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The Gothic as Counter-Discourse:

Mark Twain, Charles Chesnutt and Toni Morrison

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

Revisiting the American Gothic via Julia Kristeva's theory of "the abject" demonstrates how Gothic strategies expose the historical contradictions of race in works by Mark Twain, Charles W. Chesnutt, and Toni Morrison. As theorized by Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, the archaic process in which the subject attempts to constitute itself as homogeneous by casting off or "abjecting" all that cannot be assimilated to the self-same necessarily opens the way to repeated returns of the abject(ed) and the "horror" it provokes. Because the Gothic enacts the return of the abject, it was itself abjected from the literary canon until recently.

In American literature, especially since Reconstruction, Gothic horror subverts and reverses the process through which the new subject-nation mythologized itself as blameless by abjecting the African presence and the nightmarish history of slavery. Twain's *The Tragedy of Pudd'n'head Wilson*, Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman*, and Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* all deploy Gothic strategies to give voice to the unspeakable experiences associated with slavery and contest the rationalist discourses that enforce and legitimate racism. Twain's narrative celebrates the subversive Gothic storytelling of the slave Roxana but ultimately betrays the author's ambivalence toward racial

identity. Chesnutt's use of the Gothic more decisively reverses racist abjection through the encounter between the ex-slave Julius, with his conjure tales, and the white Yankee investor John, who tries to understand Julius but cannot. In the twentieth century Gothic narratives by black writers focus on internalized racism. In Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* Claudia's abject-writing exposes the deadly effects of mainstream mythology and internalized abjection in Pecola's destruction. In *Beloved* Morrison uses the Gothic to create an alternative world and suggest a means of healing the effects of slavery through the ghostly figure of Beloved. These narratives exemplify the increasing power of Gothic to create an alternative perspective on the racist history and culture of America.

Chapter I

Introduction

I. The Gothic as Counter-Discourse

For many years the Gothic idiom has served as an effective narrative strategy to deconstruct the existing master-narratives of Euro-American literature. This discursive strategy opens a place for the culturally repressed to articulate unspeakable horrors from a marginalized position. In the master-discourse of American literature and culture, African-Americans have been defined and treated as the social and cultural abject. Yet since the era of Reconstruction, the use of Gothic strategies has enabled African American writers to reverse the dominant discourse that consigns them to the status of the abject. Such uses of the Gothic create a counter-discourse with which African-Americans articulate their otherwise unspeakable stories. In this study, I explore this appropriation of the Gothic.

As many critics acknowledge, the Gothic as a genre is not easy to define. The Gothic seems to elicit the deepest horror in readers and protagonists, yet it is precisely from the most horrifying moments of the Gothic that readers derive most pleasure. The Gothic often describes a weak and vulnerable female, for example, but also may include a powerful witch or enchantress. Gothic stories

seem to declare the triumph of goodness and innocence over evil, yet this triumph is short lived compared to the joy of horror. The evil force in many Gothic works seems strong enough to reverse the existing social order, yet the story typically ends by restoring the original order. Such contradictions allow the Gothic to be adapted to various purposes, and make it one of the most flexible and indeterminate of literary discourses. For this reason I speak here of the Gothic as a kind of discursive 'strategy' rather than a coherent or self-identical 'genre.' In American literature, Gothic narratives are a battlefield of opposing concepts and ideas. They escape dichotomous boundaries and borders. Literary works that deploy Gothic strategies might or might not be easily recognized as "Gothic novels." This study will investigate the use of Gothic strategies to stimulate both horror and pleasure in several different kinds of narrative.

My study begins with a series of inquiries. What is the site of Gothic horror? Who is terrified at this transgression of borders? Whose boundary or safety is threatened? For those who transgress the boundaries, the disjuncture is a site of power, not horror. The disjuncture may be horrifying for those who felt safe in belonging to the already-empowered side of the boundary—whites over people of color, males over females, and the rich over the poor. Fear or horror is the reaction to the possibility of a transgression because it marks the limits of the rationalized universe. Eradicating such boundaries means questioning the social order, attacking and castrating the dominant figures, and making them less powerful. Thus, the transgression is seen and defined as "horror," "pathology," or "madness." Yet, I argue, this site of horror is powerfully used as a means of

empowering the marginalized. I attempt to identify the Gothic strategies available to marginalized writers, especially on race-related topics.

In fact, the Gothic itself is an ever-present yet ever-marginalized genre, advancing a resistant voice from an “abnormal” site. Whether Gothic endings persist or become submerged by an “invincible” dominant discourse, the power of the Gothic to disrupt the social or psychic order never fails to conjure up horror. Such a powerful strategy appears in text after text throughout American literary history. Gothic strategies allow writers from the repressed class, race, or gender to transgress against the main discourse, thereby providing a “location of radical openness and possibility” of communication (hooks 153)¹. In this sense, the Gothic opens a space not only to articulate the broken voice of suffering and pain, but also to produce a counter-hegemonic discourse.

II. The Gothic and the Abject

Such strategies, thus, have been used by writers from groups abjected by class, gender, and color in both British and American narratives, especially in the later half of twentieth century. These writers expose the absurdity of the dominant discourse, creating a dynamic counter-discourse. Such powers of the Gothic are usefully considered in terms of what Julia Kristeva calls “the abject”—

¹ The Gothic strategy achieves what bell hooks calls for: “speaking from the margin” (152). hooks argues in her *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (1990) that the “margin” constitutes “a site of resistance” where the oppressed can speak up. She refuses to simply reverse the power hierarchy between the dominant and the dominated. Instead, she emphasizes the need to speak all that has been oppressed and silenced from the very site of the margin. For her, the margin is not the site where the repressed is forced to stay by the dominant party. It is a site of choice. It is a place which includes “multiple voices” (150). It is a “community of resistance” (147). The Gothic strategy becomes an effective vehicle of contestation for the African-American’s marginalized or ab-jected position.

the repressed that constantly returns to disturb the boundary by which it is constituted. Kristeva explains the abject/abjection mainly with reference to the role of primary repression in human development. According to her, the human subject strives to establish an autonomous self-identity, and reacts to a threat to the seamless self-identity by casting off the threatening part. In this attempt to maintain a coherent self-identity the threatening part that is cast away becomes the abject. The abject is expressed in human reactions such as horror, or the discharge of vomit or excrement that breaks through the boundary of outside and inside. As Kristeva explains, abjection is “safe guards” to protect the self from “a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilate me” (2). In other words, through the abject, the “I” can find “a forfeited existence” (9). But the abject has the tendency and power to transgress the boundaries that an autonomous subject establishes by throwing off the abject. Thus the abject concerns “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules” in Kristeva’s words (4). The abject also represents the threat of meaning breaking down. Thus, the abject becomes the source of horror. The abject disrupts the crucial defining line separating the subject from the object/Other and subverts the discrete units by which univocal meaning is constituted, Kristeva argues (69).

Although Kristeva’s theory of the abject originates in the process of subject formation, it is not limited to individual experience. Kristeva’s theory is deeply indebted to Sigmund Freud’s theories of human development and repression, but Kristeva develops more social and cultural applications than Freud. Kristeva’s abjection theory provides a historical and sociological

explanation of social formation, in which a dominant party is able to constitute fundamental boundaries in human society. She explains the abject as an archaic function which first establishes the boundaries between human and animal, male and female, or the cultured and the savage. Kristeva argues that since ancient times social development has repeated the process of abjection in an attempt to produce a seamless social identity. Through the abjection process, dominant discourses in history create and maintain boundaries between species, classes, sexes and races. For example, Kristeva explains how ancient society abjected women by defining the female experience of menstruation as dirty and defiling. Through this process, society was able to silence female existence and form an apparently seamless patriarchal society. The concept of the abject can be used to analyze the repressed in terms of race and class as well. Kristeva emphasizes that the abjection process is often broken or interrupted by the return of the abject-repressed. This return brings with it the power of subversion, the “powers of horror.”

Because the presence of the abject betrays the artificiality and irrationality of social boundaries, it represents a danger to the self-identity of the dominant group. Its return reverses/interrupts the abjection process operated by the self-subject through the dominant discourse. When the abject returns through the boundary, it often dons the form of a ghost or “abnormal” substance because it is not allowed within the border of the self-subject. It returns “in a phobic, obsessional, psychotic guise,” in Kristeva’s words (11). In addition, its operation appears to be perverse in that the abject “neither gives up nor assumes a

prohibition, a rule, or law” (Kristeva 15). The abject abuses, misleads, and corrupts existing laws, using them for its profit, or turning them against themselves. Kristeva celebrates contemporary literature which enacts “a crossing over of the dichotomous categories of Pure and Impure, Prohibition and Sin, Morality and Immorality” (16). Those texts often manifest a perverse strategy, Kristeva argues, in that they seem to despise the abject and praise the social law and morals, yet they actually “retrace the fragile limits of the speaking being” by describing the abject (18). Such powers of the abject to stimulate horror are best manifested in Gothic discourse.

The Gothic, by representing the abject's ghostly presence in society, raises questions concerning the "abnormalities" that the dominant discourse has defined as such. To present a suitable identity in society, we would separate our unclean and perverse parts from our self and place such distortions at a definite, haunting distance from us. Gothic discourse resurrects these repressed desires in a ghostly form. In Gothic stories, the abject wields its greatest power in breaking down existing boundaries between normal and abnormal. The Gothic form creates a means of releasing the Other's repressed desire, of exposing the existing boundary's falseness, and therefore of destabilizing the entire social structure. Even when it ends with the restoration of the old order, Gothic discourse still implies the ability to “imagine the abject” and calls for “a softening of [the oppressing power]” (Kristeva 18). This transgressive Gothic mechanism becomes a welcome tool for those whose identity has been repressed and silenced. My study will examine how, in the development of the Gothic as

counter-discourse, the abject is always working against the abjection process that is forcedly imposed (on it) by the dominant discourse. I will focus on how the racial abject crosses over the boundary of the white-privileged society/discourse in a ghostly form, and how the writers I study wield Gothic strategies to conjure up sites of resistance. The persistence of the Gothic in American literature and culture suggests its importance as a dynamic, powerful, and secretly subversive narrative tool; the Gothic masks its aggressive attack against all discourses that abjectify its existence, conjuring a Frankenstein of different shapes in text after text.

III. "Race" and the Gothic in American Literature

American literary history presents the horrifying disjunctions of the Gothic mode in many different ways. In the period of Settlement America was struggling with "the wilderness" and trying to build its national identity as a new-born country. In this context the American Gothic became deeply involved with America's experience in the new world and emerging national consciousness. Early American sermons and documentations, including many sermons by John Winthrop and Jonathan Edwards, often manifested somber Gothic elements. Indian captive narratives or early slave narratives expressed the feeling of entrapment in a Gothic fashion. Charles Brockden Brown is widely recognized as the first Gothic novelist of America. Washington Irving's *The Sketch Book* (1819-20) fashions the Gothic "in a jovial spirit" (Birkhead 202). Edgar Allan Poe's short stories, including "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), show the strong

influence of the European Gothic, while Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Good Man Brown" (1835) and *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) evoke horrors in the puritan tradition and early America. Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), "Bartleby the Scrivener" (1853), and "Benito Cereno" (1856) reach into the Gothic depths of the new American psyche. Around the time of the American Civil War, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly* (1852), antebellum slave narratives, including ones by Frederick Douglass (1845) and Harriet Jacobs (1861), and the fiction of Mark Twain often find the source of horror in the racially-rooted institution of slavery. Later, emancipation and the Civil Right Movements open the possibility of articulating racially caused horrors. In the American south the so-called "Southern Gothic" explored a range of social issues in a genre unique to American literature in works by William Faulkner, Harper Lee, and Flannery O'Connor. Following Charles W. Chestnutt, the African American writers who most dramatically magnify the powers of Gothic horror in an American context are Zora Neale Hurston (1937), Ralph Ellison (1952), Alice Walker (1982), and Toni Morrison.

In 1921 Edith Birkhead identified Charles Brockden Brown as the first Gothic writer of America, and subsequently critics have followed her lead. Varma and Day also discussed Brown, Poe, and Hawthorne as American Gothic novelists. However, these critics did not address specific features of the American Gothic as distinct from British Gothic. Leslie A. Fiedler was the first serious critic to notice the pervasive Gothic influence in America, arguing that American writing has always been influenced by Gothic images. According to

Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1966), Gothic fears and anxieties haunted and empowered American novels from the time of the Settlement struggles. America's early experience in the New World was filled with hopes, dreams, and new beginnings, and America's "Promised Land" seemingly was not the place for unpleasant, dark stories. Yet to the settlers, the unseen, unexpected world also suggested uncertainty and unformed horrors. Their European origins gave rise to confused feelings, especially in their murderous struggles with native peoples. Unknown threats in the wilderness haunted the settlers, and their ambiguous relationships with Indians and blacks often evoked terror, which became a recurring theme essential to American literature². Thus, Fiedler maintains, the American Gothic became a metaphor for a terror already planted in America's consciousness (29). Gothic effects and images have been internalized deeply within America's great literature; they exposed the corrupt underside of the American Dream of male Anglo-Saxon Protestants.

Following Fiedler, Louis S. Gross differentiates American and British Gothic, claiming that the former "has always engaged itself in the national predilection for self-reflection." Invisible, unspecified ghosts symbolize Euro-Americans' guilt about their treatment of Indians and blacks, and have haunted Euro-American literary works, as many critics agree. In frequent encounters with natives and blacks, the settlers struggled to establish controlling relationships;

² Leslie Fiedler repeatedly refers to "our" struggle with Indians and blacks, including only Euro-Americans even while he is discussing the racial issues related to Gothic. Fiedler's choice of pronouns clearly reflects how the self-identified dominant American consciousness continues to be constituted around the collective identity of white Euro-Americans.

they needed to set safe boundaries between themselves and the other, between cultured and savage, between dominant and dominated, and between master and slave. In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1993), Toni Morrison offers an in-depth discussion of how early American literature specifically formulates literary blackness and literary whiteness. According to Morrison, the American Dream and Americanness (ideologically identified with freedom, newness, and autonomy) could be achieved in Gothic literature through expelling and transferring fear, insecurity, and terror into a symbolized blackness existing outside—the Africanist persona. In other words, the Gothic is used to expel the Euro-American's fear and insecurity from their consciousness. Therefore, Morrison emphasizes, the Euro-American's autonomy and freedom could not be constituted without the presence of Africanist people. Early European American literature, which urgently wished to build and forge a national identity, projected the early settlers' inner terror and insecurities into the form of an outside black body, blackness, the Not-me, and the abject, which needed to be expelled from a secure, freed border.

Early American literature established the binary color imagery through which white privilege was forged in the new culture, and scientific ideology in the nineteenth century rationalized and reinforced this racism. Especially after the end of legalized slavery, the discourses of natural science served to shore up racial inequality. When Charles Darwin wrote *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* in 1859, the idea that human traits were heritable yet mutable initially caused

a sensation and created confusion. But a few years later in *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development* (1883), Francis Galton, a cousin of Darwin's, demonstrated that genetic features can pass down through generations and introduced the term "eugenics" to designate the science of "race improvement." Galton and the eugenicists were convinced that social inequality was a demonstration of the natural order and a result of evolution. Eugenics promoted the mathematical measurement of "desirable traits" and the suppression of those deemed "undesirable" through selective breeding and sterilization.

In effect, the eugenics movement sought to engineer a scientifically rationalized process of national abjection. Biologists like Charles White concluded that different skull sizes and sex organs were genetic and inherited, that blacks and whites belonged to separate species. The biologist Georges Cuvier asserted that the black was the most degraded of human races; and Louis Agassiz also saw the blacks as a genetically inferior separate species. In the name of science, these biologists justified racist ideology and (re-)organized social hierarchy as legalized slavery had done in the prior century.

Eugenia Delamotte emphasizes that Gothic revivals in Britain and the U.S. between 1765 and 1850 paralleled the period when concepts of race were established as biological, essential properties classifying humankind. In "White Terror, Black Dreams, Gothic Constructions of Race in the Nineteenth Century" (2004), Delamotte illustrates that biological discourses in the nineteenth century marked off "a dark mysterious Otherness" from a normative coherent "white" self. She argues that

the major conventions of (Anglo) Gothic consist of barriers and boundaries (veils, cowls, precipices, secret doors, locked mysterious chests, massive gates, convent walls, bed curtains, and so on) between a stable, definable, unitary self and a terrifying *Other* that both challenges and ultimately establishes that very stability and definability. (25-26)

The Anglo-Gothic novel therefore operates as “a document in the history of racial formation” and the construction of whiteness (“White Terror” 19). In discussing the period from Ann Radcliffe to Herman Melville, DeLamotte examines the Anglo-Gothic's reaffirmation of the racial line and the conception of the “dark, sexual, bestial, racial Others.” This Gothic discourse, furthermore, explores the assumptions upon which the scientific discourse is based, and exposes the horrific consequences of Western rationalism. The Gothic often revives “irrational” superstitions like conjure (magic in a positive mode) and exposes the irrationality/absurdity of Western “rationalized” discourse. Gothic discourse, thereby, empowers the ones that the rationalized world of eugenics classified as inferior and animalistic traits, and suggests the possible transgression of these biologically determined boundaries.

Even though the early American Gothic often demonized the racial Other, Gothic images have been repeatedly employed in American literature to expose the horrors of slavery, especially in antebellum slave narratives and novels. Harriet Beecher Stowe's story, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), condemns slavery by introducing the horrific picture of the plantation and its brutal treatment of the

poor and benign slave, Uncle Tom. Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845) deploys Gothic conventions to describe demonic overseers and terrible systems, while Harriet A. Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) uses Gothic imagery such as her story of an innocent girl striving to keep herself from her lecherous master and hiding for seven years in an attic.

I believe that the Gothic wielded its maximum power of subversion *after* the Civil War. Late nineteenth century Gothic literature often broke the black stereotypes and articulated long-hidden, long-buried historical struggle and pain. In the last chapter of her *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation*, Teresa A. Goddu discusses how Harriet Jacobs manipulates Gothic conventions to “haunt back” by “staging her resistance” (148). Discussing the caged slave image in Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* through Frederic Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, Goddu rereads the Gothic in historical context, concluding that the later American Gothic “has served as a useful mode in which to resurrect and resist America's racial history” (152). I agree with Goddu's historicizing of the Gothic in a political, cultural context. Her reading also verifies the intertextual relation of the Gothic and the accelerating power of Gothic strategies throughout American literary history. Goddu's compelling argument about “haunting back” to the dominant racist discourse or “national narrative” does not pursue its discussion beyond antebellum slave narratives, however, nor does it explain precisely what strategies or features of the Gothic enable some writers to “haunt back” the dominant discourse.

My study will focus on later development of the Gothic in America, identifying the Gothic strategy not only as a release of pain and trauma but also as a means of exposing the existing system's absurdity and symbolically reversing the master-slave dynamic. For African-Americans, Gothic strategies function positively and actively. Gothic discourses are forged into aggressive strategies to expose racial myths from the postbellum period through the present. Although Reconstruction ended up reinstating racist violence and oppression, the period opened a window for the racially repressed to fight back through such masked writings. I will argue that Gothic's subversive strategies contest the historical contradiction of slavery that has undermined America's idealized identity.

IV. Gothic Strategies in Charles Chesnutt, Toni Morrison and Mark Twain

African-American writers have used Gothic strategies to express their "sense of imprisonment and hopelessness" in the racist culture of America (Gross, 65) to articulate the unspeakable, and to resurrect the unvoiced ghostly presence of African-Americans in official American history. The repeated returns of the black-*abject*³ in America's history have developed and accelerated the

³ My use of the "black-*abject*" implies a double meaning. In a social and cultural concept, the black *abject* refers to the image of African-Americans that has been shaped by white abolitionists and white supremacists—the exiled African-American Other that is thrown off from the center of power. The historical change and development of such images is discussed in Jean Fagan Yellin's research on the "Woman and Sister" emblem of a kneeling female slave pleading for freedom. According to Yellin in *Women and Sisters: The Anti-Slavery Feminists in American Culture* (1990), the antislavery feminists popularized the emblem in the 1830s-1840s, so that they could create a counter-discourse against the patriarchal racist code, relating the enchained the black womanhood to confined white womanhood in nineteenth century. However, the popularity of the emblem produced many variations, the signification of which was reversed by the

power of the horrifying genre. In writers like Charles Chesnutt and Toni Morrison, whose work I will examine in this study, Gothic narratives become a site of resistance and a pathway through which the abject “haunts back” to the center. In addition, in the work of the Euro-American writer Mark Twain the Gothic also appears as a site of resistance to the dominant discourse, but as I will discuss, Twain’s text is far more ambivalent in its deployment of the Gothic. Twain is not African-American like the other authors in this study, but it is meaningful to examine the Gothic strategies in this “canonical” writer’s often ignored novel, *The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead Wilson*. To some degree, Twain’s position as a white male writer popular in the nineteenth century limited his power to expand the subversive use of the Gothic strategy. Yet, *Pudd’nhead Wilson* does delineate a powerful picture both of a female slave’s tactical, subversive use of the Gothic narrative, as well as of a Reconstruction era not-yet-ready to register the major trespassing of racial and gender boundaries. According to Shelley Fisher Fishkin and Twain’s autobiography, Twain often recollected a time from his childhood when he sneaked out to a slave cabin to listen to a slave’s ghost stories, whose rhetorical powers he realized only later⁴. His understanding of Gothic rhetoric

“canonical” authors and their works, Yellin argues. The “canonical” writers’ use of the emblem to reinforce the patriarchal order manifests the abjection process of the dominant discourse. In attempting to sustain the existing order, they redefined the meaning of the image and abjected the African-American female outside their seamless system. Through such processes, African-American images in white American culture were constituted as the abject. However, where Yellin stops her analysis of the abjected image of African-Americans, the double meaning of the black-abject arises. Using the abjected position as a Gothic strategy, many writers, especially African-American writers, have attempted to reverse and subvert the abjection process effected by the dominant culture or discourse. The “black-abject” tends to return and blur the boundary and regulation that throw them out. The “black-abject,” therefore, becomes the effective site of resistance in a racist discourse.

⁴ Shelley Fisher Fishkin in *A Historical Guide to Mark Twain* says that Twain was very impressed by black storytellers, and would “emulate the lessons in storytelling and satire” he learned from

truly illuminates *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, where the Gothic wields subversive power against nineteenth century slave-holding America.

Twain's white-skinned black slave heroine, Roxana, exemplifies the black slave's rhetorical, maternal, secret Gothic power that the dominant culture fears. Defined as the lowest class in society because of her gender and race, Roxana is invisible and silenced. Yet she fashions a Gothic fiction that lets loose all the possibilities of the unknown and undoes the racial hierarchies of the town. However, in the end Twain seems to hold a divided attitude toward his own heroine's subversive powers. The novel's conclusion recuperates Roxana's subversion and restores the status quo. In this sense *Pudd'nhead Wilson* mirrors white America's ambiguous attitude about race in the later part of the century.

If Twain's Roxana fails to complete her subversive story, Charles Chesnutt's Julius, an old black ex-slave, wields the full strength of the Gothic in *The Conjure Woman* (1899). Chesnutt, the first African American fiction writer to earn a national reputation, mainly wrote the life of the South, interracial relation, and "passing" in late nineteenth century. Although Chesnutt published three novels, a biography of Frederick Douglass, and dozens of short stories and essays, his first collection of conjure stories, *The Conjure Woman*, is more often discussed than any of his writing. Its intricate frame narration allows the black former slave narrator Julius to undercut the dominant discourses of his time. Each story starts with the Yankee investor John's inquiry regarding his business

them: "He was tremendously struck by the storytelling talents of Uncle Dan'l, a slave at his uncle's farm . . . in a letter Twain wrote about him in 1881, he recalled the 'impressive pauses and eloquent silences' of Uncle Dan'l's 'impressive delivery.'" (133)

concern, leading to Julius's telling the corresponding antebellum story to John and his wife Annie. So, Julius's conjure stories are framed by John's narrative. Using this frame narrative, Chesnutt carefully contrasts John's rationalized, "scientific" narration with Julius's "irrational" Gothic storytelling. He stages the narration between John and Julius as a power struggle to form and control the definition of the world. Yet Julius's story receives most attention and more credibility from readers. His conjure tales disrupt John's justified and rationalized world, enabling Julius to obtain control over the frame story.

I focus on seven stories which were published in 1899: "The Goophered Grapevine," "Po' Sandy," "Sis' Becky's Picaninny," "Mars Jimmy's Nightmare," "The Grey Wolf Ha'nt," and "The Conjuror's Revenge." I also include short discussions on "Tabe's Tribulation" and "Dave's Neckliss" which were added to the collection later. I give more full discussion on "The Dumb Witness" in the later half of the chapter. "The Dumb Witness" exhibits one of the strongest characters among Julius's conjure tales, Viney, who overturns the master's tool in order to destroy her master. Viney, a former slave, manifests the essence of the Gothic abject: punished because she 'tells stories on her master,' she uses the same tool of oppression, the ability of speaking, to subvert the master-slave dynamic.

The Conjure Woman became a ground work articulating the African-American presence through inarticulate Gothic sounds and imagery, to be followed by many writers' works during the New Negro Renaissance and later. Sterling A. Brown points out that Chesnutt "presents Negro characters who were more than walking arguments or exotic oddities" (126). In the works of African-

American writers including Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison, and Richard Wright, the Gothic-*abject* continuously returns to the surface. Hurston's *Their Eyes Are Watching God* (1937), Wright's *Native Son* (1940), and Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) feature alienated African-American characters and their ghostly voices. The protagonist's first monologue in *Invisible Man* summarizes the ghostly presence of African-Americans in racist culture: "I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids - and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me" (1). This statement articulates the voice of the *abject* that has been oppressed in the Gothic's racist use in history. He confesses that he, as a black man, has been faded into, repressed to, and Gothicized as a caricatured ghost by white-privileged society. He was oppressed to be invisible in society. When only visible, he is identified with a monstrous being in literature or mass media.

Even though Gothic strategies are frequently employed by African American writers, critics didn't pay much attention to the Gothic or its effects in African American literature until the 1980s. Joseph Bodzioc, in "Richard Wright and Afro-American Gothic," argues that Richard Wright tries to show how "the white mythology" uses the Gothic to sustain its domination and "rewrites the American Gothic mode to suit an Afro-American context" when he allows the Gothic form to reveal the "emotional and mystical entrapment that possessed both blacks and whites" (35). Kathleen Brogan mentioned the haunted narratives

of August Wilson, Morrison and Gloria Naylor in “American Stories of Cultural Haunting: Tales of Heirs and Ethnographers” (1995). Erik Curren examined in “Should Their Eyes Have Been Watching God?: Hurston’s Use of Religious Experience and Gothic Horror” (1995) how Hurston’s *Their Eyes are Watching God* brings Gothic horror. Goddu’s attempts to historicize the Gothic also enable her to observe the subversive use of the Gothic in *Gothic America*. Jerrold E. Hogle points out “the features off the Gothic tradition most essential to African American history” in “Teaching the African American Gothic: From Its Multiple Sources to *Linden Hills* and *Beloved*” published in *Approaches to Teaching Gothic Fiction: The British and American Traditions* (2003, 215). Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s rediscovery and publication of *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* in 2001 also evokes many critics’ interests in the entrapped image of the Gothic.

I argue that Toni Morrison is the writer who most fully exploits the subversive power of the Gothic, using it to deconstruct the mythology of white-male centered society and to evoke the African-American presence that has been abjected in white-privileged culture. In Morrison’s novels, black communities are often very intimate and have surreal and bizarre atmospheres, her characters being accustomed to living in a world where the ordinary seems out of reach. Such communities offset and interrogate the rational principle of Western dominant discourse. So as to speak the unspeakable, Morrison must create the untouched, unreal, and uncanny place where she can summon the abject which has once been repressed. Speaking the unspeakable is taboo because it reveals the most “irrational,” “unnatural” reality/nature of the dominant

discourse. To speak the unspeakable and to summon the abject, Morrison creates an alternative place with alternate language, using the Gothic as a site between death and life, a site of the in-between.

Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), creates a grotesque, yet realistic world, ultimately subverting an American myth that violently abjects a black girl until she becomes a ghost alienated both from society and herself. Morrison juxtaposes the perfect world of the Dick and Jane primer with the world of the black girl, Pecola Breedlove, and her family: her father Cholly and her mother Pauline. Pecola's family reacts to and consumes the whiteness myth smeared in the Dick-and-Jane primer and pervasive in American culture. Pecola wants blue eyes; Pauline seeks an image of herself as the movie star Jean Harlow and later as an orderly housemaid for a white family; Cholly at once pursues love and decides to be free from all social engagement and responsibility. The ways in which the Breedloves deal with the white myth force them to become silent and invisible ghosts in the society where they live. The black community also internalizes hatred of their own blackness by demonizing the Breedloves as dirt and by "throwing them off" of the town. By separating themselves from the Breedloves and the whores, the black community repeats the abjection process that whiteness mythology performs on the community. Thrown out of her own community, Pecola becomes the abject of the abject.

However, Morrison's narrating power brings the ghostly presences of the Breedloves and Pecola into the focus of the story. Morrison's circular pattern plot, multiple narrating voices, and use of "speakerly, aural, colloquial" language

creates an alternative discourse—her way to speak (or un-speak) the unspeakable. Moreover, the main narrator Claudia McTeer's uncertain memory mixes the true and the false, fact and imagination. Such narration not only reveals the truth of the “second slavery” after desegregation, but it also subverts white ideology by deliberately defamiliarizing the Dick and Jane story with the eradication of punctuation and spacing in her preface. Through such devices, Morrison reconstitutes a new-found black voice in the novel.

This power of reconstructing the ghostly voice is maximized in *Beloved* (1987), in which Morrison recounts the journey of an ex-slave's reconciliation with the past. The dominant discourse, represented by Schoolteacher, Mr. Garner, and Sweet Home, names Sethe subhuman and animal. Such naming justifies Sethe's position as slave, using the system and symbolic language that Kristeva (after Jacques Lacan) called “the Law-of-the-Father.” Against her white master's repression and definition, Sethe keeps resisting and finally escapes, crossing the river that symbolizes the boundary of slavery and freedom and of life and death. Her greatest resistance, however, is manifested when her white master hunts her down to bring her and her children back to his system and order (that is, to slavery): she kills her baby at the boundaries between slavery and freedom and chooses to live in death, haunted by the baby ghost. I will focus on Sethe's strategic but deadly act of infanticide, which scares away the white masters, and will explore how the novel *Beloved* defines the Gothic world as real and how Morrison uses this world to illustrate the repressed consciousness of the African-American presence. All African-American characters in the novel accept the

haunting of Sethe's house as true and accept Beloved, the (ghostly) incarnation of Sethe's dead baby, as real. The novel even gives its ghost a body and a voice. When Beloved returns from death, she becomes the abject, transgressing the boundaries between matter and mind, between life and death, and between subject and object. Beloved's ghostly presence in the black community pits her against the rational master narrative--particularly her existence on the border between life and death—both symbolically and psychologically.

IV. Conclusion

Literary history has shunned and abjected the Gothic as an inferior genre even though Gothic images are prevalent in both Euro- and African-American literature. This abjected, exiled genre tends to keep retuning as a ghostly form in American literature. The persistence of the genre relies upon its subversive use of Gothic strategy. The subversiveness of the Gothic in American literature and culture suggests its importance as a dynamic, powerful, and secretly subversive narrative strategy; the Gothic masks its aggressive attack against all discourses that abjectify its existence, conjuring a Frankenstein of different shapes in text after text. By recovering those disturbing texts and by discussing the Gothic's alternative account of American literature and history, this dissertation searches for the possibility and power of the Gothic strategy as a legitimate communicative discourse in American society.

Chapter II
The Gothic as Abject in
Mark Twain's *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*

According to Mark Twain, *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*⁵ (1894) is a kind of conjure novel⁶ which intruded on and distorted his original intention. In the introduction to his story "Those Extraordinary Twins," Twain describes what he calls "a kind of literary Caesarean operation" (119) relating to the genesis of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. While writing the story, Twain realized that a short tale had grown into a long tale, and a farce had split into a tragedy, so that the two stories "obstructed and interrupted each other at every turn and created no end of confusion and annoyance" (119). Therefore, Twain says, he "pulled one of the stories out by the roots and left the other one—a kind of literary Cæsarean operation" (119). He had intended to write a brief farce called "Those Extraordinary Twins," but instead Pudd'nhead Wilson and Roxana, originally the peripheral characters, "pushed up into prominence a young fellow named Tom

⁵ Mark Twain read about so-called Siamese twins on December 12, 1891, inspiring him to write a story about them. Twain began to write the novel in summer, 1892. The first manuscript of the novel was not published although the revised version was serialized on the *Century Magazine* - between December 1893 and June 1894. *Pudd'nhead Wilson* was published in November 1899, along with *Those Extraordinary Twins*. Quotations in this chapter come from *Pudd'nhead Wilson and Those Extraordinary Twins*. Ed. Sidney E. Berger. New York and London: Norton, 1980.

⁶ I use the term "conjure novel" as a novel emphasizing on the gothic strategy to summon the abject and to write its story. I will explain more about the word "conjure" in the next chapter.

Driscoll,” and before the book was half finished, those three characters took over a “tale which they had nothing at all to do with, by right” (120). Roxana, Wilson, and Tom usurped Twain’s authorship and conjured up a tragic Gothic plot.

Twain’s composition process mirrors another conjuration *inside* the novel. Roxana conjures her own Gothic plot and a “monstrous” character which threatens the white-privileged society of Dawson’s Landing and counteracts its dominant discourse. Roxana’s Gothic fiction bestows a new identity and privilege upon her son Tom and subverts the existing racial hierarchy operated by law and custom. Roxana’s ability to construct a Gothic scenario creates a counter-discourse, exposing the laws and customs of Dawson’s Landing as socially constructed fictions, not the self-evident, reasonable principles they purport to be. Roxana’s Gothic fiction thereby affords her some release from her status as a slave woman, conjuring up the Tom-monster that evokes horror and fear in the town. The upheaval caused by her conjuration comes to an end, however, when Pudd’nhead Wilson, a white lawyer, devises a scientific, rationalized way to re-establish race. With this, Roxana’s plot is demolished, and she collapses. Her revolutionary scheme is frustrated by Wilson’s rationalization, and the white social order is recovered and refortified. Roxana’s failed attempt to challenge the slave-holding town reflects the failure of Reconstruction; Twain’s disappointment in the period, as well as his own ambivalent racial politics, drove him to frustrate Roxana’s plan, pulling her back down to the level of a slave. While Roxana’s rebellious characteristics, of course, reflect Twain’s criticism over racist culture of nineteenth century America, Twain’s struggling authorship described by Twain

himself, epitomizes his ambiguous consciousness on his contemporary racist discourse, rather than the clear intents of countering it. Textual tension between rebellious characters and Twain also symbolizes the inner struggle to compromise his identity as a popular Euro-American writer and his responsibility as a social critic.

Roxana's foiled plot in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* embodies Twain's pessimistic commentary on Reconstruction in an uncanny way. Even though *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is set in a pre-Civil War slaveholding town, the novel's implications clearly resonate beyond the pre-Civil War era amid the issues of the Reconstruction era. The textual critic Robert Moss denies that Twain intended to write social criticism. Rather, Moss cites Twain's letter to Fred J. Hall in 1892 as proof that Twain intended to write a fast-paced, popular story in order to compensate for recent financial losses. While it is true that Twain began the story for a financial purpose, as he wrote in the preface to "Those Extraordinary Twins," his original intent changed during the writing process. It is also hard to believe that a social critic like Twain ignored the most important issues of the time when he wrote this novel. During the period when the novel was written and published, racism was at a peak in the South. In 1865 slavery had been abolished, and African Americans in theory acquired many civil rights. However, the Reconstruction era ended with the Hayes-Tilden compromise (1876)⁷, which destroyed all efforts to empower

⁷ The Hayes-Tilden compromise was an agreement between Democrats and Republicans to resolve the presidential election of 1876. Southern Democrats agreed to support a Republican, Rutherford B. Hayes, if he in turn would support increased funding for Southern internal improvements and agree to end Reconstruction. This meant white control in the South and reversal of all gains that blacks had obtained during Reconstruction. For further details, refer to C.

blacks and instead restored a vicious racial hierarchy. Soon the Jim Crow segregation laws were institutionalized and African Americans, disenfranchised throughout the South, became victims of escalating racial violence.

According to David Lionel Smith's research, the racism of the 1890s was extreme: 235 lynchings occurred in 1892 when Twain began to write the novel; 200 in 1893; and 190 in 1894 when the novel was published. The infamous *Plessy v. Ferguson* case⁸ was in progress until the Supreme Court decided the "equal, but separate" principle in 1896. Eric J. Sundquist, in *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (1993), argues that *Pudd'nhead Wilson* mirrors the "authoritative constitutional expression" in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (228). Merit Kaschig says in his "'Vice Breeds Crime': The 'Germs' of Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*" (2002) that *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is the "fictionalized version of America's nineteenth century plutocracy" (52). According to Kaschig, *Wilson* is a reformer of the moral corruption at the *fin-de-siècle*. John Carlos Rowe (1982) argues in "Fatal Speculations: Murder, Money, and Manners in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*" (1990) that Twain addresses institutional issues of political economy, theology, and government, and that Dawson's Landing exists at the intersection of an older America and the aggressive society

Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 52-53; John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, 277-81; and Jerrold M. Packard, *American Nightmare: The History of Jim Crow*, 60-62.

⁸ The *Plessy v. Ferguson* case (1892-96) challenged the Jim Crow statute that required racially segregated seating on trains in the state of Louisiana; it was passed after Homer Plessy, who was one-eighth Negro and could pass as white, claimed his right to ride in the seats for whites in 1893. For further reference on the case, see *Plessy v. Ferguson* 163 U.S. 537 (1896); Keith Weldon Medley's *We as Freeman: Plessy v. Ferguson*. Gretha: Peliean, (2003); Heather Cox Richardson's *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901*. Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 2001. 220-21; and F. James Davis. *Who is Black: One Nation's Definition*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1991. 8-11, 42-47.

of the post-Civil War period. In “‘By Right of the White Election’: Political Theology and Theological Politics in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*.”(1990), Michael Cowan also notes the complex interplay between politics and theology in Dawson’s Landing. Wilson C. McWilliams (1990) looks into democratic ideology and American history in “Pudd'nhead Wilson on Democratic Governance.” Gregg Crane reads *Pudd'nhead Wilson* as a “satire of Jim Crow positivism” in his article, “Black Comedy: Black Citizenship and Jim Crow Positivism.” (2002, 300). Smith, in “Mark Twain, Pretexts, Iconoclasm” (2005), explores Twain’s rhetorical approach and the duality that enables him to remain a popular writer and white cultural icon while he mocks the same culture and race. As these critics agree, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* reflects the situation of the Reconstruction era. As Reconstruction represented an attempt to reintegrate the South after the Civil War and give blacks a more secure place in society, so Roxana’s transposition of the babies’ identities challenges the existing racial hierarchy, giving her baby a new identity in Dawson’s Landing. The fact that Roxana’s plot is thwarted by Wilson’s scientific proof parallels the way the Reconstruction era ended with aggravated racism and without fundamental change to the dominant white supremacist ideology of America.

Twain’s perspective does not seem to be identified with the white lawyer Wilson in the novel. It is reflected, rather, in the desperate yet powerful slave Roxana and her plot, which secretly pushes the social structure to the edge of destruction and horror. Since the first appearance of the novel in November 1894, many critics have agreed that Twain’s portrayal of Roxana is compelling and that

her character possesses tremendous power. A contemporary anonymous reviewer from *The Athenaeum* wrote that “[t]he best thing in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*” is “the picture of the Negro slave Roxana” (215). Bernard de Voto also describes her as “memorably true” and “faithful” in *Mark Twain’s America* (1932, 219). F. R. Leavis wrote in “Mark Twain’s Neglected Classic: the Moral Astringency of *Pudd’nhead Wilson*” (1956) that her presence is “a triumphant indication of life” (238). In *Mark Twain, the Development of a Writer*, Henry Nash Smith argues that Roxana is “the only fully developed character, in the novelistic sense, in the book” (179). James Cox also calls her “the primary force in the world she serves” in *Mark Twain: the Fate of Humor* (1966, 262). Carolyn Porter, in “Roxana’s Plot” (1990), focuses on Roxana’s subversive power as a black mother. But whether critics defend or attack Twain’s portrayal of Roxana, they virtually all recognize the dark, secretive side of her power which evokes a sinister spirit in the novel. *Pudd’nhead Wilson* conjures up the revolutionary potential of Gothic in the figure of Roxana. More accurately, it is Roxana’s “perverse” nature as a figure of the abject in Julia Kristeva’s sense that enables her to recognize the social, cultural boundary of race as a fiction of law and custom, not a substantive line, thereby allowing her to “write” a Gothic story in which her own son functions as a monstrous figure, collapsing racial classifications. Roxana’s transgression of the racial line gives her a subversive power and releases a secret horror in the white patriarchal slaveholding society because it shakes the racist foundation upon which the social system operates.

Even though the novel manifests a subversive and sinister scheme, few critics have noted the presence of Gothic elements in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. Those few who did so did not fully explore the use of Gothic strategy, instead attributing the novel's dark mood to Twain's financial bankruptcy and his growing doubts about human nature⁹. Leslie Fiedler was the first critic to note Twain's Gothic themes in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. In "The Blackness of Darkness: The Negro and the Development of American Gothic," Fiedler reads the novel as "a dark mirror image of the world" and as Twain's "most Gothic book" (92). Fiedler also emphasizes the absence of the river toward the North in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* as in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, saying that "there is no way to escape that drift downward toward darkness to which the accident of birth has doomed [Roxana] and her son" ("As Free as Any Cretur..." 16). Robert Regan in *Unpromising Heroes: Mark Twain and His Characters* (1966) says that *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is "chaotic and grotesque" (207). Arthur Pettit also calls the novel "semi-comic grotesque" in "The Black and White Curse: *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and Miscegenation" (1974, 144). Justine D. Edwards offers more detail about Twain's Gothic devices in the introduction of his *Gothic Passages: Radical Ambiguity and the American Gothic* (2003), explaining that Roxana "uses the Gothic discourses of ambiguous racial difference" (xxvii). He also describes Tom's passing as white as a repetition of the Gothic theme of the double.

⁹ John Carlos Rowe says in "Fatal Speculations: Murder, Money, and Manners in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*" that the novel is a product of Twain's deterministic views (163). Dorothy Berkson also points out in "Mark Twain's Two-Headed Novel: Racial Symbolism and Social Realism in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*" (1985) that *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is a "symbolic working out of the idea of the foreordained nature of moral identity" (314). Peter Messent argues in "Toward the Absurd: Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee*, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and *The Great Dark*." (1985) that it is "Twain's move toward the Absurd" in his later works, and it exposes the absurdity of social values (176).

Edwards' argument is compelling, but his discussion is no longer than three pages. In addition, Edwards concludes that Roxana's action is based on racial essentialism, and he focuses mainly on Tom's double identity. Edwards' discussion limits the Gothic strategy to bi-racial characters and leaves out the complexity of Roxana's plot and her position as the socially-defined abject. My study considers Roxana's act as a strategic deployment of Gothic to conjure a "deformed" and revolutionary creature in the nineteenth century American context. I will also argue that Roxana's plot damages to some degree Wilson's scientific "witchcraft" as seen in his restoration of the racist social order at the end of the narrative¹⁰. In this connection I briefly examine the complexity and ambiguity of Twain's position on racial issues.

The novel begins with the description of Dawson's Landing as "sleepy and comfortable and contented," implicitly evoking the repressive racial situation in nineteenth century America (4). Undisturbed and undisrupted, Dawson's Landing seems a stable, problem-free town. "It was fifty years old, and was growing slowly—very slowly, in fact, but still it was growing" (4). Dawson's Landing appears to be a peaceful place where people cherish honor, gentility, and respect. The first citizens of this respectable town are the First Families of Virginia (F.F.V.)—including Percy Northumberland Driscoll, Judge York Leicester Driscoll, Pembroke Howard, and Colonel Cecil Burleigh Essex. The narrator emphasizes that all are "gentlemen." Judge Driscoll is "fine, and just, and generous" (4); Pembroke Howard is also a "fine, brave, majestic creature" who is

¹⁰ I will explain how Wilson operates "witchcraft" later in this chapter.

a gentleman proved by the Virginian rule (4). The F.F.V. represents the moral standards and values of Dawson's Landing. Its members also are the political leaders of the town.

This opening description concludes, however, with the one-sentence declaration: "Dawson's Landing was a slaveholding town, with a rich slave-worked grain and pork country back of it" (4). Thus while Dawson's Landing appears to be a pleasant, peaceful place, it is a moral wasteland based on an inhumane institution. The narrator says that houses are "whitewashed," a fact which in turn "was *almost* concealed" by beautiful flowers (4, *italics mine*). Beneath the placid surface is a repressed discord. The town has a definite, hierarchal borderline between black slaves and white masters; all wealth and pleasures are based on slaves' sacrifice and work, Twain implies. Yet Dawson's Landing seems proud of its "cultivated" and "honorable" version of slavery; townspeople compare it to the inhumane kind of slavery practiced "down the river." White townspeople use the threat of selling their slaves "down the river" to control them. Their benevolent slavery, compared to "down the river" slavery, makes townspeople feel "noble and gracious," Twain's narrator says (12). On the night Percy Driscoll, one of the F.F.V., "generously" sells his slaves in the town instead of "down the river," he feels so proud that he writes about the incident in his diary, so "his son might read it after years and be thereby moved to deeds of gentleness and humanity himself" (12). He feels "like a god" who "stretched forth his mighty hand and closed the gates of hell against [the slaves]. He knew, himself, that he had done a noble and gracious thing" (12). Their beliefs about

their practice of slavery as contrasting with practices “down the river” provide the white townspeople with a sense of identity filled with fake honor and dignity. In Dawson’s Landing, no white person questions the institution of slavery.

The town’s pretentious attitude is not limited only to slavery. Their relation to outsiders also reflects a single-minded, self-satisfied spirit, expressed in their fascination with Europe, as when they initially welcome the Capello, the Italian twins. But in fact, this welcome is based on marking the twins as the bizarre, exotic Other. The town thinks that the twins’ title of Count and their exotic stories will endow the town with glamour and a higher status. Aunt Patsy, their landlord, is proud of “showing off her fine foreign birds before her neighbors and friends,” and the white townspeople come to ‘see’ these aliens like exotic creatures in a zoo. The twins’ arrival is an exotic occasion that excites the dull conversation in the town. The whites’ overwhelming welcome of the Italian twins seems to contrast with David Wilson’s entrance into the town. Yet Wilson, like the twins, is also branded as an outsider longer than twenty years after his arrival. The townspeople isolate him due to a joke they can’t understand because it passes over their heads. As a result, Wilson lives isolated and with a new, mocking nickname, “Pudd’nhead.” Wilson’s fate showcases the townspeople’s strong hatred toward the East. They feel insulted by “different jokes and customs.” So it is not surprising that Tom’s choice of “Eastern fashion” filled “everybody with anguish and was regarded as a peculiarly wanton affront” (24). Anything different from the town’s norm is marked as exotic, abnormal, or wrong. Dawson’s Landing is proud of its code of social norms and customs represented by F.F.V. It

is a homogeneous community where everyone respects the same values and is bound by familial relation and affection; it is like the “sivilized” place from which Huck Finn escapes. The prevailing attitude of the F.F.V. in Dawson’s Landing is one of exclusion, a division of “us” and “them.” As Pederson points out, the white townsfolk only “[speak] from the subject-position” and promote the social code represented by the F.F.V. (181). In other words, the town repeatedly performs the abjection process, protecting “us” the town from anything different or strange. Dawson’s Landing can be compared to a Gothic castle haunted by unacknowledged racism, corruption, and hypocrisy. However, its self-conception is ridiculed by the introduction of Roxana early in the novel.

A beautiful slave girl, Roxana is ethnically hybrid with a white appearance. From her manner of speech, we read, “a stranger would have expected her to be black. But she was not” (8). Her identity is not from her skin; her identity is only visible through her language and demeanor. “Only one-sixteenth of her was black and that sixteenth did not show” (8). Roxana is “as white as anybody but one-sixteenth of her which was black out-voted the other fifteen parts and made her a Negro” (8-9). Roxana’s invisibly mixed blood matters not at all to her cultural, social, or legal identity. She is a “Negro,” and she constantly has to face everyday threats of beatings and of being sold down the river. Roxana’s white skinned appearances manifest the ambiguous distinction of race. She is defined only by “a fiction of law and custom,” which means that racial categories so defined function as a rhetoric that enforces slavery (9). Officially, in Dawson’s Landing there exist only two racial categories, but Roxana’s white appearance

“blurred the clear separation between the races essential to American race slavery” in Susan Gillman’s words (91). To make the blurred distinction invisible in the slaveholding society, it is crucial to create a mythical law and custom of drawing the bi-racial borderline between black and white, slave and master, free and bond, inside and outside.

Roxana, in this sense, stages American race relations. Her diluted black blood is the result of successive generations of miscegenation; her son’s dilution to one thirty-second is the further result of her secret union with Colonel Cecil Burleigh Essex, one of the respectable F.F.V. Her own and her son’s fair skin constitutes an irremovable proof of white men’s interracial crimes. Yet Dawson’s Landing is not disturbed. As long as the “fiction of law and custom” conceals unmistakably visible signs of miscegenation by defining Roxana and her son as blacks and slaves, the town remains calm and peaceful. The regular crossing of the color line for the purpose of gratifying white male desires is an established, though unacknowledged, institution, completely integrated into the equilibrium of the community. It is part of the foundation of racism and slavery in Dawson’s Landing.

Generations of white masters’ raping their slaves have, ironically, bestowed upon Roxana the power to cross the conventional color line because of her white appearance. When Roxana’s master, Percy Driscoll, threatens to sell his slaves “down the river,” she sees her opportunity to become the author of her own fate. After repeated thefts in his household, Percy Driscoll had pressured his slaves to confess by threatening to sell them all “down the river.” This phrase, as

the narrator explains, is “equivalent to condemning them to hell. No Missouri Negro doubted this” (12). It symbolizes slavery as “social death,” in Orlando Patterson’s words¹¹. In the antebellum era, slaves lived under the continuing death threat to which they were nonetheless socially condemned. The master could kill or sell a slave at any time; a slave’s life was always contingent on the master’s decision. This condition also applies to their status in Dawson’s Landing. In *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, this deadly condition is identified with the threat posed by Percy Driscoll. Upon Driscoll’s threat, Roxana realizes that her very life and that of her son are permanently conditional: a possible “death sentence” can be bestowed or revoked at the master’s will. This situation takes possession of Roxana with “a profound terror” (13). She realizes that “her child could grow up and be sold down the river at any time! The thought crazed her with horror” (15). This sharply-drawn moment in Twain’s text epitomizes the meaning of abjection, constituting the slave’s state as a kind of living death or death-in-living.

Confronting rejection and expulsion, Roxana finds a way of avoiding this social death. Understanding that her life as a slave is predicated on a threat of death, Roxana at first grasps power over her life and that of her child by deciding to end them both. She prefers death to her fate under slavery. She stoops over

¹¹ Orlando Patterson’s cross-cultural study of slavery, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, controversially defines a slave as “a socially dead person” (35). According to Patterson, the master’s “total power or property in the slave means exclusion of the claims and powers of others [slaves]” (35). Slaves have absolutely no right and power in themselves as social beings. Therefore, the slave is desocialized and depersonalized. Living as a slave is a primary act of submission, dishonor, and therefore degradation, Patterson argues (78). In other words, the slave is living-in-death or death-in-living. Such a condition describes social abjection in which the slave-bject is thrown off of the “living” social body, so that the white social order can preserve its power and property.

her baby and says: “Oh, I got to do it, yo’ po’ mammy’s got to kill you to save you, honey [...] dey don’t sell po’ niggers down de river over yonder” (13). Roxana thereby exercises the power over her son and herself that imitates the slaveholder’s dominant position to possess the slave’s life. Roxana carries out a death sentence without her master’s consent and in her own way. Her decision is an act of claiming her mastery over her life and that of her enslaved son¹².

Different from the master’s power, of course, is her plan to resurrect her son. In Kristeva’s words, Roxana “transforms the death drive into a start of life, of new significance” (Kristeva 15). When Roxana prepares the death ritual and clothes her son in a white baby’s pretty blouse, she attempts to create “‘I’ within the Other” (Kristeva 15). The abject creates a “self” in the Other that has already projected away from the center-“I.” Kristeva explains that the centripetal tendency of the abject is an attempt to build the speaking being in the abjected being. Roxana and her son, the abjected beings, are not allowed to uphold an ‘I’-subject under slavery. They are not the speaking being, not the master, not the subject. They are the Other. However, Roxana claims her ownership of her life and that of her son, “shatter[ing] the wall of repression” built around her and her son as slaves. Invading the inside of the boundary, she sabotages and blurs the meaning of the boundary. Roxana resurrects her son out of her master’s anticipated death penalty by giving him a new social identity to decide their own fates.

¹² Roxana’s decision to kill her baby to save him from slavery is carried out in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* when Sethe kills her baby girl for a similar reason. This scene is described in Twain’s somewhat humorous manner while Morrison provides a deeper psychological description of black motherhood. For both, this moment shows the ultimate resistance of a slave mother.

Roxana's Gothic fiction begins when she feels "ready for the tomb" in her slave cabin on the night of the threat from her master (13). But when she registers the fictionality of race (as reflected in her baby's appearance in the white baby's clothes), Roxana turns her direction from death to life. Switching the white master's baby and her baby is in effect an act of writing that exposes race as a "fiction of law and custom," not as a definite or essential concept. Roxana's son "was a slave, and by a fiction of law and custom a Negro" (9), but by her action Roxana exposes the fictionality of racial classification in Dawson's Landing. Her forging of this Gothic fiction resonates with Kristeva's words on the abject:

At that level of downfall in subject and object, the abject is the equivalent of death. And writing, which allows one to recover, is equal to a resurrection. The writer, then, finds himself marked out for identification with Christ, if only in order for him, too, to be rejected, ab-jected. (26)

In the face of Percy Driscoll's threat of death-sentence, Roxana recognizes her fate to social death. Yet this abjected downfall, equal to death, nonetheless gives her a chance to be a savior to herself and her child by rewriting the racial identity of her son. Her action of exchanging the babies means writing a new fiction of race identity. Roxana's resurrection of her son is her way of articulating the abject, or performing a return of the abject. Kristeva explains such an act of writing as "a-subjectivity" or "non-objectivity," that is, the articulation of the abject propounds "a sublimation of abjection" (26). Yet, this sublimation is performed "at the limit of social or subjective identity"; therefore, the sublimation of abjection

does not include “consecration,” Kristeva explains (26). It is forfeited. It is not holy or beautiful. Instead, it brings monstrous and terrifying effects to the privileged party. Similarly, Roxana’s writing becomes a strategy to resurrect her son, but it also represents a monstrous threat and horror to the white-centered town of Dawson’s Landing.

Roxana’s power to resurrect her son depends on her ability to understand the absurdity of law and custom that defines race as untransferrable and unchangeable. Slavery is based in part on the distinct binary opposition of blackness and whiteness and, as many scholars point out, blackness and whiteness are only the metaphorical terms that are invisibly inscribed in American minds. Kenneth Rickard explains in “Blood on the Margins: Reconstructing Race in Mark Twain’s *Pudd’nhead Wilson*.” (1997) that in American ideology the “one-drop rule” is the primary construction of racial identity. Merely “one-drop” of African blood marks a person as black. This one-drop rule was recognized as a matter of common knowledge even in the federal courts. Rickard observes that the rule “rests upon a metaphysical ideology that has no basis in biological fact,” but it is a “process of mystification” (66). From a similar perspective, in “Representing Miscegenation Law” (1988) Eva Saks collects and analyzes the American case law of miscegenation between 1819 and 1970. After the Civil War, miscegenation was counted as a crime of blood, a metaphor based on a figure of speech identifying “white blood” and “black blood.” Saks argues that miscegenation law was invented to protect and essentialize white supremacy and maintain the “legal and scientific myth that the boundary between the races

was natural, ahistorical, and biological” (53). Miscegenation law also originates from “horror at the conflation of [racial] difference” because the body of miscegenation creates the mythical “Mulatto monster” that threatens the social, national body (Saks, 63). Lee Clark Mitchell also argues in “‘De Nigger in You’: Race or Training in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*?” (1987) that the ‘blood’ that determined race was an “empty category” and was “invigorated by nothing but social convention” (301). These studies expose the black/white racial distinction as a mythical concept constructed by social need to protect white privilege. In this context, Tom becomes the most “fragile spot” that manifests the absurdity of the social myth of race category.

In Dawson’s Landing, this social myth of racial difference and its discourse legally and socially constructs Roxana’s identity as that of a black slave regardless of her white skin. Percy Driscoll’s threat reproduces the myth that the boundary between races is natural, ahistorical, biological, and therefore fundamental. When this legal myth drives Roxana to the edge of suicide, her desperate situation enables her to find in the white appearance of her son the “fragile spot” that threatens the social definition of racial identity (Kristeva 135). For Kristeva, it is the “fragile spot” that reveals our collapsed defenses of subjectivity and blurs inside and outside (135). Therefore, the “fragile spot” becomes a turning point where the abject returns. Roxana’s and her son’s white skin becomes the very “fragile spot” because their physical whiteness contradicts their social blackness, providing Roxana an opportunity to cross the borderline of the metaphorical distinction between whiteness and blackness. When Roxana

strips the babies, her baby Chambers, who becomes Tom after the exchange, and the white baby Tom, who later becomes Chambers, and exchanges their clothes, she realizes that their differences inhere only in their clothes: “Now who would b’lieve clo’es could do de like o’dat? Dog my cats if it ain’t all I kin do to tell t’other fum which, let alone his pappy” (14). She notices that a difference in white and black blood exists “only as a figure of speech” in which each is “mutually constitutive and equally fictitious” (Saks 40). The black baby’s white skin allows her to bestow the same exchange value on the black and white babies. Roxana’s ability to see exchangeability between black and white empowers her to work as the abject that “shatters the wall of repression” that white supremacy imposes on her and Tom (Kristeva 15). She overwrites the fiction of law and custom with her Gothic fiction by crossing over dichotomous categories of black and white, noble and mean, and slave and master.

Roxana’s strategic writing is perverse because she *adheres* “to Prohibition and Law” and *revokes* them at the same time. Roxana shows the pride of her white skin and ascribes Tom’s cowardly behavior to his black blood. Many readers criticize the fact that Roxana strictly follows the existing system of white supremacy. Patricia Mandia writes in “Children of Fate and Irony in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*” (1991) that Roxana “is conditioned to accept” racial prejudice (63). Mandia says that Roxana and Tom are trained and fated by environment, which makes them tragic heroes. Mitchell argues that even though Roxana switches the white and the black babies, she “does not thereby escape its [white society’s] standard” (302). Evan Carton even defines Roxana’s act as only an imitation of

“a fiction of law and custom” in *“Pudd’nhead Wilson and the Fiction of Law and Custom.”* (1982, 86). Roxana’s revolution, therefore, is not subversive, Carton argues. However, these critics underestimate the importance of the fact that in nineteenth century slave-holding America, slaves were forced to be silent; they could not articulate their opinions. As Shelly Fisher Fishkin mentions in *A Historical Guide to Mark Twain*, slaves would not express their pain and struggles to a little boy Twain¹³ (133). Instead, they told the young Twain ghost stories. Similarly, instead of confronting her masters or fighting the system directly, Roxana performs as the abject under a Gothic mask in order to attack the “fragile spot” of the system. Roxana’s plot exposes contradictions in the white, slave-owning patriarchy. Instead of speaking up against its injustices, she adopts the perverse strategy of the abject that “turns [a prohibition, a rule, or a law] aside, misleads, corrupts.” Roxana manipulates these laws in order to “take advantage of them; the better to deny them” (Kristeva 15)¹⁴.

Roxana secretly twists the existing fiction and rewrites it as her own. She kills the innocent white baby’s social identity “in the name of life” (her son’s life), and she “curbs the other’s suffering for [her] own profit” in Kristeva’s words (15).

Roxana transfers her fear of social death onto the master’s baby by giving him a

¹³ Fishkin describes Twain’s experience as a child listening to black slaves’ storytelling and admiring their rhetorical power. The limitation of slavery prevents the slaves from articulating their pain to the white body eager to listen to them. Instead, they told the boy ghost stories, which hid their feeling under the mask of horror, and which I believe were refined and revived best in Charles Chesnut’s conjure stories. Chesnut insisted that his stories came from his imagination based on research of conjure doctors, but they may come from a similar spirit and nature.

¹⁴ Kristeva, in *Powers of Horror*, celebrates Contemporary literature that seems to “acknowledge the impossibility of Religion, Morality, and the Law.” Those texts firmly stick to the superego, yet they simultaneously are fascinated by the abject. Writing such texts strongly imply “an ability to imagine the abject,” Kristeva argues. According Kristeva, such perverseness is required in writing the abject.

slave-name, and abjectifies the white baby, using the white's law and custom which defines her and her son to be the abject. Not only does she reject conforming to law and custom, she also uses this law against the white social order. Roxana's counter-fiction gives priority to the thirty-one white parts (31/32) of "Tom" over the thirty-second black blood and re-defines Tom as white. She willfully becomes "monstrous" when she defies the social order. When Vidar Pederson argues in "Of Slaves and Masters: Constructed Identities in Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*" (1994) that Roxana's changing babies is not challenging the social system because she never "verbally" questions the injustice of the system, this critic misses the perverse force of her act as the abject. On the surface, Roxana is submissive to the white-superior social order, but her act subverts the white-centered town's order by using their own law against them.

Roxana, therefore, becomes a site of horror to the slaveholding town: the black woman takes the most powerful place of the town, making her son its heir; she castrates its power; and finally she becomes the hidden but actual power who dominates patriarchal slaveholding society. Roxana's subversion is undetected by other townspeople. Not only does Roxana's strategy distort the white hierarchy, but the later revelation of Roxana's plot displays the absurdity and inadequacy of the system. For example, the impotent leader/real heir, false "Chambers," is an embarrassment of the town. He cannot belong to any group of either whites or blacks and is still called "Chambers," the master's son, at the end of the novel. False "Chambers" becomes another "abject" invisible in the town.

He is living in death. Such a revelation exposes the white myth that racial hierarchy is natural and inherited. Thus, Roxana's transgression of the racial borders becomes the threatening origin of horror for the existing white patriarchal society. Her narrative releases a subversive force that redefines slave-holding Dawson's Landing as a slave-mastered town.

Roxana's perverse Gothic power twists the concept of "honor" and genealogy. The genealogy of the F.F.V. at the beginning of the novel reappears when Roxana gives her own version of the "Smith-Pocahontas" family:

My great-great-great-gra'father en yo' great-great-great-great-gra'father was Ole Cap'n John Smith, de highest blood dat Ole Virginny ever turned out, en his great-great-gra'mother or somers along back dah, was Pocahontas de Injun queen, en her husbun' was a nigger king outen Africa. (70)

Roxana insists on the family tree and claims nobility in her blood. Some critics bemoan Roxana's obsession with white aristocrats and even her adoration of white supremacy. Mitchell argues that Roxana "accept[s] her society's opposition of white and black as a distinction between mind and body" (302). Forrest G. Robinson also writes that by attributing Tom's cowardice to the one drop of his black blood, Roxana becomes "the agent of the prejudice," the same as the master's cruel and self-serving white values (42). However, Roxana's attachment to genealogy and white values is better explained as the perverse act of the abject. Roxana invents the family tree of a slave who is not allowed to have a family name; she claims nobility that belongs only to white aristocrats. By

imitating the noble genealogy of F.F.V., Roxana mocks the aristocrat's obsession with genealogy and the superiority of white men. The presence of an Indian queen, an African king, and Captain John Smith suggests the long history of miscegenation from the very beginning of America. By contrasting the mixed family tree with white men's legitimate genealogy, Roxana ridicules the pride of the pure-white, noble blood in white men. Roxana's family tree secretly distorts white supremacy and therefore deconstructs the social system again.

Through the creation of a hybrid family tree, Roxana gives herself another power of manipulating the identity-defining system of patriarchal society, the power of naming. Roxana secretly imitates the power of the white master by bestowing upon her "black" son a surname, a privilege which a slave cannot have, and by blotting out the name of the legitimate "white" baby (11). Roxana's power to erase the surname of the white family places her on an equal level with the white master who is able to give a death sentence to the slave. Her manipulation of this identity-defining system accelerates when she blackmails her son in the latter part of the novel. Roxana threatens to deprive Tom of the surname "Driscoll" by exposing his "real" identity. She completes her imitation of the white master's deadly power by enforcing the death threat over both the rightful and the false heir. When Roxana exercises her desire to distort the existing slaveholding order, it secretly becomes a matriarchal plot in that only Roxana, a mother, can manipulate a surname and serve as the only parent for both Tom and Chambers. Indeed, all white fathers in the novel are weak or dead: Colonel Essex is no more than a name; Percy Driscoll dies bankrupt. Percy is an

ineffectual father who cannot even identify his son without the markers provided by clothing. Both fathers are dead before the major action of the novel commences. In the middle of the novel, Judge Driscoll, the living symbol of law and order in the community, is murdered by Tom, the avenging agent who crosses over the color line. Judge Driscoll's death suggests anarchy. By switching the only heir of F.F.V. with a black baby and by controlling the only heir of the white aristocrat, Roxana usurps the white father-figure in Dawson's Landing. She also assumes the position of mother for the only heir of F.F.V. and becomes a real ruler in the white-patriarchal social order.

It is interesting that Roxana's subversive plan begins in the white man's nursery. The nursery, in general, symbolizes maternal care and family succession. Yet, the Driscoll's nursery again exhibits the weakest spot of racial identities. The white boy's mother died within a week of childbirth, and the only mother in the nursery is a white-skinned black slave. In addition, the seemingly distinct racial boundary between the two babies in the nursery can be discerned only by virtue of their clothes. No one except Roxana can tell the white baby apart from the black baby. In this "fragile spot" of the slavery system, Roxana finds a beginning for her story. The place of the white heir becomes the most arbitrary spot where the racial distinction is blurred, and the very seat of horror where Roxana starts forging her plot. As Roxana's story develops, the main stage moves to a darker and deeper place which is capable of inhabiting the abject--the remote, haunted house "at the end" of the town's boundary (40). Nobody goes near the house, we are told. It is a "pale, weak, and wretched"

place that symbolizes the hidden truth of the town. It is infamous as “*the* haunted house”— the house of ghosts, the place of life and death (40). It is the place of alienation, horror, and the “ab-ject.” This haunted house becomes the central stage where Roxana authors her plot, and controls and orders false Tom, conjuring up a black Frankenstein in him. It is a laboratory for her to make a monster, an avenging agent in the body of her son, Tom. Roxana’s “strong character and aggressive commanding ways” are truly revealed and illuminated. In the wretched house, Roxana directs, commands, plots her own story.

The mother-son relationship between Roxana and Tom becomes a perverse business partnership as well. As soon as Roxana reveals Tom’s switched fate at the haunted house, she tells Tom that “[they’re] gwyne to talk business” (42). Roxana claims her reward for making him a white heir: “Didn’t I change you off en give you a good fambly en a good name, en made you a white gel’man en rich, wid store clothes on-- en what did I git for it?” (46). Roxana arranges monthly meeting at the haunted house for her allowance (of which she always takes only the exact amount). In addition to this business transaction, the monthly meetings satisfy both Roxana’s need to “rule over” somebody and Tom’s pleasure of chatting with her (46). The mother-son relation falls into a trade partnership that satisfies mutual needs. Even though Roxana’s subversive story is empowered by her extraordinary maternal insight which enables her to distinguish between the two new-born babies, Roxana confronts the complex problem of defining herself as a black slave mother within the prevailing social

structure of slavery¹⁵. Not only does she desert her role as a doting mammy to her white-master baby by condemning him to hellish slavery, Roxana plays the double image of a mother to her own son as well.

Roxana performs as two different mothers, both nurturing and denying the autonomy of the child, both a creator and a potential destroyer. According to Kristeva, abjection evokes “the theme of the two-faced mother” (159). Kristeva explains that “the baleful power of women” to bestow a mortal life “without infinity” makes the mother “Janus-faced,” a figure who marries beauty and death (159, 161). While Roxana’s initial act of changing the babies resurrects “Tom” from permanent social death, she acts on her power to erase his last name. When she meets Tom for the first time in several years, Roxana’s behavior resembles that of a stereotypical doting black mammy. But when her financial request is rejected, she turns herself into a vengeful monster, exulting over the “fine nice young gen’t’man kneelin’ down to a nigger wench” (39). Roxana reveals the truth and urges Tom to call her “mother” in order to obtain control over him. Tom realizes that Roxana is the mother who can potentially destroy him; she becomes a fearful and bold figure to him. Even Roxana’s motherly

¹⁵ Deborah Gray White in “*Ar’n’t I Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*” documents the diverse myths and facts of female slaves in the antebellum South. According to her, the white slave-holding South created a long tradition of black female stereotypes like the nurturing Mammy and the sexual Jezebel in order to maintain and justify slavery. However, the portrayal of Roxana in *Pudd’nhead Wilson* disrupts and breaks these stereotypes. Roxana is described as a desirable woman and the fair-skinned mistress of a white Virginia gentleman, but her maternal role for her own son, not for the white master’s baby, is the main force of the plot. According to Porter, Roxana is located in “a region where mothers are sexual, slaves are powerful, and women are temporarily out of control, exposing the falseness of the Mammy/Jezebel opposition of black female” (124). Roxana as a slave mother becomes the blurred, confused, anxiety-produced region repressed by the binary Jezebel/Mammy. Again, she becomes an abject in crossing the boundary.

comfort terrifies Tom, so that “intimacies quickly became horrible to him” (81). Some critics like Linda Byrd emphasize Roxana’s love for her son. Yet Roxana’s motherhood is or becomes rather close to a *performance* in a monstrous, calculated way¹⁶. Roxana quickly switches between two different mother-roles in different situations. At times she is a loving, warm-hearted, pious, and simple black mother who can sell herself as a slave to save her son. At other times, she is cunning and ruthless enough to threaten stabbing that same son. Half way into the novel, Roxana appears to be a tyrannical, gigantic mother-monster who resembles an invisible magician seen only to Tom. She is almost invisible to the white townspeople. Roxana is mentioned only in the context of Tom. Her ghostly presence controls Tom and teaches him subversive strategies. Roxana is simultaneously portrayed as a mammy and a Jezebel, a creator (of life) and a destroyer, (the symbol of) life and death all at the same time. Roxana is the “black power” who conjures up sublimation and death at once; she wields the power of the abject and horror.

Roxana’s abjected strategy is most illuminated in the recurring disguises and cross-dressing of herself and her son. From early in the novel, disguises and clothes play essential roles in determining identity in Dawson’s Landing. Switching the babies is possible when Roxana exchanges their clothes. As Linda

¹⁶ Roxana’s complex motherhood is manifested in the novel. I believe Roxana’s almost monstrous picture of motherhood is more likely from the view of the dominant discourse. Sethe in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* also presents a similar complexity as a mother, yet Morrison gives a deeper, psychological explanation from the slave-mother’s perspective. I will explore this further in the last chapter.

Morris points out, clothes are “markers of identity, race, and gender”¹⁷ (37). The social definition of race and gender can only be visible with clothing. As I mentioned earlier, Percy Driscoll, Tom’s father, cannot distinguish his son without clothes. The seemingly natural and clear boundary of racial difference disappears in the moment when Roxana exchanges the babies’ clothes. When she “stripped off” the slave’s coarse clothes from her son and dressed “the naked little creature” in the white baby’s beautiful shirt “with its bright blue bows and dainty flummery of ruffles,” the blackness of Roxana’s son disappears (14). Without clothes, Roxana realizes, the babies look the same. It is the most significant moment and driving force of her plot when she eradicates the boundary between races.

Racial distinction slips further away when Roxana and Tom play with disguise. When Roxana escapes from the deep-South plantation to which Tom has sold her, she “disguises” herself as a black slave by crossing over her gender and double-crossing her race. She dresses as a man and “blackens” her “white” face in order to hide her white-faced black slave identity. She erases all visible signs of her social identity, again showing that racial distinction is socially constructed, not natural. When Tom also disguises himself as a “Negro” woman during his robberies of the neighborhood, he mocks and erases the distinction of

¹⁷ Linda Morris offers a lengthy discussion of the cross-dressing theme in her article, “Beneath the Veil: Clothing, Race, and Gender in Mark Twain’s *Pudd’nhead Wilson*.” *Studies in American Fiction* 27 (1999): 37-52. Morris studies how clothing as metaphor and cross-dressing address racial issues in the novel, and concludes that “[w]hile the old categories seem to be reinstated, they are confounded to such a degree that the old order is shaken to its core” (50). However, at the end of the novel, Roxana’s son Tom remains monstrous and guilty of being a black slave, not of being a murderer; Roxana is reduced to a sinner. While this ending shows a shaken social structure, it is still ambiguous in that the change does not favor Tom and Roxana. Such an ending implies Twain’s divided, ambiguous attitude towards racial issue of the time.

gender and race. Only by disguising his face, Tom ironically reveals his racial identity as defined by society. Tom again blackens his face to look like a black slave when he attempts to rob Judge Driscoll and then disguises himself as a black girl when he escapes. Tom's white-skinned face is erased, and his blackness revealed. Tom's white-face becomes a disguise that enables him to hide the socially-defined "blackness" and to be a white heir of the Driscoll. His real skin-color becomes a disguise for the socially-given "real" identity, while disguises with coal and clothing reveal the "real" identity. This situation itself shows us how absurd is the law of the slaveholding town. Ironically, disguise reveals the black identity that society imposes on him. By the middle of the novel, Tom's identity loses its social signification. Tom appears to be white to the townspeople, but he is black according to the socially "rightful" definition. He seems to be free, but in fact, he is a slave by law and custom. His name is not fixed, his gender is interchangeable by clothes, and his racial appearance easily fools townspeople including Wilson. Tom's identity is hardly defined; it floats over all definitions. Roxana and Tom act upon and against the "fiction" through which identity is constituted in Dawson's Landing. Roxana and Tom perform a mingling of boundaries which stand for race and gender, exposing the arbitrariness of racial and gender distinctions.

As Roxana reverses the legal and social fiction of Dawson's Landing, her voice usurps the main narrative voice of the novel. The chapter after Roxana's switching of the babies begins with the narrator's comment:

This history must henceforth accommodate itself to the change which Roxana has consummated, and call the real heir 'Chambers' and the usurping little slave 'Thomas a Becket'—shortening this latter name to 'Tom,' for daily, as the people about him did. (17)

Roxana's voice invades the main narration of the novel, and her Gothic narration overrides and usurps the narrative voice of the novel (120). Roxana's secret, uncanny plot becomes the main plot and motivation of the novel. False "Tom," a black slave, becomes the center of the town and Roxana's narration. From as early as Chapter 4, the quotation marks around false "Tom" and false "Chambers," which indicate their illegitimacy, slip away. Everyone calls Tom and Chambers as Roxana names them, even after their real identity is revealed by Wilson at the end of the novel. Roxana's unnamable, unsignifiable story devours and decenters the main narration and changes the legal names of the white and the black babies permanently, both in the novel and in scholarly discussion of the novel. Roxana's interception of the narrative meets its climax in Chapter 18 when she returns from the South plantation on a rainy, sinister Friday. With blackened face in a black man's clothes and with her "unkempt masses of long brown hair tumbled down," Roxana stops the legitimate voice of the main narrative for a while and tells in her own voice her own "slave narrative" about how horribly she was treated in the down-the-river plantation and how she finally escaped from it (85). Not only does her oral storytelling educate Tom about inhumane slavery, it also empowers him to act as an agent of vengeance and to murder the Judge, the symbol of the white legal system and Tom's foster "father." Roxana's

alternative, disruptive oral voice/language is mingled with the main narration and blurs the narrative boundary between them. As Fishkin argues in *Was Huck Black?* the “blending of black voices with white ones” in Chapter 18 “deconstructs ‘race’ as a meaningful category” again (144).

However, Twain’s description of Roxana’s son Tom manifests his ambiguous attitude towards racial prejudice/stereotype in his time. While Twain bestows a remarkable power upon Roxana with whom readers can sympathize, Tom is described as an irreparable “monster.” Tom’s behavior is so awful that readers are almost relieved with his fall at the end of the novel. He abuses Chambers, robs his neighbors and uncle, sells his own mother down the river, and even murders his foster-father. Tom once questions the racist system and its arbitrary social order on the night he discovers his racial identity, yet such reflection does not last long. Twain does not fully explain Tom’s absolute monstrosity either. Tom’s abominable action may come from “one drop of black blood,” as suggested in Roxana’s comment. Yet, the narration also suggests Tom’s bad habits are related to his white upbringing and a college education. Tom’s final destination only implies possible explanations. Tom is sold down to river due to his social identity as a slave, which Twain’s narrator particularly indicates to be absurd in tone; however, many readers cannot help feeling safe and satisfied to see the most dangerous person, who happens to be a highly mixed “mulatto,” permanently branded and punished. Such characterization seems to be contradictory to Twain’s outspoken damnation of slavery. Twain’s ambiguous attitude toward Tom is parallel to America’s common prejudice and

fear of bi-racial individuals who were regarded worse than just being black due to their ability of crossing racial boundaries. Therefore, Tom's monstrosity¹⁸ should be understood in the context of America's deeply rooted fear of the abjected bi-racial individuals which even Twain could not fully overcome.

Therefore, Twain's ambiguity about race drives both Tom and Roxana into a downfall. Roxana's plot, before it reaches its climax, is interrupted by the novel's peripheral character Pudd'nhead Wilson. Wilson comes to center stage and restores the fiction of law and custom once erased by Roxana. Wilson introduces logic and reason into Dawson's Landing and returns subversive Roxana and Tom to less than their original place. He completes and strengthens, not just restores, white patriarchal society. Pudd'nhead Wilson defeats Roxana's unreasonable and monstrous Gothic power with his "normal" reasoning and law, which destroy her lawlessness and detachment from the social order. Wilson, "incarnate analytic intelligence, the personification of science," becomes a hero to hush these threatening figures like the noisy "invisible dog" that broke the calm equilibrium of the town in the first chapter.

Defending one of the Italian twins, Luigi, who is falsely accused of the murder of Judge Driscoll, Wilson discovers not only that Tom is the murderer but also that Roxana switched her master's baby and hers at cradle. Wilson's proof relies on his old hobby fingerprinting¹⁹. Wilson's fingerprinting method, although it

¹⁸ This "bad nigger" stereotype recurs in Morrison's Cholly in *The Bluest Eye*. However, she explains the complexity of black men's inner psyche in an effective way. I will discuss this point in the later chapter.

¹⁹ Anne P. Wigger was the first critic to recognize the importance of the fingerprint in the novel in "The Source of Fingerprint Material in Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson and those Extraordinary*

brings justice to this particular crime of murder, plays a role of reinstating the racial category stronger than ever. The fingerprint Wilson offers as a proof of identity is "a sure identifier" which all human beings carry with them as their physical marks (141). With this unchanging physical marker of personal identity, Wilson reaffirms the social fiction that racial differences are inherent and ineradicable. For him, science and law become the tools and permanent identifiers of racial identity. This amazing marker redefines and rebuilds the hierarchical boundaries of race when Wilson strips all disguises in Roxana's plot and identifies Tom's history:

Every human being carries with him from his cradle to his grave certain physical marks which do not change their character, and by which he can always be identified—and that without shade of doubt or question. These marks are his signature, his physiological autograph, so to speak, and this autograph cannot be counterfeited, nor can he disguise it or hide it away, nor can it become illegible by the wear and mutations of time. This signature is not his face—age can change that beyond recognition; it is not his hair, for that can fall out; it is not his height, for duplicates of that exist; it is not his form, for duplicates of that exist also, whereas this signature is each man's very own—there is no duplicate of it among the

Twins" (1957). After Wigger's article was published, many critics developed interesting discussions regarding fingerprinting. Among these criticisms is Lee Clark Mitchell's article, "'De Nigger in You': Race or Training in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*?" She briefly argues that Wilson's fingerprinting suggests determinism of human fate "unchanged by any amount of training." According to her, Twain displays his belief about the "inability to alter one's endowments" (306).

swarming populations of the globe. (140)

Wilson's speech is eloquent and powerful, so that it sounds fascinating and even horrifying. He introduces this new identifier as the only absolute method for identifying individuals. It cannot be "counterfeited," disguised, or hidden. As Pederson argues, although the fingerprint is "racial-neutral" because it is based on individual, not on group features, it reinforces socially constructed identities when it serves to define and connect who is white and free. Derek Parker Royal also says in "The Clinician as Enslaver: *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and the Rationalization of Identity" (2002) that this system of identification is used to reconfirm the former social order and is a powerful and irresistible tool to re-establish white patriarchy in the novel. Wilson's fingerprint is more logical and believable than Roxana's maternal ability to identify the babies. The Western-scientific, rationalized, and deterministic proof wins over Roxana's maternal instinct and intuition. It "depersonalizes" the person (Royal 427). The "real" black slave and the "real" white heir return to their "rightful" places. Wilson, thereby, serves to "conceal the crime [slavery] which lies hidden at the heart of society" (Robinson 44). In Dawson's Landing, Wilson replaces Judge Driscoll, the symbol of the old order and power, and rebuilds the new social order and racial hierarchy, different from the old order yet same in its foundation—only more strongly fortified.

Wilson's scientific proof succeeds in restoring the damaged patriarchal society and eliminating the anti-social, subversive abject, Roxana and Tom, from the social system, drawing them down to their original positions. Roxana's strong

will and her strategy to intrude upon the center are defeated and permanently thrown off by the newly-established boundary. Twain concludes the novel with false Tom's fate after Wilson's courtroom scene. Tom is sentenced to imprisonment for life at first, but creditors rightfully claim that "Tom was lawfully their property" and that the murder occurs due to the "erroneous inventory" (115). Everyone understands that "there was reason in it." "Everybody granted that if 'Tom' were white and free it would unquestionably be right to punish him—it would be no loss to anybody; but to shut up a valuable slave for life—that was quite another matter" (115). Therefore, Tom, redefined as a slave, black, non-human, and property, is pardoned to be sold down the river. Tom is reduced to simple property which cannot be judged even as a human being, and Roxana to "a poor miserable sinner," the permanently silenced "abject": "Roxana's heart is broken. . . . but her hurts were too deep for money to heal; the spirit in her eye was quenched, her martial bearing departed with it, and the voice of her laughter ceased in the land" (47-48). Roxana becomes incurable, and her resounding voice is erased by making her invisible and eliminating her social existence. Wilson not only restores the white patriarchal order, he creates an invincible slave society by imbuing with logic and science a previously incoherent, unreasonable society. The power that was once secretly transferred to a slave mother is returned and remains marked at the site of white male supremacy.

Wilson's fingerprinting releases the innocent man and punishes the murderer Tom. But Wilson's trial is no more than a stage performance. Wilson surprises and hypnotizes the audience with his fascinating materials. Twain's

apologetic preface to the novel, “A Whisper to the Reader,” also ironically destroys the authenticity of Wilson’s court speech. Although Twain insists that the law-chapters are “right and straight” thanks to William Hicks’ proofreading and revising, Hicks, Twain’s only authority on the court-scene, is “a little rusty on his law” (1). Confessing that Hicks’ words are the only proof of the accuracy of the court scenes, the preface subverts the novel’s authenticity and reduces Wilson’s performance in the court into a minstrel-like show.

Wilson’s trial scene conveniently resolves the issues in dispute mainly by discovering the black criminal. His speech does not clarify the motive of the murder, his speech is focused more on the switched babies than on the trial itself. He argues that Tom surely is a murderer because Tom is black and a slave. Wilson’s proof is based on a belief that fate is inscribed in one’s hand and cannot be changed. Wilson’s belief reflects the popular practice of Eugenics in the early twentieth century which was used to naturalize racial hierarchy. In this sense, his firm belief in fingerprinting is no more than another superstition that substitutes for the social fiction of Dawson’s Landing. Wilson becomes a witch to conjure up another belief system out of science.

As with Twain’s other novels, the ending of *Pudd’nhead Wilson* is ambiguous. Despite the restoration and reaffirmation of the original social system, the very person who finally sees Tom and restores a semblance of honor and order to the community is a stranger who has acquired the title of “Pudd’nhead.” He lives at the end of the town, alienated from the townspeople. Wilson’s house is right next to the haunted house where Roxana resides. In addition, his reliance

on fingerprints as a means of criminal detection had been ridiculed for a long time by townspeople and undercuts the whole structure of familial identity on which the society stands. His effort to establish a complete fingerprint file of every member of the community is a stratagem for checking personal identity against human physiology as an absolute identity mark. Wilson refuses to rely on names and faces, the “conventional hallmarks of identity” in Cox’s words (265). In fact, his arduous hobby is based on an essential distrust of the identity of the entire town. Mark Twain, while revealing the failure of Reconstruction, defines the restoration as the result of stupidity drawn from a stranger. Even though the novel ends with Roxana’s and Tom’s downfalls and Wilson’s success, it is worth noting that Twain entitles the novel *The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead Wilson*, not *The Tragedy of Roxana, a Negro Girl* nor *The Rise of Pudd’nhead Wilson*. Twain defines Wilson’s success in and assimilation to Dawson’s Landing as a tragedy, and Wilson, a new rising hero of the town, is permanently branded as “pudd’nhead” by Twain himself. In the course of the novel, Wilson loses a part of his legal name, and Wilson’s restoration of the social order only results in one more reversion of a master and a slave by creating a white-faced, white-language speaking “black” slave and a vernacular speaking “white” master who cannot “endure the terrors of the white man’s parlor” (114).

Tom’s fate can be read as embodying the situation of blacks in the 1890s. As Reconstruction fails, Roxana’s plot is doomed to fail to subvert the slave system. Even though black slaves were legally emancipated, the fundamental racist mindset still dominated nineteenth century America. The new president

and legal system approved the segregation law in 1890s just as Wilson, a mayor of the town, substitutes for Judge Driscoll in the novel. Scientific discourse, including Darwinistic biology, was used to provide another “proof” of racial essentialism, defining blacks as inferior and unworthy of citizenship. This reality is more of a horror for Twain than Roxana’s Gothic plot is to Dawson’s Landing. Roxana’s seemingly perverse motherhood and Tom’s monstrosity remain unexamined and unexplained. In addition, Roxana’s sudden change to a conforming slave falls into the stereotypical. The temporary subversion of Roxana and Tom is marked as “sin” at the end of novel. Twain’s silence on (or inability to recognize) this ending reflects his ambiguous attitudes towards race issue in America. Nonetheless, Roxana’s spirit and her Gothic stratagems have haunted America’s minds, and have gained strength in later writers. As Kristeva argues, the “abject” never stops crossing the border and returning back to the center. Likewise, Roxana’s abjected spirit keeps returning to critical attention and continues to be re-incarnated in subsequent literary works. Her subversive use of the Gothic is more developed and more aggressive in the African-American author, Charles W. Chesnutt.

Chapter III
Storytelling and Resistance in
Charles W. Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman*

In a sense, Charles W. Chesnutt's short story collection, *The Conjure Woman* (1899), begins where Mark Twain's *Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* ends. Twain, as a Euro-American writer, betrays his ambivalence about the defeat of Reconstruction by relinquishing Roxana's subversive Gothic plot to the scientific, rationalized voice of Pudd'nhead Wilson. Chesnutt's conjure stories, on the other hand, validate and develop the perspective represented by Roxana. In Chesnutt's world, Pudd'nhead Wilson's rationalized voice, resonating through John the Yankee investor who comes to the South to exploit its resources, fails to convince readers and instead submits to the ex-slave Julius's uncanny world view. Just as Roxana attempts to write her fiction in a Gothic mode, Julius, Chesnutt's black storyteller, also portrays slavery as a horrifying reality and attacks racial domination in the post-Reconstruction era. Just as Roxana's Gothic scheme is contrasted with Wilson's scientific reasoning, Chesnutt contrasts John's rationalized, scientific narration with Julius's Gothic storytelling, thereby inviting the reader to glimpse the reality of slavery.

In each story except “The Goophered Grapevine,” the Yankee John expresses his business concerns and asks Julius for advice, since he is not familiar with Southern culture. Julius answers by telling a related story of antebellum slavery, which includes transformations of human beings into animals or inanimate beings by means of the old superstitious belief called a “goopher.”²⁰ In Julius’s stories, a goopher turns a slave into a mule, a wolf, a cat, an oak tree, a frog, or a bird; a white master is turned into a black slave. At the end of these stories, John claims to have discovered Julius’s hidden agenda of personal gain in telling the conjure tales. Constantly attempting to destroy Julius’s credibility, John appears to be a more complex version of Pudd’nhead Wilson in that he both rationalizes and capitalizes upon Southern resources. However, Julius’s ability to tell conjure tales and manipulate Gothic imagery constantly disrupts John’s rationalized worldview and empowers Julius to expose the absurdity of John’s attitude, one which condones the restoration of white supremacy. Julius’s transformation tales conjure up the return of the socially repressed element that was abjected and Gothicized under slavery, thereby reconstituting a point of view that draws attention to the same danger of racial hegemony in postbellum America. Julius’s marvelous storytelling skill has been discussed ever since the novel was published. Many critics are amazed by the way Julius “deceives” John and manipulates the situation to maximize his benefit. I argue instead that Julius’s storytelling is intended to make the invisible slaves visible, to make their

²⁰ Chesnutt, in his “Superstition and Folk-lore of the South” (1901), tells how he interviewed conjure doctors and learned about conjuration. Goopher was “the latter-day prevalence of the old-time belief” (231). Conjure doctors often use goopher dirt to heal scars, curse someone, or change a human being into an animal or inanimate thing. I will explain goopher further later.

silence shout, and to bring the margin into focus. He is a conjure man who calls up the abject that has been thrown beyond the social boundary, by using his secret formula of storytelling. My discussion focuses on the way Julius uses Gothic strategies to conjure the abject and bestow a speaking power upon this non-speaking being.

The tensions between John's narrative and Julius's tales have been discussed by many critics, particularly since the 1970s²¹. David Britt in "Chesnutt's Conjure Tales: What You See is What You Get" (1972), was the first critic to notice the importance of "the double narrative structure" in the text (271). Britt describes Julius's narrative as "an extended metaphor that reveals the dehumanization of the slave" and criticizes John's attempt to be the official interpreter of Julius's meaning (275). In "Expanding the Collective Memory: Charles W. Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman* Tales" (1994) Sandra Monyreaux

²¹ Although *The Conjure Woman* was popular when it first appeared, the book did not receive fair critical attention until the 1970s. Chesnutt's contemporary reviewers considered him a folktale writer or a "regional" Southern writer and concentrated on his use of dialect and superstition, often comparing his tales with those of Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page, writers of plantation tales in late nineteenth century America. An anonymous reviewer in *The Commercial Advertiser* (June 20, 1899) said that the book was "very limited and not artistic." Florence A. H. Morgan, in *The Bookman* (1899), even wrote that *The Conjure Woman* delineated "the phase of slave life" and a benevolent Uncle Tom-like character who is "devoted to his master" (372-73). Another reviewer from the *Boston Courier* (2 Apr. 1899) praised Chesnutt's "true-to-life description and real portrayal." William Dean Howells, a leading critic of that time, described the conjure stories as "faithfully portrayed against" stereotypes (700). Howells even compared Chesnutt with Henry James and Maupassant. Elrick B. Davis (1929) suggests that "Chesnutt is in the history of American letters the most important writer Cleveland has ever housed" (10). Until the 1960s such criticisms pigeonholed Chesnutt as "a Southern writer". Robert A. Smith, in his short note of 1962, categorizes the stories as "folktales" of "simple people who have nothing practical on which to depend" (232). Donald M. Winkelman said that Chesnutt's use of folklore was an artificial tool "to make his real point, the post-bellum South, the humanity of the Negro, and his relationships with those around him" (133). Julian D. Mason Jr. (1967) stated that the conjure stories "are nothing if not Southern" (83). He described Chesnutt as a type of "the Southern writer" who is only among the second rate of American prose writers (89). These early reviews and criticisms obscured the subversiveness of Julius's storytelling and delayed more substantial studies on Chesnutt's works.

emphasizes that *The Conjure Woman* presents a power struggle between the stories of John and Julius. Jeffrey Myers, in "Other Nature: Resistance to Ecological Hegemony in Charles W. Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman*" (2003), interprets the stories from an environmental perspective, emphasizing the struggles between human culture and nature. Myers emphasizes the contrast between John's narrative that draws a line "between self and the environment" and Julius' challenging voice that deconstructs such an "illusory separation" (10). Likewise, John's frame story and Julius's oral storytelling engage in a power struggle "to form and control the definition" and viewpoint of the world, as Joyce Hope Scott claims in "Who Goophered Whom: the African American Fabulist and His Tale in Charles Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman*" (1990, 57).

Employing a rational, dogmatic worldview, John determines the boundaries in which he accepts or rejects the validity of experience. John's narrative is based on the "Western dream of control in a discourse" of rationalization and science, as Ellen Goldner says in "Other(ed) Ghosts: Gothicism and Bonds of Reason in Melville, Chesnutt, and Morrison" (61). Just as Pudd'nhead Wilson introduces scientific methods of differentiating a white master from a black slave to Dawson's Landing, John also attempts to reform the Old South with a rational and scientific perspective. John's frame story repeatedly ridicules blacks' acceptance of irrationality and supernaturalism, defining black people as inferior and ignorant. John brings a rationalist way of thinking and abjectifies the black as subhuman and unfit for citizenship in the new nation. In this sense, John's rationalism becomes the foundation of his

racism, and his arrival at the old Southern town can be defined as a return to white dominion and black disfranchisement—a new form of slavery. Although physical slavery has been abolished, the same mentality, fortified after the Civil War by discourses of science and rationality, still defines blacks as marginal: the new form of slavery is ideological domination. In Chesnutt's stories, John attempts to abjectify Julius and blackness, while Julius, through his tales, conjures the abject which has been diminished to a ghostly presence or an inarticulate voice. John repeatedly labels Julius's view of life as "strange," "different," and "foreign," qualities he attributes to "superstition" or "ancestral feticism [sic]"²². By defining Julius's worldview in these terms, John persistently dismisses and abjectifies Julius's perspective. Through John's definitions, Julius becomes the "not us."

John's repeated abjection of Julius and his tales reflects the "national process of forgetting" in post-bellum America as described by Amy Kaplan in "Nation, Region, and Empire" (1991). After the Civil War, America needed to cultivate a sense of national unity. Post-Reconstruction ideology sought to forget the past and the "legacy of slavery" in order to rebuild the nation, according to Kaplan (241). In this context of national forgetting, plantation tales such as those by Joel Chandler Harris, Thomas Nelson Page, and their imitators enjoyed great popularity. These tales created a mythical, romanticized antebellum past, expressing nostalgia for antebellum slavery. Such tales created the image of a

²² Charles W. Chesnutt, *The Conjure Woman and Other Tales*. Ed. Richard H. Brodhead, Durham: Duke UP, 1993. 185. All quotations from this text will be indicated only by page number in parentheses.

benevolent and compassionate white master and his contented slaves living peacefully on the plantation. These gentle and often humorous stories often evoke a sense of stability and nostalgia. Forgetting the painful past through nostalgia seemed to create a national identity and a seamless social subjectivity. In doing so, the official ideology of America registered all unfamiliar and strange views in terms of a “crisis of subjectivity” in which strangeness embodies, in Kristeva’s terms, “the excess that impedes the seamless integration into the social structure” (Penny 128). In this sense the period enacted a national process of abjection.

Chesnutt’s stories are far from the plantation tales of Harris or Page. Chesnutt exposes a reality of the past slavery through Julius’s storytelling, reversing the “national forgetting process.” John finds none of their nostalgic sentiments in the stories Julius tells. Instead, Julius “never indulged in any regrets for the Arcadian joyousness and irresponsibility which was a somewhat popular conception of slavery” at the turn of the century (125). He often “[speaks] of a cruel deed” of white masters “with a furtive disapproval” (124). Julius’ tales are filled with suffering slaves and their magical transformations that repeatedly undermine an “objective” world-view and deny the official vision of the nation. Thus John must accuse Julius’s tales of being deceptive, fictional, irrational, and “different.” From John’s point of view, Julius’s “way of looking at the past seemed very strange *to us*; his view of certain sides of life was essentially different *from ours*” (125, *italics mine*). John differentiates and alienates Julius from his own subjectivity—“us.” John’s subjectivity relies on scientific and rationalist discourses

that separate the “us” from the “not-us”. Through his constant differentiation of Julius, John attempts to preserve his subjectivity and worldview by “throwing off” the improper, irrational black-object. John’s discourse meticulously registers all instabilities that threaten his identity and perspective, repeatedly asserting the strangeness/ foreignness which is far from his objective truth. Even when John praises Julius’s remarkable rhetorical ability in storytelling, and even while comparing him to skillful storytellers like “Aesop or Grimm or Hoffman,” he never admits that Julius’s tales register historical truths (196). For John, “the laborer was worth [sic] of his [Julius’s] hire” (185).

Not only does John alienate Julius’ stories, he identifies them as “ghost stories” by emphasizing superficial features of the genre and downgrading the stories as mere entertainment. He attributes physical conventions of the Gothic to Julius’s conjure stories, thereby separating irrational, fictional narratives from “truthful” and “authentic” Western discourse. For John, Julius’s conjure stories are only useful to relieve a dull Sunday afternoon. “The Goophered Grapevine” starts with the locale of a ruined plantation on which Julius resides—“decayed gateposts,” “rotting rail fence,” and “ruined chimney” (33). In “Po’ Sandy” John categorizes Julius’s story of Sandy as a “gruesome narrative” (53). The outer story of “The Grey Wolf’s Ha’nt” also wraps around Julius’s story with a lonely and gloomy surrounding mood:

The air had darkened while the old man related this harrowing tale.

The rising wind whistled around the eaves, slammed the loose window-shutters, and, still increasing, drove the rain in fiercer gusts

into the piazza. As Julius finished his story and we rose to seek shelter within doors, the blast caught the angle of some chimney or gable in the rear of the house, and bore to our ears a long, wailing note, an epitome, as it were, of remorse and hopelessness. (105)

The somber night, blasting wind, and rain are typical signs of the Gothic. John encircles Julius's story with these features ideal for "the dark and solemn swamp" and "the heavy, aromatic scent of the day, faintly suggestive of funeral wreaths" (110). John's tries to contaminate Julius's subversive storytelling in and through such superficial interpretations. "The Dumb Witness," one of the most powerful conjure tales, also starts with John's sinister description of the old estate, recalling Edgar Allan Poe's Gothic tales. By stipulating Gothic conventions as the background to Julius's tales, John trivializes Julius's truthfulness; at the same time, he indicts the conjure as irrational and insincere. He reduces Julius's narrating voice to an insignificant mumbling, a barely articulate form of expression.

When John dismisses Julius's conjure tales as superstition, framing them as one-dimensional ghost stories, he also frames the Gothic itself in a manner that serves the dominant culture. Hemenway argues in "Gothic Sociology: Charles Chesnutt and the Gothic Mode" (1974) that the Gothic has expressed a Western racist psychology that defines blackness as evil and demonic. John's Gothic code also reflects Hemenway's account of early American Gothic. In John's narrative, Julius's story is "an epitome of remorse and hopelessness" and charged with perverse energy (Hemenway 105). John uses the Gothic color code

to demonize blacks. Such conventions in Chesnut's stories, however, can function as a mask and counter-discourse that both obscures and expresses Julius's rebelliousness and social criticism. If the Western identification of blackness with evil is a strategy to build racial hierarchy, a black storyteller's use of the same conventions can become a counter-mask that disguises subversive resistance to white hegemony. In addition, the Gothic's position as a devalued genre allows an opportunity for active resistance of the kind described by bell hooks²³. Exploiting Gothic qualities, black speakers voiced their feelings under a mask. In fact, the Gothic genre itself embodies a battlefield of competing discourses in which Western ideology abjectifies racial others, but where these "others" also return in the ghostly guises of the abject. Goldner defines the Gothic representation of slavery as "a mode of haunting" in "Other(ed) Ghosts: Gothicism and the Bonds of Reason in Melville, Chesnut, and Morrison." For him, Gothic elements expose "the distortion in the lens through which rational discourse views the world" (60). Gothic haunting thereby functions as "the vehicle through which the suppressed returns" (61). Such returns of the abject represent danger and horror relative to the boundaries set up by the dominant discourse. Julius's storytelling also wears this Gothic mask to summon the slaves' ghostly presences. Likewise, through the Gothic qualities in Julius's tales, Chesnut offers a new perspective.

²³ As I discussed in Chapter 1, bell hooks argues that the margin can be a site of resistance from which the oppressed can speak. hooks refuses to reverse the power hierarchy between the dominant and the dominated. Instead, she emphasizes the need to speak all that has been oppressed and silenced from the very site of resistance.

John's manner of connecting Gothic qualities to the conjure stories emphasizes the impossibility of validating Julius's conjure tales. When Julius brings his rabbit foot as a good-luck charm in "Sis' Becky's Pickaninny," John admonishes Julius for superstition and classifies Julius's story as "a very ingenious fairy tale" which does not prove that a rabbit's foot is a good-luck charm (92). John chides Julius, saying "your people will never rise in the world until they throw off these childish superstitions" (92). John believes that he honors the "light of reason and common sense" (92). Yet it is Julius's conjure tale, not John's philosophy, that heals Annie's melancholy: "my wife's condition took a turn for the better from this very day [when Julius told the conjure story], and she was soon on the way to ultimate recovery" (92). Moreover, the frame story of "The Gray Wolf Ha'nt" exposes an irony in John's denial of transformation. In the beginning of the story, John reads a passage to Annie to relieve her boredom; but Annie finds it "nonsense" (95). The passage is a philosophical, abstract explanation of the kind of transformation which is the center of Julius's conjure stories. John reads:

The difficulty of dealing with transformations so many-sided as those which all existences have undergone, or are undergoing, is such as to make a complete and deductive interpretation almost hopeless. So to grasp the total process of redistribution of matter and motion as to see simultaneously its several necessary results in their actual interdependence is scarcely possible. There is, however, a mode of rendering the process as a whole tolerably

comprehensible. Though the genesis of the rearrangement of every evolving aggregate is in itself one, it presents to our intelligence.

(94-95)

This passage supplements the transformations of Dan into a wolf and Mahaly into a black cat in the conjure story Julius tells them later. John reads the passage in his philosophy book that explains the same transformations “which all existences have undergone,” yet he does not understand the possible transgression effected by metamorphosis in Julius’s stories (94). John’s tedious philosophic passage explains the impossibility of comprehending transformations, yet John still demands a rational explanation for Julius’s transformation tales. Ironically, John’s denial of transformation clearly exposes his inability to understand real meanings in the philosophical passage. Even when John reads the passage about transformation, he does not seem to understand its meaning. John’s inability to understand this topic shows that his confidence in philosophy and reason is actually another form of blindfold-belief. Chesnutt suggests that if Julius’s confidence in supernaturalism and transformation is a “childish superstition,” John’s belief in reason is itself a different kind of witchcraft or superstition.

Julius’s power of Gothic storytelling makes the invisible visible and gives power to the indecipherable voice of the ghost-slave. Julius’s tales resonate with cries that the master narrative renders inarticulate in order to construct a new meaning and signification. In “Po’ Sandy,” at Annie’s request, John decides to build a new kitchen, using the lumber of the old school house in the back of his

main house. One day John asks Julius to drive him and Annie to the sawmill to buy lumber, and there Julius interprets the sound made by the circular saw as the blood-cuddling cries of the slave Sandy. At the beginning of the story, Julius establishes that Sandy had already lost his first wife who was sold to pay his master's debt; now his master is separating Sandy from Tenie his second wife by loaning Sandy, "a monst'us good nigger," to his relatives on other plantations. Tenie uses her conjuring power to turn Sandy into an oak tree to keep Sandy from being taken away and to preserve their relationship. But when Tenie goes away to nurse the sick mistress overnight, Sandy, the oak tree, is brutally chopped up and cut into lump at the sawmill in order to build a kitchen which is later used as the old schoolhouse. In addition to Sandy's cruel death, Tenie is tied to a tree in front of the sawmill to watch Sandy being cut to pieces. Tenie soon died of grief on the building floor, which has been haunted by their spirits ever since. Julius claims that Sandy's moaning can be heard from the circular saw "eating" the log:

[. . .] the machinery of the mill was set in motion, and the circular saw began to eat its way through the log, with a loud whirl which resounded throughout the vicinity of the mill. The sound rose and fell in a sort of rhythmic cadence, which, heard from where we sat, was not unpleasing, and not loud enough to prevent conversation.

(45)

While John describes the sound as "unpleasing," Julius hears Sandy's "moanin' en groanin' en sweekin'" cries that "cuddle [his] blood" (45). The saw suggests

the mechanical, inhuman system of slavery. The process of the circular saw chopping the log is described as the oral activity of “eating,” which represents the deadly drive of the slaveholding society to “devour the Other.” This devouring act epitomizes slavery’s “tendency toward interiorizing and spiritualizing the abject,” in Kristeva’s words (118-19). The eating action of the saw is equivalent to the abjection process enacted in slavery that robs the slave Sandy of humanity and makes him a part of the kitchen building—practically and symbolically a prison of slaves. The saw’s mechanical action symbolizes the power of slavery that transforms black human beings into pieces of lumber. Slavery is symbolized by the repeated, mechanical action of the saw that reduces Sandy to an inarticulate cry because slavery legally defined persons as inanimate property, as chattel.

But Sandy’s story does not end until his moans haunt the kitchen building. In the inarticulate sounds of the Gothic, Sandy’s abjected spirit keeps returning to haunt the kitchen. In fact, Sandy’s moans and Tenie’s spirit prevent the whites from using the building. Sandy’s ghostly presence gives the slaves an excuse to refuse to work at night. After listening to Sandy’s tragedy, Annie asks John not to tear down the old school. Instead, she allows Julius to use the building for his church meeting. The silenced, officially forgotten trauma of Sandy and Tenie returns as an inarticulate presence to haunt white supremacist society. The grotesque transformations at the center of Julius’s stories conjure all that white society prevents and silences. Sandy’s ghostly moaning expresses his grief over and refusal of family separations, and his resistance to oppression. Memorialized

through Julius's storytelling, Sandy dons a shape and proclaims the horrible reality of slavery.

The ghostly sound of Sandy's suffering resembles another slave's fate, as heard from a bullfrog in "Tobe's Tribulation." One night when Julius comes to John's house, John offers Julius a dish of frog legs, but Julius refuses because he says the bull frog reminds him of "somebody w'at's los' somewhar, en can't fin' de way back" (185). In Julius's story, the slave Tobe is turned into a bullfrog. Tobe wants to escape to the North after hearing of another slave's success in escaping, but he is scared of being caught and punished. Therefore he asks the conjure woman, Aunt Peggy, to change him into another living form for a safe escape to freedom. After he is turned into a bear and then a fox, he is still scared and fails to escape. Finally Aunt Peggy changes Tobe into a bull frog. For fear of being caught, the bullfrog-man Tobe still stays in the pond near Aunt Peggy's house until she forgets about Tobe and dies. For forty years thereafter, Tobe cries for Aunt Peggy and freedom. The sound of frogs brings about the "lament of a lost soul," which John never hears (185). John's rationalism keeps him from hearing the slave's voice in the tale and understanding the meaning of the story. Just as Tobe still is imprisoned in a bullfrog's body even after he is legally freed from slavery, African Americans in Chesnut's time continued to struggle with racial violence and discrimination. Tobe's inaudible voice symbolizes the cries of black people for humane treatment and a dignity that was still unavailable in post-bellum America. Both Sandy's and Tobe's fates suggest the tragic entrapment of slavery that can only be heard in the broken language of the

Gothic. Such Gothic voices summon and record the pain silenced by the dominant discourse.

In Julius's stories Gothic qualities merge with the world of the goopher, the region of the marginalized and abjected. According to Robert Farris Thompson, the word "goopher" refers to "grave dirt," which has an etymological root in the Kikongo verb *kafwa*, "to die" (105). Goopher dirt, therefore, is a "substitution for corpse." (Puckett 249). If Kristeva is right in saying that the human corpse "occasions the greatest concentration of abjection and fascination" and therefore is "the utmost of abjection," the goopher represents "death infecting life. Abject" (147, 4). In this sense, the goopher is working in-between death and life, in-between all boundaries that Western thought and philosophy define. Used for good or evil, the goopher is the abjected belief system that most radically challenges what the master discourse defines as "normal" and "sensible." When John and Annie hear of the word *goopher* from Julius, they immediately dismiss it as an "unfamiliar word" because the goopher is the unknown and mysterious region to John and his dominant discourse (35). The goopher works at the site that John most fears and to which he is most blind, the boundary between rational and irrational powers. It can change a slave into animal, a white into a black slave, a child into a bird, a human being into a piece of ham. It ignores, invades, and blurs all the boundaries and borders. In this sense, the goopher works as a vehicle for the slave-abject to resist the oppressing system and stir up horrors to the point where the existing social system is "turned into something undecidable" and unstable (Kristeva 150). The goopher provides a means for

slaves to express deeply felt emotions, to survive trauma, and even to change their situation.

The incomprehensible goopher with its Gothic affinities threatens the identity of subject-whites and their dominant discourse. John constantly posits binary oppositions and presents himself as the bearer of rational truth in opposition to Julius's irrational and superstitious belief. John determines the boundaries between races, between the animate and the inanimate, between superior and inferior, between logic and nonsense. Such boundaries become more fluid and twisted in Julius's tale. Transformations of a human being into an animal or an inanimate form expose the distortions bound up in the rationalist society's institution of slavery—an institutional conjuration that transforms humans into beings with the legal status of animals or property. Although Western racist hegemony is based on distinctive differences between animal and human, black and white, slavery itself enacts the interchangeability between black and animal.

John even compares Julius's intellect with the base mentality of horses and dogs and dismisses the black man's belief in the supernatural as childish (55, 83). Such a self-contradictory concept in slavery actually makes "irrational" transformations possible as Annie concludes from Sandy's story: "What a system it was . . . under which such things were possible!" (53). Sandy's transformation, indeed, results from his desire to preserve his family from the separation which they suffer under slavery.

The goopher's perverse power lies in working along the border of the mentality that cannot distinguish between animal and human being²⁴, at once exaggerating, underscoring, *and* subverting the dehumanizing slave system. In "The Goophered Grapevine," the slave Henry's physical condition is bound to the vines and the plantation. Henry's condition, however, is caused by Mars Dugal' McAdoo's greed. Mars McAdoo has asked Aunt Peggy to goopher the grapevine, so that he can prevent slaves from eating grapes and so increase his profits. When Mars McAdoo discovers the new slave Henry has eaten grapes without knowing that the grapevine is goophered, he asks Aunt Peggy to *reverse* the conjure on Henry so he will not lose this more precious property—Henry himself. As a result, Henry's health fluctuates along the seasonal cycle. When grapes begin to grow, Henry's hair grows out and he gets stronger and younger; when grapes fall, he becomes bald, old, and weak. Mars McAdoo finds a way to profit from Henry's transformation by selling Henry at a high price in spring and buying him back at the lowest price in winter. Henry's physical link to the grapevine represents the slave's fate as a property to be traded at any time.

Similarly, in "Sis' Beck's Pickaninny" Kunnel Pen'leton trades Becky for a race horse, separating her from her baby Mose, and equating her with an animal. Becky's new owner refuses to take her baby with her: "I doan raise niggers; I raises hosses, en I doan wanter be both'rin' wid no nigger babies. Nemmine de baby. I'll keep dat 'oman so busy she'll fergit de baby; fer niggers is made ter wuk,

²⁴ The perverse power of the abject was explained in the previous chapter. The goopher, as abject, works *along with* its adversary, just as Roxana both adheres to *and* twists the white's law and custom for her own benefit.

en dey ain' got no time fer no sich foolis'ness ez babies" (86). Slaves are not allowed to have feeling to grieve over the loss of family. For him the slave is the same as a horse, or the less than one. "Dave's Neckliss" includes the powerful psychological transformation of a slave who turns into ham. Dave is wrongly accused and punished for a theft by having a piece of ham shackled to his neck. Dave's master does not investigate the matter or listen to Dave. Even after the ham is removed, Dave identifies himself with the ham and finally hangs himself like bacon in the smokehouse. This grotesque psychological transformation demonstrates how the lives of slaves are legally treated as the commodities of white masters. As Eric Sundquist argues, Dave's inability to give up the symbol of the ham "dramatizes not only the dehumanization of racism, but also the self-destructive effects of African Americans' own acceptance" (380). Chesnut suggests that slavery not only makes and treats black slaves as working chattels but it also engraves their inferiority on them²⁵.

Yet "The Conjuror's Revenge," cast in a comical idiom, suggests strong resistance to the psychological impact of slavery. After taking the conjure man's "shote," Primus is turned into a mule by the conjure man and is re-sold to his master who does not know the mule is Primus. Unlike other stories, "The Conjuror's Revenge" is centered on the Primus-mule's "strange" behaviors, rather than the transformation itself. The mule-man Primus acts just like a human being: he eats tobacco plants, drinks wine, and attacks Dan, another slave who

²⁵ The self-destructive acceptance of what the dominant culture engraves is grotesquely and powerfully depicted by Toni Morrison in *The Bluest Eye*. I will discuss this topic further in the next chapter.

dates Primus's wife. This weird behavior by the mule is soon reported to the master. The mule-man Primus's "weird" acts enact a refusal to be treated as a mule and a determination to retain his humanity. The mule's coveting of wine, cigarettes, and a woman is strange to people because of course a mule is supposed to work and conform to its master's will.

When slavery slyly rationalizes the abjection process that transforms blacks into chattel/property, goopher mirrors the way in which slavery works, yet reverses its core signification. Julius's stories portray the power of the goopher as positive, not-weird, natural, and even normal, not as evil or simple trickery. The goopher becomes a means of healing and relieving the slaves' agony. The goopher appears to be a positive force which is contrasted with John's rationalized world and slavery. In "Po' Sandy," the goopher is a tool for Sandy to avoid another separation from Tenie. The voodoo doll in "Hot-Foot Hannibal" marries the two lovers, Chloe and Jeff. Aunt Peggy's goopher in "Sis Becky's Pickaninny" circumvents the master's transaction to reverse the trade of Becky for a horse, reuniting the slave mother and her son. "Mars Jeems's Nightmare" includes a political conjuration of the white master who does not allow slaves to sing, dance, play, or marry. A slave, Solomon, asks Aunt Peggy to work a goopher to save him from the brutal white master. Aunt Peggy changes Mars Jeems into a slave so that he will experience the inhumane system as a slave, and turns him back again later. Even though Mars Jeems believes his experience was only a nightmare, this nightmarish experience changes him into a "noo man" (67). The goopher allows Solomon to marry the girl he loves. In Julius's story,

even a nightmare can benefit a slave whose “only resource of power was the magic of the conjure woman,” according to Cary D. Wintz in “Race and Realism in the Fiction of Charles W. Chesnut” (1972, 125). Gothic features in conjuration are positive symbols, just as Roxana’s act of exchanging babies is the act of redeeming her son from social death. The conjure becomes a healing and redeeming strategy that provides power for the powerless; the goopher offers an alternative way of reasoning.

Many early critics, including many of Chesnut’s contemporaries, point out Julius’s shrewd motives in telling the tales, or criticize his acceptance of black stereotypes. In the end of every story, John claims to detect Julius’s selfish intention to take advantage of him. Using the tales, Julius tries to protect his gain from the deserted vineyard in “The Goophered Grapevine,” to use the old-kitchen building for his Church meeting in “Po’ Sandy,” to make John and Annie rehire his “lazy” grandson in “Mars Jeems’ Nightmare,” and to buy a new suit in “The Conjuror’s Revenge.” Charles Alexander, an early reviewer, wrote that Julius’s narratives “spring from a motive of questionable selfishness” (1899); Anonymous reviewers from *The Southern Workmen*, *The Literary World*, and *The Christian Advocate* called Julius a schemer, hypocrite, and fancy liar. Wintz described Julius as “an astute old Negro who took advantage of the white woman’s gullibility and sympathies and turned the white’s belief that the blacks lack serious mental capacity back on to the originators of the myth” (124). Melvin Dixon also describes him as a trickster who “fulfills his own material and psychological needs by telling folktales” (186). It is true that Julius tricks John to

protect his living situation. Julius's trickeries, however, may not be his main purpose or motive for storytelling. John's questions trigger Julius's past memories correspondent to the current happenings. Julius's economic reason is only a "red herring" to hide his real intentions, in Eric J. Sundquist's words (373). Julius uses the financial motive as a mask to disguise his condemnation of slavery. Often Julius's trickeries provide comical scene to the readers. That is why early critics related Chesnutt's conjure tales to the Br'er Rabbit tales that were extremely popular in Chesnutt's time. Julius's disguise as a trickster gratifies John's expectation by giving him what he wants to see and believe.

Julius's subtle manipulation is more explicit in "A Victim of Heredity: or, Why the Darkey Loves Chicken." When John catches the black man who has been stealing his chickens, he invokes the popular stereotype of blacks as chicken thieves. Julius surprisingly agrees with John's comment, returning the blame to the white's greedy motive: "A w'te man's ter balme fer dat" (174). In Julius's stories, a white slave-owner, out of greed, asks Aunt Peggy to "goopher" his black slaves to eat less while they work the same. The goopher seems to work at first, but soon the slaves get weaker and sicker. Aunt Peggy advises the white slave-owner to buy all the chickens to feed his slaves until they regain their original strength. The white master has to buy all chickens in the village in order not to lose his property—the slaves. According to Julius, that is why blacks have to eat chicken. Julius's story makes Annie release the chicken thief, yet Julius's stories are not limited to helping his fellow black man. By telling the greedy white slave-owner's story, Julius ascribes the stereotyping of the blacks to the white

man and slavery, twisting the stereotypes to reveal the more fundamental problem of slavery and racist thinking in America.

Julius's description of little Mose in "Sis' Becky's Pickaninny" also seems to embrace another stereotype, this one of singing and dancing blacks. Sis' Becky's little Mose, a "shiny the Darkey-eyedes' little nigger," can "sing en whistle des lack a mawkin'-bird" (91). Mose often comes up to the master's house to entertain white folks with singing and dancing. This image of a singing black boy is reminiscent of the infamous "Topsy"²⁶ of Chesnut's times. Yet such minstrel acts, Julius emphasizes, enable Mose to buy freedom for his mother and himself. The stereotype of a singing black becomes both a mask that hides Mose's desire for freedom and a strategy that raises money to fulfill his purpose.

Such manipulation is empowered by Julius's rhetorical skill in oral storytelling. His dialect further masks the stories' real meaning, counteracting John's colonizing power. In effect, Chesnut's text becomes a site of struggle between oral and the written culture. Julius's marginalized, deviant vernacular overpowers John's normal, standard written English. In story after story, Julius's oral storytelling seems more credible to Annie and the readers. Julius's language of the conjure creates a site of cultural struggles because it operates on the border between two cultures, two different points of view, John's rationalist, official discourse, and Julius's oral folktales. John repeatedly asserts that he knows objective "truth" in opposition to Julius's superstitious "fairy tale," and

²⁶ "Topsy" is a little black girl from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The "Topsy" character became a popular stereotype of a silly dancing black girl which often appeared in minstrelsy and "Tom" shows in the nineteenth century.

insists that Julius's speech is riddled with lies. But it is Julius's stories, not John's documents, that bear the "stamp of truth" (92), the true story of antebellum history. John notices that Julius's story has "perspective and coherence" (35). In fact, Julius's vernacular trumps John's "official" language, inspiring more confidence and becoming a controlling voice in the work. Such manipulation with language *and* non-language is most clearly manifested in "The Dumb Witness," one of the most subversive conjure stories.

Although not included in the collection of seven conjure stories originally published in 1899²⁷, "The Dumb Witness" features one of the strongest characters in Julius's conjure tales. Viney, a former slave, overturns the master's tool of oppression in order to destroy the master. The story begins with John's description of Malcolm's decaying estate. When he passes the declining marks of the plantation, John sees Malcolm imploring Viney, an old housemaid of mixed color, to tell him the location of valuable papers. Viney responds only with an inarticulate "murmuring." According to Julius's story, the unmarried Roger Murchison had inherited a large estate. Since Roger was often absent in the estate, his nephew Malcolm managed the property, and Viney, the slave housekeeper, ran the house. Once Malcolm announced that he was going to marry a white lady, Viney became furious for some unstated reason and told Malcolm's fiancée something that made her break the engagement. When

²⁷ The first edition of the conjure stories included only seven stories, all of which contain a goopher: "The Goophered Grapevine," "Po' Sandy," "Mars Jeem's Nightmare," "The Conjuror's Revenge," "Sis Becky's Peckaninny," "Gray Wolf's Ha'nt," and "Hot-Foot Hannibal." Richard H. Brodhead, in the Introduction of *The Conjure Woman and Other Tales* discusses the editor's intention, arguing that other stories not included in the first edition of *The Conjure Woman* lack recourse to conjure, but have even more subversive qualities.

Malcolm found out that Viney was responsible for the broken engagement, he punished Viney in some way the story does not specify. Soon after, Malcolm received a letter from the dying uncle that he [Roger] had hidden valuable documents that would prove Malcolm's right to the estate and fortune. The letter also indicated that only Viney, who is "of our blood," knew the hidden place (166). Malcolm was "commanding, threatening, expostulating, entreating her to try, just, once more, to tell him his uncle's message" (170). But Viney cannot reveal the place because she has lost her power of speech on account of the previous punishment. Upon Malcolm's death, Viney reveals the location to his nephew, who restores the decaying plantation and estates. Ironically the papers were hidden on the seat of an old oak arm chair where Malcolm had been sitting for years. Viney had pretended to lose her speech in order to control Malcolm.

Although the story does not explicitly include goopher roots or mixture, it features a strong subversive element in the figure of Viney. Instead of using roots, Viney uses her relationship to language for conjuration. Like Julius, Viney is of mixed blood, combining Indian, black, and white (163). In addition, John's observation strongly implies and Roger's letter confirms that she is a Murchison: "[Viney's] face was enough like [Malcolm's], in a feminine way to suggest that they might be related in some degree" (159). Yet she is excluded from the legitimate Murchison family. She is also physically silenced. When Malcolm punishes Viney, he proclaims, "I will teach you to tell tales about our master. I will put it out of your power to dip your tongue in where you are not concerned" (165). Ironically, Viney's silence itself becomes her subversive strategy against her

master. Viney has a power over words since only her words can reveal the location of the documents; by silencing Viney, Malcolm disinherits himself. By manipulating truth and meaning, she becomes a master of her master. The power structure is reversed.

Viney's silence contrasts with the logical Western language John treasures. Viney cannot speak a word that Malcolm or John can understand due to the wound from the previous mistreatment. Richard H. Brodhead claims that Viney's inarticulate babble may be "a non-European language that sounds like babble to white folk, an issue that the tale leaves wholly enigmatic" (18).

[John] thought at first in some foreign tongue. But after moment I knew that no language or dialect, at least none of European origin, could consist of such discordant jargon, such a meaningless cacophony as that which fell from the woman's[Viney's] lips. And as she went on, pouring out a flood of sounds that were not words, and which yet seemed now and then vaguely to suggest words, as clouds suggest the shapes of mountains and trees and strange beasts, the old man seemed to bend like a reed before a storm, and began to expostulate, accompanying his words with deprecatory gestures. (160)

John calls Viney's language "discordant" and "meaningless" because he cannot understand meanings. Her language is like "clouds" that produce shapeless, abundant, and multiple meanings. Viney's babble sound has a power to make Malcolm "bend like a reed before storm" and begin to "expostulate,

accompanying his words with deprecatory gesture" (160). Her inarticulate babbling, in reverse, silences Malcolm and becomes a constant reminder of his brutal act.

Viney perversely exploits a slave stereotype, frustrating Malcolm's pursuit of the hidden papers. Malcolm hires a free Negro to teach Viney how to write so that she can write the location of the documents, but she pretends that she cannot understand the lessons. Malcolm does not even question her inability to learn because he attributes it to a "remarkable stupidity" of slaves (168). Viney's performance of stupidity is credible to the white masters. Viney, like the stereotypically loyal slaves, stays and helps Malcolm after the Civil War, never leaving the estate. She does simple housework until others believe that she shares Malcolm's affliction (170). She appears to be a female version of "Uncle Tom." But Viney stays at the estate only to torture Malcolm and witness his misfortune and self-destruction. Performing her speechless role, she stays so that she can watch Malcolm with her "inscrutable eyes" (170).

Viney's gaze at Malcolm is described several times in John's narrative: "She was watching him from the porch" with "the same inscrutable eyes" (170). For years Viney watches him gradually become unbalanced. Freud's "The Uncanny" interprets a phobia about eyes as revealing a deep terror that constitutes "a castration complex." Scopophilia exists when one gets pleasure from looking at another person as an object. The individual becomes aroused from watching an objectified other. Laura Mulvey, in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," also emphasizes the significance of a dominant male gaze as

a tool of objectifying the Other²⁸. According to Mulvey, the bearer of the look has power to assign meaning to the looked-at-object. Kristeva further explains “seeing” as a process of abjection: “Voyeurism accompanies the writing of abjection” (46). “Looking” registers as the abject what the signifying system throws off of the system. It is no accident that plantations are managed by a white overseer’s watchful eye in an attempt to maintain total control over their lives. Slaves had to cope with the constant pressure of being “the watched.” The act of watching abjectified and tamed slaves. In the first encounter, John’s ‘observation’ in “Goophered Grapevine” gives a minstrel-like picture of Julius even before he listens to Julius’s stories: “He held on his knees a hat full of grapes, over which he was smacking his lips with great gusto, and a pile of grapeskins near him indicated that the performance was no new thing” (34).

However, in “The Dumb Witness,” it is the (ex-)slave woman Viney who bears the gazing over her white master. She bears and creates meaning, defining Malcolm as crazy and bizarre. John also states that Malcolm’s “eyes were turned toward” Viney (159). But it is Viney’s “inscrutable eyes” that persist and remain ‘till the story ends (170). This scene embodies what bell hooks calls “the oppositional gaze.” For hooks, the oppositional gaze responds to the dominant and colonizing looking-relationship and is constituted by understanding and awareness of racial politics. The oppositional gaze “has been and is a site of

²⁸ Laura Mulvey discusses how mainstream cinema structures “ways of seeing and pleasure in looking” (7). According to Mulvey, woman is an icon threatening male subjectivity because she represents castration. Thus, the male gaze functions to turn this threatening female figure into a fetish and objectify it. Mulvey’s classic article relates to the power of the gaze in cinema, but her argument can also apply to the analysis of race relation.

resistance for colonized black people” (116). So Viney’s act of looking at Malcolm “creates a critical space” where the binary opposition of racial hierarchy is continually undermined (hooks 123). From the porch Viney watches Malcolm dying and decaying. Viney’s gaze opens the possibility of agency, manifesting her resistance in the face of structures of the white master’s domination.

In *The Conjure Woman*, Chesnutt similarly creates a space to open the possibility of a conversation between the oppressed and oppressor by summoning the abject that has been thrown off in the institution of Western hegemony and domination. In so doing, Julius’s conjure stories wield the subversive power to correct John and Annie, disrupt their binary thought, and instigate a form of multiple discourse. *The Conjure Woman* presented the African-American presence through the apparently inarticulate sound and imagery of the Gothic; this strategy persists into the period of the “New Negro” Renaissance and into the late twentieth century. Other African-American writers including Jean Toomer, Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison, and Richard Wright use Gothic elements in their novels. In contemporary writing, Toni Morrison brilliantly exploits “the powers of horror” embodied in the Gothic-abject, with its uncanny ability to conjure the repressed of American history.

Chapter IV

Reviving the “Ghosts in the Machine:”

Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*

While in different ways Mark Twain and Charles W. Chesnutt represent the ghosts of slavery which the dominant society has abjected, Toni Morrison, in *The Bluest Eye*²⁹ (1970), examines the inner struggle of African-Americans in a white-privileged world. In this context Morrison conjures up a range of “monstrous” images: a father who rapes his own daughter; an “ugly,” deranged girl who has no sense of self-worth and is finally impregnated by her father; a mother who does not love her daughter and is devoted only to the white family for whom she works. Releasing this grotesque story of cultural “monsters,” Morrison subverts the central cultural myth of white-centered society as encoded in the image of “Dick-and-Jane.”

Here I use the term “myth” in the sense characterized by Roland Barthes as a paradoxically “illusory reality” that circulates widely and serves to systematize value in everyday life. Myth constructs a world for society’s members and imposes a “value” that they follow (117). In *Mythologies*, Barthes challenges belief in the innocence and naturalness of such mythic texts and practices which

²⁹ All quotations from this text are indicated with pages in this chapter.

“fabricate” the dominant ideology and “mimic a universal order which has fixated once and for all the hierarchy of possessions.” Myth functions as “ideology” that “[immobilizes] the world” and masks the real structure of power in society (155). A society’s dominant myth characterizes the identity and boundary of its members and provides a sense of solidarity while alienating those who cannot assimilate to the myth. Myth becomes *the* imperialistic eye which both guards and supervises its members and judges them with its presented “value.”

The Bluest Eye exposes the homogeneous, colonizing power of American myth, and delineates the dilemma of African-Americans who must live inside a myth to which they do not belong. Morrison argues in *Playing in the Dark* that the American myth creates “Americanness,” which reflects and preserves only the white male view (5). Her emphasis on such terms as “Americanness,” “white myth,” and “whiteness” indict the myth that inscribes white lives and standards as neutral, normative and necessary for all to pursue and follow³⁰. African-Americans confront the everyday contradiction between a mythical world in which they have no part and a real world which they know well. Myth operates to make the African-American presence invisible and monstrous in American society. *The Bluest Eye* explores the monstrous, monolithic power of the whiteness myth, reviving the ghosts imprisoned by the homogenizing myth machine, in order to construct a site of resistance. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison conjures up these “ghosts in the machine” whom she calls “active but unsummoned presences that

³⁰ Peggy McIntosh, in “White Privilege and Male Privilege,” articulates that white privilege (the so called “the myth of meritocracy”) confers power not only in order to control other races but also to dehumanize and even morally “murder” them.

can distort the workings of the machine and can also *make* it work” (“Unspoken” 13).

In conjuring up the presence of the cultural ghost-object, *The Bluest Eye* employs non-normative language and multiple narrating voices, including that of the main narrator, Claudia McTeer. Claudia remembers her childhood from an adult vantage point, but she narrates the story from a child’s point of view, albeit one that is often overridden by her mature voice. Claudia re-members and articulates the ghostly presence of the black girl, Pecola Breedlove, who phantasmatically conforms to the white myth’s monstrous power which defines her as ugly and “strange.” Claudia’s narration emphasizes the brutal power of white-centered culture, constructing African-Americans as invisible, silenced ghosts, but also opening a potential site of resistance in the Gothic-object.

The Bluest Eye is connected to the Black Power movement of the 1960s, which aroused the anxieties of white America. After the Civil Rights movement led the way to the Voting Rights and Civil Rights Acts that ended the Jim Crow laws, many African-Americans worked to consolidate their cultural heritage. The political activists of the 1960s advocated African-American features for black dolls³¹, proclaiming “Black is Beautiful.” As Morrison acknowledges in the Afterword of the novel, “[t]he reclamation of racial beauty in the sixties stirred these thoughts, made me think about the necessity for the claim” (210). However, Morrison’s concern is not limited to the question of racial *beauty*. In a 1974 *New*

³¹ In this connection, see Kenneth B. Clark and Mamie P Clark. “Racial Identification and Preference in Negro Children.” *Reading in Social Psychology*. New York: Henry Holt, 1947. 169-78.

York Times Magazine article called "Rediscovering Black History," Morrison argues that the slogan "Black is Beautiful" shows a romanticized image of African beauty that focuses solely on physical appearance rather than "intelligence" and "spiritual health" (14). According to Morrison, this approach evokes a reactionary politics that devalues African-American experience and reproduces middle-class white values in an inverted form. Morrison, instead, seeks to "recognize and rescue those qualities of resistance, excellence and integrity that were so much a part of our past and so useful to us and to the generations of blacks now growing up" (14). Merely proposing another standard of black beauty creates another binary opposition. For Morrison, it is just another way of adopting white standards, and does not challenge the foundational problem of African-Americans' symbolic non-existence in America. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison critiques the binary world of beauty and ugliness and its judgmental gaze. She criticizes the psychically entrenched stereotypes of African-Americans and summons up the abjected ghost of Pecola, who hopes to obtain "the bluest eye." To revive this abjected, ghostly, Morrison deploys non-normative language, experimental storytelling and Gothic elements as a counter-discourse designed to create a new African-American selfhood.

Morrison deliberately juxtaposes the black girl Pecola Breedlove's "grotesque" story with popular reading material, the Dick and Jane primer that was used in American classrooms during the early Twentieth Century. This primer represents the romantic beauty myth by portraying a happy, white middle-class family. The Dick and Jane story pervaded the educational system and was

a ubiquitous cultural phenomenon whose imagery was displayed in movies, billboards, cups, and candies. Pictures and stories related to the primer were displayed in shops, magazines, newspapers, and window signs. In effect, this text became a cultural manifesto for an ideal white American family. Children were educated to believe that Dick and Jane were the ideal American children whom they should emulate, with no acknowledgement that Dick and Jane represent only elite middle-class children of Anglo-Saxon heritage. As Morrison argues in "Unspeakable Things Unspoken," we are "the subjects of our own narrative, witnesses to and participants in our own experience" (9). The Dick-and-Jane primer not only teaches children how to read and write language, but it also constitutes children's first official and systematic encounter with language and cultural norms.

In the preface of her novel Morrison deliberately defamiliarizes the Dick-and-Jane story by eradicating its punctuation and spacing. Repeating the same text three times, she disfigures the text more aggressively each time. The second repetition omits punctuation and capitalization, and the third even drops the spaces between words. Barbara Christian explains in "The Contemporary Fables of Toni Morrison" that removing the punctuation "heightens the lack of internal integrity essential to their simplistic order" (61). Without these mechanical devices of spacing and punctuation the text loses its familiarity, meaning, function, and cultural pertinence. The picture of the white family is displayed as artifice, one produced by the machinery of myth. The rhythms of the Dick-and-Jane story undergo nightmarish acceleration, and the words fuse into a

monolithic chunk. Here Morrison deploys “the Gothic defamiliarization of reality” in which “something familiar becomes estranged from us” by deconstructing the grammar and the order of the story (Kilgore 220). Maggie Kilgore, in her book *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, claims that the Gothic’s defamiliarization of reality suggests “a tension between a lower nature and interfering system of repression, which internalizes the gothic conflict between individual and society” (220). By rendering the Dick-and-Jane text unreadable, Morrison forewarns readers about the grotesque outcomes that this canonical text evokes. When the devices of myth fail, this cultural manifesto becomes a misshapen monster.

Similarly, Morrison situates Pecola’s story in an unnatural seasonal cycle, deconstructing the mythical belief in which everything is eventually revived according to a cyclical pattern of renewal. Morrison names each section after a season of the year beginning with Fall and ending with Summer. In Greek myth, the seasonal cycle is supposed to move from winter to spring, symbolizing the promise that everything will be revived and the dead will be resurrected. All elements of dark, coldness, and death are exorcised, while warmth, life, and revival are recycled. Morrison’s use of the regeneration myth, however, is deeply related to the abjection process which throws out all the dirt and impurities of a society in preparation for rejuvenation and solidarity among its members. Pecola does not belong to this ritual of regeneration because she is among the ones that must be thrown out of the cycle so that the culture of whiteness can renew itself.

Morrison, thus, starts Pecola’s story with “Autumn,” moves to “Winter” and “Spring,” and ends with “Summer,” foreshadowing that the seasonal cycle will

produce a disastrous outcome. As Christian explains, such unnatural seasons are “ironic and brutal comments on Pecola’s descent into madness” (62). The “Autumn” chapter shows the environment in which the Breedloves live and suffer. Pecola’s family lives in an abandoned store, not a green-and-white house. The “Winter” chapter portrays how Pecola is rejected even in the black community and how “colored” folks assimilate and internalize whiteness and learn to despise their own blackness. Spring does not bring renewed life either. The “Spring” chapter only provides a “false spring day.” Early in the chapter, the twigs bend into a complete circle, but their hopefulness is only “a change in whipping style” (97). All Claudia can remember about Spring is the ache of being switched, the forsythia signifying death (97). Likewise, the Breedloves suffer and are reduced to invisible ghosts by racism and the poisonous seasonal myth. Pecola is raped by her own father, and descends into madness thanks to Soaphead Church’s evil scheme. The “Summer” chapter begins with the warning of storms and death. Frieda and Claudia plant seeds for Pecola, but, as Claudia informs us at the beginning of the story, Claudia’s seeds won’t sprout. Everything runs toward death and despair without a hint of hope, and Pecola’s story sinks into the seasonal discontinuity and disorder which express the destructive outcomes of this particular myth. The seasonal titles stand out as perverse contradictions of Pecola’s experience, and there is no renewal for Pecola: renewal is only allowed to white Dicks and Janes. Pecola must be cast out of the regeneration cycle in order to ensure the safety of white culture, for her existence disturbs it. The seasonal cycle of the oldest Western myths becomes a horrible exorcism of

blackness, which secures only the superior position of white culture. Thus, the regeneration myth becomes a death process for Pecola.

Morrison divides Pecola's story of despair and non-revival into smaller chapters, which are each preceded by a different portion of the spaceless, distorted text from the Dick and Jane primer. Except for the first one, these chapters begin with an unreadable phrase from the primer which corresponds to Pecola's life as described in the chapter. The fixed and perfect world of myth is sharply juxtaposed with the alienated world of Pecola and her family. Pecola does not have white skin with blue eyes like Jane. Pecola does not have anyone to love or be loved by: she lacks a friend, a dog, or a cat to play with. Pecola and her family are held in "contempt" by the black community; her father was "the old Dog Breedlove [who] had burned up his house" (17). Pecola does not live with a loving family; she lives in an abandoned store with angry parents who fight and curse each other every day. This abandoned place both represents and reinforces their physical and cultural alienation.

To describe the condition of Pecola's family, the omniscient narrator uses a term that denotes both strong belief and legal condemnation: "conviction." The narrator says that Pecola and her family are "convicted" as "ugly." Their ugliness comes from the cultural, legal "conviction."

You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious, all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without

question. The master had said, "You are ugly people. They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. "Yes," they had said. "You are right." And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it a mantle over them, and went about the world with it. Dealing with it each according to his way (39).

As a legal term, "conviction" evokes a long history of injustice including segregation, anti-miscegenation and Jim Crow laws, as well as slavery itself, all of which have established America's hierarchical binaries of white and black. This system of legislated injustice enforces racial hierarchy and condones the superior value of whiteness. Having been sanctioned by the American legal system, the value of whiteness defines blue eyes in a fair, white face as normal and beautiful in opposition to "inferior" blackness. In this context, Pecola is "convicted" as ugly by the norms of white beauty. However 'ugliness' is neither essential nor natural. It comes from a "strong belief" which has been repeatedly enforced in American culture and history. The "mysterious, all-knowing master" silently convicts the characters as ugly and useless without allowing any appeal or argument, and Pecola's family accepts the cultural norm "without question." Their acceptance ratifies the cultural gaze that judges them. They cannot "see" in themselves what "every billboard, every movie, every glance" called "beauty." When they accept this gaze and reflect it back upon themselves, they realize

their differences from the norm and therefore recognize themselves as “abnormal” and “freak[ish]”

This conviction and acceptance is displayed in Pecola’s encounter with Mr. Yacobowski, the owner of a candy store, who frustrates her attempt at understanding herself. On the way to the store to buy some candies, Pecola attempts to unravel a confusing social assumption: is the dandelion a weed or is it a beautiful flower? Implicitly, Pecola here struggles to discover whether she herself is a weed or a flower. At first she enjoys the innocent view different from others: grownups say that the dandelions are ugly, but Pecola thinks that dandelions are pretty and even are the “touchstone of the world” (46). The dandelions are “real to her. She knew them” (47). She is a dandelion. If she is able to find beauty in them, she can identify beauty in herself. Pecola attempts to accept her self by redefining the beauty of the dandelions, the metaphor for her self-identity in that they also have been defined as ugly. She even feels a sense of belonging: “owning them made her part of the world, and the world a part of her” (48). However, when she looks up at Mr. Yacobowski’s blue eyes and sees the “vacuum,” Pecola again shrinks from total absence of human recognition” (48). Mr. Yacobowski does not see Pecola. He refuses to see or touch her: “He hesitates, not wanting to touch her hand” (49). For the store owner Pecola is nothing, not human, not even worthy of being seen. She is much like “the little brown speck” that destroyed her mother Pauline's tooth (116). As nothing but dirt, she is “thrown off” by Mr. Yacobowski’s gaze. Pecola reads the disdain in his eyes and knows that “[t]he distaste must be for her, her blackness” (49). The

moment Pecola allows the globalized perspective of whiteness to invade her self-identity, she sees the image of blue eyes close-up; before these eyes, Pecola shrinks into a shapeless, insubstantial ghost. She gives up her own perspective and re-defines the dandelions as “ugly” and “weeds.” When Pecola re-evaluates dandelions as ugly and negates herself, she dis-members her “self.”

This self-negation darkens and reverses even the most positive experience in Pecola’s life—her first experience of menstruation. When Pecola stays with Claudia’s family for a while, she has her first period. Pecola’s momentary terror at the blood soon subsides when Frieda, Claudia’s sister, reveals its meaning to Pecola and Claudia: “Noooo. You won’t die. It just means you can have a baby!” (28). As Kristeva indicates, menstrual blood stands for “the danger to identity” which haunts the relationship between the sexes (71). Menstrual blood symbolizes “maternal authority” as opposed to the paternal power and laws of language, which discipline the body into a territory. In patriarchal society, archaic maternal authority is suppressed under paternal power to create a binary logic and gender hierarchy, according to Kristeva. In this process of repressing archaic, maternal power, menstrual blood, signifying sexual difference, is *classified* as defilement, something of shame. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola’s first menstrual period is positively ritualized and validated under the maternal care of Mrs. MacTeer, the mother of Claudia and Frieda, who washes Pecola and her clothes with “the music of mother’s laughter” (32). Mrs. McTeer’s laughter celebrates Pecola’s emerging womanhood. It is a pleasurable moment when Pecola realizes her power as a woman for whom Claudia and

Frieda are “full of awe and respect” (32). But this moment turns is reversed the same night when Pecola relates this experience to her own loveableness. During the bedtime talk among the girls Pecola asks, “how do you get somebody to love you?” (32). While Frieda and Claudia see Pecola’s new experience as the power of being able to give a life, which deserves “awe and respect,” Pecola brings up the question of passively *being* loved because her blackness makes her believe that she cannot be. Here Pecola’s ability to bring life into the world becomes a questionable experience which forewarns of the curse and shame she will experience because she cannot find any value in herself as compared to “the cutest girl,” Shirley Temple. When Pecola connects her experience of menstruation to the dominant social standard of acceptance, the archaic power of womanhood is negated and abjected.

Pecola projects the Dick-and-Jane world onto herself and judges herself based on what she learns from the white-centered cultural fiction. She is looking in the mirror and studies her self, “trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike” (45). In the mirror, she cannot find a socially sanctioned beauty—“a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skin” face, like the one featured in the popular baby doll or celebrity Shirley Temple. This is the only beauty that society promotes and cherishes. When Pecola finds the “secret of the ugliness” laid on her black hair and black skin, she sees herself as abnormal, accuses herself of ugliness, and prays for blue eyes.

Pecola accepts blue eyes, fair skin, and blond hair as the standard of beauty, and attempts to remove her blackness—the source of her ugliness, she believes. She even squeezes herself into non-being:

“Please make me disappear.” She squeezed her eyes shut. Little parts of her body faded away. Now slowly, now with a rush. Slowly again. Her fingers went, one by one; then her arms disappeared all the way to the elbow. Her feet now. [. . .] The face was hard too. Almost done, almost. Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left. (45)

Pecola’s discovery that she is not Jane creates this almost grotesque self-effacing wish. Her entire existence is blurred by her self-image of ugliness perpetuated by what she sees and reads. Pecola sees herself only with “the eyes of other people,” the watchful eyes of the white myth (47). She sees and defines herself as an essence of ugliness associated with blackness. She is not seen even by herself, until she is driven into madness. This self-effacing wish is her desire to throw off her blackness, expel it from her self. Because she is only able to see herself through the socially sanctioned gaze, she becomes invisible and cannot see anything worth seeing. She abjectifies herself by reflecting the imperialistic gaze onto her “self” and relinquishes her own being to “unbeing.” She herself performs the abjection of blackness.

As Trudier Harris notes, images of blond hair and blue eyes are constant reminders that “blackness is of lesser value” and that whiteness makes happiness and beauty (43). Pecola believes that blue eyes will allow her to unite

permanently with those pretty features and have everything she wants, including acceptance, love, and visibility. She believes that if she had blue eyes she would be beautiful, and her parents would not want to argue in front of their beautiful child. "They'd say, 'why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola, we mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes'" (46).

In this sense, the blue eye symbolizes the objectifying discourse of dominant hegemony. As Elisabeth Mermann-Jozwiak argues, vision is "a tool for subjugation" (193). The gaze/eye symbolizes the power to see a "value" which is produced through the cultural myth. The blue eye signifies the eye of whiteness, and the title *The Bluest Eye* symbolizes the dominant, monolithic perspective of society. This singular "eye" is a "particular" way of seeing things. It is the homogenizing force, the hegemonic gaze of the norm. This gaze circulates images that define beauty and "rationalize" and "naturalize" white superiority through signifiers such as Shirley Temple, Mary Jane, and Jean Harlow. This "convicting" eye defines white beauty as universal. Pecola internalizes the binary oppositions: ugly and pretty, black and white, dark and light, bad and good, unfortunate and happy, abjection and acceptance.

Pecola's craving for white beauty is associated with the devouring act. She drinks three quarts of white milk at once when she stays with Claudia because of her desire to "see sweet Shirley Temple's face" printed on the cup (23). Similarly, Pecola's gesture of eating the Mary Jane candy is the ecstasy of a transporting identity. For Pecola, "[t]o eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane" (50). For Pecola, Mary-Jane

candy and the Shirley-Temple cup signify white beauty; she eats and drinks the signified symbols of whiteness, beauty, love, and acceptance. When she chews the candy, she phantasmatically internalizes the whiteness that the little girl image on the candy cover represents, and she becomes a Mary Jane. By eating the signified beauty engraved in milk and candy, she introjects the white ideal and “sanctifies” herself.

These devouring behaviors demonstrate Pecola’s consuming desire to purify her blackness and ugliness by means of the divine communion, as in Kristeva’s terms:

I am divided and lapsing with respect to my ideal, Christ, whose introjection by means of numerous communions, sanctifies while reminding me of my incompleteness. ... By absorbing the symbolic the abjection is no longer a being of abjection but a lapsing subject.
(118-19)

Holy Communion symbolizes a sinner’s temporal release from sin and subsequent purification. By devouring the beauty symbols of the white-privileged society Pecola attempts to purify and save herself. She exorcizes her blackness, baptizing herself with white qualities. The Shirley-Temple cup and Mary Jane candy allow Pecola to carry the image through her very being. George Yancy argues that Pecola’s consuming the milk is “the transubstantial power” that creates “a metamorphosis, changing her from black to white, from absent to present” (311). However, as Kristeva indicates, the communion of “absorbing the symbolic” is only “temporary” (119). Consuming the signifier (of white beauty)

does not make Pecola what it signifies. Pecola experiences nothing but a *momentary ecstasy/fantasy* of being “Mary Jane.”

Pecola’s unfulfilled desire gradually reduces her into an invisible ghost in society. She cannot pronounce the name of the candy she wants to buy when she confronts Mr. Yacobowski’s blue eyes that look upon her with such distaste. Even in the rape scene, the only sound she makes is “a hollow suck of air in the back of her throat. Like the rapid loss of air from a circus balloon” (163). While Claudia and Frieda open the story and articulate their witnessing of Pecola’s despair and tragedy, Pecola is not able to say a word. Pecola has no control over her body and no authority over the narrative. She is silenced or only allowed to make ghostly articulations because her presence is “unbearable” and “unspeakable.” In silence she regresses into madness, disappearing from the center-world of the American myth into the marginalized Gothic world. She embodies the ghostly presence of the black who has been forced to internalize whiteness. She is the ghost of poverty, disorder, funkiness, and blackness that has been abjected by the American myth. As Minrose C. Gwin describes her, Pecola is framed in the “claustrophobic spaces” where her blackness cannot be tolerated, and squeezed tighter and tighter until she shrinks into nothing (322). Her body itself becomes an uncanny stranger to herself. By splitting herself, she “dismembers” her “self.” Finally, Pecola abjectifies herself. A series of cultural and mythical symbols of whiteness drive her into madness in which she hallucinates that she has blue eyes. Pecola, in desperation, defines her own “self” as the “other” and conjures up a friend out of her imagination to endorse

her “non-existent” white beauty. Pecola’s self-negating wish, at last, is fulfilled. She exists only as the mythical blue eye which exorcizes all her body and mind. She becomes an empty cultural signifier (the bluest eye) without a signified (white beauty).

Pecola’s ghostly presence is inherited from and shared with her parents, Pauline and Cholly Breedlove. Pauline is first introduced to the reader in terms of her physical deformity: a “crooked, archless foot” (110). Pauline’s lame foot makes her pitiful and invisible until she meets and marries Cholly. But when Pauline moves to Lorain, Ohio, she has to encounter the white values implanted in the northern culture. She meets many white people and assimilated black ladies, and the northern black ladies make fun of her because of her make-up, hairstyle, and dialect. To them, Pauline represents the essence of “funkiness” which white supremacist culture negates and expels³². In an attempt to assimilate white values, Pauline straightens her hair, wears high heels, dresses her hair like the white actress, Jean Harlow, and goes to movies. She attempts to be “white.” Yet, one bite of candy at a movie theater pulls a good tooth right out of her mouth. Teeth³³ are associated with aggression, and when Pauline loses a good tooth, she loses all aggression towards whites, as Katherine Gilbert observes (49). She loses all sense of “self.” Pauline then realizes that she cannot

³² I will discuss later in the chapter how Morrison uses the term the “funkiness.”

³³ The tooth analogy is repeated in Cholly’s encounter with the white men who force him to copulate in front of them. “He [Cholly] could think only of the flashlight, the muscadines, and Darlene’s hands. And when he was not thinking of them, the vacancy in his head was like the space left by a newly pulled tooth still conscious of the rottenness that had once filled it” (150). This symbolic ‘rape’ experience takes away his aggressiveness toward the white man and with it the possibility of growing into an adult.

even imitate white “beauty” and instead seeks beauty in the Fisher home where she works.

Pauline accepts her situation. To survive in the system, she distances herself from all funky blackness by serving white values. She cannot afford beauty herself, but she can dominate over other servants and create order and beauty for a white family. Housekeeping enables Pauline phantasmatically to bring her life into order. At the Fishers, she could “arrange things, clean things, lines things up in neat rows . . . Here she found beauty, order, cleanliness, and praise” (127). She becomes an “ideal servant.” Pauline desperately clings to her relationship with the Fishers but fails to care for her own daughter. She is fond of being called by her pet name “Polly” in the Fishers’ house but stops taking care of her own children, who call her “Mrs. Breedlove.” Pauline cannot see her daughter Pecola because Pecola is everything that she is running away from. Pauline begins to distance herself from her daughter’s body because Pecola threatens her peaceful haven in the Fishers’ ordered space. Pecola is an intruder in her mother’s perfect world. Pauline is living in “fear of being clumsy, fear of being like their father, fear of not being loved by God, fear of madness like Cholly’s mother’s” (128). She cannot comfort or love her own daughter when Pecola gets burned by a spilled pie. Instead, Pauline runs to the crying white child. Incapable of loving her own children, Pauline becomes a loyal servant to the white household—a black shadow loyal to the whiteness myth. She thus exemplifies a stereotypical black “mammy” for the white family.

While Pauline plays the part of the typical “black mammy,” Cholly Breedlove does his as a “bad nigger.” Cholly burns his own house; he drinks and screams; he makes his wife support the family; he rapes his own daughter. Behind this stereotypical ‘bad nigger’ persona lies a “history of distortions of the principal relationship and rituals of life,” as Byerman says in “Beyond Realism” (102). Cholly lives outside and beyond the whiteness norm as a ghost-like character expelled from society. The American myth reminds him of his lack of self-identity as a black man. Cholly internalizes the binary opposition of blackness and whiteness, identifying himself as evil. He remembers a watermelon breaking at a church picnic when he was still a boy: when Cholly sees a big black man, a father of a family, lift the melon over his head to break it on the ground, he first wonders if God would be like the big black man. But soon Cholly corrects his first perception:

He [Cholly] wondered if God looked like that. No. God was a nice old white man, with long white hair, flowing white beard, and little blue eyes that looked sad when people died and mean when they were bad. It must be the devil who looks like that—holding the world in his hands, ready to dash it to the ground and spill the red guts so niggers could eat the sweet, warm insides. (134)

Imagining that God is only like a “white man with white hair and little blue eyes,” Cholly accepts the binary opposition of blackness as devil and whiteness as

divine.³⁴ Such experience prevents him from forming an ethical base and compels him to identify himself as an evil force in the white dominant world.

Cholly's internalization of himself as inferior and evil is also manifested in his first sexual encounter. This liaison, experienced with Darleen, is situated in the perfect "garden of love." "The smell of promised rain, pine, and muscadine made him giddy" (146). Darlene looks sweet and pretty under the romantic moonlight. His own body "make[s] sense to him" for the first time (147). Although set in a sensual and benign context, this liaison is violently interrupted by two white men with long guns who force Cholly and Darleen to copulate in "the round moon glow" of their flashlight (151). Cholly's sexual initiation becomes a puppet show under the white men's gaze, which is identified with the flashlight they wield. The dominating and intimidating presence of the white men not only poisons Cholly's first sexual experience but also initiates a chain of events that destroys his male identity. He internalizes this oppression and develops a distaste for his own black self. Because Cholly cannot hate the white men who terrorize him, he transfers his hatred to Darlene (150). The myth of white superiority authorizes the white men to treat Cholly as a black-faced actor to entertain them, and his acceptance of this false myth strips Cholly of the ability to hate the men in return. Cholly's feeling of "vacancy" (150) is uncannily repeated in the "hollow" sound made by Pecola in the rape scene.

³⁴ Daniel Candel Bormann, in "The Material Bodily Principle in Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*" (1997), offers an interesting discussion of this scene focused on Morrison's narrative strategy of using what Bakhtin calls an "opposition between high and low, abstract and material" (391). Bormann argues that Morrison's narrative "inverts" the "ambivalence of life and death" that usually evokes a positive result in Bakhtin (393). The passage quoted above, however, displays Cholly's acceptance of the binary enforced by white society.

Traumatized by repeated experiences of isolation, rejection, and violation Cholly declares a “dangerous” freedom from ethics and responsibility. Not only abandoned by his parents when he was born, and interrupted in his first sexual intercourse, but Cholly is rejected again by his father who Cholly finds after a long search. These series of experiences push him over the edge and make him abandon social responsibility:

Cholly was free. Dangerous free. Free to feel whatever he felt—fear, guilt, shame, love, grief, pity. Free to be tender or violent, to whistle or weep. [. . .] Cholly was truly free. Abandoned in a junk heap by his mother, rejected for a crap game by his father, there was nothing more to lose. He was alone with his own perceptions and appetites, and they alone interested him. (159)

Cholly’s experiences render him at once invisible and hideous in white-centered society. “Abandoned in a junk heap by his mother, rejected for a crap game by his father, there was nothing to lose” for Cholly (160). He is ‘lawless’ and has “no self control.” As Morrison said in an interview, Cholly, indeed, is “someone who is fearless and who is comfortable with that fearlessness . . . It is a kind of self-flagellant resistance to certain kinds of control” (*Conversations* 165). Cholly is a lawless, a rascal, and an outcast, a “bad nigger.” For the black community, Cholly “had joined the animals; was, indeed, an old dog, a snake, a ratty nigger” (18). He epitomizes the abject.

Cholly’s rape of Pecola is an uncanny repetition of his first sexual encounter, of his own experience of violation. Cholly’s first and final attempt to

console and love his daughter instead destroys her and finally delivers her to madness. He wants to help her. As Claudia remembers, he is “the only one who “loved her enough to touch her, envelop her, [and] give something of [him] to her.” Yet Cholly’s “touch was fatal, and the something he gave her filled the matrix of her agony with death” (206). Cholly’s warm embrace is mixed with hatred, and his lovely gift becomes the act of rape. In him, every sense is mixed and confused. When Cholly sees his daughter standing in the kitchen, he wants to help and love her. Yet, he remains “mute, helpless, and in turmoil, unable to communicate his changing feelings of tenderness and hatred” (Cormier-Hamilton 119). Those mixed feelings are the reflection of his feelings towards Darlene long after the event of their liaison, where his act of love became a puppet show for the white men, and his love for Darlene ended in hatred and violence. The quintessentially domestic place, the kitchen, turns into a site of domestic violence. Cholly can communicate his love to his daughter only in this hideous and deadly action of raping her. This last action of love drives his daughter into madness, and he dies alone silently and invisibly in the workhouse.

Cholly’s confusion reflects a loss of the ability to “distinguish ‘me’ from ‘not me’,” as Harihar Kulkarni argues (5). The rape scene clearly displays this confusion. Cholly’s mixed feelings of love and hate are expressed as “puke.” When Cholly sees Pecola in the kitchen, he feels the sequence of emotions: “revulsion, guilt, pity, then love” (161). Yet, “Guilt[y] and impotent” because he cannot return the look from Pecola’s “haunted, loving eyes,” his feelings soon resolve into “hatred” which “[threatens] to become vomit” (161-2). Kristeva

theorizes that vomit/puke represents the abjected material that reinforces a sense of self. Disgust/filth is cast off from the border of the “self.” The unnatural feeling of hatred toward his daughter is about to be turned into puke and expelled from his system. Yet the “puke” does not come out of Cholly: “This hatred of her slimed in his stomach and threatened to become vomit. But just before the puke moved from anticipation to sensation,” Pecola’s feet remind him of Pauline and this association fills him with “a wondering softness” (162). The impulse to puke changes into a feeling of softness and Cholly ‘swallows’ the abjected feeling. He himself becomes the “puke” in its most perverse, socially abhorrent, incarnation, the act of incest. Morrison said that this perverse act is associated with effeminization (“Unspeakable” 23). Although the rape is considered the “most masculine act of aggression” in society, Cholly does not intend violence or aggression in his act; in fact, it is a perverse expression of his paternal “love” for Pecola. Thus, Cholly’s act is identified with descriptions of “a border of politeness,” with “tenderness” and “protectiveness” (162). Socially abandoned to be the abject, Cholly is able to claim his paternal love only perversely.

Pecola’s self-condemnation is closely tied to the black community’s self-hatred and internalization of whiteness. When little black boys jeer and taunt Pecola with “Black e mo. Black e mo. Yadaddsleepsnekked,” they are condemning their own blackness (65). Frieda and Claudia run toward them and break the circle of the black boys to “save” Pecola (from the insult of blackness). But the rescue turns out to be only temporary when a high-yellow girl, Maureen Peal, draws a circle around herself that Pecola, Claudia, and Frieda cannot break,

shouting “I *am* cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I *am* cute!” (73). Maureen articulates the privilege of her normative prettiness connected to her light skin, and separates herself from blackness. This brings back an incurable self-hatred to Pecola. Conscious of her ugliness and blackness, Pecola again seems to disappear where she stands: “She seemed to fold into herself, like a pleated wing” (73). Claudia and Frieda cannot break the spell of the cultural myth of whiteness or “destroy the honey voices of parents and aunts, the obedience in the eyes of our peers, the slippery light in the eyes of our teachers when they encountered the Maureen Peals of the world” (74).

To survive in white society some African-Americans assimilate to the myth of “Americanness.” They never realize their identities as African-Americans; their identities depend on the white norm. They try to recreate the house of Dick and Jane and imitate the white family, but without finding the happiness implied in the story. They learn to repress all desires, impulses, and human emotions because those are “funky” (83); in other words, they live as another type of ghost. Thus the character Geraldine tries to eradicate “the funk,” the kind of disorder that, for her, blackness exemplifies. As Christopher Douglas argues, the “funk” is “embodied and racialized through the phenotypic differences that mark the social construction of race and that threaten to overwhelm the whitening process” (141). Geraldine desperately engages in the ‘whitening process.’ She does not want to live or look like an African-American; instead, she imitates the white standard of living in speech, clothes, hair, and the like. She lives in the gold-and-green house of Dick and Jane and practices self-restraint and self-negation as taught in

school. For Geraldine, the racialized funk (blackness) is so dangerous as to invade and threaten her pursuit of white happiness. It reminds her of her blackness from which she runs away. So she tries to eliminate every sign of the funkiness from her life circle.

Precisely because Geraldine's gold-and-green house imitates all features of the Dick-and-Jane house, it symbolizes Geraldine's pale, empty life. Its elaborately artificial décor obliquely recalls the artifice of a Gothic house:

The house looked dark. . . . What a beautiful house. There was a big red-and-gold Bible on the dining-room table. Little lace doilies were everywhere—on arms and backs of chairs, in the center of a large dining table, on little tables. Potted plants were on all the windowsills. A color picture of Jesus Christ hung on a wall with the prettiest paper flowers fastened on the frame. . . . More doilies, a big lamp with green-and-gold base and white shade. There was even a rug on the floor, with enormous dark-red flowers. (89)

Such "beautiful" decorations, including a big Bible and a Jesus picture, do not guarantee Geraldine happiness. In the beautiful house are no family pictures or voices. It lacks all liveliness. All the relationships in the house are artificial: her husband is an "intruder" in her wasteland, and Geraldine's relationship with him is stilted (86). Geraldine meets all the physical needs of her son Junior, but she does not talk to him or vocalize with him. She never cares about him as much as she does about her blue-eyed cat. Morrison deliberately uses a third person singular "he" (not "it") for the cat only when it is referred to in relation to Geraldine.

In a real sense, only the cat is her lover and family. When Geraldine negates her blackness in order to conform and to practice the whiteness from which she expects to get happiness, she ironically falls to a level equal to that of a cat. Geraldine's identity is like that of a black cat with blue eyes, a comical and grotesque figure. She and her "beautiful" house are nothing but "a shadow image of the Dick and Jane life" (Furman 15). Geraldine strives to obtain the white happiness described in the primer by cutting off her blackness.

Geraldine's haunted house becomes the scene of a horrifying experience for Pecola, which is almost a parody of a Gothic story. Rather than a beautiful damsel seduced and confined in a Gothic castle, a black girl of socially-engineered ugliness is lured into the dark house and imprisoned by a malignant boy, Junior: "You can't get out. You're my prisoner" (90), he tells her. Yet when his mother Geraldine returns home, this "damsel" is accused of killing the cat which Junior had thrown at Pecola previously. Then the ugly black "damsel" is expelled, instead of rescued: "You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house," Geraldine spits at her (92). The princess-rescued-from-the-Gothic-castle plot is reversed in Pecola's story because of her blackness. For Geraldine, Pecola is a symbol of the blackness from which she flees and which threatens to contaminate her house; her entry into the house marks the intrusion of black funkiness that taints Geraldine's faux-white world and exposes its absurdity. Pecola is destined to be at once rejected *in* and then excluded *from* this mythical house. She compels Geraldine to perform another purifying ritual of throwing the tainted blackness 'outdoors.' Like the black cat with blue eyes that was helpless

before Junior's abuse, Pecola is helpless. The blue-eyed cat's fate foreshadows her fate.

Soaphead Church, perhaps the most grotesque character in the novel, exceeds even Geraldine's assimilating desire and sanctions the whitening process Geraldine pursues. He is a grotesque version of Faust who believes he could have done better than God. Soaphead comes from a West Indian family, but he is obsessed with the European body. Racially, his family is mixed: his mother is half-Chinese, his father half-white and half-black. His extended family is mixed black and white. His family holds the theory that the further they remove themselves from their black roots, the better off they'll be. They stress education because they believe that it brings them closer to being "white" and further away from their African roots. Using his knowledge and education, Soaphead theorizes, intellectualizes, and justifies the internalization of whiteness. He believes that "all civilization derives from the white race" (168). When Pecola comes to him seeking blue eyes, that symbol of whiteness, Soaphead does not question the request because he truly has no doubt about the superiority of whiteness. Soaphead Church is a person "who would also believe that she [Pecola] was right," Morrison continues, "he would be wholly convinced that if black people were more like white people they would be better off" (*Conversations* 22). Soaphead immediately understands and grants Pecola's request for white beauty. Convincing himself that only he can perform a good miracle for the poor girl, he actually works as an "evil" agent to incarnate the "horror at the heart of her yearning" for blue eyes (204).

Yet it is Soaphead's manipulative murder of the old dog Bob that pushes Pecola into madness. Soaphead sees the ultimate expression of the abject in the old dog. For Soaphead, the gunk that oozes out of the dog's eyes symbolizes the most disgusting essence, the source of horror: "exhausted eyes ran with a sea-green matter around which gnats and flies clustered" (171). This image symbolizes death in a living being. It is grotesque to him because it shows the possible transgression of the boundary. "[T]o go near him [the old dog]" is "only the horror" because it epitomizes the most abjected images, what he most wants to avoid. (171). He even feels a responsibility to finish Bob's "misery." Yet, this grotesque image of the dog in fact shows Soaphead's grotesque characteristics. His own family history itself is filled with transgressions of the racial boundary, yet he and his family maintain their belief in the clear boundary between races and racial hierarchy. For Soaphead those boundaries must not be violated. Thus Soaphead's life goal is a consistent identification of the "gunk" in his family and community, which he identifies with blackness. His evil deed in killing the dog is the symbolic act of abjection which pushes all disgusting images back to the side of death. When Pecola came to Soaphead for blue eyes, he finds a chance to abject both Pecola and the dog: he hands poison to Pecola and asks her to feed the dog with it. Watching the dog slowly die, Pecola is pushed to perform the ultimate self-abjection and "[step] over into madness" (206).

Like Geraldine and Soaphead, the black women of Lorain also demonize certain other blacks--the three whores and poor black families like the Breedloves--as a source of corruption. These whores, Pecola, and her family are

the community's garbage. Michael Awkward argues that the community's abandonment of the Breedloves evince a (silent) "rejection of white myth" (70). Awkward claims that they wear "the pattern of mask" that scapegoats Pecola "at the altar of white beauty" as a gesture "to fool the master, to appease the gods" (73). It is evident that Pecola becomes a scapegoat through which the black community forms its identity. But Awkward's argument does not really explain the community's victimization of Pecola. In addition, this community is not itself aware of the 'mask' which Awkward claims it deliberately wears. His claim that the "double voicedness" of the community is healed by Pecola's sacrifice sounds compelling, but this view does not account for Morrison's technique of using multiple perspectives and voices. In fact, the novel's "double voicedness" is *not* in need of being cured. On the contrary, Morrison reinforces and fortifies it, negating the monolithic, linear voice of Western writing, and deliberately multiplying the narrating voices. In criticizing Morrison's multiple voices, Awkward attempts to make her writing conform to a Western standard of monologism.

The community as portrayed by Morrison does not see what is really destroying its life: racialized self-loathing, the loss of their own culture, and the yearning for white beauty. Since the black community internalizes the myth, it wields another monstrous power to expel and destroy an individual by performing the rite of abjection, as the adult Claudia understands:

All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed.
And all of our beauty, which was hers first and which she gave to
us. All of us—all who knew her—felt so wholesome after we

cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. Even her waking dreams we used—to silence our own nightmares. And she let us, and thereby deserved our contempt. We honed our egos on her, paddled our characters with her fragility, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength. (205)

This passage describes the abjection process as a purifying community ritual. Kristeva suggests that society clarifies the distinction between the clean/proper and the filthy/improper, gaining an identity as a united society through the abjection process. “Throwing off” Pecola and her family, the black community attempts to physically and psychologically remove “waste” and dirt and gain the “proper” beauty which the white myth would endorse. Pecola is “a scapegoat who, having been ejected, allows the city to be free from defilement” in Kristeva’s terms (84). By expelling Pecola, the African-American community again internalizes the whiteness myth and reproduces the same abjection process in order to define themselves as clean, beautiful, and generous, and in order to forget their own “nightmares.” Community members draw boundaries against Pecola, and she becomes a shapeless, voiceless, and grotesque shadow. Pecola becomes the object of the abject.

However, Morrison's narrating skill shapes Pecola's ghostly presence, makes her visible to readers, and places her in American history, breaking the spell of the whiteness myth. Doreatha Drummond Mbalia criticizes the "illogical" structure and gaps in the novel as a mark of Morrison's "undeveloped writing skills" (37). Mbalia also argues that chapter headings from the broken primer distract the reader from concentrating on the narrative itself. It is true that the narrative is not "logically" maintained: it is not linearly structured with beginning, climax, and ending, and the stories are not chronologically ordered. On the first page the novel reveals the surprising fact that Pecola has given birth to her father's baby, and the plot of the novel moves back and forth constantly. The narrative contains many flashbacks, and the narrating voices also are many and "incoherent." The novel employs three narrators, Claudia, Cholly, and Polly. Its complexity should be considered as a counteraction, a counter-hegemonic discourse opposing the Dick-and-Jane myth. The novel's narrative calls upon multiple points of view, unlike the monolithic primer which presents its version of American happiness as truth. By contrast, Morrison uses "speakerly, aural, colloquial" languages "to transfigure the complexity and wealth of Black American culture into a language worthy of the culture" ("Unspeakable" 23).

Morrison creates the figure of Claudia as an oppositional voice contesting the dominant discourse. Claudia's narrative gives flesh and blood to Pecola's invisible body, revives her feelings, humanity, voice, and shape, and "re-members" her "dis-membered" spirit. Claudia indirectly represents Pecola's perspective and translates her heartbreak. Pecola has no voice in the text, nor

does she have any control or authority over her life. Claudia creates a site of voice and resistance on Pecola's behalf. Claudia breaks through madness and silence to generate a "survivor discourse" (Gwin 326). Claudia's narrative releases the grotesque image of a black girl and her dysfunctional family: modern monsters. Claudia thereby constitutes a site of re-memory, witnessing, and resistance. She carries on and translates Pecola's perspective and silence. Claudia's ability to "re-member" the ghostly presence of the expelled girl is an attempt to conjure a Gothic-bject.

Claudia, however, does not quite seem to be a reliable narrator. She tells the reader both in the beginning and at the end that she does not have a clear memory: "my memory is uncertain" (187). She sometimes gets the summers mixed up (187). Claudia is not sure if her facts are correct because she recognizes that memory transforms things, suggesting that she not only keeps secrets from the reader, but also mixes fact and fantasy. As Charles Chesnutt's Julius did in his narrative, Claudia brings up her memories and rearranges them, thereby shaking the boundary between the past and the present, and between reality and imagination. Kristeva theorizes that "when narrated identity is unbearable, when the boundary between subject and object is shaken, and when even the limit between inside and outside becomes uncertain, the narrative is what is challenged first" (141). Claudia's narration shakes and destroys the monolithic point of view, suggesting the possibility of seeing things differently, and inviting readers inside the circle of storytelling. Such a narrative performs the "abject writing" that, according to Kristeva, threatens and upsets the binary world.

Claudia's childhood experience of illness described in the first chapter anticipates her narrating power as the abject. She remembers that she was sick in bed and threw up:

The puke swaddles down the pillow onto the sheet—green-gray, with flecks of orange. It moves like the insides of an uncooked egg. Stubbornly clinging to its own mass, refusing to break up and be removed. How, I wonder, can it be so neat and nasty at the same time? My mother's voice drones on. She is not talking to me. She is talking to the puke, but she is calling it my name: Claudia. (9)

Kristeva calls vomiting or food loathing "the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection" (2). She explains that the act of vomiting protects the "me" by expelling "defilement" within "me." Vomit symbolizes the abject in a privileged way because, while the "I" wants none of that element, yet partially digested food is not the "other" for the "me" because it comes out of my own interior, out of myself. Puke confuses the identity of my-self. Claudia, however, describes the puke as "both neat and nasty," something that resists being "removed." She also remembers that her mother calls the puke "Claudia," her name. Claudia's identification with the puke implies her art of the abject as a narrator in the story. Claudia refuses to repudiate the abject as society does; instead she finds neatness and beauty in it. Claudia's strength lies in her ability to look differently, which enables her to interrupt the abjection process and break through its logic. Claudia's narrative endows Pecola with a story and a shape, placing the abjected being at the center of the novel. By articulating the long-silenced story of Pecola,

Claudia explains why blackness comes to be expelled as monstrous from the American myth. Claudia dismembers a white doll and plants marigold seeds for Pecola's black baby's life out of her childlike and defiant wish to "counteract the universal love of white baby dolls, Shirley Temples, and Maureen Peals" (190). Grown up, Claudia gives "very good attention to" all Pecolas in delivering their "secret, terrible, awful story" (191, 188).

As Claudia implies at the end of the story, white-centered society is bad for certain kinds of people: "This soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers" (206). Just as Claudia's marigold seeds fail to grow in soil that does not sustain them, the society that the Breedloves inhabit allows no room for them. However, the ghost-generating myth is temporarily broken through in Morrison's narrative, with its ghost-summoning Gothic spell. Thus Morrison re-covers the story which has been marginalized and excluded from the 'official' history of America and re-creates the life of African-Americans. As Morrison explains in "Recovering," her narrative revives the grotesque picture of ghosts in the machine and searches for resistance and healing. In *Beloved*, Morrison's ability to recreate an unspeakable reality 'snatches' and drags her readers down into a still deeper level of the ghost-reviving Gothic, an alternative discourse horrifying to Western rationality, that becomes a site of healing precisely because it allows the unspeakable to be spoken.

Chapter V

Morrison's *Beloved*:

Crossing the River Between Life and Death

Set in the 1870's, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) recounts a former slave's reconciliation with her past, reconstructing the history of slavery through the perspectives of African-Americans in an attempt to heal its traumas. Morrison tracks down the "rememory" of various people in a process that becomes a site of both resistance and healing. *Beloved* reflects Morrison's desire to revive lost African traditions and re-tell the history of African-Americans in their own voices.

Beloved is a historical novel based on the story of the fugitive slave Margaret Garner. Morrison discovered this woman's story in a newspaper report, printed in 1855, when she was working on *The Black Book* (1974)³⁵. According to the report, Garner attempted to kill all her children in order to protect them from being sent back to slavery, but in fact only killed one daughter. Morrison says in an interview with Walter Clemons that "the [newspaper] clipping about Margaret Garner stuck in my head" (75). This image of Garner drove Morrison to write *Beloved*, where she retells the story of Garner's infanticide. But Morrison

³⁵ *The Black Book*, compiled by Middleton Harris and edited by Toni Morrison, is an influential compendium of photographs, drawings, songs, letters, and other documents related to black American history from slavery through Reconstruction to modern times.

recounts a different story from the one in the old newspaper clipping, snatching her readers into the 'rememory'³⁶ of Sethe, Garner's counterpart in Morrison's retelling. In investigating Garner's/Sethe's inner life and the rationale for her action, Morrison breathes life into the cold, barren discourse of the newspaper clipping that had paralyzed Garner's soul in a few words. Morrison's figurative language imagines the complex interior life of the enslaved mother and the unspoken trauma of her enslavement, which in turn becomes a filter for collective history-memory. In this sense, *Beloved* is the return of a Gothicized historical reality.

Morrison's recounting of Garner's story therefore works as a counter-argument to the newspaper clipping—the "official" history which arbitrarily draws a veil over "proceedings too terrible to relate" ("Site" 302). In "The Site of Memory," Morrison defines her role as a writer as being to witness "a truth about the interior life of people who didn't write it" and to "fill in the blank that the slave narratives [have] left" (303). In order to deliver this inner truth, rather than merely reporting facts, *Beloved* follows the memories and emotions of the characters in the novel. The photographs, portraits, signatures, and authenticating letters that often provided "proofs" in nineteenth century slave narratives do not appear. Instead, emphasis falls on dialogue and narration: memories and storytelling are the tools of delivering this particular history. In fact, readers do not know the content of the newspaper clipping that reported the infanticide of Garner/Sethe.

³⁶ "Rememory" is a word Sethe's uses instead of "memory." For Sethe, "rememory" designates experiences that never die and continue to exist in the present. She uses the word both as a noun and a verb.

In the novel, the clipping serves to inform the readers that “Sethe could recognize only seventy-five printed words” and that “the words she did not understand hadn’t any more power than she had to explain” (161). In the novel, the “official” written report is reduced to almost nothing, and “unofficial” memories and personal accounts assume the voice of authority. As a result, Morrison shifts the source of power from printed words to her own verbal account of Sethe’s story. Retelling the story through Sethe’s/Garner’s personal memory, Morrison resurrects an inner truth that has been silenced because it is too horrible to speak, and explores the influence of the past on present life. She painstakingly exposes the need to reconcile with the past by conjuring up a collective past returned from the grave in the character of Beloved. Through this incarnation, Morrison invites readers to witness the things that were too terrible to be spoken. By articulating the unspeakable trauma that compelled Garner in real life and Sethe in fiction to kill their babies, *Beloved* creates African-American history as lived experience. Morrison’s narrative becomes a site of resistance by bestowing voice and shape upon a ghost and reviving the dead letter of the past, thereby evoking horror.

In delivering this horrific story of infanticide and haunting, Morrison forms an alternative world that does not conform to the dominant Western discourses that have prevented the abjected presence of African-Americans from being seen and heard. Because Morrison’s story is “unnatural” and macabre from a rationalist perspective, she needs an alternative language and space in order to conjure it up. In creating the story, Morrison “blend[s] the acceptance of the

supernatural and a profound rootedness in the real world” (“Rootedness” 342). From the first page of the novel, readers are pulled into the dread space of a haunted house, ignorant of the how or why of its horror. An unshaped trauma returns in an unidentifiable ghost-human named Beloved; the plot is fragmented; narrating voices are entangled in various forms; the language is often undecipherable; many characters tell different versions of memories and offer various interpretations; and readers are invited into the inner mind of the ghost. The novel even gives its ghost a body and a voice, thereby not only deferring the “official” history of slavery but also reconstructing the story in different writing voices and interpretations. *Beloved* thereby challenges Western critical assumptions about the real and the unreal or supernatural. Gothic elements represent the most vivid reality of the formerly enslaved woman and the legacy of slavery. In the following discussion, I focus on Sethe’s strategic but deadly act of infanticide, which conjured away the white masters, as well as Beloved’s ghostly presence in the black community and her resistance to the rationalist master narrative, as well as her existence--both symbolically and psychologically—on the border between life and death.

Morrison’s narrative, in a sense, is delivered through the places which evoke the past memories: Sweet Home, the Kentucky plantation from which Sethe escapes, and Sethe’s haunted house, known as 124. These locations represent the “rememory” of collective traumas and experiences, indeed rememory itself. As Sethe tells Denver, “Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it’s gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my

rememory..." (36). To Sethe, the past is alive in the present, and everything is held in memory, planted in place(s). For Sethe, a place from the past, therefore, is in the present and can "get you" unless she and other characters "disremember" certain things and lock these things in the back of their minds. Thus, for Sethe and Paul D, the last surviving slave from Sweet Home, Sweet Home is the place that stays and repeatedly haunts them. As Denver, Sethe's living daughter, notices, "everybody run off from Sweet Home can't stop talking about it"; this is because Sweet Home is the place which has created the darkest, most "unspeakable" memories for Sethe and Paul D--memories that still persist in the present (13). Sweet Home is not a physically haunted house like 124. It rather haunts whoever was and is in it. Sweet Home has a "sweet" name with beautiful trees, yet it is not home for Sethe and Paul D. It is the place that once gave them a certain identity—as slaves and property; it made them non-beings and arrested their later lives. Sweet Home is a *haunting* house, not a *haunted* house like 124. The name "Sweet Home," in a sense, becomes equivalent to schoolteacher and his discourse, and the discourse of slavery.

Contrasted to Sweet Home, the numeral name of 124 is "a thrilling enough prospective for slaves who had owned nothing, least of all an address," in Morrison's words ("Unspeakable" 31). Unlike "Sweet Home," the numeral name 124 is not characterized by its modifiers, but it is "personalized by its own activity" ("Unspeakable" 31). For Denver, 124 is like "a person rather than a structure. A person that wept, sighed, trembled and fell into fits" (29). It is like a living being that calls her ghost companion. Stamp Paid, a prominent community member

who helped fugitive slaves, is unable to decipher the sounds from the house. 124, painted in gray and white, symbolizes Sethe's state of mind and even the collective experience of slavery. Sethe's world, stripped of hope and a future, is a black-and-white picture, haunted by the past. Like the novel *Beloved*, 124 is filled with flashbacks to slavery, Sweet Home, trauma, guilt, and shame. 124 signifies the colorless, barren existence of the enslaved who have been deprived of a social life and self identity. Thus, it is no coincidence that Sethe stops thinking of colors, of the future, and of life after the infanticide. She "became as color conscious as a hen" (38-9). Her repressed rememory makes 124 a site dominated by black-and-white, devoid of diversity. In effect, 124 is a huge grave where Sethe has buried all her trauma and memories; when *Beloved* comes to the house, it becomes the slave ship where many captive people died during the Middle Passage.

It is another character's *love* for colors—that of Sethe's mother-in-law, Baby Suggs--that allows the ghostly shouting to come to the house. Baby Suggs' craving for color is her desire for a future and for healing, a desire that "made the absence shout" (38). For Baby Suggs, colors are identified with the ability to articulate the silence. Baby Suggs and Sethe had silently agreed that the enslaved past was too traumatic to speak. At the dying bed, Baby Suggs finds a power of articulation and of presence of self through colors. When *Beloved* coincidentally appears at the house on the carnival day, the house becomes the site of speech for these repressed traumas, ultimately connected to the "rowing" of the "people of the broken neck" that Stamp Paid recognizes. Through her

conversations with Beloved, Sethe's "unspeakable thoughts [that are] unspoken" fill 124, forcing her to face the enormity of the experience of slavery (199). The ghost's voice and shivering moves combine in the numeric name of the house where those experiences and traumas are expressed and reshaped. Thus, 124 transfers its ghostly power of "rowing" the unspoken to Beloved's disembodied existence, and becomes a counter-discourse to the official, dominant discourse symbolized in Sweet Home and schoolteacher.

In this sense, 124 is the most plausible place for Morrison to start the story with "the fully realized presence of the haunting" of the dead, the past, and the ghost (32). Sethe's haunted house and the venom of a ghost on the novel's first page confront readers with uncanny, irrational images. As Morrison explains in "Unspeakable Things Unspoken," the reader, with "incomprehensible, abrupt information," is "snatched, yanked, thrown into an environment completely foreign" by "something [that] is beyond control, but is not beyond understanding" (32). Readers are "snatched" into Sethe's haunted house where the old crippled Grandma, Baby Suggs, has just died, where Sethe's two boys have run away, and where a deranged mother and her recluse daughter reside under the "protection" of a baby ghost.

Schoolteacher, a new slaveowner of Sweet Home, and Sweet Home itself represent the institution and the essence of slavery as an expression of Western rationalist discourse. Schoolteacher particularly represents the "scientific" racism used to rationalize slavery and, later, racist discrimination. Schoolteacher's slavery essentializes Sethe's identity as subhuman and animal, naturalizing the

boundary between whites and blacks through language and the discourse of science. He measures slaves' bodies and estimates their market values. His measuring string is a tool for keeping the clear boundary between black slaves and white masters. For schoolteacher, who uses the measuring string for slaves to determine their trading value, slaves are equal to numbers and to the cattle that should be tamed and work for his household. He is a student of racism and eugenics, founded on biosocial data of racial differences. Schoolteacher theorizes his racism on the basis of human hereditary and racial hierarchy, as does Soaphead Church, the demonic figure in *The Bluest Eye*. Like Soaphead, schoolteacher believes that racial hierarchy is "natural." Using an essentialist discourse, he defines slaves as essentially different from whites. His racial theory is based upon a binary opposition symbolized by the absolute, invincible line. Through experimentation, definition, and note-taking, schoolteacher practices and theorizes slavery as part of 'authentic' and 'authorized' Western history.

Interestingly, schoolteacher's methods and theories are produced through the act of writing. Sethe recalls that schoolteacher asked the slaves various questions and wrote down their answers in his book. Sethe later realizes that schoolteacher's book "was a book about us" (37). He records each slave's different characteristics, "things that's natural to a thing," and (re-)creates the lined categories (195). Schoolteacher trains his pupils to neatly draw a line and write down the human and the animal characteristics of a slave on each side. He naturalizes and formalizes these characteristics through his writing. In doing so, he attempts to prove the inferiority of the enslaved and justify the inhumane

system of slavery. Schoolteacher's writing and education perform the abjection process on the enslaved. Thus, schoolteacher reduces individuals to a few words and fixes this identity in his book by the mechanical act of writing³⁷, which becomes a tool of definition and thereby of oppression. Sethe painfully remembers that when she is assaulted, and in a sense raped, by schoolteacher's boys while pregnant, schoolteacher, their "book-reading teacher," is "watching and writing it up."³⁸ He is the witness and history-maker of the scene, a situation that could stand for the 'official' history of slavery.

The "rape" scene signifies the ultimate abjection that redefines the boundary between master and slave. According to Kristeva, pregnancy teaches "the falseness of rigid boundaries between persons" (144). The maternal body, especially the pregnant body, signifies the proto-social or anti-social because it collapses the differences upon which social order and social distinctions depend; in effect, it exhibits the arbitrary and constructed nature of all boundaries. Thus the maternal body must be abjected in order to maintain social order. Similarly, Sethe's ability to create a life blurs the hierarchal relationship between the white masters and the baby inside her body, which damages their authority as slave owners. The white boys' invasion of Sethe's pregnant body, thus, symbolizes the abjection process which re-defines the boundary between the master who legally owns the black body and the slave who legally belongs to him. By scarring the

³⁷ This mechanical discursive action recalls the "fiction of law and custom" dominating Dawson's Landing in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, the saw machine which chopped up Sandy, a slave turned into an oak tree, in Chesnutt's "Conjure Woman," and the superiority of white beauty which reduces Pecola to (social) ghost in *The Bluest Eye*.

³⁸ Many critics use the term the "rape" to indicate the violation of Sethe's body, so I use the same word with quotations in describing the incident. However, Sethe does not describe the scene as a literal rape; she emphasizes that they "stole her baby's milk." I will explain this point later.

maternal body, the boys reduce Sethe's body to a simple reproductive tool or container; by taking her milk, the source of her baby's life, they re-claim their ownership of both Sethe and her baby; and by witnessing the scene, schoolteacher procreates the "official" record of history.

Therefore, when Sethe tells Mrs. Garner about the "rape," it is Sethe's ability to speak that alerts schoolteacher. For schoolteacher, the incident should not be defined or interpreted as something for Mrs. Garner to "[roll] out tears" about (15): it should be the natural, plausible claim of a master's ownership. It should be reported only by *his* witnessing, writing, and definition. Schoolteacher believes that "definitions belong to the definers—not the defined" (190). The narrating power belongs only to schoolteacher, who represents white patriarchal culture and who is a speaking agent. Sethe, as a slave, is not allowed to tell her version of slavery. To punish Sethe for her vocalization, schoolteacher engraves marks on her back with whipping. "Schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still" (17). Schoolteacher physically inscribes her body as his "signature" of ownership.

Sethe's scars, however, becomes an open text and sign to be read and interpreted by others, and even work as a counter-discourse against the culture that schoolteacher represents. Although Sethe's marks are intended to authenticate the slave owner's ownership, they erase this original intention and recreates multiple meanings. For Paul D, it is at first a "sculpture like the decorative work from an iron smith" and later "a revolting clump of scars," yet it soon becomes a trigger for remembering a tree Brother, under which he talked

and rested with another Sweet Home man, Sixo³⁹, the most defiant figure in *Beloved* (16, 17). For Amy Denver⁴⁰, who helps Sethe's escape and who assists in the birthing of Denver, Sethe's back is not a mark of slavery; it is a painful yet beautiful chokecherry tree which is able to blossom (79). Baby Suggs reads it as "roses of blood blossomed in the blanket covering Sethe's shoulders" (91). This mark also connects Sethe to another mark, that of her mother (61). Sethe remembers that her mother once showed her a mark consisting of "a circle and a cross burnt right in the skin" as a sign by which Sethe can recognize her mother. As Sethe's mother uses the mark written on her body by a slave owner as a reminder to Sethe, Sethe's scars also become a sign that helps her understand and remember her mother. Sethe's scar, through re-readings, loses its signification of white ownership and becomes a floating signifier.

The illusory, rigid relation between signifier and signified which schoolteacher planted is thus deconstructed. The meaning of Sethe's scars is

³⁹ Sixo is one of the Sweet Home men who is "Morrison's most dramatic symbol of resistance" in Loyalie King's words (274). Sixo refuses to speak English, the language of the oppressors, and ignores all the rules of Sweet Home. He sneaks out of the plantation to see his woman, a practice that protects him from bestial desires. He refuses the system that denies his humanity. He recognizes that the Garner's slavery is no different from Schoolteacher's. He has "a knowing tale about everything," Paul D remembers (219). Sixo forges a "knowing tale" about the masters that mixes fact and fiction. For example, his "knowing tale" about Mr. Garner's death does not seem authentic or factual, but it is the only story that Paul D knows and delivers. Sixo's last confrontation with schoolteacher exposes the absurdity of schoolteacher's seemingly scientific racism and the slavery it supports. Sixo is able to see what schoolteacher expects him to say. He can penetrate schoolteacher's intentions when other slaves think of him as a fool. Later Sethe reminisces that schoolteacher's questions 'tore Sixo up' (37). Sixo subverts the way schoolteacher produces signification.

⁴⁰ Amy Denver is the white girl who helps Sethe escape and give birth. She often attracts critics' attention. Richard C. Moreland offers an interesting reading of Amy Denver as an altered version of Huck Finn. He argues that while Twain focuses on "the white, free nation's ambiguously innocent heroism," Morrison focuses instead "on the runaway slaver, her family and her community" (160). Morrison alters and twists a story of the innocent white boy with a black fugitive man into one of a 'ragged' looking white girl with a pregnant fugitive black woman.

changing and “still growing” as Sethe says to Paul D (17). Stamp Paid symbolically links the “growing” tree on Sethe’s back to whites’ attempt to build a rigid boundaries when he attempts to visit Sethe’s haunted house later. This passage reflects, in more poetic language, Morrison’s argument in *Playing in the Dark* about how early Euro-Americans formulated arbitrary categories of blackness and whiteness, and the profound effect this construction had on their own identities:

It was the jungle white folks planted in them. And it grew. It spread. In, through and after life, it spread, until it invaded the whites who had made it. Touched them every one. Changed and altered them. Made them bloody, silly, worse than even they wanted to be, so scared were they of the jungle they had made. The screaming baboon lived under their own white skin; the red gums were their own. Meantime, the secret spread of this new kind of whitefolks’ jungle was hidden, silent, except once in a while when you could hear its mumbling in places like 124. (198-99)

This jungle is the “place” that whites planted in blacks. That is through the abjection process whites designate the place of socially defined evil and defilement as blackness, a wild, savage, tangled place. In order to create the concept of pure and benign whiteness, whites put all junk and excrement in this artificially constructed jungle and push blacks into it. They create and attribute the features of the “Other” to this jungle of blackness. Yet, as Stamp reflects, this jungle “spreads” and “invades” whites. It makes them “bloody, silly, worse than

even they wanted to be" (199). The jungle whites have planted in blacks returns to haunt whites themselves in ghostly mumbling voices. Such voices keep returning to a place like 124, appearing as a Gothic haunting.

The "jungle" in *Sethe*, which is planted by schoolteacher's oppression and abuse, drives her to escape from Sweet Home by crossing the river that symbolizes the boundary of slavery and freedom and of life and death. Brutally beaten and pregnant with her fourth child, Sethe crosses the river soon after delivering a baby on the way. Soon she is tracked down by schoolteacher and slave hunters who want to bring Sethe and her children back to his system and order. Haunted by images of Sweet Home, Sethe's eyes register schoolteacher and his company as "four horsemen," a sign of apocalypse which would smash down her freedom. As soon as the four horsemen approach Sethe's house, she drags her children into a shed and attempts to kill all of them. When Schoolteacher enters the shed, two boys are bleeding, a blood-soaked child lies down on the floor, and Sethe holds a baby with one hand and a knife in the other hand. Sethe "was looking at him [schoolteacher]" with "all black eyes" (150). It is not the infanticide itself that drives schoolteacher out. For schoolteacher, "the worst" was "the woman's eyes with no whites [that] were gazing straight ahead" (151). His look of "righteousness" that invades Sethe's yard is dismissed in Sethe's gaze (157). Unbelievable as a mother's infanticide is, what schoolteacher cannot bear is Sethe's gaze, because the gaze and witnessing belongs to an agent, a subject, and a speaking being. Thus he immediately denounces Sethe's "gazing" eyes as those of a crazy woman. Sethe's gazing becomes the finishing

act of her counter-act. “By the time she faced him, [she] looked him dead in the eye” (164). Her gaze registers him as dead. Sethe becomes the agent of the incident and witnesses the scene with her own eyes.

Like Twain’s Roxana, Sethe creates a subject in her abjected slave body and claims what a slave cannot. It is not “what Sethe had done” but “what she claimed” that amazes Paul D (164). “[A] used-to-be-slave [who] love[s] anything that much was dangerous” (45). Sethe claims what a slave is not allowed to claim—family, children, and motherhood. Sethe’s love is too “thick” for a slave. Her “thick” love cannot allow her children to suffer from slavery even if this means killing them. Her murder is a conscious decision, an exertion of her will. Sethe’s act, uncannily, displays the social status of a slave mother who is a carrier of both life and death. Under slavery, a slave mother, by giving birth, sentences her child to “social death” because her birthing only produces another property, a slave, for her white master. Sethe’s infanticide symbolizes her fate as a slave mother who is destined to take away a life which she gave. Yet it is also a rebellious act because infanticide is performed from the will of the slave-bject who is not supposed to have any willpower. In fact, slavery does not allow a slave to own anything, including children; the system forbids an enslaved mother from nurturing and loving her children. Thus Paul D soon learns about “loving just a little bit” (45); Baby Suggs learns to make peace with herself when she sees each of her children sold by slave-trades. By claiming this “over-privileged” right as a slave, Sethe’s unusual “thick” mother-love prevents her daughter from becoming a non-being in slavery.

Right after killing her baby girl, Sethe first gives milk to another living baby, Denver, who takes the dead sister's blood as well: "Sethe was aiming a bloody nipple into the baby's mouth... So Denver took her mother's milk right along with the blood of her sister" (152). In an uncanny way, this action repeats the white boy's violation of Sethe's body, which Sethe repeatedly identifies with "stolen milk." The invasion of the pregnant body damages her privilege or right as a mother. Sethe's "rape" symbolizes and reinforces the slave master's ownership and negation of her motherhood. Sethe's resistance is manifested through mothering her own child. Sethe kills her baby to protect her from the social death of enslavement and provides another baby daughter with both milk and the murdered baby's blood in an attempt to nurture the baby. In this weird way, Sethe retakes and re-claims her motherhood, which was once negated and erased under schoolteacher's writing. As Sethe tells Paul D, she "stopped him [schoolteacher]" from enslaving "her babies", and "took and put [them] where they'd be safe" (164)—one of them being secured on the other side of life, and another in the house of a "ghost company" (54). For this slave mother, ghostliness and death are safer place than Sweet Home, the emblem of slavery.

Sethe's "thick love," however, also creates an uncanny environment where she is trapped in the past with her guilt. She isolates herself and her family from the community, enclosing them within the confines of 124. She constantly revisits her past, rather than planning for a future. Sethe's act saved her children from slavery, but also imprisoned her in the past. At the same time, Sethe tries to seal off her past because it is unspeakable; she tries to keep the past at bay through

her symbolic act of “beating dough” at the restaurant where she works every day (73). She “buries all recollection... and luck” (188-89). Sethe is “not interested in the future. Loaded with the past and hungry for more, it left her no room to imagine, let alone plan for, the next day” (70). As in the conversation with Paul D, Sethe “[doesn’t] go inside” where she locks her memories, just as Paul D locks his own traumatic memories in his chest (symbolized as the “tobacco tin”) (46). Going inside means remembering the painful past about which Sethe and Baby Suggs have “agreed without saying so that it was unspeakable” (58). Going inside brings the horror of pushing herself into “a place [Sethe] couldn’t get back from” (72). Sethe does not allow herself to remember or feel anything. Even when she talks to Paul D about the white boys’ violation of her body or the infanticide, she only “circles around” these topics without really expressing her experience and feelings.

Unable either to articulate the past or plan for a future, Sethe is also disconnected from the community. As the Lorain ladies do to Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*, the Cincinnati community shuts down to Sethe and abjectifies Sethe and Denver until Denver reaches out to them later. The day after Baby Suggs throws a party to celebrate Sethe’s successful escape, the community turns angry and disapproving of what they read as the ostentatious excess of the party (137). Even though they enjoy and participate in the party, they think that the party and food are too much for the ex-slaves because, as Denver understands later, slaves are not allowed to have any “pleasure.” Just as schoolteacher gives a “sad look” at slaves playing games, the community disapproves the bounty of

Baby Suggs' party and the pleasure they experience. The "scent of their disapproval" made them neglectful enough not to sound the alarm about schoolteacher's coming to recapture Sethe and her children. Moreover, judging Sethe to be "prideful, misdirected" after the infanticide, Ella, one of the influential female members of the community, "junked [Sethe] and wouldn't give her the time of day" (256). In a way, Sethe's life is frozen in time and space, and 124 becomes her prison-house. Her life becomes barren, color-blind. Sethe is blind to her own emotions and her "inside," which causes her living daughter Denver to be isolated and intensely lonely.

The figure of Beloved is the one who is able to penetrate into Sethe's locked 'inside.' Scholars have questioned the exact identity of this mysterious figure. Many agree that Beloved is Sethe's murdered daughter, but Elizabeth House argues that Beloved is not the ghostly reincarnation of Sethe's murdered baby but "a young woman who has herself suffered the horrors of slavery" (17). Sharon Jessee sees Beloved as "all the ancestors lost in the Diaspora, demanding restoration to a temporal continuum" (199). Tzvetan Todorov views Beloved as a "ghost within the text" (41). Denise Heinze states that Beloved is "Morrison's most unambiguous endorsement of the supernatural," "a memory come to life," and "Sethe's alter-ego" (207). Trudier Harris reads her as "the nature of evil" (129). Andrew Schopp says that Beloved is "a prime example of the unspeakable being spoken" (356) Beloved, however, is hard to define in one word. She is a reincarnation of Sethe's dead daughter, a spirit of the past, a rememory, a young woman who has suffered slavery, and "all the ancestors lost

in a slave ship.” Beloved means death, memory, forgiveness, and punishment to Sethe, a new life for Denver, and consolidation with the community. Beloved’s uncanny memory about the Middle Passage also offers a rediscovered African-American history with a different perspective. All efforts to nail down her signification fail. Many interpretations are possible, yet no one meaning can fully explain Beloved. As Denver notices in the novel, Beloved is “more” (266).

Beloved defies all binary definitions and categorizations. She is neither absolute evil nor definite good. Beloved is both a monster to destroy Sethe and a life-giver who provides a chance for Sethe to have a future. In the Clearing where Baby Suggs used to preach, Beloved’s “choking” hands are mysteriously overlapped with Baby Suggs’ loving hands that had bathed Sethe. Sethe comes with Beloved and Denver to the Clearing. When Sethe attempts to remember Baby Suggs’ loving hand and her message of love, Beloved’s choking hands suffocate Sethe. Later, Beloved explains to Denver that it was “the circle of iron,” the symbol of slavery (101). In a way, Beloved is linked to Baby Suggs’ inspiration of love and freedom; yet at the same time Beloved also signifies the chain of slavery, the horrific effects of slavery. The mark on Beloved’s neck signifies Sethe’s ultimate resistance to schoolteacher’s racism. Beloved’s presence drains Sethe and brings out the worst in all characters. Sethe gives up all responsibility for Denver and herself and dedicates herself only to storytelling for Beloved, suffocating herself with shame and guilt. Paul D is “fixed” by this ghost-girl. Beloved haunts the characters and reveals their locked memories. Yet the exposed memories also empower each character to confront past trauma

and act on it. In a way, Beloved conjures up the past from the repressed memories of Sethe and Paul D, and then 'swallows' and 'digests' the traumatic memories. Beloved, at times, is an innocently slain baby who wants her mother's love, yet she uncannily "remembers" and embodies the ancient stories of the Middle Passage. Beloved's monologue in the middle of the novel addresses the voices of unknown slaves in the slave ships of the Middle Passage. She exists beyond time and place. When Beloved returns from death, she becomes the abject who transgresses the boundaries between matter and mind, life and death, and subject and object. As Beloved repeatedly answers, she exists "at the bridge" or "in the water" which symbolizes the ambiguity and arbitrariness of her being. Beloved "bridges" life and death, past and present, and reality and illusion. She is the spirit of the Gothic.

In addition to this ambiguous existence, Beloved is a ghost who can think, imagine, and even dream. In the middle of the novel, readers are invited into the ghost's consciousness. Sitting in the kitchen with Denver, Beloved pulls out her tooth and imagines dismembering her body piece by piece:

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 at once. Or on one of those mornings before Denver woke and after Sethe left she would fly apart. It is difficult keeping her head on her neck, her legs attached to her hips when she is by herself. Among the things she could not remember was when she first knew that she could wake up any day and find herself in pieces.

She had two dreams: exploding, and being swallowed. When her tooth came out—an odd fragment, last in the row—she thought it was starting. (133)

Beloved loses a tooth and suddenly visualizes the fragmentation of her own body into pieces. She cannot hold herself together. Then she remembers the recurring dreams of exploding or being swallowed. Some critics read this particular moment of Beloved's fragmentation as her attachment to Sethe or her obsession. I partly agree, yet the passage offers more dimensions for discussion. In the context of the Gothic, Beloved's imaginary fragmentation signifies the reversal of the abjection process. Kristeva contemplates "the utmost of abjection" in the corpse. The dismembered, decomposing, or rotten body-parts remind us of death and make us confront death, which evokes horror, Kristeva theorizes. Therefore the dismembered body speaks of the "horror of abjection." Beloved, the ghost in flesh-and-blood, visualizes her body parts as teeth, skin, arms, and head, and then dismembers the body parts one by one like a decomposing corpse. She in a sense familiarizes herself with death. Beloved herself is an already returned body of the abject, and her vision perversely intensified death and dismemberment, precisely contrasting with the unified social body of Western discourse.

Yet like Kristeva, Beloved's fragmented presence, in a way, also celebrates and emphasizes the abject. Kristeva celebrates modern art and literature that evoke the power of horror through representing the abject (210). In the similar way these other modern works do, Beloved's fragmented body calls attention to the abjected body and celebrates it. Beloved's fragmented presence

cancels the Western discourse of (artificial) unity and order. Elevating slaves' lives, it recalls Baby Suggs' message in the Clearing, addressed to the formerly enslaved members of the community, about loving each part of the once-negated slave body:

Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. You got to love it, You! ... This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. (88)

Baby Suggs's message of self-celebration is fully achieved through Beloved's fragmented body, which though negated as a corpse, celebrates itself in its reincarnation. Beloved's fragmented body, in a way, signifies the living-in-death existences of Sethe, Paul D, and Denver. They also are fragmented corpses. Pro-slavery whites frame Sethe's act of infanticide as animalistic, bestial behavior that demonstrates slaves' inferiority to whites, while abolitionists used the same incident as a simple propagandizing tool, arguing that slavery *leads to* such behavior, reducing persons to the level of beasts⁴¹. But both of these

⁴¹ Even for abolitionists like Mr. Bodwin, Sethe's act is only a useful propagandizing opportunity to achieve their goal. "The society managed to spread the infanticide and the cry of savagery around and built a further case for abolishing slavery" (260). As Denver saw later in Mr. Bodwin's

interpretations reductively exploit and paralyze Sethe's life and pain into a few formulaic words. Paul D also lives as an animal or a ghost that merely works, eats, and sleeps for about sixteen years. Denver's life is limited to the haunted house where she ironically feels safest. She is scared to death of her own mother and has nightmares about Sethe cutting her head off (206). Beloved signifies the abjected body of all these formerly enslaved people and their fragmented community. While Pecola's imaginary self-fragmentation in *The Bluest Eye* is intentional and draws upon her negation of blackness and desire for whiteness, Beloved's involuntary fragmentation represents many possible meanings that are open to all the main characters of the novel and also to Morrison's readers.

Like Beloved's fragmented body, her voice is incoherent, as seen most distinctively in her monologue. In the later part of the second section, Morrison records the stream of consciousness of the main characters--Sethe, Denver, and Beloved. Specifically, Beloved's monologue mixes tenses, blending time and space, connecting Sethe's infanticide to nameless slaves' experiences in the slave ship during the Middle Passage. Beloved's monologue pictorially re-plays the horrors of slavery and the initial abjection of slaves. In Beloved's narrative, a voice of the unknown in the ship addresses those slaves who were forced to drink the white masters' urine and eat excrement and were crouched under the

house, "a blackboy's mouth full of money . . . bulging like moons, two eyes were all the face he had above the gaping red mouth . . . And he was on his knees . . . Painted across the pedestal he knelt on were the words 'At Yo Service'" (255). Even in the home of a supposed abolitionist, African Americans are depicted as inferior. That is how Baby Suggs realizes her self-less slave-body, the social abject when she is asked to fix shoes at the very moment of Sethe's "horrible" act and family "disaster." Baby Suggs is still a "nigger woman howling shoes" (179) to white folks. Baby Suggs realizes that it is seen only as a momentarily "rout" of the abject. The whites "wore her out" and drove her to bed.

weight of corpses. Beloved's identity is repeatedly connected to those who lost their names in the Middle Passage, (re-)evoking the initial horrors of slavery. Beloved is beyond and across time and place. Incoherent and fragmentary, she is not an empty signifier—rather, Beloved is something “more.” She contains many fragments of historical trauma, story, and experience. In a sense, she herself is a hybridized text which is fragmented and reconstituted as a montage.

Beloved's textual body conveys trauma, the past, and the memory of Sethe and other characters. Sethe kills her baby out of fear that the baby will be violated, yet, as Jan Stryz argues, that very act “leads to Beloved's being made into a written image” engraved on Beloved's gravestone. Stryz's argument is interesting and partially correct in that Sethe's ultimate act of resistance freezes Beloved into a few engraved letters. Beloved is frozen and abjected by slavery and by her mother. However, it is more important that Morrison's narration resurrects this ‘abjected’ written image in flesh-and-blood and reverses the freezing process. When Beloved comes back to life, she becomes a textual puzzle which represents Sethe's hidden fear and memories. Yet this time, this “text” is not an “officially” written piece of paper. It is a living ghost-body, different from schoolteacher's note-taking and mathematically measured records. This text asks questions and speaks out deeper truth than the official history or the slave-narratives left behind. This textual body unfolds the multiple versions of a story and even calls for more. In Stamp Paid's words, Beloved spits out “unspeakable thoughts, unspoken” (199).

Beloved's return, therefore, is the step needed for Sethe to forgive herself and move on with her life. As Ralph D. Story says, Beloved "has to return for Sethe to be reborn" (22). Beloved works to open past memories and make Sethe articulate for herself the things she decided were unspeakable. By making Sethe explain the infanticide herself, Beloved becomes Sethe's "told story," a living text. Beloved's hunger for storytelling ironically starves Sethe's body yet revives her mind. Her return forces Sethe to confront the "unspeakable" past and to cope with the present. Through Beloved's gaze, Sethe can "rememory" and re-vision the past and live her life. Even though "every mention of her past life hurt," and "everything in it was painful or lost," Sethe even finds "an unexpected pleasure" when telling stories to Beloved (58). Just as Roxana's re-writing of her son's identity resurrected him from social death, Sethe's storytelling "which allows [her] to recover, is equal to resurrection" in Kristeva's words (26). Sethe articulates her abjected life and her choice in her own voice, not focusing on detached writers of the newspaper stories instead. This articulation of the abject brings her this unexpected *jouissance* under the guidance of Beloved who, like a Muse, inspires Sethe.

In so doing, Beloved bridges Sethe's personal memory with the collective memories of the black community. Beloved's uncannily familiar questions let Sethe tell her stories and relate them to the collective memory. When Beloved asks Sethe about her mother, Sethe can connect her own mark to her mother's and then to the Middle Passage. Tossing Denver's hairs (like goopher powder) into the fire triggers Sethe's memory that "she had forgotten she knew" (61). She

re-members how her mother and Nan, the nursing slave, came to the country across the Ocean, how her mother gave her a name and loved her, how her mother and Nan spoke different languages, and how her mother died. Denver's hairs, like goopher dirt or a spell, conjure up hidden memories. These newly revived memories are related to Sethe's roots, to the Middle Passage, to the mother language, and to Nan's stories that place Sethe and her trauma in the register of the collective memory. They reveal that her pain is related to that of others and belongs to collective memory, not to an isolated incident.

In a somewhat different way, *Beloved* touches Paul D's "deep inside" which begins trembling when he confronts his abjected (non-)being through Mister's gaze. After seeing Sixo laughing as he is burned to death and after learning his worth at a slave market, Paul D, with iron bit in his mouth, leaves Sweet Home to be sold. When he turns around to see his beloved tree Brother one more time, Paul D instead sees Mister, the "hateful" rooster of the plantation, smiling at him in a tub. Comparing himself to Mister who looks so free, Paul D realizes his abjected self—himself as socially dead. Even the rooster has a name and freedom; but Paul D has no "self" or possible identity. His name is conveniently alphabetized along with his fellow slaves (Paul A, Paul D, Paul F, etc). His market value is determined by schoolteacher's measuring string and notes. The size of his teeth and buttocks determine his value. Stripped of agency, Paul D becomes the abject, a living ghost. Like Cholly in *The Bluest Eye*, Paul D accepts (the conviction of) his abjection and assumes a ghostly life for years. He walks, eats, sleeps, and sings. He shuts down his head and locks "all that shame

him in the tobacco tin” because the contents in the tobacco tin made him “their prey” (113). As long as he puts all of pains, shames, and guilt inside, Paul D does not have to feel a “sense of failure” (221). Imprisoned in a little box after killing Mr. Brandywine, the man to whom schoolteacher sold him, he was chained to forty other fellow prisoners. Living like an animal, Paul D, in his singing, repeatedly kills a boss, a master, and Life itself. As a song-murderer, Paul D beats Life to death and celebrates Mr. Death (109). Yet Beloved’s presence reminds Paul D of “something. Something, look like, I am supposed to remember”—something he locked in the tin (234). For Paul D, Beloved signifies a reminder of shame, his non-being/non-self, and the enslaved body. When Beloved seduces Paul D, she touches his inside enough to break the lock of the “rusted tobacco tin” and take out his “red heart” (117). When everything in his chest comes out, he is able to reflect and remember Sixo’s defiant death and his love, which later make Paul D return to 124 and ask Sethe for companionship.

It is Denver, however, who summons Beloved to 124. As Sethe mentions, Denver is truly “a charmed child. From the beginning” (41). Born in the Ohio River, Denver bridges freedom and slavery. Denver’s “miracle birth” also connects the runaway slave Sethe to the rugged-looking white girl, Amy Denver, after whom Denver is named. Drinking the dying sister’s blood along with her mother’s nurturing milk, Denver also stands between death and life, between violence and nurturing. Discovering Sethe’s infanticide causes Denver to keep earlier hunger for life “at bay”. Yet unlike Sethe, Denver acts on that hunger first by taking lessons in Mrs. Jones’ house and then by summoning her sister’s baby

ghost. Not only does she hear the baby ghost crawl the stairs of the house first, Denver identifies Beloved as her baby sister almost immediately. When Denver claims to see Beloved “by the stream” even before Beloved comes to 124, she shows a certain quality as a “conjure woman,” as also when Denver’s hairs conjure up Sethe’s long-forgotten memories about her late mother (75). Denver is indeed enchanted by the “safety of ghost company.” Witnessing the presence of the ghost, Denver is able to enjoy “terror in her eyes” with “a vague smile on her lips” (18). Despite her craving for a company, the narrator particularly says that Denver takes pride in “the condemnation Negroes heaped on them: the assumption that the haunting was done by an evil thing looking more” (37). Denver enjoys and even celebrates the contempt, the abjection performed upon her family and house. Living in the Gothic world, Denver is the conjure woman who summons her baby-sister’s ghost.

Even though Denver’s hunger summons Beloved to 124, Beloved opens Denver’s eyes, guides her into collective memories, and drives her out into the world and the black community. Denver *re-hears* the favorite story of her birth by *telling* it out to Beloved. When she tells the story to Beloved, Denver begins “to see what she was saying and not just to hear it” (77). “Watching Beloved’s alert and hungry face, how she took in every word, asking questions about the color of things and their size, her downright craving to know,” Denver is able to picture her mother as a slave girl, pregnant with a baby and struggling to get to her children (77). Denver is experiencing and engaging with the past—with history. “Denver was seeing it now and feeling it—through Beloved. Feeling how it must

have felt to her mother. Seeing how it must have looked” (78). Denver’s storytelling is mixed with Beloved’s listening and questions. It conjures up “a duet,” starting with Denver’s monologue “as they lay down together, Denver nursing Beloved’s interest like a lover whose pleasure was to over-feed the loved” (78). This sisterly duet connects Denver to Sethe and becomes a musical narrative. Denver actually becomes a part of the story. Denver’s birth story, which has been like “a bill” for her to pay, becomes alive through Beloved (77).

Denver’s understanding of the history of slavery is growing when she happens to glimpse a slave life through a unique experience in the cold room. One afternoon, Denver asks Beloved to help her get the cider jug in the cold room. As soon as the door is shut, Denver loses sight of Beloved in the dark and experiences ultimate loneliness and selflessness. Trudier Harris argues that the darkness of the cold house symbolizes Beloved’s evil spirit because Beloved identifies herself with “Dark.” However, this is an argument based on the binary oppositions pervasive in early Gothic discourse. The darkness Denver sees in the cold room is more connected to collective trauma, which has been eradicated from the official history and left black and dark. The cold room was used as an outdoor kitchen during slavery, and its function was changed when Baby Suggs moved a kitchen inside the house. Covered with a pile of newspapers on the floor and dark inside, the cold room symbolizes the life of the enslaved as defined and written by white masters. Separated from the main house, this room signifies the place where slaves are supposed to belong. Thus, the cold room and its darkness are related to African-Americans’ abjected existence that is reduced to

nothingness. It is a blank image of text that should be written and reconstituted. Inside this cold house, Denver experiences a self-deprived slave's life: "Now she is crying because she has no 'self.' Death is a skipped meal compared to this. She can feel her thickness thinning, dissolving into nothing" (123). Denver realizes that lack of self—the ultimate identity of a slave—is worse than death—something similar to be "eaten alive by the dark." When Denver, like Sethe, "decides to stay in the cold house and let the dark swallow her" because "there is no world out there," Beloved magically reappears before Denver to lead her out (123). This experience in the cold house becomes a rite of passage for Denver to contact the inner life of the enslaved and her collective history. Beloved becomes the guide for Denver to step out to the world.

In a sense, Beloved's questions and Sethe's storytelling are a "springboard" for Denver. Sethe's storytelling affects Denver most. By listening to Sethe, Denver comes to understand the "connection between her mother and Beloved" and the reason Sethe murdered her own daughter. By listening to Sethe's stories, Denver understands what Sethe fears the most: "That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. ... Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up" (251). Denver hears this explanation and interprets the message through her own eyes. Moreover, Morrison delivers Sethe's explanation and voice through Denver's interpretation, rather than Sethe's direct voice. This understanding makes Denver decide to take action and assume responsibility, which gives her "a new thought, having a self" (252). Denver realizes she had to

“step off the edge of the world” to save her mother and herself (239). Denver then becomes the link that connects Sethe to the community and breaks the abjection process inside the community.

Many scholars argue that *Beloved* is “exorcised” by the community when at the end of novel, the community women come to 124 to rescue Sethe from the “devil” child who comes back to life. David Lawrence argues that the “ritualistic sacrifice of *Beloved*” frees the community “from this pervasive haunting” (231). Linda Krumholz also says that Morrison performs a healing ritual for the characters, the reader, and the author. The powerful scene where thirty women sing and march to Sethe’s haunted house exorcises the ghost-in-flesh. However, it is *Beloved* that casts a spell and performs an exorcism of all that has been repressed by Sethe, Denver, Paul D, and community members. The so-called “devil child” looks “beautiful. It had taken the shape of a pregnant woman naked and smiled... her smile was dazzling” in the eyes of the women who gather to help Sethe (261). *Beloved* “touches deep inside” the community women, takes out their trauma and scars, devours them, and impregnates herself with them. Her belly is “protruding like winning watermelon” with all the pains and shame not only of Sethe but of all the community members (250). As a result, *Beloved* reverses the abjection process that the black community had performed upon Sethe and her family. Still implanted with the ideology that slaves are “not supposed to have pleasurable feelings on their own” (209), the community could not allow any excess or pride that Baby Suggs and Sethe displayed. So they “[heap] upon Sethe’s family the[ir] condemnation” and assume “the haunting was

done by an evil thing” (37). Janey cannot bear the look of Sethe’s pride “trying to do it all alone with her nose in the air,” and Ella “junked” Sethe (254-55). Those reproaches are undone when they decide to come and rescue Sethe from Beloved.

When these thirty women gather and come to the hill of 124, they experience a healing of their own. They first remember Baby Suggs’s bounteous feast and the pleasant feelings (258-9). Ella remembers and is able to connect her past trauma (leaving her baby who died five days after birth) to Sethe’s. When the women see Beloved from the hill, they can actually confront their experience and their unspeakable trauma, as well as Sethe’s. Inspired by looking at Beloved, the women holler all together. Their musical, communal response/exorcism is described with the revised biblical passage: “In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like” (259). Paraphrasing John 1:1, the passage indicates the importance of musical expression in African-American culture, and authorizes its power that can break “the back of word.” The musical sound subverts and corrects the words in the newspaper clipping which initiates Morrison to re-write Garner’s/Sethe’s story. Such powerful sound makes Sethe “[tremble] like the baptized” (261). The wave of sound finally breaks a spell previously cast by their enslaved experiences. Sethe experiences a rebirth to a possible future.

Sethe’s rebirth is accompanied by the déjà vu-like scene of the infanticide when she sees Mr. Bodwin who comes to 124 to pick up Denver for work:

Standing alone on the porch, Beloved is smiling. But now her hand is empty. Sethe is running away from her, running, and she feels the emptiness in the hand Sethe has been holding. Now she is running into the faces of the people out there, joining them and leaving Beloved behind. Alone. Again. Then Denver, running too. Away from her to the pile of people out there. They make a hill. A hill of black people, falling. And above them all, rising from his place with a whip in his hand, the man without skin, looking. He is looking at her. (262)

When Sethe spots Mr. Baldwin on the road, she mistakes him for schoolteacher who intended to take her children back to slavery. Yet this time she is running toward the white oppressor to attack him, not toward Beloved whom she believes to be her daughter. Witnessing Sethe's action, Denver is running away from "the safety of ghost companion" towards the community. At this moment, the power dynamic is reversed once again. The threat of the white men's apocalypse subsides. In addition, it breaks another dynamic inside the black family and community as shown in *The Bluest Eye*. The last scene changes the kind of cultural and family dynamic in which Cholly is unable to hate the white men who terrorize him and Pauline is unable to love her daughter. The black women in the community approach Sethe's house together to help Sethe, not to judge her. The abjection that they had put on Sethe before is reversed as well. The community comes together to exorcise Beloved, who is filled with trauma and rememory. It is a powerful scene of re-discovering history, this time with the African-American

voice. *Beloved* resurrects and then revises the scenes from Morrison's own previous work.

Morrison's writing may be as "thick" as Sethe's love. Her language and plotline exemplify certain "flaws" in relation to the standards of realism and rationalism. *Beloved's* storyline is hard to follow. Morrison constantly changes the point of view within her narrative. She barely uses transitions. The text flows from a scene to another similar scene, which causes confusion. Such changes in viewpoints, setting, and time add to a sense of discontinuity. Some reviewers criticize her style⁴². However, Morrison's "defective" style is intended to challenge Western standards of writing. Morrison's narrating is similar to the way Sethe is circling around her story. Paul D thinks that Sethe spins around the room, 'circling the subject' and thus he catches 'only pieces' of what she says (161) "Circling, circling... instead of getting to the point" (161). In order to tell the story which Western realism is unable to convey, Morrison likewise circles and repeats the narrative. Morrison even presents a character who refuses to speak English⁴³. In T. Mark Ledbetter's words, *Beloved* "has no plot but a series of plottings, stories within stories without respect for conventional time sequences of past, present, and future" (80). Morrison's language reflects her desire to reconstitute and rediscover African-American cultural history. In *Beloved*, Sethe's personal history is "revealed so gradually, fragmented into symbols, and finally, [it] becomes one with the history of all African-Americans" (Rigney 33). The story is

⁴² Carol Iannone criticizes the repetition of the story and its Gothic dimension as only "designed to arouse and entertain" (63). Stanley Crouch denounces the novel as "a work of protest pulp fiction" with "overstatement, false voices, and strained homilies" (68). Snitow calls it "melodrama" (48).

⁴³ Loyalerie King's article focuses on Sixo's resistance and rhetorical power as a trickster.

told by the collective voice of the enslaved and resonates with diverse memories and voices. In and through the act of rememory, Sethe's story is reconstructed and incorporated into the collective history of the black community. When *Beloved* narrates her stories with language, the unspoken spell/bond of slavery is broken; the ghostly voice is delivered.

In the epigraph to *Beloved*, the haunting ghostly voice of the novel is compared to the Godly voice that calls into light His people [Israel] and names them "Beloved": "I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved" (Romans 9:25). Re-citing the biblical text, Morrison bestows this holiest of voices upon her own act of Gothic/abject writing. Morrison connects her voice's reconstruction of the history of African Americans to God's voice calling his people, and names the abjected social bodies of the enslaved as the "beloved" that is the authorized name of the chosen people in the Bible. Her "holy" voice breaks the "mythified" concept of blacks as the abject and breaks the long-persistent silence of history with particular voices. It shows that, as Baby Suggs advises Denver, we have to "know [the story], and go on out the yard. Go on" (244).

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