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The Dialogic and The Carnivalesque in *Beloved* and *Jazz* by Toni Morrison

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Abstract

Emphasizing the political commitment of Toni Morrison, as an African American woman writer, my thesis explores the ways in which, as a means of asserting her black racial identity, this writer incorporates other discourses such as history and jazz music into her narrative form. In this dialogic process Morrison narrates her characters' memory of their traumatic pasts in order to reconstruct a fictive past. She also draws on the aesthetics of jazz music, such as the technique of syncopation and call response, in order to create oral African American novels, which engage in the endorsement of this music as a means of reflecting the hybridity of African art. This intertextual incorporation of music and history coincides with Michail Bakhtin's theoretical perception of the novel as a "response-ible" art that reflects the culture that shapes it, and also his assumption that this genre is a dialogical and carnivalesque fictional space that deconstructs conventional hierarchy by allowing the incorporation of other genres.

Morrison's deconstructionist tendency is apparent not only in her blurring of the generic paradigms between literature, history and music, but also in her belief in the fictive aspect of historical accounts, which she treats as discursive and fabricated discourses rather than objective representations of reality. This innovative perspective on history is indicative of Morrison's belief in the death of absolute truth and meaning, a death which is further enhanced in *Jazz's* celebration of the proverbial death of the reliable author in order to create an open-ended text, which, like jazz music itself, stimulates the engagement of an active reader.

Key words: Toni Morrison, African American art, magical realism, black history, jazz music, hybridity, intertextuality, Mikhail Bakhtin, dialogism, carnivalesque, fragmentation, modernism, poststructuralism, death of the author,

Résumé de synthèse

Ma thèse se rapporte à la liberté de Toni Morrison d'incarner d'autres discours non littéraires tels que l'histoire et la musique de jazz dans ses œuvres afin de créer des textes hybrides. Dans ce processus, Morrison applique les techniques de la musique de jazz telles que la « *syncopé* » et le « *call-response* » pour créer un texte oral, et se fonde sur le passé racial traumatisant de ses personnages pour reconstruire l'histoire Afro-Américaine, mais d'une manière fragmentée et fictive. Cette incorporation intertextuelle coïncide avec la perception théorique de Mikhaïl Bakhtine qui pense que le roman reflète la relation symbiotique entre l'œuvre et le contexte socio-culturel, et que c'est un espace carnavalesque et dialogique qui permet d'établir le dialogue de plusieurs genres littéraires et non-littéraires, créant ainsi un art qui déconstruit toute frontière entre les discours.

Dans le contexte de Morrison, la déconstruction de la hiérarchie conventionnelle est reflétée non pas dans la transcendance des paradigmes génériques, mais aussi dans sa perception de l'histoire comme étant une fabrication non-authentique au lieu d'une représentation objective de la réalité. Cette perspective innovatrice indique que cette auteure est attachée à l'idée de la mort de toute vérité ou interprétation absolue. Une mort qui est illustrée à la fin de *Jazz*, une œuvre où Morrison célèbre le concept de « la mort de l'auteur » et l'engagement d'un lecteur actif dans le but de créer un texte d'interprétations multiples. Cette polysémie est un aspect caractéristique du jazz.

Mots- clés : Toni Morrison, l'art Afro-américain, le réel magique, l'histoire des Afro-américains, la musique de jazz, l'intertextualité, Mikhaïl Bakhtine, dialogisme, le carnavalesque, la fragmentation, modernisme, post-structuralisme, « la mort de l'auteur ».

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Introduction

In the course of my reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Jazz*, I have noticed that her novels examine, first and foremost, the historical issues of the black community in terms of slavery, racism, black migration from the South to the North, and the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, an era marked by black cultural and artistic revolution. This cultural and historical preoccupation stems from Morrison's use of the postcolonial and postmodernist regional subcategory of "magical realism" (Slemon 409) as a means of resisting homogenization in order to foreground her previously marginalized culture, and to assert a black racial identity in the very matrix of her black, but hybrid, language. Magical realism is concerned with issues of "otherness" (D'haen 194-95, Slemon 408). Its name was first coined in the 1920s by a German critic, Franz Roh, to reflect upon surrealist paintings, in which objects are depicted with photographic naturalism but encapsulate paradoxical elements or strange juxtapositions that infuse the ordinary with a sense of mystery, in order to convey a feeling of unreality (D'haen 191). Magical realism is also defined as a thematic device and as a narrative technique that is much used by Latin and African American authors to combine real elements of folklore and folk history specific to a particular culture with unreal images. In Latin America, magical realism has signified a kind of uniqueness or difference from mainstream culture (Slemon 408). It is what in another context Alejo Carpentier has called "lo real maravilloso Americano" or "marvelous American reality" (110), which "gives the concept the stamp of cultural authority, if not theoretical soundness" (Slemon 407). This movement also possesses what Frederic Jameson calls a "strange seductiveness" (302), which is characterized by the active involvement of the reader (Thiem 241); idiosyncratization of the narrator and the reader (Thiem 242); and circular, non linear, double, multiple and labyrinthine plots (Zamora 498). In magical realist novels, there is, in addition, a the use of the oral tradition of

storytelling, and a concern with the creation of a mythical place that has a specific historical, geographical, and cultural dimension (Zamora 501).

In light of these magical realist principles, *Beloved* and *Jazz* can be seen as compelling examples of this literary tendency because they are free fictional spaces wherein Morrison, as a politically engaged black writer, foregrounds cultural and aesthetic black values to create counter-narratives that give voice to her previously oppressed people. Morrison, like Ralph Ellison, believes in “an aesthetically powerful and politically effective African American literature” (Conner 10). She combines political consciousness with aesthetic sensibility (Heinze 9) because she perceives that “a novel has to be socially responsible as well as very beautiful” (Jones and Vinson 183). Her novels are articulations of Black Cultural Nationalism (BCN), which “contends that black people possess a culture, style of life, world view, and aesthetic values different from White Americans” (Reed 50). Black Cultural Nationalists, like Morrison, chose to subordinate the political in order to “establish a positive black identity and to reorder racial consciousness through serious exploration and rediscovery of the black community’s unique cultural heritage: its own particular beauty, its rich and varied oral tradition, its private joys and agonies, as well as its communal ‘trials and tribulations’” (Reed 51). Morrison insists that her goal has been “to write literature that was irrevocably, indisputably Black” that “took as its creative task and sought as its credentials the recognized and verifiable principles of Black art” (“Memory” 389): namely, the presence of displacement or alienation that affects black experience in a racist framework; a close relationship between author and reader; and an oral quality in the voice of the text. At the formal level, she advocates a quality of music in the writing that can also be seen as distinctively “black” (Connor 22).

In *Beloved* and *Jazz* Morrison rewrites a fictionalized history of blacks from a black perspective by focusing on the characters' memory of their traumatic past, thereby creating historically contextualized fictions that express the suffering of the black self in a racist discourse. In *Beloved*, Morrison approaches history from the magical realist perspective. She relies on her ancestral African cosmological belief in the return of the spirit of Beloved, whose presence reveals her poststructuralist perception of history as the combination of the real with the fantastic, since this spectral element serves as a typically African device to revive the repressed past, which, like this ghost, haunts and torments the black characters. Morrison's engagement with the fictional "historicization" of black experience in *Beloved* is also realized through the location of her novel in a particular historical context of slavery in the American South, a place which engaged in the alienation and the distortion of black identity and in the severance of the collective black family structure. In this particular novel, Morrison focuses on the fragmented and mutilated body as a site for the projection of the violence of the racial discourse on the slaves. The bodily fragmentation is made vivid in the depiction of Beloved, whose body is tearing apart, in the distortion of the black family, and in Baby Suggs' sermon, wherein she laments not only the blacks' dispossession from their bodies, but also the loss of their harmonious African perception of the organic link between the body and the soul.

In *Jazz*, Morrison laments the death of the ancestor. This death is epitomized through the absence of parents, who are, in fact, a symbolic representation of the total disappearance of that ancestor, who functions as "the person who connects past and present, and embodies a sense of historical continuity and communal wisdom" (Scruggs 174). As in *Beloved*, Morrison portrays the detrimental impact of slavery, an institution which engaged in the utter dislocation and fragmentation of the black self

This fragmentation is further enhanced by the exodic migration of blacks to the north, an illusive space wherein the collective identity of the black community has disappeared as a matter of ideological acculturation into the mainstream, white, urban discourse. In this novel, the fragmentation of the black self is illustrated in the description of Joe Trace's splitting of his self seven times; in Golden Gray's feeling of his amputated arm; and in the depiction of Violet's identitarian division, which is caused by the fracturing maternal absence, by the perception of her body as an alien entity, and by her internalization of the white discourse's privileging of white over black skin, an internalization, which W. E. B. Dubois calls a state of "twoness," or "double consciousness," a theory which will be further developed in the first part of this thesis.

In both novels, Morrison employs the oral African American tradition through the transposition of the aesthetics of jazz music onto her palimpsestic narratives. This "transgeneric"¹ transposition enables her to transcend conventional generic paradigms and to write polyphonic and hybrid novels which incorporate other discourses and genres. This transposition also engages the writer in the concern with the participation of the reader, and consequently with the death of the traditionally reliable and knowledgeable author, an authorial death that is made evident at the end of *Jazz*, where the narrative voice is unable to maintain control over the events, because like a jazz musician, it falls into a cycle of trials and revisions. Moreover, using jazz's fragmentary technique of syncopation, the novelist innovatively distorts her narrative plot through flashback and forward movements, since she purposefully embarks on the distorting memories of her characters to convey the theme of the fragmented black

¹ A concept coined by Jacques Derrida to reflect upon postmodern literature, which transgresses conventional generic boundaries, such as those between poetry and prose form.

self in the very fractured form of her narrative, a structural fragmentation which is championed by the theory of trauma; by the modernist trend, especially when it comes to the use of the technique of stream of consciousness; as well as by the postmodernist field, which engages in the deconstruction of any belief in the perception of literature as a linear, coherent and understandable realm, as a means of engaging the involvement of the active reader.

In addition, through Morrison's transposition of jazz aesthetics, *Beloved* and *Jazz* become dialogically carnivalesque novels not only because they are intertextual and hybrid narratives which deconstruct the hierarchical boundaries between literature and music but also because the very incorporation of jazz as a popular music of the unprivileged is a technique for popularizing black art. Morrison's aim at popularizing her novels stems from the influence of the 1960s Black arts movement's struggle for "the populism" of black literature, a struggle wherein "art is from the people and for the people, there is no question of raising people to art or lowering art to people, for they are one and the same thing" (Karenga "Black Cultural Nationalism" 32). This movement believed that "art must be with the masses and moved by the masses" (32) because "the artist and political activist are one" (Butler-Evans 29). Art is "everyday life given more form and color. And what one seeks to do [...] is to use art as a means of educating people, and being educated by people, so that it is a mutual exchange rather than a one way communication" (32). This movement also believed, as Morrison does, that literature acquires a representational and communal dimension that demands that the writer bring into light the marginalized, in order to construct new definitions of "Blackness," and to create alternative narratives that would serve

as “contrapuntal”² discourses to master narratives. The appropriation of jazz music in highly literary narrative articulates not only the very purpose of this movement, but also Morrison’s convergence with Bakhtin’s belief in the “response-ibility,” the carnivalesque, and the representative dimension of the polyphonic form of the novel, a commonality which will be the main focus of my research.

In this thesis, I will focus implicitly on the magic realist aspects of *Jazz* and *Beloved* in terms of the ways Morrison fictionally reconstructs black history, and the ways she appropriates the aesthetics of jazz music in her narrative. In addition, the first part of the first chapter will take a psychoanalytical approach to the fragmentation of black identity in relation to the absent mother, an absence that fractures Morrison’s characters, and incites them to connect with that loss through sites of substitutions. This thematic fragmentation affects the structure of *Jazz* and links it to poststructuralist accounts of the death of coherent identity. The second part of the first chapter will be a discussion of the dialogical and the carnivalesque aspect of this black popular novel, which, like dialogic jazz music, demands interactive dialogue among characters and other intertextual discourses. This section also entails a Bakhtinian/poststructuralist interest in the participatory reading as a site for the deconstruction of the conventional perception of the reliable and authoritarian voice, and of the traditional belief in fixed truth and meaning. The second chapter of this thesis is about *Beloved*. It will be a short analysis of how there, as in *Jazz*, Morrison embarks, in a more pronounced way, on the haunting memory of the past in the life of the traumatized black characters in order to reconstruct, in a fictional way, black

² A postcolonial term coined by Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* as a method to require us to extend “our reading of texts to include what was forcibly excluded” (66-67).

history. This fictional historical perspective is also illustrated in the inclusion of the supernatural element of the ghost of Beloved, which further revives the repressed past, and functions indirectly as a connecting element that links the fragmented characters, such as Sethe and Denver, to their community, which has long marginalized them after Sethe's infanticide. The second part of this second chapter is about the transposition of jazz principles onto the narrative form of *Beloved*, which like *Jazz*, has become an intertextual and dialogic text that seeks an external dialogue with the active reader, and thereby converges with Bakhtin's theory of the novel as a hybrid and polyphonic genre.

Chapter I
Jazz

Part 1

I- Fictional Historicization of Black History in *Jazz*

A-The Past: An Integral Part in Black Culture and Identity, and a Site for the Fictionalization of the Racial Black American Experience

In a conversation with Gloria Naylor, Morrison coins the concept of “past-present-future,” because she thinks 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 us by our assuming responsibility for people no one’s ever assumed responsibility for” (247). This neologism conveys the erasure of temporal boundaries, as well as Morrison’s African and gnostic belief in the cyclic aspect of time (Mbalia 101). It also illustrates her assumption that the past is an integral part of the history and identity of black Americans because she is aware, as Melville J. Herskovits notes, that “[...] the African past plays a full part [...] traced to a pre-American past” (*The Myth of the Negro Past* 207). As a politically engaged writer, Morrison asserts through most of her historical novels that her black characters must not forget their traumatic past. They must remember and pass on their stories. Otherwise they will have suppressed an “essential” part of their being, and not incidentally an “essential” part of history (Carmean 86). Linking the past with the symbolic figure of the ancestor, Morrison writes, in “The Site of Memory,” that following one’s path back to the ancestor becomes a “route to a reconstruction of a person’s story, to an exploration of one’s interior life that was not written and of a world that has been ignored or devalued” (115).

In *Jazz*, the novelist demonstrates graphologically that the present is meaningless without the return to the past, in spite of its painfulness. She inaugurates each chapter of her

novel with an incomplete sentence. She thus provides a compelling backward reading of the previous chapter, which symbolizes the past, in order to comprehend the current chapter, which epitomizes the present. In *Jazz*, the second chapter begins with “Or used to” (27), the third chapter with “like that day” (53), the fifth chapter with “and when spring comes to the city” (117), and the seventh chapter with “a thing like that could harm you” (156). This relegation of meaning to the past is an example of what Bakhtin refers to as “a historical inversion,” the core of which is found in the fact that “mythological and artistic thinking locates such categories as purpose, ideal, justice, perfection, the harmonious condition of man and society and the like in the past” (*Dialogic Imagination* 147). In Morrisonian context, the revival of the past is not a mere nostalgic act, but rather a therapeutic and identitarian revisiting of what has been repressed in the history of the black community.

The relegation of meaning to the past is also stylistically reflected in the novel through the introduction of the ambiguous acts of the main characters. Morrison uses the technique of suspension, in which “an image or a fact is narrated but not fully explained until the narration circles or spirals back to that same incident, explains it further but still not fully, then circles back again then forward” (*Dangerous Freedom* 33). This technique is apparently necessary because the initial fact or event cannot be fully described at first, is beyond verbal explanation, and requires the entire novel to be fully understood (33). In this way, “the *What* of the story is known from the beginning but not comprehended, and the rest of the novel is required for an understanding of the *how*, which is thus made more significant” (Page 33). In *Jazz*, the novelist begins with Violet’s incomprehensible and apparently insignificant act of stabbing the corpse of Dorcas, an eighteen-year-old girl, who has been murdered by her husband, Joe Trace. These acts acquire meaning through the return to the past realities and experiences of these two characters, because the confusing past, in Morrison’s narratives, “is given a crucial role to play-context and motivation for

action in present time (Wilkerson 184). After having fragmented pieces of information from each chapter of *Jazz*, the reader comes to realize that Violet's bluesy act is an outcome of her disturbed mental and psychological state because of the harsh socio-economic conditions she has lived through within the framework of the racist system. Her behavior is also a revenge against the betrayal of her husband. Joe Trace's betrayal is a mere consequence of Violet's repetition of the silence of his mother Wild. "Over time her silences annoy her husband, then puzzle him and finally depress him" (24). The murder Joe Trace has committed is the result of his frustration with his mother's absence, a maternal lack he wants to compensate for through the substitution of Dorcas, who, nevertheless, like his mother, has also denied him. For him this crime is just a peculiar way of sustaining the feeling of love.

1--History: A Combination of the Real with the Unreal

In a writer of dissenting fictions, history is presented as "a text composed of competing and conflicting representations and meanings" (Moses 11). Similarly, Morrison depicts the haunting past traumatic experiences of her black characters, and the fragmentation of black agency in each character's chapter, in order to create different versions of history, because she knows that, for the story of history to be told, competing and conflicting voices must tell it from multiple perspectives. In so doing, she deconstructs any belief in the true authoritative and objective transmission of historical fact. This unconventional poststructuralist approach to history reminds me of Paul Ricoeur's belief in the fictional and impure dimension of the narrativization of historical facts. In "La Marque du passé", Ricoeur maintains that there is never a pure imitation in realist and historical

narrative forms because the memory of the historical past is inexorably discursive, and a “representational” (représentance) medium that reports past records, rather than a pure representation of facts. For Ricoeur “the representationality [...] expresses the opaque mélange of recollection and fiction in the reconstruction of the past” (15). Similarly, in *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison’s use of the term “playing” signifies her manipulation of facts; she believes that her writings require her to think of her freedom as a “genderized”, “sexualized”, and “wholly racialized” African American writer whose “imagination” is “for purpose of the work, becoming” (4).

Morrison’s historical fictions are both “realistic and mythical” (Page 33). She recognizes that her role is not to reveal some already established reality but to “fret the pieces and fragments of memory,” and to investigate “the process by which we construct and deconstruct reality in order to be able to function in it” (E. Washington “Toni Morrison Now” 58). She also admits that, in her novels, she approaches the real through the unreal, because the fictional reconstruction of the historical fact is more real than the recorded reality of “History” of grand narratives. “I’m trying to develop the various themes I write about,” she says; “the people who best manifest those themes for me are the black people whom I *invent*” (Tate *Black Women Writers at Work* 118). Morrison has stated that “memories and recollections” cannot give her complete access to the “unwritten internal life” of her ancestors, and that she must therefore rely on “imagination” to give her a roundabout access (“Unspeakable Thing” 9). She further articulates this view in *Playing in the Dark*, wherein she asserts that “writing and reading are not at all that distinct for a writer. Both exercises require being alert and ready for unaccountable beauty, for the intricateness or simple elegance of the writer’s imagination, for the world that imagination evokes” (XI).

Through the fictional interpretation of the historical fact, Morrison engages with the subversion of the dividing line between history and fiction, a deconstruction that was initially welcomed by the historian Hayden White. In "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," White assumes that the historian is like a storyteller who must rely on the novelistic configurations of events as an "emplotment" technique to bring about coherence, chronology, and format wholeness to provide different meanings and interpretations of the recorded events (1715), and to engage the historian with the participation in specific process of sense-making which identifies him as a member of one specific cultural endowment (1717). An historical narrative is not a mere reproduction of reported events, but also "a complex of symbols which gives us directions for finding an icon of the structure of those events in literary tradition" (1718). For White, the historian's encoding of events in terms of the plot structures of the narrative genre is one of the ways that culture has of making sense of both personal and public pasts (1716) that subsequently become familiarized and grasped on the part of the reader (1717). His deconstruction of the conventional boundary between fiction as the "representation of the imaginable" and history as "the representation of the actual", or what he calls prose form versus the poetic discourse, is meant to convey the fictional aspect of the historical account, wherein the historian is dependent upon "the techniques of figurative language both for our characterization of the objects of our narrative representations and the strategies by which to constitute narrative accounts of the transformations of those object in time" (1727). In other words, the historian resorts to some distortions and variations in the process of constructing the historical fact (1720) because "history is a verbal model of a set of events external to the mind of the historian (1718). For White "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). We can only know the *actual* by contrasting or likening it

to the *imaginable* (1728), a concept that goes in tandem with Morrison's fictional way of approaching the real as part of her African folkloric heritage that gives free reign to imagination. Her fictional "narrativization" of the past is thus a mere Whitean fictionalization of history, since, like White, she also engages in the constructivist belief in the fictive aspect of any mimetic representation of reality, including history.

Morrison's texts disclose their relationship to and interplay with events "inside" and "outside" their constructed worlds (Fultz 12). To this extent, her fiction delineates relationships between the textual world and the external world of reality (13). Larry McCafferey has noted that Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* "has [...] become a kind of model for the contemporary writer, being self-conscious about its literary heritage and about the limits of mimesis [...] yet managing to reconnect its readers to the world outside the page" (qtd in Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism* 5). This observation is also applicable to Morrison, because her texts, in their mimetic functions, tell us not so much what is but rather what is possible (Fultz 14). As representations of race memory, these texts tell about the multifaceted African American experiences which "build on each other" (Tom Feelings, qtd in Fultz 14). And as Ricoeur puts it, "to narrate a story is already to 'reflect upon' the event narrated" (*Time and Narrative* 2:61).

In addition, it is worth noting that in Morrisonian context the manipulation of historical events becomes feasible when a writer reviews histories of great suffering (Eckstein 54), because Morrison's fictional revival of the traumatic past that her characters repress aligns with ideological intentions; "the fictional, alternative restructuring of an historical experience gives expression to a challenging force which is directed at an external, social reality, with inevitably political reverberations" (Eckstein 57). As a dissenting fiction writer, Morrison puts the story back into history to create the historical racial identity of blacks, because she perceives that historical narratives and identity

narratives are intertwined (Moses 11). Through the fictionalization of history, Morrison preserves the historical and collective memory of her community that serves “to communicate in a long-term historical perspective and ensure an identity which generated by belonging to a trans-generational tradition and an encompassing historical experience” (Assman 49-50). Black history, as Morrison emphatically insists, is “not a story to pass on” (*Beloved* 274), and it is only through the fictional “narrativization” of the past that she can preserve the painful story of the black experience in the “imaginary space” of her own text which gives shapes, expression and credibility to African American experiences (Fultz 20). This function of narrative, as Ricoeur perceives, evolves from the “necessity to save the history of the defeated and the lost” (*Time and Narrative* 1:75). “We tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated” (1:75).

2- *Memory: Site for the Revival of the Racially Fragmented Past in Relation to the Characters’ Absented Parents and to Their Struggle for Reunion*

In order to fictionalize history, Morrison embarks on her characters’ memories that are related to historical facts in telling her story because, as the psychologist Pierre Janet points out, “memory, like belief, like all psychological phenomena, is an action; essentially an action of telling a story” (*Psychological Healing* 25). In *Jazz*, black characters develop fragmented identities around the memory of absent parents who function as tropes for significant moments in the history of African American oppression and resistance (Moses 13). Dorcas, for instance, is still haunted by the death of her parents and the burning of her dolls in a fire during an East Saint Louis race riot (57), a violent historical moment when racist white mobs terrorized Illinois, killing more than forty black people. The riot was an

eruption into violence of white fear and hatred of black workers, and was ostensibly touched off by the employment of black laborers in a factory under government contract (Moses 35). During the East Saint Louis riot, white residents and police roamed the streets, beating and killing black people, and setting fire to their homes--the fate that befalls Dorcas (Moses 35). Dorcas retrospectively recalls that landmark event when "Everybody [was] running. For water? Buckets?" (38), when the fire engine, [was] polished and poisoned in another part of town?" (38). It was the day when "there was no getting in [her] house where her clothespin dolls lay in a row. In a cigar box" (38). "She tried anyway to get them. Barefoot, in the dress she had slept in, she ran to get them, and yelled to her mother that the box of dolls was up there on the dresser" (39). As a traumatized character, Dorcas "must have seen the flames [...] because the whole street was screaming. [But] she never said anything about it." She went to two funerals of her parents, "and never said a word" (57).

The death of her parents has fractured this girl and has indirectly occasioned her promiscuity because of the conservative discipline imposed by her sexually and racially traumatized aunt, Alice Manfred, within a racist and "phallogocentric"³ environment. Alice is entrapped by the memory of her traumatic past life on Fifth Avenue, a place "where women who spoke English said, "don't sit there honey, you never know what they have." And "women who knew no English at all and would never own a pair of silk stockings moved away from her if she sat next to them on the trolley"(54). In the fourth chapter when she becomes distracted and leaves the iron too long on the dress, she sees "the black and smoking ship burned clear through the yoke" (113), a scene which is not simply a metaphoric image for the iron, but also "a reminder of a painful past – the slave ships, the middle passage, the yoke of slavery and the branding irons" (Rodrigues *Experiencing Jazz*

³ A concept propounded by Jacques Derrida, it fuses the concepts of phallus and logocentrism, which characterize the essentialist and binary discourse of patriarchy.

264). For Alice, Fifth Avenue stands also as a place of patriarchal oppression “where white men leaned out of motor cars with folded dollar bills peeping from their palms” and “where salesmen touched her and only her as though she were part of the goods they had condescended to sell her” (54).

Experiencing double oppression as a black woman, Alice “hid the girl’s hair in braids tucked under, lest whitemen see it raining round her shoulders and push dollar-wrapped fingers toward her” (54). She “instructed her about deafness and blindness” and “how valuable and necessary they were in the company of White men who spoke English and those who did not” (54-55). She also “taught her how to crawl along the walls of buildings” and “how to disappear into doorways, cut across corners in chocked traffic” (55) and “how to do anything, move anywhere to avoid a white boy over the age of eleven” (55). As Dorcas grew older, “more elaborate specifications had to be put in place. High-heeled shoes with the graceful straps across the arch, the vampy hats closed on the head with saucy brims framing the face, makeup of any kind- all of that sort was outlawed in Alice Manfred’s house”(55). Yet, “While her aunt worried about how to keep the heart ignorant of the hips and the head in charge of both (60), Dorcas is enchanted by the sensuousness of life, and transcends the strict moral paradigms to live the life of the “melty tendency of the flesh” to the fullest (62).

Aside from Alice, chapter four is exclusively about Violet’s childhood memory of her traumatic past. She is still haunted by the scene of the racial violence against her black family, and focuses on the image of her silent mother, Rose Dear, who has then committed suicide as an escape from racial oppression:

They came inside the house and all of us children put one foot on the other and watched. When they got to the table where our mother sat nursing an empty cup, they took the table out from under her and then, while she sat there alone, and all but herself like, cup in hand, they came back and tipped the chair she sat in. She did not jump up right away, so they shook it a bit

and since she still stayed seated--looking ahead at nobody--they just tipped her out of it like the way you get a cat off the seat if you don't want to touch it or pick it up in your arms (98).

The memory of the lost mother is “the motor force of *Jazz*” (McDowel 156). Rose’s silent image is branded forever in Violet’s memory (Higgins 64): she develops a “regenerate tongue” (*Jazz* 24). She learns to distrust herself and “speak less and less” until she becomes silent. In *Dangerous Freedom*, Philip Page argues that for Violet, the traces of the past take the form of her apprehension of repeating her mother’s suicidal act; Violet can never forget Rose Dear “or the place she had thrown herself into--a place so narrow, so dark, it was pure, breathing relief to see her stretched in a wooden box” (*Jazz* 101). The maternal memory emerges in Violet’s inability to have her own child, an abortive act that functions as a form of the lesson of her own mother’s life and death that teaches Violet “to never never have children. Whatever happened, no small dark foot would rest on another while a hungry mouth said Mama?” (102). Through the continued rejection of the reproduction of motherhood, Violet epitomizes what Nancy Chodorow terms, “the reproduction of motherlessness” (O’Reilly 158). Her miscarriages are, in fact, self-induced abortions, signifying her rejection of motherhood, or more accurately her refusal to become her mother (O’Reilly 156). When Violet claims that “[she] didn’t want to be like that [her mother]. Oh never like that” (97), she expresses what Adrienne Rich has termed matrophobia (O’Reilly 156): “the fear not of one’s mother or of motherhood but of *becoming one’s mother*” (Rich 235).

The trace of Rose Dear also takes the form of Violet’s series of substitutions as sites to regain her maternal loss. Although she rejects motherhood, Violet attempts to find her lost self through mothering (O’Reilly 157). With Dorcas, the doll, the stolen baby, her hairdressing customers, and the parrot, Violet seeks to actually become the mother she has lost (O’Reilly 157). Searching for maternal identity, Violet substitutes Dorcas for the

“mama’s dumpling girl,” the daughter who fled her womb?”(109). Her hairdressing represents a type of mothering activity; her customers are her surrogate children. In grooming and advising these women Violet assumes a maternal role and offers nurturance and counsel to “her daughters” (O’Reilly 157). She also personifies her birds. As Joe explains to Malvonne: “Violet takes better care of her parrot than she does me” (49). As a result of her childlessness, Violet suffers from “mother hunger [that] hit her like a hammer” and subsequently endeavors to steal a baby. Holding the child in her arms, Violet speaks of a “brightness that could be carried in her arms. Distributed, if need be, into places dark as the bottom of a well” (22). When the baby was in her arms, “she inched its blanket up around the cheeks against the threat of wind too cool for its honey-sweet, butter-colored face. Its big-eyed noncommittal stare made her smile” (19), and made her feel “comfort settled itself in her stomach and a kind of skipping, running light traveled her veins” (19).

B-Fragmentation of the black characters

Throughout the novel, Violet’s public cracks which the narrator describes as “dark fissures in the globe light of the day” (22), stem from these fracturing traces of the past that are linked to her mother:

I call them cracks because that is what they were. Not openings or breaks, but dark fissures in the globe light of the day. She wakes up in the morning and sees with perfect clarity a string of small, well-lit scenes. In each one something specific is being done.... But she does not see herself doing these things. She sees them being done. The globe light holds and bathes each scene, and it can be assumed that at the curve where the light stops is a solid foundation. In truth there’s no foundation at all, but alleyways, crevices one steps across all the time. But the globe light is imperfect too. Closely examined it shows seams, ill-glued cracks and weak places beyond which is anything [...] Sometimes when Violet isn’t paying attention she stumbles onto these cracks. (22-23)

This passage depicts radical dislocation of self, a fragmented subjectivity (O'Reilly 154). Violet's observations that [she] sees things "being done" not herself doing them, suggests "a mind-body split or splintering of schizophrenia" (O'Reilly154). The metaphorical references to "crevices," "ill-glued cracks," and "dark fissure" illustrate Violet's fragmented and alienated subjectivity (154). The cracks represent the consequence of the disintegration of her family caused by the paternal absence, an absence that functions as the lacking ingredient of her life, because without parents, life has no "foundation at all" (*Jazz* 23) and the person becomes "frustrated, defeated, devastated, and unregenerated" ("City Limits" 39). Violet's fragmentation is conspicuous in the second part of her story, where she is portrayed as a character who suffers from duplicity of self. There are two Violets, textually differentiated as Violet and **that** Violet (O'Reilly 154). **That** Violet is the supposedly real, authentic, or original Violet. And the other Violet is the younger version of her self; the woman, Violet tells us, "my mother didn't stay around long enough to see the one she would have liked and the one I used to like before" (208).

Aside from the fragmentary effect of the maternal loss, Violet's fragmented self is also accentuated through her fatal attraction to Golden Gray. By loving a white male, Violet locates that which is beautiful and desirable outside of herself (O'Reilly155). From her grandmother's tales of the pampered Golden boy, Violet learns that whiteness ensures love and happiness. In so doing, she develops an identity around a lack: her desire becomes not only to love this boy, but to become him (155), a desire that demands the denial of her original black female self. Like the character of Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*, who wishes to have blue eyes as an internalized western "beauty formula" (Stern "Toni Morrison's Beauty Formula" 77), Violet also fetishizes Golden Gray by the self-denying process of internalizing the master narrative that equates beauty and desirability with light skin and blue eyes (Moses 37). Through this identitarian desire, Violet sees herself as the dominant

culture sees her: as “an object body excluded from the category of the subject, which is constructed as white or light-skinned, and which she believes is embodied in Golden” Gray (Moses 37). She thus rejects her authentic racial identity because she is co-opted by the racist discourse that, at that time, privileged whiteness as an aesthetic criterion, while denigrating blackness for being associated with “invisibility, sin, death, [...] and absence” (Mori 22). By desiring to become other than her self, Violet falls into “the cracks” between the fragments. She becomes the embodiment of W.E. B. Dubois’s concept of “double consciousness:” “a self made ever aware by the gaze of a dominant culture of its “twoness,” an American,”- a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unrecognized strivings in one dark body” (Dubois 5).

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Dubois defines the liminal⁴ state of “double-consciousness” as a “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (5). This account of “twoness” derived from viewing the self through the eyes of contemptuous others recalls Hellen Block Lewis’s description of the accented sense of self-consciousness experienced by the shamed individual. Explaining that the shame experience is “directly about the self, which is the focus of a negative evaluation,” Lewis writes: “Because the self is the focus of awareness in shame, identity imagery is usually evoked. At the same time that this identity imagery is registering as one’s own experience, there is also vivid imagery of the self in the other’s eyes. This creates a ‘doubleness of experience’, which is characteristic of shame” (“Shame” 107). Violet lives in a white supremacist period, in which the “negro” is racially denigrated. Her desire for whiteness conveys not only her unconsciously imposed feeling of shame of being a black “other,” but also her

⁴ A concept coined by Edward Said to reflect upon the state of being torn between two different dimensions. The concept is roughly equivalent to Derrida’s neologism of “in-betweeness”.

“epidermalization” of a sense of inferiority (Fanon 116-11), which is dissipated through the racist discourse. In a fashion similar to Dubois’s definition of “double-consciousness,” the black Antillian psychiatrist Frantz Fanon further defines this concept in relation to the doubleness of experience lived by the black as a shame sufferer, whose feeling of inferiority “comes into being through the other,” who regards that “alterity” as “dirty nigger” (110-109). Fanon depicts his feeling of being “dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes,” and of having his body “given back” to him “sprawled out, distorted” (116-113). Likewise, Violet’s “twoness” is a mere construction by the racial discourse, which engaged in the alienation of the black self within its own self. Depicting the black shame that arises out of internalized racism--that is, the absorption by African Americans of “negative feelings and attitudes about blackness held by white people”--bell hooks observes that many blacks, like Violet, internalize this racist discourse and see themselves as inferior, as “lacking” in comparison to whites, and that they therefore overvalue whiteness and “negate the value of blackness” (*Killing Rage* 186, 148, 158). In the same vein, reflecting upon blacks’ negation of their blackness, Michael Awkward claims that Morrison’s characters are “hopelessly divided selves, selves which attempt an erasure of blackness” (*Inspiring* 80).

By means of Violet’s identity split, Morrison reveals in an implicit way the Foucauldean perception of how relations of power have an immediate and direct effect upon bodies (Moses 42). Aside from her racial desire for whiteness, Violet feels a strong yearning for the return to the previous young, attractive, and strong Violet of rural Virginia. Like the “anorectic”, she seeks to gain power and control by modifying the dimensions of her body. She associates agency, power, and control with “that Violet,” the one who stabs Dorcas (Moses 42). In her *Literary Criticism and Cultural Theory*, Cathy Moses claims that Susan Bordo’s study of anorexia nervosa is useful in reading Morrison’s narrative of

Violet's experience of her body (42). Although the bodies Bordo treats are slender bodies, and the desire of an anorectic is to have a thin body, her observations elucidate Violet's desire for a larger body. Bordo states that anorectic women seek to gain power and control over their lives by reducing the size of their bodies. But *Jazz* is set in a period when a fuller, more rounded female body was idealized (42), a female aesthetic preoccupation that triggered Violet's desire to enlarge her body. "I want some fat in this life", she says in a conversation with Alice (111). The desire for bodily enlargement is for the same reason that Bordo cites in the anorectic's desire to reduce (42). In her *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, Bordo cites four components of Augustinian mind-body duality that persists the anorectic's perception of her body: "[1] the body is experienced as alien.... [2] The body is experienced as confinement.... [3] The body is the enemy.... [4] The body is the locus of all that threatens our attempts at control" (144-145). Violet perceives her body in all of these terms, and she develops a fragmented identity in response to perceptions (Moses 42). There is a Violet who is in control, and there is another Violet who acts upon her unmediated desires, and hence is out of control (42):

Where she saw a lonesome chair left like an orphan in a park strip facing the river, that other Violet saw how the ice skim gave the railing's black poles a weaponry glint. Where she... noticed a child's cold wrist jutting out of a too-short, hand-me-down coat, that Violet slammed past a whitewoman into the seat of a trolley four minutes late. And if she turned away from faces looking past her through restaurant windows, that Violet heard the clack of the plate glass in mean March wind. (89-99)

In this passage, the Violet whom Violet perceives as her "self" sees an "orphan," a child's cold wrist, and herself as a passive, unseen object caught in the gaze of strangers looking at something more interesting (Moses 43). Everywhere she looks she sees lonely, fragile, parentless children; she sees her childhood. **That** Violet sees the possibility of aggression, of resistance, of agency, in each vignette that Violet envies her (Moses 42). At the root of Violet's malaise is a perception of her other self as an agent and herself as a passive object

who is acted upon. Violet deems her body as an obstacle to subjectivity and agency rather than the site of a resisting subjectivity (Moses 43).

Like Violet, Joe Trace is also a fragmented character who is “bound to the track” of past memory of his mother. He metaphorically names himself Joe Trace because he is the sign of his parental absence: “the trace they disappeared without was me” (124), he says. He still recalls his past spiritual quest for his mother Wild’s sign in the Virginian wood. During his second search in Harlem for Dorcas, who functions as a substitution for that maternal absence, he retrospectively parallels the two quests, claiming that “[he] tracked [his] mother in Virginia and it led [him] right to her, and [he] tracked Dorcas from borough to borough,” and that “[he] didn’t even have to work at it. Didn’t even have to think. Something else takes over when the track begins to talk to you, give out its signs so strong you hardly have to look” (130).

As in the case of most of the black characters, the discourse of Joe’s track circles back to, and converges with, the discourse of the mother (Badt 570) because the mother functions as a desired object in his psyche (Higgins 66). He confuses Dorcas with his mother because, in his mind, Dorcas, the wild girl of the city, serves as an extension of Wild, the naked and once pregnant wild girl of the village. She exists as Joe’s link to his past; in her, through her, his mother lives again and directs him into a future in which he will have to come to terms with his sense of self (Higgins 70). He thinks that Dorcas possesses traces of Wild. The horse’s hooves that spook Wild into running blindly into a tree are the hoof marks which appear on Dorcas’ face (Mbalia 111). These marks are the hoof marks that marked the soon-to-be born Joe who is in Wild’s stomach (112). In his unconscious mind, Dorcas is “Not Dorcas. She’ll be alone. Hard-headed. Wild, even. But alone” (182). Significant too is the fact that with Dorcas Joe feels “fresh, new again.” With the first introduction of Dorcas, she is structurally connected with Wild:

Maybe those were (Wild's) fingers moving like that in the bush, not twigs, but in light so small he could not see his knees poking through the holes in his trousers, maybe he missed the sign that would have been some combination of shame and pleasure, at least, and not the inside nothing he traveled with from then on, except for the fall of 1925 when he had somebody to tell it. Somebody called Dorcas with hooves tracing her cheekbones and who knew better than people his own age what that inside nothing was like. And who filled it for him, just as he filled it for her, because she had it too. (37-38)

The reason why Joe Trace hankers after Dorcas is the acknowledgement that he belongs to her. In searching for one, Joe also searches for the other. The trail across the streets of New York becomes, in Joe's mind, the viney, treacherous Virginia woods where he hunted the woman who was said to be his mother, in order to be granted a glimmer of recognition (Furman 88). Joe never finds his mother. After the third abortive search his hurt feelings compete with feelings of anger and humiliation that his mother would choose a cave and not him (88). In this desperate search Joe desires to touch the unattainable hand of his mother: "give me a sign." "Let me see your hand," he beseeches, "[a] sign. He begged, pleaded for her hand until the light grew even smaller" (178). That hand he could not reach becomes, later, the hand of the gun with which he wants to connect with Dorcas. The ambiguous murder of Dorcas is a site for connection with the maternal past, and a means to discharge the pent-up misery and humiliation of this past (Furman 88). It testifies to Badt's perception of "the maternal body" as "a core in two senses of the word: it is that which gives stability, provides a past, and it is that, like the proverbial apple, which provokes movement-spurring us, like Adam and Eve-into a history of our own making" (570-571).

Throughout the novel, Morrison represents the experience of loss felt by individuals who have been severed from parents, spouses, children and lovers, and scarred by a legacy of cultural dislocation, personal dispossession and emotional dismemberment (Rubenstein 112). Like all of the other black characters, Joe suffers from parental abandonment. The

substitution of the young girl for his unattained mother reflects also his strong attempt at filling “the inside nothing” (37) where the minimal trace of his lost parentage has expanded to form a space of enormous longing (Rubenstein 117). Although he never finds the woman who abandoned him, in the Virginia woods where he grew up, he does discover the denlike home of the woman referred to only as “Wild.” The depiction of his arrival in her primitive den is especially evocative of the archetypal fantasy of a return to the womb followed by rebirth (Rubenstein 118): “he had come through a few body-lengths of darkness and was looking out the south side of the rock face. A natural burrow [...] Unable to turn around inside, he pulled himself all the way out to reenter head first [...] Then he slit. It was like falling into the sun” (183). For a time Dorcas occupies the empty space of the “inside nothing” in Joe’s heart. She becomes the beloved who temporarily assuages the unappeased hunger he feels for the woman who abandoned him at birth. He confides to Dorcas that she is the central figure in his vision of Paradise (Rubenstein 118): “the reason Adam ate the apple and its core [...] You looked at me then like you knew me, and I thought it really was Eden” (133).

“Nostalgia for a vanished Eden or Paradise is a mere fantasy that encodes our knowledge of the inexorable original loss at the personal level: separation from infantile bliss” (Rubenstein 118). But for an actual orphan like Joe Trace, there never could have been a true interlude of infantile bliss experienced as unconditional love. Nonetheless, the longing to “recover” something that never existed in the first place endures as an emotionally powerful imperative (Rubenstein 118). As the Jungian analyst Mario Jacoby observes, despite the fact that “the harmonious world which is now regarded as lost [...] never really existed” (5), the image of Paradise “as an inner image or expectation [...] lives on within us, creating a nostalgia the intensity of which is in inverse proportion to the amount of external fulfillment encountered in the earliest phase of life” (8). In *Jazz*, Joe

Trace's nostalgic fantasy for Paradise and of his irrecoverably absent/lost mother fuels a need so insistent that, even into middle age, it demands an outlet. After the discovery of Wild's primitive space, he asks plaintively, "But where is she?" (184). Following a noticeable narrative pause produced by the white space of a chapter break, the response "There she is" (187) reveals Morrison's consummate narrative sleight of hand as well as her psychological compass (Rubenstein 119). The ambiguous pronoun refers to Dorcas, the emotional substitution for Joe Trace's mother. The graphological fragmentation of the novel through the white spaces of chapter breaks signifies the space of absence, the space once occupied by the lost love object, who survives in the emotional imagination because of its absence (Rubenstein 119). In his studies of effects of loss, bereavement, and object-relations, John Bowlby has theorized that the loss of a parent during early childhood "gives rise not only to separation anxiety and grief but to process of mourning in which aggression, the function of which is to achieve reunion, plays a major part" (37). Similarly, Joe Trace is haunted by the ambivalent feelings of loss and aggression of his futile search for his mother; he follows the trail from the phantom of his absent mother in the woods to his absenting-herself young lover in the City who becomes her substitute (119). His crime is an ambivalent act both to reunite and to punish the woman who, like his mother, has deserted him. This maternal abandonment entails his desperate struggle for connection with the past via the substitution of Dorcas for that absent mother, and the fragmentation of his identity, a fragmentation which has been further accentuated through the different racial phases of life he went through as a black character.

Joe Trace has changed seven times before meeting Dorcas. His first change has occurred when he named himself "Trace." His second change occurred when Hunter's Hunter chose him as a student of the hunt. When he turned twenty-eight, he changed for the fourth time, in celebration of Booker T. Washington's luncheon at the White House. In

1901, he bought a parcel of land, from which he was dispossessed by a black landowner. The fourth change occurred in 1906 when Joe took Violet to Rome, Virginia and boarded a train for New York. Once in the city Joe changed for the fifth time, thinking, like other black migrants, of progress and the prosperity of his race. In 1917, Joe changed for the sixth time. While he was trying to help an injured black boy in a race riot, he was injured. That injury, however, was accountable for this change. As Joe explains, “after those whitemen took that pipe from my head, I was brand new for sure because they almost killed me” (J 128). His seventh last change occurred when he marched proudly with “the three six nine” (J 127), celebrating the black troop of WW1 veterans, and found a new job in a hotel where “the tip was folding money more often than coin” (J 129). In *The Myth of the Negro Past*, Melville J. Herkovits interprets this metamorphosis as the author’s inspiration by the African belief in the transformation of the black individual in life: “[...]among Africans, a person’s name may in so many instances change with time, a new designation being assured on the occasion of some striking occurrence in his life, or when he goes through one of the rites marking a new stage in his development” (190). This interpretation is valid because, as an African American writer, Morrison delves into her African American heritage and belief. But in this very context, Joe’s unstable identity indicates, instead, the author’s portrayal of the devastating impact of racism.

Like a blues lament that repeats the same primary musical themes in different keys, another Orphan’s story in *Jazz* recapitulates and amplifies the emotional issues at the heart of Joe Trace’s story. Golden Gray is represented as the son of a “phantom father” and as an enigmatic character belonging to an earlier era, that of the antebellum South. Like Joe Trace, Golden Gray is also bound to his past track. He is portrayed in a spiritual quest for a radically absent parent. Awaiting the arrival of “Henry Lestory or LesTroy,” the man reputed to be his father, Golden Gray metaphorically describes his missing parent as “an

amputee might describe his experience of a phantom limb, in language that most explicitly articulates the “inside nothing” by a child’s experience of abandonment or radical estrangement from a parent” (Rubenstein 121). In depicting his feeling of identitarian incompleteness, Morrison employs the image of “non-entity” to convey the theme of dismemberment, which is reiterated in most of her fictions as a trope for the legacy of damage inflicted on African Americans by slavery and its aftermath. During his search for the unacknowledged father, Golden Gray is frustrated by this absence: he “looked like an empty man with one arm” (158). “Only now... that [he] know[s] [that he] ha[s] a father, do[es he] feel his absence: the place where he should have been and was not. Before, [he] thought everybody was one-armed, like [him].” But “Now [he] feel[s] the surgery” (*Jazz* 158). He claims that he does not need the arm. “But [he does] need to know what it could have been like to have had it. It’s a phantom [he] ha[s] to behold and be held by” (158). “I will locate it,” he says, “so the severed part can remember the snatch, the slice of its disfigurement (158-9). Golden Gray assimilates his parental absence to an “arm that never held itself out to give him balance and shape (159). He thinks that perhaps, when he sees his father or “what is left of him,” he “will locate [his arm] by telling him “the missing part of him” so that they “will both be free, arm- tangled and whole” (159).

As a mulatto, Golden Gray also suffers from the “liminal” state of “double consciousness.” Paradoxically, the discovery that blackness is part of his identity infuriates him. He first describes the spiritual quest for his father as a “dark purpose” (146). Even though he grows accustomed to his surrogate mother, True Belle, who helped him to reconnect with his missing part, the discovery that his unknown father is a “nigger,” a man “of no consequence, except a tiny reputation as a tracker” (148), puzzles him. The mulatto “came all that way to insult not his father but his race,” because “he always thought that there was only one [racial] kind-True Belle’s kind. Black and nothing. Like Henry Lestroy

[...]” (149), but suddenly he is confronted with the revelation that “there was another kind--like himself” (149). The latter’s disdain of blackness is obvious in his first racial encounter with the pregnant Wild. At first, he perceives this woman as an untouchable and filthy “thing lying in wet weeds” (149), “a naked berry-black woman” who nauseates him with her large and terrible deer-eyes (144). He also assimilates her, from a white perspective, to a grotesque body whose blackness, wetness and nakedness are mere reflections of his own horse. He “wanted nothing to do with what he has seen.” But “when he picks up the reins he cannot help noticing that his horse is also black, naked and shiny wet” (144). Yet this repudiation of his own race is momentary. After his feeling of disfigurement he has come to understand the value of his “blackness” in relation to his absent father as the ancestral protective figure that should have guided and protected him. “This gone-away hand that never helped me over the stile, or guided me past the dragon, pulled me up from the ditch into which I stumbled,” he says. This guiding arm never “stroked my hair, fed me food; took the far end of the load to make it easier for me to carry” (159).

1- The Northern City as a Site for Further Physical, Cultural, and Ideological Dislocation

Aside from her emphasis on the detrimental impact of the absent parents on the coherent development of the identity of the black characters, Morrison retrospectively revisits other dark episodes in the history of blacks, most notably, the Northern Migration to the “City” of Harlem. As an “anti-urban”⁵ writer Morrison purposefully capitalizes the name of this urban space to account for its hypnotizing power, as well as its illusory and

⁵ A term used by Morrison in “City Limits, Village Values” to account for American writers’ rejection of the city as a hostile urban space that kills the spiritual side of life. Morrison states that the hostility of black writers towards the city differs from that of the white writers. Aside from racial ostracization of blacks, what also matters in African American anti-urban texts is the absence of the ancestor rather than the death of individualism and freedom, which has thematically impregnated white modernist texts (36-40).

fictional dimension in the minds and the psyche of black migrants who “came on a whim”(32), dreaming of the fulfillment of equal civil rights, such as freedom, equality and black selfhood. Initially, the narrative voice ironically exults as it applauds the emergence of the urban new order. The city for black migrants is portrayed as a place where “here comes the new. There goes the bad stuff. The things no-body-could-help-stuff,” a charming place where “History is over [...] and everything is ahead at least” (7). Black people coming from the South think that in this space “there would be no green-as-poison curtain separating colored people” from whites (31) but a final destination for southern blacks who came in search of a refuge from want:

Some were slow about it and traveled from Georgia to Illinois, to the city, back to Georgia, out to San Francisco and finally, shaking their heads, surrendered themselves to the city. Others knew right away that that it was for them, this city and no other. They came on a whim because there it was and why not? They came after much planning, many letters written to and from, to make sure and know how and how much and where. They came for a visit and forgot to go back to tall cotton or short. Discharged with or without honor, fired with or without notice, they hung around for a while, and then could not imagine themselves anywhere else. Others came because a relative or hometown buddy said, “Man, you best see this place before you die”; or, “We got room now so pack your suitcase and don’t bring no hightop shoes.” (31)

Harlem, “Nigger Heaven,” as Rudolph Fisher’s *King Solomon Gillis* calls it, was “the beacon of light for Africans in the US” (Mbalia 106). In *Jazz*, the voice fervently celebrates the Harlem era of the “New Negro” along with the emergence of opportunity, cultural pride, and vibrant new musical idioms. However, beneath these exuberant expressions, lie a “complicated danger” interwoven with strands of sorrow and loss (Rubenstein 114). The city of New York distracts the narrating voice and the people it observes/fabricates, by the enticement of urban life at the dawn of a new age (Rubenstein 114): “Round and round about the town. That’s the way the City spins you. Makes you do

what it wants, go where the laid-out roads say to. All the while letting you think you're free [...] You can't get off the track a city lays for you" (120). In this depiction the narrative voice hints implicitly at the danger of the city's cultural and ideological entrapment of blacks, who "surrendered themselves to the City," (32) and have become subject to its acculturating power. This power makes them feel free, because "there is no air in the City but there is breath" (34), and also makes them feel part of mainstream America, which meanwhile denigrates them. The city promised relief from lynching, unemployment, rape, slave labor and freedom from oppression, but for many the legacy of oppression continued and was perhaps uglier than that in the South because it was more subtle (106). Harlem, like the South, is still a place for perpetual racial discrimination and segregation. In describing the city, Morrison uses parentheses to reveal the restrictive social and economic life of blacks:

you don't please to go many places because everything you want is right where you are: the church, the store, the party, the women, the men, the postbox (but no high schools), the furniture store, the street newspaper vendors, the bootleg houses (but no banks) [...].(10)

Aside from the racial marginalization of black migrants, Morrison demonstrates what happens to African Americans who lose their sense of community, who uproot themselves, and, in so doing, become fragmented and changed people (Higgins 109). Morrison believes that this metamorphosis occurs as a result of the great migration to the "dangerous" northern cities, which enhances selfish individualism at the expense of the collective life that characterizes the African community, and engages in the creation of black subjects totally detached from their rural past and ancestral values. Joe Trace, for instance, is a compelling example of the metamorphosis of the village dweller to the city slicker (Higgins 110). In the city, "he forgets little pebbly creeks and apple trees so old that they lay their branches along the

ground". He also "forgets a sun that used to slide up like a yoke of a good country egg" (34-35). Joe Trace is the archetype of the black migrant who has lost his ancestral values in the city of Harlem, which has become no longer "distant from the white culture that surrounds it, because it has become "a case of complete acculturation" (Locke, qtd in Herskovitz 301).

Jazz is obviously a novel about community, because as an African American writer, Morrison is concerned with the collective life of the black "tribe." "[Her] characters exhibit a dual allegiance to self and collectivity. They are assessed in the logic of her novels insofar as they take their place in the community and maintain its structure" (Harding 87). In her novels Morrison thematically foregrounds the importance of solidarity and mutual interaction between the individual and his community. She suggests that African people are one people, bound by history, culture, and current oppression (Mbalia 5). This implication is structurally expressed through the inter-relatedness of her fragmented chapters, and thematically revealed through her brief portrayal of the communal aspect of black community in Harlem:

Up those big five-storey apartment buildings and the narrow wooden houses in between people knock on each other's doors to see if anything is needed or can be had. A piece of soap? A little Kerosene? Some fat? Whose husband is getting ready to go see if he can find a shop open? Is there time to add turpentine to the list handed to him by the wives? (10)

In this passage Morrison tackles the creation of the new kind of collectivism in the city. African Americans banded "together into a tribal unit in order to ensure their survival" (Harding 89). But this banding together did not ensure that they were truly a community reflective of their past communities (Higgins 111), because "the city dwellers of *Jazz*," as Harding puts it, "are a new phenomenon in Morrison's fiction in that they constitute a community composed entirely of exiles. Dispossessed of their homes in the rural South, they have migrated toward the North," and, yet, "in the city, they feel disconnected from

the past and from each other” (106-7). In *Jazz*, the city is a space of estrangement, where “hospitality is gold; you have to be clever to figure out how to be welcoming and defensive at the same time” (9). It is also a place where neighbors are, after all, “amiable strangers,” a perception of neighborhood that would have been foreign to village dwellers (Higgins 112). When Violet attempts to abduct a baby in the street, the girl’s hysterical outburst brings people to her side, but their reaction is to reprimand her for leaving “a whole live baby with a stranger” (21). Harlem is also portrayed as a space of utter individualism and alienation. Blacks in Harlem lack guidance because of the absence of what Harding calls ancestral “healers” as a result of the movement away from close community (Higgins 111). The Salem Women’s Club fails in its effort to help Violet because she will just have “to figure out on her own what the matter was and how to fix it” (4). When Dorcas is bleeding to death, the people around her are less concerned with helping her than with the mess her blood is making (Harding 95). The gaze of the community has turned inward, onto the self, the individual. As a result, the community fails to function, and its members are left to fend for themselves (Higgins 112).

Morrison warns her black audience against the dangers and the genocidal impact of isolation and individualism on the life of “the village.” The author claims that when African migrants fled the South to the North, as a tame place free of exploitation and oppression (“want and violent”), they were actually coming to a wilder and colder place where they would forget the necessity of communication and the value of collectivism (Mbalia 109). Morrison perceives the urban space as a discourse that accentuates the dislocation and dismemberment of the black agency. The relocations of the Great Migration were similarly infused with cultural loss and mourning for disrupted communal lives as well as for people and places left behind (Rubenstein 115). In *Jazz*, black migrants are described as those who forget their past selves as country people, because they fall in love with a city in a way that

“they were not so much new as themselves: Their stronger, riskier selves” (33). The narrator claims that “They and the city have grown up, they love that part of themselves so much they forget what loving other people was like” (34).

In addition to the erosion of the communal function, African Americans have also lost their connection to their ancestors. As Harding points out, “[a]t the hub of community life, the place where all unifying collective functions tend to converge, we find the ancestor, the linchpin character in Morrison’s fictional universe” (104). But such a figure does not exist in *Jazz* (Higgins 113). In “City Limits, Village Values,” Morrison deals with the absence of the benevolent figure of the ancestor in contemporary African American fiction. This “absence of some vital element of city life” (39), however, is very much present in village life. Morrison defines the ancestor as a signifier of a particular bond which holds together a community, a figure that breathes life and continuity into a community because it represents its past and acts as a guide for its future (Higgins 113). But in the city “the worst thing that could happen is that the ancestor becomes merely a parent or an adult and is thereby seen as a betrayer--one who has abandoned his traditional role of advisor with a strong connection to the past” (“City Limits” 40). In *Jazz*, even the old people who normally epitomize African ancestral guidance and wisdom have changed because they no longer feel the desire to guide nor the desire to pass on the traditions of old (Higgins 113). “They sit around looking at goings-on.” “They find themselves butting in the business of people whose names they can’t even remember and whose business is none of theirs”. And what matters for them is “just to hear themselves talk and the joy of watching the distressed faces of those listening” (J11).

Part II

Fragmentation of Characters and Plot: Sign of Poststructuralist and Modernist Influence

A-Fragmentation of the Self: A Poststructuralist Account of Fragmented and Unstable Identity

Like Joe Trace, who suffers total fragmentation of identity, Violet's internalization of the formulaic beauty of racist discourse, her disconnection from her past, her roots and her ancestry is what makes her suffer from a split into different personalities. Reflecting upon the factors behind the fragmentation of black identity, Morrison also insists implicitly that space-movement and relocations are crucial elements in the formation of the subject. Through the unstable and changing identities of Joe and Violet Trace, she suggests, from a poststructuralist perspective, that identity is a social construct, a malleable entity that is in the process of becoming, which shifts, multiplies, and contradicts (Russel 6). As Ermarth defines it, identity is the incarnation of the state of "palimpsestuousness", a state in which the individual self is created through layers of multiple discourses of gender, race, class and space. Morrison's negative portrayal of the urban space as a dividing realm, and her emphasis on the absence of the ancestor, which is epitomized in the death of the guiding parents, are thus sites for the disorientation and fragmentation of her black characters. Through the image of the identity split, Morrison makes of *Jazz* a textual space in which family, spatial, and ideological dislocations create a "plural", "never fixed" identity which is "always in process" (Byerman 5).

Prior to the emergence of postmodernism, some African American theorists and writers celebrated the duplicity and the dividedness of black identities. Ralph Ellison, for instance, considered that the Negro's position in America has caused untold disruption and

has forced him to come to grips with life and self (*Shadows* 112). He stressed that being a Negro “imposes the uneasy burden and occasional joy of a complex double vision, a fluid, ambivalent response to men and events which represents, at its finest, a profoundly civilized adjustment to the cost of being human in this modern world” (131-32). According to Houston Baker, Jr., double consciousness led to forms of discourse such as the blues, whose “matrix avoids simple dualities” and which is built upon “a fluid and multivalent network” (*Blues* 9). Reflecting upon the issue of identity split, many critics argue that Morrison’s unconventional portrayal of the fragmented identity stems from her inspiration by poststructuralist accounts of identity as “a complex locus of forces, always in process of becoming, and inevitably divided yet somehow unified” (Page 8). Derrida, for instance, claims that the conventional perception of the self as a unified entity is contradictory and illusory. Lacan also maintains that when the subject enters into the linguistic realm, it becomes divided. In his essay, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” he further explains that the self image that causes identification and recognition is a fiction, dictating the effort of the subject (“I”) toward a totality and autonomy it can never attain” (Leitch 1281). Lacan also insists 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” (Lacan 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-- or between the *Innwelt* (the inner world) and the *Unwelt* (outer world) (Lacan 1287).

Thomas Dochery theorizes that postmodern fiction substitutes much more fluid subjectivity for the fixed notion of the character, who is replaced by “the process of characterization, the continual re-creation or re-positioning of character as “becoming

rather than an essence” (268). Whereas postmodernism welcomes the duplicity and the split of identity to subvert the monolithic spirit of “logocentric” western culture, Morrison, by contrast, uses the fragmented image of the black self in her fictions to lament the negative impact of racism on her black community, because she believes that “the trauma of racism is [...] the severe fragmentation of the self” (“Unspeakable” 214), a fragmentation that contrasts with the harmonic world vision of “the village”. Adebayo Adesanya finds in African thinking “a coherence or compatibility among all disciplines”(qtd in Jahn 96) and claims that the disciplines “all find themselves logically concatenated in a system so tight that to subtract one item from the whole is to paralyze the structure of the whole” (97). In contrast with the fragmentation of European cultures, there is no clear demarcation, in the African world view, between life and death (Asante 99; Barthold 11; Jahn 107), sacred and secular (Smitherman 93), or spiritual and material (Smitherman 75). Instead, the focus is on a reconciliation of oppositions in which the cosmos, as well as every community, is a “balanced force field” (Smitherman 108).

B-Structural Fragmentation: Modernist Influence

In “Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation”, Morrison talks about the importance of the ancestor in the life of the black community. She claims that the fragmentation of the black self through the absence of that figure also affects the structure of the text as a fragmented space, the fragmented form of which reflects the theme of the fragmentation of black identity. In this essay, Morrison creates a blueprint for *Jazz* when she states in regards to contemporary African American fiction that “whether the novel took place in the city or in the country, the presence or absence of that figure (the ancestor)

determined the success or the happiness of the character. It was the absence of an ancestor that was frightening, that was threatening, and it caused huge destruction and disarray in the work itself” (343). Page argues that when the narration is split, the form of Morrison’s novels recapitulates the divided nature of individuals, families, and communities (31-32). In Smith’s terms, the form thereby achieves narrative resonance with the cultural conditions being described (*Self-Discovery* 124). This convergence of the thematic fragmentation with the structure of the text has long been championed by modernist writers, such as T.S. Eliot, Henry Miller, Gertrude Stein, who stressed the cultural dimension of the modernist text as a fragmented form that reflects the fragmentation and distortion of the modern world, and the split between man and his society, because they felt a duty, owing to their social position as modernist writers, to shape and to articulate new modes of writing to deal with the unprecedented social and economic development of their transitional and unharmonious period.

In *Dangerous Freedom*, Philip Page links the fragmentation of the text with Morrison’s use of “multiperspectivism”, a Faulknerian modernist technique that occurs through the repetition of the slightly altered narrative theme in each chapter of the novel. In Morrisonian context this fragmentation is not a total disruption of unity: the text of *Jazz* is unified in spite of its division into fragmented chapters, because all of these life episodes are inter-related, since each story of each character is in dialogue with, and completes, the stories of other characters. The structure of this fragmented but unifying technique is what Ralph Ellison calls “the puzzle of the- one –and-the- many” (164-65). A “plurality-in-unity” that presumes that any entity is simultaneously unified yet divided, a whole yet an aggregation of parts (Page 3). The use of this technique has to do with Morrison’s adherence to the African American image of the “quilt”, which she uses as a metaphor for the structure of her narrative. The quilt is plainly referred to in *Jazz* in relation to True

Belle's power of connecting the disconnected black characters with their past. It is described as the combination of "rags, bits of truly unusable fabric shoved into a ticking shroud" (J152).

Some critics argue that there is a strong analogy between the fragmented form of modernist texts and the theory of trauma. Reflecting upon this theory, Assman states that "trauma and symbol are mutually exclusive," (264) because the former ultimately renders the narrative operation impossible, in that neither a meaningful relation of events nor their temporal configuration succeeds (264). Trauma, as Eckstein claims, is the impossibility of putting into words what has been too inhuman to be speakable, because language is too weak to be able to capture the horror of certain experiences (21-22). Morrison, like modernist writers, distances herself from this perception, because she is aware that the narration of the traumatic experience is never impossible; on the contrary she uses the fragmented modernist form with its emphasis on interiority, psychological verisimilitude, and personal isolation, and its development of fragmented, non-linear plots" (Moran 3) as "an ideal medium for the transcription of traumatic experience" (3), and an appropriate way of enabling her to speak the unspoken and to create an innovative non-linear form of language as a formal fragmentation that best reflects the distorted and fractured psychic life of blacks, because "boundless misfortune, the resounding gift of gods, marks the point where language begins" (Foucault 90).

Part III

Transposition of the Aesthetics of Jazz Music onto the narrative form of Jazz

A-Hybridity of the Intertextual Black Art: A Convergence with Mikhail Bakhtin's Concept of "Dialogism."

In *Remembering the Black Atlantic*, Lars Eckstein regards historical fictions as “mnemonic” narratives, and equates this genre with Bakhtin’s concept of “dialogism” (3), with Julia Kristeva’s notion of “intertextuality,” (5) and with Gérard Genette’s depiction of this form as “palimpsest,” or literature in the second degree (12). In *Jazz*, history is not the only “intertextual” reference in the novel, which deconstructs the binary opposition between history and narrative. Morrison also intertextually embodies musical form in her novel to transcend generic hierarchy. This is a “carnavalesque” transcendence, which enables the writer to create “the syncretist mélange of various references to seemingly incompatible sources” (Eckstein 55). This musical supplementation of the novelistic form confirms Bakhtin’s theoretical perception of the novel as a “plurivocal” and “pluristylistic” genre that stylizes oral forms of narration, and integrates other forms of discourse that are not literary. In *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, Bakhtin concedes that the intertextual incorporation of other “familiar and intimate genres” into secondary genres “gives rise to a certain candor of speech” because they lie “more or less outside the framework of the social hierarchy and social conventions” (*Speech* 97). The incorporation of the familiar genres destroyed the conventional and “traditional official styles and world views”, and “opened up to layers of language that had been previously been under speech constraints” (*Speech* 97). Bakhtin believes that “the special relationship” between the novel and “extraliterary genres, with the genres of everyday life and with ideological genres” is

an innovative phenomenon in the history of the development of the novel (Bakhtin, qtd in Tally, 98), and that “incorporated genres” become “one of the most basic and fundamental forms for incorporating and organizing heteroglossia” in the narrative form, because the novelistic genre “permits the incorporations of various genres, both artistic (inserted short stories, lyrical songs, poems, dramatic scenes, etc) and extra-artistic (everyday rhetorical, scholarly, religious genres and others)” (*Dialogic* 320).

Morrison’s appropriation of jazz music conveys the “intertextual” aspect of her “double-voiced” text as a cross-cultural composition which transcends the boundaries between literature and music, the written and the spoken. It also engages her in the fusion of the typically black traditional aesthetics with the language of mainstream white America. In his “Discourse and the Novel”, Bakhtin theorizes the issue of “organic hybridity” with respect to language and literature, and explains how that unavoidable mutation occurs in a language when speakers of that language from different world views interact (1205). For Bakhtin this organic hybridization is in a sense very “productive [...] pregnant with potential for new world views” (1215). In *The Signifying Monkey*, Henry Louis Gates expands Bakhtin’s concept of “hybridity”. He claims that black literary tradition is inherently “double voiced” and intertextual because it is based on patterns of revision and repetition, on reversing and modifying both white texts and texts from its own tradition. For Gates, African American literary tradition is composed of “texts that talk to other texts, an expressive modes he calls Signifyin(g). This process is similar to Bakhtin’s terminology of “intentional hybridity”, or “double-voiced word” in a language, in which “two points of views are not mixed, but set against each other ideologically” in a single utterance (360).

The notion of “double voicedness” is applicable to African American literature, because, as Nathan Higgins puts it, it is an “intertextual” art that “attempts to speak with two voices, one from the stage of national culture and the other from the soul of ethnic

experience” (195). Gates himself considers jazz music to be a double-voiced discourse (63), and that “improvisation [...which is] so fundamental to the very idea of jazz, is ‘nothing more’ than repetition and revision. In this sort of revision, again where meaning is fixed, it is the realignment of the signifier that is the signal trait of expressive genius” (63-64). Extending the theory of Signifyin(g) Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. and Ingrid Monson conclude that jazz is a “signifying” art, and stands as a logical extension of an African American tradition that turns on the “transformation of other genres” (104). It is a “musical Signifying” that engages with “the transformation of preexisting material by trifling with it, teasing it, or censoring it” (Floyd 104). This “musical Signifyin(g) is the rhetorical use of preexisting material as a means of demonstrating respect for or poking fun at a musical style, process, or practice through parody, pastiche, implication, indirection, humor, tone play or word play, the illusion of speech or narration, or other troping mechanisms” (Floyd 8). In African American art Signifying takes the form of contradiction as a characteristic of the vernacular worldview that opposes rigid categorization. In blues/jazz lyrics, the propensity for contradictions can lead to a heightened sense of social consciousness expressed in humorous self-mockery and irony, in particular (Bolden 51).

Jazz is the derivation of Blues, the hybrid music, and “a model of dynamism and creolization, constantly assuming new shapes and forms while preserving its Africanist uniqueness and distinctiveness (Bolden 40). It is a cultural matrix. As Charlie Baker observes, “A matrix is a womb, a network, a fossil-bearing rock [...] a point of ceaseless input and output, a web of intersecting, crisscrossing impulses always in productive transit” (qtd in Bolden, 43). It is also noted for its art of riffing, in other words, repetition by the jazz musician of the same musical note, a repetition which also includes variation, and encompasses the technique of call/ response (Bolden 54). As a trope, riffing also refers to a kind of “mimetic pastiche,” and involves an intertextual transposition of the vernacular

aural expression onto the written form (55). Similarly, Morrison, like a jazz musician, riffs upon this musical form and inserts her African legacy within the English language to create a transgeneric and hybrid novel, whose hybridity does not deconstruct the authenticity of black art. As Grandt puts it, “Authentic blackness actually thrives on “hybridity”: it harnesses the energies inherent in the tension-filled process of cultural production and its myriad possibilities while simultaneously affirming and extending, not diluting, the African American tradition” (106).

B- Dialogism in relation to the “Response-ibility” of the Black Writer

Through the adaptation of jazz to the narrative form, Morrison becomes like the jazz musician who borrows and absorbs other genres and stylistic motifs in his performance (Borshuck 45). By transcending the generic boundaries between music and literature, Morrison intertextually repeats, revises, and improvises the aesthetics of that improvisational art, to create a typically “Signifyin(g)/intertextual/double-voiced/improvisational” black narrative to deconstruct from within the eccentricity of white discourse, because the intertextuality of African American art is a critical attitude and has an ideological potential (Jenny 37). As Byerman puts it “African-American text creates an alternate discourse designed to counter the claims of the logocentrism of [racial] order” (Byerman 7). It is a counter-discourse that embodies “the incendiary deconstruction, defamiliarization, and signifying within the master narrative” (141). Morrison believes that art, like *Jazz*, is politically engaged and a “representational” discourse that asserts and preserves African culture, its language, and its artistic literary tradition of Call/Response, which is defined by Smitherman as “a spontaneous verbal and non verbal interaction between speaker and listener in which all of the speaker’s statements (calls) are punctuated

by expressions ('responses') from the listener," and a collaborative improvisation that is a characterization of common content and shared experience, an outward expression of group that indicates a connection, a shared history and culture. Call-response unifies the listener and the speaker. Response also allows the caller to know that the audience approves of what she is saying and/or how she is saying it (Atkinson 22). It is a process which "requires that one must give if one is to receive, and receiving is actively acknowledging the other" (*Talkin'* 119, 104, 108).

African American writers, like Morrison, have combined the rhetoric of Call/Response with Witness/ Testify (Atkinson 23), because they are aware that "in the African American grain, stories were told in unceasing collaboration between the story teller and his audience, the black community" (Callahan 71). In "Black English Oral Tradition in Works of Morrison", Atkinson defines the act of Witness/Testify as a tangible proof that symbolizes or serves as evidence to validate one's existence as part of the group, and claims that in the oral tradition of Black English, "one who witnesses has an obligation to testify. To witness is to affirm, attest, certify, validate, and observe" (23). Hence black writers, as witnesses, must have the responsibility of preserving and telling the tale (Atkinson 23), because testifying is "a concept referring to a ritualized form of black communication in which the speaker gives verbal witness to the efficacy, truth, and power of some experience in which all blacks have shared" (*Talkin'* 58). This "Africanist" assumption converges with Bakhtin's term of "response-ibility" (Tally 68) because the technique of call-response corresponds to "his emphasis on the intersubjective interdependence of individuals. Response to the other means, in effect, "response-ibility" to and for the other"(Tally 68) and hence the response-ibility of the individual writer towards his community.

The way in which Morrison practices language is “a search for and deliberate posture of vulnerability to those aspects of Afro-American culture that can inform and position [her] work” (Morrison “Unspeakable” 33). She thinks that “what makes a work Black is its ‘unpoliced’, ‘seditious’, confrontational’, ‘manipulative’, ‘inventive’, ‘masked’, and ‘unmasking’ language” (p11). Her use of the oral tradition helps to establish a context which in turn creates meaning in her stories (Atkinson 28). She develops the written word in the oral tradition (Atkinson 28). The use of words from Black English and the rituals and style of the oral tradition enhance her texts (28), and the systems of language, the style, the lexicon of Black English that [she] uses in her novels bear Witness to African American culture”(Atkinson 28). To borrow Helene Cixous’s phrase, Morrison writes with “the flesh of language” (qtd in Atkinson 29) from the vantage point of a people who live, and thrive, within the context of political and historical realities (Atkinson 29).

Morrison is astutely aware that “language is more than a form of communication: it reveals the concepts that shape the significance and legacy beyond the word itself” (Atkinson 12). Language “defines a culture’s style and method of looking at life and the individual’s place within that culture” (Atkinson 12). According to Geneva Smitherman, Black English is “an Africanized form of English reflecting Black America’s linguistic-cultural African heritage” (*Talkin’* 2). It is a sophisticated and complex oral language in which voice and visual styling help to create meaning, as “beyond and within, more or less than meaning: rhythm, tone, color, and joy, within, through, and across the Word” (Kristeva *Desire* 158). Morrison is aware of the oral quality of her own language; she persists that it “must not sweat. It must suggest and be provocative at the same time. It is the thing that black folks love so much- the sayings of words, holding them on the tongue, experimenting with them[...]. Its function is like a preacher’s: to make you stand up out of your seat, make you lose yourself and hear yourself. The worst of all possible things that

could happen, would be to lose that language” (LeClair 123, qtd in Atkinson 14) which is the only medium that defines the boundaries of an authentic culture “because it is itself authentic” (Carby 41).

Morrison also expresses that what is crucial to her is “the way words are put together, the metaphors, the rhythm, and the music – that’s the part of the language that is distinctively black to [her] whenever [she] hear (s) it” (Morrison in Ruas 96). Her appropriation of that music reflects her awareness that her position as a black writer makes her “the transmitter of racial legacy”, the key to the very idea of race, whose writings are mere processes of racialization, the enactment of the relation between narrator and narrated as a genealogy through which an autonomous racial identity is both authenticated and, through the process of authentication, created (Michaels 94). Morrison believes in the interdependent relationship between culture and literature. She states that the body of her work is a “running commentary on race theory and cultural practices and how each shapes the other” (“Race and Literature” qtd in Fultz 9). As Bakhtin says, “Literature is an inseparable part of culture and it cannot be understood outside the total context of the entire culture of a given epoch” (Speech 2). It is an expressive field that refracts the “generating socioeconomic reality” (*Dialogic* 136), and “[...] a concrete socio-linguistic belief system that defines a distinct identity for itself within the boundaries of a language that is unitary only in the abstract” (*Dialogic* 356). The image of such a language in a novel is “the image assumed by a set of social beliefs, the image of a social ideologem that has fused with its own discourse, with its own language [...]. In the novel, formal markers of languages, manners and styles are symbols for sets of social beliefs” (*Dialogic* 356-357).

Jazz is written in a period after the emergence of postmodernism. Even if there is a close link between this trend and postcolonial black literature, for they both deal with the literature of marginalization and the issues of “constructionism,” Morrison as an African

American writer seems to deviate from the postmodernist account of the death of race and identity, because she is, instead, interested in the ways in which literature is a means of constructing the racial identity of her black community. When black Americans discovered they had shaped or become a culturally formed race, and that this race had a specific and revered difference, suddenly they were confronted by the belief that there is no such thing as race, biological or cultural, that matters and that genuinely intellectual exchange cannot accommodate it (Bouson 17). Morrison counters the theoretical erasure of race by insisting that “there is culture and both gender and race inform and are informed by it. African American culture exists...” (“Unspeakable Things” 3). Responding to the postmodernist premises of the race as “an empty category”, and a “destructive and powerful forms of social categorization” (Bouson 17), Morrison insists that race is a “powerfully destructive emptiness” (Introduction ix), but also a social construct because she believes in the textually racial construction of black identity, which remains integral to the politically implicated black art. bell hooks has also interrogated the relevance of postmodernism’s deconstruction of essentialist perception of identity to African Americans, and finally assumed that “postmodern critiques of essentialism which challenge notions of universality and static over-determined identity” is “useful for African Americans concerned with reformulating outmoded notions of identity”, because this movement “can open up new possibilities for the construction of the self and the assertion of agency” (*Yearnings* 28).

C- Popularization of Black Art: Instance of the “Carnavalesque”

In *The Story of Jazz*, Tally refers to H. W. Rice’s assertion that “to some extent Morrison uses jazz (a musical idiom from popular culture) just as Bakhtin asserts that Rabelais used “popular-festive elemental imagery” (120 qtd in Tally 70). Bakhtin speaks of

popular styles in language and literary expression in combating authoritarian discourse, and describes how these styles become fundamental to achieve powerful literary works (Tally 70). Morrison's appropriation of this popular black music engages her with the popularization of art as means to assert her cultural black heritage. Her novel becomes what Bakhtin terms a "carnavalesque" narrative which engages in the disruption of conventional hierarchy and the serious, official discourse. In studying Rabelais's narratives, Bakhtin defines the "carnavalesque" as a moment of equality, wherein rank and hierarchical precedence are suspended. For Bakhtin, the "carnavalesque" is associated with the market place, where "a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age" (199). This real and ideal suspension of hierarchy led to "the creation of special forms of marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times" (200).

The ascendancy of jazz from an intimate association with the lower classes of society to the status of a world-renowned high art form closely parallels the German historian, folklorist, and philosopher Johann von Herder's perception that the highest cultural values can be derived from the "vulgar", lowest levels of society (Herder, qtd in Tally 65). Morrison's appropriation of jazz expresses the fact that the lower layers of society are not at all devoid of cultural significance. In fact they are the major source of the materials that sophisticated society uses to fashion its literary expression; and these original materials are acknowledged to be aesthetically valid on their own terms (Bluestein III). The disruption of official discourse by the disempowered populace is a means of rebellious expression which simultaneously revises and renews both spoken language and literary expression. Dubey comments on the carnivalesque aspect of jazz music, and concedes that

“it is precisely in Bakhtin’s notion of ‘carnavalesque’ that we find the same usurping of authority of language that jazz came to represent in music.” Regarded as an epidemic of moral anarchy, jazz became “the prime signifier of a new urban culture that was perceived as threatening to social stability and order” (300).

During the first phase of the black arts movement of the Harlem Renaissance (1910s-1920s), jazz was excluded by some African American Renaissance intellectuals because they wanted to resist stereotypes circumscribed by primitivism and exoticism as part of a heightened class consciousness among 1920s African Americans (Borshuk 23). Jazz had been defined as an anti-artistic phenomenon that can only appeal to low aesthetics and bestial tastes (Borshuk 22). During that period this music was inexorably linked to immoral sexuality (27), while the erotic aspect of this aural art plainly reflects the eroticism of Afro-vernacular tradition, which engages with the celebration of the human life cycle wherein physical pleasure is vital to procreation itself (Bolden 49). Jazz was referred to the “vulgarity and crudities of the lowly origin” (Rogers 221). It had been known as “the jungle style,” typified by “the beat of the rhythm and plaintive wail of the reeds, as well as [...] muted growls, dirty tones, and wash-wah lines in the brass” (Clar 304). During that period, the black activist W.E. Dubois advocated that African American writers and artists should depict black life “on its beautiful and interesting side” (qtd in Wintz 143) in order to improve the opinion of African American in the white imagination (Borshuk 24). By contrast, others deemed the inclusion of jazz in African American academia to be an act of cultural and artistic assertion of black agency. David Meltzer argued that “despite the early stereotype of jazz musicians as noble savages or simple-minded entertainers [...] these musicians were involved] in the transmission of an intellectual activity as complex as theoretical physics, allied to a core of emotional power and intelligence” (4-5). This jazzy characteristic is something that Langston Hughes did not fail to grasp. Hughes, as opposed

to Dubois, imagined that this black popular music was a mere expression of a complex humanity that transcends stereotype (Borshuk 36), and therefore, he used jazz aesthetics in his poetry as a black artistic medium to reflect and assert the life and the values of his community (Burshuk 21), because he was convinced that this music “marked the birth of a new racial consciousness and self conception” (Johnson 17), and defined Harlem’s developing New Negro spirit (Borshuk 21). With the emergence of postmodernism in the 60s, the African American literary movement became more concerned with the popularization of art, and caught the attention of many African American writers, including Toni Morrison.

IV- ways of Appropriation Jazz to the Novelistic Form

A-Fragmentation as the Equivalence of Jazz’s Technique of Syncopation

Morrison’s chapter endings and beginnings tease with the pregnant pauses so important in Black music, Black language, and Black life (Jennings152). Robert Farris Thompson explains that “suspending and preserving of the beat” is crucial to African art, and that “in some African styles art and music forms are enlivened by off-beat phrasing of the accents” (10). African musicians syncopate when they play. This syncopation is a reflection of the African’s worldview that life is a complex wholeness (Jennings 152). Quoting Richard Waterman, Thampson elucidates the deliberateness of beat suspension, and argues that “melodic tones, and particularly accented ones, occur between the sounded

or implied beats of the measure with great frequency. The beat is, so to speak, temporally suspended, i.e., delayed or advanced in melodic execution, sometimes for single notes (syncopation), sometimes for long series of notes. The displacement is by no means a random one[...]" (13). The break reflects the African belief in the sacredness of "silence", which stands as an integral part of the African way of life, and its cosmological vision that silence is meant to "appreciate the full complexity and beauty of life experience" (Jennings 153).

In his *Kinds of Blues*, Jurgen E. Grandt links the issue of fragmentation in the novel to Morrison's adaptation of the aesthetics of jazz to the text (94-95). When the "violent" Violet tried to kidnap the baby, the narrator makes an "intertextual" reference to "The trombone Blues", a fragmented jazz song that was first recorded by Duke Ellington's Washingtonians in early September of 1925 in the Pathé Studios in New York city:

"Will you just look at what she has left that baby for."
 "What is it?"
 "'The Trombone Blues'"
 "Have mercy"
 "She'll know more about blues than any trombone when her mama gets home." (21)

Grandt claims that the strategic positioning of the "Trombone Blues" serves to strengthen the connection between the novel and the music. This song is noted for its choppy performance because of its inordinate number of breaks (95). In *Jazz* these recurrent musical breaks reappear as psychological breaks (Grandt 95), when the narrative voice seeks to explain the "public craziness" of Violet snatching the baby out of the buggy: "I call them cracks because that's what they were. Not opening or breaks, but dark fissures in the globe light of the day [...] Sometimes when Violet isn't paying attention she stumbles onto those cracks, like the time when instead of putting her left heel forward, she stepped back and folded her legs to sit in the street" (22-23). Providing a better illustration

of the convergence of the novelistic fragmentation with the fragmentary form of jazz music, Grandt refers to Mark Tucker's analysis of the breaks in "Trombone Blues," as a music noted for its "frequent breaks" that were "characteristic of dance tunes of the time, but the best players-say, a Louis Armstrong or Sidney Bechet- could seize the moment of rhythmic suspension, spin out a phrase or two, then set up a band's entrance in such a way as to make the interruption dramatic [...] The breaks on "Trombone Blues" do not serve this function. Instead they make an already fragmented structure even choppier" (154).

In his *Swinging The Vernacular*, Michael Borshuk assimilates the fragmented form of jazz music to the unconventional modernist tendency to deconstruct the literary canon's concern with coherence, linearity and chronology. In the early twentieth century, "jazz constituted a 'language' as a singular expressive mode that simultaneously allows for the articulation of African American experience, the creation of a representatively American modernist aesthetic style, and the sundry forms of 'cross-cultural' appropriation and sympathetic exchange on which that national modernism has dependent so often" (3). As Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane suggest in their essay, "The Name and Nature of Modernism," "[I]n any working definition of [modernism] we shall see in it a quality of abstraction and highly conscious artifice, taking us behind familiar reality, breaking away from familiar function of language and conventions of form" (24). This deviation from conventional artistic and linguistic literary establishments is also persistent in jazz music, wherein the jazz drummer highlights the performativity of musical presentation in an aggressively modernist way (Borshuk 3). In the realm of this modernist music, Borshuk claims that "the musician is not the humble conduit of the music performed. His brash display at the drum kit evokes "the shock, the violation of expected continuities," which Bradley and MacFarlane maintain "is a crucial element of the [Modernist] style" (24).

B- Dialogism: Multiplicity of voices: A Carnavalesque Deconstruction of the Absolute Authorial Voice

In a fashion reminiscent of the dialogic aspect of jazz music, Toni Morrison engages in writing a “polyphonic” novel marked by its multiplicity of voices to create a “carnavalesque” atmosphere wherein the voices interact with each other or with the voice of the author. Like the dialogic nature of the synchronic music of jazz, Morrison also experiments with language through using multiple ways of telling her story, as through the narrator’s or the characters’ voices via the inflection of words and phrases which call to intertextual references (Tally 138). The writer also makes use of the interplay of the free direct monological discourse of the characters and of the narrator’s with the third person narrator to disrupt the absolute authority of the authorial voice (Tally 138). This narrative technique implies the incorporation of other voices within each narrator’s story. This is conspicuous in Golden Gray’s tenth chapter story of his spiritual quest for identity, which is suddenly interrupted by the inclusion of the pregnant Wild’s story, and that of True Belle, which is told through Golden’s memory. Felice’s chapter story also includes the story of the dead Dorcas’s last conversation in her dying moment and contains obligatory references to disparate ways in which stories are told such as newspaper stories (199), gossips(199), the secrets of Dorcas’s illicit relationships with Joe Trace and of the ring stolen by Felice’s mother (201), and lies (205).

The undermining of “monological discourse” by the dialogic nature of “the sign” is the crux of the third chapter wherein the unofficial discourse of the “public market place” perpetually disrupts the official discourse of texts such as the Declaration of Independence or the Holy Bible, including sermons, editorials and other forms of authoritarian voice. Silence imposed by monologism is contrasted with the abuse of the teasing of women, the

lyrics of the blues, the hybrid incorporation of the radio series, folk sayings, the church litany, the black sermon, and the messages conveyed by newspaper headlines (Tally 138). Through the reference to intertextualized voices and discourses, Morrison's novel converges with Bakhtin's definition of the dialogical prose form as "the expression of a Galilean perception of language, one that denies the absolutism of a single and unitary language" and which "refuses to acknowledge its own language as the sole verbal and semantic center of the ideological world" (*Dialogic* 366). Bakhtin also defines the dialogism of the prose form in his "Discourse in The Novel", claiming that "diversity of voices and heteroglossia enter the novel and organize themselves within it into a structured artistic system", and that "this constitutes the distinguishing feature of the novel as a genre (1219). By encapsulating the authentic and diverse social discourses within her novel, Morrison becomes a compelling example of Bakhtin's definition of the prose writer who "as a novelist does not strip away the intentions of others from the heteroglot languages of his work, and does not violate those socio-ideological cultural horizons (big and little worlds) that open up behind heteroglot languages, rather he welcomes them into his work" ("Discourse in the Novel" 1219). In *Jazz* the heteroglossia of the novel is also reflected in the carnivalesque dialogism through Morrison's deconstruction of the reliable author, who enters into a dialogue with the reader.

C- Unreliability of the Author and the Engagement of the Active Reader: Aspect of Dialogism in Black Art

In a fashion reminiscent of Bakhtin's belief that "every literary work faces outward away from itself, towards the listener-reader, and to a certain extent thus anticipates possible reactions to itself (*Dialogic* 257), Morrison also gives credence to the interlocutive aspect of African American literature of call-response. In *Jazz*, Morrison, like

postmodernist writers, deconstructs the traditional belief in the reliability of the author. In the beginning of the novel, the narrator adopts a prophetic tone through the use of visionary terms such as “I watch everything and everyone” (8), “I see” (8), “I have seen” (35, 36, 59, 67), “I could see” (195), and “I could hear” (196), to account for her full control of narrative events and characters. She often uses the present tense to emphasize the firsthand nature of her one-dimensional and absolute knowledge, and compares herself to the private “eye of storm” (219). Yet, near the end of the novel, she progressively recognizes her vulnerability. She realizes that she was “the predictable one, confused in [her] solitude into arrogance, thinking [her] space, [her] view was the only one that was or that mattered” and that “[her characters] know how little [she] could be counted on; how poorly’ how shabbily [her] know-it-all self covered helplessness” (220), and that finally “[she] overreached and missed the obvious” (220). In these instances, Morrison implicitly hints at the proverbial poststructuralist belief in “the death of the author,” because she desacralizes the reliability of the authorial voice, and the conventional belief in the self-centered position of the narrator as the “centripetal” omniscient narrative voice, and the pillar of textual construction and truth.

The unreliability of the “undecidable” narrator is conspicuous in Golden Gray’s chapter, wherein the narrative voice falls into a procession of reiterations, corrections and variations (Mbalia 121). The repeated version of the story reflects not only the self reflexive moment of the novel as in the process of being created, but how the section of the narrative is “the jam session,” (Mbalia 122) where the novelist lets the reader in early, before the full story is constructed (122). In this section, the reader gets a treat, witnesses the artist at work, and sees how the novelist shapes (makes) and reshapes (remakes) his work. In this creative process, the narrator first gives the basic outline of Golden’s story. The bare facts are as follows: Golden Gray, a mulatto, the offspring of Henry Lestoy and

Vera Louis, a southern European Plantation's daughter, begins his quest for his unknown father. On his way, he came across the black, pregnant Wild, whom he frightens into running into a tree, knocking herself unconscious. Reluctantly, he decides to put her into his wagon to seek for help. The pivotal part of the story occurs at Lestroy's house. When Golden arrives, he first takes care of his material belongings, and lastly Wild. Before this same story is retold on page 153, the narrator explains why this part of the story is troubling; it is his humanity and humanism that is questioned: "That is what makes me worry about him. How he thinks first of his clothes, and not the woman. How he checks his fastenings, but not her breath" (151). Then in the second version of this story, the narrator reshapes the character of Golden by representing him as a cultural product of his society and of his material conditions (Mbalia 122) in order to legitimize his behavior. She eventually writes, "Aw, but he is young, young and he is hurting, so I forgive him his self-deception and his grand, fake gesture, and when I watch him sipping too quickly the cane liquor he has found, worrying about his coat and not tending the girl, I don't hate him" (155). When Golden's story is retold the third time, the author, the narrator and the reader grasp why Gray is the way he is. Being fatherless made him feel disfigured, and as if he had only one arm (158-59). Now, with the full story in hand, the narrator can depict him more humanely, and can "be the language that wishes him well, speaks his name, wakes him when his eyes need to be open" (161).

In *Dangerous Freedom*, Page suggests that this chapter is a compelling example of the contradiction of the unreliable narrator. It is where Morrison "doubles the doubling when, without warning, she re-imagines and retells the same scene" (152). "This-double-take" reports the scene with slightly different details from the first version; the fireplace, for instance, is now "clean, set for a new fire" (152) whereas in the first telling it "has a heap of ash" (147). In the first version, the narrator describes Golden Gray's shirt as "white" (147)

and then “yellow” (158). The discrepancies, and the mere fact of the juxtaposition of two competing accounts by the same narrator, obviously interrogate the status of each account and of the narrator’s accounting in general (152). Such an unraveling of the means of narrative transmission draws attention to the narrative and therefore to the act of reading, thereby reminding readers of their roles and requiring their active participation, much like the invitational gaps of *Beloved*. This telling/retelling is a mere “return to the book,” “a testimony to the necessity of repetition” (172).

In this metafictional moment (Heinze 181), the language of the narrator is a process of trial and error, like an artful jazz improvisation inventing itself from a stated musical theme, which, indeed, was Morrison’s controlling image of *Jazz* as she composed it: a book “writing itself. Imagining itself. Aware of what it is doing”, willing “to fail, to be wrong” like a jazz performance. *Jazz*, Morrison says, “predicts its own story. Sometimes it is wrong because of faulty vision. It simply did not imagine those characters well enough, admits it was wrong, and the characters talk back the way jazz musicians do. It has to listen to the characters it has invented, and then learn something from them” (Schappel and Lacour interview 117). In this self-referential moment, Morrison echoes Bakhtin’s view of the novel as a process and “the only developing genre” that “reflects more deeply reality itself in the process of its unfolding. Only that which is itself developing can comprehend development as a process (*Dialogic* 7). Like Bakhtin, Morrison believes that in the novel, “language does not merely represent: it is itself an object of representation. Novelistic discourse is always self-critical” (Bakhtin “Prehistory”; qtd in Todorov, 66).

In addition, the indecisive narrative voice in *Jazz* is perhaps the most jazz-like aspect of the novel’s technique of storytelling (Grandt 80), and Paula Gallant Eckard goes so far as to claim that “though unnamed, jazz is the essential narrator of the novel” (13). Critics have pointed out that the narrator resembles a jazz soloist who improvises on a basic

theme of the novel's first paragraph, and in the course of the solo constantly invents, re-harmonize, elaborates, digresses, and explores (Grandt 80). Morrison's narrator is the narrative voice, engaged in the creative process of storytelling, reacting against and responding to other voices, other sounds, picking up new motifs on the way, correcting itself, even, contradicting itself (Grandt 80). This voice is, uniquely, "without sex, gender, or age" a presence Morrison designates as the voice in order to highlight its function not as a person (of either gender) but as "of talking book [...] as though the book were talking, writing itself, in a sense"(Morrison, qtd in Carabi, 42). Through this self-reflexive modernist moment, Morrison "signifies" intertextually on the trope of the talking Book, a tradition with sources in the slave narrative (Rubenstein 114).

In his *Kinds of Blues* Grandt relates the unreliability of the narrative voice to the jazz aspects of the "cutting contest", a form of battle between individual jazz musicians: "In a cutting contest, two ore more soloists alternately improvises on the same tune with the ultimate goal of "cutting" or outplaying the opponent by countering, subverting, expanding, and ultimately topping the opponent's musical ideas (86). In this jazzy moment, "solo space is allotted in accordance with the success or failure of the improviser as adjudicated on the spot by both musicians on the bandstand and the listeners in the audience (86). In *Jazz*, "cutting contest" is textually incarnated in the portrayal of the defeated narrator, who fails to be in full control of the narrative events and characters. At the end, when Felice, the "true-as-life Dorcas" (197), is introduced the narrator becomes "nervous" (198), because she is out of her control. She is "disturbing [her], making [her] doubt [her] own self just looking at her sauntering through the sunshafts like that (198). The narrator has become "a bit false" (219), she wrongly predicts a quarrel between Felice and Joe and Violet Trace, but all of these characters have finally reconciled.

Doubting her belief and knowledge, Morrison's narrator recognizes her "logocentric" mistake. In her solitude, her privileged selfhood, she thinks that only she knows, that only her perceptions have truth, or at least that her view and her imagination are superior (Page170). She has privileged self over other, her narration of events (the sjuzet or discourse) over the events themselves (Page171). Morrison thereby suggests that such privileging is suspect. At the end, when the narrator realizes each of her major errors, her self correcting wish is to move into a close physical intimacy with the reader. After describing the reconciliation and the new love of Joe and Violet Trace (222-25), the narrator extrapolates their love to lovers in general (*Jazz* 226-229). But the narrator, isolated in her peculiar role neither within the characters' world nor physically in the reader's, cannot participate directly in human relationships, and because of this authorial isolation, she laments her alienation in the closing paragraph of the novel: "I envy them their public love. I myself have only known it in secret, shared it in secret" (229). Using italics, the narrator targets the reader, who must share her secret love: "*that I have loved only you, surrendered my whole self reckless to you and nobody else.*" Like any lover she wants to reciprocate: "*that I want you to love me back and, show it to me.*" She imagines that she is the book and, therefore, that the reader holds her: "*that I love the way you hold me, how close you let me be to you. I like your fingers on and on, lifting, turning*" (229). The reader's act of reconstructive reading of the book becomes the basis of the narrator's love affair: "*I have watched your face for a long time know, and misses your eyes when you went away from me. Talking to you and hearing your answer- that's the kick*" (229). Or, as Derrida writes: "The beyond of the closure of the book is neither to be awaited nor to be refound. It is there, but out there, beyond, within repetition, but eluding us there. It is there like the shadow of the book, the third party between the hands holding the book and the book, that other hand" (*Writing* 300).

The direct allusion to the participatory reader reveals that, for Morrison, a text is not an easy textual game, nor a matter of simple receptivity, but a textual space laden with lapses, discontinuities and fragments that a reader must work on for textual reconstruction. As opposed to the standard view of the reading process as a matter of deciphering the purposefully hidden meaning of the author, the writer deems the author and the reader to be partners in the dialectical creation of the text and its meaning, a relation derived from the call and response form of oral African tradition. "Writing and reading", remarks Morrison, "mean being aware of the writer's notions of risk and safety, the serene achievement of, or sweaty fight for, meaning and response-ability" (*Playing in the Dark* 11). Morrison regards literature as "a total communal experience" (Davis 231) that requires the participation of the other, that is, the audience, the reader (Christina Davis 231; Tate 164). She compares the African artist to the black preacher who "requires his congregation to speak, to join him in the sermon, to behave in a certain way, to stand up and to weep and to cry and to accede or to change and to modify-to expand on the sermon that is being delivered" ("Rootedness" 341).

By representing the narrator as longing for readerly text, Morrison deconstructs the centrality of the conventional author in order to authorize the reader (Duvall 136) and to create "the reader/writer/text relationship" (Moses 49). In a particularly mean-spirited review, Bruce Bawer finds the narrative voice at the end of *Jazz* "a bit too rich, its gendered effect that of a somewhat too heavy perfume. Its frequent descent from vibrant authenticity into glib detachment muddles one's image of the narrator [...]" (11). Bawer's demands for an "authentic", reliable narrative voice seem at best anachronistic, but they are worth considering, since they are precisely the demands that the narrator of *Jazz* overtly deconstructs in the final pages of the novel (Moses 49). As Denize Heinze points out,

Jazz [is] a metafictional fiction that commits the supreme transgression- it calls into question the very authority of authorship. [Morrison] effects this with the use of a narrator as enigmatic and ghostly as *Beloved* and possessed of a similar feminine, African American consciousness, the difference being that the uncanny, or that which should remain secret, is not a collectively repressed national disgrace, but a collectively dormant national imagination so dependent on the voice of power it never thinks to question the very legitimacy of the narrative itself and, hence, the truth as presented by a single individual. (*The Dilemma of Double-Consciousness* 181)

Morrison wants from her readers “a very strong visceral and emotional response as well as a very clear intellectual response” (McKay 147). The reader “supplies the emotions [...] He or she can feel something visceral, see something striking” (Tate 164). Morrison risks hurting her readers, but she also holds them “in a comfortable place”, as she puts it, so they won’t be “shattered” (Tate 164). At the end of the novel, the narrator states that she “ought to get out of this place. Avoid the window; leave the hole [she] cut through the doors to get in lives instead of having one of [her]” (220). The reference to the hole and place are mere spaces she leaves for the reader’s engagement with the text (Russel 44):

My 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.(Morrison qtd in Wilentz 127)

In the same vein, in her “Oral Tradition”, from *The Toni Morrison Encyclopedia*, Suzanne Lane states that Morrison herself discusses the form of her novel as emanating from a type of oral storytelling common in kitchens and on porches, in which the participation of the audience is essential to the performance. In Morrison’s novels, “The reader must actively construct meaning of the novel by sorting through and evaluating information gained through the characters’ individual stories”(256). Because as Bakhtin, Morrison believes that “all rhetorical forms are oriented toward the listener and his answer,” and that “this relationship toward the concrete listener is a blatant, open and

concrete relationship that enters into the very internal construction of rhetorical discourse” (“Discourse in the Novel” 1205). In *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, Bakhtin suggests that the speaker or the writer ends his utterance “in order to relinquish the floor to the other or to make room for the other’s active responsive understanding” (69).

Through the fragmentation of her “intertextual” novel, Morrison engages with the poststructuralist concern with the multiplicity of meanings and interpretations, because nothing is simplistic in Morrison’s way of molding black life. Her art is “deliberate and deceptively accessible” (Fultz 11), “at once difficult and popular”. While her “densely lyrical narrative texture[s]” may be “recognizable” (Gates and Appiah X-XI), their intricate constructions are not necessarily apparent or readily understood (Fultz 11). “Morrison’s fictions-within the context of their serious content and self-conscious engagement with the pathos and tragedy of black life- nevertheless, reveal a sense of play that does not undercut those deeply serious concerns. Rather, they provide fresh and dramatic disruptions that set up alternative readings and interpretations” (Fultz 11). As Harold Bloom points out, “all readings are misreadings,” and “one compelling aspect of Morrison’s writing is also her ability to engage in the kind of narrative play that exposes conceptions as misconceptions” (Fultz 15), and that “invites the readers to come along in a journey in which the final destination--truth and understanding-- is only the beginning” (Heinze 13). Morrison herself says, “I don’t shut doors at the end of books. There is always a resolution of a sort but there are always possibilities- choices.” (Bessie W. Jones 135). Her own canon resists determinacy and absolutism as an anathema to spiritual growth and understanding, implying that the sole real meaning in life comes from a healthy respect for and engagement in its capacity of untruth (*The Dilemma of Double- Consciousness* 185).

The inconclusiveness of the meanings has to do with the open-endedness of jazz music. “Jazz always keeps you on the edge,” she says, “there is no final chord. 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” (qtd in McKay 411). Like the Blues, jazz implies “the multidirectionality of the juncture” (Baker, *Blues* 7), ceaseless flux and mobility, the necessity of polyvalent interpretations, the avoidance of “simple dualities” (9), and instead the sign of “a fluid and multivalent network”(9). Morrison insists that her novels remain open-ended, not as final authoritative statements but as maps (Morrison “Memory” 389) or as texts with plenty of ambiguities so the reader can come into them. Instead of focusing on the whole or the center, Morrison tries to develop “parts out of pieces,” “prefer[ing] them unconnected-- to be related but not to touch, to circle, not line up” (388), because she requires that her novels be regarded as unfinished texts, not completed works (Barthes “From Work to Text” 74-79). Perhaps the engagement of the reader in remaking her text is an act to avoid closure. Only by repeating the book can we avoid its potential dead end: “the return to the book does not enclose us within the book” (Derrida *Writing and Difference* 294). The book must be remade, must be “ceaselessly begun and taken up again on a site which is neither in the book nor outside it” (298), because in that “repetition,” that “bottomlessness of infinite redoubling” (296), or tracing, what disappears is “the self- identity of the origin,” the center as “the abyss,” “the unnameable bottomless well,” “the absence of play and difference, another name for death” (297). Through participatory reading, or the return to the book, “we are fulfilled [...] by remaining open, by pronouncing nonclosure” (298), because the novel, as a dialogical space, “knows no limits (it disappears into an unlimited past and in our unlimited future). Even past meanings, that is, those that have arisen in the dialogic of past centuries, can never be stable [...], they will always change (renewing themselves) in the course of the dialogue’s subsequent development, and yet to come” (Bakhtin “Aesthetics” 373).

Like Bakhtin, Morrison believes that “nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will celebrate its rebirth” (“Aesthetics” 373). A text is “a galaxy” (Barthes *S/Z* 5), a “cacography” (9), with no beginning or end. With Morrison, the traditional concept of the “work” as a finished, authored product becomes a “text” in a process of ongoing interpretations, in which the reader, inseparable from the text, is as integral as the author (“From Work” 74-79). Morrison perceives a literary text as a “fugued” space, composed of uncountable bits and pieces, forever separate but comprising one text, in which “sequences move in counterpart” (*Image* 103). Unlike the conventional belief in fixed truth and meaning, Morrison, like Bakhtin, is aware that a text is a space characterized by “heteroglossia”: “a set of conditions--social, historical, meteorological, physiological--that will ensure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions” (*Dialogic* 428). As multiple perspectives and nonlinearity suggest, contemporary African -American novels, like *jazz*, tend to de-emphasize conventional closure (Page 24). In its circular and repetitious aspect *Jazz* remains an “Africanist” text,” where “there is no closure (Kubitschek 6), no resolution or progress, only return” (Kubitschek 8-9).

Morrison’s texts feature multivalent perspectives and authorial strategies. Inge Crosman Wimmers formulates these perspectives from the reader’s point of view as “multiple, interlocking frames of reference [that] account for the complex, interdependent nature of the various frameworks--cultural, textural, personal--within which a given reading takes place” (XV). Like the major of African writers, Morrison resists New Critics’ rejection of the “affective fallacy”, i.e., the emotional and personal involvement of the reader in the reconstruction of the text as “art for art’s sake.” She also distances herself from the stark extrinsic approach to literature. For her, a black text encapsulates both approaches. As Barbara Hill Rigney observes, Morrison “scatters her signs, her political

insights,” thereby demanding rigorous analyses of her “languages” for readers willing to “reconstruct an idea of the political and artistic revolution constituted in her work” (7). Her critique of critical practices related to African American literature in the United States during the turbulent 1960s and 1970s points toward what she felt was the need for a different perspective on the role of writing by African Americans and a new direction for African American criticism (Fultz1-2). She argues for criticism that will engage African American within relevant critical practices and not merely as a sociological study of black life (Fultz 2). While the sociological is relevant to African American life, Morrison urges that it cannot be the end of criticism and theory. Rather, she argues that sociology informs African American art, but it must do so within the context of a given artistic construction (Fultz 20). For Morrison more than content is at issue; in her fictions, she is testing readerly competence and insisting that the role of the involved reader is to uncover meaning behind the texture of the textual construction. This dual project of analyzing the narrative strategy and interpreting meaning is what Morrison has in mind when she speaks of the reader’s role (Fultz 5).

In his *The Dilemma of “Double- Consciousness” in Toni Morrison’s Fictions*, Denize Heinze claims that through the engagement of the participatory reader, Morrison establishes a diverse readership that crosses racial, cultural, and class boundaries to achieve identification (11). In her discussion of writer, subject, and audience, Theresa Enos suggests that identification is a process by which the writer imaginatively creates a virtual audience that is allied to the author’s values and ideals:

The writer creates the audience out of potentially shared perceptions of reality. Furthermore, instead of a real audience listening to the classical orator, the discourses’ audience today is likely an internalized one in the Vygotskian sense- that is, in “creating” our audience we’re “inventing” what’s already part of us [...] Furthermore, and importantly, out of the writer’s inventive universe comes a generative ethos that makes possible interlocking identification among writer, subject, and audience. (100)

By creating a fictive audience sharing the writer's values and ideals, as Peter Elbows says, an "inviting audience of trusted friends or allies" (qtd in Enos 102), Morrison "project[s] a self that invites the reader in, and, if readers identify with this self, they, in effect, become part of that self, become the audience in the process of reading (Enos 102). To complete the identification, since the writer creates an audience with a given set of values in a text, the writer "through ethos [...] also becomes one with the audience that has been created" (106). Robert Roth claims, that given the nature of reader response theory and the poststructuralist debunking of the perception that the writer communicates messages, and readers decode them, "it may not seem strange to say that writers may be their own audience or to think audience as a textual entity that writers create during composing and readers create anew when they perform the text" (175). In essence, one can say that Morrison has invented an ideal audience to create an identification-based relationship between the writer and the reader to deconstruct the conventional binarism between the author and the reader, a deconstruction that Roth assimilates to the "end of authorial dominance" in which "writers search for ways to bring readers into their texts" (181). In this process, "instead of trying to reduce the writer's intentions, readers are engaged in a productive dialogue in which their own purposes and practices come into play, often taking the foreground" (Roth181), a readerly foregrounding which entails the authorial death, which has often been championed by poststructuralist critics and writers. Samuel Becket, for instance, distanced the author from his own writing in order to leave a textual space for the reader to reconstruct the text. Roland Barthes's "The Death of The Author" carries out the same idea through the definition of the text as a space made up of "multiple" and diverse discourses, "drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual

relations of dialogue, parody and contestation”. “There is one space where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author.” (1469).

Eventually, by digging into the past history of the characters, and through the appropriation of jazz to the novel, *Jazz* becomes not only a dialogic and carnivalesque narrative, which reflects that the highest form of Black ritual expression is in popular culture (Butler-Evans 31), but also a medium that “explores how language at once constitutes and defines the specificity of black culture and how it is used to tell stories (Tally 82). Like jazz music itself, the narrative creates and invents itself in the moment (Grandt 82). Through the appropriation of jazz music, *Jazz* suggests that the politically committed black artist, as the black theorist Larry Neal says, has to reverse the oppositions written/oral, literary/nonliterary, high culture/popular culture (Butler-Evans 31):

The poet must become a performer the way James Brown is a performer_ loud, gaudy, and racy. He must take his work where the people are: Harlem, Watts, Philadelphia, Chicago, and the rural South. He must learn to embellish the context in which work is executed, and where possible, link the work to all aspects of music.

[...] Poets must learn to sing, chant, and dance their works, tearing into the substance of their individuals and collective experiences. We must make literature move people to a deeper understanding of what the thing is all about, be a kind of priest, a black magician, working juju with the world on the world (655).

The spatial and temporal contextualization of black art, as well as the concern with oral quality are also present in *Beloved*, a novel which reflects a particular black historical context of slavery, and incarnates the jazzy form of call-response. Similar to *Jazz*, *Beloved* also engages with the popularization of “Black” art through the author’s transposition of jazz aesthetics onto the narrative form, and through her immersion in the repressed collective black history, and finally through the insistence of the collective life of the black community. In *Beloved*, these concerns, which are the subject matter of the second chapter

of this thesis, are Morrison's primary materials for creating representative black counter-discourse.

Chapter II
Beloved

I- Memory: Site for the Fictional Historicization of the Racial Black Experience in the Period of Slavery

Like *Jazz*, *Beloved* is also a historical fiction which is based on the black characters' haunting memory of their racial traumatic past, particularly in the harsh context of slavery. Morrison locates her novel in this era to show that this heinous system reified and merchandised the black subject, to the extent that all human bonds-- mothers and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters--had been completely ruptured, and subsequently created a world of fissured bodies and souls (Weinstein 422). Morrison understood slavery as "the systematic dismantling of human connections, the atomizing of the human subject, the piercing apart of the human family." (Weinstein 445). It is "a crime" that "abolishes memory, relationship, and integrity" (445). In *Beloved*, black characters-- Sethe, Paul D, Denver, Beloved, Baby Suggs, Stamp Paid, and Ella-- are the most despoiled figures in western literature, because "their lives have been robbed of the density and breadth and web of human relations that we take for granted as the condition of a normal balanced life" (Weinstein 445). More than in *Jazz*, Morrison's concern with the memory of the traumatic period is made textually pronounced through Sethe's redefinition of "re-memory" as the remembrance of "a picture floating around out there outside [her] head," a picture that remains forever "right in the place where it happened" (36). This definition of memory as a haunting visual image is applicable to all *Beloved's* characters, who remain, like the characters in *Jazz*, "bound to the track" of their traumatic past.

Using the traumatic memory of her characters, Morrison portrays the dislocation of the dehumanized black slave families, as well as the moral, psychological, and physical violence inflicted on them. As in *Jazz*, her concern with memory suggests her therapeutic attempt at exteriorizing what has been repressed, and at creating a historically-oriented but

fragmented novel that conveys the theme of multifaceted fragmentations that African American suffered from, because the disrupted and “complex narrative strategies of the novel reflect the way in which Toni Morrison sees slavery as a disruption of all the normal relations and process of human experience” (Birat 324). This fragmentation also reflects, as in *Jazz*, her belief in the fictional aspect of history, a belief which is enhanced by the inclusion of the ghost of Beloved as a spectre who signifies the atrocity of black history (Schroeder 114). Like Hayden White, the poststructuralist historian, whom I have discussed in the first part of my *Jazz* chapter, Morrison, in *Beloved*, deconstructs “the conventional oppositions of realism and the fantastic, of the symbolic and the imagery, and of the socio-political and the psychological” (Molgen 205). Perhaps, the fragmentation of the magical realist text of *Beloved* is the very deconstructive medium that “breaks the linear march of history” (Schroeder 105), and “calls into question our attitude toward history as a form of order and coherence” (Birat 324). “If history is what happened, then literature [...] is what happened means” (Denard 40). “Morrison’s literature rewrites ‘the what happened’ of slavery into the magical realism that is *Beloved*” (Schroeder 117).

A-Memory in Relation to the Fragmented Family Structure and the Dispossession of the Fractured and Dehumanized Black Body

In *Beloved*, Paul D, the last of the Sweet Home men (72), tries to repress his painful past, a repression which Morrison metaphorically compares to “the tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be,” with “lid rusted shut” (72-73). Paul D is represented as a character whose mind is “a chamber of horror” (Weinstein 424), including a stint in Alfred, living in a cage and doing chain-gang labour that “he had shut down a generous portion of his head” (41), placing all the worst memories “into the tobacco tin lodged in his

chest,” a tin that, by the time he arrives on the scenes and enters Sethe’s life again, “nothing could pry [...] open” (113). Yet the voluntary neglect of the painful past is short lived, because Paul D is still haunted by his dehumanizing experiences as a former black slave. He still remembers that after the death of Mr Garner, Sweet Home male slaves were dispossessed of their manhood under the control of the schoolteacher, who disdainfully regarded his slaves only as “trespassers among the human race. Watchdogs without teeth; steer bulls without horns; gelded workhorses whose neigh and whinny could not be translated into a language responsible humans spoke” (125). Paul D is still haunted by the rapacity of the school teacher in that small plantation bearing the euphemistic name “Sweet Home”, a place where he was regarded as a mere “something less than a chicken sitting in the sun on tub” (72). He still remember his racially disdained fellow slaves who, like him, were also deprived of their own manhood, and of their own naming, because the schoolteacher believes that “definitions belonged to the definers-not the defined” (190), a dichotomized colonial and static language, which justifies and maintains the brutality and violence against what it terms, “inferior race” (Williams 158). In *Beloved*, the schoolteacher is represented as the symbolic incarnation of the white supremacist discourse. He studies and records the animalistic characteristics of his slaves in a separate column on his page. Like the dangerous European phrenologist, he employs language and what he considers rational and scientific means to establish a biological argument justifying slavery (Williams 158). The way he uses language to establish dominion and a sense of white superiority and entitlement encourages his nephews to brutally steal Sethe’s milk, since she is perceived as an animal they have the right to enslave and violate (158). As Morrison says in her Nobel Prize Speech, “sexist language, racist language, theistic language [...] all are typical of the policing languages of mastery” (WLT 6). Sethe and Sweet Home slaves’

inhumane treatment is linked to this type of discourse, wherein black bodies are deprived of their own agency, and can hold only grotesque definitions (Williams 159).

As a traumatized former slave, Paul D also remembers that “[d]uring, before and after the war he had seen negroes so stunned, or hungry, or tired or bereft it was a wonder they recalled or said. Who, like him, had hidden in caves and fought owls for food; who, like him, stole from pigs; who like him, slept in trees the day and walked by night; avoided regulators, raiders, paterollers, veterans, hill men, posses and merrymakers” (66). When he first meets Beloved, Paul D considers her as “a coloredwoman drifting from ruin” (52), and remembers that “he had been in Rochester four years ago and seen seven women arriving with fourteen female children. All their men-- brothers, uncles, fathers, husbands, sons-- had been picked off one by one” (52). He also recalls that after the secession war “odd clusters and strays of Negroes wandered the back roads and cowpaths from Schenectady to Jackson” (52). They were “dazed but insistent, they searched each other out for word of a cousin, an aunt, a friend who once said, ‘Call on me. Anytime you get near Chicago, just call on me’” (52). “Some of them were running from family that could not support them, some to family; some were running from dead crops, dead kin, life threats, and take-over land” (52). Paul D saw “Configurations and blends of families of women and children, while elsewhere, solitary, hunted, and hunting for [were] forbidden public transportation, chased by debt and filthy [...] followed secondary routes, scanned the horizon for signs and counted heavily on each other. Silent, they never described nor asked about the sorrow that drove them from one place to another” (53).

As a fugitive slave, Paul D is aware of his restless life, he “could not remember living anywhere else” (66). He spent most of his slave life “mov[ing], walk[ing], run[ning], steal[ing] and mov[ing] on”(66). “Only once had it been possible for him to stay in one spot-- with a woman, or a family-- for longer than a few months. That once was almost two

years with a weaver lady in Delaware, the meanest place for Negroes he had ever seen outside Pulaski Country, Kentucky, and of course the prison camp in Georgia” (66). Like all slave characters, Paul D suffers from family severance. “He was the youngest of three half-brothers (same mother-different father) sold to Garner and kept there, forbidden to leave the farm, for twenty years. Once, in Maryland, he met four families of slaves who had all been together for a hundred years: great-grands, grands, mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, cousins, children. Half white, part white, all black, mixed with Indian” (219). Paul D “watched them with awe and envy, and each time he discovered large families of black people he made them identify over and over who each was, what relation, who, in fact, belonged to who” (219). Yet, “nothing like that had ever been his and growing up at Sweet Home he didn’t miss it. He had his brothers, two friends, Baby Suggs in the kitchen, a boss who showed them how to shoot and listened to what they had to say. A mistress who made their soap and never raised her voice” (219), and “for twenty years they had all lived in that cradle,” but this imagined family broke up. “when Paul D waved goodbye to his oldest brother[s], the boss was dead, the mistress nervous,” and subsequently “the cradle already split” (219).

Baby Suggs, Halle’s mother, suffers from the family split. Within the framework of slavery she has been dispossessed of her children. Once, when Sethe complains about the troubles caused by Beloved’s ghost, Babby Suggs explains that “Not a house in the country ain’t packed to its rafters with some dead Negro’s grief. We lucky this ghost is a baby. My husband’s spirit was to come back in here? Or yours? You lucky. You got three left. Three pulling at your skirts and just one raising hell from the other side” (5). She remembers that she had eight, but “everyone of them gone away from [her]. Four taken, four chased” (5). All what she can remember is that her first born loved the burnt bottom of bread (5). Her eight children had six fathers who, because of slavery, “run off, or have been hanged,

rented out, loaned out, bought out, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized” (23). Halle, Sethe’s husband, was the one she could keep the longest. “Given to her, no doubt, to make up for hearing that her two girls, neither of whom had their adult teeth, were sold and gone and she had not been able to wave goodbye” (23).

Sethe is also a traumatized and fragmented character, Like Violet in *Jazz*, she suffers from maternal absence. She still remembers that before Sweet Home, she lived in a place, wherein she “remembered only song and dance. Not even her own mother, who was pointed out to her by the eight-year-old-child who watched over the young ones- pointed out as the one among many backs turned away from her, stooping in a watery field” (30). Plagued by the rapacity of slavery, Sethe perceives that death is “soft as cream. Being alive was the hard part” (7), a nihilistic tendency which is evidenced when she kills her “crawling-already baby” when the whites came to the yard of Baby Suggs’ house to take her and her children back to slavery. Since Sethe is a black fugitive mother slave, Morrison deems this crime a legitimate act that grows out of Sethe’s “thick love”. On the day of the infanticide, Morrison opens the first crucial narration of the murder with chilling words that allude to the coming of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse: “When the four horsemen came--schoolteacher, one nephew, one slave catcher and a sheriff-- the house on Bluestone Road was so quiet they thought they were too late” (148).

In this heinous criminal scene, Morrison, inspired by a true story of the historical case of the fugitive slave Margaret Garner (Eckstein 187), re-creates slavery’s horror. She believes that “the truest account of the slave system, the most accurate and adequate way of demonstrating what it really is, is to give a longitudinal account of what it produces in its victims” (Weinstein 451). Sethe’s crime is meant to save her baby girl from the brutal and dehumanizing living death of slavery life. A black perspective which antagonizes the schoolteacher’s racist response to the scene as a kind of pragmatic moral lesson, wherein

the black body is portrayed as a disowned and grotesque entity: she was earlier whipped so fiercely by the nephew that she'd "gone wild," proving that one must think carefully about the consequences of whipping slaves, just as one considers such matters in disciplining hounds, because if you go too far, they just won't be reliable any longer (Weinstein 453). "One can't mishandle creatures and expect success" (150), he thinks. After Sethe's infanticide the white men leave the scene of "the damnedest bunch of coons" as a "testimony to the results of a little so called freedom imposed on people who needed every care and guidance in the world to keep them from the cannibal life they preferred" (151), a perception that ignores the fact that slavery, as the white's evil institution, planted the seed of violence in the very heart of its victims, and that that very maternal act was what Stamp Paid calls, "Sethe's rough response to the Fugitive Bill" (171). In this scene, Sethe's infanticide "wasn't the jungle blacks brought with them to this place from the other (livable) place. It was the jungle whitefolk planted in them" (198-199). Sethe "ain't crazy. She loves her children. She was trying to out-hurt the hurter" (234). She is just "implicated in the cycle of violence by which she was herself produced" (Schroeder 112).

Following this crime, Sethe's sons, Howard and Buglar, fled from the house fearing their death. Their absence is conveyed through Baby Suggs's patched quilt. "Baby Suggs was so starved for color. There wasn't any except for two orange squares in a quilt that made the absence shout" (38). Like Paul D, Sethe, because of her racial victimization as a black slave woman, grows amnesiac, and succumb to what Rimbaud termed "*le dérèglement de tous les sens*", the ultimate destination for those who have been violated to the breaking point (Weinstein 424). The wounds of her traumatic past--having seen (as a child) her mother hanged, being violated by white boys when six months pregnant, having her milk taken, her back opened up and turned into a chokecherry tree, and having murdered her own baby--constitute a body of psychic materials that is so toxic, so

unbearable, that “life is reduced to the here and now, to not looking back. One lives as best one can: hunkered down” (Weinstein 424).

Sethe, whose name echoes Lethe, the mythical river of forgetfulness (Schroeder 111), believes in the motto that “the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay” (42). She, nevertheless, cannot escape from her inexorable past, because it is never “dead. It lives, and it hurts. No amount of bread-kneading is going to prevent it from coming back to life” (Weinstein 437). Beloved, the ghost, engages Sethe in “rememory,” a journey into self and back through time to remember all that she was resolved to forget (O’Reilly 87). Similar to Milkman in *Song of Solomon*, who recovers his history and discovers his identity through a spiritual return home to the place of his ancestors, Sethe learns to live with the past and to accept herself through a psychic journey of remembering (87). In the sixth chapter of the first part of the novel, the inquisitive spectre asks Sethe about her diamonds. This question reminds Sethe of her gloomy wedding with Halle: “the crystal that once hung from her ears” were a gift from Mrs Garner, a white lady she worked for in Sweet Home in Kentucky, when she got married (58), because she “saw how bad [Sethe] felt when [she] found out that there wasn’t going to be no ceremony, no preacher. Nothing” (58). Sethe remembers her disappointment that the negro’s wedding is not celebrated as whites do. She “thought there should be some ceremony. Dancing maybe”, but “it was just [her] moving over a bit of pallet full of corn husks. Or just bringing [her] night bucket into [Halle’s] cabin” (58). Sethe also recalls “stealing fabric, and wound up a dress” for her wedding, because she saw Mrs. Garner’s wedding gown in the press (59).

Telling past stories has become a way to feed Beloved. Sethe learned the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling. It amazed Sethe (as much as it pleased Beloved) because every mention of her past life hurt. Sethe “had felt warm satisfaction radiating from Beloved’s skin when she listened to her mother talk about the old days” (74).

Everything in [those days] was painful or lost” (58), an incarnation of the shameful past that she and Babby Suggs “agreed without saying so that it was unspeakable”, a dark episode where “the hurt was always there--like a tender place in the corner of [Sethe’s] mouth that the bit left” (58). Beloved also reminds Sethe of her suffering from maternal absence. Your woman she never fix up your hair? Beloved asks, and to this question Sethe remembers that she “did see her a few times out in the fields and once when she was working indigo. By the time [she] woke up in the morning, she was in line if the moon was bright they worked by its light” (60), and that “she must of nursed [her] two or three weeks [...]. Then she went back in rice and [Sethe] sucked from another woman” (60). Sethe also remembers that her mother never slept in the same cabin most nights (61). She also remembers the day when her mother brought her to the smokehouse to show her the mark of a circled cross on her rib as a sign for Sethe to recognize her if she dies. She remembers the slap on her face when she wanted a mark as a sign for recognition. Following the memory of her lost mother, Sethe becomes frustrated and angry, and resorts to folding the sheets as a site to repress the painful past. “She walked over to a chair, lifted a sheet and stretched it as wide as her arms would go. Then she folded, refolded and double folded it. She took another. Neither was completely dry but the folding felt to line to stop” (61). Sethe feels the need “to do something with her hands because she was remembering something she had forgotten she knew. Something privately shameful that had seeped into a slit in her mind right behind the slap on her face and the circled cross” (61). This private shame is a mere memory of killing her crawling-already baby, a motherly crime which has also been committed by her mother, who threw her children in the sea from the slave ship. Sethe remembers Nan who took care of her. “She told Sethe that her mother and [she] were together from the sea. Both were taken up many times by the crew” (62). Remembering her

experience in the slave ship *Nan* also told Sethe that her mother threw her children all away, without names, except [Sethe]" (62).

Denver, Sethe's daughter, is also represented as a character who feeds the ghost's hunger for knowledge of the past. Denver tells Beloved about the circumstances of her birth by the white woman, Amy Denver. "Watching Beloved's alert and hungry face," and "how she took in every word, asking questions about the color of things and their size, her downright craving to know, Denver began to see what she was saying and not just to hear it" (77). Denver imaginatively reconstructs the image of Sethe as a young -pregnant-fugitive- mother slave, "walking through the dark woods to get to her children who are far away." (77-78). She imagines her in the fugitive moment as "tired, scared maybe, and maybe even lost. Most of all she is by herself and inside her is another baby she has to think about too. Behind her dogs, perhaps; guns probably; and certainly mossy teeth. She is not so afraid at night because she is the color of it, but in the day every sound is a shot or a tracker's quiet step" (78). In telling the old stories, "Denver nurses Beloved's interest like a lover whose pleasure was to overfeed the loved" (78). "Denver spoke, Beloved listened, and the two did the best they could to create what really happened, how it really was, something only Sethe knew because she alone had the mind for it and the time afterward to shape it: the quality of Amy's voice, her breath like burning wood. The quick change weather up in those hills-- cool at night, hot in the day, sudden fog. How recklessly she behaved with this whitegirl-- a recklessness born of desperation and encouraged by Amy's fugitive eyes and her tenderhearted mouth" (78).

In this revivalist moment, Denver further reports Sethe's encounter with Amy Denver, and her discovery of what she describes as "a chokecherry tree" in her whipped back, a tree "in bloom," with a trunk, "red and wide open, full of sap," and with "a mighty lot of branches," and "tiny little cherry blossoms" (79). Through Amy's initial musing on

Sethe's wounds, Sethe has an opportunity to "see" through Amy's description just how badly she has been beaten by her white master (Fultz 33). "The treelike scarification heals, but the configuration remains. And while Sethe cannot see the mark, it has been seared into her memory and has become for her a symbol of slavery and the impetus for her flight." (Fultz 33). As she later tells Paul D, "I got a tree on my back [...] I have never seen it and never. But that's what [Amy] said it looked like [...] A chokecherry tree" (15-16). When Paul D sees the "tree," he, like Amy, is moved to a poignant eloquence in the face of the horror the wound invokes (Fultz 33). He "saw the sculpture her back had become, like the decorative work of an iron-smith too passionate for display" (17). Like Amy, Paul D traces the contours of Sethe's wounded back, "none of which Sethe could feel because her back skin had been dead for years" (18). The tree is a "hieroglyphics of the flesh -- a visual and tactile narrative of Sethe's personal suffering and the strength of her resolve-that ramifies to embrace the whole history of African American suffering" (Fultz 33). This configuration of the "chokecherry" tree is a mere trope for the African American "family tree" of wounds dating from the slave trade (33). In this context, Morrison's play on the word "chokecherry" directs the reader toward the tree used for hanging blacks during the Klu Klux Klan's reign of terror during and after Reconstruction (34). Victims of such hangings were referred to in songs and stories as "strange fruit," a metaphor for the black bodies strung from trees and often witnessed by crowds in a carnivalesque atmosphere (Fultz 34). In *Beloved*, Stamp Paid, another Sweet Home slave, refers to "eighty seven lynchings in one year alone in Kentucky "necks broken," as he fingers a "red ribbon knotted around a curl of wet woolly hair, clinging still to its bit of scalp." What are these people?" he asks in horror (180).

B-The Ghost of Beloved: A Magical Realist Element That Revives the Past

The inclusion of the ghost in *Beloved* makes of this novel “Morrison’s most unambiguous endorsement of the supernatural; so rife is the novel with the physical and spiritual presence of ghostly energy that a better term than supernatural would be uncanny, defined by Schelling as “the name for everything that ought to have remained [...] Secret and hidden but has come to light” (qtd in Heinze *the Dilemma* 175). “She is, in Freud’s words, ‘something repressed which recurs,’ something supposedly ‘dead’ returning painfully to life, through the supernatural at work in the ‘ world of common reality,’ yet ‘in reality nothing new or alien, but [...] familiar and old-established in the mind’”(Ferguson 113). The inclusion of this spectre is purposefully meant to create a magical realist and postmodern text which engages Morrison, more evidently, in deconstructing the traditional hierarchy between the fictional and the real (Foreman 296). She, herself admits that she blends “the acceptance of the supernatural and a profound rootedness in a real world at the same time, without one taking precedence over the other” (“Rootedness” 342), a combination that, as in *Jazz*, enhances her fictional and constructivist perception of history, and more broadly, interrogates the knowability, the predictability, and the controllability of reality, and unsettles modernity’s belief in progressive, linear history (Zomara 498). *Beloved*’s presence thus functions as a technique which reveals the constructivist dimension of truth in grand-narrative as such history, by persuading the reader to suspend disbelief by discovering the credibility in the magic of the tale (Foreman 298), and thus “amplifies the parameters of our present realities” (298). For, as Bakhtin remarks, the novel is a site of a “diversity of social speeches” (*The Dialogic* 263) in which a battle takes place

“in discourse and among discourses to become ‘the language of truth,’ a battle that Foucault calls power knowledge (Slemon 410).

Beloved is the fictional re-emergence of the repressed traumatic history, which, nevertheless, “was not a story to pass on” (*Beloved* 274-75), and implies in Amy Denver’s words that terms, “anything dead coming back to life hurts” (35). She is “the externalization of internalized horrors” (Zomara 497) that incarnates the period of slavery which ought to have remained secret, a dark episode in black history that African Americans would like to bury since it is the historical reminder of a national disgrace (Heinze *The Dilemma* 175). Morrison herself procrastinated during the writing of *Beloved* because she could anticipate the pain of recovery and confrontation (175). She claims that when she was writing the book she was frightened, and that excavating this traumatic period evoked a sheer “unwillingness and a terror of going into an era for which you have no preparation. It’s a commitment of three or four years to living inside-because you do try to enter that life” (qtd in Kastor 3). Despite “this terrible reluctance about dwelling on that era, Morrison finished writing the novel because she “was trying to make it a personal experience” (Angelo 123), as a means of legitimizing her historical revivalist aim, because she believes that African-American’s attempt at escaping from the memory is legitimate, because this “amnesia” functions as a defense mechanism of denial. At the same time, however, she feels the need to remember the horror of slavery, but ‘in a manner it can be digested, in a manner which memory is not destructive” (Darling 247-48), but rather a medium that makes the historical suffering an accessible and bearable part of identity (Eckstein 227). The configuration of *Beloved* as part ghost, zombie, devil, and memory is an implicit metaphor for Morrison’s reluctance to recall the painful episode of slavery (*The Dilemma* Heinze 175). It is through this fictional spectral character that Morrison revives

and enumerates the list of racial oppression inflicted to her previously enslaved people. In *Beloved*, the ghost resists single identitarian definition. She is a “liminal” and discursive figure (Shroeder 98), which “can never be fully conceptualized because she is continually in a state of transition” (*Beloved and the Tyranny of the Double* Heinze 208). It stands as a spectre of Sethe’s murdered daughter who returns from “another place” to the world of the living in uncannily manifest guise” (Edwards 18-19) of a thirsty woman coming from water with “flawless” (*Beloved* 51), “new, lineless, and smooth” skin (*Beloved* 50), “except for three vertical scratches on her forehead so fine and thin they seemed at first like hair, baby hair before it bloomed and roped into the masses of black yarn under her hut” (*Beloved* 51). She stands also as a real woman in flesh hidden away and sexually exploited for years by a sadistic white farmer (Eckstein 184-185). *Beloved*, as Deborah Horwitz argues, “is the haunting symbol of the many Beloveds-generations of mothers and daughters- hunted down and stolen from Africa” (157). As a ghost, she is “the true migrant, the one with no home, no borders, [...] whose restless and frustrated wandering evokes the pain of the unburied dead who have found no peaceful passage” (Williams 155), maybe until his painful story is accounted for.

Beloved is unquestionably a symbolic representation of what Brooks Bouson calls, “the collective suffering and shame-rage of the ‘black angry dead’” (198) as well as “the psychic woundedness of those who survived the middle passage and were victimized by slavery (152). Her memories of “another place,” which Denver and Sethe take to be some realm of limbo between the worlds of living and the dead, in fact include a historical reference to a real slave ship (Eckstein 185). Her scar can be explained as deriving from the iron collar she wore during the middle passage (Eckstein 185). Her highly cryptic and fragmented recollections are bits and pieces of torn images that resist all attempts at

narrative configuration (Eckstein 220), and subsequently give a twisted impression of how she went through the torments of the Atlantic crossing, during which her own mother chose to commit suicide by jumping overboard (Eckstein 185). *Beloved* describes the slave ship as another dark place, where men without skin (white men) abused her, a dehumanizing space where “piled,” and agonizing- neck-chained slaves are “floating on the water” (*Beloved* 211-212). Her traumatized and fragmented language comes from the voices of the drowned (Williams 15). In an interview with Marsha Darling, Morrison asserts that *Beloved* “is a spirit on one hand, literally she is what Sethe thinks she is, her child returned to her from the dead. And she must function like this in the text. She is also another kind of dead which is not spiritual but flesh, which is, a survivor from the true, factual slave ship” (Darling 247). For Morrison *Beloved* “speaks the language, a traumatized language, of her own experience, which blends beautifully in her questions and answers, and her preoccupations, with those of Denver and Sethe. [...] Both things are possible, and there’s evidence in the text so that both things could be approached, because the language of both experiences- death and middle passage- is the same” (247).

Relying on the language of traumatic experience, Morrison, as in *Jazz*, engages in writing a fragmented text, which is evidenced in the disruptive narrative flow through the technique of flashback. As I stated in the very beginning of this chapter, Morrison emphasizes the haunting memory of her black characters to create a fictionalized historical account. As in *Jazz*, the textual fragmentation of *Beloved* is also a reflection on the fragmentation of the black identity during the period of slavery, a fragmentation that is plainly reflected in *Beloved*’s monological chapter in the second part of the novel, wherein she revives her experience on the slave ship, a moment of total dislocation of black families, and their detachment from Africa, a detachment which is graphologically mirrored in the long spaces between incomplete sentences in *Beloved*’s spectral text. As in *Jazz*, the

textual fragmentation links Morrison to the aesthetics of cultural modernism, which attempts to create a symbiotic relationship between the theme and the fragmented form of the novel.

The textual fragmentation of *Beloved* stems from Morrison's immediate inspiration by modernist stream-of-consciousness literature, especially by writers such as Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, and most notably, William Faulkner, who was the subject of her MA thesis. Stream of consciousness literature is concerned with the interior spiritual and mental experience of the fictional characters (Humphrey 7). It is what Robert Humphrey defines as "the realization of the force that takes place in the minds of human beings" (21), a literary form which includes the categories of mental experiences such as sensations, memories, imagination, feelings, soliloquy, or interior direct and indirect monologue (Humphrey 7, 23, 33). In order to create an incoherent and fragmented narrative form that best reflects the complexity of the psychic and mental human world, stream-of-consciousness writers employ the cinematic device of montage, as "the rapid succession of images or the superimposition of images on image or the surrounding of a focal image by related ones" (Humphrey 49). This technique has been used, for instance, by T.S. Eliot in the *Waste Land*, William Faulkner in *The Sound and The Fury*, Virginia Woolf in *Mrs Dalloway*, and James Joyce in *Ulysses* as a means of creating a discursive movement that is not rigid clock progression, but demands instead the writer's freedom to shift back and forth, to intermingle past, present, and imagined future (Humphrey 50). Focusing on the memory and the interior monologue of the traumatized black characters, Morrison, like stream of-consciousness writers, creates a discursive and discontinuous fictional space, a distortion which is further enhanced through the use of the technique of free association as "a method of suspending sense impressions and ideas in the memory for so long that they reappear at unexpected and seemingly unreasonable places to preserve the appearance of

‘privacy’” (Humphrey 67). This technique is made evident in the division of *Beloved* into incomplete chapters, wherein the fragments of each character’s story circulate in other chapters so that the reader, in an unconventional way, try to collect the dispersed bits of information to reconstruct a whole story, which, as in *Jazz*, takes the shape of the quilt, and conveys the idea of ‘one-yet-many,” a metaphorical image which also characterizes William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*.

Like *Jazz*, Morrison’s concern with the fragmentation is thematically expressed through the use of the image of “non-entity”⁶. Like Golden Gray’s feeling of his amputated arm because of his paternal absence, Morrison links the same image of bodily distortion in relation to Sethe, who is portrayed as a compartmentalized character in the “heteronomous attribution of colonial discourse” (Eckstein 199). “Will he [Paul D] do it in sections First her face, then her hands, her thighs, her feet, her back And if he bathes her in sections, will the parts hold” (272). *Beloved* is also represented in a bodily fractured image, whose fragmentation summarizes and represents the collective state of all fragmented black character. She is represented as one of the living dead, who is hurt by everything. Her eyelids are too heavy and can be kept open scarcely two minutes or more. Her head seems too heavy for her slim neck, and later, when Sethe and Denver become increasingly attentive to her makings, they see that she has a scar on her neck. And her body seems to want to mutiny: She fears that her appendages- tooth, arm, hand, toe- are going to drop off, that her legs will become unattached to her hips, that she will wake up and find herself in pieces (Weinstein 440). When Paul D goes to Sethe’s room, *Beloved* desires to push him away from the house, because she feels that he disrupts her unity with Sethe and Denver . “She pulled out a back tooth [...] *Beloved* looked at the tooth and thought, this is it. Next would be her arm, her hand, a toe. Pieces of her would drop maybe one at a time, maybe all

⁶ A term used in Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer* to convey the theme of fragmentation, p 78.

at once. Or on one of those mornings before Denver woke and after Sethe left she would fly apart” (*Beloved* 135). She feels that “it is difficult keeping her head on her neck, her legs attached to her hips when she is by herself”, and that “she could wake up any day and find herself in pieces” (135). *Beloved* had two dreams: “exploding, and being swallowed. When her tooth came out- an odd fragment, last in row- she thought it was starting” (*Beloved* 135).

The translation of the fragmentation of black selfhood through the disruption of the body is also reflected through Baby Suggs’s secret clearing speech in the wood. Baby Suggs’s sermon is a magnificent tribute to human flesh, whereby she delivers a wrenching description of the dismembered, ripped-apart, mutilated life within slavery (Weinstein 447), an institution which engaged not only in the disowning of the black’s own body, but also in the rejection of it. Morrison depicts this healing communal speech as a therapeutic process which exteriorizes and enumerates the whites’ ill-treatment of the black body. Building on a masterful rhetoric in which the body parts are at once evoked in their functional beauty--for nourishment, tenderness, utterance, love--and simultaneously exposed as targets of the slave owner--picking out eyes, flaying skin, binding and chopping off hands, breaking mouths, noosing necks--Morrison grounds her novel by translating the fragmenting system of slavery out of all abstractions and into a deeply moving somatic register (Weinstein 448). In Baby Suggs’ sermon (88-89), it is clear that Morrison is, as in *Jazz*, concerned with the body. She makes of *Beloved*, “a hymn to the body as divine: it celebrates the body’s possibilities while inventorying the systematic manipulation of the body that is slavery’s signature” (448). Inspired by her African American belief in the organic and harmonious life of the cosmic universe. This passage demonstrates how the novel becomes “a paean to human integrity, to wholeness, now understood as a consort--the complete body, the

harmonious body, the loved body-- that is at once spiritual and physical; that wholeness is what slavery seeks most to destroy” (448).

3-The Struggle for Connection

As in *Jazz*, and in spite of the fragmentation of blacks, *Beloved*'s fictional characters struggle for connection. Morrison uses the imagery of liquids such as blood, milk, urine, and water to convey the theme of connection (Weinstein 466). *Beloved* is, as Weinstein terms, “‘a cardiac’ novel wherein Morrison’s universe of pulsing blood and flowing milk is haunted by the view of life as ‘a connective tissue, of linkage as the primal reality’” (467). As an African American writer Morrison rejects the western dichotomizing spirit. She believes that reality is fluid (Weinstein 449), and that although blacks have been severed from their communal and familial cultural milieu, they are still hankering for sites to achieve harmony between the self and other, the body and the soul, and the individual and his community. In this narrative, the black hole at the core of the novel is the murder of the baby girl. After this crime Sethe and Denver have become ostracized by their own community. Sethe’s sons, Howard and Buglar escaped from the house fearing their mother and the “spiteful” haunting baby ghost (*Beloved* 3). Baby Suggs traumatized by this crime gave up faith in god and life, and died. “Her love, her imagination and her great big old heart began to collapse [...] after her daughter-in –law arrived” (89). After Baby Suggs’s death, and following the externally incomprehensible act of Sethe’s crime, 124 has been emptied of all human connection: “the twenty-eight days of having women friends, a mother-in-law, and all her children together; of being part of neighbourhood [...] - all that was gone and would never come back.” (173). After “the dark thing” (*Beloved* 147), there was “no more dancing in the Clearing or happy feeds. No more discussions, stormy or

quiet, about the true meaning of the Fugitive Bill, the Settlement Fee, God's Ways and Negro pews; antislavery, manumission, skin voting [...], and other weighty issues that held them in chairs, scraping the floorboard or pacing them in agony or exhilaration" (173).

Following the isolating impact of Sethe's infanticide, Denver is hungry for company. "She stayed lonely [...] as a mountain and almost as big, thinking everybody had somebody but her" (104). Yet, with the coming of Beloved, "the true-to-life presence" of the murdered baby girl (119), Denver is amused by the ghost's gaze. She perceives that "to be looked at in turn was beyond appetite; it was breaking through her own skin to a place where hunger hadn't been discovered" (118). "Denver's skin dissolved under that gaze and became soft and bright [...]. She floated near but outside her own body, feeling vague and intense at the same time" (118). "Beloved is my sister," she says, "I swallowed her blood right along with my mother's milk" (205), and to keep Beloved's company, Denver becomes "a strategist" (121). "She has to keep Beloved by her side from the minute Sethe leaves for work until the hour of her return" (121). "Plotting has changed [her] markedly. Where she was once indolent, resentful of every task, now she is pry, executing, even extending the assignments Sethe leaves for them," because "otherwise Beloved gets private and dreamy, or quiet and sullen, and Denver's chances of being looked at by her go down to nothing" (121). Beloved becomes Denver's treasured presence, a possession, and a sister coming from death, that she has to protect from Sethe's "murderous love". In a hide-and-seek game, when Beloved hides in the dark house, Denver feels that "the loss is ungovernable" (122). She "feels like an ice cake torn away from the solid surface of the stream, floating on darkness, thick and crashing against the edges of things around it. Breakable, meltable and cold" (123). She cries because, with this sudden and magical disappearance, "she has no self" (123). In this moment she is reminded of the absence of Baby Suggs and her brothers, and fearfully predicts the loss of her mother.

For Sethe, Beloved is her daughter who “came right on back like a good girl, like a daughter which is what [she] wanted to be and would have been if [her] ma’am had been able to get out of the rice long enough before they hanged her and let [her] be one” (203). For Sethe, Beloved is her “beyond- the grave” reincarnation of her daughter who came back to her out of her own free will, because Sethe’s love is “tough” (200). After the carnival, when Paul D, Denver, and Sethe are finally united in a happy, familial unity, their shadowy unity, for “they were not holding hands, but their shadows were” (47), is not real; instead, it foreshadows the female reunification of Beloved, Denver, and Sethe. In *Beloved*, Sethe remembers the unifying moment after the carnival with Paul D, and comes to realize that the shadows must have represented Denver, herself, and Beloved, but not Paul D (Williams 154): “Right after she saw the shadows holding hands at the side of the road hadn’t the picture altered. And the minute she saw the dress and the shoes sitting in the front yard, she broke water. Didn’t even have to see the face burning in the sunlight. She had been dreaming it for years” (132). Sethe returns to the image of the shadow on the road once again after Paul D leaves, and she, Beloved, and Denver are left alone to form a powerful community of women (Williams 154): Sethe introspectively thinks that “obviously the hand-holding shadows she had seen on the road were not Paul D, Denver, and herself, but ‘us three’. The three holding on to each other skating the night before; the three sipping flavoured milk. And since that was so-if her daughter could come back home from the timeless place-certainly her sons could, and would, come back from wherever they had gone to” (182).

In *Beloved*, Morrison recreates a new mother-daughter bond between Sethe and Beloved. “Beloved could not take her eyes off Sethe. Stooping to shake the damper, or snapping sticks for kindling, Sethe was licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved’s eyes” (57). This obsession stems from Beloved’s suffering from dismemberment, and consequently her

strong desire for reunification with the mother she lost: “I am alone I want to be the two of us I want the join,” an elemental desire that closes with the fixation on Sethe (Weinstein 466): “It is the face I lost she is my face smiling at me doing it at last a hot thing now we can join a hot thing” (213). Sethe is “flattered by Beloved’s open, quiet devotion. The same adoration from her daughter [...] would have annoyed her; make her chill at the thought of having raised a ridiculously dependent child. But the company of this sweet, if peculiar guest pleased her the way a zealot pleases his teacher” (57). At the end of the novel, the relationship between Sethe and Beloved grows stronger. “Sethe and Beloved are trapped in the pre-Oedipal mother-daughter symbiosis where differentiation between self and other is not possible” (O’Reilly 85), a cycle of love and hate between mother and daughter until it threatens to destroy them both (Mathieson 212). In this phase, “Sethe identifies with her daughter and does not allow her psychic individuation” (85). She “played with Beloved’s hair, braiding, puffing, tying, oiling it until it made Denver nervous to watch her” (240). Both women “changed beds and exchanged clothes. Walked arm in arm and smiled all the time” (240). At this stage, Beloved becomes Sethe’s alter ego (*The Dilemma* Heinze 177). “She dressed in Sethe’s dresses, she stroke her skin with the palm of her hand. She imitated Sethe, talked the way she did, laughed her laugh and used her body the same way down to walk, the way Sethe moved her hands, sighed through her nose, held her head” (241). Beloved’s imitation of Sethe is so strong that Denver cannot “tell who is who” (241).

At the very end of the novel, Beloved’s reunion with Sethe grows unhealthy, “dangerous,” “devouring,” and “destructive.” Both women are “locked in a love that wore everybody out” (243). “Beloved becomes a monster of sorts, bent on sucking dry the life of Sethe” (Heinze *The Dilemma of Double-Consciousness* 176). “She made demands. Anything she wanted she got, and when Sethe ran out of things to give her, Beloved

invented desire” (240). While “Sethe was trying to make up for the handsaw; Beloved was making her pay for it” (Beloved 251). Beloved grows greedy, “she took the best of everything-- first. The best chair, the biggest piece, the prettiest plate, the brightest ribbon for her hair, and the more she took, the more Sethe began to talk, explain, describe how much she suffered, been through, for her children...” (241). But “Beloved becomes her executor, condemning her to a slow death in which redemption, no matter how earnest or feverish the repentance, is denied” (Heinze *the Dilemma* 178-79). She “accused her of leaving her behind. Of not being nice to her, not smiling at her” (241). She claims “they were the same, had the same face, how could she have left her?” (241). Sethe cries and explains that “she had the milk all the time and had the money too for the stone but not enough. That her plan was always that they would all be together on the other side, forever”, but “Beloved wasn’t interested” (241). Beloved grows violent. She “slammed things, wiped the table clean of plates, threw salt on the floor, broke a windowpane” (242). In this moment, the relationship between the mother and the daughter is reversed, “Beloved looked the mother, Sethe the teething child” (250), “the bigger Beloved got the smaller Sethe became; the brighter Beloved’s eyes, the more the eyes that used never to look away became slits of sleeplessness.” (250). “Sethe sat in the chair licking her lips like a chastised child while Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it,” and finally “grew taller on it. And the older woman yielded it up without a murmur” (250).

Subsequently, Denver takes it upon herself to save her mother, an ironic twist since, as Denver says, “the job she started out with, protecting Beloved from Sethe, changed to protecting her mother from Beloved. Now it was obvious that her mother could die and leave them both and what would Beloved do then?” (243). This ironic twist to save Sethe reflects how Morrison introduces the ghost of Beloved not only as a thematic device to revive the repressed past, but also a developmentally as disruptive but connective character

that purposefully necessitates Denver's recourse to the help of the Cincinnati community that has long stigmatized Sethe following her murder. After the exorcizing of Beloved, Sethe reaches not only reconciliation with the community, but also reunification with Paul D, because she is the gatherer of his pieces (272), and the woman " [he] wants to put his story next to hers" (273), because both " need some kind of tomorrow" (273).

Part II

The "Response-ibility" of the Hybrid and Dialogic Black Art: Appropriation of Jazz Music to the Narrative Form

The revival of traumatic black history is not the only "intertextual" reference to *Beloved*. As in *Jazz*, Morrison also transcends the generic boundaries between literature and music in *Beloved* to create what Bakhtin terms, a "dialogical," and "hybrid" narrative that incorporates other genres. Morrison incorporates jazz aesthetics in her novel, because she believes that as an African American novelist, she is politically engaged in creating representative black oral art. She claims that "[b]lack Americans were sustained and healed and nurtured by the translation of their experience into art, above all music. That was functional" (Gilroy 181). She insists that [her] parallel is always the music, because all of the strategies of art are there. [...] the power of the word is not music, but in terms of aesthetics, the music is the mirror that gives [her] the necessary clarity [...]" (Gilroy 181). Morrison contends that music, in the contemporary world, has lost its elementary functional role in the black communities because of the process of globalization and commercialization on the music market (Eckstein 231). The modern development has diluted and spread black music in a way that it has lost much of its communal value (Eckstein 231): "That music is no longer exclusively ours," she claims, so "another form

has to take its place, and it seems to me that the novel is needed [...] now in a way that it was not needed before” (Evans 340).

In spite of Morrison’s Western modernist influences such as Marcel Proust, William Faulkner, and Virginia Woolf, her radical concern with the “village,” her anxiety not to be appropriated in the larger context of western literary discourse, in which the specifics of her African-American aesthetic would lose their contours, and in which her art would lose its functional relevance for the black community, makes her deny all of these “intertextual” impacts on her fictions (Eckstein 231). Because her role as a black writer is to be in dialogue with her “village,” by coming to terms with African- American reality through references to typically ‘black’ modes of expression, notably the transposition the aesthetics of jazz music onto print: “antiphony, the group nature of art, its functionality, the critical voice which upholds traditional and communal values and which also provides occasion for an individual to transcend and/or defy group restrictions” (“Memory, Creation, and Writing” 388-89).

Morrison is aware that jazz is “a marker of authentic black agency” (Grandt 85). Her jazzy style is an aesthetic device to foreground this blackness” (Rice 432). This music is about “the desire to express an affirmative way of life” (Elison *Shadows* 229). Jazz is a decidedly hybrid music, but this “hybridity” therefore also raises a question regarding how viable a tool a literary-critical jazz aesthetic can be for the examination of a distinct African American literary tradition (Grandt 77). Morrison is aware too that the history of literature written by blacks in America has always consisted of the struggle to establish an “authentic” voice against a hegemonic and dominant culture that has sought to distort, to silence, or ignore that voice (Grandt 78). She also believes that jazz had first emerged from black communities (Borshuk 21), and has been a particularly important realm of meaningful emotive expression of blacks, and a central “lieu de mémoire” in the African

Diaspora (Eckstein 39-40). She is fundamentally aware that this music contributes to a further advancement of the African American political project of race (Borshuk 21), because, as Hughes proclaims in his famous essay, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” nothing was more indicative of black culture’s aesthetic achievement in a world of white power than the new music (qtd in Borshuk 34).

Morrison reflects on the oral quality of *Beloved*, and states that “the sound of the novel, sometimes cacophonous, sometimes harmonious, must be an inner ear or a sound just beyond hearing, infusing the text with a musical emphasis that words can do sometimes even better than music can” (“Unspeakable Things Spoken” 228). This statement raises a judgemental paradox: on the one hand, Morrison demands a musical quality to the narrative language; on the other hand, she makes it quite clear that words and music will never converge. “The power of the word is not music,” Morrison says; and indeed language always carries a ‘surplus’ of meaning compared to musical expression, because it inevitably signifies (Eckstein 211). Stephan Richter notes:

in order to organize its sounds in a musical fashion, [literature] has to use the denotative meaning of its material, which it can hardly escape [...]. The sounds of language assembled in literature always assemble around ‘meaning’. Literature may choose to take up jazz in the denotative meaning and thus draw attention the ‘jazz content’ of its material. This is what we are generally presented as jazz literature: texts that deal with jazz, its musicians, its typical situations. Texts that employ jazz-aesthetics principles without ever denoting ‘jazz’, in contrast, are rare and above all hardly ever noticed as ‘jazz-texts’. (280-81)

Beloved is the archetype of “jazz-text par excellence” (Eckstein 195) which is organized according to what Richter calls “jazz-aesthetic principles” (Eckstein 211). The mnemonic reference to jazz music is made evident through Morrison’s concern with the indispensable communal African life, a concern which converges with the dialogical aspect of the “polyphonic” black music as an art of call-response, and which also accounts for the hybrid nature of the novel, which like jazz, incorporates other genres, as such the musical element

to the narrative form that calls into being the involvement of the participatory reader in the rebuilding of the open-ended black text. In what follows I will deal with these “jazz – aesthetic principles” to show how Morrison’s cultural-musical background is strongly entangled in the shaping of her novel.

A-Beloved’s Intertextuality: a Symptom of the Dialogic and Hybrid Black Art

In fact, *Beloved* thematizes jazz in relation to the characters (Eckstein 195). Sethe’s memories of her childhood are framed in the context of song and dance (30-31, 62). At Sweet Home, the music is omnipresent, from Halle’s tunes (224) to Sixo’s song at his execution (225-26); Denver also sings at school (120), Paul D sings the blues (39-41, 108-109, 263), Sethe for her children, Beloved to herself (88-89), Baby Suggs with the community (88-89), and eventually the community for Denver and Sethe (259-61). The evocation of music in these various narrative contexts reveals several different aspects of the musical performances (Eckstein 196), and reveals that through her characters, who represent the constitutive elements of the hybrid jazz music, Morrison puts into dialogue musical styles such as folklore, sermons and spirituals, blues and work songs, and other manifestations of Euro-American music to reflect textually the discursive make-up of the novel, which like *Jazz*, has “a jazz-aesthetic compass” (Eckstein 238).

Paul D is represented as the embodiment of the secular tradition of African-American music, of work songs and the larger heritage of the blues (Eckstein 205). Thematically Paul D is associated with blues, in that his experience of slavery and the chain gang in the deep South, and his escape, his restless wandering, his temporary refuge with women whom he feels compelled to leave again, all prefigure blues topoi (Eckstein 205).

Paul D's tunes (39-40, 263) clearly refer to the blues legacy and its functionality. The introductory lines of "song he knew from Georgia," for example,

Lay my head on the railroad line,
Train come along, pacify my mind (40)

reproduce one of the most common motifs in the blues, which was made famous by Robert M. Jones's composition "Trouble in Mind" (Eckstein 206). The Tune was first recorded by Bewrtha "Chippie" Hill in 1926, together with Jones on piano and Louis Armstrong on trumpet, featuring the verse "I'll gonna lay my head/ On a lonesome railroad line/And let the two nineteen pacify my mind." The partly self-ironical (Chippie Hill, a few lines later, sings: "But when I hear the whistle, lord, I'm gonna pull it back") (Eckstein 207), partly painfully serious performance is typical of the blues mood. As Ralph Ellison points out, "the blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in the aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near comic lyricism" (78). Ellison's definition of the bluesy mood of blues matches Paul D's song and actions. Closing down "a generous part of his head" after the brutalizing experiences in the Georgia prison camp, and "operating on the part that helped him walk, eat, sleep, sing," he keeps the "unsayable" part of his experience safely locked away in a metaphorical tobacco box (Eckstein 207-8). Cathartic expression of the unspeakable pains comes only in music, in the blues and its predecessors, the collective work song. This is put forth in Paul D's experience on the Georgia chain gang, where the men survive by singing their brutal lives in the typical call-response patterns rooted in West African field songs (Eckstein 208). The gang leader, called Hi Man, here comes forth with an improvised, rhythmical verse which is answered in chorus by the rest of the gang (Eckstein 208):

With a sledge hammer in his hands and Hi Man's lead, the men got through. They sang it out and beat it up, garbing the words so they could not be understood; tricking the words so their syllables yielded up other meanings. They sang the women they knew; the children they had been; the animals they had tamed themselves and had seen others tame. They sang the bosses and masters and misses; of mules and dogs and the shamelessness of life. (108)

Beloved also reflects the subversive potential of African music in the face of colonial oppression, and its design to match the spiritual needs of the black community. The most drastic rejection of the dehumanizing racial discourse, however, is enacted by Sixo in the face of the Manichean ideology of Schoolteacher (Eckstein 198). This is obvious in the narrative sequence where Paul D remembers the heinous circumstances of Sixo's execution (198):

Sixo turns and grabs the mouth of the nearest pointing rifle. He begins to sing. Two others shove Paul D and tie him to a tree. Schoolteacher is saying : "Alive, Alive. I want him alive." Sixo swings and cracks the rib of one, but with bound hands cannot get the weapon in position to use it in any other way. All the whiteman have to do is wait. For this song perhaps to end Five guns trained on him while they listen, Paul D cannot see them when they step away from the lamplight. Finally one of them hits Sixo in the head with his rifle, and when he comes to, a hickory fire is in front of him and he is tied at the waist to a tree. Schoolteacher has changed his mind: "This one will never be suitable." The song must have convinced him. (225-26)

In this passage, the subversive employment of the undecipherable music is manifested in the radical objection to the discourse of colonial exploitation. Sixo's song, in fact, has such an alienating and confusing impact on Schoolteacher and his men that they are convinced that Sixo can no longer be profitably used as a valuable commodity on the plantation (Eckstein 199). Hence, he eventually triumphs over the economic logic of slavery-even if he tragically pays for his refusal with death (Eckstein199). However, for African-Americans, the thorough denial of the racial colonial discourse is not possible as it is for Sixo, whose Native American background provides him with a language he may retreat to (Eckstein 199): "he stopped speaking English because there was no future in it" (25). For

Paul D, Sethe, and Baby Suggs, the refusal of the colonizer's language would imply an utter silence, they must instead appropriate and transform the English language in such a way that it can render their personal experiences and enable autonomous expression (Eckstein 199). In *Beloved* the memory of personal suffering is restricted to musical expression because like jazz music African art is a sheer expressive potential. This appears most explicitly in a brief passage wherein Paul D he tries to tell Sethe about his past. To Sethe's question "you want to tell me about it" he replies: I don't know. I never have talked about it. Not to a soul. Sang it sometimes, but I never told a soul" (71).

Baby Suggs's secret sermon also reflects the jazzy aspect of *Beloved*. It is a collective gathering that reflects call-response pattern of the dialogic African-American music. Her calls largely comply with the central characteristics of sermonizing as Gerhard Putschogl describes them in a study of John Coltrane and the African-American oral tradition: Putschogl points at a "b[lack] rhythmic structure and sounding," a "gradual intensification" of the expressive effect which is achieved by a "rhythmical phrasing suggestive of a metrical pattern," and the use of sounding devices which eventually give way to a chanted performance ("the sermon chant" 77). All these are rhetorical and musical techniques that impregnate Baby Suggs' sermon (Eckstein 204). Moreover her call closes with sudden turn to music and dance: "Saying no more, she stood up then and danced with her twisted hip the rest of what her heart had to say, while the others opened their mouths and gave her the music" (89). The sudden shift from preaching to dance and song is typical of the sermon, which resists closure (Putschogl 77).

Baby Suggs's sermon also reveals the redemptive potential of African music (Eckstein 198). As I mentioned in the first part of this chapter, Baby Suggs endeavours to redeem the members of the black community from their trauma by gathering together the individual parts of their fragmented bodyscapes, but this redemption is performed in the

context of music, because her charismatic call to reconnect the dismantled black body is, in fact, a call for the claiming of that body, a claiming that is the chief role of African-American music. In an interview with Ellissa Schappell, Morrison claims that “for some black people jazz meant claiming their own bodies. You can imagine what that must have meant for some people whose bodies had been owned, who had been slaves as children, or who remembered their parents being slaves.” She further emphasizes that beside the claiming of the black body, black music like “[b]lues and jazz represented ownership of one’s own emotions” (113).

In *Beloved* reference to the music is also conspicuous in the context of Sethe’s flight across the Ohio river. In the Last stage of her pregnancy and completely worn out, “nothing was alive in her but her nipples and the little antelope” (30), Sethe Suddenly remembers her childhood in the American South:

“Well, at last I don’t have to take another step.” A dying thought if ever there was one, and she waited for the little antelope to protest, and why she thought of an antelope Sethe could not imagine because she had never seen one. She guessed it must have been an invention held on from before Sweet Home, when she was very young. Of that place where she was born (Carolina maybe? Or was it Louisiana?) She remembered only song and dance. Not even her own mother [...]. Oh but when they sang. And oh but when they danced and sometimes they danced the antelope. The men as well as the ma’ams, one of whom was certainly her own. They shifted shape and became something other. Some unchained, demanding other whose feet knew her pulse better than she did. Just like the one in her stomach. (30-31)

This passage is significant in that it points to the continuity of musical expression in the historical context of African enslavement, the Middle Passage and the enforced acculturation in the New World (Eckstein 196). This is mainly relevant inasmuch as the use of African languages was forbidden and punished on plantations in the Americas; inevitably, therefore, African dialects did not make it into the second generation of slaves, unlike African musical traditions (Eckstein 196). The loss of language as opposed to the survival of music and dance is made poignantly clear in a scene where Sethe remembers

Nan, who nursed her in the absence of her mother, and “who used different words. Words Sethe understood then but could neither recall nor repeat.” Sethe “believed that must be why she knew so little before Sweet Home except singing and dancing and how crowded it was. What Nan told her she had forgotten, along with the language she told it was. The same language her ma’am spoke, and which would never come back” (62). Music and dance could survive mainly because they were perceived by the planters to be innocent diversions with little subversive potential (Walvin 157-75). It is precisely here, then, that a part of the African culture and value-system could be kept alive and transmitted. This also reveals that, to this day, basic features of African American music--especially its complex polyrhythmic patterns, forms of artistic interaction, improvisational techniques, and its harmonic and melodic designs-are rooted in the traditions of African culture (Eckstein 197). This continuity of musical expression is plainly underlined in the novel by the fact that Sethe not only unconsciously remembers the African chants and dances of her childhood but intuitively associates them with the movement of her unborn child Denver, “the little antelope” (Eckstein 197). In this moment Morrison establishes an unbroken connection of past, present and future which is rooted in music, from Sethe’s African ancestors to Denver, as the embodiment of the hope for a better future (Eckstein 197).

Aside from the continuity of African American music, one should also consider the fact that, like history, the generational transmission of the music is never pure. In his *Remembering the Black Atlantic*, Lars Eckstein insists on the fact that black music was never purely African from its very beginning; on the contrary, it has been involved in a complex and enduring process of creolization which unified African, Western, and Oriental elements (Eckstein 198). Apart from its appropriation by other European artistic forms, Black music also incorporated European instruments and particularly the English language, which had become an important part of the blues, spirituals, and latter jazz. This external incorporation

makes of African American music a hybrid art rooted in constant cultural exchange and appropriation (Eckstein 198). Morrison intertextually reflects the hybrid aspect of black music through the inclusion of the song by the white woman Amy Denver in her moment of helping Sethe deliver her child. Amy's song is not Morrison's fictional composition, but a reference to the second and fourth stanzas of a poem by the St Louis journalist Eugene Field titled "Lady Button Eyes" (Eckstein 209). Amy's song appears in a positive light since it has a harmonizing effect in the careful intercultural encounter between Sethe, and hints at the hybrid exchange between black and white, an exchange that created black double-voiced. Morrison's purposeful inclusion of Amy's song symbolically acknowledges manifestations of the Western tradition as legitimate predecessors of modern African American music next to African recitals, spirituals, the blues, and jazz (Eckstein 209). As Sherley Anne Williams is careful to point out, black music "[is] the first recorded artefact to grow out of the complex relationship between Africans and Europeans on the North American continent"; moreover, the development of African American music is indebted to a process of creolization: "Afro- American oral tradition [...] combines with traditions rooted more in the literate cultures of the west than in the oral traditions, either indigenous or transplanted, of the New World" (123).

Hence, it can be stated that Morrison anchors the oral and musical material which has gone into the making of modern jazz in the immediate configuration around the central characters. She evokes the major African and African-American modes of performance and sets them into a complex dialogue with elements of Western music. She thus symbolically accounts for how recitals, spirituals, sermons and blues, are intermingled in a hybrid *mélange* of jazz as a variant music (Eckstein 210). Cornel West describes this music as a democratic and trans-ethnic force, a "mode of being in the world, an improvisational mode of protean, fluid, and flexible dispositions toward reality suspicious of 'either/or'

viewpoints, dogmatic pronouncements, or supremacist ideologies”(105), and also as a “kind of critical and democratic sensibility,” that “flies in the face of any policing of borders and boundaries of “blackness,” “maleness,” “femaleness,” or whiteness” (105). Similarly, *Beloved* is a “dialogical” novel that intertextually incorporates history and musical element, becomes like jazz, a hybrid novel whose dialogism is not only reflected in the mélange of other non-literary discourses, but also in its celebration of the dialogic aspect of African culture, a concern which is portrayed in relation to the engagement of the participatory reader.

B- The Involvement of the Participatory Reader

Like the dialogic nature of jazz music that embarks on the pattern of call-response *Beloved*, like *Jazz*, borrows the aesthetic of jazz music, mainly in its resistance to closure through the engagement with the participation of the audience. “In order to maintain a dialogue with the audience, a jazz piece- literary as well as musical- never fully expresses itself” (Eckstein 222). In the African-American tradition, music and literature, Morrison claims, simultaneously suggest certain patterns of meaning and hold back from divulging them, thus creating interpretative spaces in which the audience may and must step in (Eckstein 222):

I want to break away from certain assumptions that are inherent in the conception of the novel form to make a truly aural novel, in which there are so many places and spaces for the reader to work in and participate. [...] I try to provide every opportunity for that kind of stimulation, so that the narrative is only one part of what happens, in the same way as what happens when you ‘re listening to music [...]. (Charles Ruas 108)

Indeed, as in *Jazz*, the composition of *Beloved*, by means of its fragmentary, hesitant unfolding of the protagonists' discursive stories, continually pushes the reader to engage actively in the open-ended interpretations of the textual meaning, which never fully reveals itself. As in *Jazz*, the jazzy "musicalization" of *Beloved* is accountable for the interpretative disclosure of this narrative, because the polyphonic black music embarks on what Gilroy terms, "the ethics of antiphony," which relies on the absence of closure in black music, and, therefore gives free reign to the egalitarian integration and participation of the audience (*Living Memory* 175). The mysterious presence and the disappearance of Beloved at the end of the novel, provide a highly dissonant ending which symbolizes Morrison's denial of closure (Eckstein 222). If jazz music is the metaphor for the theme and structure of *Jazz*, *Beloved*, as a jazzy element, is also meant to be the thematic and structural incarnation of *Beloved* as a jazz novel. One may argue that the fragmentation is meant to incite multiperspectival analysis of *Beloved*, wherein language, which is traditionally supposedly to be a mere vehicle for truth, meanings, and interpretations, becomes "always shadowed by loss, an elsewhere, a ghost" (Chambers 4). Like Beloved, whose power and magic derive from her discursive liminality (Schroeder 98), since "she is both a child and a woman but neither, both a ghost and a living human but neither" (Comfort 123), language in *Beloved* is also a matter of amalgamation of transitional interpretations that deconstructs the belief in the fixed and absolute meaning of grand-narratives, and creates *Beloved* as an open-ended narrative, or like the ghost itself, a story "not to pass on" (274-75), "an annihilation [that] had not taken place because it was still in a process of annihilation, consuming itself from within, ending at every moment but never ending its ending" (Gabriel Marques *One Hundred Years of Solitude* 409).

Morrison embarks on the patterns of circularity, which controls the scene of *Beloved* in order to prevent the reader from immediate and coherent understanding of the novel

(Page 134). At the end of part one, when Sethe endeavors to explain the motives behind her shocking crime, she nervously circles around the kitchen, around Paul D: She was spinning. Round and round the room [...] Once in a while she rubbed her hips as she turned, but the wheel never stopped” (159). And as she “wheels,” her confession resolves around the subject, “circling him the way she was circling the subject”(161). Paul D, “listening to her was like having a child whisper into your ear so close you could feel his lips form the words you couldn’t make out because they were too close. He caught only pieces of what she said- which was fine, because she hadn’t gotten to the main part” (161). Sethe is conscious of the circling: “ [She] knew that the circle she was making around the room, him, the subject, would remain one. That she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask. If they didn’t get it right off- she could never explain” (163). *Beloved* not only presents this pattern of ambiguous circularity but also enacts it. Its telling replicates Sethe’s act of circling her subject: she cannot say directly what she did and why, so the narration does not tell the story directly; she says a little, then digresses, then circles back, and the narration does likewise; Paul D catches fragments and must wait until she circle closer and closer, so readers must be content with fragments and must wait until they are told enough (Page 140). The novel is like the circle Sethe spins, collecting, omitting, and repeating the fragments (140). It is like the house at 124 Bluestone Road, “where bits of news soaked like dried beans in spring water- until they were soft enough to digest” (65) (Sale 44), and so makes the task of unifying and absolute interpretation of the text, at first, deferred, if not almost coherently impossible.

Beloved is an intertextual inspiration, not only by the modernist current, but also by the nineteenth Century slave narratives. In spite of this palimpsestous influence, Morrison avoids or cancels all intertextual references to written material, because she holds that textual references function as a higher ground to which her readers may be tempted to

retreat (Eckstein 194); “name dropping, lists, literary references, unless oblique and based on written folklore,” she claims, prevent them from surrendering imaginatively to the performativity of her narration (Eckstein 194). “Literary references in the hands of writers I love can be extremely revealing,” she says, “but they can supply a comfort I don’t want the reader to have because I want him to respond on the same plane as an illiterate or preliterate reader would be,” because her aim as an unconventional writer is “to subvert the traditional comfort [of the reader] so that he may experience an unorthodox one: that of being in the company of his own solitary imagination” (“Memory, Creation, and Writing” 387), because her novel as jazz music, is a transcendental art of improvisation that “knows no limits” (Bakhtin “Aesthetics” 373) and “always keeps you on the edge” (Morrison in McKay 411).

Like the unreliable narrator of *Jazz*, *Beloved*’s narrator also no longer provides any sense of secure guidance, because the narrative voice loses itself in the performativity and immediacy of the text, which immerses the reader in the communal voices and their often painful stories (Eckstein 222). The text, Morrison argues, “if it is to take improvisation and audience participation into account, cannot be the authority (Memory, Creation and Writing 389), a poststructuralist and Bakhtinian belief in “the death of the conventional author.” In “Unspeakable Things Unspoken” Morrison further characterizes the aesthetic effect of *Beloved*, and contends that “[she] wanted the compelling confusion of being there as the characters are; suddenly without comfort and succor from the ‘author’ [...],” and that [t]here is just a little music, each other and the urgency of what is at stake. Which is all they had. For that work, the work of language is to get out of the way” (229). What Morrison implies here, is that in order to engage and immerse an active reader, language must therefore step out from the page, “get out of the way”-by blending into music”. “Verbal speech, in

Beloved, discursively invokes the arrangements, the expressive qualities, and performative spontaneity of jazz as embodied in the work of such artists as John Coltrane” (Eckstein 22).

In addition, it is worth stating that, as in *Jazz*, the involvement of the active reader in the reconstruction of the narrative makes it a fictional space that deconstructs the traditional hierarchy between “readerly” and “writerly” text (242). The textualization of the reader, in fact, expresses the very dialogism between the textual world (the writer), and the extra-textual world (the reader), a subversion of binarism, which is the very expression of the postmodern novel’s fascination with ontology, that is, the study of possible worlds (Thiem 244), or what Brian McHale and Thomas Pavel term, the “theoretical description of a universe” (75). One of the tasks of ontology is to explain how a world, such as that found in a fictional text, is constructed (Thiem 244). Another task is the exploration of what happens when “different worlds are placed in confrontation or when boundaries between worlds is violated” (McHale 60). This very subversion of hierarchy between the fictional and the extra-textual world has many ramifications for inquiries into the relationships that are possible between possible worlds (Thiem 245), it facilitates the fusion of possible and irreconcilable worlds (245) as a means to deconstruct single-dimensional vision of the textual world. As Iser points out, “reading removes the subject-object division that constitutes all perception” (67).

Conclusion

In the course of my textual analysis of *Beloved* and *Jazz*, I have come to recognize the strong impact of Toni Morrison's African American heritage on her literary works. As a politically engaged black novelist, Morrison is a compelling example of the dialectical relationship between culture and art. In these two selected novels, I have clearly shown the author's pragmatic focus on the haunting memory of her traumatized black characters, as a means of mirroring the collective memory of her community in a racist American colonial discourse that engaged with the psychic, mental and physical fragmentation of the "deterritorialized" blacks. As I mentioned in my thesis, Morrison's concern with the revival of the painful episodes of black racial experience is to overcome what she terms, "national amnesia", to heal the black victims from the wounds of their repressed past. But what is innovative in her treatment of the past is her fictive approach to history, as if to deconstruct any dogmatic belief in absolute truth, and in the conventional perception of history as a pure and objective recording of empirical past facts. This implicit perception of history makes me believe that Morrison's fictional narrativisation, or what Linda Hutcheon terms "the totalization" (66) of history, links her to deconstructionist theorists such as Michel Foucault, Paul Ricoeur, Hayden White, and Jean Francois-Lyotard, who also believe in the fictive and the denaturalized aspect of history as no longer a pure and innocent representation of facts, but as a culturally ideological construct to establish order and meaning in the world (Hutcheon 55-56), a "yarn" (55), wherein the past exist in the text's discursive words (58). Perhaps, Morrison's capitalization of "History" in the beginning of *Jazz* reflects this postmodernist parody of authentic representation of historical facts, a deconstructive parody that has also been much championed by the contemporary historiographers who share Barthes' belief that there is "nothing natural anywhere, nothing but the historical anywhere" (Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes 139).

Together with the inclusion of historical discourse in both narratives, Morrison also innovatively creates “palimpsestous” narrative spaces through the appropriation of jazz aesthetics to the narrative form, a “trans-generic” invasion that subverts not only the conventional literary paradigms which impose dichotomies among different literary genres, but also western colonial discourse, which engaged in the “subalternization” and the misrepresentation of racial alterity. She does this by writing black novels that powerfully foreground her cultural and artistic racial background, and that assert African identity by means of her contribution to the mainstream American literature; for as she says in her Nobel Prize Speech, “narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is being created” (8). For this reason, it is important “to make up a story,” since “language alone protects us from the scariness of things with no names. Language alone is meditation” (8), and a site to reconnect with one’s cultural milieu. Thus one can state that the “intertextual” inclusion of black music and history is a site for Morrison’s reunification and identification with her textually represented culture. As Carole Boyce Davies argues:

Because we were/are 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, the need to reconnect and re-member, as Morrison would term it, has been a central impulse in the structuring of Black thought. Thus Toni Morrison [...] makes re-memory central to the experience of that novel; the recalling of what she calls the “unspeakable thought, unspoken” and the re-membering or the bringing back together of the disparate members of the family in painful recall. Morrison is clearly talking here about crossing the boundaries of space, time, history, place, language, corporeality and restricted consciousness in order to make reconnections and mark or name gaps and absence. (*Black Women* 17)

In this thesis, I have, on the one hand, investigated Morrison’s modernist influence, in terms of her interest in the theme of fragmentation of the dislocated black characters; and, on the other hand, how she has successfully incorporated this theme into the very

structure of her discursive and suddenly transitional plot, a technique which is omnipresent in such modernist texts as Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, William Faulkner's *the Sound and the Fury*, and James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which are modernist influences that Morrison purposefully avoids acknowledging because she wishes not only to create an imaginative active reader, but also to highlight the racial purity of her works. This "response-ibility" of the ideologically oriented black literature presumes the return to the dogmatic essentialist belief, which has often been criticized by poststructuralist critics.

In addition, my choice of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of "dialogism," and "the carnivalesque," as well as his perception of art as a matter of "response-ibility," has best confirmed the strong convergence of this theory with the African American literary conventions' concern with the representative dimension of black communal art, a collective concern that I have explored in relation to the answerability of African art, and in the polyphonic aspect of *Jazz* and *Beloved* as "intertextual" and "carnavalesque" texts that incorporate other genres, and that demand, as jazz music does, the involvement of the active reader in the rebuilding of the "indecidable" text. Still, aside from Bakhtin, the richness of Morrison's works entails many other theoretical framings, because Morrison's resistance to closure in term of the traditional belief in the fixed meaning of the text, and in the conventional belief in the reliable author as the source of truth, makes her novels subject to open-ended theoretical studies and interpretations, since, the hidden motto behind her narratives is an articulation of the theoretical proposition that "all readings are misreadings."

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