere labourer on the land which could have been his. Lucas is aware that he had been born on the McCaslin land, twenty-five years before the Edmonds who now, under the law, owned it. He persists that "he had worked on it ever since he got big enough to hold a plow straight; he had hunted over every foot of it during his childhood, up to the time when he stopped hunting" (36). The fact that he refuses to work on the McCaslin's land "was not because he could no longer walk a day's or a night's hunt, but because he felt that the pursuit of rabbits and possums for meat was no longer commensurate with his status as not only the oldest man but the oldest McCaslin descendent even though in the world's eye he descended not from McCaslin but from McCaslin's slaves" (36).

Lucas perceives money and material ownership as the only source to subvert the arbitrariness of the legal system which is “rich white lawyers and judges and marshals talking to one another around their proud cigars, the haughty and powerful of the earth” (137). When Lucas informed on George Wilkins’ secret still, he becomes manipulated by his daughter Nat, who implicitly unveiled his secret. Hiding stills in that era was forbidden by the American law under the twenty-first amendment¹², but what saved Nat, George Wilkins and Lucas Beauchamp is their kinship, which resists legal pursuit. Nat had already married Wilkins and the proof of their marriage saved the whole black family. Lucas, then, finds another alternative to gain money free from labour. He becomes preoccupied with the hidden money on the McCaslin land. In this project, he engages George Wilkins as a partner to help him dig the secret money at night. Lucas, again, further manipulates Roth. He sold Roth Edmonds’ mule to the white salesman in exchange for the divining machine in order to excavate the treasure. The description of the machine transcends Roth’s still agrarian usage and perception of the land. The machine is “an oblong metal box with a handle for carrying at each end, compact, solid, efficient and business-like and complex with knobs and dials” (81).

In manipulating his surroundings to keep his secret project hidden, Lucas becomes a solitary and individualistic subject detached from the collective life of his African American family. His materialist mode of resistance is, however, inconclusive because property within the moral order of the black community is a form of racial and

¹² Amendment XXI to the United States constitution mandated nationwide prohibition on alcohol on January 17, 1920. Prohibition focused on the manufacture, transportation, and sale of alcoholic beverage for moral and health reasons. The claim on the prohibition law continued to have its constitutional effect till the 1930s.

cultural deracination. His materialist pursuit is interrupted by Mollie, the black wife, who performs her ancestral role of preserving the cultural heritage of the deracinated black male subject. Lucas's struggle for property and for the treasured money, are instances of neo-slavery. It is, in the first place, because of the white man's greed and lust for owning property that white American settlers engaged in institutionalizing the enslavement of the black body. In internalizing the same white colonialist discourse, Lucas reiterates the same patterns. For Mollie, echoing Ike McCaslin's vision of property, the land belongs to God who has the power over it, and that, therefore it cannot belong to any human being. "Because God say, 'what's rendered to My earth, it belong to me unto I resurrect it. And let him or her touch it, and beware'" (99). In her African American heritage, property becomes a form of a curse. Mollie wants a divorce to free herself, their daughter, Nat, and Nat's husband, George Wilkins, from the sin of the "lost" and "crazy" Lucas. She refers to Roth Edmonds, Zack's son, for this procedure. His intervention is, however, inconclusive. Lucas refuses that he interferes in his private family affairs because Lucas alone as the man of the family can handle his issue. "I'm a man," Lucas asserts. "I'm the man here. I'm the one to say in my house, like you and your paw and his paw were the ones to say in his. You ain't got any complaints about the way I farm my land and make my crop, have you?" (120).

In the courthouse, Lucas challenges the laws of the white world. Impervious and indifferent to the Chancellor who names him a "nigger," he refuses the divorce sentence. Once again, Lucas retakes possession of his wife and restores his marriage against the white world. In the end he asks Roth to wait on him in front of the courtroom. In describing him, Roth notices that not only did Lucas defeat his own

father -Zack Edmonds- in taking back his wife, but he is a complete individual with a strong self-confidence that challenges the white world's conventional expectation of the black subject. Roth sees Lucas "erect beneath the old, fine, well-cared-for-hat, walking with that unswerving and dignified deliberation which every now and then, and with something sharp at the heart, Edmonds recognized as having come from his own ancestry too as the hat had come" (129). When he arrives, Lucas brings a small sack of candy and put it into Molly's hand. The hand, which was for Ike McCaslin, a form of manacles, is now the symbol of physical proximity and love within the modest black life of the Beauchamps. As Roth Edmonds puts it, Lucas and Mollie "were married . . . very hard" (119). Their love transcends the white world's racist and patriarchal institution. In the end, Lucas does not want to be subject to further temptation. He asks Roth to "clean off this place" from the metal-detecting machine¹³.

1.4 The Power of Black Women: Love and Racial Resistance

In *Faulkner's Subject: A Cosmos No One Owns*, Philip M. Weinstein contends that Molly "appears as virtually a foil, a figure reduced to the single quality of breeder, an indiscriminate breast for children black and white. She is denied the complications of either desire or outrage" (96), which are responses left to the males. Weinstein explains that Faulkner portrays the black mummies as women who are "nearer to the earth—more in tune with the demands of the clay they are made of—and therefore not

¹³ Lucas joins Mollie's biblical rejection of property: "Man has got three score and ten years on this earth, the Book says. He can want a heap in that time and a heap of what he can want is due to come to him, if he just starts soon enough. I done waited too late to start... I am near to the end of my three score and ten, and I reckon to find that money ain't for me" (131).

at war with the resources of their own bodies” (28). In a similar fashion, Lee Jenkins contends that Faulkner’s perception of black women’s functions “incorporates the effects of victimization of black women, projecting upon them as natural traits what may more serviceably be thought of as consequences of their degraded exploitation” (223). Weinstein and Jenkins’s characterization of Molly is not very descriptive of Faulkner’s perception of his black female characters. First, Faulkner’s portrayal of black women differs from his characterization of the voiceless white women. Mollie is not a subjugated woman in Faulkner’s sexist text. She does not represent the conventional stereotype of the black mammy who sacrifices her life to raise the white master’s children at the cost of her own. In *Go Down, Moses*, her silence is power. Silence, as opposed to the male characters’ agitation, is wisdom and a proof of self-autonomy. Mollie, throughout this novel, rarely utters a word. However, her actions as a devoted nurse, wife, and mother are “performative” and resist any patriarchal claim over her characterization. She has the power to contradict and interrupt the materialist preoccupation of her husband. Even though she is the object of the male battle between Zack and her jealous husband, she is the woman without whom Lucas’ life would drift into nothingness. It is through Mollie that Lucas can voice his racial and gendered identity. Mollie is described as “impervious, tranquil, somehow serene” (59) in contrast to Lucas’ rage and struggle for claiming and asserting his identity. In Roth Edmonds’s description, she is delicate, thin, with “her shrunken face collapsed . . . moving slowly and painfully . . . appearing to be much older even to Edmonds. . . .” (99). As she and Roth walk toward the courthouse proper, Roth in catching her feels again “the thin, almost fleshless arm beneath the layers of sleeve, dry and light and brittle and frail as a

rotted stick. . . .He led her forward, still supporting her, believing that if he released her for an instant even she would collapse into a bundle of dried and lifeless sticks, covered by the old, faded, perfectly clean garments, at his feet” (126-127).

In “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” Michel Foucault assumes that the body is figured as a surface and the scene of cultural inscription: “the body is the inscribed surface of events” (148). The task of genealogy, Foucault claims, is to expose the body as “a volume in perpetual disintegration” and “totally imprinted by history” (148) whose goal is to destroy it, because history is the creation of values and meanings by signifying practices that requires the subjugation of the body (148). The body, then, is described through the language of surface and force, weakened through a “single drama” of domination, inscription, and creation (150). Roth’s stereotypical description of Mollie’s body might be interpreted in these Foucauldian paradigms, wherein the bodies of black women become chronicles that register their double subjugation in a patriarchal and racist society. But at a deeper level, I choose to interpret Roth’s corporeal description as alluding to Mollie’s power as an ancestral figure whose advanced age attests to her character. She is an individual who still has the aura of the past. Thus Mollie’s body does not refer to her physical decay. Her body, instead, is a narrative space, the inscription of her endurance as a powerful black woman whose life was devoted to the survival of her black family.

Mollie is the reflection of Caroline Barr, Faulkner’s black surrogate mother to whom *Go Down, Moses* is dedicated. The book begins with the following inscription:

To MAMMY

CAROLINE BARR

Mississippi

[1840-1940]

Who was born in slavery and who
gave to my family a fidelity without
stint or calculation of recompense
and to my childhood an immeasur-
able devotion and love (3)

Mollie, like Caroline Barr and Dilsey, in *The Sound and the Fury*, epitomizes love, which is the lacking ingredient in the life of the white Southern community. Her love is unconditional and transcends racial barriers. In nursing and nurturing Roth when his mother died during the night of flood and rain, she becomes the surrogate mother to the orphaned newborn. For Roth, Mollie “had been the only mother he ever knew, who had raised him, fed him from her own breast as she was actually doing her own child” (117). She is the surrogate mother “who had surrounded him always with care for his physical body and for his spirit too, teaching him his manners, behaviour . . . to be gentle with his inferiors, honourable with his equals, generous to the weak and considerate of the aged, courteous, truthful and brave to all” (117). She is the one “who had given him, the motherless, without stint or expectation of reward that constant and abiding devotion and love which existed nowhere else in this world for him” (117). When Mollie asked for a divorce, Roth, in protecting her, feels that Lucas, because of his selfishness, will break forever the fire in this woman’s hearth. This womanly hearth is preserved by Mollie’s love, the fire that keeps her household intact and protected.

Mollie's love is not restricted to her role as a mother. Her love is racialized. She resists racism to preserve the dignity of her family. In chapter three of "The Fire and the Hearth," Faulkner constructs a primary narrative of the white subject formation of the white boy- Roth- when he moves into his white male adulthood. Inserting himself into a social structure that is comprehensively racialized, young Carothers consciously becomes white. In taking possession of his whiteness, he accepts a central tenet, a "conceptual nucleus" that whiteness shares with property "the right to exclude" (Davis 200). Before his racial awareness, "the two houses had become interchangeable: himself and his foster-brother [Henry] sleeping on the same pallet in the white man's house or in the same bed in the negro's and eating of the same food at the same table in either" (11). Roth, actually, preferred "the negro house, the hearth on which even in summer a little fire always burned, centering the life in it, to his own" (111). In Roth's mind, Mollie, the black woman, was "constant," "steadfast" (110), and Lucas was the black man "of whom he saw as much and even more than of his own father" (110). Yet, "[o]ne day he knew, without wondering or remembering when or how he had learned that either, that the black woman was not his mother, and did not regret it; he knew that his own mother was dead" (110). In this racialized moment, he refuses to share a harmonious life with the black family. When Roth refuses to allow Mollie and Lucas Beauchamp's son, Henry, his foster brother, to share either the sleeping pallet or the bed with him, he assumes the racial right to exclude. In his white racial identity, Roth can thus control and dictate the space he occupies. His engagement with the racial exclusion of his own culture, his acceptance of a false idea, of the "old haughty ancestral pride based not on any value but on accident of geography, stemmed not from

courage and honor but from wrong and shame” (111), conveys his separation not only from Henry, but also from Lucas and Molly, the source of love he has known.

Roth soon comes to realize the terrible loss, and tries to repair the breach he has caused, but to no avail: “So he entered his heritage. He ate its bitter fruit” (114). It was through Mollie that Roth experienced his ancestral shame. If Roth- like Ike McCaslin-identifies himself with the property of the white blood lineage as an assertion of his identity, Molly’s identity is reflected in her power of racial resistance and in her art of signifying upon Roth’s racial exclusion. After a period of his willed separation from the black family, Roth announced to Mollie that he was having a dinner with them. “Course you is,” Mollie answers indifferently. “I’ll cook you a chicken” (113). Yet when he came “[i]t was too late. The table was set in the kitchen where it always was and Molly stood at the stove drawing the biscuit out as she always stood, but Lucas was not there and there was just one chair, one plate, his glass of milk beside it, the platter heaped with untouched chicken” (113).

The exercise of exclusion on the basis of race is an assertion of power, an enactment of privilege which confirms to Toni Morrison’s assumption that “an Africanist character is used to limn out and enforce the invention and implication of Whiteness” (*Playing in the Dark* 52). According to Cornel West, “without the presence of Black people in America, European-American would not be ‘white’—they would be only Irish, Italian, Poles, Welsh, and others engaged in class, ethics, and gender struggles over resources and identity” (*Race Matters* 156-57). In fact, “what made America distinctly American for them was not simply the presence of unprecedented opportunities, but the struggle for seizing these opportunities in a new land in which

blacks and racial castes served as a floor upon which class, ethnic, and gender struggles could be diffused and diverted” (West 156-57). Race is always a relationally derived construct. As Morrison points out:

[This black population] was available from meditations on terror-the terror of European outcasts, their dread of failure, powerlessness, Nature without limits, natal loneliness, internal aggression, evil, sin greed. It offered itself up reflections on human freedom in terms other than the abstractions of human potential and the rights of man [...]. [The white man’s concern with] autonomy, authority, newness and difference, absolute power- not only become the major themes and presumptions of American literature, but that each one is made possible by, shaped by, activated by a complex awareness and employment of a constituted Africanism. It was this Africanism, deployed as rawness and savagery, that provided the staging ground and arena for the elaboration of the quintessential American identity. (37-44)

Africanism, thus, “is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny” (Morrison 53). As Donald E. Pease further puts it, “the American national discourse has been an exclusive discourse which produced national identity by a way of a social symbolic order that systematically separated an abstract, disembodied subject from resistant materialities such as class, race and gender” (3). The externalization of these categories is “a structural necessity

for the construction of a national narrative and a universal body of imagined community whose sense of belongingness depended upon the internal opposition between Nature's Nation and peoples understood to be constructed of a different nature" (Pease 4). The black subject becomes, to use Julia Kristeva's term, "the abject," which, by means of expulsion, designates that which has been expelled from the body, discharged as an excrement and literally rendered "Other," an alien, "the not-me," which, however, establishes the boundaries of the body which are the first contours of the subject (63).

Faulkner as a white Southern writer understands the illusive construction of white identity. Throughout his novels, he reveals "an increasingly powerful grasp of racism as a discursive dynamic: a disease perpetuated through language practices" (Weinstein 43). Roth, like Ike McCaslin, and his father Zack, is the product of the Southern environment. He reproduces its dichotomized discourse to construct the illusion of the white identity which is performatively produced by acts that "effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal" (Butler 148). In other words, identity is a form of "citational repetition," "a corporeal style," "an act," which is both intentional and performative, where "'performative' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (141). Mollie is obviously aware of the symbolic production of the white subject. She knows that Roth is merely repeating the racial structures of his culture in order to construct his identity. As an African American woman, Mollie is endowed with the art of signifying upon white culture. In response, she also performs the same dichotomized acts as a "parodic" gesture to subvert from within the discourse from which Roth constructs his racial identity. Her "citational"

performance has a clearly punitive consequence: Roth is now isolated. He can no longer have a harmonious and interchangeable life with Mollie's family. All that is left for him is to experience the bitter consequence of his act of separation.

In "Speaking in Tongues," Mae Gwendolyn Henderson theorizes upon literature written by black women. She describes it as "dialogic" and "interlocutory" in character, reflecting not only "a relationship with the 'other(s),' but also "an internal dialogue with the plural aspects of self that constitute the matrix of black female subjectivity" (349). What constitutes the plurality of the black woman's myriad self is that, as a subject, she is "racialized" in the experiencing of gender (350) and is "gendered" in the experience of race. Black women speak in a plurality of voices and in a multiplicity of discourses. "This discursive diversity, or simultaneity of discourse," is what Henderson deems "speaking in tongues" (351), a form of heteroglossia, to use Bakhtin's terms. Black women speak not only for their gender, but also for their race. Mollie, in signifying upon Roth's racial difference and separation, proffers a mode of resistance against racial oppression. Mollie, as an illiterate black woman, does not have the "writerly" tools to resist her double oppression as a black woman. Her acts, instead, account for her strength as a subject who is speaking in the name of her black community. Mollie does not simply occupy a small space in the text of *Go Down, Moses*. She is the overriding figure in "The Fire and the Hearth" chapter wherein she is a source of love and racial resistance. She is also the guiding conscience in the final chapter of the novel, "Go Down, Moses," wherein her characterization as an ancestral figure and an agent of racial resistance is further accounted for. To use Minrose Gwin's words, "Molly(ie), perhaps more than any other character, travels the borders of race

and gender . . . she is a liminal figure whose identity(ies) as the ‘Molly’ of ‘The Fire and the Hearth’ and the ‘Mollie’ in ‘Go Down, Moses’ together transgress certain expectations of black-ness and femaleness that Faulkner simultaneously reflects and deflects” (92). In “Go Down, Moses,” Mollie visits Gavin Stevens in order to see about her grandson, Butch Beauchamp. Butch is described as a culturally deracinated black Northern city dweller: “His face was black, smooth, impenetrable [and his] eyes had seen too much” (369). His “negroid hair had been treated so that it covered the skull like a cap, in a single neat-ridged sweep, with the appearance of having been lacquered, the part trimmed out with razor, so that the head resembled a bronze head, imperishable and enduring” (369). Butch “wore one of those [expensive]sports costume . . . smoking cigarettes and answering in a voice which was anything under the sun but a southern voice or even a negro voice” (369).

Butch as an instance of western assimilation is rich. He has money to defend himself since “he was in a business called numbers, that people like him make money in” (375). Like Lucas Beauchamp, he associates money with male power and racial assertion. Butch relies on illegal means to get money by robbing the white man’s property. The last time he did so, he killed a police officer who caught him in a criminal act. The killing of a white person by a black is a systematic sentence to execution. Butch’s death illustrates that the absence of the ancestral Southern figure in the North is damaging to the Black Northern community. Mollie is not present in Chicago to protect Butch the way she protected her husband Lucas. But she knows intuitively that something wrong has happened to her grandson, the reason for her visit to the lawyer. Gavin “did not for one moment doubt the old Negress’ instinct. If she

had also been able to divine where the boy was and what his trouble was, he would not have been surprised, and it was only later that he thought to be surprised at how quickly he did find where the boy was and what was wrong” (372-73). In contrast to the white empiricist mode of knowing, Mollie knows intuitively. She does not need to have the print of Butch’s execution to be hidden from her because she knows it all, as she tells Gavin. Mollie is illiterate but she knows that the story of Butch must be told. Mollie tells Gavin Stevens “to put hit in de paper” (383) so that the whole world will know what “Pharaoh” has done to her great-grandson. Mollie performs the “Go Down, Moses” song in a call-response with her brother and his wife. This chant becomes a subversive form of oral resistance against racial oppression and the white world and word. It “defamiliarizes” and alienates the lawyer, for whom the song becomes “a true constant soprano which ran without words beneath the strophe and antistrophe of the brother and sister” (381):

“Sold him in Egypt and know he dead.”

“Oh yes, Lord sold him in Egypt.”

“Sold him in Egypt.”

“And now he dead.”

“Sold him to Pharaoh.”

“And Now he dead.” (381)

Mollie insists that Butch is yet another casualty of racial captivity, sold by Roth Edmonds to Pharaoh. She rebukes Roth Edmonds for the death of Butch. It was Edmonds who actually sent the boy to Jefferson in the first place when he had caught him breaking into his commissary store and had ordered him off his place and had

forbidden him to ever return. In Gavin's view, Mollie's chant is "not the sherrif, the police. . .Something broader, quicker in scope" (373). The chant is an oral narrative history on the tragedy of the Negro in the white world. It reflects that Butch's execution is due to the white man's obsession with blood and genealogy, with the "seed not only violent but dangerous and bad" (355), making this last Beauchamp the "concluding sacrificial victim to the South's culture of racial violence" (Martin 23). In this chanting and claustrophobic moment, Gavin hurries to the door. "Soon I will be outside," he thought. "Then there will be air, space, breath" (380-81). Although he was sympathetic with the black race, Gavin cannot sympathize with Mollie's rage at her grandson's exile and execution. He mirrors "the situation of many white Americans in the South today, who feel that they share the guilt of what has been done to the Negro, and see the necessity to establish rapport between the races, but find an invisible barrier between them" (Thornton 328). In Weldon Thornton's view, "the bondage he feels is not of his own doing, and he is even ashamed of it, but he must admit that, desire communication as he may, the tradition and prejudices of his time and place have inflected him and prevent his oneness with the Negroes" (363). Gavin Stevens is indifferent to Mollie's demands. In his mind, "she doesn't care how [Butch] died. She just wanted him home, but she wanted him to come home right. She wanted that casket and those flowers and the hearse and she wanted to ride through town behind it in a car" (383). The lawyer's final racist gesture is accomplished when he desires to come back to town where he has not seen his desk in two days (383). Mollie at the end seems to fail in performing her racial resistance. She remains confined in Stevens' definition

of her as an illiterate old black woman, whose concern is strictly limited with providing her grandson with decent death rituals.

Mollie's failure to resist her "racialized" gender attests to Faulkner's symbolic association of women with the characteristic of the hen. Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz, in "Faulkner's Hen-House: Woman as Bounded Text," contends that Faulkner's text takes the structure of the hen-house in describing women (239-40). The hen-house, according to Calvin Brown's *A Glossary of Faulkner's South*, is "a small house, a square in which hens roost. It usually has nest-boxes for laying, though hens often ignore them and lay in various hideouts around the barn instead. A hen-house is often entirely enclosed by wire and the chickens are shut into it at night, in an attempt to protect them from possums and other vermin (187). The hen-house is an "enclosure," a "concrete structure with a difficult access and exit" (Diocaretz 239). The nest-boxes indicate yet another feature: "hens are expected to perform a function for which they are assigned a place (the nest-boxes) and it is known that they are inclined to disobey these rules. So are women. When the bounds are respected, the expectations dutifully followed, we speak of a 'henly behaviour'" (239). In the hen-house structure of Faulkner's text, women are allowed certain mobility; yet, there are constraints to their freedom (239). To follow this logic, Mollie may embody the configuration of the hen. Her request to the lawyer to write Butch's story is inconclusive because it is through the mediation of a white Southern man that the story will be narrated in a manner which will be inevitably biased, subjective and reductive. The lawyer is like the white American historian who will, inexorably, alter and distort the events to "emplot" his narrative. Reference to Gavin's mocking stance in relation to Mollie's request is then

of no coincidence. However, Mollie's failure is not a totalizing one. At least she tries to impose her voice amidst the racial bias of the South. Her song encapsulates a larger and broader scope which competes with the written, therefore, confining story of the lawyer. In one sense, Mollie becomes the destabilizing figure whose song has a strong alienating effect on the white lawyer. The hen that both Diocartez and Calvin Brown define, thus, does not necessarily encapsulate Faulkner's portrayal of black women. They are, instead, the racial consciousness of his novels and metaphors for love. On many occasions, their absence entails the systematic death of the black male characters, and the tragic story of Rider in "Pantaloon in Black" is a testimony to that.

Faulkner associates love as a noble characteristic in the life of the black community. It is only through black women, who reject the world of property, that the black individual male subject finds his refuge and sense of his existence. Because of her love for the community, Mollie functions as a consciousness, affirming racial solidarity and family unity. Faulkner, purposefully, juxtaposes her sensibility against the white world of property, wherein the concern with the world of ownership stripped the white Southern subject of his humanity. In juxtaposing love against the discourse of property, Faulkner foretells Nikki Giovanni's poetic statement that "black love is black wealth" (5 qtd in Phur)¹⁴. "Pantaloon in Black," though many critics consider it as a

¹⁴ "Black love is black wealth" is a line from Nikki Giovanni's introspective poem, "Nikki-Rosa." It reflects the fear of the black narrator that her simple pleasure of her childhood would be overlooked by the reductive accounts written by white biographers who will not take into account the positive side of her life. The black narrator of the poem insists on how white critics will narrate her life story in relation to her poverty, to the constant fight of her parents and to the alcoholic abuse of her father. However, they will not write about the warm baths taken "in one of those big tubs that folks in Chicago barbecue in" nor about the happiness she felt when her mother was all to herself, nor will they see that "everybody is together" and "you and your sister have happy birthdays and very good Christmases." White biographers are not only reductive in their representation of the black poet. They will also not see that in poverty there is happiness, which the poet associates with the collective and supportive life of her black family

disconnected part from the other sections of the novel, is, nevertheless, the section which most effectively thematizes this Faulknerian message of love versus property. Faulkner revisits the 19th century reductive account of a book called *The Southern Plantation Overseer As Revealed in His Letters*, published by Smith College Press in 1925. Here is part of the introduction to that collection by John Spencer Bassett (Marius 178):

We must not forget . . . that an important part of the problem [of overseeing a plantation] was the negro himself. A fundamental part of the slave problem was the negro problem. The African slaves were close to savagery. They were to learn much in the process of forced labor and they learned it very slowly. The finer feelings of advanced peoples were not for them. They had not developed such feelings in Africa—they could not be expected to acquire them in American slavery in one, two, or five generations. For them uplift was a thing that could only come gradually and painfully. The first generations died in order that those who came afterwards might make a slow and meager advance in culture. (qtd in Kinney 63-65)

What is argued here—in 1925—is that black slaves came from a culture where the finer feeling of love did not exist, and that slavery helped instill these emotions in them. Slavery becomes “a civilizing mission” which represents a step in the progress of their human consciousness. Faulkner re-writes this misrepresentation of the black

that comes only through love. “Black love is black wealth” summarizes the idea that the richness of the black life rests on love, a spiritual wealth.

subject in his story of Rider and his beloved dead wife-Mannie. In “Pantaloon in Black,” Rider’s name is derived from a widely known blues song, “Easy Rider,” and its cognate blues, “I know You Rider” or “Circle Round the Sun,” with the repeated refrain, “I Know you rider, gonna miss me when I’m gone” (Hoffman 134). Rider’s love for his wife is expressed not in words exchanged between them but by the things they do together: improving the house that they rent from old Carothers Edmonds, and how she settles his life down to a pattern of satisfied routine (Marius 178). At the first sight of Mannie, Rider abandoned his irresponsible bachelor life. They married “and he rented the cabin from Carothers Edmonds and built a fire on the hearth on their wedding night as the tale told how Uncle Lucas Beauchamp . . . had done on his forty-five years ago and which had burned ever since” (137). Within the marital institution, Rider “would rise and dress and eat his breakfast by lamplight to walk the four miles to the mill by sunup, and exactly one hour after sundown he would enter the house again, five days after a week, until Sunday” (138). Once at home,

Rider would ring the bright cascade of silver dollars onto the scrubbed table in the Kitchen where his dinner simmered on the stove and the galvanised tub of hot water and the baking powder can of soft soap and towel made of scalded flour sacks sewn together and his clean overalls and shirt and waited, and Mannie would gather up money and walk half-mile to the commissary and buy their next week’s supplies and bank the rest of the money in Edmonds’ safe and return and they would eat once again without haste or hurry after five days-the sidemeat, the greens, the cornbread, the buttermilk from the well-house, the cake

which she baked every Saturday now that she had a stove to bake in.
(138-39)

With Mannie's presence, "Rider's rent was paid in advance, and even in a short period of six months he had refloored the porch and rebuilt and roofed the kitchen, doing the work himself on Saturday afternoon and Sunday with his wife helping him and bought the stove" (*GDM* 137). Suddenly Mannie died, leaving Rider haunted by her ghostly memory in the cabin that now seems unbearably empty. It seemed to him that "the house had never been his anyway, but now even the new planks and sills and singles, the hearth and stove and bed, were all a part of the memory of somebody else" (139). Mannie's death predicates Rider's self-annihilation which Faulkner symbolically associates with the animal imagery of the dog that resides in Rider's now "congealed," "lifeless" and empty house (141). Rider's and the dog's shadows "flitting broken and intermittent among the tress or slanted longer and intact across the slope of pasture or old abandoned fields upon the hills" (142). The image of the dog foreshadows Rider's reduction to an instance of a "bare life." He enters a poker game. He catches in the act Birdsong, the redneck man, who, as everyone around knows, "has been running crooked dice on them mill niggers for fifteen years" (156). Rider kills him with a razor. Then, of course, he is lynched by a white mob, led by Birdsong's relatives. Rider sought his death, because he knows in advance that a black man cannot kill a white man without dying for the offense. After this murder, Rider had gone home to his cabin to wait to be arrested. He has surrendered to the lynch mob to protect his old aunt who has come to jail to spend the night with him in the belief that she can protect him. Rider is indifferent to escaping capture or lynching. Amidst

the crowd of other prisoners he howls, yells and laughs hysterically: “laughing and laughing and saying, ‘Hit look lack Ah just can’t quit thinking. Look lack Ah just can’t quit’” (159). His violence, like gambling, “has only a spurious, temporarily distracting value shock” (Moreland 174), what Benjamin called “the disintegration of the aura in the experience of shock” (194). Rider “can only repeat and intensify in such shocks the momentary experience of what it is (or who it is) he has lost, thus without ongoing symbolic exchanges and reinvestments of those reminiscences in mourning” (Moreland 174). In Sensibar’s view, no language can express Rider’s rage and grief at Mannie’s death, thus his body speaks: “Mourning the loss, he returns to the pre-symbolic. All his senses take command to speak an image of the body in pain and conflict” (117).

This inscrutable act of love and grieving cannot be understood by the sheriff’s deputy. Instead of sympathising with Rider’s tragedy, he reiterates the racist sentiment of his culture:

Them damn niggers. . . .I swear to godfrey, it’s a wonder we have as little trouble with them as we do. . . .Because they ain’t human. They look like a man and they walk on their hind legs like a man, and they can talk and you can understand them and you think they are understanding you, at least now and then. But when it comes to the normal human feelings and sentiments of human beings, they might as well be a damn herd of wild buffaloes. Now you can take that one today. (154)

The deputy has no compassion for a black man who has been lynched and no understanding of why Rider has done what he has done. The scene is a bearing-witness

to a white man who “has just experienced something, Rider’s grief-stricken and doomed humanness which nothing in his background has prepared him for, and he is clumsily trying to talk it out, trying to explain to his own mind, using a completely inadequate redneck vocabulary and conceptual system, something it cannot quite grasp” (Polk 149).

In analysing the suicidal grief of Rider, Benjamin H. Ogden, in his article, “Rethinking Rider’s Love: The Less Romantic Logic of Property and Space in ‘Pantaloon in Black,’” assumes that Rider’s spiritual and emotional annihilation after the death of Mannie does not fall necessarily into the patterns of romantic love. Mannie’s disappearance, instead, occasions the empiricist death of his masculine identity in economic terms. As he puts it, Rider’s grief is for “the loss of self identity constructed through property and money that marriage makes possible. . . .Mannie becomes metonymic with Rider’s newfound connection to property and her death figures as the disintegration of such connectedness” (386). For Odgen, Rider’s grief becomes the product of a sentimental love founded partly on the position she secures for him within a largely unfeeling labor economy. His relationship with Mannie is endowed with the capitalist and pragmatic structure of marriage. According to Odgen, Mannie is presented impersonally as an agent of change associated with spending money and banking Rider’s money (388). “At no point,” Odgen claims, “does Rider humanize her in thoughts, desires, or ideas. When recalling their domestic life together, Rider does not recall Mannie fondly: all he recalls is the evidence of her wifely functions as cook, house cleaner, and washerwoman” (388). She exists only as a physical and functional body with “her narrow back and haunches squatting” (*GDM*

136). For Ogden, Mannie has steadily effaced Rider's sense of himself as property, as having no control over his own labor and as having no use for his money because he sees no future for himself (388). Simultaneously, "she has returned his masculinity to him by restoring his place within the presiding symbolic configuration of the time: that self-made identity is constituted by self-possession (control of one's own labor and body, as well as one's own wife) and possession of property (human or land or home)" (388).

Ogden's analysis is reductive. First, Mannie's financial contribution to Rider's life and her performance of the domestic rituals does not necessarily imply the patriarchal and pragmatic relationship of this couple. It is, rather, a testimony of love which is obviously the lacking ingredient in the matrimonial life of the deputy. This love is not only epitomized in Rider's suicidal act, but also in the presence of Mannie's ghost that haunts Rider's empty house and crosses the boundaries of space and time. Second, Ogden fails to capture Faulkner's use of the latent juxtaposition between the deputy's cold and loveless couple and the romantic warmth symbolized by Rider and Mannie's emotional bond. The deputy's wife is indifferent and her communication with her husband is brief, cold, and superficial. She is careless to her husband's account of Rider's story. "The deputy snatched his feet rapidly out of the way as she passed him, passed almost over him, and went into the dining room" (155). In contrast to Rider's harmonious communication with Mannie, the deputy "rais[es] his voice a little to carry the increased distance" (155) with his wife. In juxtaposing the loveless white couple embodied in the sheriff and his wife with Rider and Mannie's deep emotional enmeshment, Faulkner does two things: he foregrounds the humanity of the

black race, which deconstructs the racist bias of the white couple, whose racial order reflects the white Southern discourse, and implies that “blacks in Yoknapatawpha are capable of qualities of love unattained by the whites, despite, or perhaps because of, their lives of suffering, their lack of sophistication and worldly advantages” (Hoffman 136). Second, Faulkner valorizes the role of black women whose absence causes the annihilation of black men. Mannie becomes the spectral entity, the ground for the interplay between absence and presence. She is physically dead, but she becomes the ghost who haunts the space of “Pantaloon in Black,” a revenant who entails the suicidal, but romantic act of love, which replaces the world of property, and remains a distinctive feature of Faulkner’s black community throughout most of his novels.

Chapter 2

Property, Race, and Gender in *Song of Solomon*

If anything I do, in the way of writing novels or whatever I write, isn't about the village or the community or about you, then it isn't about anything. I am not interested in indulging myself in some private exercise of my imagination . . . which is to say yes, the work must be political (Toni Morrison, "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation." (340)

African American writers and theorists have often been concerned with the displaced subjects. Given the fragmentation of black identity within the framework of the western discourse of slavery, racism, and the Great Migration from the South to the North, many African American writers tackle the issues related to "double-consciousness." "Double-consciousness" involves not only what Du Bois terms as the state of "twoness," or identity split, it also implies, to use Henry Louis Gates' assumption, the re-writing of the white canon through the transposition of the "Africanist" aesthetics on the literary material. Using the aesthetics of her African American vernacular art of signifying upon the white canonical word and world, Toni Morrison, in a form of call and response, re-writes some of William Faulkner's theoretical approaches to the concepts of identity and truth. Both writers, using the aesthetics of meta-narratives, reflect, self-reflexively, on the constructed nature of identity and of truth, which is epitomized in their use of historical documents, and more precisely, on the epic genre in portraying their male protagonist's quest for

identity. Yet, if Faulkner's modernist tendency presupposes the existence of a coherent and fixed perception of identity, which is ingrained in the local Southern space of Mississippi, Morrison, on the other hand, perceives that the black subject formation is always already fluid. This deconstructionist perception of identity within African American art, literature and theory precedes the postmodernist assumptions which belatedly called for the subversion of any system of belief that focuses on the fixity or stability of knowledge and truth.

In delineating the “hybridity” of African American epistemology, Paul Gilroy, in his *The Black Atlantic*, argues that the nation-state is not an appropriate unit of analysis for the study of black diaspora populations, because it leads to a counterproductive and even destructive “ethnic absolutism” rather than a truly liberatory politics (5). Alternatively, he proposes the metaphor of “the Black Atlantic,” which links the black peoples of Europe and the Americas to Africa, as an alternative area for study of the “compound culture” of blacks (5). Instead of relying on “national culture,” Gilroy places more emphasis on identity formation through “routes” (the circulation of peoples, ideas and other cultural forms and forces) than “roots” (a specifically distinct and “authentic” culture embedded in a particular place). Gilroy further writes, “dealing equally with the significance of roots and routes [...] should undermine the purified appeal of either Africentric or the Eurocentrism” (190). The metaphor of the Black Atlantic concerns the world of flows, exchanges, and in-between elements that call the very desire centre into question” (190). His argument implies that all cultures are intermixed and transculturated. Put differently, in the global world, the transnational undermines the conventional belief in the purity of the

national. In the same vein, Henry Louis Gates Jr. has also emphasized that Du Bois's concept of "double-consciousness" is a positive state which enables the black person to have a broader and double vision of life, and that this doubleness manifests itself in the creation of hybrid arts of improvisation, such as the blues and jazz music. In short, "double-consciousness" becomes a provocative and even an oppositional act of political insubordination that has to do with the theoretization of creolization, metissage, mestizaje, and hybridity (Gilroy 2), concepts that inevitably challenge the western totalitarian and absolutist discourses.

Toni Morrison does not diverge from these perspectives. She recognizes the cultural fluidity in the formation of the black subject, but, in order to also preserve the African heritage, which is already fluid, she perceives herself as the cultural heir who is accountable for the preservation of her roots amidst the postmodern world of routes and globalization. She contends that, amidst the postmodern world of uprootedness, her work must also be politically concerned with the issues of "blackness." In "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation," Morrison yearns for a closer identification of the black American artist with his or her community: "There must have been a time when an artist could be genuinely representative of the tribe and in it; when an artist could have a tribal or racial sensibility and an individual expression of it" (330). According to Morrison, "[t]here were spaces and places in which a single person could enter and behave as an individual within the context of the community" (339). In her literary work, language becomes "a place of struggle," because, as bell hooks writes, "[t]he oppressed struggle in language to recover our selves, to reconcile, to reunite, to renew. Our words are not without meaning, they are an action, a resistance" (146), "a

struggle of memory against forgetting” (147). African American yearning to recover the past is not a simple nostalgia for things as they were, but a politicized memory constructed to give a new take on the old (147). It is a form of recovery of what has been lost with a new mode of articulation, to illuminate the present (147). In this respect, African American writers become the custodians of their Africanist culture. As Asante puts it, “[b]lack Americans retained basic components of the African experience rather than specific artifacts” (“African” 21).

Toni Morrison delves into the revival of African heritage as a memorial stratagem to delineate the cultural importance of the hybrid black community. In *Song of Solomon*, she portrays the dichotomy between the urban North and the rural South in order to reflect upon the tension between the global metropolis and the local Southern space. She positions her male characters in the mainstream discourse of the urban North in order to account for their cultural uprootedness. In order to reach the state of “liminality,” black male characters must reconcile with their lost past. This reconciliation is accomplished through the help of the female ancestral figures, who function as the mediators who bridge the gap between past and present. If Faulkner's regional narrative is focused simply on the Southern space with all its materialistic mechanisms that shape the male identity in terms of owning property, Morrison's regional novel reflects hybridity, a movement in and out the local (Southern) and the global (Northern) space. She alters the Southern space into a highly feminized body, wherein knowledge transcends the white “scriptographic” norms and acquires an oral dimension that resists closure, and property, which shapes one's masculine identity, into a spiritual ownership of the lost past and people. This feminized rural space is a

rupture from the empiricist and materialistic discourse of the Northern space, and is endowed with some degree of simplicity, which is illustrated in the poverty of the pre-modern Southern milieu. The Northern space, on the other hand, is a masculine space that relies on an empiricist approach to knowledge, wherein the perception of identity is linked to the idea of owning property at the cost of the African American ancestral background and based on the subordination of women.

Morrison's vernacular art of signifying upon Faulkner's white canon is a testimony of her artistic and literary maturity. The individual talent, says T. S. Eliot, at once extends and modifies an inherited literary tradition.¹⁵ Morrison exhibits this talent. She integrates her precursors, including their subjects, their themes, sometimes even their language (Cowart 108). Morrison riffs on Faulkner's theme of history, identity and freedom, and re-contextualizes them in the context of African American heritage. Although Faulkner was the subject of her MA thesis, Morrison, in many interviews, refuses to be compared to her white precursors. "I am not like James Joyce; I am not like Thomas Hardy; I am not like Faulkner," she contends. "I do not have objections to being compared to such extraordinary gifted and facile writers, but it does leave me sort of hanging there when I know that my effort is to be like something that has probably only been fully expressed in music" (McKay 426). In another interview Morrison remarks that from the age of seventeen, when she left for school, "the things I studied were Western and . . . I was terrifically fascinated with all of that, and at that

¹⁵ "No Poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His signification, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists...What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them" ("Tradition and the Individual Talent" 37).

time any information that came to me from my own people seemed to be backwoods and uninformed . . . they hadn't read all these wonderful books . . . the consciousness of being Black I think happened when I left Cornell” (Jones and Vinson 131). In another interview with Thomas LeClair, Morrison praises Faulkner on his “regional literature,” which according to her, is “good and universal because it is specifically about a particular world” (124). Morrison, in another interview with Nellie McKay, expressed her concern with Faulkner's artistic articulation of the American past that was not available in history (296). Most of all, she valorizes Faulkner's emphasis on the peripheral spaces and voices, which she metaphorically compares to “the gaze,” a “sort of staring, a refusal-to-look-away” approach in his writing (297).

Morrison's remarks about the relation of her work to Faulkner's accounts for her ambivalence. His influence is both asserted and subverted. Her rejection of this Western-oriented channel of influence is, however, legitimate, in that as an author belonging to a minority group, and as a woman writer, she wants to preserve the uniqueness of her art and the culture that shapes it. As a struggle for “agon,” she, indisputably, falls into the two phases of defense mechanism that, in Harold Bloom's words, attest to the writer's or the poet's struggle for uniqueness, namely “Tessera” and “Kenosis.” Tessera, is a term derived from mosaic-making, a completion of anti-thesis, a form of recognition (14). In this process, “the poet completes his precursor, by so reading the parent-poem as to retain its terms but to mean them in another sense, as though the precursor had failed to go far enough” (14). In this stage the young poet, as the latecomer, finds the poetic space already filled by the vision of the precursor, the ultimate resolution is the resort to what Sigmund Freud calls the language of taboo in

order to make his own space (65). It is this language of taboo, this antithetical use of the precursor's primal words that must serve as the basis for an antithetical criticism (66). Kenosis, in Harold Bloom's words, "is a breaking-device similar to the defence-mechanisms our psyches employ against repetition compulsions. It is a movement towards discontinuity with the precursor" (14), a process wherein the father poet is humbled and emptied out (15). Bloom's theory is about imitation to subvert the discursive order of the precursor, and the same subversive principle is echoed not only in African American theories on the art of Signification, as it is epitomized in the works of Gilroy, Gates and Du Bois, but also in other postcolonial theories. Homi Bhabha, for instance, assumes that mimicry is never a neutral imitation, but a transgressive act to mock from within the Western agenda¹⁶. Morrison's art of signifying upon *Go Down, Moses* is an act of emptying out and relocating the precursor's work. Linda Krumholz notes that Morrison invokes the practice of signification to establish a discursive world-order that runs counter to the established white culture. "Signifying" in black language is a form of parody that undermines the original intent of words and phrases, giving rise to new meanings, which in this novel, affirms the black self and enables resistance to an insidiously prescribed "inferiority"

¹⁶ In "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," Bhabha contends that "colonial desire is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse is constructed around an ambivalence. In order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference." (126). According to Bhabha, "mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal." In a fashion similar to Henry Louis Gates and Du Bois, Homi Bhabha further observes that mimicry is "a sign of double articulation, or an "inter-dicta" (130); a complex strategy of reform," "a form of resemblance and menace" (127). Mimicry, for Bhabha, is like a fetish. "It radically revalues the normative knowledge of the priority of race, writing, history" (131) for the fetish "mimes the forms of authority at the point at which it deauthorizes them" (132). Like the fetish, "mimicry rearticulates presence in terms of its 'otherness' that which it disavows" (132).

(204). As Krumholz further points out, “[i]n *Song of Solomon*, Morrison provides . . . an African American cultural literacy composed of folk stories, . . . biblical stories, [myth], individual and collective history, and a spiritual openness and perception, all of which comprise the 'subversive memory' . . . which generate a sense of agency . . . self-evaluation . . . and resistance” (204).

The purpose of this chapter is to portray the “binarism” between the South and the North, which reflects the fragmentation of the male protagonist characters such as Macon Dead II, and notably his son, Milkman Dead. The Northern space will be treated as a case of Western assimilation and cultural deracination. Similar to Faulkner's treatment of African American women, Morrison focuses on the image of Pilate Dead-Macon Dead's estranged sister-who symbolizes the ancestral figure that helps Milkman reconcile his past and present. Like Mollie Beauchamp, in *Go Down, Moses*, she preserves her oral African American heritage that resists the discourse of owning property and valorizes love and the collective life of the black community. As her symbolic name suggests, Pilate is a mediator who helps Milkman shape a hybrid identity that resists Faulkner's modernist, therefore essentialist, perception of subjectivity. She induces him to travel back to Shalimar wherein he learns the history of his family and the heritage of the rural South which is denied to him in Michigan. Morrison transgresses Faulkner's perception of black women. Pilate's name suggests not only her role as the mediator, but also her subversive sexuality. As opposed to Mollie, she is the figure of the drag who resists sexist claims over her body. Unlike Faulkner's treatment of the wilderness, Morrison's woods are endowed with the aspects of orality that resist fixity. If Ike McCaslin's woods permit him to acquire a stagnant

and fixed identity that resists the social changes of his Southern culture, Morrison's natural landscape, on the other hand, allows Milkman to have a fluid identity that negates neither his Northern nor the Southern milieu. However, when it comes to the issue of constructed reality and truth, both writers, despite their gendered, racial and cultural disparities, engage in the same critique of western "essentialism," but in different means. Ike McCaslin's decoding of his ancestral ledgers is an illustration, as I mentioned in my first chapter, of the way "History" is a cultural product of diversions and distortions. Ike's role is of the historian who fills in the gaps of the historical record. Morrison's treatment of history is oral and, therefore, transcends any fixed perception of truth. Unlike Ike's "scriptographic" reading of the ledgers, Milkman's genealogical history is imparted to him orally through Pilate, then Circe, the ageless ancestral figure in Danville, Pennsylvania, and through the black community in Shalimar, Virginia. Milkman, in a fashion reminiscent to Ike McCaslin, engages, like a historian, in further decoding the truth of his orally transmitted knowledge of his past, filling in the gaps, and introducing his own interpretative subjectivity. In other words, both Faulkner and Morrison engage in subverting the truthful and objective definition of history, which, in their novels, becomes an instance of "constructedness." However, in treating the impact of knowing one's past, both writers diverge. Faulkner's Ike remains a loveless and stagnant character. He is incapable of developing a flexible ego boundary with others and with the doomed cultural and economic changes of the South, which is becoming-in the mid-twentieth century-a case of socio-economic miscegenation. The ending scene, which coincides with the recession of the woods, mirrors Ike's stagnation and frozen identity. However, Morrison's black character is

endowed with flexibility and fluidity. Milkman's knowledge of the past enables him to transcend his autonomous ego to reach others and to preserve his heritage along with his Northern legacy. Both the image of the sea and the water and the myth of the flying African symbolize the world of flow, which further accounts for Milkman's hybrid subject formation, and stands in sharp contrast to Ike McCaslin's act of drawing himself into his blankets.

In comparing and contrasting Faulkner and Morrison's respective novels, *Go Down, Moses* and *Song of Solomon*, this chapter provides an analysis which studies the divergences and the intersections between these two authors within their distinct cultural and literary realms. It shows that, despite their concern with the concept of cultural constructedness, both authors diverge in their treatment of identity and truth. One's modernist treatment of formation of the subject and knowledge falls into the absolute dimension of modernism, in that they remain fixed and static. The other's African American vernacular art enables her to subvert western "essentialism" in making claim to a flexible, unstable and hybrid truth and identity. In both novels, not only race, but also gender performances affect the characters' sexist perception of the self. African American women, in both narratives, are portrayed as mirrors, which the patriarchal characters use to limn out and enforce the invention and implication of manhood. Both novels use the figure of the ancestral women as the bridge and the mediators who help the deracinated black male subject preserve his lost Southern legacy, which transcends the western discourse of property. However, because she writes from the perspective of an African American woman novelist, Morrison's black women have more agency in redefining their identities. If Roth Edmonds' black

mistress, Fonsiba Beauchamp, Mannie and Mollie Beauchamp remain co-opted in the confining gaze of men, Ruth and her daughters-Lena and Corinthians, find forms of resistance against their patriarchal home, despite their delicate and feminine upper middle-class appearance. They protest. They create secret worlds of their own in order to defy not only patriarchy, but also the discourse of race and class that Macon Dead imposes on them. Pilate, like Mollie, is an ancestress in playing the role of the mediator. But, unlike Mollie, she has the power to deconstruct-through both her refusal of the conventions of motherhood and her strategic embrace of drag-the dominant racial discourses and gender paradigms.

This chapter will be divided into four parts. The first section deals with the Northern approach to the concept of property in terms of race, class and gender. It focuses on Macon Dead, who constructs his identity in acquiring property and in dominating the remaining female members of his family- particularly Ruth, Lena, and Corinthians- his wife and two daughters, respectively. Because race and class overlap, these women are not only confined within Macon Dead's patriarchal order, they are also alienated from the local black community. From a Butlerian perspective, these women's subordination is studied through their bodily performances of dressing, which highlights the artificiality of their identities. The second section of this chapter studies how identity, according to Morrison, is not only a cultural construct or a performance through bodily acts. It is also a site of defiance, which enables the Dead women to resist the discourse of race, class and gender. The third section deals with the constructive role of Pilate Dead in initiating Milkman into a spiritual journey to the South as a deconstructive alternative to the world of property that invades his moral

order in the North. It foregrounds the supernatural and oral legacy of Pilate, who, in a fashion reminiscent to Mollie Beauchamp, destabilizes the racial order, and more than Mollie, she engages in subverting established gender hierarchies. In signifying upon Faulkner's sexist portrayal of Mollie, this section narrativizes Pilate's quest in search of identity and community. It is thanks to her marginalization, because of her lack of a navel, that Pilate creates her own agency by deciding to cherish her black ancestral heritage and by embodying the figure of the drag through her masculine appearance, which destabilizes the patriarchal order. The fourth section is a treatment of the gradual initiation of Milkman's journey to the South. This section analyzes Milkman's cultural encounters in Danville, Pennsylvania, then Shalimar, Virginia-spaces of his lost past. It is a section wherein both identity and truth are approached from the postmodernist African American angle. Identity becomes a hybridized entity, through Morrison's emphasis on the myth of the flying African, and truth- as an orally transmitted realm- becomes a multiperspectivist form. It engages Milkman and the people he encounters, such as Pilate, the Danville men, Circe, Sweet-his lover-Susan Byrd, and the children singing "Song of Solomon," in re-constructing, collectively, the genealogy of the Dead family. This collective and hybrid knowledge of the past, the unstable movement in and out the Northern and Southern territory shape the "double-voiced" identity of Milkman, which stands in sharp contrast with Faulkner's characters, and, specifically, Ike McCaslin whose essentialist subjectivity resists harmony with the racial and gendered Other.

2.1 Identity Quest: Property, Race, and Gender in Michigan

As a politically engaged African American woman writer, Toni Morrison insists on the necessity for blacks to return to their redemptive and constructive past. In a conversation with Marsha Darling, she defines the coinage of past-present-future in relation to her belief that “the gap between Africa and Afro-America and the gap between the living and the dead and the gap between the past and the present does not exist. It’s bridged for [African American writers] by assuming [their] responsibility for people no one’s ever assumed responsibility for” (247). Morrison insists that African Americans must remember their past to pass on their stories. Otherwise, they will have suppressed an essential part of their being, and not incidentally an essential part of history (Gillepsie 86). *Song of Solomon* is a sheer recapitulation of this issue. Morrison warns her black audience against the genocidal impact of isolation and individualism on the life of “the village.” She indicts the Northern city for being accountable for blacks’ cultural “deterritorialization” and “uprootedness,” because when African Americans migrated to the urban north-as a safe place free of exploitation and oppression-they were actually coming to a wider and colder place where they would forget the necessity of communication and the value of collectivism (Mbalia 109). Blacks therefore developed a sort of internalized racism, which made them adopt the capitalistic life style as a mode of self-affirmation. Morrison associates male characters with the urban landscape, wherein property is a matter of possessing not only the land and money, but also the female black body as a further assertion of masculinity.

Morrison is obviously aware of the lure and lie of the American dream when she writes: “A whole tradition of 'universal' yearnings collapsed into that well-fondled phrase, 'the American Dream'” (*Playing* 33). Materialism destroys rituals which are linked to group and individual survival. The capitalistic order is strongly felt in Northern and urban spaces, which most of Morrison's male characters occupy. Morrison uses the imagery of the peacock as a symbol to account for Macon's material narcissism. Because Macon is borne down by his excessive concern with property, Guitar compares him to the male peacock which cannot fly because of “too much tail. All that jewellery weighs it down. Like vanity. Can't nobody fly with all that shit. Wanna fly, you got to give up the shit that weighs you down” (179). The image of the peacock illustrates, metaphorically, the fact that Macon is not capable of claiming a spiritual agency that transcends the empiricist world he is wrapped in. He cannot have a normal social life and be an agent of his own life, since he is already owned by the objects he owns. He becomes the property of his own property. Macon's life “is fundamentally inauthentic; he is monomaniacally driven to acquire material wealth, at all costs, personal and human” (Samuels and Weems 58), because he sees that identity can only be found in the future, in his linear vision to “own things,” “own people,” and therefore “own yourself” (55). “Own things. And let the things you own own other things. Then you'll own yourself and other people too,” Macon contends (55). He perceives that “money is freedom,” “the only real freedom there is” (163).

If Faulkner's Lucas Beauchamp sees property and money as the only inscriptions of the hegemony of the male symbolic and the only source to consolidate his manhood in a racist and capitalistic American society, Macon, in a similar fashion,

associates power and manhood with property. He promulgates the belief that the introjections of white capitalism's competitive, success-oriented motivations and actions- are the only viable alternatives for the fulfilment and advancement of the black race (Byork 83). When his son, Milkman grows up, Macon felt that Milkman could help him conduct his project of accumulating money. He now “had time to think, to plan, to visit the bank men, to read the public notices, auctions, to find out what plots were going for taxes, unclaimed heirs' property, where roads were built, what supermarkets, schools; and who was trying to sell what to the government for the housing projects that were going to be built” (63). As a selfish individualist, he spends his life acquiring the possessions he feels will keep him safe and immune from racism (Gillespie 182). Macon Dead’s obsession with material acquisition alienates him from the larger black community. Obsessed by his Packard car, “he never had a blown tire, never ran out of gas and needed twelve grinning raggle-tailed boys to help him push it up a hill or over to a curb. No rope ever held the door to its frame, and no teen-agers leaped on his running board for a lift down the street” (40). Macon Dead “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 bottle or ice cream cones poked from the open windows. Nor did a baby boy stand up to pee out of them” (40).

In Samuel Allen's words, Macon is “the industrious ambitious businessman, standard-bearer of bourgeois horrors” (30). As Mrs. Bains, Guitar’s grandmother, points out, “A nigger in business is a terrible thing to see” (23). His obsession with property makes him heartless, cold, and calculating to the point that he becomes “a difficult man to approach, a hard man, with a manner so cool it discouraged casual or

spontaneous conversation” (*SOS* 25). Property not only detaches Macon Dead from the black community, but also strips him of his love and compassion for other people. He evicts black tenants from his buildings once they cannot afford to pay their rents. As Guitar puts it, “He’s a kicker. First time I laid eyes on him, he was kicking us out of our house” (102). Morrison equates property with the loss of love. If Faulkner, in “Pantaloon in Black,” contrasts the loveless scene of the white sheriff and his wife with the suicidal love scene of Rider, Morrison, in a similar vein, reproduces the same effect. Macon’s heartlessness is contrasted, in the very beginning of the novel, with the image of the drunken Henry—one of his tenants—who, described in the act of trying to commit a suicide because of the burden of love, whimpers: “Gimme hate, Lord . . . but don’t give me love. I can’t take no more love, Lord. I can’t carry it . . . It’s too heavy” (26). What interests Macon, at that moment, is not the value of the human life but the money Henry owes him. He asks Freddie to take the money from the now sleeping Henry, then leaves the scene indifferently. Obsessed with the white materialist world and social status, Macon, like Lucas Beauchamp, becomes manipulative. He marries Ruth Foster simply because her father was rich and the first black doctor for whom a street, “Not Doctor Street,” is ironically and ritualistically named. Macon becomes tactical, he thinks that “he himself was certainly worthy of the doctor’s consideration as a gentleman friend for Miss Foster since, at twenty-five, he was already a colored man of property” (*SOS* 23). Macon’s marriage to Ruth is far from romantic. Ultimately, she functions as a mere bridge due to her lighter complexion and middle-class position.

Macon’s obsession with materialism renders him as devoid of life and love as his Packard car, which the black community called “Macon Dead’s hearse” (33)

because, like Macon, “it had no real lived life at all” (33). His sterile sex life is restricted to his foreplay in acts of “untying,” “unclasping,” “unbuckling the snaps and strings of what must have been the most beautiful, the most delicate, the whitest and softest underwear on earth” (16). During these undressings, Macon is delighted with toying with each eye of his wife’s corset and with unlacing “each grosgrain ribbon that threaded its pale-blue way through the snowy top” of Ruth’s naked body (16). Macon and his wife never spoke to each other, but “they giggled occasionally, and as when children play 'doctor,' undressing of course was the best part” (16). In this scene, Morrison excavates the relation of the body to gender performance. Macon toys with his wife’s delicate garments. He unties them, unclasps them, unbuckles them, unlaces them, and unthreads them so that, after having sex, Ruth ties them, clasps them, buckles them, laces them and threads them back again. The scene plays on the terms of doing and undoing Ruth’s clothes in order to evoke the idea of repetition of acts and how gender- using Judith Butler’s words- is a matter of ritualistic performances of discursively gendered discourses through the medium of the body. As the novel progresses, Macon, then, ceases to look at his wife, but what he misses is her underwear (16), which remains the object on which he exerts his ritualistic sexual acts that consolidates his manhood. The image of the peacock is not only restricted to Macon’s obsession with the material acquisition. It also reflects how materialism affects black men’s relationship with black women. As an animal registry, the peacock, in this novel, brings to mind the act of peeing on women, an image which, like Faulkner’s image of the doe, evokes the dynamics of patriarchal domination. As a peacock, Macon not only sees his wife as a sexual body, but he also abuses her

emotionally. “Ruth . . . began her days stunned into stillness by her husband's contempt and ended them wholly animated by it” (10-11). When her father refused to lend Macon the money to buy the Erie Lackawanna estate, Macon felt that he was betrayed by his own wife who reflects the image of the doctor. Ruth, then, becomes the object of his own frustration to the point that he interprets her relationship with her dying father to be an incestuous and necrophiliac one: “In the bed. That's where she was when I opened the door. Laying next to him” (73), Macon tells his son. “Naked as a yard dog, kissing him. Him dead and white and puffy and skinny, and she had his fingers in her mouth” (73). Macon's frustration at the lost land not only caused his misinterpretation of the death scene of the doctor, but also his suspicion of the fact that his eldest children-Corinthians and Magdalene called Lena- were delivered by Ruth's own father. He perceives their birth as an act of “nasty” molestation, because Macon believes that “there's lot of things a man can do to please a woman, even if he doesn't fuck” (74).

In *Strong Mothers, Weak Wives: The Search for Gender Equality*, Miriam Johnson confirms Macon's suspicion of incest as she embarks on Dr. Foster's recollections of his daughter:

Fond as he [Dr. Foster] was of his only child, useful as she was in his house since his wife had died, lately he had begun to chafe under her devotion. Her steady beam of love was unsettling, and she had never dropped those expressions of affection that had been so lovable in her childhood. The good-night kiss was itself a masterpiece of slow-wittedness on her part and discomfort on his. At sixteen, she still insisted on having him come to her at night, sit on her bed, exchange a

few pleasantries, and plant a kiss on her lips. Perhaps it was the loud silence of his dead wife, perhaps it was Ruth's disturbing resemblance to her mother. More probably it was the ecstasy that always seemed to be shining in Ruth's face when he bent to kiss her—an ecstasy he felt inappropriate to the occasion. (*SOS* 23)

Johnson assumes that “the incest . . . is psychological, not overtly sexual” (173). Johnson’s interpretation of this father-daughter relationship is not valid. Obviously the scene mocks Macon Dead's imaginative and paranoid interpretation of Ruth's relationship with her father. Dr Foster expresses his inner fear that his love for the daughter will be culturally transmitted as incest, a taboo. Macon Dead, the product of patriarchal culture, does not interpret this father-daughter in an objective way. His reference to Freddie- his janitor- as someone who “does not lie, but misrepresents” echoes implicitly his misinterpretation of Ruth's love for her father. The passage juxtaposes two competing levels of truth: the one which objectively refers to the over-protective love of a widowed father for his orphaned daughter. The other is how this love is culturally misconceived by the heterosexual discourse which prescribes a set of acts and attitudes to regulate sexual identities. Johnson not only fails to grasp Morrison’s message, but also fails to recognize the materialistic frustration of Macon Dead for the denied land. As Milkman rhetorically puts it: “So what did he let you marry his daughter for? So he could screw her without the neighbors knowing it? Did you ever catch them doing it? No. You just felt something you couldn't put your fingers on. His money probably,” Milkman rhetorically points out. “And his daughter

wouldn't help you, would she? So you figured they must be getting it on the operating table" (77).

In most of her novels, Morrison uses the theme of "rememory," which is a process that combines both the events in their ontic occurrence with the subjective reconstruction of them (Rushdy 150). If history- as it is epitomized in the McCaslin ledgers in *Go Down, Moses*- is a subjective recollection of the events imparted to us as the memory of the past, Morrison, in the same way, uses the term "rememory" to illustrate the imaginative construction of the truth. "Rememory," then, becomes both reminiscence (recreation or reconstruction of the primal scene) and mimesis (invention or the recollection of the events as they happen). What the ledgers tell, and what Macon thinks he truly sees in Ruth's relationship with her father both allude to the fabrication of events as facts. Macon's recollection of what he believes to be an incestuous relationship of his wife with Dr. Foster is a mere reconstruction of the event in his febrile mind: "Once he believed that the sight of her mouth on the dead man's fingers would be the thing he would remember always. He was wrong. Little by little he remembered fewer and fewer of the details, until finally he had to imagine them, even fabricate them, guess what they must have been. The image left, but the odiousness never did" (16). Macon is not consciously lying in interpreting Ruth's relationship with her father. Instead, "he is confusing and fusing the two memories that occupy his mind" (Rushdy 150). For the nourishment of his outrage, he depended on the memory of her underwear. The underwear becomes a metonymy for his own lovemaking to his wife: the association of the underwear with the primal scene of Ruth and her father has, in fact, allowed Macon to perceive nakedness where there was none (Rushdy 150).

Ruth's identity is constructed in a double patriarchal discourse. The first is that of her over-protective father, with whom, as Samuels and Hudson-Weems note, "Ruth grows without a personal identity, as the extension of [himself]" (54), a "daddy's girl." The other is that of her abusive husband to whom she is a sexual property, and ultimately, an estranged non-entity. The position of Ruth as daddy's girl trains her to be a passive and subservient wife: "the father-daughter relationship reproduces in daughters a disposition to please men in a relationship in which the male dominates" (Johnson 184). Put differently, "daddy's girls are in training to be wives" (184). In Byork's words, Ruth has lived a "baby doll" existence (197). She has been made weak and passive by the "affectionate elegance" of her father's class-conscious upbringing, and she has been rendered invisible and inconsequential by her boorish and dominating husband (197). In short, she has lived her life in service to the male-dominated order. The death of her father, and her own estrangement from her frustrated husband, leaves Ruth a weak and lonely woman who lacks a center, a self: "Totally taken over by her anaconda love, she had no self left, no fears, no wants, no intelligence that was her own" (137).

Ruth, then, has no personality and cannot be the mistress of her acts and will. As Leslie Goss Erickson, quoting from Pearson, puts it, Ruth mirrors the archetype of the Orphan (84): "The Orphan's story is about a felt powerlessness, about a yearning for a return to a primal kind of innocence, an innocence that is fully childlike, where their very need is cared for by an all-loving mother or father figure. The yearning is juxtaposed against a sense of abandonment" (Pearson 28 qtd in Erickson 84). As a substitution for her emotional lack, the childlike Ruth, then, develops a complex

attachment to her son, Milkman, her “velveteened toy” (*SOS* 132), by breastfeeding him long after the time that he needs. In so doing, Ruth feels “like the miller’s daughter, the one who sat at night in a straw filled room, thrilled with the street power Rumpelstilskin had given her: to see golden thread stream from her very own shuttle” (*SOS* 13). Now that her father is dead, she lives in the shadow of his memories. She finds meaning in life through a watermark on the dining room table. Throughout her father's life, it was there that a bowl of “fresh flowers had stood. Every day” (11). Now she regards the stain as “a morning, a checkpoint, some stable visual object that assures her that the world [is] still there . . . that she [is] alive somewhere” (11). Ruth's isolation and hunger for love further entails her posthumous ritualized night visit to Fairfield, the cemetery where her now deceased father rests: “with nobody touching me, or even looking as though they'd like to touch me. That's when I started coming to Fairfield” (125), Ruth explains to Milkman. “To talk to somebody who wanted to listen and not to laugh at me. Somebody I could trust. Somebody who trusted me. Somebody who was . . . interested in me” (125). Ruth sees herself as a “small woman,” pressed by a great house into a small package (124). She had no friends, but 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. I was small, but he was big. The only person who ever really cared whether I lived or died” (125). Ruth contends that her father “was an arrogant man, and often foolish and destructive one. But he cared whether and he cared how I lived, and there was, and is, no one else in the world who ever did” (124). In short, Ruth lives her life only in memory and passion of another's gaze (Byork 88). As Milkman's reflections early in the novels convey: “Never had he thought of his mother

as a person, a separate individual, with a life apart from allowing or interfering with his own” (*SOS* 75).

Macon's daughters, in turn, cannot escape their father's materialistic and patriarchal domination. Lena and Corinthians cannot develop a strong identity because their relation to their emotionally and physically annihilated mother does not allow them to produce a coherent and strong perception of themselves. Macon keeps each member of his family awkward with fear: “His hatred for his wife glittered and sparked in every word he spoke to her. The disappointment he felt in his daughters sifted down on them like ash, dulling their buttery complexions and choking the lilt out of what should have been girlish voices” (11). Under his frozen glance “they tripped over doorsills and dropped the salt cellar into the yolks of their poached eggs. The way he mangled their grace, wit, and self-esteem was the single excitement of their days. Without the tension and drama he ignited, they might not have known what to do with themselves” (11-12). Lena and Corinthians are not only terrorized by the rigidity of their father, they are also objectified. Because race and class overlap, Macon uses them along with his luxurious Hudson car as objects- an extension of his property- to show off in front of the black Michigan community, in order to distance himself socially from it. In Jessica Gama’s words, “Macon ...had children predominantly to parade them around like accessories” (Gama 50). “Fixing his gaze upon their upper middle-class clothing, Lena and Corinthians, like their mother, are bodily images: “they were all dressed up near his car, in white stocking, ribbons, and gloves” (216). They stood apart from the sweating black men, “sucking ice out of [their] handkerchiefs. Away from the black neighbourhood's children who are “barefoot,” “naked to the waist,

dirty” (216). Macon just glances at his car and at his own daughters because they are the objects of the other black men's envy (216).

When a black boy came to touch Corinthians' hair, she offered him her piece of ice. But Macon came running tossing her ice on the dirt and pushing them into the car under the gazing eyes. As Lena further points out, “First he displayed us, then splayed us like virgins through Babylon, then humiliated us like whores in Babylon” (216).

Macon not only objectifies his daughters by making them objects of exhibition, he also sees the lightness of their skin as a further extension of his social status. Russel et al point out that “color complex” is a psychological fixation about color and skin features. It “leads blacks to discriminate against each other” (2). Macon criticizes Dr. Foster for his obsession with his daughters' complexions: “Negroes in this town worshipped him. He didn't give a damn about them, though. Called them cannibals. He delivered both your sisters himself and each time all he was interested in was the color of their skin” (71). In a fashion similar to Ike McCaslin, Macon falls into the same racial obsession. Ike refuses Roth's black mistress, despite his rejection of slavery. In a voyeuristic way, he focuses on her miscegenated complexion, which he deems as a threat to the racial purity of the McCaslins, and on her threatening masculine clothing, which he associates with the Northern women. Macon, also, exhibits his daughters, who, in the process of being gazed upon, connote, what Laura Mulvey terms, “to-be-looked-at-ness,”¹⁷ because not only are they, physically, the embodiment of the black upper

¹⁷ In “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Laura Mulvey contends that “in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active-male and passive-female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness” (2186).

middle-class status, but they are also of a whiter complexion. In his display of them, both Lena and Corinthians become as objectified as his car.

As a pragmatic individual, Macon escapes the past because it has no materially functional purpose. His manipulation of power and people as objects not only inhibits him from establishing a loving collective relationship with the black community, but it also enables him to escape his own identity and heritage and, in turn, to not pass on any heritage to his own children save for his capitalist pronouncements and achievements (Bjork 82). His daughters, Lena and Corinthians, are not only bodily exhibited before others to arouse envy and to aggrandize their father's self-image and esteem (216), they are also socially disconnected from their African American surroundings.

Corinthians- at the age of forty- cannot find a husband because of her black middle-class social status. Although "she was pretty" and "pleasant enough," all the men she came across "wanted wives who could manage, who were not so well accustomed to middle-class life that they had no ambition, no hunger, no hustle in them" (188).

Corinthians does not match Black men's racial and patriarchal agenda: "They wanted their wives to like the climbing, the acquiring, and the work it took to maintain status once it was achieved" (188). They prefer women "who would sacrifice themselves and appreciate the hard work and sacrifice of their husbands" (188). Corinthians's alienation is double. Not only is she unresponsive to the norms of the local black community, she is also alienated by the white racist society that still rejects the humanity of black people. Corinthians is educated, but her race does not allow her to find a suitable job that reflects her social status. She is restricted to be the maid for the

white Miss Graham who, in turn, further uses her to aggrandize her own social status, because she is educated and the granddaughter of Dr. Foster.

Milkman is the replica of his father. He is excessively influenced by owning property, and by his father's patriarchal control over his mother and sisters. As a peacock which cannot fly, he is plagued by “warped values, inadequate character formation, and self-centredness” which all define his incomplete vision of the world (Harris 89). Milkman carries out the business of his father. He collects the money from the rents. Like his father, he believes that the capitalistic mode of owning property enables him to assert his empiricist perception of the self. By internalizing the mainstream materialistic discourse, Milkman becomes a case of Western assimilation. His friend, Guitar, explains that Milkman is incapable of understanding that “a Negro cannot be an egg,” because it is “difficult, complicated, fragile and white” (128). A black man “can't be an egg. It ain't in him. Something about his genes. His genes won't let him be no egg no matter how hard he tries. Nature says no. 'No, you can't be no egg, nigger” (115). Echoing Ike’s critique of the Enlightenment discourse¹⁸, the image of the egg accounts for the artifice of the white world wherein identity is constructed on the exclusion of the racial “Other” and on class privilege. The egg is white and “complicated” and the fragile shell that covers its inside accounts for what Guitar terms, “the unnaturalness” of the mainstream culture. Alluding to the whites, Guitar compares them to “the unnatural” people: “They know they are unnatural. Their

¹⁸ Guitar’s perception of the “unnaturalness” of the white identity, in fact, echoes Faulkner’s critique of the Enlightenment discourse, wherein the progress of the humanity does not include all races. The language of science and progress, according to Ike, constructs the racial “Other” as a natural entity so that culture legitimizes their subordination.

writers and artists have been saying it for years. Telling them they are unnatural, telling them they are deprived. . . .The disease they have is in their blood, in the structure of their chromosomes” (157), Guitar contends. As a case of Western assimilation, Milkman responds, “I want to be an egg” (117).

Born in 1931, Milkman reflects the patriarchal mindset of his era. Readers encounter him during his belated maturation in 1962 and 1963, the period of both the Civil Rights movement and black militancy. At that time, Black leaders invited their black followers and sympathetic whites to make choices between nonviolent civil disobedience and an often violent counter-racism (Harris 62). During the period of this novel's action, many blacks embraced a violent ideology, which was espoused by men like Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammed. Black militancy began to manifest itself in radical organizations like the Black Panthers. Members of these organizations relied on violence to acquire power and opted for sexism to recover and assert black manhood, preaching that black women's proper role was to “complete” or “complement” black men (62). Milkman’s obsession with the world of property enhances his social and racial distance from the black issue and renders him a politically disengaged character. Morrison introduces the figure of Guitar, the black political activist, who embodies the nationalistic politics of separation from whites, as an example to mirror Milkman's insouciance to the racism experienced by blacks during the novels' narrative action. If Guitar is involved in the Seven Days organization in order to kill white people as a political stratagem to maintain the ratio or balance, a form of resistance and black agency, Milkman, on the other hand, restricts himself to benefiting from the socio-

economic privileges that his father provides for him, and which remains the ultimate way of inserting himself racially within the racist white society.

For Milkman, race does not matter. For Guitar it does, because the poorer the black subject is, the more concerned he or she becomes with the black issue. In a fashion reminiscent to his father, Milkman does not identify with the black folk and their priorities. Rather, similar to both Macon, and Lucas Beauchamp in *Go Down, Moses*, he perceives money as a form of power and agency. In addition, he too subscribes to a patriarchal perception of women as incomplete entities to dominate. Milkman's position within two distinct discourses, that of his radically black nationalistic friend, and that of his own father, is an illustration of what W.E.B. Du Bois terms the state of "double-consciousness," "a self made ever aware by the gaze of a dominant culture of its 'twoness,' a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unrecognized strivings in one dark body" (5). In Michigan, Milkman feels that his surrounding is ghostly and unreal. He looks at himself in the mirror. "He was as usual unimpressed . . . had a fine face. Eyes that women complimented him on, a firm jaw line, splendid teeth" (69), but his image "lacked coherence, a coming together of the features into a total self" (69). In his essay, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of The Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," Lacan claims that the mirror stage functions as "the source of secondary identification," which "produces the illusive form of 'the ideal I' that situates the agency of the ego in a fictional direction, and rejoins the coming-into-being of the subject asymptotically" (1286). The function of the mirror stage is "a particular case of the function of the imago, which is to establish a relation between the organism and its reality" (1287). Throughout the novel,

Milkman senses the incompleteness of his identity, which is metaphorically bodily incorporated in his limping movement. At the age of fourteen, “he had noticed that one of his legs is shorter than the other. His left foot was about half inch off the floor. So he never stood straight. It was not a limp but an affected walk, the strut of a very young man trying to appear more sophisticated” (62). Milkman’s ideal image is to be a man, a fully developed and independent entity.

2.2 Transgressive Identities: Freedom in *Song of Solomon*

Like *Go Down, Moses*, *Song of Solomon*’s theme centers around the idea of freedom. As an African American woman writer, Morrison is not only concerned with how identity is a cultural construct, but also with how all of her characters, including not only Milkman, but also black women, negotiate, defy and subvert the discourse of race, class and gender, which is epitomized in the figure of the father, Macon. Milkman’s transgression of the law of the father is accomplished when he visits his aunt- Pilate- whom Macon despises. Milkman’s visit is portrayed as a “delicious” transgression because in Milkman’s view, it is a form of “secrecy” and “defiance” (49). However, despite this defiance, Milkman cannot liberate himself from the “phallogocentric” and empiricist education of his father. Influenced by the patriarchal dictates of his father, and obsessed with owning property, Milkman, like Macon, is detached from his familial and social surrounding, and, subsequently, fails to truly love and respect women. Milkman engages in objectifying his beloved cousin, Hagar, Pilate’s granddaughter. Like Macon, Milkman sees women in a voyeuristic way. Despite the fact that Hagar was five years older than him and that she “was as strong

and muscular as he was” (45), Milkman, metonymically, reduces her to the image of the behind. When he met Hagar for the first time, all what Milkman could see was “the bent back of a girl” (43). It seemed to Milkman that he had no need to see her face, because “he had already fallen in love with her behind” (43).

If Macon reduces Ruth to the image of the delicate underwear, Milkman reduces Hagar to the image of “the beautiful behind.” As a peacock which cannot fly, Milkman cannot perceive women in a picture other than that of his sexist father. For Milkman, Hagar is a sexually disposable property. She is “his private hot pot, not a real and legitimate girlfriend—not someone he might marry” (91). After more than a dozen years, Hagar ceases, then, to be the object of his erotic drive: “Her eccentricities were no longer provocative and the stupefying ease with which he had gotten and stayed between her legs had changed from the great good fortune to annoyance” (91). Sex with Hagar “was so free, so abundant, it had lost its fervor and excitement” (91) to the point that she became Milkman's third beer (91) because it is always there. Milkman decides to break up. He writes her a “thank you” note enclosed with money as a means of ending their relationship. In a fashion reminiscent of Roth Edmonds, in the “Delta Autumn” chapter of *Go Down, Moses* Milkman exchanges money as a payoff for the denied love. After the breakup, Hagar saw him with another girl whose “silky copper-hair” and “gray eyes,” drove her out of her mind. She becomes a “restless ghost, finding peace nowhere and in nothing” (127), a stalker, and a potential killer, trying to kill Milkman several times but to no avail. As Milkman lies in Guitar's apartment, unmoving, Hagar approaches with a knife. She knows that she can no longer evoke any emotion from him, and certainly not the pity she deserves. Milkman notices that she

was trying to kill him. He sarcastically taunts her by suggesting that she hurt herself: “If you keep your hands just that way and then bring them down straight and fast, you can drive that knife right smack in your cunt,” Milkman claims. “Why don't you do that? Then all your problems will be over” (130).

Upon noticing her inability to react, Milkman felt triumphant for “she had proved, so far, to be the world's most inept killer” (129). He “patted her cheek and turned away from her wide, dark, pleading, hollow eyes” (131). Milkman could so thoroughly mock Hagar’s love and madness because, due to her failed revenge, she made him a “star,” “a celebrity” among the black community and “one bad dude” who had the power to destroy a woman, simply because “he had fucked her and she was driven wild by the absence of his magnificent joint” (301), his hog’s gut. In an intersubjective way¹⁹, Milkman, similar to his father, needs the image of women as inferior beings in order to consolidate his “strong” male identity. Hagar, like Milkman’s subjugated sisters and mother, functions, to use Virginia Woolf’s terms, as “looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size” (45). Women are constructed as mirrors for men’s phantasms of their self-amplifying identitarian desire (Butler 18). Without the constructed negative image of women, men’s constructed power and agency fail. As Woolf further points out, “[t]he looking-glass vision is of supreme importance because it charges the vitality; it stimulates the nervous system. Take it away and man may die, like the drug fiend deprived of his cocaine” (47). Milkman, likewise, uses and abuses

¹⁹ The role of women as both the absence and presence of the phallus is similar to Hegel’s master-slave dialectics. The master’s recognition and self-consciousness comes only through the presence of the slave to consolidate his image as a free master man.

the vulnerability of Hagar, who is the mirror without whom he would fail to prove himself to be a man within the black community.

Theorizing upon Freud's Oedipal phase and Lacan's Symbolic Stage, Judith Butler, in her *Gender Trouble*, went even further as to point out that women are the Phallus, because their presence as the phallic lack is the only reference point that illusively reaffirms man's sexual identity as the phallic beholder. As she puts it, "For women to be the phallus means, then, to reflect the power of the phallus, to signify that power, to embody the phallus, to supply the site to which it penetrates, and to signify the Phallus through being its Other, its absence, its lacks, the dialectical confirmation of its identity" (56). Butler further asserts that "by claiming that the Other that lacks the Phallus is the one who is the Phallus, Lacan clearly suggests that power is wielded by this feminine position of not-having, that the masculine subject who 'has' the Phallus requires the other to confirm and, hence, be the Phallus in its 'extended' sense" (58). The role of the woman in a heterosexual discourse is both the absence and presence of the Phallus, where her phallic lack becomes the being of the phallus as her role is to consolidate the masculine identity and self-affirmation of men (57).

Milkman is accountable for the psychological breakdown of his cousin. Hagar has become obsessed and "nothing 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" (127). Hagar grows violent and wild. She "toyed with her unsucked breasts, but at some point her lethargy dissipated of its own accord and in its place was wilderness, the focused meanness of a flood or an avalanche of snow which only observers, flying in a rescue helicopter, believed to

be a an indifferent natural phenomenon, but which the victims, in their last gulp of breath, knew was both directed and personal” (128). Hagar's agitation is the outcome of passion, anger, jealousy, and “loss of face.” In “Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body,” Susan Bordo theorizes on the protesting female body in some texts written by women:

In hysteria, agoraphobia, and anorexia, then, the woman’s body may be viewed as a surface on which conventional constructions of femininity are exposed starkly to view, through their inscription in extreme or hyperliteral form. They are written, of course, in languages of horrible suffering. It is as though these bodies are speaking to us of the pathology and violence that lurks just around the corner, waiting at the horizon of ‘normal’ femininity. It is no wonder that a steady motif in the feminist literature on female disorder is that of pathology as embodied protest--unconscious, inchoate, and counterproductive protest without an effective language, voice, or politics, but protest nonetheless. (2369)

Bordo assumes that even if the bodily manifested protest of women against patriarchy is non-productive, the act itself remains an attempt to destroy the patriarchal dictates that subordinate women. Hagar’s protest is not only semiotic, in that it reflects the language of the body stripped of its symbolic agency, but her very violence makes her more entangled in the phallogocentric order that dominates her. Instead, her rejection makes her internalize, unconsciously, the Eurocentric standards and ideals of feminine beauty.

Hagar has internalized mainstream, Euro-American notions of feminine beauty and values. She desires to transform herself physically in order to look like Milkman's new girlfriend. She spends all of Pilate's and Reba's money on new clothes because "everything is a mess" (310). "No wonder ... Milkman likes silky and penny-colored hair" (315), she redundantly complains. Hagar believes that Milkman rejects her because "he likes lemon-colored skin" and "gray- blue eyes" (316). Like Ruth, whose sexual life is restricted in performing the role of a submissive middle-class wife through dressing and undressing, and like her daughters, who are "displayed" and "splayed," Hagar, in the same vein, further inserts herself into a world of hyper-feminized clothing. She becomes obsessed with cosmetics. She "believed she could spend her life there among the cut glass, shimmering in peaches and cream, in satin. In opulence. In luxe. In love" (311). Hagar is obsessed with all these commercial objects which refer to the mainstream commercial culture which "defines female beauty as white and pampered" (Walther 78).

The body is a medium of culture. Quoting from the anthropologist, Mary Douglas, Susan Bordo argues that the body is "a powerful symbolic form, a surface on which cultural rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments are inscribed and reinscribed" (2362). The body, to use Pierre Bourdieu's stance, is an immediate locus of social control and domination. "The body is in the social world and the social world is in the body" (Bourdieu *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* 26). Culture, with all its social institutions, has a conscious and unconscious impact on the behaviour of the individuals. Their manners, style, and customs are all manifestations of the cultures they occupy. As a result, individuals become the "habitus" ("Structure" 163). As

Bourdieu further contends, “Through table manners, routine habits, rules and practices,” culture is “made body,” “converted into automatic, habitual activity” (Bourdieu *Outline of a Theory of Practice* 94). The body becomes a “docile” entity, to use Foucault’s terms, since it is regulated by the norms of specific cultures (*Discipline and Punish* 135). In a patriarchal culture, Hagar becomes the gendered “docile body” in reducing herself to a mere “to-be-looked-at” woman, the object of the male gaze. All what she looks for is Milkman’s attention through transformation and improvement. In so doing, she is a reflection of those female “docile bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjugation, transformation and improvement” (“Unbearable Weight” 2363) through “the exacting and normalizing feminine discipline” of makeup, high heels, girdles and dress, which at the farthest extremes “may lead to utter demoralization, debilitation, and death” (2363).

Morrison insists that “the concept of physical beauty as a virtue is one of the dumbest, most pernicious and destructive ideas of the Western world” (“Behind” 89). Indeed, Hagar dies tragically. Her physical death illustrates, literally, the damage of the inscription of the racist and patriarchal discourse on her “suffering” body, but also, taken, metaphorically, it illustrates the demise of her agency as a woman. In Leslie Goss Erickson's terms, “Milkman's rejection is a heroic call to move toward her individuation. Instead of summoning her strength and individuality to answer the call for her heroic identitarian journey that transcends race and patriarchy, Hagar sinks even more deeply into the ideology of the society which rejects and objectifies her” (82). As she further puts it “[i]n a phallogocentric culture that conveys a woman's incomplete condition without a man, and having refused the call to overcome that

suffocating message, [Hagar] cannot defeat the trial of Milkman's indifference and move toward independence” (82). Michael Akward notes “Hagar's journey to reification and, ultimately, physical death has its source in her adoption of a patriarchal society's almost timeless figuration of a woman as object, in her futile attempt to achieve the bourgeois society's notions of female beauty” (492). In O'Reilly's words, “Had Hagar grown to maturity in a rural village, she would indeed have been raised among a community of black women who would have instilled in her pride for her black female self” (83).

Nevertheless, Morrison refuses to reduce women to the image of victims. The disintegration of Hagar and her death function as a narrative, albeit tragic, which mirrors Milkman's failure to liberate himself from the racial, class and gender dictates of the father, and, subsequently, further asserts his image of the peacock. It is true that Hagar succumbs to the patriarchal discourse that shapes her own perception of a woman who is incomplete without the presence of Milkman. However, her immersion in the capitalist and phallogocentric ideology of her society is, also, meant to accentuate Milkman's deracinated identity. Hagar functions as a double metaphor for race and gender. She is the double of Guitar. She functions as a mirror to further illustrate Milkman's distance from his own black race. Through Hagar, Milkman becomes a performing white subject to the point that her attempt at winning him back necessitated her own slippage in the discourse that does not match with her own black cultural background. Hagar echoes the character of Pecola Breedlove in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Yet, if Pecola's internalized racism stems from the racial exclusion of the white culture she lives in, Hagar's internalized racism comes directly from her

black/white cousin who makes her question her perception of beauty in highly racialized terms.

Hagar is not a deracinated character. Her frenzied behaviour and ultimate death further ingrain her in her own black legacy. She encapsulates the wilderness of the Southside: “Not the poverty or dirt or noise, not just extreme unregulated passion where even love found its way with an ice pick, but the absence of control . . . not the wilderness where there was system, or the logic of lions, trees, toads, and birds, but wild wilderness where there was none” (138). The wild passion that transcends barriers, ultimately, leads Hagar to her own death. Even if she is physically omitted from the text, Hagar, like Rider and Mannie in *Go Down Moses*, remains as the love consciousness who is juxtaposed against Milkman, the “unfeeler” and the dead, as his name symbolically suggests. Hagar dies for love, and Milkman Dead lives for his own sophisticated death-like life of surfaces and images, which is as devoid of love as his father's.

At the age of twenty-two, Milkman hit Macon Dead for slapping his mother's face- an act of defiance-which, however, further grounds him in the patriarchal world of his father. With strong Oedipal impulses, Milkman performed the role of protecting the fragile and helpless mother whom he could not rescue, in his dream, from the smothering flowers surrounding her. Narrating the dream to Guitar, Milkman focuses on Ruth digging in the garden: “She made little holes and tucked something that looked like a small onion in them . . . tulips began to grow out of the holes [then] several stalks were coming out of the ground behind her . . . the tubes were getting taller . . . pressing up against each other and up against his mother's dress” (105). But Ruth kept on

digging while some stems began to sprout bloody red heads that bobbed over and touch her back. The stems become smothering flowers, taking away her breath, and covering her till Milkman could just see a mound of tangled tulips covering her body (105). Milkman's image of the bloody and smothering flowers that are pressing against his mother's dress attests to the annihilation of her agency under the patriarchal control of the austere and loveless father.

Reference to flowers account for the dynamics of how patriarchy legitimizes the subordination of women by associating them with the natural order²⁰, which is dominated by the figure of man who symbolizes culture. Nature in the phallogocentric culture is the only property left for women. Ruth is not only the body that procreates, which links her to nature, she is also the body that Macon dresses and undresses. Milkman embodies this vision of the cultural construction of women as natural entities. It seems to him that Ruth was merely smiling and fighting them as though they were harmless butterflies. Milkman narrates the incident of beating his father to Guitar. The former associates her, implicitly, with the image of the vulnerable doe, he mistakenly hunted down: "I saw it was a doe. Not a young one; she was old, but she was still a doe. I felt . . . bad" (85), Guitar states. By associating the agency of his mother with nature, Milkman, like Guitar, and, in a fashion reminiscent to Ike McCaslin, sees black women only as helpless does. It seemed to him that it was his role to protect the fragile

²⁰ In "One is Not Born a Woman," Monique Wittig, the French writer and radical lesbian theorist, argues that women's imaginary construction as a woman in the patriarchal culture comes through her association with the natural order as through the process of procreation, matriarchy, marriage...etc: "We have been compelled in our bodies and in our minds to correspond feature by feature, with the idea of nature that has been established for us. Distorted to such an extent that our deformed body is what they call 'natural.' Distorted to such an extent that in the end oppression seems to be a consequence of this 'nature' within ourselves (a nature which is only an idea)" (2015).

doe from the tyranny of the father. In Milkman's view, this act is the normative history of the patriarchal world wherein men engage in protecting the frail and confronted the image of the father, "the King of the mountain" (75), which makes his transgressive act more poignant. In that moment, Milkman felt a "horse-galloping glee as old as desire" (68), because his actions were alone. "He knocked his father down and perhaps there were some new positions on the chessboard, but the game would go on" (68). Playing an oedipal role as a twenty-two year old, Milkman acted by instinct more than commitment when he usurped his father's authority (Otten 54).

The novel plays on appearance versus reality. Milkman constructs Ruth as a frail woman and a mother whose association with nature further objectifies her identity. In his mind, Ruth has no agency and is in need of her own son to protect her from her brutal husband. But Morrison's text unsettles this image. As Ruth grows older, she is described as "fierce in the presence of death" and "heroic even" (64). Instead of fearing death, "its threat gave her direction, clarity, and audacity" (64). Milkman's construction of his mother is juxtaposed with that of Corinthians. If Milkman associates Ruth with nature to account for her vulnerability in order to legitimize his patronizing act, Corinthians sees her as a strong woman and a trickster, who, at the surface level, gives the impression that she is harmless, but at a deeper level, she is capable "to bring her husband to a point, not of power, but of helplessness" (64). Ruth talks about her humiliation in the wedding of Anna Djvorak's son, an old Hungarian woman who had been a patient of Ruth's father. She tells about her conversation with the Catholic priest on communion. As a Methodist, Ruth, apparently, does not know that Catholics can take communion only in Catholic

churches. Macon criticizes her for being “a silly woman,” whose ignorance humiliated her in front of the white guests. But Ruth insists that she is not. Macon further insults her: He asserts that “she ain’t nobody” in the eyes of the white people, and that her presence in the weddings was simply because she was the daughter of Dr. Foster. Knowing that her husband despises her father, Ruth, in a cold-blooded tone and with pride, asserts that she is indeed her “daddy’s daughter” (67) in order to frustrate him. Ruth is not, as Milkman thinks, “insubstantial,” and a woman who lacks “a vicious vocabulary and a fast lip” (75). Ruth has the power to provoke her husband’s anger, which is expressed in violence, as a means to ridicule him and to prove that, as a weak person, he is incapable of communicating, peacefully, in words, as a normal human being.

Each step Milkman undertakes in order to defy the dictates of his father, he proves to be incapable of liberating himself and to achieve an identity which exists outside the paradigms of race, class and gender. In beating Macon to rescue his mother, Milkman’s patriarchal justification further ingrains him in his father’s limited vision of women. Ruth, who is the object of the patriarchal fight, proves to have an agency to defy the degrading patriarchal space she lives in. Milkman remains a peacock because he cannot fly. But Ruth, as opposed to the image of the doe, has agency through words and acts. Not only does she associate herself with the image of “Daddy’s girl,” in order to exasperate Macon, she also proves to be deep in thoughts rather than “insubstantial.” When she talks about her condition as a woman pressed by the tiny world of both her father and, then, her husband, Ruth proves that she is fully aware of her condition in a patriarchal culture, which restrains and subordinates women. Ruth defies Macon not

only in thoughts and words, but also in acts. Despite the fact that she is inhibited from visiting her father's grave, Ruth defies Macon's rules and finds solace in the silent cemetery to talk and express herself to the man who was the only one who really cared for her. Ruth is not afraid of death. Morrison, metaphorically, links this concept to Macon Dead's symbolic name and his patriarchal world, which both annihilate the agency of the Dead women, and to the grave. Death does not illustrate the annihilation of Ruth, as Philip Page has argued²¹. On the contrary, death empowers Ruth and gives her "direction, clarity, and audacity" (64) which helps her talk back to her brutal husband, and secretly ritualize her nightly visits to her dead father.

Morrison re-writes Faulkner's patriarchal portrayal of black women. Instead of inserting their image in the natural registry of a fragile doe²², Morrison's women have agency to speak, act, and protest. Despite his art of foregrounding the voice of the discredited, Faulkner excludes the voice of black women, in spite of their association

²¹ In *Dangerous Freedom: Fusion and Fragmentation in Toni Morrison's Novels*, Philip Page states that the name "Dead" fits Ruth well because "she perpetuates the ghost of her father and the ghost of time past" (86).

²² In the "Delta Autumn" section of *Go Down, Moses*, Ike McCaslin sees Roth Edmonds' mixed race mistress as a doe, a woman who is acted upon by the male world. Ike McCaslin, a product of the twentieth century patriarchal world, presumes that man must protect does and fawns, implying, ironically, the rational and cultural role of man in protecting the natural order of the world, including symbolically women, who are the does: "We got a deer camp-if we ever get to it," Legate, one of the hunters proclaims. Ike asserts that "It's a good time to mention does....Does and fawns both. The only fighting anywhere that ever had anything of God's blessing on it has been when men fought to protect does and fawns" (339). To this response Edmonds implicitly associates women with the doe and degrades them to the infantile world because they are irrational and plentiful: "Haven't you discovered in- how many years more than seventy is it?- that women and children are one thing there's never any scarcity of?" (339). The same image of the doe goes back in "Delta Autumn section" when Edmonds's black mistress left the hunting camp leaving Ike McCaslin murmuring "it was a doe" (365), symbolically reflecting on Roth's agency as a hunter to act upon women who belong to the natural world. John Duval in *The identifying fictions of Toni Morrison* studies the image of the doe in relation to both Faulkner and Morrison. He stipulates that, save for Pilate, all Morrison's women, similar to Faulkner's, are portrayed as does. As he puts it, "In both *Go Down, Moses* and *Song of Solomon*...killing a doe also means hurting African-American women" (99).

with love and resistance. In *Go Down, Moses*, Faulkner focuses only on the heroic quests of his male characters. Ike McCaslin, Terrel Beauchamp, Lucas Beauchamp, Roth Edmonds, and Butch Beauchamp are portrayed in the process of constructing their identities, in a manner that excludes the voices of their women. Ike sees his wife, as a sexual body, which hinders his freedom from the world of property. He deems Roth's black mistress, despite her deconstructive performance of the figure of the drag, as a doe. Terrel, despite his racial transgression of the white law, nevertheless consolidates his manhood through his marriage to Tennie. By so doing, he relegates her to the marital status. Lucas perceives Mollie, despite her association with love and racial resistance, as part of his property that he won back from his white cousin. Mollie sings the spirituals, "Go Down, Moses," but her voice and her body remain reified by the gaze of Gavin Stevens. In the end, all Faulkner's women remain confined in the gaze of men. Milkman's search for identity, on the other hand, is more entangled with the women he is in touch with. In portraying his subject formation, Morrison not only uses them as fictional tools to portray black men's fictive construction of their identity, but, in the process, brings light to their subversive powers in words and acts, and shows that they are also capable of having their own heroic journeys.

Morrison portrays her black female characters as "subjects that emerge from an oppressed situation and who seek survival" (Mori 30). Morrison's women have the power to achieve an identity which exists outside the paradigms of race, class and gender. Corinthians steps out of her father's house to achieve an autonomous identity, which unsettles Macon's obsession with the black upper middle-class status. Ruth's confinement in the patriarchal world of Macon Dead gives her strength and audacity to

confront the tiny space through the role of a trickster. Following a severe depression, Corinthians- in a fashion similar to her mother- realized that she has “to get out the house” (189). Like her mother, Corinthians becomes a manipulator. As a maid, she made of her job a secret through playing the role of a trickster: First, she lied about her job: She tells her family that she was working as “Michael-Mary Graham’s amanuensis.” Also, she makes use of her upper middle-class appearance in order to disguise: “She avoided the other maids on the streets, and those whom she saw regularly on the bus assumed that she had some higher household position than theirs since she came to work in high-heeled shoes” (189). In so doing, Corinthians makes these women believe that “only a woman who didn’t have to be on her feet all day could stand the pressure of heels on the long ride home” (190-91).

Rather than making artificial velvet roses and being, “like a child” (190)—dependent on the money of her father—Corinthians’ secret job allows her to be financially independent, responsible, and capable of creating a world of her own “to shape her time and activities carefully in order to meet the heavy demands of artistic responsibility” (191). Corinthians defies not only her father’s patriarchal and class obsession; she also negotiates her position as a maid even within her mistress’s territory: Knowing that Miss Graham uses her because of her upper middle-class status, Corinthians lies to her. “She never let her know that she had ever been to college or Europe” (191). Upon noticing that her maid can read and that she “seemed to be acquainted with some of the great masters of literature” (191), Miss Graham gave Corinthians less work to do, and integrated her in her intellectual circles of local poets, painters, musicians and writers. What Corinthians did is double-folded: She uses her

upper middle- class position in order to disguise and keep her work a secret, and to subvert Miss Graham's racial construction of her identity, which reduced her to be a maid, in order to be "almost" an amanuensis. In so doing, Corinthians, as a trickster, builds her agency in defiance to race, class and gender.

Corinthians' job allows her to meet other people. Her encounter with Henry Porter, one of Macon Dead's tenants on the South side of Michigan Street, adds to her secret life. Henry is poor. As opposed to her fancy clothes and education, Corinthians notices that he "was ill-dressed" (192). If Corinthians' class status makes her detached from the black community and its priorities, Henry, on the other hand, is secretly involved in the organization of the "Seven Days," a cell that kills white people when blacks are assassinated in order to restore a "balance," "a ratio" (158) as Guitar terms it. Corinthians "knew she was ashamed of him, that she would have to add him to the other secret, the nature of her work, that he could never set foot in her house" (194). Because they come from distinct background, Corinthians and Henry's relationship culminates in a dispute which, ultimately, propels her desire to further liberate herself from sophistication of her black middle-class background: "Corinthians Dead, the daughter of the wealthy property owner and the elegant Ruth Foster, granddaughter of the magnificent and worshipped Dr. Foster, who had been the second man in the city to have a two-horse carriage, and a woman who had turned heads on every deck of the Queen Mary and had French men salivating all over Paris" (197), is now banging on the window of Henry, a yardman, to escape forever the velvet (198), her womanly middle-class performance, which Morrison compares to "a smothering death of dry roses" (199). If Macon Dead "displayed" and "splayed" her, with Henry, Corinthians

feels “bathed,” “scoured,” “vacuumed,” “and for the first time simple” (199).

Corinthians’ romantic sexual intercourse is a refuge from “roses . . . and silk underwear and bottles of perfume” (200), from “chocolate creams in a heart-shaped box” (200), and from “a big house and a great car” (200). In Henry’s modest place, Corinthians feels she has agency. “In place of vanity she now felt a self-esteem that was quite new. She was grateful to this man who rented a tiny room from her father, who ate with a knife and did not even own a pair of dress shoes. A perfect example of the men her parents had kept her from” (201).

In performing the role of the protective brother, Milkman interferes in Corinthians’ quest. He tells his father on her secret relationship. Corinthians is now forbidden to leave the house. Her father forced her to quit her job, evicted Henry and garnished his wages (215). Milkman’s patronizing act is, once again, subverted by women. Corinthians decides to move to a small house in Southside with Porter (334). In defending her sister, Lena reminds Milkman of the day when he peed on the maple tree whose leaves are now dead. “You have been laughing at us all your life . . . Corinthians. Mama. Me. Using us, ordering us, and judging us: how we cook your food; how we keep your house” (216), Lena protests. “You don’t know a single thing about either of us. We made roses, that’s all you knew” (215). Lena continues, “Our girlhood was spent like a found nickel on you. When you slept, we were quiet; when you were hungry, we cooked; when you wanted to play, we entertained you” (215). Returning the gaze on Milkman, Lena contends that his assumption of authority comes from “that hog’s gut that hangs down between [his] legs” (216), which makes him a “sad,” “pitiful,” “stupid,” “selfish,” and “hateful man” (216). As Patrick Bryce Byork

puts it, “Lena further testifies to Milkman's disconnection from self and place by simply restricting himself in performing the prescribed social codes of womanizing and male-domination which mask and assuage his sense of insecure self (101). Lena’s protest, similar to Ruth’s, is a testimony to the fact that she is rebellious. She associates the Dead women’s servitude with the act of “making artificial flowers,” which constitutes a form of sublimation, to replace the potential violence that these suffocated women are capable of inflicting on Milkman: “I was the one who started making artificial flowers....It kept me quiet,” Lena confesses. “That’s why they make those people in the asylum weave baskets and make rag rugs. It kept them quiet. If they didn’t have baskets they might find out what’s really wrong and do something. Something terrible” (213). Reference to the artificial roses illustrates the fact that Lena is aware that gender is fake, a performance. She sees herself to be “the last rose” that Milkman has pissed in the house. Lena, metaphorically, implies that she ceased to be a woman: “I don’t make roses anymore” (216). She asks Milkman to get out of her room.

Reference to the room recalls Virginia Woolf’s long essay, *A Room of One’s Own*, when she stipulates that “a woman must have her own room in order to write” (4). Lena finds her space in rejecting her identity of an “artificial rose” and in excluding her brother, the mirror of Macon Dead, from her room. Corinthians finds her space in her job and in the simple room of Henry Porter. Ruth finds her room in the cemetery in order to express herself. Hagar, despite her physical annihilation, finds her room in the textual space, wherein she becomes the voice of love. Morrison’s women have agency. They unsettle the male-dominated heroic design of Faulkner in *Go Down*,

Moses, wherein women are acted upon and are only mirrors and objects in consolidating men's fictional identities. Morrison's women are not, as Harris puts it, "servants who content themselves with existing in the tiny spaces into which Macon and Milkman have shoved them" (109). Morrison's black women are not the does, nor men's objects, but subjects whose actions and yearnings affect Milkman's life: "My family's driving me crazy," Milkman complains to Guitar. "My mother wants me to think like her and hate my father. Corinthians won't speak to me; Lena wants me out. And Hagar wants me chained to her bed or dead" (222). Milkman feels hated, excluded and confined within these women's spaces. Feeling marginalized, he decides to escape from the house. His escape, however, makes him more involved in the life of another woman, his aunt, Pilate Dead, who will, subsequently, change the trajectory of his life.

2.3 Pilate, the Subversive Voice of the Black Ancestral Legacy

In most of her novels, Morrison supplies the black deracinated subjects of the urban North with a black female ancestral figure, who functions as the bridge that helps male uprooted characters come to terms with their forgotten ancestral past. Pilate, in this part of this chapter is not only the mediator who will help Milkman achieve a hybrid identity, which is rooted in the Southern past. She is the voice of race consciousness in performing her role as an ancestress, and more importantly, a transgressive female figure who transcends patriarchy and racial paradigms. In a fashion similar to Faulkner's portrayal of Mollie Beauchamp, Pilate, in *Song of Solomon*, has a strong presence and challenges the racially demarcated space she occupies. Pilate reflects the rural South. Even though her neighbourhood is located in

Michigan, her house and her presence in the Southside endows the Northern space with the aura of the rural South. In Ruth's view, the place represents the Southern "wild wilderness" in miniature (138). Pilate's moral order is a subversive presence in the Northern capitalist milieu. As opposed to Macon Dead's materialistic world of owning property, Pilate's household is simplicity and "hand-to-mouth existence" (Matus 84). Her house resembles one in a traditional African village compound (Middleton 116). She uses candles and kerosene, and cooks over a three-stone fireplace. Pilate lives "pretty much as though progress was a word that meant walking a little farther down the road" (27). If Macon Dead's materialistic upper middle-class household is loveless and cold, Pilate's house is a loving alternative world where "it was the first time in his life that [Milkman] remembered being completely happy. . . .He was sitting comfortably in the notorious wine house; he was surrounded by women who seemed to enjoy him and who laughed out loud . . . No wonder his father was afraid of them" (47).

Pilate is metaphorically associated with the guiding and protective ancestral figure. She is a magical healer and a strong woman who valorizes her cultural heritage as part of her inheritance. She is the "custodian of the culture" (Arhin 92) who epitomizes "those African American women who have historically mothered African American culture into being" (Reagon 177). In short, she is an "operative agency of culture" (Rigney 45). She "has stature, strength, and presence" with her black skin, wine-colored lips and her constant act of chewing the stick between her lips, much like a West African market woman (Wilentz "Civilization Underneath" 116). If Mollie Beauchamp sings the "Go Down, Moses" spirituals, Pilate sings the blues, which, in

spite of Macon Dead's rejection, is still a seductive trace of his ancestral past. He "surrender[s] to the sound...The music makes him think of fields and wild turkey and calico" (36). Hidden in the darkness, Macon observes "the effortless beauty of the women singing in the candlelight" (29). He contemplates Pilate's face which "would be a mask" from which "all emotion and passion would have left her features and entered her voice" (29). Contrasting the Southern orality of Pilate's female circle to Macon Dead's urban voyeurism, Kimberley Benston writes that Macon's voyeuristic observation of the women illustrates "the mastery of [a] reified perception" (90). Whereas Macon's gaze is detached and disembodied, "the act of listening is trope and substance of renewal through sympathetic identification," of "immersion in the other's domain" (100).

Pilate's voice is juxtaposed against Macon's description of her house whose "basement seemed to be rising from rather than settling into the ground" (25). The oral atmosphere that endows Pilate's surrounding is metaphorically compared to her house, which in its metaphoric rising, reflects the oral African American tradition of Pilate which transcends the hard-core materialistic and scriptographic moral order of Macon—his voyeurism and his belief in the empirical facts. Pilate does not only sing; she is also a storyteller who provides Milkman with bits of information concerning his family history:

Hadn't been for your daddy. I wouldn't be here today. I would have died in the womb. And died again in the woods. Those woods and the dark would have surely killed me. But he saved me and here I am boiling eggs. Our papa was dead, you see. They blew him five feet up into the

air. He was sitting on his fence waiting for'em and they snuck up from behind and blew him feet in the air. So when we left Circe's big house we didn't have no place to go, so we just walked around and lived in them woods. . . .And talking about dark! You think dark is just one color, but it ain't. There're five or six kinds of black. Some silky, some woolly. Some just empty. Some like fingers. And it don't stay still. It moves and changes from one kind of black to another. (40)

Characteristic of an oral storyteller, Pilate relates events to events and moments to moments which intersect with a pulsing poetic quality that transforms historical fact into a felt experience (Byork 90). When Guitar asks, “What year?” Pilate responds, “The year they shot them Irish people down in the streets. Was a good year for guns and gravediggers” (42). Pilate's language has musicality in it. She repeats the way how her father was shot to emphasize the traumatic scene of his death. In fact, her reference to the types of darkness illustrates the horror of the racist experience. Like a musician, Pilate delays the immediacy of her message by referring to the whites as “they,” which further accounts for the difficulty of relating images to the traumatic experience of her father's killing. Yet, despite her illiteracy, Pilate plays the role of the educator who “turn[s] [her] plea into a note and pass[es] on the memory of names that were stolen and the stories suppressed” (Wilentz 73).

Pilate not only epitomizes the African oral art, but also what Morrison perceives as “the timeless ancestral figure whose relationship to the character is benevolent, instructive, and protective, and provides a certain kind of wisdom” (Erickson 76) and guide. The figure is known by the African term “griot,” who

mediates between the self and community (Erickson 76). Pilate “was a natural healer, and among quarrelling drunks and fighting women she could hold her own, and sometimes mediated a peace that lasted a good bit longer than it should have because it was administered by someone not like them” (*SOS* 150). After her split with Macon, Pilate seeks to re-connect with her brother, especially after the realization that Hagar, her “prissy” granddaughter, needs a more conventional, stable and collective family life for her equilibrium (150). Though Macon refuses to accept her as part of his family, she, nevertheless, settles close to Macon in order to protect and guide the remaining fragile family.

As an ancestral figure, Pilate “represents the ultimate value in life, namely, the continuation of the group” (Steady 32). She seeks to reconcile the members of the black community. In a fashion reminiscent of Faulkner's Mollie Beauchamp, Pilate preserves “the Fire and the Hearth” of the Deads. Whereas Mollie nurses the white orphan-Ruth Edmonds-Pilate helps Ruth to connect sexually with her cold husband. Ruth had been desperate for greater intimacy with Macon and to have another baby, the “first off—a wished-for bond between herself and Macon—something to hold them together and reinstate their sex lives” (131). Pilate helps this connection through her magical remedy—a greenish-gray powder that accelerates sexual appetite. But soon, Macon discovers the ruse and tries to force Ruth to abort. When the situation accelerates into physical violence, Ruth runs to the Southside looking for Pilate—her refuge. Pilate, then, helps her until the last spell was “a male doll with a small chicken bone stuck between its legs and a round red circle painted on its belly” (132) that she placed in Macon Dead's office in order to spare Ruth from a forced abortion. Pilate,

therefore, helps Ruth keep the baby, Milkman, “her beautiful toy, a respite, a distraction” (132). She becomes the symbol of life and fertility. In so doing, Pilate engages in the African American custom of “othermothering.” “Nurturing children in black extended family networks,” writes Patricia Hill Collins, “stimulates a more generalized ethics of caring and personal accountability among African American women who often feel accountable to all the black community's children” (129).

Pilate was named by her father, who “[c]onfused and melancholy over his wife's death in child-birth, had thumbed the Bible and, since he could not read a word, chose a group of letters that seemed to him strong and handsome” (18). He “saw in them a large figure that looked like a tree hanging in some princely but protective way over a row of smaller trees” (18). Though the designation of Pilate's name is a random one, it is, nevertheless, symbolically meaningful. Reference to the tree reflects rootedness, which Morrison contrasts with Macon Dead's cultural dislocation. Pilate is the preserver of her ancestry. Morrison further compares her to “a black tall tree” (39) to further account for her “rootedness,” a qualification which is further reinforced through Pilate's act of keeping a rock from every place she visited. “Every place I went I got me a rock” (142), she contends. Pilate possesses psychic and supernatural abilities; after witnessing her father's death, she sees him in visions. She then preserves his bones, which were thought to be the white man's that Macon Dead killed down in the Pennsylvania cave. Obsessed with owning property, Macon Dead, struggles to own the bag of gold placed next to the dead body, because at the sight of it “life, safety, and luxury fanned out before him like the tail-spread peacock” (170). But Pilate, like Mollie Beauchamp in *Go Down, Moses*, refuses. She asserts that, in her African

American belief, stealing the money, or owning a treasure, which is not the fruit of one's own labour, is sinful. Instead, after giving birth to her child, Reba, Pilate's father comes to her, asking her to "sing," and to go back to Pennsylvania and collect what was left of the man she and Macon Dead murdered (147). Believing the bones to be the white man's, Pilate preserves it as her "inheritance" (97), a tribute to the dead, because, as the voice of her dead father proclaims, "a human life is precious" (208), and "one can't fly on off and leave a body" (147). "And the dead you kill is yours . . . your responsibility" (209).

"As a mistress to the two worlds of time and eternity, she stands at the threshold between them, interpreting for those younger the lessons and values of human life and human morality" (Lichtman 66). Pilate's ability to hear the voice of the dead father is what Morrison calls "the discredited" knowledge of the African American world. "I could blend the acceptance of the supernatural and a profound rootedness in the real world at the same time with neither taking precedence over the other. It is indicative of the cosmology, the way in which black people looked at the world," Morrison remarks. "We are very practical people ...but within that practicality we also accepted what I suppose could be called superstition and magic, which is another way of knowing things . . . And some of those things were 'discredited knowledge' that black people had; discredited only because Black people were discredited therefore what they knew was 'discredited'" ("Rootedness" 342). It is this "discredited knowledge" that Pilate has and which is a unique way of knowing that characterizes black women in most of Morrison's fictions. In *Song of Solomon*, Macon tells Milkman to avoid Pilate because she is a "snake" who "can't teach you a thing you

can use in this world. Maybe the next, but not this one” (55). He also asserts that one can never know what Pilate knows. Pilate, as opposed to Macon's and Milkman's materialist knowledge, has “an Afrocentric perspective in which there is dialogue with the ancestors, extended longevity, and perceptions of things outside a narrow, literalist vision” (Wilentz 121). Like Mollie Beauchamp, who knows intuitively that something bad has happened to her great-grandson, Pilate also knows things intuitively and does not rely on hard facts or institutionalized knowledge. She criticizes the mainstream education of the deracinated blacks who according to her “must be the dumbest unhung Negroes on earth” (37).

Morrison is doing more than portraying Pilate as the voice of racial consciousness. More than Faulkner, she provides this character with a narrative of identity quest by chronicling her life of being an outcast, a state which nourishes her will to become not only an ancestress, but also a subversive figure in a heterosexual culture. Since her birth, Pilate is marked with a physical anomaly. She has no navel: “the baby, who they had believed was dead also, inched its way headfirst out of a still, silent, and indifferent cave of flesh, dragging her own cord and her own afterbirth behind her. . . .Once the new baby’s lifeline was cut, the cord stump shriveled, fell off, and left no trace of having ever existed” (*SOS* 28). Pilate’s navel-less body is the source of her marginalization and sequestered life. It hedges her love relationships and her connections with the black community. “It isolated her. Already without family, she was further isolated from her people, for, except for the relative bliss on the island, every other resource was denied her: partnership in marriage, confessional friendship, and communal religion” (*SOS* 148). Men were frightened to see her naked. Even

though they “fucked armless women, one-legged women, hunchbacks and blind women, drunken women, razor-toting women, midgets” (148), the sight of her belly that looked like a back, destabilizes their perception of women, and makes them feel they are limp and cold. Women “whispered and shoved their children behind them” (97).

Although this navel lack is the source of her ostracization, it, nevertheless endows Pilate with the figure of the wanderer, whose identity, in Pearson's view-stems from being an outsider (52), a state, which defines itself in direct opposition to a conformist norm (52). The lack of navel symbolically reflects Pilate's strong and subversive character. In Samuels's and Hudson-Weems's words, “[her lack of a navel] symbolizes her independent and untrammelled spirit; she is not anchored to anyone or anything” (61). Mollie Beauchamp, in “The Fire and Hearth” chapter, is controlled by the patriarchal gaze of her husband who sees her, in the final scene, after his fight with Zack, as the same wife wearing the same faded dress and performing domestic tasks. Pilate, on the other hand, transgresses gender norms. Unlike Mollie, Hagar, Ruth and her daughters, who are immersed in the bodily performance of femininity, Pilate wears pants and leads a nomadic life style. Poor as she is, she is only concerned with reading geographical books, which help her move in and out of the spatial territories she occupies. By her own free will she decided to build a life of her own. “Although she was hampered by huge ignorances, but not in any way unintelligent, when she realized what her situation in the world was and would probably always be, she threw away every assumption she had learned and began at zero” (149). First off “she cut her hair . . . then she tackled the problem of trying to decide how she wanted to live and what

was valuable to her” (149). In John N. Duvall's words, Pilate re-evaluates life in a way that places her in the tradition of Emersonian self-reliance, making her a cross between Henry David Thoreau and Hester Prynne (92). Performing Thoreau's call to reassessment, she decided to start a fresh with her life in order to ask herself fundamental questions about how to live in the world (92). And like Hester Prynne, who covers her hair under a cap, Pilate cuts her hair to repress her sexuality which caused her troubles among the black migrant community. Like Hester, she decided to live on the margin of the community to create a woman-centered community that operates without regard for middle-class conventions or expectations of men (92).

Pilate's gender transgression is physically accounted for when Milkman describes her as an androgynous woman, “sitting wide-legged . . . she was all angles . . . knees, mostly, and elbows. One foot pointed east, and one pointed west” (36). “Why can't you dress like a woman?” the patriarchal Macon Dead protests. “What's that sailor's cap doing on your head?” Later he adds: “Don't you have stockings? What are you trying to make me look like in this town?” (21). Like Roth Edmonds's black mistress in “Delta Autumn,” who disrupts Ike's masculine space in the woods with her masculine clothes, Pilate's masculine appearance also marks her with the figure of drag, which subverts the established feminine appearance of woman within the patriarchal world of both white and black society. In portraying Pilate, Morrison re-writes Faulkner's scene wherein Lucas Beauchamp fights with his white cousin over his wife. Like Lucas, Pilate uses a knife to subdue her daughter's man: “approaching the man from the back, Pilate whipped her right arm around his neck and positioned the knife at the edge of his heart” (93). Pilate did not move until the man felt the blood

coming from his neck. Pilate, then, whispers: “You might lose about two tablespoons of blood, but no more. And if you’re real still, honey, I can get it back out without no mistake” (94). If Faulkner attributes physical power and the symbol of the knife to manhood, Morrison attributes them to Pilate. Mollie Beauchamp, in *Go Down, Moses*, is the object of the patriarchal battle. She is not equipped with physical and emotional strength as Pilate. In confronting Reba’s man, Pilate subverts Faulkner’s conventional perception of heterosexuality. Pilate becomes, like a man, who is also capable to defend a woman. Pilate, like Lucas, defeats her opponent with such a strength that even her neighbours believe that she has the “power to step out of her skin, set a bush afire from fifty yards, and turn a man into a ripe rutabaga” (*SOS* 94).

Pilate subverts not only the patriarchal dictates of the category of woman, but also the dictates of “good” motherhood, namely, that mothers are to be respectable, moral, chaste, passive, obedient, controlled, altruistic, selfless, and domestic (O’Reilly 81). If Mollie performs the role of the mother and is institutionally tied to her marriage to Lucas, Pilate—as an independent woman—refused a marriage to the man who fathered her child, Reba. Instead of relying financially on men, Pilate embarks on an unconventional job of a bootlegger, which is usually linked to the male outlaws, in order to provide for her own family. In so doing, Pilate becomes the “outlaw of the institution of motherhood,” resisting the patriarchal script of motherhood that demands women mother children in a nuclear family in which the mother is subservient/inferior, economically and psychologically, to her husband (O’Reilly 81). In Carmen Gillespie’s words, “Pilate’s life is lived in defiance of traditional definitions of womanhood. Her birth from a dead mother and her maturation without a navel reinforces her

metaphysical and psychological independence” (174). Even if she dismisses much of what society finds conventionally valuable, Pilate exists within that same society and embodies the characteristics of Pearson's Magician (174):

The Magician learns that we are not life's victims; we are part of the unfolding of God . . . understanding that each of us contributes to the unfolding of God, not by holding back our natures to live up to some ideal of perfection, but by allowing ourselves to be who we are, to love who and what we love, and to do the work that brings pleasure to our hearts and minds. (117-118)

As her name phonetically suggests, Pilate is not only an elusive and transgressive character, but is a pilot in Milkman's life. We first encounter her in the tragic and comic opening of the novel. She sings “O sugarman done fly away” in a moment when Robert Smith, a North Carolina Mutual life insurance agent, tried to leap to his death from the roof of Mercy Hospital. Pilate is present in this scene where the images of the death are intermingled with the pregnant Ruth who starts moaning and holding the underside of her stomach (50). Pilate, at that moment, was “poorly dressed as the doctor's daughter was well dressed” (5). Ruth wore “a neat gray coat with the traditional pregnant-woman bow at her navel, a black cloche, and a pair of four-button ladies' galoshes” (5). But Pilate “wore a knitted navy cap pulled far down over her forehead” (5). As an ancestress, “she had wrapped herself up in the quilt instead of a winter coat. Her head cocked to one side, her eyes fixed on Mr Robert Smith, she sang in a powerful contralto” (5-6):

O Sugarman done fly away

Sugarman done gone

Sugarman cut across the sky

Sugarman gone home[...]. (6)

Pilate's song is "a register of historical and cultural memory" (Grewal 61) which subverts the middle-class identification of Ruth and her daughters. It also attests to the intuitionist power of Pilate, who intuitively predicts the birth of Milkman: "a little bird'll be here with the morning" (8), she tells Ruth. The scene becomes "some form of worship" (6), a "mythic enactment of heroic birth" (Byork 85). The presence of Pilate, the theme of the flight, and the prediction of the birth of the bird are all symbols that predict the heroic journey of Milkman through Pilate. Pilate designates Milkman to be a bird, and this designation will have a performative dimension on his subsequent life. Her symbolic role as a pilot in the life of Milkman is not only restricted in saving him from an abortive father, in providing him with an alternative world of love, away from the household of his father, and in nourishing him with the stories of his family background, which, however, are proven to be inconclusive because of Milkman's capitalist obsession. Throughout all his developmental life stages, Pilate is present in Milkman's life, but, as he starts his maturation, her guiding role becomes more poignant. Near the end of *Song of Solomon*, we encounter Milkman at the age of thirty-one, but he is still entrapped within his father's materialistic values. Not only does he intrude onto Pilate's circle of women and ultimately destroy Hagar's life after years of sexual use, he intends to steal the gold he and his father assume that Pilate stole back in the Pennsylvania cave. "The tarpaulin was green. . . . Now you tell me she got a green

sack full of something hard enough to give you a hickey on your head when you bumped into it. That's the gold, boy. . . .Get it" (172), Macon urges his son.

This materialistic urge involves Milkman in the act of breaking and entering Pilate's house, with his friend- Guitar- in order to steal the green bag of gold. In the act of stealing, Milkman "felt a self inside himself emerge, a clean-lined definite self" (184). The bag hung heavy, "like the green of Easter eggs left too long in the dye. And like Easter, it promised everything: the Risen Son and the heart's lone desire. Complete power, total freedom" (185). But, on their way home, Milkman and Guitar were arrested by the police. As a protective figure, Pilate tells the police a lie: that the bones were her husband's whose burial was so expensive that she was obliged to keep the remains with her. As a result, she "opens herself up wide for their amusement, their pity, their scorn, their mockery, their disbelief, their meanness, their whimsy, their annoyance, their power, their anger, their boredom" (210). If Faulkner's Mollie Beauchamps signifies upon Roth Edmonds' white discourse of distancing himself from her black family by directing the same logic of exclusion toward him, Pilate, in a similar fashion, signifies upon the white order: she manipulates the police. In manipulating the white legal institutions and law, Pilate, as her symbolic name designates, changes shape, form, and personality. In Gay Wilentz's words, "Pilate takes on the changeable characteristics of Legba, the African deity worshipped throughout the Caribbean and parts of the South. Almost the height of Macon, she shrinks herself in front of the police, turning her strong powerful African presence into a stereotypical imitation of Aunt Jemima" (*Binding Cultures* 88). Pilate plays the role of the trickster in imitating the figure of the "Sambo," a "docile [body] but irresponsible, loyal but

lazy, humble but chronically given to lying and stealing” (Elkins 82). Pilate performs what the white authority racially expects from the docile black body as a tamed entity but subject to hidden acts of manipulation.

Pilate's art of lying constitutes her private protective tactic, or what James C. Scott terms “the hidden transcript,” the underside of the “public transcript” wielded by the dominant over the subordinate. Public transcripts, Scott suggests, plot out “the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate” (2), that is, the rule for “hegemonic conduct” (xii), but those transcripts alone, don’t tell the whole story. “Every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a ‘hidden transcript’ that presents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant” (xii). Such critiques, Scott contends, are “expressed openly, albeit in disguised form,” in “rumors, gossip, folktales, songs, gestures, jokes, and theatre of the powerless as vehicles for insinuation and insubordination” (xiii). Milkman fails to recognize his aunt's transgressive techniques. But, at least he acknowledges her protective role in dehumanizing herself in front of the white police. He feels ashamed of his act of robbing the bag of bones from a woman who brought him into the world. However, his struggle to achieve financial autonomy and agency does not stop him from tracking the gold, because “[a] grown man can also be energized by hunger, and any weakness in his knees or irregularity in his heartbeat will disappear if he thinks his hunger is about to be assuaged. Especially if the object of his craving is not gingerbread or chewy gumdrops, but gold” (219). The gold-similar to Lucas Beauchamp in *Go Down Moses*- becomes, for Milkman, a source for freedom and independence. In search for the treasure, Milkman, like the bird, feels that he must fly to Pennsylvania, then to the South,

Shalimar, to achieve his material autonomy in order to escape from the burden of his dysfunctional family. “He wanted to beat a path away from his parents' past . . . which was threatening to become his present as well” (180). He struggles to escape from all those whom he believes have threatened him “like a garbage pail,” dumping into him all of their “actions and hatred” (222). Ironically, the material impulse turns into a spiritual quest for a collective and hybrid identity, which resists the dichotomies of race, class and gender.

2.4 The Journey Within: The Myth of the Flying African and Milkman's Southern Experience

Because we are/were products of separations and dislocations and dismemberings, people of African descent in the Americas historically have sought reconnection. From the 'flying back' stories which originated in slavery to the 'back to Africa' movements of Garvey and those before him, to the Pan-Africanist activity of people like Dubois and C. L. R. James, this need to reconnect and re-member, as Morrison would term it, has been a central impulse in the structuring of Black thought. (Carole Boyce Davies 17)

As he takes his first airplane flight to Pennsylvania, Milkman introspectively thinks that “this one time he wanted to go solo. In the air, away from real life, he felt free, but on the ground . . . the wings of all those other people's nightmare flapped in his face and constrained him” (222). As an African American novelist, Morrison

embarks on the myth of the flying African. The myth refers to the imagination of supernatural power and the soul's return from exile, presumably, to Africa. It historically impregnated oral modes of black resistance – such as tales and songs- especially the blues²³ and Negro spirituals²⁴- which were performed by black slaves, and functioned as hidden transcripts since the notion of the flight expressed black slaves' yearning for freedom from a constraining and repressive context. Even if the theme of escape is a universal yearning that also characterizes Western cultures, African American writers still persist on the myth of the flying African, which has become linked to the idea of black creative energies (McDaniel 36). Morrison not only associates it with the black cultural personality and aesthetics, but also uses the trope of the flight in Milkman's journey in order to unsettle Faulkner's essentialist definition of individual journey in *Go Down, Moses*. Despite the individualistic pronouncement on the nature of his escape from Michigan, Milkman's journey is, like the myth of the flying African, aerial, and, like the symbolic name of Pilate, he has to pilot across different spaces in order to complete his journey. His quest, as opposed to that of Ike McCaslin and Lucas Beauchamp, is not geographically confined in the Southern space, which delineates a fixed identity rooted only in the South. The aerial journey in *Song of Solomon* is transgeographical, a movement in and outside local territories, which will ultimately create a hybrid identity based on collective, rather than dichotomized, encounters and interaction with others.

²³ Black American song is filled with reference to flight. The blues - more than any other song genre- projects masked and common metaphor of physical flight to represent social escape (Chartres 70).

²⁴ "Negro spiritual adapts the Christian vision of the soul's ascent to heaven, of its flight 'to Jesus and to rest'" (MacDaniel 34)

In re-writing Faulkner's heroic journey, Morrison perceives that African American culture and heritage has always already been plural and hybridized even before the rise of postmodernism's celebration of fragmentation, discontinuity, and diversity. Literature, written by African American writers and poets that dates back to the eighteenth century has always functioned as a subversive discourse against nationalist "exceptionalism" and absolutism of European and American intellectuals. In *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy, in a fashion similar to Henry Louis Gates, foregrounds the miscegenation of black culture and identity. He translates the fluid and hybrid African American art and legacy in the metaphor of the Black Atlantic that obliterates "logocentrism" (4): "I have settled on the image of ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a central organizing symbol for this enterprise," Gilroy contends. "The image of the ship—a living, micro-cultural, micropolitical system in motion focuses attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well the movement of key cultural and political artefacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs" (4). "Double-consciousness," as it is epitomized in the image of the transatlantic ship, is an intercultural position that transcends and deconstructs conventional binary and hierarchical boundaries between whiteness and blackness and particulars (6). According to Gilroy, "ships were the living means by which the points within that Atlantic world were joined. They were mobile elements that stood for the shifting spaces in between the fixed places that they connected" (16). The ship provides a chance to explore the articulations between the discontinuous histories of England's ports, its interfaces with the wider world.

Ships also refer us back to the middle passage, to the half-remembered micro-politics of the slave trade and its relationship to both industrialization and modernization (17). For all these reasons, the ship is the first of the novel's chronotope presupposed to rethink modernity via the history of the Black Atlantic and African diaspora into the western hemisphere (17). In theorising upon the hybridity of culture, James Clifford- in a similar vein- refers to Gilroy's transcultural African American experience. In his well-known essay, "Travelling Culture," Clifford writes: "The history of transatlantic enslavement-to mention only a particularly violent example - an experience including deportation, uprooting, maroonage, transplantation, and revival - has resulted in a range of interconnected cultures – African American, Afro-Caribbean, British, and South American" (108). Culture- to use Levi-Strauss's words-is "a place of transit, not of residence" (*Tristes Tropiques* 120). Cultures are never fixed and stable. They are "Travelling" rather than "dwelling cultural units" (Clifford 101). If Gilroy embarks on the notion of the transatlantic ship to designate hybridity, Clifford, on the other hand, stresses the idea of "travel" because "culture is "a site of travel encounter as of residence, less a tent in a village or a controlled site of initiation and inhabitation" (101). Morrison's perception of African American cultural identity corroborates Gilroy and Clifford's innovative assumptions on cultures. Milkman's aerial journey, even more than Gilroy's metaphoric designation of the ship, better translates the idea of culture as a transcultural space. Aerial trip presupposes plural aspects of the "travelling" self in process, a self which exists outside the conventionally paradigmatic world of race, class, and gender.

As opposed to Lucas Beauchamp and Ike McCaslin, Milkman's journey is not rooted in a fixed space. He has to move to Danville, wherein he hears mixed stories of his family's past. His encounter with the Reverend Cooper, the old man who knows everybody, enables Milkman to be enticed by stories of his successful grandfather- Macon Dead I. He owned a land- a possession which consolidated his black masculine identity in the Montour County. As Cooper described it, it was a farm that colored the lives of the black community, speaking to them like a sermon: "See? See what you can do? Never mind you can't tell one letter from another, never mind you born a slave, never mind you lose your name. . . .Here, this here, is what a man can do if he puts his mind to it and his back in it" (235). The land becomes an insertion, an advantage to integrate in the white empiricist society. The Deads' farm says, "stop picking around the edges of the world," to "take advantage," and that "if you can't take advantage, take disadvantage" (235). Blacks as part of the United States must have their share of wealth, because they "live in this planet, in this nation, in this country right here" (235). One must take the land, "hold it," "make it," "shake it," "squeeze it," "turn it," "seed it," "reap it," "rent it," "buy it," "multiply it, and pass it on" (235). The land, therefore, must be owned and acted upon to exercise power over it, and thus to make it a part of one's empirical self. Upon hearing the story of his grandfather's success, Milkman, then, narrates the accomplishment of his father as a mode of resistance against racism. He enumerates the houses Macon Dead has, the variety of brand cars he has, and how he tried to buy the Erie Lackawanna. The black men hoot with joy. They want to know everything so that Milkman finds himself "rattling off assets like an accountant, describing deals, total rent incomes, bank loans . . . and the stock market"

(236). In the midst of his telling, he yearns to snatch the bag of gold right from under the noses of the Butlers, “who were dumb enough to believe that that if they killed one man his whole line died” (236). Despite the fact that Cooper’s story of Macon Dead I centers around the discourse of property, his narrative, nevertheless, not only pronounces the history of the institutionalized dispossession of blacks but also provides Milkman with crucial information about his unknown past.

Milkman's next step is to visit the Butlers' farm, a place which the ancestral figure, Circe, haunts. Circe is “a keeper of spirit, a vessel of secret from the past, a figure so utterly beyond the pale of the white logos” (Powell 56057). In a voyeuristic way, Milkman notices that “she was old. So old she was timeless” (240). In tracking down the gold, Milkman, once again, meets his past. Circe, like Pilate, is a healer, the mid-wife who delivered almost all of the black Danville children, including Pilate and Macon Dead. She tells Milkman how she played the role of the protective figure by keeping both his father, Macon, and Pilate hidden in the elegant mansion of the white Butler family, who, ironically, killed their father. Like the Danville men, Circe provides Milkman with bits of his genealogical past, but, in a manner that transcends the mainstream discourse of property. She introduces his grandmother, Sing, a young Native American of mixed race ancestry whose life she failed to save after delivering Pilate. In doing so, Circe tells him the legal name of his grandfather, Jake. Circe is not only the provider of Milkman's past. But, like Pilate, she provides a contrast to Milkman's materialistic pursuit. If Milkman's initiation is to achieve financial autonomy to escape the love and the burden of his family and to assert his identity in the white empiricist culture, Circe's racialized resistance is to witness the decay of the

Butlers. Despite her timeless age, she still lives in the Butlers's household with the dogs.

Her servitude after the death of the Butler family is not an instance of what Guitar would have called “voluntary slavery,” but a revenge against the capitalist system, which engaged in enslaving the black body as a further provision of human capital and compelled servitude. “They loved this place . . . brought pink veined marble from across the sea for it and hired men in Italy to do the chandelier that I had to climb a ladder and clean with white muslin once every two months” (247), Circe points out. They “[s]tole for it, lied for it, killed for it. But I'm the one left. Me and the dogs . . . everything in this world they lived for will crumble and rot. . . .And I want to see it all go, make sure it does go, and that nobody fixes it up” (247). Circe's “propertylessness” outlives the materialistic world of the Butlers and, in a biblical tone, she insists, like Ike McCaslin, that man's search for wealth is futile. But Milkman's obsession with property makes him unable to detect the moral implication of Circe's narrative. Instead, she becomes the agent who shows him the path to the cave where the bag of gold is supposed to be. In Mobley's words, Circe becomes “a spiritual midwife to Milkman, helping him to give birth to himself” (121). She gives Milkman his amulets, in the form of his family, and points the way forward: “Right in there the woods are open. Walk a little way in and you'll come to a creek. Cross it there'll be some more woods, but ahead you'll see a short range of hills. The cave is right on the face of those hills. You can't miss it” (245). Circe's presence, like Pilate's, is a typical element of Milkman's heroic journey. As Joseph Campbell argues in *The Hero of a Thousand Faces*: “The first encounter of the hero is with a protective figure (often a little old

crone or old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass” (69).

Milkman follows Circe's instructions “scriptographically.” In a fashion reminiscent of Ike McCaslin, he relies on print to track down his destination. The Pennsylvania woods, mistakenly, reminds him of City Park, “the tended woods on Honore' Island where he went for outings as a child and where tiny convenient paths led you through” (250). The search for the cave becomes the beginning of the literal stripping process (Harris 97). His city hat gets ripped off by tree branches. He must take off his shoes and socks in crossing the stream to the cave, and his bare feet are “unprepared for the coldness of the water and the slimy stones at the bottom” (249). He soaks his fancy pants and cigarettes, and breaks the “gold longines” watch his mother had given him: “the face was splintered and the minute hand was bent” (250). His fancy shirt becomes soaked with sweat, as does his face, for which he uses his tie as a handkerchief. Throughout his search, Milkman “smelled money” (250-51). After challenging obstacles, he, finally, reaches the cave and was blinded by the absence of the light. The cave's darkness is of no coincidence. It symbolically further reflects Milkman's blindness caused by his utterly materialistic drives. Milkman cries with despair. He cannot find the gold and is comically chased from the cave by its resident bats. Milkman goes through branches and weeds back to the stream and the highway where he has been scheduled for a pickup. His watch now gone, he can only gauge by the sun that his ride has probably come and gone. Although much of his city clothing has been stripped from his body, Milkman has not learned much from his adventures (Harris). Instead, he is convinced that Pilate took the gold to Virginia, so he decides to

follow her tracks. His greed is his only motivation: “The fact was he wanted the gold because it was gold and he wanted to own it. Free” (275). The cave not only reflects the blinding materialism of Milkman, but is also “a turning point in Milkman's journey because it begins his series of encounters with life-threatening situations” (Mobley 65). These impediments are to be further experienced in the Southern space of Virginia, which to the black city dweller becomes as unknown and as dark a space as the cave itself.

The American South, “despite its history of slavery and racial segregation, has become for many African American writers a source of heritage, a genealogical home. This may seem paradoxical, but the fact remains that this is where Afro-America began and where the relationship to the African roots is the strongest” (Wilentz 124). African American writers center healing experiences and the awareness of their black heritage in Southern coastal regions, the movement south reaffirms a link to the African diaspora. Morrison is no exception, and Milkman's trip south will gradually lead him to an understanding of himself, his family, and his culture, an understanding that comes only through the collapse of the materialist world he bequeathed from the patriarchal Michigan. Virginia challenges Milkman’s obsession with property, class and gender. He is surprised at the unmappability of the place,²⁵ which destroys his empiricist agenda, and by the utter simplicity of the town. If Milkman’s mother and sisters are performing gender and class dictates through their delicate clothing, women in Shalimar are free from all types of artifice. In a voyeuristic way, Milkman notices that

²⁵ “He had to pay close attention to signs and landmarks, because Shalimar was not on the Texaco map he had, and the AAA office couldn’t give a nonmember a chartered course-just the map and some general information” (260).

“their hands were empty. “No pocketbook, no change purse, no wallet, no keys, no small paper bag, no comb, no handkerchief. They carried nothing” (259). They just “sat on porches, and walked in the road swaying their hips under cotton dresses, bare-legged, their unstraightened hair braided or pulled straight back into a ball” (263). It seemed to Milkman that they reflect the image of Pilate, who is out of place in the big city she has settled in: “That's the way Pilate must have looked as a girl, looked even now . . . wide sleepy eyes that tilted up at the corners, high cheek-bones, full lips blacker than their skin, berry-stained, and long, long necks” (266).

What strikes Milkman is not only the simplicity of the place but also the sameness of the Shalimar people. They all look alike save for some light-skinned and red-headed men. As Milkman observes: “Visitors to Shalimar must be rare, and new blood that settled here non-existent” (263). If Milkman's northern life style is a focus on the present and newness, Shalimar, on the other hand, presents the past that is never perishable. Mr. Solomon's store, the gathering place of the black men, is “residualist.” Milkman notices that it is marked with poverty, a place wherein “the sacks, trays, and cartons of perishables and semiperishables were plentiful” (261) and well-preserved. It occurred to him that “Danville, with its diner/bus station and its post office on the main street was a thriving metropolis compared to this no-name hamlet, a place so small nothing financed by state funds or private enterprise reared a brick there” (259). Milkman starts to enjoy the trip, and is pleased not only by the authenticity of the Southern space, but also by the hospitality and the generosity of the Shalimar inhabitants who, unlike his family in Michigan, are modest, “pleasant, wide-spirited, and self-contained” (260).

The Southern simplicity of Shalimar challenges Milkman's capitalistic view. The emphasis on the residualistic objects of Mr. Solomon's store is a metaphor for the fact that heritage or property in the African American Southern tradition is often associated with the preservation of the past. The pivotal moment that challenges Milkman's urban moral order takes its peak in the physical confrontation that Milkman has to experience with the black men of Shalimar. Because of his "citiness" and arrogance, Milkman is challenged by the rural black. He thinks that his struggle to get a new car to replace the broken one he bought in Danville offended the townsfolk. Milkman cannot understand their hatred. He simply thinks that they envy him because they have no property, which diminished their sense of masculine identity. "His manner, his clothes were reminders that they had no crops of their own and no land to speak of either. Just vegetable gardens, which the women took care of, and chicken and pigs that the children took care of" (266). Milkman believes that Black men in Shalimar envy him because his "eyes that had seen big cities and the inside of airplanes were the measure" (266). It seemed to him that his presence, in an uncanny way, reminded them of the figure of the white masters who "came to pick them up in the trucks when they needed anonymous, faceless laborers" (266).

Although he is black, Milkman distances himself from the poor black men to the point that he considers them racially distant from him. He echoes Roth Edmonds, who resorts to the mechanism of difference and differentiation from Mollie's black family in order to assert his racial difference. Milkman not only dehumanizes the black men on the basis of their lack of property, he is not even interested in knowing their names. As for these men, they, in turn, look at his dark black skin and are convinced

that he is “a black man with a white heart” (266). Milkman’s encounter accelerates into a verbal violence. Because he has the power, manner, clothing, and money the black men identify with white men, they focus their first test on his sexual capacity: is he as much a man in sexual matters as the signs suggest, or can he be dismissed as a “faggot”? “If they succeed in humiliating him with insinuations about homosexuality - and perhaps embarrass him or drive him away - they can restore to themselves some of the lack of manhood his presence makes them feel” (Harris 99). The ritual of the transference is old, though its specific manifestations may be unique (99). If Milkman leaves the scene, then the men will feel justified in not helping or accepting him. “If he can hold his own and somehow survive their insults, they will interrupt the ritual testing and tolerate him—perhaps even accept him into the community” (99). Shalimar men's perception of identity transcends property and acquires a more physical dimension as a test of manhood.

In portraying Milkman’s physical confrontation with the black men, Morrison re-writes Faulkner's scene of the bottle between Lucas and Zack Edmonds. Lucas, in *Go Down, Moses*, resorts to physical violence in order to win back his wife from Zack Edmonds. The scene ends when Zack misfires, a defeat, which, ultimately, reaffirmed Lucas's manhood. But in the context of Morrison’s novel, Milkman’s obsession with owning property and his disrespect for women does not give him the luxury to fight over his beloved, Hagar, whom he did not care about. His fight is a mere physical assertion of his manhood. The Shalimar men begin their test with a verbal assault. From the assertion that “pricks is . . . wee, wee little” in the North, they seek confirmation from Milkman and move on to insults about homosexuality. They

assume, alluding to Milkman, that men in the North are homosexuals. “That’s why they pants so tight” (267), Saul, one of the man says. Milkman replies, “I wouldn’t know. . . I never spent much time smacking my lips over another man’s dick” (267). “What about his ass hole? Ever smack your lips over that? (267), the man replies. Milkman responds: “Once. . . .When a little young nigger made me mad and I had to jam coke bottle up his ass” (267).

Saul pulled a knife and started the fight. Milkman continues to ridicule him since he sees the knife to be a playful thing for young boys (268) as a means to destroy his manhood. He gives Saul, his adversary, a “jagged cut” over his eye, sufficient to induce profuse bleeding. In *Go Down, Moses* and *Song of Solomon*, both scenes illustrate the fact that masculine power is associated with men’s phallic obsession. Lucas fights because he is threatened by the possibility that Mollie is a sexual entity shared by his white kinsman. He pulls a razor, then decides to fight with his naked hand as a further means to assert his manhood, until he ultimately defeats Zack. Milkman, in the similar vein, not only refers to the knife, a male symbol, as nothing but a playful thing to further subvert Saul's masculine power, but he also ends up hitting him with the bottle, which, like the razor and the knife, is metaphorically associated with manhood. The bottle becomes the symbol of “the coke,” or the cock with which Milkman defies Saul. Lucas, in *Go Down, Moses*, feels triumphant and leaves the scene to join in with Mollie in a manifestation of normative ritual life. But Milkman's triumph takes a different trajectory. The fight is a source of his public humiliation. He believes that he is “already dead” (27) and is frustrated by the fact that he is “unknown,” “unloved,” and “damn near killed” by “the meanest unhung niggers in the

world” (270). However, the experience necessitates him to fall in order to lose his false and superficial identity and to become resurrected from the dead (Otten 57). Manhood becomes an assertion of his innermost self without the artifice provided by urban capitalism. To use Byork's words, it is “the [art] to measure self-worth,” which “involves raw emotions and survival skills” (Byork). Milkman's triumph culminates in his spiritual immersion into his Southern heritage, when the Shalimar men invite him to join them in their night hunt. As Trudier Harris puts it, “Milkman's ability to hold his own with the bottle earns him a tinge of respect, but not enough for the fun to end. The measure of his worthiness continues in the older men's invitations to him to join them in a night hunt” (100).

In *Go Down, Moses*, Ike seeks a simple life in the woods as a retreat from the capitalist world of property which he links to the McCaslin ledgers. Milkman, in the same way, and, in spite of the complexity of the forest adventure, seems to appreciate the authenticity of the Southern space. The mythical night hunt symbolizes the death of the counterfeit life that haunted him in the mainstream culture of the Urban North. In the woods, “[h]e found himself [...] walking the earth. Walking it like he belonged on it; like his legs were stalks, tree trunks, a part of his body that extended down ... into the rock and soil, and were comfortable there—on the earth and on the place where he walked. And he did not limp” (281). Like Ike McCaslin in the “The Bear” chapter of *Go Down, Moses*, the journey into the forest is not only a symbiotic place between man and nature, it is also an escape from society and the materialistic world. Now, like his experience in the Danville cave, Milkman has to abandon all signs of material property, including his money, his car, his father's reputation, his suit, his shoes, his

snap-brim hat, his tie, his watch and his two hundred dollars that have become an impediment to his experience in the wilderness. If Ike McCaslin's hunting experience is based on scriptographic knowledge, as through tracking down lion's print, Milkman, in the Southern woods of Virginia, must know orally. All what he could hear is "shrieks," "rapid tumbling barks," "yells," "tuba sounds," "drumbeat sounds," "low liquid bown bown," "whistles," "thin eeee's of a cornet," and "the unh unh unh bass chords" (278). In this pivotal moment Milkman realizes his nothingness and his inability to understand his ancestral language, a language which is not language, but something which precedes language, a pre-linguistic realm which comes before things were written down: "Language in the time when men and animals did talk to one another, when a man could sit down with an ape and the two converse . . . when men ran with wolves, not from and after them" (278). Ike McCaslin, in *Go Down, Moses*, sees the woods as the articulation of the primordial world free from the taints of civilization; Milkman, in the Shalimar woods, begins to experience the oral language of his ancestral world long forgotten in Michigan. A language uncontaminated by man's lust for property, wherein the hierarchies between man and nature, and between the self and other, have been eroded.

In the woods, Milkman lost touch with the black hunters, a self-reflexive moment when he gains an important insight. Sitting alone, he begins to catalogue the men who have abandoned him: "What kind of savages were they? Suspicious. Hot-tempered. Eager to find fault and despise any outsider. Touchy. Devious, jealous, traitorous, and evil. He had done nothing to deserve their contempt (276)." In this solitary moment, Milkman, suddenly realizes how inhumanely he has treated others:

“his self—the cocoon that was ‘personality’—gave way . . . there was nothing to help him—not his money, his car, his father's reputation, his suit or his shoes” (278). He realizes the peace and love that comes from the connectedness he feels: “He felt a sudden rush of affection for them all” (278). This new struggle for connectedness, and this surrender to his true being, makes him more attached to life: “Feeling both tense and relaxed, he sank his fingers into the grass. He tried to listen with his fingertips, to hear what, if anything, the earth had to say, and it told him quickly that someone was standing behind him and he had just enough time to raise one hand to his neck and catch the wire that fastened around his throat” (279). Milkman is able to fight with his friend Guitar, the one who is now trying to kill him after tracking him down all the way back from Michigan. Once escaping this near deadly encounter, he has no trouble locating the men. Milkman is now no longer an already dead entity, as he constantly claims. Rather, he admits that he was “scared to death,” and revels in the men's teasing. Although teasing creates certain exclusions (Taylor 70), it also enforces social conformity and allows inclusion (Fagan 36). Milkman is now part of the Southern community, and enjoys becoming the object of their jokes. In the woods, “the pride has to be tempered at the same time that the men must re-evaluate their feelings towards Milkman (Harris 100). Change on his part would bring him closer to them and, on theirs, will encourage them to respect him at a mutual, horizontal level rather than a hierarchical one (100). The hunting experience is, thus, a cultural ritual of black initiation and bonding, which is based on the notion of brotherhood, transcending ethnic, caste, and conventional dichotomies and designations.

Morrison signifies upon Faulkner's woods. Milkman's hunt helps him transcend the social hierarchies. The hunting atmosphere of the Mississippi woods, in *Go Down, Moses*, is far from being a carnivalesque space free from the societal caste and class. Ike hunts with an exclusive company: Mississippi's most respected white citizens, the largest landowners, men of both means and honour. Accompanying them are their servants, some former slaves, who perform the manual labor. Only the mixed race Sam Fathers has earned the stature comparable to that of a white hunter. Faulkner's Negroes cannot be heroic bear hunters. Ike's hunt, in contrast to Milkman's, remains a ritual that works by exclusion and by status privileges, which make the hunt, as Faulkner calls it, "the ancient and unremitting contest according to the ancient and immitigable rules" (*GDM* 184). "Unremitting" and "immitigible" are terms that name the kind of fixity and rigidity that Faulkner's white hunters revere but which Morrison's black hunters must learn to defy (Harris 18). If Faulkner's hunt is based on racial and class exclusion, Morrison's hunt, on the other hand, is inclusive. Milkman's hunting scene ends with the bisection of a bobcat among the hunters. He takes the heart. The image of the heart, and the scene of gathering, which is occasioned by the activity of bisection, further account for Milkman's integration in the collective life of the black Southern milieu. In Trudier Harris' words, "the bobcat culminates the ritual of acceptance; by allowing Milkman, the initiate, to pull out its heart, the men incorporate him into their fraternity and forgive him his former superiority over them" (19). As Genevieve Fabre notes, "[i]n the deceptive creeks and woods or among the country people where his presence—a black man with a white heart—is first an offense, the tests and trials

become necessary rites of passage. They further purify him and initiate him back into the tribe” (112-13).

Milkman's purification is further established through his new relationship with a beautiful prostitute-Sweet. Despite the fact that his relationship with her is based on monetary exchange, Milkman's love for this woman is a pivotal moment in his life. It allows his change in consciousness, and shifts his perception of women:

[Milkman] soaped and rubbed her 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. He made up the bed. She gave him gumbo to eat. He washed the dishes. She washed his clothes and hung them out to dry. He scoured her tub. She ironed his shirt and pants. He gave her fifty dollars. She kissed his mouth. He touched her face. She said please come back. He said I will see you tonight. (*SOS* 285)

In Stephanie Demetrakopoulos' words, “Milkman's final baptism into an abiding connection with his anima is with a woman named 'Sweet,' who bathes him, a [form of] baptism into humanity, community” (93). While defined as the exchange of cash, a form of property, Milkman now engages in reciprocal relations with women. The alternation of his acts with Sweet's illustrates that he has become less narcissistic. He, therefore, gives as well as receives. Milkman performs domestic tasks. He insists, in turn, on bathing Sweet, washing her dishes, making the bed. He is no longer the peacock who pees on women, as Lena formerly assumed. Milkman is now immersed in the world of flow which he tried to understand in the epiphanic moment in the woods-

the language of the ancestor which destroys hierarchies not only between man and nature, Self and Other, but that between men and women. Milkman succeeds in resolving his sexist and inauthentic definition of manhood. Ike, on the other hand, and, despite his love for the world of flow, remains in the hierarchical world, wherein race, gender and social status remain the only dictates which assert one's identity. Ike remains patriarchal. His unnamed wife remains an instance of the fallen woman, "the female illicit flesh" with her naked body, and an "evil," who tries to drag him down to man's primordial sin of owning property. Milkman, on the other hand, exchanges gesture with Sweet.

The Southern experience liberates Milkman from the artifice of race, class and gender. After eliminating "all the shit that weighs him down" (179), Milkman becomes interested in knowing his past. Like Faulkner, Morrison is concerned with the idea of how one's knowledge of familial genealogy is crucial to one's understanding of himself or herself. History, like in Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*, becomes part of the protagonist's heroic journey to self-discovery. Yet, writing from her African American heritage, Morrison, implies that oral history, as opposed to the scriptographic forms of knowing, not only resists closure but in its oral dimension, privileges a collective and face-to-face reconstruction of the past. This ultimately subverts written history, which, in its monological and individualistic reading, separates not only the object from the subject, but becomes, performatively, an isolating reading act. Ike McCaslin's scriptographic reading of the McCaslin ledgers refers to what Jacques Derrida terms

“the metaphysics of presence.”²⁶ This implies an understanding that focuses on the visibility of the sign, which refers automatically to meaning, which is always there, fixed. Even if Ike discusses the origins and the implication of the ledgers in relation to the institution of slavery with his cousin, the dialogue ends with a failure of polyphonic communication. Milkman's knowledge of the history of his family is not only oral but, in the process, collective. Pilate in Michigan, Reverend Cooper in Danville, Circe in Pennsylvania, and now Sweet in Shalimar all give him glimpses of the past. The spaces Milkman, literally, occupies throughout his “aerial journey” are all multiple places inhabited by different people who give him distinctive and diversified versions of his past. As he nears the completion of his journey, Milkman listens to the children performing the song, “Solomon don’t leave me here” (324). The chant becomes a quintessential discovery of the ancestor. In hearing it, Milkman tries to trace the genealogy of his family. First, he phonetically notices that in Shalimar almost everybody is linked to Solomon: “Everybody in town time is named Solomon, he thought wearily. Solomon’s General Store, Luther Solomon (no relation), Solomon’s Leap, and now the children were singing ‘Solomon don’t leave me here’” (302). Milkman realizes that “even the name of the town sounded like Solomon: Shalimar, which Mr. Solomon pronounced and everybody else pronounced Shalleemone” (302).

²⁶ Derrida criticizes Western philosophy and thought for embarking on what he sees “the metaphysics of presence” or “metaphysics,” which implies the privileging of that which appears to be without taking into account the very conditions that precedes that very appearance. Put differently, presence is privileged, rather than that which allows presence to be possible. Derrida attacks western philosophy, from Plato to Rousseau, Descartes to Husserl, on privileging the spoken form over the written language as pure, intact, self-identical...etc. Metaphysics, according to Derrida, is a system that installs hierarchies and orders of subordination in the various dualisms it encounters (*M* 195) and negates contingency and complication. I am using Derrida’s coinage of the “metaphysics of presence” in a counter- manner in order to criticize Ike’s scriptographic reading which depends on the visibility or the presence of the form or the sign as pure, intact and self-contained.

Like a historian, Milkman, in a fashion similar to Ike McCaslin, is, self-reflexively, represented as a historian who is in the process of decoding the meaning of the historical record, an oral record, which is vaguely reported to him through the “defamiliarizing” song. Morrison, like Faulkner, refers to the meta-narrative strategy, portraying Milkman's attempt at reconstructing the past, in order to allude to the constructedness of truth and knowledge in general. Although her means of demonstrating this tenet is an oral one-following her African American oral art-Morrison, nevertheless, shares the modernist Faulkner's critique of what is believed to be authentically objective. History becomes an interpretive process. It includes errors, trials and presuppositions which are reflected in Milkman's rhetorical questions about the link between his grandmother, Sing, and his grandfather, Macon Dead I. He interrogates the truthfulness of Pilate, of his father's and Circe's knowledge of the genealogical history of the Deads and the circumstances of Sing's presence on the wagon of ex-slaves headed towards the North. He also questions Pilate's misinterpretation of her father's request to sing. Milkman's firsthand knowledge, thus, needs a further consolidation through Susan Byrd's competing version of the story, which is, yet, imparted to him in a deferred and fragmented way.

In performing the role of the detective, Milkman is not convinced of the wholeness of Susan's story. He goes back to the song of Solomon as his primary material. He notices that the boy in the middle is now spinning around pointing his finger at Milkman. This act symbolically reflects not only Milkman's personal involvement in the story of the song, but also his interpretive agency in decoding the oral past. Milkman thus becomes both the object and the subject of the story. The

gesture of spinning in performing the song of Solomon reflects how listening, rather than reading the past, evokes the idea of plurality, divergences, deferral of meaning and variation of the history of the Deads, which further entangles Milkman in a communal understanding of his past. Milkman gradually collects the fragments of his past. He revisits Susan's house to reinforce his interpretation of his history: "His mind was ahead of hers, behind hers, with hers, and bit by bit, with what she said, what he knew, and what he guessed, he put it all together" (323). Milkman, finally, notices that Solomon, or Shalimar is, in fact, his great grand-father, the eponymous progenitor, who flew to Africa. Fleeing slavery and leaving behind twenty-one slave children, he also left his wife Ryna "out of her mind" (349) crying inconsolably in a gulch, which is now called Ryna's Gulch. Milkman comes to understand that the word "Sing," which Pilate, literally, understood as an act of singing is, in fact, the name of her deceased mother. Milkman also identifies that his mixed blood Indian grandmother, Sing, ran with Jake- his grandfather- on the wagon of ex-slaves to the North, and that his great-grandfather was the last of the twenty-first children whose father attempted to carry him, but, finally dropped him in the arms of Sing's mother, who, then, becomes his surrogate mother.

Milkman's flight has restored his sense of community because not only does the myth open out his family's history, but, as he later realizes, "it permits him to recover names. This is ultimately a way to pierce the invisibility that history has imposed on them (Bjork 107). Milkman's exposure to the oral transmission of his family history enables him to decode the hidden meaning behind the written sign, a subversive luxury that Ike McCaslin misses. Ike's reading of the ledgers in its written, therefore, frozen

form, does not allow him to see beyond the sign. His reading becomes so naive to the point that he reads his grandfather's rape of his daughter-slave as an act of love. "There must be love" (294), he insists. But Milkman's reading takes a deeper understanding of the game of the written language which hides truth and does not name the things it designates. After this discovery, Milkman becomes attentive to the hidden significance of the names and signs of the American states, which reflects the unspeakable history of the black American experience. As he interrogates: "How many dead lives and fading memories were buried in and beneath the names of the places in this country?" (354). He comes to understand that "under the recorded names were other names, just as 'Macon Dead,' recorded for all time in some dusty file, hid from view the real names of places, and things" (354).

Names had meaning, and Pilate literally places hers in a tin attached to her ear. "[She] had taken a rock from every state she had lived in because she had lived there. And having lived there, it was hers and his, and his father's, his grandfather's, his grandmother's. Not Doctor streets, Solomon's Leap, Ryna's Gulch, Shalimar, Virginia" (354), places which link the dismembered African Americans to their communal past. He comes to understand why people in Michigan insist upon calling the street on which he lives Not Doctor Street, why they value the nicknames he has heard in the pool halls and barbershops all his life (Harris 104). They are names they got "from yearnings, gestures, flaws, events, mistakes, weaknesses. Names that bore witness" (*SOS* 330) to the concrete reality of black people's lives in spite of the census bureau or the post office or drunk records (Harris 104). Milkman now understands that "[t]rue names are indispensable to the sense of identity, that great goal of all who, their

humanity denied, must struggle for a sense of their own value as human beings. To know oneself and one's real worth, one needs at least to know one's name" (Coward 99). The lesson that Milkman now learns is that "When you know your real name, you should hang on to it, for unless it is noted down and remembered, it will die when you do" (333). Names are performative signifiers that mark and register life occurrences and events that shape one's own perception of identity. In short, they are historical records.

In analysing the implication of knowing one's past, Morrison not only subverts Ike's individualistic reading of his written ledgers, but also shows the way that his very isolated reading further ingrains him in the logocentric discourse where identity becomes self-contained rather than a flexible entity that exists in relation and in a collective co-existence with others. Milkman's collective and oral transmission of his past, on the other hand, makes him more entangled in the Southern tradition, which disrupts his individualistic perception of the self. Instead this process enables him to develop a flexible identity in relation to others. His oral knowledge nurtures his compassion, and intensifies his understanding of the people he rejected throughout his life in Michigan. Ike fails to mature, but Milkman reaches a mental maturity wherein he understands that the actual behaviours and attitudes of his "crazy" family are rooted in their confusing past. He, now, "remembers [his] mother's quiet, crooked, apologetic smile. Her helpless helplessness (324)." He understands that "The years of her life ... plagued by sexual deprivation" (324) account for "her long nursing of her son and for some occasional visits to a graveyard" (324). Both her pride as a daddy's girl and the irony of his name, Milkman, account for her emotional deprivation and yearning.

Milkman is now no longer ashamed of his own nickname. At least he knows its origin and is able to come to terms with its significance that chronicles the life of his once resentful mother. Milkman also understands that “as a son of Macon Dead the first, [his father] paid homage to his own father’s life and death by loving what that his father had loved: property, good, solid property, the bountifulness of life. He loved these things to excess because he loved his father to excess. Owning, acquiring - that was his life, his future, his present, and all the history he knew” (325). “That he distorted life, bent it, for the sake of gain, was a measure of his loss at his father’s death” (325). As Wilkerson claims, the confusing past in Morrison’s narratives “is given a crucial role to play—context and motivation for action in present time” (184). It is through this understanding of his family’s traumatic past that Milkman finds healing in forgiveness. “Milkman learns that he must look backward in order to look forward, that he must remember the past in order to know the future” (Middleton 153).

Love, which was the lacking ingredient in Michigan, is restored, and becomes the preamble to reconnect not only with the lost past but also with people “he had been hell-bent to leave” (324). In gaining emotional nurturing, “hating his parents, his sisters, seemed silly now. And the skin of shame he had rinsed away in the bathwater after having stolen from Pilate returned. . . . His mind turned to Hagar and how he had treated her at the end. Why did he never sit down and talk to her honestly” (300-301). Ike McCaslin's knowledge of his past entails his resignation in the wilderness, his stagnation, and his fall into the essentialist Southern identity that negates the presence of and the co-existence with the other. Milkman, on the other hand, reaches a complete and fluid identity that reconciles the tension between his bourgeois Northern milieu

and rural, black Southern culture. Ike's final portrayal in *Go Down, Moses* is an epitome to death and closure. He “lay back down, the blanket once more drawn to his chin, his crossed hands once more weightless on his breast in the empty tent” (365). But Milkman's portrayal reflects fluidity, love and connectedness. Ike remains patriarchal and racist in refusing the humanity of Roth Edmonds’ mulatto mistress and her son. Milkman, on the other hand, not only understands and has compassion for the others, but his mental maturity destroys his patriarchal vision of women. He drove to the house of Sweet. “I want to swim!” (326), he shouts. “I want water” (326). “The sea! I have to swim in the sea. . . I need the whole entire complete deep blue sea” (326-27). The image of the sea and the water reflects the world of flow, which contrasts Ike McCaslin's act of drawing into his blanket, a parallel movement of the wilderness, of going inward toward death.

Embracing his heritage, Milkman, finally, believes in himself. Unlike Ike McCaslin, he frees himself from the constraints of isolation and separation. If Ike McCaslin fears the railroad that connects rural Mississippi to the North and deems it as an instance of cultural miscegenation, Milkman, on the other hand, feels the need to return back to Michigan, in order to provide his family with the new piece of their genealogy. This act is what Campbell, in theorizing the epic genre of the identity quest, terms as the stage of the “return and reintegration with society,” a phase wherein the hero has the responsibility to distribute wisdom and apply what has been learned (Erickson 71): “[The hero] begins the labor of bringing the runes of wisdom, the Golden Fleece, or his sleeping princess, back into the kingdom of humanity, where the boon may rebound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten

thousand worlds” (*Hero* 193). This return to the North not only implies Milkman’s heroic role in communicating his cultural heritage to the rest of his family, but it also conveys the fact that even the knowledge of that past will be mediated and collectively discussed with others. Thus, the knowledge of one’s inheritance does not mean dwelling in the South as a sign of rootedness. Morrison, as opposed to Faulkner, rejects essentialist perceptions of Milkman’s identity. His “aerial” journey presupposes him to return to the North. In Michigan, Milkman expresses his identification with Solomon—the ancestor who fuels his own desire for personal identity and freedom: “He didn’t need no airplane. He just took off; got fed up. All the way up! No more cotton! No more bales! No more orders! No more shit! He flew” (332). But Pilate, once again, disrupts his egocentric vision. She breaks a wet green bottle over his head. She rebukes him for Hagar’s death. Like Solomon, Milkman had flown off and left a body. In a self-reflexive moment, Milkman makes a connection between his desertion of Hagar to Solomon’s act of leaving behind his wife—Ryna—and the twenty-one children: “Who looked after those twenty children? Jesus Christ, he left twenty - one children!” (336), Milkman wonders. As opposed to Ike McCaslin, Milkman learns that escape or freedom presumes an act of responsibility towards the one left behind. If freedom, for Ike, implies the retreat from the worldly and social bonds and responsibilities, freedom within the African American heritage is commitment. Hagar’s death helps Milkman further embrace the ritual of death. He now has to carry locks of her hair wherever he goes because, as Pilate’s father proclaims, “a human life is precious” (208), and “one can’t fly on off and leave a body” (147). “And the dead you kill is yours” (209).

In Michigan, Milkman informs Pilate that the bones she carried with her were, actually, her father's. The knowledge of Deads' past reunites the family. Despite the fact that "no reconciliation took place between Pilate and Macon" (335), the two accompanied Milkman in his trip back to the South. Because Macon was not a bit interested in the flying part, Milkman and Pilate alone went to Solomon Leap in order to rebury the bones. At Solomon's Leap, Guitar shot Pilate to death, a last initiation act which moves Milkman to commit a sacrificial leap down on Pilate's murderer: "As fleet and bright as a lodestar, he wheeled toward Guitar and it did not matter which one of them would give up his ghost in the killing arms of his brother. For now he knew what Shalimar knew: If you surrendered to the air, you could ride it" (337). This leap, finally, suggests Milkman's ability to transcend his material artifice, and therefore his ability to become a flying African capable of discovering his roots and reconstructing his unspeakable and communal past. Based on the myth of the flying African, Milkman becomes a classical hero whose struggle to trace his past and reconstruct a hybrid identity is allowed by collective memory. *Song of Solomon* bears witness to the power of lost and discredited traditions to heal and reconnect the psychically fragmented and spiritually detached individual to the communal whole (Scott 32). Milkman not only embraces the black Southern moral order, but he is now the one who sings to Pilate just before her death. It is through Milkman that Pilate can perform the last stage of her heroic path: "As Pilate dies, the novelist indicates Milkman's full maturity in having him change roles with her: he teaches her the way, he sings the song of Solomon to her" (Imbrie 480). Milkman's act of singing marks him with the final stage of his identity quest. If Ike McCaslin's knowledge of the past is a terrible epiphany that

entails his own seclusion, marginalization, and his ultimate refusal to come to terms with his heritage, Milkman, on the other hand, becomes part of his own ancestral history and an agent of cultural continuity.

Song of Solomon remains a literary discourse which “is based on the values and traditions of an African heritage which informs the African American community and its writers” (Wilentz 74). The ambiguous ending of the novel, in which the reader cannot know whether Milkman survives or not, is a metaphor for the flying African, a moment of freedom that the reader must also appreciate in the multiple interpretations fundamental to Morrison’s open-ended novel. Therese Higgins states: “*Song of Solomon* is about people who could fly. No metaphors, no symbolism, just poor African American/African belief in the power of a person to fly” (14). Ann Imbrie vehemently explains the metaphorical meaning of Milkman's leap: “Flight, a dead metaphor suggesting escapism, is brought to new life here to represent an escape from artificial restrictions into a more demanding recognition of one's human capacity for trust and self-acceptance” (480). Fabre notes the effectiveness of the ending: “In the last swift scene, each gesture and act, unreal as they are, assume perfection and finality. They are the re-enactment of familiar rites and rituals, and Milkman's leap, the fulfilment of a dream, is an act of faith in the legacy, an act of communion with Pilate, and with the flying ancestor” (113). Ultimately, this diversity of interpretation reflects not only the ambiguity of the novel, but further enhances the impossibility of fixing Milkman’s identity.

If Faulkner's modernism does not allow him to go beyond the local and the particular, Morrison's African American heritage enables her to transcend the

hierarchies and conventional dichotomies between the local and global. Faulkner's last scene ends with Ike's state of inwardness and death, a scene which combines the death of nature by the culture of progress with Ike's withdrawal into his blankets. It is this same scientific discourse that Morrison challenges. The culture of science which destroys Ike's wilderness becomes signified upon in *Song of Solomon*. Science, read through the loops of this novel, becomes as fixed an entity as Ike's linear and uni-dimensional interpretation of his family history. *Song of Solomon*, in its performative dimension, ends with Milkman's flight, a destabilizing movement, an action and mobility which reflects resistance to interpretive finitude, and ultimately, movement, circulation and life. Morrison insists that her African heritage-like jazz music-is the foundation of her aesthetic literary achievement. "Jazz always keeps you on the edge . . . There may be a long chord, but no final chord. . . . I want my books to be like that because I want that feeling of something held in reverse and the sense that there is something more" (McKay 411). The world of flow, expressed in Morrison's symbolic reference to the sea, the water, to the myth of the flying African, and, especially to the name of Pilate, and her symbolic lack of navel, are all metaphors that incorporate the theme of "open-endedness" and the lack of closure in viewing not only truth but identity

Similar to Milkman's coding and decoding of the bits and fragments of the oral history of his past, Morrison wants to make the reader feel the same reconstructive experience. As Wolfgang Iser puts it, "even in the simplest story there is bound to be some kind of blockage, if only because no tale can ever be told in its entirety. Indeed it is only through inevitable omissions that a story gains its dynamism. Thus whenever

the flow is interrupted . . . the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections for filling in the gaps left by the text itself” (*The Implied Reader* 55). Morrison contends that “[her] writing expects, demands participatory reading, and that I think is what literature is supposed to do. . . .It’s not just about telling the story; it’s about involving the reader. . . .My language has to have holes and spaces so the reader can come into it. . . .Then we (you the reader, and I the author) come together to make this book, to feel this experience (qtd in Wilentz 127). “I don’t shut doors at the end of books,” Morrison says. “There is always a resolution of a sort but there are always possibilities, choices” (Jones and Vison 135). Knowledge for Morrison, becomes the product of a fluid, ever-changing process, a realm of misreading that “makes all knowledge-gaining creative guesswork among shifting possibilities of meaning, none of which are stable” (McKethan 106). To use Derrida’s terms, only by repeating the book can we avoid its potential dead end because in that repetition, that “bottomlessness of infinite redoubling,” what disappears is “the self-identity of the origin” (*Writing and Difference* 297). Morrison’s use of the family name of the Deads is of no coincidence. The Deads are alive. Milkman continues his legacy and becomes aware of his hybrid identity. Pilate’s death, at the end, transcends its physical dimension because death, in the African American cosmology, is a continuation of life. The birds circling over Pilate’s dead body suggests that physical death is not the end of her existence. The swooping down of one bird to take Pilate’s snuffbox up to the sky implies that her name will live on (McKethan 107). “There must be another one like you,” Milkman whispers to her. “There’s got to be at least one more woman like you” (336). The theme of death in this novel, thus, becomes a parody of

Faulkner's conventional perception of death, and not incidentally, a parody of his white literary canon, which, in a fashion similar to the fixed and unalterable discourse of its ledgers, remains a closed and stable medium.

“If Morrison is ending her novel in the style of an African dilemma tale, there may be other perceptions of reality for the reader: In a multicultural society, there may be other perceptions of reality, other values, and other ways of interpretation than the ones ordained by the dominant culture” (128), Gay Wilentz remarks. “In this case, Morrison exposes the conflict of Western and African cultural perceptions, revealing the importance of African heritage and values for black Americans” (128). Morrison's incorporation of the myth of the flying African in *Song of Solomon* is a double subversion to Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*. Not only does it reflect that African Americans have a culture of their own, but also that the very metaphor of the flight reflects alternative worlds and possibilities that challenge Faulkner's Western essentialist discourse of the mainstream culture. Flight reflects a globalized and hybridized vision of reality, which stands in sharp contrast to Ike's literalist and uni-dimensional perception of the world. Milkman moves inside and outside the constraints of the territory he occupies. His movement from Michigan, to Danville, Pennsylvania, to Shalimar in Southern Virginia, then back to the North shapes his globalized and hybrid vision of American reality. These spaces, in turn, forge his hybrid identity. Milkman's accomplished identity is a double-voiced one, but Ike's subjectivity is a strictly white and masculine. Gilroy's theoretical metaphor of the ship which underlines the hybridized forms of truths and identities within the African American legacy is re-appropriated in this novel, to become a metaphor for flight.

Establishing the channel of influence between Faulkner and Toni Morrison helps the reader read Faulkner through Morrison. Reading *Song of Solomon* excavates the gaps, the distortions, and the left-overs of the white, western canon. History, although treated as a cultural construct in Faulkner's text, is, in *Song of Solomon*, a collective and multiperspectivist realm that deconstructs Ike's essentialist worldview and vision of history. Through this novel, the reader challenges Faulkner's white perception of the classic identity quest. If Ike's knowledge of the shame of his family background entails his misguided perception of freedom in the form of escape in the empty and lonely woods, and, therefore, death, then, escape and freedom, in Milkman's moral order, becomes commitment and collective integration with the black community he previously abandoned. Ike is socially dead, but Milkman's quest resolves around the image of the flight, which reflects his new flexible-ego boundary. If Faulkner's novel epitomizes the idea that "all plots move death-wards," Morrison's embarkation on the myth of the flying African, on the image of the water, on the symbolic name of Pilate and Milkman Dead, refers to the impossibility of ultimate resolution.

My reading of Faulkner's treatment of black women is challenged when I read them from the loops of Morrison's text. Black women subvert Faulkner's image of the doe. Ruth and her daughters, despite their apparent submission, have their own spaces of resistance which challenge the discourse of race, class and gender. My reading of Mollie Beauchamp, is, equally, deconstructed when Morrison creates the character of Pilate as her alter ego. Mollie Beauchamp escapes the racialized stereotypes of the black mammy in nursing and taking care of the Edmonds's household. I felt that she

has an agency that transcends the patriarchal and racist culture she lives in. Both Mollie's love that transcends racial barriers and her art of signifying upon Roth's segregationist approach in the creation of his own white identity, made me feel that Faulkner has an unconventional manner of dealing with the black woman, especially that *Go Down, Moses*, was a tribute to Caroline Barr-Faulkner's black servant. But reading Mollie's double in *Song of Solomon* makes me suspicious of Faulkner's innocence from phallogocentrism. Pilate, like Mollie, preserves "the Fire and the Hearth" of her black community. Like Mollie, she is the ancestral consciousness that challenges the empiricist and materialistic world of the black male subjects. If Mollie's agency is restricted in the small space that the physical text provides her with, Pilate exists everywhere, throughout all chapters. If Sam Fathers is the spiritual father to Ike, helping him create his own identity in the emptiness and isolation of the woods, Pilate, in *Song of Solomon*, is the surrogate mother that stages Milkman's full development in a world of flow. Mollie resists race and gender in the limitation of the space she occupies, but Pilate haunts the whole novel, and her multiple names as Pilate, the wanderer, the "snake" who "drop[s] her skin in a split second" (205), "the raggedy bootlegging bitch" (204), the weirdo, and the drag with her masculine appearance, all refer to her complicated characterization as a volatile woman who transgresses the patriarchal and racial space she occupies. If Mollie is portrayed through her forms of resistance, as a woman of her own space and time, Pilate exists both inside and outside the world she inhabits.

Morrison's black literary heritage, as well as her gender awareness, makes her one of the most prolific and read writers of our time. Her deconstructionist strategy, in

turn, becomes an inspirational form for other black women writers, including Gloria Naylor, who, in her *Mama Day*, the subject of the following chapter, tackles the same themes of history, identity, and freedom from a similarly subversive angle. Naylor, in a fashion reminiscent of Morrison, re-writes the classic narrative of Faulkner's identity quest. Identity, like in *Song of Solomon*, is linked to the issue of race and gender. And women, such as Mama Day, becomes like Pilate, the figure who links the deracinated Northern black subjects to their past in a manner emphasising their hybrid worldviews and identities.

Chapter 3

Property, Race and Gender in *Mama Day*

Take my hand, Precious Lord.
Lead me on. Let me stand.
Through the dark. Through the night.
Lead me on to the light.
And lead me home.
When my life is almost gone
By the river I will stand.
Guide my feet, hold my hand.
And lead me home.
Sometimes stumbling
Sometimes falling
Sometimes alone. (*Mama Day* 214)

The faith of African Americans in transcendental truth, which at times and in different ways was both a curse and a blessing, is important in interracial struggle against all forms of domination (Bell 46). The mythic song above, though impregnated with religious register, nevertheless, illustrates not only African American writers' adherence to religion, which was, historically, considered to be a haven from the agony of slavery and racial subjugation in the pre-Civil Rights American South, but, more importantly, it foregrounds the theme of escape through divine guidance. Similar to *Song of Solomon's* myth of the flying African, the harbinger of Milkman's escape from the materialistic and patriarchal world of his father, the song's reference to "home," refers to the epistemological and cultural purport of the journey which, in a fashion reminiscent of Morrison, illustrates the idea of the return to the African home. Gloria Naylor uses metaphorical concepts such as the "leading hand" and "the bridge" to account for the agency of women in helping black male characters reconnect with their past. Black women, in *Song of Solomon* and *Mama Day*, become the leading hands that guide deracinated male characters to "the light," which means to the knowledge and the understanding of their Africanist home, which comes only through the heroic

processes of “falling” and “stumbling” in what seems to be an alienating Southern landscape.

The leading hand that guides the black male hero into the Southern home is not only associated with black women as the catalysts of the heroic journey, but also with the concept of the river which, in its metaphoric signification, refers to the cultural Africanist home which celebrates the idea of the place as a flow, a process that negates essentialist perception of culture, truth and identity. If Morrison alludes to this flowing and hybrid world through the myth of the flying African and through the symbolic name of Pilate, which further supplements the idea of flight, Naylor, supplements, metaphorically, the image of the fragile bridge, which connects Willow Springs to the Western mainland, as not only a frontier space that delineates the geographical and the cultural authenticity and rootedness of the ancestral Southern place, but also as a moving place that transports George Andrews, the alienated black Northern pragmatist, to the defamiliarizing world of the island in order to achieve a fluid identity. In this chapter, the images of the leading hand and the bridge further theorizes Du Bois’s theory of double-consciousness, Henry Louis Gates’ work on African American art of signifying, James Clifford’s work on “Travelling Cultures,” Arjun Appadurai’s “Putting Hierarchy in its Place,” and Gilroy’s metaphor of the black Atlantic ship, in their studies of the hybridity of non Western cultures and subjecthood. Like in *Song of Solomon*, the notion of hybridity becomes characteristic of George Andrews’s quest, which, in contrast to Ike McCaslin’s and Lucas Beauchamp’s journeys, negates neither the African nor the Western world, but instead focuses on the fluidity of truths, experiences, cultures, and identities.

This chapter analyzes the identity quest of George Andrews. It involves the role of the wild Southern space of Willow Springs as the embodiment of the African American legacy. The island celebrates oral tradition and the belief in the supernatural, a space, which unsettles his empiricist values. Using the metaphor of the bridge, this chapter re-writes both Faulkner and Morrison's essentialist depiction of the South. Willow Springs, despite its rootedness, does not exclude Western influence. The bridge therefore accounts for the island's incorporation of the Northern and Southern moral orders, and, performatively, reflects the theme of hybridity, which affects not only George Andrews's identity but also that of African American culture itself. As a black feminist writer, Gloria Naylor signifies not only on Faulkner's reductive account of black women, but also on Morrison's patriarchal legend of the flying African. If Faulkner and Morrison build their identity quests on the importance of one's knowledge of his or her past, which they usually relate to the patriarchal figure, Naylor, on the other hand, builds her narrative on the feminine figure of Sapphira Wade, as the ancestral spirit of the island.

This chapter will be divided into four major parts. Similar to my analysis of *Song of Solomon*, the first part analyses the dichotomy between the modern urban city of New York as an empiricist place, and the Southern space of Willow Springs, which epitomizes the feminized and ancestral African American moral order. In a fashion similar to Morrison, this section juxtaposes the character of Cocoa Day, the culturally moored black woman, against George Andrews in order to further corroborate the disjuncture between the Southern and Northern legacies. The second portion studies how George and Cocoa's differences culminate in the institution of marriage.

Marriage, like the image of the bridge, functions as a trope which theorizes the double-voiced identity of both Cocoa and later George Andrews. Cocoa's encounter with George renders her more receptive of the cultural diversity of New York, besides her Southern rootedness. In turn, Cocoa Day, functions as the bridge, who marks George's "entering" into the defamiliarizing rural South. In analysing Naylor's portrayal of the South, I subvert both Faulkner and Morrison's logocentric vision of the South. Using the metaphor of the bridge, I read the island of Willow Springs as a space which exists in the limbo between rootedness and Western acculturation. While the islanders protect their island from economic and cultural exploitation of the mainstream culture, they, nevertheless do not negate its influence on the island. The third portion of this chapter involves the study of the oral transmission of history, which in its polyphonic and unwritten form subverts not only Faulkner's scriptographic and fixed ledgers, but also Morrison's patriarchal legend of the myth of the flying African. In so doing, I refer to Mae Gwendolyn Henderson's theory on "speaking in tongues," and bell hooks's work on the deconstructionist strategies within the African American vernacular in her *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Practice*. The fourth segment analyses the belief in the supernatural as a uniquely feminine power, which subverts George's linear, pragmatic and scientific agenda. This section focuses on the ancestral figure of Mama Day, who functions as "the bridge," who helps George reconcile with his lost past. Relying on the metaphor of the hand, I stipulate that Willow Springs, like the image of the bridge, is a space of connection between George's empiricist and pragmatic world and Mama Day's feminine and intuitionist world, a connection which is consolidated through the bridging power of love.

3.1 Divergent Spaces and Moral Orders: The North versus the South

Like Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor is concerned with the constructive ancestral past and its legacy. “More than other contemporary African American novels *Mama Day* grounds the authenticity, authority, and agency of the identity formation of African Americans in the language, knowledge, and power of the vernacular tradition of the ancestors and elders” (Bell 282). In a fashion reminiscent of Faulkner and Morrison, Naylor builds her narrative on the genre of the mythical hero. In this novel, George Andrews functions as the alter ego of both Milkman Dead in *Song of Solomon*, and Ike McCaslin and Lucas Beauchamps in Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses*. He is the Days’ mediator who is portrayed in a spiritual quest for their genealogical past to save the history of the family. Naylor uses the technique of the chronotope, or the fusion of space and time. The novel oscillates between past and present. Time shifts abruptly from the past, which epitomizes the ancestral rural South, and the present, which symbolizes the Northern urban space. Naylor’s disruption of temporal narrative sequences as well as her use of Bakhtin’s technique of chronotope, is an authorial purpose to illustrate the necessity for the black community to preserve their ancestral past and heritage as part and parcel of their identity.

Naylor acknowledges that Toni Morrison is one of her sources of literary inspiration: “The writers I have been taught to love were either male or white. And who was I to argue that Ellison, Austen, Dickens . . . Baldwin, and Faulkner weren’t masters? They were and are” (11), Gloria contends. “But inside there was still the faintest whisper: Was there no one telling my story? . . . until I enrolled in a creative

writing seminar at Brooklyn College . . . and read Toni Morrison's *the Bluest Eye*," Naylor asserts. "It said to a young poet, struggling to break into prose, that the barriers were flexible; at the core of it all is language, and if you 're skilled enough with that, you can create your own genre," Gloria further contends. "And it said to a young black woman, trying to find a mirror of her worth in society, not only is your story worth telling but it can be told in words so painstakingly eloquent that it becomes a song" ("A Conversation" 11). Naylor, in this interview, stipulates that she read all of Morrison's novels, and that she attended a lecture after Morrison's publication of *Song of Solomon* (11). "I have come to the realization that I like this woman" (12), Naylor adds. "We are from two generations, city and small town ... But we are, after all, women" (12).

Naylor, like Morrison, does not negate the Western presence in the formation of black identity. She perceives that the present must cohere with the past to guarantee a better and healthy future of her "double-conscious" characters. As does *Song of Solomon*, *Mama Day* portrays the dichotomy between the modern North and the rural South. If Morrison associates the patriarchal household of the urban Dead family with the North, and the household of Pilate and her feminine community of women, including her daughter Reba and granddaughter Hagar, with the Southern world, Naylor, in the same vein, associates her gendered characters, George Andrews and Cocoa Day respectively, with the theme of the spaces they occupy. Cocoa reflects the South and George the Northern city of New York.

The novel is a recollection of posthumous conversation between George and Cocoa. It reflects the dialogical nature of their relationship, which, in some ways, subverts the hierarchical dynamics, which qualify the relationships between Morrison's

characters. This conversation reflects a dialogue of two romantically involved characters who remember their encounters, marriage, and early life together. They address their first-person narrations directly to each other. In so doing, they provide two distinct visions and moral orders to their stories. Cocoa represents an Afrocentric vision of the South, and George epitomizes a more pragmatic and globalized vision of the North. Perhaps because Naylor, unlike Morrison, is from New York City, she does not negate its richness. In her work, New York City embodies a site of diversity and psychological freedom. “You can’t hear music, and you can’t go to the cinema without being exposed to the multiplicity of New York” (Rowell 191), Naylor contends. Yet, despite her appreciation for the city’s cultural diversity, Naylor also seems to insist that one cannot be fully detached from his or her African background if he or she is to survive psychologically. In this novel, George Andrews is an urbanite with no family or cultural ties. Because he has never known his parents or any members of his family, and feels ashamed of what he perceives as his having been abandonment as an infant, he seems ambivalent about identifying with other blacks only because of shared skin color. Instead, he relies on a pragmatic and empiricist discourse of the self-made urbanite for emotional balance. He thus takes solace in identifying himself with the character of the bastard in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. “I’d gone through Lear uncountable times. It had a special poignancy for me, reading about the rage of a bastard son,” he says, “my own father having disappeared long before I was born” (106).

Like Milkman Dead, George is obsessed with the mainstream discourse of urban America. However, if Milkman’s obsession is tied to the materialistic world of

property, George's obsession is more ideological, in that he is co-opted by the mainstream empiricist world of the city. New York becomes a space which replaces his genealogical connection to his family and its past. Brought up in an orphanage, George was taught that "only the present has potential" (126). George has come to live by that creed. He does not believe in fate or predestination, because as he puts it, "[t]o believe in fate or predestination means you have to believe there's a future, and I grew up without one" (22). George can invent the present with equanimity and feels comfortable in New York, where the past is easily obliterated and the future only tentatively envisioned (Simon 17). Like Milkman Dead's pragmatic world, the boys in the shelter are taught to believe in the empiricist and concrete world of hard facts and rules. "The discipline Wallace P. Andrews tailor-made for all of us said ... the present is you. And what else did we have but ourselves? We had a more than forgettable past and no future that was guaranteed," George proclaims (26). George has no childhood models for behaviour, except the pragmatic teaching of the orphanage. As Kathryn M. Paterson further points out:

Because George knows nothing of his parentage except for the fact that his mother was a whore (30), he grows up accepting and even depending upon the monoglossia of the shelter. The shelters' rules are predictable, its structure implacable, and George begins to internalize the facts of life that Mrs Jackson teaches (26). Because he has no authentic heritage, George allows his concepts of rules and laws to supplant his concept of self, as he discovers a spiritual underpinning in the Western (often white) system of logic and science. Because scientific principles are

universals, they are the only ideas he can trust, and he places his faith in them accordingly. (86)

The Northern austerity of the shelter teaches the boys to use and study the body of the human being in strictly scientific and anatomical ways. Mrs Jackson never taught the orphaned boy a more creative interpretation of human existence. The sexed bodies they studied were just “Two ugly blowups of the skinned male and female anatomy...taped on the floor” (104), and the dry lectures they were taught are merely about the “procreative responsibilities” of these bodies. The children are, then, warned against sex: “keep [your genital parts] or you will pay through your pockets” (105), a statement which links the act of procreation with financial expenses and loss. The institution’s pragmatic teaching affects George’s perception of women. Not only does he identify himself with the white canonical character of Shakespeare’s bastard as the only source of reference to account for his fractured identity, but his perception of women is also embedded in the white and essentialist definition of Sigmund Freud’s theory of women who stand as the figures of the phallic lack. Lucas Beauchamp, in *Go Down, Moses*, fights to win back his wife as his own property to assert his manhood in the eyes of his white cousin, Zack Edmonds. Macon Dead and his son, Milkman, in *Song of Solomon*, brutalize and use women as mirrors to affirm the illusion of their manhood. Even if George Andrews does not objectify or degrade women, his perception of them remains, theoretically, sexist. Women, according to him, stand as biological bodies who suffer from “penis envy.” Alluding to Cocoa, George stipulates that “the inequality in our social system intensified your innate envy of us—the ‘tampon complex.’ The shape of our sexual organs reminded you of the cruel trick

biology had played upon you” (142). For George, not only women’s hormones, but also their minds are incredibly complex (143). As a patriarchal character, George associates men with wisdom and rationality, and women with the emotional order. He believes that the complexity of their hormones and minds make them “deteriorate into the nonsensical” (142). Because they are very sentimental, women fail to understand that sex is sex (105). “You’re a fag or a wimp,” George contends, “[s]o what’s a guy to do? When women run around screaming that men lie to them, it’s because we’ve learned that they want—or even need—to be lied to. They aren’t programmed to accept the fact that in the beginning sex is sex” (105). Sex, then, becomes a set of rules, serving physical and biological instincts.

George’s cultural effacement is not only linked to his pragmatic and patriarchal world view in the city, but also to the circumstances of his naming. “I was always in awe of the stories you told so easily about Willow Springs. To be born in a grandmother’s house, to be able to walk and see where a great-grandfather and even great-great-grandfather was born,” George tells Cocoa. “You had more than a family, you had a history. And I didn’t even have a real last name” (128). Naming in the African American legacy is performative. Names refer to the history, life experience, the character, and the identity of the persons to whom names are symbolically attached. In the *Afrocentric Idea*, Molefi Asante articulates the importance of nicknames in the black community. He claims that “While the African-American does not maintain the formalized Akan or Yoruba response to naming, one does find the prevalence of nicknames, which serve as markers of the African presence in ‘the sound-sense’ of black America” (84). Asante further assumes that “[a]lmost all young men and women

receive nicknames at an early age, and these names are designatory, referring to one's physical appearance (eg., Red, Gooseneck, Peanut Head), character (eg., Bull, Slick, Rap), or relation (eg., Buddy, Bro,' Boy, Big Sister, Cool Baby) (85). Cultural reality, as Linda Ann Johnson further puts it, "is reflected in the language of African Americans, as well as in their names. In an effort to maintain some sense of selfhood, they often assign each other nicknames" (37). By adopting these labels, they are rejecting the European definition and negative images of them. These names, in fact, symbolize their collective attempt to repair psychological/spiritual damage that slavery inflicted on them (37). Not only is George an orphaned child, presuming that even his parents lied to each other in terms of their real names, he is also named by an unidentified person, Wallace P Andrews. George's naming further implies his racial non-existence and disconnectedness from his African American legacy. His name, as his character, are both institutionalized by the pragmatic orphanage which becomes, in turn, his only point of reference defining his own selfhood. If names within the African American legacy is a source of self-definition and empowerment that historically freed African Americans from the bondage of slavery and its aftermath, George's namelessness further evokes not only his familial and cultural detachment, but also the fact that he is owned and enslaved by the shelter as well as the foster care system (Johnson 39).

While George's name is randomly institutionalized, Cocoa's multiple naming is designated by her culturally rooted grandmother, Abigail, and her sister, Mama Day. Cocoa's life stages performatively inform her nicknames. They nicknamed her Ophelia "Baby Girl" because she is the last surviving member of the new generation of Day

women (*MD* 39). The name is also one of endearment. Because she was a sickly child and they feared losing her, the women doted on “the Baby Girl.” As she grew older and they were sure she would survive, the older Day women dropped the “the” in her nickname. Her other nickname “Cocoa” was given to her after she turned five years old and decided that she would no longer answer to “Baby Girl.” Mama Day implies that her new name will probably “put color on her somewhere” since she was so pale (41). Cocoa’s multiple names chronicle her life experience, her relations to the people who are involved in her life, and therefore, ground her historically, culturally, and genealogically to the collective past, memory, and culture of Willow Springs. Her multiple naming endows her with a rooted agency which contrasts with George’s state of non-entity.

Cocoa is committed to her ancestral and spiritual beliefs that support the conservation of her heritage. When she finds out that George is already in a relationship with Shawn, a “red-headed” woman, she stipulates that, as an African American woman, she keeps the coolness of her race, which comes from endurance and perseverance. As she points out:

Cool comes with the cultural territory: the bearing of the bush, the rocking of the slave ship, the rhythm of the hand going from cotton sack to cotton row and back again. It went on to settle into the belly of the blues, the arms of Jackie Robinson, and the head of every ghetto kid who lives to a ripe old age. You can keep it, you can hide it, you can blow it- but even when your ass is in the tightest crack, you must never, ever, **LOSE** it. (102)

Cocoa's interpretation of "cool" is impregnated with a collective memory of black history. As opposed to George, she connects with the historical black past which incorporates the development of black history from the time of slavery to the modern position of the black subject who invades the black Northern ghettos of the big cities. As Daphne Lamothe further contends, "this meditation on cool delves beneath the surface of posture and style, and it grounds Cocoa's self-awareness in a collective history of dispossession, hardship, endurance, and transcendence" (159). In *Mama Day*, when natives leave Willow Springs, they "go Mainside and stay there. Those who remain believe that if 'you cross over' you leave something behind which may be your soul" (52). Kathryn M. Paterson, in "Gloria Naylor's North/South Dichotomy and the Reversal of the Middle Passage," contends that

[a]s long as Cocoa remains geographically separate from the island, she cannot be fully part of its narrative... Although many of the townspeople still align themselves with her and consider her a part of them, her time in the urban North has sent her into a state of permanent limbo between communities—a limbo that, while allowing her to be the arbiter of certain kinds of information, prevents her from being privy to others. (85)

Cocoa's urban adventure, however, does not undermine her cultural rootedness. She remains tied to the feminine community of *Mama Day* and her sister, Abigail, her "othermothers," through correspondence. "[E]ven as she assimilates to her urban environment," Julie Tharp claims, "[Cocoa] depends upon the letters they send, her occasional visits home and the affirmation they provide that tells her who she really is.

They convey to her the knowledge that she is not simply another office drone in a large big city but someone with a rich history and cultural background, someone who matters very much to a small family and community” (125). Not only does Cocoa’s strong connection to her community and her interpretation of “cool” ingrain her in the rural South, but also her intuitionist behavior and knowing in the big city is a further example of her cultural preservation.

George’s mode of knowing is empiricist: “My engineering degree, the accelerating success of Andrews & Stein, proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that you got nothing from believing in crossed fingers, broken mirrors, spilled salt” (33). Cocoa, on the other hand, convinces herself that the intuitionist mode of knowing that she inherited from Willow Springs will work for her in this city. Her intuitionist approach to knowledge challenges George’s empiricist perception of the world: “George, you were always so exacting ... Some things just couldn’t be boiled down to a formula that you could shove new elements into and have it all come out nice and neat,” Cocoa contends. “You operated by rituals. I guess a lot of it came from growing up in an institution... you were not an imaginative man, but you were constant” (145). As a rooted character, Cocoa has learnt from her great-aunt, Mama Day, ways of dealing with the world that allow her to retain her belief in black rural tradition (Tharp 126). Her perceptions of New York are paralleled by Mama Day’s perceptions of urban America, gleaned by examining the faces in the audience on television shows (only the faces; she turns the sound off). Mama Day judges these people on the basis of the way they laugh, “the slump of the shoulders. And always, always the eyes. She can pick out which ladies in the audience have secretly given up their babies for adoption, which

fathers have daughters making pornographic movies, exactly which homes have been shattered by Vietnam, drugs, or ‘the alarming rise of divorce’” (38). Similarly, Cocoa bears this ancestral intuitive trait, and like Mollie Beauchamps in *Go Down, Moses*, and Pilate in *Song of Solomon*, she knows intuitively, and thinks that she can determine by the look of the brief case or appointment book whether or not a woman is unemployed (126).

Cocoa radically rejects Western literature. She rebukes George for reading Shakespeare since his writing does not encapsulate issues related to her black identity: “Shakespeare didn’t have a bit of soul...If he had been in touch with our culture, he would have written somewhere, ‘Nigger, are you out of your mind?’” (64). Cocoa repudiates the Northern capitalist lifestyle because its inauthentic Restaurants “were designed for assembly-line nutrition-there was nothing in there to encourage you to linger” (13), and food is genetically modified and replicated: “Cakes and pies inside of them never made crumbs when they were cut,” Cocoa complains, “and no juice ever dripped from cantaloupes and honeydews” (13). For Cocoa the North is so unreal that it becomes, to recall Jean Baudrillard’s words, an instance of simulacra²⁷. According to Cocoa, urban people cannot have immediate access to the essence of the food they

²⁷ In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Jean Baudrillard defines the postmodern world as an instance of the death of the real replaced by copy of an invented origin without difference. Simulation, he writes, “is no longer that of territory, a referential being, or a substance (1). It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreality,” which “is sheltered from the imaginary, and from any distinction between the real and imaginary, leaving room only for orbital recurrence of models and for the simulated generation of differences” (3). Simulation threatens the difference between ‘the true’ and ‘false’ ‘the real’ and ‘the imaginary.’” (3) Simulation stems from the utopia of the principle of equivalence from the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference.” In short, simulation or simulacra is “a plethora of myths of origin and of signs of reality- a plethora of truth, of secondary objectivity, and authenticity,” “a resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared,” a “strategy of the neoreal and the hyperreal that everywhere is the double of a strategy of deterrence” (3).

consume, but just fake replicas of it. Food, in turn, recalling Baudrillard, becomes a simulated image where the distinction between original and the copy is blurred, a process where the postmodern subject cannot have access to the essence and the value of things but only their surface and depthlessness (Harvey 287-289). Images, become the signifying characteristic of postmodernism which are themselves altered into commodities and used to manipulate desires and tastes through signs that may or may not have anything to do with the product to be sold (287).

In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison supplies Milkman with Guitar, a radical nationalist, who is obsessed with the black issues in order to accentuate Milkman's indifference to the racial problems of his black community in Michigan. Guitar's definition of black identity in biological terms falls into an essentialist discourse. He associates the genes of the black subject as a pretext for the necessity of blacks to radically separate themselves from the white world and culture. In *Mama Day*, Cocoa, like Guitar, is a radical separatist. Her obsession with the rural South does not make her appreciate the cultural diversity of the city. Because she feels apprehensive about metamorphosis, Cocoa refuses to "go through the motions." Instead of existing in the limbo between Northern and Southern localities and legacies, she is frightened of "change and difference" (63) to the point of being xenophobic²⁸. Estranged from New York, she compares the Northern city-dwellers to "[a] whole kaleidoscope of people—nothing's just black and white here like in Willow Springs. Nothing stays put" (63). Cocoa identifies herself with the Orthodox Jewish community which isolates itself

²⁸ Cocoa is afraid of change and difference. She prefers seclusion than interminglement with people: "There were more people living on my one block than the whole island where I grew up" (63).

from the metropolitan life. As she puts it, “I had heard that they were clannish, and coming from Willow Springs I could identify with that” (19).

If Cocoa refuses change and metamorphosis, George’s condition as an orphaned urbanite makes him more receptive to the culture of New York. Not only does he believe in the pragmatic agenda that the present and the now are the only potentials in his world, George challenges the willed isolation of Cocoa. He criticizes the hordes of African American Southerners who, like Cocoa, settle down in New York and refuse to change their Southern, African American moral order. “That’s why you still feel like a stranger to this city after seven years. And you can die here and feel that way if you confine yourself to the tourist ghettos that are being set up for you,” George tells Cocoa (65). “Most people are confined in ghettos by economic circumstances, so there’s no chance for them to grow and explore, to be enriched by the life of the city,” George continues. “And I just think it’s a little sad that here, of all places, the young and talented confine themselves by choice” (65). George unsettles Cocoa’s limited vision of New York. Because she refuses to take the subways, she spends her city life on “the fringes” of the town. For George, Cocoa’s spatial stagnation does not permit her to appreciate the cultural diversity of New York: “My city was a network of small towns, some even smaller than here in Willow Springs” (61). Each small town has “its own laws and codes of behaviors, and sometimes even its own judge and juries” (61).

New York is a network often divided and devoid of genuine community, “a network of warehouse apartments and complicated intersections where people are isolated by schedules dictated by trains and office clocks rather than the season of

agricultural economy” (Paterson 78). Such isolation “exacts” from humanity “a different sort of consciousness than does rural life,” notes sociologist George Simmel (131). As a new space, the role of the metropolis creates “psychological conditions” that “use up” more consciousness than do the slower, more habitual and familiarized “life and sensory imagery” of the Southern rural community (131). When Southern blacks arrive to the metropolis, they are immediately confronted “with a foreign space and time, with technology and urban capitalism, with the crowd and the stranger” (Griffin 51). As a defense mechanism, they become psychologically and culturally secluded. Aside from culture, the paradoxical graphology of the space further alienates the black migrants, because as George Simmel further points out, “the bodily proximity and the narrowness of space” “makes the mental distance” between individuals “all the more visible” (Simmel 133). Cocoa certainly epitomizes this migrant’s alienation in the metropolis. However, she sees that George’s complaint about the isolation of African Americans in New York reflects his inability to interpret the fact that the spatial confinement of African Americans is the result of the ongoing discrimination and institutionalized alienation of the black community in the metropolis. Naylor, like Morrison, focuses on the division of the Northern space to further criticize the continuity of racial separation among people on the basis of race and gender. .

Cocoa discovers that many of the opportunities held out by the big city turn out to be far more elusive than she imagined. She must spend a six-month period searching for a job. She begs leads from friends when she uses up her unemployment benefits and discovers that a job through temping agencies will scarcely pay for the rent, let alone all the other necessities of life (*MD* 15). Such an issue highlights the crumbling

American ideal of the self-made man, which is illustrated by the illusive statue of liberty thrusting her torch upward above Ellis Island. “Give us your poor, your huddled masses,” the engraving at Liberty’s feet read (Paterson 79). However, at the time of that engraving, those “huddled masses certainly did not include the chained rows of slaves, legs soiled by sweat and urine, crowded onto the decks of slave ships on the forced pilgrimage to the New World” (Paterson 79). Neither did they include the regiments of African Americans fighting in the civil war against their own freedom or the myriad of black slaves harvesting corn and cotton to boost the Southern economy (79). While it was fashionable during the hey-days of the industrial revolution to believe that individuals could advance beyond their stations given the right education and set of skills, by the mid-twentieth century, many people began to interrogate such a promise, contending that even if the ideal did exist, it only applied to white men who were born into situations of privilege (80). Instead of leading to a close examination of racial relations and a genuine understanding of the accumulated horrors of slavery, this challenging of ideals prompted yet more false structures, designed to appease white guilt by attempting, on the surface, to promote equality (Paterson 80).

Cocoa is all too familiar with these gestures, as she acknowledges that firms which recruit African Americans as front desk receptionists often hire no other black people for the more advanced positions, believing that by hiring just one person, “they’d put the ghost of Martin Luther King to rest” (20). In the racist hidden structures of New York, Cocoa, implicitly, implies that George Andrews’s position as a black mechanical engineer, who owns and runs his own corporation, reveals the illusion of the ideal of self-made man in the promise of this city, and to use Cocoa’s words, he

becomes an instance of the very fewest people of color who have prestigious social and economic positions, and are used to hide the racist American institutions. Cocoa's perception of the racial matters is valid. However, in looking for a job, she, paradoxically, yearns for segregation: "Mama Day and Grandma had told me that there was a time when the want ads and housing listings in newspapers—even up north—were clearly marked colored or white. It must have been wonderfully easy to get a job hunting then" (19). For Cocoa this form of segregation would help her spare "a lot of legwork and headwork" (19). "And how I longed for those times, when I was busting my butt up and down the streets," Cocoa further asserts (19).

3.2 "The Bridge:" Cocoa and George's Initiation into the South

Through their reflections, the reader realizes that Cocoa and George not only come from vastly different backgrounds and geographies, but also possess "divergent sensibilities and philosophies" (Charles E. Wilson 87). This disjuncture between Northern and Southern ideologies culminate in a final resolution, the institution of marriage. Marriage, like the image of the fragile bridge that links Willow Springs to the mainland, is a symbol of union wherein differences and disparities of philosophies and perspectives are intersected. Robin Blyn, in "The Ethnographers' Story: *Mama Day* and the Spectre of Relativism," makes a striking point when she links the metaphor of the bridge to the crisis of particularism versus entanglement in analyzing the ethnographic space of Willow Springs. "The bridge aptly figures the lived tension of this diasporic community between entanglement and separatism, between a hybrid identification and an indigenous one" (257) since it is perpetually constructed, deconstructed and

reconstructed when the Willow Springs community is threatened by the cross-cultural world of the mainland. Instead of reading the bridge as a space that delineates dual worlds, I read it as a geo-cultural space that facilitates the movement of people and ideas to move inside and outside the local territories. It is through this bridge that Cocoa can move in and out the Northern and Southern locations. Only through her penetration into the Northern world can she meet George, and, despite their ideological disparities, end up marrying each other.

The city, despite George's cultural deracination, is a space of love and open possibilities. Cocoa's encounter with George changes her perspective. Instead of inserting herself into "tourist ghettos," Cocoa is now riding subways in order to discover the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens (97). She, ultimately, started appreciating the city: "I am now having a lovely time seeing New York" (67), Cocoa asserts. She realizes "how small and cramped her life had been" (98) before George's enriching encounter. Cocoa's experience in New York and her encounter with George changes her consciousness and makes her a fully developed character: "You have already turned me into a better woman" (104), she tells George. Marriage becomes the bridging space of both cultures, which reflects, in a fashion similar to Morrison, the theme of "hybridity." If Morrison subverts Faulkner's logocentric perception of identity through her reliance on the myth of the flying African in describing the aerial and fluid nature of Milkman's journey in the South, Gloria Naylor, relies on the metaphor of the bridge to account for the double-voicedness of the African American world. George contributes to Cocoa's change and now it is the turn of Cocoa to mark the first steps of George's initiation into Southern ancestral heritage. Hybridity does not imply uprootedness. Besides her appreciation of

the city, Cocoa remains a bearer of her cultural legacy. Like Pilate and Circe in *Song of Solomon*, she functions as a mediator for George to bridge the gap between his past and present. Cocoa occupies the empty space of “the inside nothing” of George’s parental and cultural loss. As an uprooted character, George must share Cocoa’s ancestral past because, as she puts it, “a person is made up of much more than the ‘now’” (127). It has to be also grounded in a coherent past, which is George’s lacking ingredient.

In *Song of Solomon*, it is only through the agency of Pilate that Milkman traveled to the South. Believing that the bag of gold was hidden in Pennsylvania cave, Milkman ultimately finds himself in Shalimar. In *Mama Day*, George’s trip to the South has a romantic dimension. It is his marriage to Cocoa that entails his physical and spiritual migration to the South. Like Milkman’s Southern experience, George has to experience and come to terms with the legacy of the island in order to potentially achieve hybridity. This sort of journey to the African American rural South, however, comes under massive attacks by contemporary writers and theorists in that it has become an obsolete return to an “essentialist” culture and epistemology, a nostalgic imagining of an authentic region that does not go in tandem with the changing postmodern world. Postmodernism, as Fredric Jameson assumes, epitomizes the death of semi-autonomy of culture and the obliteration of “critical distance”, i.e., the critical attitude sustaining the outmoded belief in the purity of the cultural realm because in postmodern era of late capitalism, our postmodern bodies become incapable of “distantiation” (*Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 48-49). David Harvey refers to the return to localism, in general, as a danger that can breed cultural insularity and ethnic chauvinism as a reaction against the disruption and alienation of

the postmodern subject from the experience of place (286). As he puts it, “there is a return . . . as a means to overcome the uncertainty produced by ephemerality, temporality, and instantaneity process....to religious fundamentalism, search for authenticity, local communities as a defense mechanism against the homogenizing flow of postmodernity” (292).

Madhu Dubey refers, specifically, to Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* and Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day*. She contends that these writers’ return to a “residual” “Southern regionalism” (147) obscures the real material class crisis that affects African Americans in the urban ghettos. (292). Dubey refers to Raymond Williams and Adolphe Reed who criticize African American writers’ focus on the rural South. Raymond Williams, for instance, qualifies it as a “stick to beat the present,” but in its backward tendency turns “protest into retrospect” (12 qtd in Dubey 148). Adolphe Reed, in a similar vein, sees this return as an instance that banishes the realities of class stratification within segregated black communities (28 qtd in Dubey 148) and qualifies it as the consolidation and romanticization of the segregating Jim Crow law (148) that “falsifies the past,” substituting a partial and idealized memory for historical truth (97). Hazel Carby, in analyzing Zora Neal Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, argues that “Afro-American cultural and literary history should not create and glorify a limited vision, a vision which in its romantic evocation of the rural and the folk avoids some of the most crucial and urgent issues of cultural struggle, a struggle that [African American writers] recognized would have to be faced in the cities, the home of the working class” (*Reconstructing Womanhood* 175). Building her critique on Carby’s sense of displacement, Dubey further contends that “literary turn South revives organic

forms of racial community that are unavailable in contemporary urban conditions, and in this sense might be said to displace postmodern crises of literary representation” (144).

What these theorists and writers imply is that dwelling on the rural Southern past is an obsolete reaction to the changing contemporary world, which obliterates class stratification. Dubey further grounds her critique of the rural black aesthetic in the postmodernist context. She admits that in the postmodern world of surfaces, images, and in a culture of “virtuality,” mediation, simulation, and hyper-reality, African American writers’ call for authenticity results in a further devaluation of the African American body and culture, which become subject of the colonialist gaze (229). Quoting from Samuel Delany, Dubey writes: “the notions of premodern communities uncontaminated by technology typically primitivize the others of the modern West as ‘a people . . . without history’” (*Stars in my Pocket* 204 qtd in Dubey 230) and underwrite material as well as symbolic violence against these “others” (230). “The notion of pure culture (the presumed object of anthropology) becomes one with an imperialistic ideology that justifies abuses toward a society because that society has ‘no history’” (*SIP* 204 qtd in Dubey 230). As an alternative, Dubey proposes the science fiction genre as a means of representing and affirming African American culture and epistemology because the unreal becomes more real than the real

Despite the validity of their claims, Dubey, Reed, Carby, and Williams’ critiques of the turn South are not necessarily descriptive of Gloria Naylor’s treatment of the African American culture and identity. First, the Northern capitalist city has a strong place in *Song of Solomon* and *Mama Day*. As I mentioned in the first part of this

chapter, the city, despite its cultural richness and possibilities, also, serves for the critique of continued racism and segregation in the contemporary white world. In representing the Northern city as a site of urban apartheid, Naylor, like Morrison, does not negate class stratification. Second, the postmodern legacy's emphasis on the world of simulacra presupposes the death of any belief in the existence of culture and identity. Or identity in the African American poetic is often associated with culture, which has often been misrepresented and silenced in the mainstream canon and discourse. "Black writers have been writing in this country since this country has been writing and have literary heritage of their own. Unfortunately, they haven't had encouragement or recognition of their efforts" ("A Talk with Gloria Naylor" Goldstein 4), Gloria contends. "There is a historical tendency to look upon the output of black as not really American literature. What had happened was that when black people wrote, it wasn't quite serious work—it was race work or protest work" (4). According to Gloria Naylor, "very gifted writers died unrecognized for that reason—and for other reasons that many other gifted writers have died unrecognized" (4). Similar to Morrison, Naylor asserts that as a voice of the "x-ed" spaces, all what she is personally benefiting from is "all those graves. All the doors that had been knocked upon and been unheeded" (5). Postmodernism's critique of identity, hooks writes, tends "to threaten and close down the possibility that this discourse and practice will allow those who have suffered the crippling effects of colonisation and domination to gain or regain a hearing" (28). Instead, "African Americans should be vigilant and suspicious of postmodern critiques of the subject when they surface at a historical moment when many subjugated people feel themselves coming to voice for the first time" (hooks 28).

Third, Dubey's critique of the turn South neglects "the imaginative act" of African American Woman writers in rebuilding cultural spaces and values. This artistic imagination is what Morrison terms "literary archeology" ("Site" 112). The imagined South not only gives voice to African American literature and epistemology, but also subverts the western monolithic knowledge and vision of the world by showing that there are other cultural realities which have different modes of knowing and seeing. In effect, Morrison and Naylor, through their reconstructed South, celebrate diversity. "Literature must be pluralist the same way as society should be" (Strouse 53), Morrison asserts. By claiming that the science fiction genre is the best angle to represent the postmodern reality of African American subjects, Dubey neglects another fact: that postmodernist art and literature celebrate plurality and diversity of reality, which are not only linked to the postmodern genre of science fiction. In *Postmodernist Fiction*, Brian McHale contends that contemporary writing is a "confrontation between worlds, through transgressions of ontological levels or boundaries, or through vacillation between different kinds and degrees of 'reality'" (232). By making their characters, Milkman and George Andrews, vacillate between "different kinds and degrees of 'reality,'" which are epitomized in the Southern and Northern spaces, Morrison and Naylor challenge monolithic modes of representing African American culture as "pure."

Fourth, Naylor makes of Willow Springs a metaphor of a signifying space, which besides the Northern influence, defines and shapes African American literature and identity. Naylor's turn South, even more than Toni Morrison's, is not logocentric or essentialist in nature, as Dubey asserts. It does not reflect, using Dubey's quote from Kiarri Cheatwood, "one of the authentic zones" (156), which is "totally detached from

the mainstream American order” (qtd in Dubey 156). Willow Springs does not represent a “premodern communities uncontaminated by technology.” Morrison’s South is more essentialist than Naylor’s. Morrison relies on the character of Milkman who crosses the borders between Northern and Southern worlds. This criss-crossing is what makes him achieve the state of hybridity, which qualifies African American thought. Naylor, on the other hand, negates both Eurocentric and Afrocentric worlds. Her turn South reflects flexibly. As Naylor further points out, “the Southern experience is by no means monolithic . . . and is as complex as the authors whose works reveal an engagement with the region” (“Conversations with Gloria Naylor” Montgomery xi). Milkman’s reversed migration back to the South, presupposes a movement inside and outside Northern and Southern spaces in order to account for the rich and hybrid African American culture and identity. On the other hand, George Andrews finds himself in a place where people perpetually preserve their unique Southern order, while at the same time, do not negate the mainstream influence which comes across the fragile bridge. The bridge then, becomes a metaphor of both preservation and entanglement, a form of dialogue and contestation between Willow Springs and the mainland discourse.

Like Milkman Dead, the journey South is a form of cultural confrontation. In *Song of Solomon*, Milkman is amazed by the rootedness of Shalimar, wherein the past is never perishable but well-preserved. George, in Willow Springs, is also confronted by the cultural preservation of the island, a place, which, in his words, “all smelled like forever” (175). In this eternal space, “there’s the same folks coming into the general store to pick up their supplies, the same group hitched up on chairs outside of Parris’s barbershop, the same heads leaving Reema’s all oiled up and curled” (160). Reference

to the sameness of this place reflects the conversation of its ancestral heritage. Another instance of this cultural preservation is accounted for in the inhabitants' reliance on nature, and on the seasonal time, which regulate their daily activities and behaviors. In New York, "the clocks and calendars" are designed to order the urbanites' reality (158). In Willow Springs, time is tied to the cycles of nature: "Time is so slow it's like it's not happening at all. . . It's all one night, one day--one season. Time don't crawl and time don't fly; time is still. You do with it what you want, stretch it out, or here we just let it lie" (161), because, "for its own sake, was never a major factor here. The crops, the weather, the season-- they all controlled behavior much more than [George's] elaborate digital watch" (281).

It is "Home," Cocoa, perpetually, contends. Reference to "Home" is congruent with hooks's concept of "homeplace." Drawing on past legacies, hooks writes, "Contemporary black women can begin to reconceptualize ideas of homeplace, once again considering the primacy of domesticity as a site of subversion and resistance" (48). The concept of "home" in *Mama Day* translates how the residents of Willow Springs' resistance to the mainland helped them preserve their cultural legacies and practices. The island itself sits just out of the legal reaches of Georgia and South Carolina. "And the way we saw it," the ghosts whisper, "America ain't entered the question at all when it come to our land... We wasn't even Americans when we got it-[we] was slaves. And the laws about slaves not owning nothing in Georgia and South Carolina don't apply, 'cause the land wasn't then-and isn't now-in either of them places" (5). The states of Georgia and South Carolina after the Civil War tried to incorporate the island, but, because "it belongs to us—clean and simple" (5), the

residents resist this incorporation. In order to protect the island from the capitalistic exploitation, the islanders refused any deal with the developers, despite their luring talks about “vacation paradises,” “better jobs” and “community uplift” (6). By rejecting deals with the mainland world, the inhabitants were immune from both racial and cultural exploitation. Joephyne Hazelwood Donlon makes a striking point in analyzing the relation of the right of property with the preservation of the authentic legacies of the island: “The islanders’ conviction to maintain ownership over one’s body, land, and community along with their emphasis on cooperative action and self-reliance direct the residents to fight against their inclusion within the state boundaries of Georgia and South Carolina, turn away developers in the 1980s, whose construction of vacation resorts had transformed other island communities” (153qtd in Lamothe 175). Landownership, coupled with willed isolation, “enables Willow Springs residents to maintain and continue their distinct cultural traditions and folk culture” (153 qtd in Lamothe 175). As Lamothe further points out, “Land’s ownership is an integral component of Willow Springs’ past and present. Willow Springs’ uniqueness is marked by ‘the inordinate amount of agency held by its inhabitants, who not only absorb the normalizing forces of mainland culture, but also actively resist being torn apart by them or relinquishing their rights of ownership’ (175).

As a self-contained space, Willow Springs rejects the laws of the white institutions. “There ain’t no sheriff to watch out for, and no jail...The nearest courthouse is fifty miles beyond the bridge on the South Carolina side, and over a hundred on Georgia’s” (79). Far from the white dominant order, black folks in Willow Springs have their own rules, judges and juries. They “take care of their own, if there

is a rare crime, there's a speedy judgment. And it ain't like the law beyond the bridge that's dished out according to likes and dislikes, and can change with the time" (79). In resisting the outside world, Willow Springs epitomizes an instance of what Marc Augé's terms "the signifying places," which stand as "universes of meaning of which the individuals and groups inside them are just an expression, defining themselves in terms of the same criteria, the same values and the same interpretation procedures" (33).

Cultural preservation of the island is illustrated in its rejection of the mainstream empiricist culture. The inhabitants ridicule all those people who believe in the concrete world of measurement. Reema's boy, the educated fool, "came hauling himself back from one of those fancy colleges mainside, dragging his notebook and tape recorder... to put Willow Springs on the map" (7) in order to study its "ethnography" and "cultural preservation" (7). The "18&23" date, which encodes the island's history and philosophy,²⁹ he has determined, is actually an inversion of the lines of longitude and latitude on which Willow Springs was once located on maps, an observation which denies the fact that inversion is the key to the worldview of Willow Springs, a place where, in order to assert their cultural identity, people had "no choice but to look at everything upside down" (8). George Andrews falls into the same scriptographic fallacy: "My suspicions were confirmed when we drove over that shaky wooden bridge...I had to be there and see—no, feel—that I was entering another world" (175), George expresses when he first passed over the flimsy bridge. The concept of entering the Island

²⁹ 18&23 dates back to the historical foundation of the island by a conjure woman, Sapphira Wade, a legendary figure who is believed to have married her master, Bascombe Wade. She "bore him seven sons in a thousand days" (4), and obliged him to deed the land to his slaves.

reflects George's confrontation with an alienating unreal world that subverts his empiricist mode of knowing.

As opposed to the dictates of his work as an engineer, which implies his reliance on concrete facts, George's passing through the delicate bridge obliges him to feel rather than see. Willow Springs subverts George's empiricist world of exactitude. Constructed from his perspective as an outsider, the Southern island is not only romanticized as a cozy, unique, spiritual, "liminal," rooted and paradisiacal space, it is also "unmappable" because it resists spatial categorization. George, like Ike McCaslin in *Go Down, Moses* and Milkman in *Song of Solomon*, relies on the "scriptographic" discourse as a form of knowing. "It's hard to know what to expect from a place when you can't find it on the map," George says. "Preparing for Willow Springs upset my normal agenda" (174) because it is a place coming from nowhere. "Your insisting that the place was exactly on the border between South Carolina and Georgia wasn't terribly reassuring" (174). Unlike "beyond the bridge" (250), Willow Springs resists measurement. Its invisibility on the official map and its fictional localization in-between the plausible towns of South Carolina and Georgia that Naylor supplies in the maps of the introductory pages, attests to its liminality and (in)determinacy (Rosca 41) as both visible and invisible, real and unreal. It is neither here nor there but somewhere in the intersection of the two real towns.

The state of in-betweenness that characterizes the island is illustrated in the multi-faceted metaphor of the bridge. The bridge illustrates the supernatural identity of the island as an (in)visible entity and denotes, to use M Ruth Noriega Sánchez' words, "the magic realist strategy of building an autonomous world with a particular cosmology when supernatural events are possible" (63). Aside from the cultural symbol of the

bridge, I also read it as a linking point, which in connecting two distant localities, corroborates the liminality of the island, which, despite its cultural heritage, does not negate the mainstream presence. Liminality, then, reflects the hybridity of the island, which exists in the limbo between the local and the mainland discourses. I would argue that Naylor, even more than Toni Morrison, is aware of the complexity of the Southern. If Shalimar is described as a unique space, in Virginia, which exists outside the realm of the modern mainstream culture, Willow Springs, despite its depiction as a “barrier island” (250), nevertheless, is in dialogue with the mainstream world. In *Song of Solomon*, Milkman’s urban appearance and his car constitute an offense to the black community, especially to the Shalimar men. Faulkner’s South and Ike’s woods are described as pure and exclusive spaces. In Willow Springs, characters such as Abigail and Mama Day, Ambush and Bernice, and Dr. Buzzard all wear and use products from “across the bridge”. Miranda, the ancestral figure of the island, owns an “ancient Motorola” (37). She and her sister receive letters and postcards each month from her grand-niece, Cocoa. Mama Day has a TV. She watches her favourite programs, like Phil Donahue’s talks on NASA and the UFO (37-38). Abigail has “a fresh bunch of collards from across the main road” (35). Mama Day and Abigail order from Sears or Montgomery Ward’s (66). Bernice Duvall owns a “dark green Chevrolet” (42) and, then, a convertible. Her husband Ambush sells “a load of tomatoes beyond the bridge. He takes care of most of the fresh produce for the big supermarket” (42). Ambush and his wife go to the night clubs “beyond the bridge.” They dance while they enjoy “the boogie-woogie music” (72). When Mama Day opens their freezer, instead of organic and home-made food, all what she could see was “frozen pizzas, Sara Lees. And a cabinet full of

canned soup... Jiffy cornbread” (83). Dr. Buzzard is “wearing his beyond-the-bridge clothes: a clean t-shirt under the denim overalls that he usually wears by itself, and a rooster feather stuck in the band of his felt hat” (46). Artists from Willow Springs, like Muddy Waters, play “beyond the bridge” (154), and black folks are “gallivanting to juke” (154) to listen to his music. To sum it up, elements of the lifestyle from “beyond the bridge” are intertextually incorporated in the island.

The bridge, despite its fragility, remains a cross-cultural space, which permits the people of Willow Springs to move in and out between the local and mainstream spaces. It reflects the nature of the island, which, despite its separatist tendency, remains mobile and flexible. Home, as “a space of resistance,” tolerates changes of the modern time, more than Morrison’s Shalimar and Faulkner’s Mississippi woods. The acceptance of the changing reality does not undermine the island’s moral order, nor, as long as “the old survives,” does it alter its inhabitants into “total strangers” (49). Each December twenty-second, people of Willow Springs celebrate Candle Walk, as a tribute to Saphhira Wade, the spirit of the island. The ritual “was a way of getting help without feeling obliged” (110). People, usually, exchange home-made gifts in order to help each other. They exchange food, potatoes, ginger cookies, meat. However, with the new generations, “the younger ones done brought a few other changes” (110). Because they have more money and work beyond the bridge, they started buying each other “fancy gadgets from the catalogues” (111). Some “will even drive their cars instead of walking, flashing the headlights at folks they passed” (111), instead of using candles. Other youngsters “begun to complain about having no Christmas” (111), but instead this “old 18&23 night” (111). Among these changes, older people are afraid

that these youngsters would spell the death of Candle Walk. Mama Day, however, does not fear changes, because one cannot deprive the young folk of traveling back and forth “beyond the bridge.” She contends that in her young days, Candle Walk was different, that her father, John-Paul, stipulated that, in his time, Candle Walk was also different, and that in his father’s time the ritual was even more distinctive. Mama Day keeps reassuring them that “there’s nothing to worry” (111) because time changes the ways the rituals are conducted but not the object of the rituals, because Willow Springs is a “Home. You can move away from it, but you never leave it. Not as long as it holds something to be missed” (50). In Lamothe’s words, Mama Day “recognizes that aspects of tradition remain and mingle with the new; that a hybrid culture is, and has always been developing” (164).

Reema’s Boy fails to confine the cultural and geographical aspect of the island. George fails to map it either. This failure of mapping and identifying the singularity of the space is double-folded: Willow Springs, constructed from the moral order of its inhabitants, resists the scriptographic world of measurement. Second, because of its hybridity, one cannot study its cultural identity in essentialized terms. Willow Springs transcends the conventional anthropological strategies where terms such as “unique speech patterns,” pure “cultural preservation” and “ethnography” negates the fluidity of the non-Western cultures. In “Travelling Cultures,” James Clifford asserts that traditional anthropology “has privileged relations of dwelling over relation of travel” (99). Instead, anthropology must work on hybrid nature of cultures than on rootedness” (101). In “Putting Hierarchy in Its Place,” Arjun Appadurai criticizes the conventional anthropological strategies in localizing non-Western people as “natives.” Hierarchy, in

studying the culture of the so-called natives, “is one of an anthology images in and through which anthropologists have frozen the contributions of specific cultures to our understanding of the human condition. Such a metonymic freezing has its roots in a deeper assumption of anthropological thought regarding the boundedness of cultural units and the confinement of the varieties of human consciousness within these boundaries” (36). In studying cultures, traditional anthropologists often use the term “native” to imply one’s state of being born “in particular spaces, and belonging to those places” (37). This term, however, limits the “native” in a space which is deemed as “distant from the metropolitan West” (37). Appadurai assumes that the conventional meaning of the term “natives” is very restrictive, since it suggests that they are seen as “somehow incarcerated, or confined, in those places” (37). Like Gilroy, Gates, Du Bois and Clifford, cultures should not be studied in a state of “immobility” nor as being “prisoners of their mode of thought,” nor as being “tied to their niche” (Appadurai 38). Instead, cultures must be viewed as “transregional interactions” (39), a form of what Appadurai terms, “diffusionism” (39). As he further points out, “people confined to and by the places to which they belong, groups unsullied by contact with a larger world, have probably never existed” (39).

Hybridity does not overlap with cultural uprootedness. Naylor’s definition of the “home” as “being new and old all rolled into one. Measuring your new against old friends, old ways, old places. Knowing that as long as the old survives, you can keep changing as much as you want without the nightmare of waking up to a total stranger” (49), attests to Clifford’s perception of cultures as “dwelling-in-travelling” spaces (103). Reference to hybridity as both interminglement and preservation is

metaphorically accounted for when George describes his heart condition: “the blood flows in, it leaks out a little. Flows in, and leaks out a little. As long as too much blood isn’t pressured in, the hole gets no larger, and the leak stays small” (107). The image of the leakage and the blood celebrates the world of flow, which as long as “the hole” gets no larger, the leakage will not undermine what is essential to the community of Willow Springs. Among these changes, people remain attached to their local traditions, because the island, using Naylor’s description of Mama Day’s body, is “soft around the edges without getting too soft at the center” (203). Candle Walk, despite the leakage caused by the bridge, remains, like the metaphor of “the heart,” alive, and an essential part, which sustains the continued remembrance of the holy spirit of Sapphira Wade, whose association with the supernatural world of conjuring and with the community’s rejection of the scriptographic forms of knowing, constitutes the backbone of the island, and, not incidentally, the spaces in which George has to “fall” and “stumble” throughout his journey South.

3.3 Black Oral Culture and History

It ain’t about right or wrong, truth or lies; it’s about a slave
woman

Who brought a whole new meaning to both them words, soon
as you cross over here from beyond the bridge. (*Mama Day* 3)

In *Signs and Cities*, Madhu Dubey makes a striking point in studying the dilemma of African American writers in the postmodern era wherein the legacy of

print literacy is rejected for being racially exclusionary, culturally elitist (55), and an art form that cannot serve marginalized groups' political agenda. In the postmodern era of high technologies, the printed form is replaced by electronic technology. Dubey assumes that postmodernist attack on what she terms 'scriptocentrism' is symptomatic of a wider disenchantment with the career of modern humanism, in which print literacy has been thoroughly implicated (155). African American writers and theorists, for instance, assume that the dehumanization of African Americans was essential to the definition of universal humanity in print modernism (155). The postmodernist rejection of the print legacy is however controversial especially for the marginalized groups whose voice must be carried in the print legacy. The call for the subversion of the visible sign led some postmodernist figures to question the validity of applying postmodernist ideologies in the rising literatures written by minority groups. Dubey, herself, concludes that "it is perhaps premature to proclaim the death of print literature...for some marginalized groups, especially African Americans, who historically have been barred from participating in this culture" (56). African American writers, like Morrison and Naylor, use the print form as a means to subvert from within the very discourse they write through. They insert an oral ethos in the very structure of the print medium to underline the cultural heritage they write for and from within. Writing another racialized oral discourse in the very printed form of the novel brings to mind not only Du Bois's aestheticized art of "double-consciousness," but also how, through the acquisition of the print legacy, African American writers, especially Naylor in this part of my thesis, highlight the oral tradition as a means to subvert from within white "History" of the white canon. Naylor, in a fashion reminiscent to

Morrison, writes an oral book wherein oral history is juxtaposed against the written form as a means not only of foregrounding that African Americans have their own art and culture, but also to reflect on the mythic construction of histories, on their essentialist and exclusionary implication in portraying the racial “Other.” By adopting the oral form of history Naylor, similar to Morrison, brings about a collective and polyphonic way of constructing historical facts that transcend a monological mediation of the past.

Willow Springs in *Mama Day* echoes the oral, primitive and primordial nightly hunt space in Morrison’s *Shalimar*. It is part of the heroic test which challenges George Andrews’s empiricist approach to knowledge. The ghostly whispers in the epilogue, first evokes the oral dimension of not only the text of *Mama Day* itself, but also the black community’s ancestral oral heritage. “Really listen this time: the only voice is your own. But you done just heard about the legend of Sapphira Wade, though nobody here breathes her name,” the ghosts whisper. “You done heard it the way we knew it, sitting on our porches and shelling June peas, quieting the mid-night cough of a baby, taking apart the engine car - You done heard it without a single living soul really saying a word” (10).

If William Faulkner’s text is about a “scriptographic” and patriarchal mediation of the family history of the McCaslins, which translates the whites’ fear of racial miscegenation, Naylor’s novel, on the other hand, takes a feminist trajectory. The legend of Willow Springs rests on the story of a heroic ex-black female slave, Sapphira Wade, who, perhaps, married her white master, Bascombe Wade in 1823. In the very beginning of this novel, she is described to us as a black female body subject

to capital circulation, a body to be sold within the institution of slavery. In the sale letter of 1819, she is described as a twenty-year old “pure African stock,” with “limbs and teeth sound,” “inflicted with sullenness and entertains a bilious nature” (ii). She is chaste, a nurse, but “not without extreme mischief and suspicious of delving in witchcraft” (ii). The sale letter epitomizes the white patriarchal and empiricist history that engages in dehumanizing the black female body, which is reduced to a state of capital and sexual commodity. Or as suggested by Hortense J. Spillers in her *Black, White and In Color*: “In a very real sense, black American women remain invisible to various public discourses, and the state of invisibility for them has its precedent in an analogy on any patriarchal symbolic mode that we might wish to name [...] Black women are the beached whales of the sexual universe, unvoiced, unseen, not doing, awaiting their verb” (153).

Similar to *Song of Solomon*, written history is questioned. Mama Day, metaphorically, has difficulties reading the sale letter. She relies on her oral memory in order to know the past genealogy of the Days. She finds the family ledgers in the big house, placed in the corner. The ledgers, like Faulkner’s, are described as “narrow, bent almost in two from being jammed into the point of the roof” (279). Like Faulkner’s ledgers, the pages are “swollen and discolored from years of dampness” (279) and “the ink wasn’t all run together” (279). Like Faulkner’s introduction of the ledgers, Naylor re-introduces the Days’ ledgers in the same graphological fashion. “The ink that wasn’t all run together” and “the discolored and narrow pages” reflect the leftover and the empty spaces that characterize the depiction of Sapphira Wade in this Western record. She is introduced just as a marketable and sexual black body. Like

Reema's boy's ethnographic approach to Willow Springs, History, as an institutionalized discourse, proves to be little more than what historian Pierre Nora has termed "sifted and sorted historical traces" (285). The emphasis on the location of the ledgers in the corner further corroborates the narrative of the silenced black voice and, as an African American woman writer, Naylor gives specific location and space for black women during the antebellum era. The conditions of the letter of sale is introduced as a micro-narrative inserted within the longer ledgers to further account for the double marginalization of black women in white racist and patriarchal discourse. Miranda reads:

Tuesday, 3rd Day August, then a I and half of what must be an 8, with the rest of the date faded away. Sold to Mister Bascombe Wade of Willow Springs, one *negress answering to the name Sa...* Water damage done removed the remainder of that line with the yellowish and blackened stains spreading down and taking out most of others as well: *Law...knowledge...witness...inflicted...nurse*. It's all she can pick out until she gets to the bottom for the final words:
Conditions...tender...kind. (280)

African American writers, in hooks's words, always already function as deconstructionist cultural critics through their art of signification upon the white canonical tradition. As she further puts it, "cultural criticism has historically functioned in black life as a force promoting critical resistance, one that enabled black folks to cultivate in everyday life a practice of critique and analysis that would disrupt and even deconstruct those cultural reproductions that were designed to promote and reinforce

domination” (3). For hooks, “cultural critique is particularly relevant to black artists/or intellectuals who see themselves as committed to an ongoing black liberation struggle with a central emphasis on decolonization” (5). It is a contrapuntal reaction that celebrates diversity of interrogation and interpretation that transcends the conventional white hierarchy, tautology, and monolithic discourse. Working within the African American literary tradition, African American writers, to use Henry Louis Gates’s statement, alter their works into “a talking book” (77), which responds to and signifies on other works as well as aesthetic traditions. They all rely on various dimensions of the black aesthetic to represent and meditate on the black body (Brown 4). In juxtaposing the oral history of Sapphira with the white written sale letter and the ledgers, Naylor criticizes Western history as a discourse, which is as confining as the space of the letter that confines the body of Sapphira. Naylor’s critique of western written history is as graphologically demonstrated as Faulkner’s in *Go Down, Moses*. The sale letter and Faulkner’s ledgers are both historical documents which reflect the reductive and restraining language that confines the body of the black slave within the capitalistic institution of slavery. “Although there is no valid scientific evidence of a biological relationship between culture and race,” as African philosopher Anthony Appiah argues, “it is nevertheless the perception of biological and cultural differences (color, hair, religion, language, beliefs, and values) ascribed to and socially inscribed as race in popular and formal texts by white American society that served as the paramount basis for the incremental regional social subjugation, exploitation, and exclusion of African captives and African Americans” (32).

The sale letter's emphasis on the body and the physicality of Sapphira, juxtaposed with Mama Day's fragmented reading of the words "knowledge," "law," and "witness" further illustrates the mythic construction of the black body as a natural given by the grand-narratives of the white institutions and laws. The naturalization of the black body serves for a further legitimization of the oppression and subordination of black people. French socialist and feminist theorist, Colette Guillaumin, makes it more explicit in underlying the discursive construction of race as a natural given: race, exactly like sex, is taken as "an immediate given," a "sensible given," "physical features," belonging to a natural order (150). But what we believe to be a physical and direct perception is only a sophisticated and mythic construction, "an imaginary formation" (144), which interprets physical features through the network of relationships in which they are perceived (146). "Nature is the ideological form of a certain type of social relationship" Guillaumin writes. "The idea of the somatic-psychological internal specificity of the social groups ... is an imaginary formulation (in the sense that naturalness exists in the mind) associated to a social relationship" (146). The succession of words "Law," "Knowledge," "Witness," "Inflicted," "Nurse," "Conditions," "Tender," and "Kind" of the sale letter excavates two overlapping discourses in the formation of the so-called naturalness of the concept of the "racial group." The naturalistic descriptions of Sapphira Wade forms what Guillaumin terms "the naturalistic false consciousness," which presupposes the existence of "natural" groups of humans, "finite," and "specific" (133). References to the law and knowledge, which function as "witness," belongs to social science which consolidates the construction of the naturalistic characteristic of a particular racial group, or what

Guillaumin terms, “the conventional and artificial inscription of social practices,” “a system of false marks” (138). “Law, more than science,” Guillaumin contends, “came to serve as witness of and assurance for the strong usable belief in the endo-determined character of groups in a given society” (148).

Language, similar to Faulkner’s critique of the McCaslin ledgers, becomes an art of distortion and manipulation that contributes to further subjugation of the African American subject. More than mere prejudices, as African American sociologist William J. Wilson puts it, racism is “an ideology of racial domination or exploitation that (i) incorporates beliefs in a particular race’s cultural and /or inherent biological inferiority and (ii) uses such beliefs to justify and prescribe inferior or unequal treatment for that group” (32). Faulkner criticizes the logocentric and constructed dimension of history but does not give an alternative reading and action on the part of Ike McCaslin, who is proven to be a passive reader and a subject who, nevertheless, remains ingrained in the white and phallogocentric world of his era, despite his indignation at the horror of slavery. Naylor, in a fashion similar to Morrison, not only criticizes the reductive and subjective dimension of written history, but also creates within her construction of the oral mediation of the Sapphira legend an alternative meaning that challenges the racial bias of white history. The critique of “essentialism” is useful for African Americans who are “concerned with reformulating outmoded notions of identity” (hooks 28). It allows them to affirm multiple black identities, varied experiences that “challenge colonial imperialist paradigms of black identity which represent blackness one-dimensionally in ways that reinforce and sustain white supremacy” (28). This monolithic discourse created blacks as primitive and promoted

the notions of authentic black experiences, seeing as “natural” those experiences of black life which confirmed and consolidated a pre-existing pattern or stereotype (28). For hooks abandoning essentialism would be a serious and performative challenge to racism (28). Naylor gives another version of Sapphira Wade’s identity and experience. As opposed to the essentialist and misrepresentative dimension of the sale letter and the ledgers, Sapphira had a voice, and as Mama Day would say, “[Mister Bascombe Wade] had claim to her body, but not her mind” (225). In the oral legend, and from the opening pages of the novel, Sapphira is orally depicted as “the Mother-Earth Goddess” (R. Mark Hall, 80):

Willow Springs. Everybody knows but nobody talks about the legend of Sapphira Wade. A true conjure woman: Satin black, biscuit cream, red as Georgia clay: depending upon which of us takes a mind to her. She could walk through a lightning storm without being touched; grab a bolt of lightning storm in the palm of her hand; use the heat of lightning to start the kindling going under her medicine pot: depending upon which of us takes a mind to her. She turned the moon into a slave, the stars into a swaddling cloth, and healed the wounds of every creature. . . .(3)

Not only does Sapphira Wade have agency in the oral transmission of her story but, also the way her legend is transmitted does not follow the mainstream patterns of either/or structures in understanding and reconstructing historical facts. Oral knowledge resists the closed interpretive system, and is subject to “multiperspectivist” versions. The written sale letter describing Sapphira as a submissive entity is challenged by the black folk’s polyphonic oral transmission of her legendary character.

Sapphira, the ghosts whisper, “married Bascombe Wade in 1823, bore him seven sons in just a thousand days . . . persuaded him to deed all his slaves every inch of land in Willow Springs” (3), then killed him. Unlike the fixed understanding of Ike McCaslin’s reading of the ledgers, the oral story of Sapphira Wade keeps on shifting as time goes by. The legend is read from the perspective of a slave woman who came to Willow Springs, and then left “in a ball of fire to journey back home east over the ocean” (111), leaving behind her seven sons and a dead white master “as she walked down the main road with a candle held high to light her way to the east bluff over the Ocean” (111). Earlier communities believe that the legendary Sapphira Wade left Willow Springs walking the main road with a candle in her hand (111). Even if the reader cannot have immediate access to Sapphira’s legend and the circumstances of her disappearance from Willow Springs, Mama Day remembers another version of the story in which Bascombe Wade inherited the island. Because he fell under her spell, he decided to deed the property over to his slaves, presumably, his mulatto children. Mama Day keeps repeating that the white master owned her in body but not in mind, and that nobody knows her name. Even her name is as unidentifiable as the legend that surrounds her identity.

The act of killing her white master is also ambiguous: “[Sapphira] got away from him and headed over here toward the east bluff on her way back to Africa. And she made that trip—some say in body, others in mind. But the point is that he lost her. He kept a vigil up here at Chevy’s Pass— he’s keeping it still. And the wind is right in the trees, you can hear him calling and calling the name that nobody knows” (206). The killing may, in fact, have turned out to be a spiritual one, an emotional breakdown

of the white master after his slave's departure, and even the departure cannot be understood literally as a physical disappearance, because as the legend tells it, "some say she left in mind," presumably; she created an imaginative world of her own as an escape from her reality as a slave. However, other versions evoke, in a fashion reminiscent of Toni Morrison, the myth of the flying Africans. They assert that Sapphira Wade literally left the island back to Africa, leaving the white master out of his mind calling her unknown name that still haunts Willow Springs. Naylor implies that the different versions of Sapphira Wade's legendary story resist single interpretations because the oral mediation of events encapsulates imagination, and inventiveness, which transcend the fixed written mediation of history in *Go Down, Moses'* ledgers. Plurality of perspectives, like in *Song of Solomon*, subverts Faulkner's monolithic written ledgers, because woven together, they make the whole, "the multifaceted truth" which, according to Meisenheder, forms a "complex narrative quilt of distinct voices" ("Whole Picture" 418) whose lack of consensus implies that histories are likely to splinter and "shift down through the holes of time" (Paterson 86). In Daphne Lamothe's words, "the multiplicity of ... memories formed is embedded in the novel's structure, which recreates an act of collective memory and storytelling" (158). The various versions "all narrate the same event from slightly different points of view. Their memories combine to offer a unified yet internally differentiated account of the past, a narrative form modeled on oral traditions of storytelling that challenge the monolithic histories theoretically produced by literate societies" (158).

The juxtaposition of the ledgers and the sale letters with diverse oral narrations of Sapphira's story is not implied to privilege a certain oral mode of

presentation and mediation over the written form. Instead, this amalgamation of discourses functions as a “palimpsestic” collage and montage of voices, which are intertextually combined to give alternative understandings and truths. These amalgamated discourses defy Western dualism and binarism. They constitute a form of “proliferation, juxtaposition, and disjunction,” which celebrates “difference over uniformity, flows over unities, mobile arrangements over systems” (*Of Other Spaces* Foucault 24). This heterogeneity and difference is what Foucault calls “heterotopias,” “the coexistence in ‘an impossible space’ of a ‘large number of fragmentary possible worlds’ or, more simply, incommensurable spaces that are juxtaposed or superimposed upon each other” (24). This intertextual co-existence forms the technique of collage: “Writers who create texts or use words do so on the basis of all the other texts and words they have encountered, while readers deal with them in the same way. Cultural life is then viewed as a series of texts intersecting with other texts, producing more texts” (Harvey 49). Naylor’s montage constitutes what Bakhtin calls the dialogic form which characterizes the novel, wherein “the stratification of language-generic, professional, particular, social in the narrow sense, that of particular world views, particular tendencies, particular individuals, the social speech diversity and language-diversity (dialects) of language-upon which the novel establishes its own special order within it, and becomes a unique artistic system, which orchestrates the intentional theme of the author” (1219). The political message behind Naylor’s discursive montage is self-reflexively further accounted for in the image of the hen coop George is repairing. As Mama Day cautions, “Everybody wants to be right in a world where there ain’t no right or wrong to be found. Just like that chicken coop, everything got

four sides: his side, her side, an outside, and an inside” (230). George’s construction of the hen coop that is subsequently dismantled by the storm symbolically attests to how the multiperspectivist narrations of Sapphira Wade’s legends once juxtaposed together construct and deconstruct each other’s validity in a way that “there ain’t no right no truth to be found” (230), nor “truth or lies” (3), because as Cocoa puts it, “there are just too many sides to the whole story” (213).

Hazel Carby contends that “the politics of sex as well as the politics of race and class are crucially interlocking factors in the works of black women writers” (8). This interlocking is what Barbara Smith, in her seminal work on black feminist criticism, terms “the simultaneity of discourse” (xxxii). As black women, who write within and from the structure of sub-dominant discourse, their subversive works have to do with their complex otherness as both black subject and black women. This complex otherness that informs the works of black women writers is what Mae G. Henderson deems as “an interlocutory” or “dialogic” characteristic within black women’s writings, which reflects not only a relationship with the “other(s),” but also an internal dialogue with the plural aspects of the “Self” that constitutes the matrix of black female subjectivity (3). In this process, black women writers enter simultaneously into familial, or testimonial and public, or competitive discourses with black men as black women, with white men as black women, with black women as black women, and with white women as black women (4). This dialogic of difference and dialectic of identity characterizes both black women’s subjectivity and their discourse. It is this very complexity of their simultaneously homogeneous and heterogeneous social and discursive domains out of which black women write and construct themselves (as

blacks and women and, often, as poor black women) that enables them authoritatively to speak to and engage both hegemonic and ambiguously (non)hegemonic discourse (5).

For Mae G. Henderson, black women must speak in a plurality of discourses. This diversity, or simultaneity of discourses, which she calls, “speaking in tongues” (6), becomes characteristic of black women writers whose works confirm, dispute, compete, interrogate, and subvert not only the canonical tradition of the dominant order but also the sub-dominant discourses which are concerned with the issues of Otherness. As a writer who “speaks in tongues, Naylor subverts not only Faulkner’s hermeneutic and monolithic approach to history, but also Morrison’s patriarchal legend in *Song of Solomon*. In *The Signifying Monkey*, Henry Louis Gates also stresses the fact that the African American art of signifying is not only restricted in re-writing the white canon. “If black writers read each other, they also revise each other’s texts” (124). If Morrison focuses on the figure of Solomon who left Shalimar flying to Africa, leaving behind twenty-one children and a screaming wife behind, Naylor revises the paradigm with Sapphira. The legendary woman has the agency to defy not only slavery but also her racialized gender by escaping, physically or metaphorically, from slavery. She not only leaves behind seven sons but also a white master, who out of his mind, obsessively calls her name. If Shalimar in *Song of Solomon* rests on the patriarchal legend of Milkman’s great-grandfather, Willow Springs rests on a legendary female ancestress who not only inverts the racial and phallogocentric world, but in the process becomes the Goddess whose procreation of seven sons further equates her with her divine and transcendental power of creation. If Morrison focuses on the body as both a site for

resistance or compliance within racial and gender discourses, Gloria Naylor, on the other hand, makes of Sapphira Wade a volatile character through her lack of corporeal presence, a form of deconstructive invisibility that asserts her agency that cannot be stable or fixed within the colonial gaze of race and gender dynamics. Morrison reports the violence done on black women's bodies but, also, asserts the possibility of exploring and foregrounding their inner lives. Naylor, through the character of Sapphira Wade, resorts to the nineteenth century writers' sentimental technique, wherein the visible black female body, or what Carla L. Peterson calls "the eccentric" body of black women, is replaced by the process of decorporialization in order to privilege their souls or minds instead.³⁰ In deconstructing Faulkner's scriptographic and sexist approach to history and Morrison's patriarchal genealogy, both topography and genealogy become two essential elements that, to use Helene Christol's words, "allow Naylor to reconstruct a parallel black history, to reinvent America by subverting its historical and mythical elements" (349).

The Days' ledgers are located in the Big House in "the other place," next to the Sound, where a small ghostly family cemetery resides. The noun, "sound," is defined

³⁰ African peoples believed in the fact that there is no clear separation between the body and the spirit or soul. "The body is conceived as the material form of the spirit" (Peterson x). This conjoining of the material and the spiritual is evident in African cosmology's refusal to distinguish between the realms of life and death. With the institutionalization of slavery in the United States, the dominant culture created a dichotomy between the black body and the spirit. At its extreme, slaveholding ideology denied the very existence of an African spirit or soul in order to legitimize the enslavement of the black people who, because they were soulless, could not, in the process, be considered human. The materialization of the black body as an instrument for servitude and subjugation is antagonized by African American writers during the 1800s who embarked on the sentimental genre, wherein the materialistic focus of the body is rejected and replaced by the representation of the soul or the spirit of the black subject in African American literature in order to assert not only the humanity but also the intellectual and sentimental power of the black subject (3). The characterization of Sapphira Wade falls into this sentimental genre, as opposed to her representation in the white ledgers. Her decorporialization gives her more agency not only as an immanent being but also as a mystic character whose identity is unattainable and unstable. In short, her invisibility as an invisible body is a weapon against her invisibility.

as a relatively narrow passage of water or between the mainland and an island (Wall 178), which, in this very definition, implies the “liminal” and ghostly dimension of the “other place”. A sound is also defined as “the sensation produced by stimulation of the organs of hearing by variations transmitted through the air or another medium” (178). The term sound has other meanings. It is defined both as “auditory effect” and “spoken utterances” (178). In *Mama Day*, those who have deep psychological insight and are familiar with the ghostly space can hear the voices of pain and yearning coming from the Sound. Like the ledgers, the Big House stands as a chronicle which enumerates the horror of slavery. It has the uncanny effect of reviving the story of Sapphira Wade’s enslavement, and the series of losses which affected her descendents: “The place felt uneasy in spite of the gentle breezes coming from the Sound. That house had known a lot of pain. . . .Your great-grandmother, Ophelia, losing her baby daughter at the bottom of the well; closing herself up from her husband and her children” (225), only to end up crazy and dead. “There was something more, and something deeper than the old historical line about slave women and their white masters,” George expresses. “A slave hadn’t lived in that house. And without a slave, there could be no master” (225). The history of the Days encapsulates successive deaths, losses, and yearnings that are caused by women through their escapes. Cocoa’s great-grandfather, John-Paul, yearns for Ophelia, his dead wife, who herself yearned for her lost child, Peace.

George’s reliance on the visible sign does not allow him to hear the voices of the dead. It is Cocoa who transmits the Days’ past to him through the stories which were orally transmitted to her by Mama Day and her grandmother, Abigail. The oral transmission of the past incarnates imagination in the process. They are in Cocoa’s

words “legion” and “fanciful” (224), which fed her imagination as a child. In George’s words, they are “ripe for myths” (218), which subverts his scriptographic approach to history. When he visits the family cemetery, George is shocked at the absence of the transcriptions on the Days’ tombstones: “An odd custom. But then I was entering the oddest graveyard I had ever seen. The tombstones...were of varying heights with no dates and only one name” (218). Andrews’s institutional training and his work as an engineer confines him within an empiricist culture of measurement and exactitude. The absence of transcription is replaced not only by the ghostly voices, which invade the Big House and the whole Willow Springs Island, but also by the various sizes of the tombstones which delineate the lived life of each of the members of the Day family. In George’s words, this “self-contained” tradition, “had redefined time” (218).

In Faulkner’s novel, Mollie Beauchamp sings the “Go Down, Moses” spirituals, which defamiliarizes the scriptographic world of Gavin Stevens. The song attests to her intuitionist and oral mode of knowing. Morrison supplies Pilate with the African American oral tradition. She refuses institutionalized education, as a form of intellectual contamination. Pilate sings the blues and is a storyteller, who nourishes Milkman with the stories of his genealogical past. Naylor, in the same vein, juxtaposes the “scriptographic” world of George with the feminine oral tradition of Mama Day. Miranda revisits the well into which Ophelia’s daughter, Peace, jumped:

Miranda’s pulse is racing for a good many reasons as she grasps **the edge of the well**, and peers down. **A bottomless pit** . . . she looks down. . . . There ain’t much chance of seeing through to the bottom, of even seeing her face. . . . *Look past the pain*. But there ain’t nothing down

there and this looking is straining her eyes. . . .Miranda **closes her eyes**.
. . . .And when it comes, it comes with a force that almost knocks her on
her knees. She wants to run from all that screaming. Echoing shrill and
high, piercing her ears. But with her eyes clamped shut, she **looks at the
sound**. A woman in apricot homespun: Let me go with peace. And a
young body falling, falling toward the glint silver of coins in the crystal
clear water. **Circles and Circles of screaming**. Once, twice, three times
peace was lost at that well. How was she ever gonna look past this kind
of pain? (My emphasis 284)

The well, to use Philip Page's words, "is a fixed point, a closed circle, where variation, alternatives, movement, play, indeed life, all cease" (112). In short, the well is an image of death, "enclosed, dark, and final, and much like a grave or a coffin" (112). The image of the bottomless well echoes, in its symbolic form, the tiny space of the ledgers and the sale letter of Bascombe Wade. Similar to her (un)reading of the written historical document of Sapphira Wade, Mama Day cannot, scriptographically, remember the past. The act of seeing "restrains" her eyes. Naylor, in this passage, equates her inability to see her reflection on the surface of the water with the opacity of history itself. It is only through closing her eyes that, then, she "looks at the sound" in order to account for the fact that knowing truth, "seeing," can only be achieved through the oral tradition. The well in its bottomlessness, refers to the scriptographic forms of knowing, which according to Mama Day's belief, freezes meaning. In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison refers to the deferred and multiple interpretations of Milkman's history of his family through the children's act of spinning around while chanting

“Song of Solomon.” In *Mama Day*, the act of closing her eyes enables Miranda to hear the past events which, in their “circles and circles of screaming,” evokes the plurality of versions of truth. Naylor’s reference to the bottomless pit in criticizing the voyeuristic white form of knowing echoes Jacques Derrida’s critique of the logocentric discourse of the white canon, which in its fixed form, becomes “the self-identity of the origin,” the centre as “the abyss,” “the unnameable bottomless well,” “the absence of play and difference, another name for death” (*Writing and Difference* 297). The “bottomless well” of the empiricist world of the sign, is replaced by the lack of inscription on the Days’ tombstones, and the oral re-telling of the stories, which includes imagination and the privileging of “play and difference,” which affects the multi-faceted narration of history within the African American culture.

Neither Cocoa nor her grandmother, Abigail, like to stay in the Big House, because, in its uncanny effect, it revives the painful memories of the Days which are not only linked to the theme of loss but also to the history of slavery and perhaps to the rape of Sapphira. The Big House, like the ledgers and the sale letter, is associated with slavery and property. Like Sapphira Wade’s black body, it belongs to Bascombe Wade. The ledgers and the letter, in a fashion reminiscent of Faulkner’s treatment of the relation between written history and slavery, are discursive mediums which further legitimized the enslavement of the black body. Because of the horror that invades the Big House, it is only Mama Day who visits it to take care of its garden. “It was her garden,” Cocoa claims. It did not really belong to Bascombe Wade, who originally lived in it, because “it actually belonged to the garden engulfing it on four sides and there was little difference between that garden and the woods that stopped at the front

gate. It was an old house and it was an old garden: a garden designed by a woman” (225). Mama Day occupies the wider space of the other space. Her garden transcends the tiny space of that Big House and overlaps with the woods. The image juxtaposes two spaces: that of Bascombe Wade’s house, which, like in Faulkner, reflects the world of ownership, and that of the extended garden, which reflects nature as an open space, and like Ike’s definition of the wilderness, “it belongs to nobody because it belongs to all.” Mama Day, similar to Mollie Beauchamp and Pilate, refuses the world of property. Her coming in and out the tiny space of the big house is part of her role as an ancestress who has to bear the burden of the past. She refuses to own it, and like her sister, Abigail, they associate it with the capitalistic world of ownership, and with the superficial luxury that opposes their simple yet fulfilling life.

George, like Milkman and Lucas Beauchamp, associates identity with the right to own property: “Let’s bring ourselves into the house and erase a little of that sadness,” he states trying to persuade Cocoa. “I felt something to give—maybe something we owed—to those other couples who tried but didn’t make it... We could defy history” (226). George’s intention to inherit the house differs from that of Milkman and Lucas, since the re-appropriation of the house implies the defiance of the painful history of losses and yearnings that affected the Day family. However, like them, he fails to understand that property in the African American moral order is a mere re-enactment of the same mechanism which created the institution of slavery. Instead of owning the Big House, George has to embrace his wife’s ancestral heritage as the only source of property which transcends his empiricist world.

George, like Milkman, is not only introduced to the oral history of the Days, his journey to the South is equated with the nightly gambling game he played with the black Willow Springs men, Dr. Buzzard, Parris, and Rickshaw. Naylor rewrites Morrison's woods. In *Song of Solomon*, Milkman's masculinity is challenged by the Shalimar men, who, then, invited him to the night hunting as a form of acceptance into the black community. In *Mama Day*, the game subverts George's mathematical mind because Dr. Buzzard uses tricks to win:

I had learned to play at Columbia in a mathematics course dealing with game theory. I came out of that course with an A and a solid grounding in analyzing problems of conflicts by abstracting common strategic features from an infinite number of conflict situations. And once you had distilled those handfuls of strategic features, you devised methods that could give you what is called "a most favorable result." The dozen matrix charts I had labored over in graduate school proved that, all things being equal, there is a payoff matrix within the axis of maximizing a minimum result and minimizing a maximum result. In short if Dr. Buzzard wasn't palming jacks between his thighs, stacking the deck, or making the cards - whatever he was doing - I wouldn't have lost consistently for twelve hands and been out of five dollars and twenty cents. (210-211)

The passage reflects George's mathematical mind. "Strategic features," "mathematics," "devised methods," "matrix charts," "maximizing," and "minimizing" are all terms that prefigure George's pragmatic and exacting perspective. Dr. Buzzard's

manipulation of the game cards transcends George's world of measurement and closure. His tricky game performatively reflects the absence of a direct link between the signifier and the signified. In turn, George must get rid of his mathematical learning and appropriate what he calls a "behavioral strategy" (211). "The pure strategy I'd been using wouldn't work to my advantage against him; I needed to introduce the formulas for behavior strategy" (211), George claims. This shift from mathematical reasoning to behavioral strategy implies George's acceptance of the discourse of unexpectedness, and variance, which, like the oral transmission of Sapphira's legend, challenges his fixed mathematical approach. During the game, George focuses on Dr. Buzzard's "sweaty" and "dancing" hands: "I was paying more attention to his hands, waiting for him to exchange his hole card with the hidden seven of hearts" (212). With the third deal, George notices that Dr. Buzzard was showing only a deuce, a six, and a jack high, but all were hearts (212). At the fifth deal, George won, when Dr. Buzzard "flipped over his hole card—The King of Seven" (213). Reference to number seven and to the heart, symbolically, echoes George's heroic journey in preserving the genealogy of the Day family that comes only through love. The night gambling culminates in an oral song which is associated with Sapphira Wade's legend and, explicitly, further supplements the theme of George's heroic initiation. In *Song of Solomon*, when Robert Smith was attempting suicide, Pilate starts singing "O Sugarman done fly away," "Sugarman cut across the sky" (6) and "gone home" (6). She, then, turns to Ruth, whose water broke, and tells her that "a little bird'll be here with the morning" (8). The scene becomes "some form of worship," an oral mythic enactment of heroic birth. Amidst the chanting men, George, in a similar fashion,

becomes the object of the heroic initiation. Dr. Buzzard refers to him when, in a call-response manner, he sings:

Take my hand, Precious Lord.
Lead me on. Let me stand.
I am tired. I am weak. I am worn.
Through the dark. Through the night.
Lead me on to the light.
And lead me home.
When my life is almost gone
By the river I will stand
And lead me home.
Sometimes stumbling
Sometimes falling. (214)

Similar to the “song of Solomon” in Morrison’s novel, the chant thematizes the idea of escape to reconnect with the past. “Stumbling,” falling,” and being “alone” become the underlining impediments that George must come to terms with. In *Song of Solomon*, Milkman experiences difficulties crossing the creek that leads to the Pennsylvania cave. The threat of physical violence from the black Shalimar men and his nocturnal hunt are all physical and culturally specific challenges that Milkman must come to terms with in his journey. Not only, like Milkman, is George introduced to the oral, though alienating tradition of the black community, he is now to follow the dictates of Mama Day, who, like Mollie in *Go Down, Moses* and Pilate in *Song of Solomon*, is the only source of guidance to “guide [his] feet,” and “hold [his] hand” in

order to “lead him home” (214), to “the light,” alluding symbolically to the Day family.

3.4 “The Bridge,” The Quilt, and “the Hand:” Mama Day and George’s

Final Quest

Like the role of Pilate in *Song of Solomon*, and Mollie Beauchamp in *Go Down, Moses*, Mama Day functions as the maternal ancestor who protects and guides the members of the black community. Like Pilate, she is compared to a tree which accounts for her rootedness: “She can stand so quiet, she becomes part of a tree” (81). If Mollie Beauchamp in *Go Down, Moses* is portrayed as “thin,” “fleshless,” “dry,” “light,” “frail as a rotted stick,” “dried,” and “lifeless” (126) to account for her rootedness, Mama Day, in a fashion reminiscent to Circe in *Song of Solomon*, is depicted as an ageless character. “I was reasonable in expecting wrinkles, sagging skin, some trembling of the limbs,” George contends. “It must have taken me ten minutes to regain my equilibrium, looking like this, how could these women ever die?” (175). Mama Day’s rootedness is expressed in her strong belief in the supernatural, which transcends George’s pragmatic world of facts and rules. Belief in magical powers is, according to John S. Mbiti, in *African Religions and Philosophy*, commonplace in African villages. Willow Springs is the cultural reproduction of such a community. “The whole psychic atmosphere of African village life,” Mbiti writes, “is filled with belief in this mystical power. African people know that the universe has a power, force or whatever else one might call it” (192). Rather than science, people conjure or

practice witchcraft, which in African American literature is often gendered in that it is usually associated with black women.

George finds himself in an alienating feminine world where black women challenge his western agenda. Willow Springs is more feminized a space than Shalimar in *Song of Solomon*. Not only is Sapphira Wade a conjure woman and the holy spirit of the island, many women in her community possess similar supernatural powers. Aside from Sapphira, figures such as Ruby and Mama Day use magical recipes to heal or take revenge. Although witchcraft is appropriated by Dr Buzzard, who is a male, Mama Day discredits him as a fraud since this transcendental power is uniquely attributed to the domain of women. “You know what he gives folks when they got an ache in their left side?” Mama Day tells George, “Moonshine and honey. And for an ache in their right side? Honey and moonshine” (196). Despite Buzzard’s assumption that there is a “professional rivalry” between him and Mama Day, he is well aware of the authenticity of her supernatural powers and the falsehood of his. The belief in the occult remains an integral part in the moral order of the Willow Springs community, and the presence of Mama Day, as the descendant of the conjure woman, Sapphira Wade, suggests the continuing belief in magic despite modern changes.

As an ancestral figure, Mama Day believes that “there is more to be known behind what the eyes can see” (36). Like Pilate and Circe in *Song of Solomon*, she epitomizes the Africana healer woman who is endowed with second sight power.

Hudson-Weems offers a clear definition of spirituality in Africana womanism:

The Africana womanist demonstrates a definite sense of spirituality, a belief in a higher power that transcends rational ideals, which is an

everlasting part in the Africana culture. From this point of reference, she acknowledges the existence of spiritual reality, which brings into account the power of comprehension, healing, and the unknown ... Moreover, she is connected to the spiritual world and with undaunted faith she is often spiritually guided by those of that world. In African cosmology, the physical and spiritual worlds co-exist and hence, both realities complement each other in the working for the good of all in the universe. (69-70)

As a mid-wife and a healer, Mama Day relies on her magical potions and on her intuition to cure and sustain the life of the black community, a transcendental ability which antagonizes modern science's empirical approach to the human body, and not incidentally George's limited urban rationality. Her given name, Miranda, "worker of wonders," bespeaks her power to assist even in the creation of life (Wall 178). In an erotic scene, Mama Day treats Bernice's illness intuitively.³¹ Bernice yearns to have a baby. She ingests some fertility pills that Mama Day warned her against, and which subsequently cause her to develop an ovarian cyst. Instead of prescribed drugs, Mama Day advises that she consume pumpkin seeds that give her the illusion of recovery,

³¹ Nine openings. She breathes through two, hears through two, eats through one, the two below her waist, and two for the life she longs to nurse. Nine openings melting into the uncountable, 'cause the touch is light, light. Spreading each tiny pore on each inch of skin. If she could scream, she would, as the touching begins deeper at the points of her fingertips to expand the pores that let in air, caressing down the bones each finger joint to the ones that join the palm, the wrist, the lower arms. Her shoulders, sides, and stomach made into something more liquid than water, her breast and hips flowing up against the pull of the earth. She ain't flesh, she's a center between the thighs spreading wide to take in...the touch of feathers. Space to space. Ancient fingers keeping each in line. The uncountable, the uncountable, is one opening. Pulsing and alive – wet- the egg moves from one space to the other. A rhythm older than woman draws it and holds it tight. (140)

because as she tells her sister, Abigail, “the mind is a funny thing...and a powerful thing at that. Bernice is gonna believe they are what I tell her they are—magic seeds. And the only magic is that what she believes they are, they are gonna become” (96). Through the supernatural treatment of Mama Day, Bernice gives birth to a son, Little Cesar. Like Pilate, who uses magical potions in order to intervene in the unwanted birth of Milkman, Mama Day is also associated with life and procreation.

Many critics read this scene as a patriarchal confinement of women within the natural world of procreation and motherhood. Daphne Lamothe writes, “The traditions preserved by the island include a set of patriarchal norms that privilege women’s roles as child-bearers and caretakers, illustrated primarily through a subplot in which Miranda enables Bernice to realize her feverish desire for motherhood” (161). Some feminists claim that the identification of women with their biological roles as mothers further subjugates them in the masculinist world where men are identified with culture and women with nature, a division which further oppresses women and confine them in the supposedly natural world of domesticity. “[M]aternal body,” Judith Butler proclaims, is “an attitude that confirms the logocentric discourse’s juxtaposition of women to nature as an evidence of the domination of man associated with culture to dominate the natural feminine body” (103). Monique Wittig, the advocate for lesbian transcendence of heterosexuality, points out, “[women] have been compelled in our bodies and in our minds to correspond, feature by feature, with the idea of nature that has been established for us. Distorted to such an extent that in the end oppression seems to be a consequence of this ‘nature’ within ourselves” (2015). Angela Y. Davis goes further, pointing out that “[m]en have severed the umbilical cord between

themselves and nature. They have deciphered its mysteries, subdued its forces, and have forged their self-definition in contradistinction to the nature they have conquered. But women are projected as embodiments of nature's unrelenting powers" (148). In their alienated portrait, "women are still primarily undifferentiated beings—sexual, childbearing, natural" (148). In Erik Erikson's view, female self-realization is a function of the "somatic design [which] harbors an 'inner space' destined to bear the offspring of chosen men, and with it, a biological, psychological, and ethical commitment to take care of human infancy" (580 qtd in Davis 148).

The theme of motherhood and procreation in the context of this novel, however, transcends the feminist critique of the phallogocentric definition of the maternal body. If Pilate in *Song of Solomon* refuses to marry the father of her own child, Reba, and decided to live a nomadic life as a means of resistance against conventional patriarchy, *Mama Day*, on the other hand, is introduced as a single woman. In addition, unlike Pilate, she is childless. Naylor, in this novel, transforms the very ideology that conventionally subordinates women into a "dynamic, religious, psychologically compelling celebration of female biological potential."³² Motherhood in African American literature written by black women is a transcendence that is juxtaposed against the rigid cultural and materialistic white world of patriarchy. It subverts the death-like world of Faulkner's text. Motherhood is continuity and a life-giving that transcends the capitalistic dimension of the antebellum breeding epitomized in the

³² Andrea Dworkin, a radical American feminist writer, who emphasizes that many lesbians recently transform the very ideology that enslaved women in the phallogocentric discourses into a "dynamic, psychologically compelling celebration of female potential" ("Biological Superiority" 46). I used her words to contextually foreground Naylor's valorization of motherhood, despite its patriarchal construction, as a means to celebrate the procreating power of women in opposition to the sterile white environment of Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*.

McCaslin ledgers, which functions as a mere further extension of capital. Motherhood is a result of love. Bernice and her husband's desire for a child expresses their yearning for the physical actualization of their love. Second, in taking care of other children, who are not necessarily her own, Mama Day engages in the benevolent act of "othermothering, which is a strategy of survival and empowerment within the African American thought. "Othermothering" transcends the conventional Western and patriarchal definition of motherhood. If motherhood is traditionally strictly biological and stipulates that a woman must take care of her own biological children, then, motherhood, within the African American epistemology, reflects the flexible ego boundary of black women, who in nursing and in taking care of other women's children, contribute to the continuity and the survival of their communities. When her mother Ophelia lost her baby, Peace, and, then, died, Mama Day becomes both "mama and sister" for Abigail (88). Mama Day, as a mid-wife, and a nurse, becomes the othermother of most of Willow Springs' children. In so doing, she becomes "everybody's mama" (89).

Third, the scene of motherhood is associated with the second sight power of Miranda whose knowledge of the human body transcends the scientific agenda of the mainstream culture. "Being there to catch so many babies that dropped into her hands. Gifted hands, folk said" (88). "You have a gift, Little mama" (88-89), John-Paul, her father, always told her. When Mama Day touches the inside of Bernice, the latter feels that they are not human hands: "It can't be human hands no way, making her body feel like this" (49). Contrary to institutionalized knowledge, Mama Day relies on her intuition to cure the sick. Despite the fact that she does not have an official diploma in

science, which would have officially certified her role as a healer, her supernatural power, nevertheless, is acknowledged, even by Brian Smithfield, a licensed physician from “beyond the bridge” with whom she works and competes. For years, they “have had what you’d call a working relationship—some seasons it worked better than others. But each knew their limitations and where to draw the line” (84). Dr Smithfield sees her as an equal, and although “it hurt his pride at times,” he admitted that Mama Day’s remedies and advice “were usually no different than what he had to say himself—just plainer words and a slower cure than them concentrated drugs” (84).

Mama Day’s intuitive knowledge comes from her symbiotic contact with nature, which endows her with “second sight.” “Mama Day’s healing powers transcend the world of science and verge on the magical” (522), Kathleen M. Puhr writes. “Aside from powers of nurse and midwife, she has the gift of ‘second sight’: precognition derived in part from a high degree of sensory awareness” (522). Mama Day can tell “what part of [the] forest she uses in the fall, summer or spring. Differences in leaves of trees, barks of trees, roots. The tonics she makes up, the poultices, the healing teas” (207). When Mama Day was young, “she’d walk through in a dry winter without snapping a single twig, disappear into the shadow of a summer cottonwood, flatten herself so close to the ground under a moss-covered rock shelf” (79). This close relationship between Mama Day and nature makes folks believe that “John-Paul’s little girl became a spirit in the woods” (79), whose later walking stick is “a magic wand” (Puhr 523): “A wave over the patch of zinnias and the scarlet petals take flight ... winged marigolds flow them into the air... a thump of the stick: morning glories start to sing” (152). Because of this symbiosis with the natural environment, Mama Day can

also predict the future: “Listening [to nature] without hearing. She knew what she’d hear now: crows, hawks, ducks, and geese making a mighty racket for no earthly reason; ‘cause reason was coming in from the southeast, pushing clear skies before it. And storms like that are born in hell” (227). “Miranda feels death all around her” (226). She was feeling change (226). She “shakes her head and takes a final look around her garden before she turns her face to the sky. Gray” (243), she says. “The color you’d get from blending a bridal dress and a funeral veil” (243). Mama Day predicts the coming of a hurricane: “This was gonna be a big storm” (227).

The hurricane is an intertextual reference to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*.³³ Obviously, the voice of Shakespeare haunts this novel, from George’s identification with the bastard of *King Lear*, to *Hamlet* in relation to Ophelia’s madness, to the storm of the novel which is identified with *The Tempest*. This palimpsestic allusion refers not only to the hybrid and double-voiced dimension of African American literature but also

³³ Inmaculada Pineda-Hernández, in “A Celebration of Female Ancestors in Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day*,” asserts that as an African American woman writer, Naylor revises and reinterprets Shakespeare. Prospero has the power to control the storm and his own daughter, Miranda. Naylor subverts Shakespeare’s patriarchal and racist discourse: Miranda, like Prospero, becomes the magician, who performs the role of the conjure woman. Miranda in Shakespeare has no human contact, save for her father and the servant in the remote island. “She is passive and submissive” (132). Naylor’s Miranda is “the guide of the community in Willow Springs” (132). Hernandez contends that “in re-writing those classical texts from a black perspective, Naylor places *Mama Day* in a literary continuum that includes both American and European traditional texts blending them with African American cultural references” (135).

In *Challenging Realities: Magic Realism in Contemporary Women’s Fiction*, M Ruth Noriega Sánchez contends that despite Naylor’s assumption that “she did not have *The Tempest* in mind while writing *Mama Day*, the similarities are shocking: an island full of magicians, a storm, the theme of reconciliation, a close juxtaposition of facts and fancy in the romance tradition, a character named Miranda...etc” are all meant for revisions (67).

Gary Storhoff, in “‘The Only Voice is Your Own:’ Gloria Naylor’s Revision of *The Tempest*,” asserts that *Mama Day* is an inverted configuration of *The Tempest*. In studying Mama Day’s magical skill, he contends that, contrary to Prospero, who controls nature, Mama Day “consistently operates with natural forces” and is associated with “life force” not with destruction (37).

to the ways Gloria Naylor re-writes Western culture in order to foreground her Africanist literary heritage. References to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, in the context of the novel, reject the white world's scientific approach to this natural phenomenon. Mama Day intuitively associates the hurricane with two deaths. Little Cesar, indeed dies and was buried according to the community's customs. "Go home, Bernice. Go home and bury your child" (259), Mama Day says, while stretching "her hand to touch the broken face" of Bernice. After the hurricane, Mama Day feels that "there's more sorrow coming" (262) when suddenly Abigail comes running for help to save her granddaughter, Cocoa, from death. Cocoa succumbs to the poison of the jealous Ruby. Thinking that Cocoa is trying to steal her man, Ruby works roots on her hair, which causes nausea, dizziness, loss of memory, paranoia, and "red splotches around Cocoa's temples" (264). Knowing that Cocoa's sickness is not an ordinary one, and that her death implies the demise of the whole genealogy of the Days, Mama Day stares "past her dried herbs, past the birth of Hope and Grace, past the mother who ended her life in the Sound, on to the Mother who began the Days" (263). As an ancestral woman and a symbol of survival, Mama Day is convinced of using "her gifted hands" in order to save the life of Cocoa.

In *Go Down, Moses*, Mollie Beauchamp is associated with love through the image of "the Fire and the Hearth," which associates her with the ancestral figure of communal survival and continuity. In *Song of Solomon*, Pilate is associated not only with the image of the tree, but also with the theme of the flight and with the quilt. In Gloria Naylor's novel, Mama Day is metonymically associated with the overriding concepts of "the bridging hands" and with the art of quilting, which both refer to the

theme of cultural connection and spiritual survival. After the hurricane, Mama Day touches the tree her father planted and “under the grayish light her skin seems to dissolve under the fallen tree, her palm spreading out wide as the trunk, her fingers twisting out in a dozen directions, branching off into green and rippling fingernails” (225). Mama Day’s hands are symbolically associated with the spreading trunk and with the growing branch, which symbolizes not only her rootedness, but also the fact that she is a figure of the survival. Beside the image of the tree, Naylor supplements this character with the metaphor of the quilt, which she patches for Cocoa’s wedding:

The overlapping circles start out as golds on the edge and melt into oranges, reds, blues, greens...A bit of her daddy’s Sunday shirt is matched with Abigail’s lace slip, the collar from Hope’s graduation dress, the palm of Grace’s baptismal gloves. Trunks and boxes from the other place gave up enough for twenty quilts: corduroy from her uncles, broadcloth from her great-uncles. Her needle fastens the satin trim of Peace’s receiving blanket to Cocoa’s baby jumper to a pocket from her own gardening apron. Gold into oranges into reds into blues...The front of Mother’s gingham shirtwaist . . . I’ll just use a silver, no longer than the joint of my thumb. Put a little piece of her in here somewhere. (137)

The art of quilting, like the metaphor of “the leading hand” and “the bridge,” further accounts for the theme of the survival of the black community and its history which comes only through the ancestral agency of Mama Day. In their book, *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad*, Jacqueline L. Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard contend that the African American quilt is “a cultural hybrid that

enjoys encoded meaning through geometric patterns, abstract improvised designs, strip-piercing, bold, singing colors, and distinctive stitches” (35). These five elements of encoding meaning imply that the African American quilt is a “fabric griot,” “a communicator conveying heritage as it once displayed a means for slaves to flee the plantation and journey to freedom” (35). The practice remains alive within the black diaspora, because it sustains the survival of their histories which are as connected and interlinked into one another as the shape and the design of the quilt itself. As an ancestral griot, Mama Day weaves together the threads of all of the Day family members. She spends sleepless nights patching the double-ringed quilt because she believes that it is her duty to sew the quilt for her descendants, in case she has already made her transition into the other world. The act of quilting, then, becomes her duty as well as her role in sustaining the continuity of her family.

As a figure of survival and connection, Mama Day uses magical skills in order to kill Ruby and to reverse Cocoa’s slow death. Her “old hands grasp the walking stick, hands knotted with veins and splattered with warm rain” (258). She pours silvery powder all around Ruby’s house to produce thunder which hits Ruby’s house twice. Mama Day’s magical spell subverts George’s scientific understanding: “There was something strange about this lightening. It struck twice in the same place. Theoretically, it is possible, but not probable, for lightening to strike twice in exactly the same place,” George ponders. He then explains:

the first exchange of electrical strike between the ground and the clouds, which in a sense is a strike, causes the negative-charge center up in the clouds to short-circuit and nullify itself. So it would take another

exchange of negative electrons from higher in that same cloud to the same positively charged spot on the earth to have lightning strike twice. That's rare. Unless, of course, in a scientific experiment someone purposely electrifies the ground with materials that hold both negative and positive charges to increase the potential of having a target hit. No one was running around with that kind of knowledge in Willow Springs, and it was highly improbable that it would happen naturally. (274)

George's interpretation is laden with scientific logic. He fails to understand that there's a transcendental and supernatural power which goes beyond the limitation of the mind. But Mama Day keeps saying that "he's gonna know what he ain't believing" (271). Cazadero Starhawk, in *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*, explains such magical abilities:

Magic is the craft of witchcraft, and few things are at once appealing, so frightening, and so misunderstood. To work magic is to weave the unseen forces into form; to soar beyond sight; to explore the uncharted dream realm of the hidden reality; to infuse life with color, motion, and strange scents that intoxicate; to leap beyond imagination into that space between the words where fantasy becomes real; to be at once animal and god. Magic is the craft of shaping, the craft of the wise, exhilarating, dangerous-the ultimate adventure. (101)

As a city boy, George Andrews is frustrated at the events which transcend the scope of his rational understanding. The inexplicable thunder and the sickness of Cocoa make him interrogate the validity of his pragmatic knowledge: "What good was

all that math and logic now?" (263). The bridge which links Willow Springs to the outside world is broken. This fall changes George's perception of the South. From his struggle to remain in Bascombe Wade's house to procreate children in the mahogany room, he experiences frustration, imprisonment, and, subsequently, loneliness. Unable to escape Willow Springs to save his dying wife, George feels the non-existence of the place and an uncontrollable realization that he was marooned on a backward island (256). "In a culture which equates 'the real' with the 'visible' and gives the eye dominance over other sense organs, the un-real is that which is in-visible. That which is not seen, or which threatens to be unseeable, can only have a subversive function in relation to an epistemological and metaphysical system which makes 'I see' synonymous with 'I understand.' Knowledge, comprehension, reason, are established through the power of the look, through the 'eye' and the 'I' of the human subject whose relation to objects is structured through his field of vision" (Jackson 45). Because of his entrapment in the mainstream empiricist world of the signs, George feels helpless. He associates Mama Day's ancestral belief in the supernatural with "mumbo-jumbo" (295), when she asks him to "go to the other place" in order to bring peace to Cocoa. He compares her language with the inscrutable language of intricate metaphors, "like what they used in poetry and stuff. The stuff folks dreamed up when they was making a fantasy" (294). In her explanation of "Speaking in Tongues," Henderson assumes that this discursive form of communication is not only linked to the simultaneity of language or to Bakhtin's heteroglossia. It is "a particular," "private," "closed," and "privileged communication," "inaccessible to the general congregation," because it is a mode of communication which is "outside the realm of

public discourse and foreign to the known humankind” (6). “Speaking in Tongues” is associated with the inscrutable baby talk or what Henderson further calls “babble” discourse, that reflects one’s ability to speak in and through the spirit (6). Mama Day incarnates this unknown form of communication, which is not only expressed in her oral knowing of the past, but also in her intuitionist and supernatural power. Confronted by this “unseeable” power, George Andrews feels alienated. His “mumbo-jumbo” statement over Mama Day’s inscrutable world echoes the lawyer’s encounter with Mollie Beauchamp whose intuitionist knowledge and defamiliarizing song of “Go Down, Moses” puzzles him and disturbs his public and rational form of communication.

Mama Day, as the quilting and connecting figure, must initiate George into the very “private” and inscrutable realm to ensure the survival of the Days, and for this reason, she is convinced, despite George’s rejection of her spiritual world, that in order to save their historical continuity, George must function as the “the leading hand,” the mediator, and “the bridge.” “It’s gonna take a man to bring [Ophelia’s] peace” she says. “But all they had was that boy, George” (263). “She looks down at her hands... In all her years she could count on half of her fingers folks she’d met with a will like his” (285). “He believes in himself,” Mama Day introspects. “[...] deep down within himself...and he keeps it protected down in his center, but she needs that belief buried in George” (285). It is “of his own accord he has to hand it over to her. She needs his hand in hers-his very hand-so she can connect it up with all the believing that had gone before. A single moment was all she asked, even a fingertip to touch hers here at the other place” (285) so that “together they could be the bridge for Baby Girl to walk

over” (285). “Yes,” Mama Day insists. “In his very hands he already held the missing piece she’d come looking for” (285). “The hand,” “the bridge,” and “the quilt” become all metonymic association with not only Mama Day’s art of sustaining the genealogical survival and the history of the Days, but also with George’s collaborative agency in consolidating that effect. Mama Day goes to the Big House and prepares for George’s journey: She uses her own concoction and with it “her hands never ceasing the oiling and rubbing of John Paul’s walking cane and Bascombe Wade’s ledger” (293). Mama Day, then, places them directly under the moonlight till the first breaking of the dawn. She perceives George coming tired and stumbling from days of hard work on the bridge. “I can do more things with these hands than most folks dream” (294), Mama Day tells George. “But this time ain’t no good alone” (294). Cocoa “done bound more than her flesh up with you. And since she’s suffering from something more than the flesh, I can’t do a thing without you” (294). Mama Day, finally, succeeds in convincing George to follow her instructions. She hands him the cane and the ledger and tells him to go into the chicken coop and search into the northwest corner for the nest of an old red hen and to bring back whatever he finds there. Mama Day warns him to watch out for his eyes: “I’m warning you, she’s gonna be evil so watch out for your eyes” (My emphasis 295).

George’s adventure in the chicken coop parallels that of Milkman when Circe mystically gives him direction to reach the cave in Pennsylvania. Because of the water current, Milkman was obliged to put off his fancy watch, pants and shirt, when he crossed the stream to the cave. George, on the other hand, was hampered by the strong breeze. He stumbled and was compelled to drop the cane and the ledger when he

slipped trying to climb over a fallen palmetto. “The ledger was wedged between two rocks, the pages turning in” (300). But when George tried to take it back, “that breeze stayed at his back until he reached the chicken coop” (300). Both men in these scenes are confronted with the forces of nature. The water obliges Milkman to dispose of all signs of cultural artifice. However, George’s loss of John-Paul’s cane and the bible epitomizes his incredulity towards Mama Day’s supernatural and intuitionist knowledge. When Milkman, finally reaches the cave, he was blinded by the absence of the light. George, in the same vein, notices that the light in the chicken coop was so dim. All what he could see was row of yellow eyes glinting at him. Milkman could not find the gold and is comically chased by the bats. George was struck by the red hen and chased from the coop after a fight with the animal. George, out of intense frenzy and fatigue, goes back to the coop, kills the red hen and many others, smashing the eggs he finds: “I tried grabbing her from behind- my right hand, my left hand. Both hands attacked with her beak and spurting fresh blood...I took up the walking cane and smashed her in the skull” (301). All what George could remember was a high shriek, and “the whole place exploded in rumbles and cackling” (300). Subsequently, because of his heart condition, George succumbs to his injuries.

Rita Mae Brown asserts that George’s sacrifice is an initiation that necessitates him to “let go of his rigidity, his male mind” (13), and that his sacrifice “is a form of surrender: the opposite of the desire to control” (13). Susan Meisenhelder contends that George ended up as a “madman,” “dying as the fatally flawed hero in a white tragedy” (412). In his essay, “The Only Voice is Your Own,” Gary Storhoff provides a Jungian analysis to George’s quest through Mama Day. He stipulates that individuals are

“contrasexuals.” Men repress the feminine side within due to the socialization process of the heterosexual discourse, something Jung calls, “anima,” or “the woman within,” “an aspect which embodies intuition, sentimentality, sensitivity to nature, beauty, fertility, and emotionality” (42). Women, in turn, hide “the men within,” or “the animus,” which suggests reason, belief in the hard-core world of facts, rationality, commerce . . . and science” (43). According to Storhoff, George’s killing of the hen and his frenzied smashing of the eggs, which are both symbols of fertility and procreation, is a systematic failure of acknowledging his anima. Brown, Meisenhelder and Storhoff confine George’s death in the conventional gender paradigms, which suggest the collapse of George’s masculine world and power. However, in an interview with Toni Morrison, Naylor asserts that she is concerned primarily with fairness in characterizing males: “I bent over backwards not to have a negative message come through about the men” (579). As R. Mark Hall puts it, “Naylor encourages us to read her male characters not as ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ but as forces which unify these boundaries” (79). As James Robert Saunders suggests, “Naylor’s depiction of male and female heritage has little to do with stereotypes of aggressive, macho men and submissive women or of cold men and lovingly over-dependent women” (121).

George’s death transcends conventional gender taxonomies. George fails in what he calls a “mumbo-jumbo” mission, but his very sacrificial act is a testimony of eternal love. George died “a good-hearted boy with a bad heart” (170). Storhoff associates the anima with emotionality, sentimentality, and sensitivity and makes it absolutely part of the feminine world. Or George’s love links him already with the feminine. George, as opposed to Faulkner and Morrison’s male characters, is not

exclusively patriarchal, despite his association of women with the phallic lack. Much of his deeds and thoughts attest to his sensitivity³⁴. If Storhoff links the killing of the hen and the smashing of the eggs with George's destruction of the feminine world of fertility and procreation; George, in counter-part, is already associated with life.³⁵ By sacrificing one's self for the continuity of the other, George contributes to the ongoing survival of the Days' genealogy, thus, to the procreative potential and life.

In *Masculinist Impulses: Toomer, Hurston, Black Writing and Modernity*, Nathan Grant makes a striking point when he refers to the image of the hands during George's frenzied fight with the hen. Grant states that "George had chosen his way over Miranda's to save Cocoa" (209) by using his own hands. George perceives that his hands, which symbolize his empiricist vision of life, were all what he could find in the hencoop. They become the most visible, concrete, and, ultimately, the most valuable alternative to bring peace to the Days. As George previously points out, "When I left Wallace Andrews I had what I could see: my head and my two hands, and I had each day to do something with them" (27). Despite George's empiricist speculation over the usage of his hands, they metaphorically become the bridge, and the most valuable hands that Mama Day needed alongside her own hands, which symbolise the supernatural world, in order to save the Days' genealogy. Mama Day was sure that George's supernatural initiation into the hencoop implies his death because the belief in the empiricist world of fact was "deep down within himself"

³⁴ Despite the fact that George belongs to the empirical world of business and science, as his job suggests. George, however, is emotional and very sentimental. He reads literature and appreciates arts, which are, usually, linked to sentimentality, therefore to the feminine.

³⁵ George is associated with life and fertility: If Macon Dead obliges Ruth to abort, George and Cocoa throw Cocoa's pills in the river. George wants his wife to own back Bascombe Wade in order to procreate in the mahogany room.

(285), but what she needs most is “that belief buried in his self” (285), in order to save Cocoa, and which come only through George’s determination and will to sacrifice his life out of love. Mama Day sees in George what she imagines that she perceives in Bascombe Wade and her father: “looking past the loosing was to feel for the man who built this house and the man who nailed this well shut. It was to feel the hope in them that the work of their hands could wipe away all that had gone before” (285). Mama Day assumes that George was like “those men,” who “*believed*—in the power of themselves, in what they were feeling” (285). George’s hands do not illustrate his posthumous assumption that “there was nothing that old woman could do with a pair of empty hands,” nor are they an illustration of “wasted hands” (301). George’s hands translate the physical manifestation of the power or what Gloria Naylor terms “the magic of love” (Perry “Interview with Gloria Naylor” 233). Together with Mama Day’s hands, they form a symbiotic wholeness consolidated through love. As Dorothy Perry Thompson puts it, “Miranda’s power alone cannot save Cocoa; they must be coupled with George’s belief” (95). In this symbiotic relationship between Mama Day’s feminine and supernatural world and George’s male empiricist world, Naylor celebrates equality of cultures devoid of gendered prejudice and of the traditional western dualism of primitivism versus civilization.

Love, as bell hooks contends, symbolizes the revival and recovery of the ancestral black community, which provides a sense of place and belonging and togetherness (*Yearning* 35), a location of the margin rooted in solidarity, in love, a relational love that does not blur the uniqueness of individuality. Love, as Fatima Mujčinović puts it, “empowers one and others to extend the self beyond the limits of

experiential borders. In the process of self-creation through the dynamic of love, the boundaries of identity continually alter, expanding selfhood and deepening community” (157). Love, using Linell E. Cady’s words, is a mode of relating that seeks to establish bonds between the self and the other, creating a unity out of formerly detached individuals. It is a process of integration where the isolation of individuals is overcome through the forging of connections between persons. These connections constitute the emergence of a wider life including yet transcending the separate individuals. This wider life that emerges through the loving relationship between selves does not swallow up individuals, blurring their identities and concerns (35). On the contrary, the wider life created by love constitutes a community of persons. In a community, “persons retain their identity. They also share a commitment to the continued well-being of the relational life uniting them” (35). Relational love, Linell asserts, “negotiates the private and public realms through principles of connections, unity, caring, and mutual understanding” (35).

George’s presence in the local and private space of Willow Springs illustrates the relational love of the black community which accepts differences and connects the severed subjects to the forgotten past. Not only is George accepted in the defamiliarizing and private world of Willow Springs, his love for Cocoa makes him embrace the “private” and “particular” word and world of Mama Day. Love, like the metaphor of the bridge, the hand, and the quilt, becomes a source of connection and survival. Mama Day’s love for her ancestry becomes the bridge for the Days’ continuity, through George, who becomes, in turn, the bridge for Cocoa’s survival. Love, like the image of the bridge, the hand and the quilt is life and continuity, which

subverts Faulkner's deathward text. If Ike McCaslin's heroic journey into the primitive and mythic space of the Mississippi woods entails his loss of commitment with the other, George, on the other hand, learns to connect and to accept the other domain that challenges his world view and to be part of it, despite its alienating power. George's commitment to others is finalized through his sacrificial love for Cocoa, an image which, similar to Morrison's final scene, stands in sharp contrast to Faulkner's Ike, who remains old, lonely, loveless, and isolated in the dying woods of Mississippi.

Similar to *Song of Solomon*, Naylor implies that death, within the African American literary tradition, transcends its white empiricist definition. After eliminating George from the story, Naylor supplies Cocoa with a new husband and two sons and moves everyone to Charleston. But this Northern movement does not imply that George failed to restore the Day family. Charleston is urban but still culturally Southern. "It was easier ... and I drew strength from moving in the midst of familiar ground" (308), Cocoa observes. Charleston, like Willow Springs, exists in the limbo between Northern and Southern values and legacies. If *Song of Solomon* ends with an ambiguous leaping to account for Morrison's challenge of Faulkner's fixed text, Naylor, on the other hand, refers not only to the image of the hand, the bridge and the quilt to account for the fluidity of black identities and for the black belief in eternity; she also refers to the image of the waters. At the end of the novel, Mama Day holds George's ashes and stands in front of the waters, which, like the image of the hand and the bridge, epitomize the world of flow, which transcends space and time, the "Self" and "Other" and the conventional dualism of life and death. George "is gone," Mama Day says, "but he ain't left" (308). He died physically, but, like the ghost of Sapphira,

he will haunt Willow Springs, because through his sacrificial act, he becomes as legendary as she is, and part of the Days' genealogical past. Like Sapphira, he becomes object of the nocturnal Candle Walk of Willow Springs. "Miranda holds her candle in the direction of the waters that carry his ashes: I can tell you now about this here night. You done opened the memory for us," Miranda continues. "My daddy said that his daddy said when he was young, Candle Walk was different still. It weren't about no candles, was about a light that burned in a man's heart. And folks would go out to look up at the stars—they figured his spirit had to be there, it was the highest place they knew" (308). George's death, in fact, adds to the variation of the existing variation of the versions surrounding the legendary past of the Days. The legend, because of George's sacrifice for love, now takes a romantic turn. He is now the mirror of Bascombe Wade, whose love for Sapphira "took him that high" because he believed it was right, and "while what buried him in the ground was the lingering taste of ginger from the lips of a woman" (308).

African religion conducts the idea that one's life does not end with physical death. Death is "the permutation between the dead and the living world" (Coetzee 251). Like the bridge, which connects Willow Springs to the mainland, death expresses the world of in-betweenness, the limbo, and the state of liminality. It is a "door between two worlds" (Creel 82); a site of passage which allows contact with the living world (Donlon 23). Such a belief highlights the cycle of life as typified by the Bakongo cosmology of the "four moment of the sun"—its rising (birth), ascending (maturity), setting (death), and, finally, midnight (life in another world) (Thompson 106). This cosmology authorizes the "everlasting continuity of all righteous men and women"

(Thompson 106-108). John Mbiti writes, “The living-dead is a person who is physically dead but alive in the memory of those who knew him in his life as well as alive in the world of the spirits. So long as the living-dead is thus remembered, he is in a state of *personal immortality*” (25). The personal immortality of the living-dead relies on their having a family to remember them. Otherwise “they vanish out of existence” (25). George is not dead as long as the newly established family—Cocoa, Mama Day and Abigail—remember him. Cocoa now, in effect, safeguards his personal immortality in Willow Springs. She even named her second child George as a tribute to him. George’s living memory is further corroborated in Naylor’s omission of his picture:

Would you believe it—I’ll be forty-seven next year. And I still don’t have a photograph of you. It’s a lot better this way, because you change as I change. And each time I go back over what happened, there’s some new development, some forgotten corner that puts you in a slightly different light. . . .But when I see you again, our versions will be different still. All of that would be different still. All of that would have been too complicated to tell a child. Mama Day was right—give him the simple truth. And it’s the one truth about you that I hold on to. Because what really happened to us, George? You see, that’s what I mean—there are just too many sides to the whole story. (310-311)

The man who believed only in “the now” has found an eternal spiritual home among the ancestral voices in the very southern Willow Springs, which he previously resisted in his passion for the concrete world of facts. No picture, no maps and no

scriptographic forms can now be tributes to his memory, because in their visible forms, George's whole life and death story would freeze, or "there are too many sides" to it, which keep changing because there will be always "some new development" in the ways Cocoa posthumously perceives him.

Conclusion

My doctoral dissertation has provided a comparative analysis of the novels of William Faulkner, Toni Morrison, and Gloria Naylor. Embarking on the epic genre of identity quest, I show how the three authors link their male subjects to the concept of property, which transcends materialistic acquisition and affects race and gender dynamics. In portraying their male characters in the process of constructing their identities, the three novelists, despite their cultural and literary differences, share the view that identity has never been a natural entity but, rather, a social construct, a form of performance. Embarking on the subversive power of Morrison and Naylor, this dissertation foregrounds the heroic quests of the black women through their transcendence of the conventional paradigms of race, class and gender. I stress their constructive role as mediators who help deracinated male characters reconcile with their past in order to have a fluid identity.

Lucas Beauchamp, in *Go Down, Moses*, manipulates the white law, which denied him the right of inheriting property from his white grandfather, old Crothers McCaslin. As a moonshiner, Lucas is obsessed with a secret building of a still during the prohibition era. He is also obsessed with the treasure, which was buried in Roth Edmonds' land. Aside from his materialistic obsession with the world of property, Lucas fights to win back his wife from his white cousin, Zack Edmonds, as a means to consolidate his manhood in strictly gendered terms. In so doing, Mollie becomes part of his possession. His father, Turl, in the antebellum South, transgresses the boundaries of slavery in search for his beloved, Tennie Beauchamp, in order to confirm his black manhood, which was denied to him within the institution of slavery. In my analysis of

Song of Solomon, I demonstrate how, in a fashion similar to Faulkner, Morrison relies on the concept of property in portraying Macon Dead and Milkman's obsession with the empiricist and materialistic world of ownership. Both novelists share the idea that black males' obsession with the mainstream culture of owning property is a movement towards cultural deracination. In *Go Down, Moses* and *Song of Solomon*, male characters' concern with the world of property signifies their isolation and their detachment from the black communal life. In analyzing *Mama Day*, I showed, however, that George Andrews' cultural deracination is not as much about property as it is about his immersion in the pragmatic and empiricist world of concrete facts. In so doing, I showed that Naylor's characterization of her male protagonist is less radicalized and less gendered.

This dissertation demonstrates the fact the three novelists also converge in their critique of Western history, which further legitimized the discursive fabrication and subjugation of black individuals. In chapter One, I introduced Ike McCaslin's act of reading his family ledgers as a revolutionary critique of how the antebellum South's subordination of the black subject as a natural body is a discursive language game, which consolidated the misrepresentation of the racial other as a means of legitimizing the enslavement of the black body. In so doing, I refer to Adorno and Horkheimer's subversion of the Enlightenment discourse and other contemporary theories on historiography. Morrison and Naylor, in the same way, are incredulous towards Western history. However, they not only excavate its absolute and fixed construction, but through their reliance on the oral African American tradition, they give alternative and multiperspectivist versions of truth, which subvert Ike's fixed reading of his family

ledgers. In chapter Two, Morrison provides an oral mode of knowing the past, which is accounted for in the “Song of Solomon” performance and other fragments of Milkman’s history of his family, which are orally narrated by the characters he encounters throughout his journey. In chapter Three, Naylor’s critique of Faulkner’s ledgers is graphologically demonstrated in Bascombe Wade’s hidden ledger, which encloses the sale letter of Sapphira Wade. Naylor uses these texts as paratextual elements, which foreground the reductive account of black life in the mainstream historical document of the antebellum South. Like Morrison, Naylor not only criticizes scriptographic history, but gives claims to contrapuntal readings of Sapphira Wade’s life and identity through the various oral translations of her story, which gives her an alternative and transgressive agency.

My dissertation shows how Faulkner, Morrison, and Naylor rely on their characters’ knowledge of their past in their heroic quest for identity. I demonstrate that Ike’s individualistic and scriptographic reading of the McCaslin ledgers entails his seclusion in the Mississippi woods, which he constructs as a utopian space free from societal influences. Ike’s knowledge of his past, however, entails his social death in that, by repudiating all forms of ownership, he annihilated himself in an empiricist world, wherein identity is defined strictly by what one empirically owns--including money, land, and women. Ike’s social death is also tied to his failure to acknowledge the humanity of the racial and the feminine other. In rewriting Faulkner, I showed how the knowledge of the past within the African American tradition of both Morrison and Naylor implies commitment to others, which comes only through love.

My thesis has demonstrated that despite these authors' regional concern with the South, Morrison and Naylor do not negate the Western presence in the formation of black cultural identity. They give claim to fluid and hybridized identities, which stand in sharp contrast to Faulkner's traditional and essentialist perception of subjectivity. "The writer has got to write in terms of his environment" (*University* 41 qtd in Wainright 163), Faulkner explained at the University of Virginia. What Faulkner implies is that a writer writes from a specific cultural and regional background, which shapes his literary imagination. Written for the South and in the early twentieth century, *Go Down, Moses* remains confined in its own space and time. Despite his concern with the hybridity of his black male characters, Faulkner, nevertheless, associates this concept with the hybridity of the blood rather than with the fluidity of vision.

In portraying Morrison and Naylor's black male characters, my thesis focused on their position in the limbo between the Northern and Southern spaces. Embarking on the myth of the Flying African in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, and on the mythical figure of Sapphira Wade, who mystically flew to Africa, and on the metaphor of the bridge, which connects Willow Springs to Georgia and South Carolina, I showed how the journey of both Milkman and George Andrews transcend the regional spaces they occupy. In so doing, their journeys encapsulate a double vision of the world. In delineating the hybridity of the male protagonists in *Song of Solomon* and *Mama Day*, I referred to Paul Gilroy, W.E. B Du Bois, James Clifford, and Arjun Appadurai who celebrate the fluid nature of non-Western cultures and identities. Naylor's treatment of Willow Springs enabled me to respond to some African American theorists and writers

who reject the rural South, since, like Madhu Dubey, they associate it with a retrospective strategy that negates class stratification and further subjugates African American culture to the colonial gaze of the postmodernist era of simulation and hyperreality. I show that both Morrison and Naylor's treatment of Shalimar and Willow Springs indicates the necessity to open up to other ways of knowing and to alternative worlds which have previously been silenced, a strategy which is not denied in the postmodern era that celebrates diversity and plurality of worlds and perceptions. Naylor and Morrison's turn South does not discredit their voices. Through their artistic reconfiguration of the African past they become the "custodians" of their culture, which, besides the fluidity of the contemporary era, remains an essential part of the cultural identity of African Americans today.

My thesis also demonstrates that despite Faulkner's concern with the voice of the discredited, his vision of black women, in spite of their association with the theme of love and racial resistance, remains sexist and racially-oriented. In portraying male characters' journey, I showed that black women in Morrison and Naylor are more than simple mediators. They transcend their confining world, and are capable of creating their own heroic journeys.

Because signification within African American art and culture implies not only the rewriting of the mainstream canon, my thesis shows that Naylor not only rewrites Faulkner's patriarchal text, but also Morrison's male-dominated account of the Flying African. In *Mama Day*, it is the black female character, Sapphira Wade, who has the agency to fly and liberate herself from slavery and from any stable accounts of her life and identity. In dealing with Willow Springs, I demonstrated that through Naylor, the

South in Morrison's *Song of Solomon* is as conventionally "pure" as Faulkner's depiction of Ike's Mississippi Woods. Because the island reflects the spirit of Sapphira, Willow Springs is more feminized a space than Shalimar and Ike's woods. In rewriting both Faulkner and Morrison, I relied not only on Gates's theory on the subversive art of African American thought, but also on Mae G. Henderson's theoretical article, "speaking in Tongues," which helps me frame Naylor's myriad responses to the confining space African American women writers write for and from within.

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