

**Authenticity in the Fictional Voices of Toni Morrison's *Love and Home*:  
Tracing Conversations Among Author, Readers, and Narrators  
as a Rewrite of U.S. History**

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
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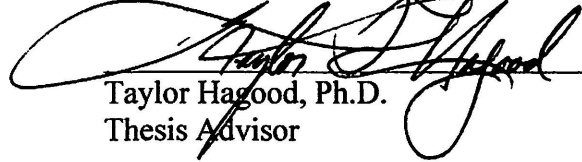
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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Taylor Hagood, Department of English, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

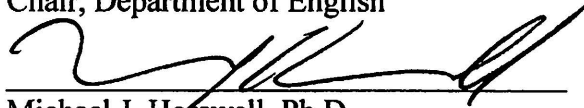
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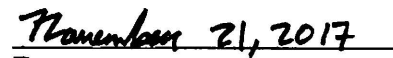
  
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## Abstract

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Toni Morrison's later novels *Love* and *Home* bring forth an issue of identity anxiety for those involved in the narrative: author, narrators, and readers. Featuring both first-person and third-person narrators, these works offer conflicting narratives in which the writer, Morrison, allows her characters to question her own authorial voice. Greater agency is given to the first-person narrators through which they deconstruct the traditional objectivity of third-person narratives. As such, this thesis argues, the structures of *Love* and *Home* extend their inside conversations to the real world of readers who must reconsider where their narrative trust has been. Moreover, Morrison's challenge to her authorial voice becomes the means through which she questions the hegemony of U.S. historical narratives. In the end, it is the subjective voices of the first-person narrators which offer a more reliable, counter narrative of not only Morrison's fictional stories, but that of the nation's historical past.

## **Dedication**

This manuscript is dedicated to my family for all their enthusiasm during the writing of this project, particularly to my baby girl, Freya, whose strength of character even in her newborn months has truly taught me the importance of a voice. She has been an inspiration through the writing of this thesis. As she learns to communicate, I rediscover language in new ways that truthfully makes me rethink narrative.

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## Introduction

### **Unconventional Freedoms: The Authorial Voice of Toni Morrison, First-Person Narrators, and Readers' Role in the Narrative**

In her introduction to *What Moves at the Margin*, Carolyn C. Denard reveals the tale Toni Morrison tells in her Nobel Lecture as an inspiration for the context that frames her collection of Morrison's non-fiction. The story's moral, as one may expect, is at the center of most of Morrison's works, of both a fictional and non-fictional nature. The tale describes an encounter between an old black woman who is blind and wise, and young children who have come, it seems, to "disprov[e] her clairvoyance" (198). The children ask a question that intends to trick her, since the woman is blind: "Is the bird I am holding living or dead?" they ask (199). The old woman's response is that of responsibility for both one's actions and words. Because she cannot see the bird, she does not know whether it is dead or alive; "what I do know," she says nonetheless, "is that it is in your hands" (199). She has no need to see the children to know that its life or death is "in their hands," that the bird is their responsibility just like those questioning words which intend to ridicule her.

The children's trick, however, may be of another nature altogether, Morrison suggests. Perhaps they are not looking to mock her but open her up to them. "Suppose nothing was in their hands?" she says, suppose they see this as "a chance to interrupt, to violate the adult world...to be spoken to, taken seriously" (204). If so, then their question may be a worthy one about life itself, and about death. Unhappy with her answer, they



reveal their true intentions of gaining knowledge from a wise person that would help them “start strong” in life: “Is there no context for our lives?” they ask, “[Is there] [n]o song, no literature, no poem full of vitamins, no history connected to experience that you can pass along to help us start strong?” (205). The story, as scholars such as Denard have noted, represents a running theme throughout Morrison’s works which regards context, history, and people’s narratives as the cornerstones for meaning. In addition, I find that the tale reveals a concern by Morrison as an author—a concern of responsibility with language that translates into her fiction through certain experimental narrative devices I will later discuss, and which I find mostly pronounced in her more contemporary novels, specifically, *Love* (2003) and *Home* (2012). As such, these two works question their own narratives, the storytelling in Morrison’s previous novels, and the narratives of United States history, wondering whether a single-voice has taken-over the story or if there has been room left for conversation.

Within her lecture, moreover, Morrison provides her own interpretation of the story. She says:

So I chose to read the bird as language and the woman as a practiced writer. She is worried about how the language she dreams in, given to her at birth, is handled, put into service, even withheld from her for certain nefarious purposes. Being a writer she thinks of language partly as a system, partly as a living thing over which one has control, but mostly as agency—as an act with consequences. (199-200)

Her concern, she posits, does not belong solely to her or to the old woman in the story; it is shared rather by those who write: “Being a writer,” Morrison makes the distinction,

“she thinks of language...as agency—as an act with consequences.” Thus, writing becomes a responsibility, for it is enabled by the author’s usage of that language. Responsibility, however, bears a second meaning for Morrison. In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, she divides the word to signal two significations: response-ability. Morrison’s writing, therefore, reveals a deep awareness of the reader. She considers the “ability” of a writer to trigger a “response” from his or her audience as a valuable, if not essential, contribution to literature. “The imagination that produces work which bears and invites rereadings,” she explains, “which motions to future readings as well as contemporary ones, implies a shareable world and an endlessly flexible language” (xii). In an interview with Claudia Tate, furthermore, Morrison describes a relationship between herself, the author, and her readers in which she envisions a co-creation: “The reader supplies the emotions. The reader supplies even some of the color, some of the sound. My language has to have holes and spaces so the reader can come into it...Then we...come together to make this book” (125). In such shared experience, therefore, literary responsibility becomes a matter that involves both writer and reader.

These concerns with agency and response are widely thematic and represented more openly in the two novels by Morrison that this thesis considers: *Love* and *Home*. In both works, the reader encounters two narrators, in the first and third-person, whose stories are frequently conflicting. A seemingly consistent personal narrative opens each novel, but as soon as the reader begins to feel he or she knows the story, a new voice is introduced, creating a multiplicity of possible truths as well as fictions. Morrison’s narrative structures place great emphasis on giving agency to the first-person, allowing it

to interject throughout the third-person narration not only between chapters, but also in the middle of them. Both L (the first-person narrator of *Love*) and Frank (the first-person narrator of *Home*) are allowed interruptions that create an inner-textual conversation between narrators. At the same time, the very nature of this internal conversation actively involves the reader, for he or she must discover which narratives are truthful and which ones are not. While her earlier novels also deal with a multiplicity of storylines, *Love* and *Home* create an overt conflict of voices that speak to each other, to the audience, and most interestingly, to the author herself. As such, the narrative structures of these novels extend their inner conversations to the real world of the reader, therefore, allowing Morrison's characters to reach outside the text.

This thesis seeks to bridge Morrison's overall concern with the responsibility that storytelling entails to the powerful agency she provides to her first-person narrators. In tracing the interactions between narrators, I illustrate Morrison's own anxiety about authorship encoded in the first-person interruptions and challenges to the third-person's narration. In *Love*, for instance, Morrison chooses to give agency to the character of L even though she is dead; readers find out that L is a ghost narrator by the story's end. In the Foreword to the novel, Morrison explains: "The interior narrative of the characters, so full of secrets and partial insights, would be interrupted and observed by an 'I' not restricted by chronology or space—or the frontier between life and not-life" (x). In giving voice to a dead character, she gives L the flexibilities of a third-person narrator, not limited by the spacial or temporal constraints of a typical homodiegetic narrator. In terms of *Home*, furthermore, Frank is given the authority not only to interrupt the third-person

narrator, but to challenge the accuracy of its storytelling<sup>1</sup>. Speaking about such narrative choice, Morrison observes: “I didn't want to take on the ‘I’ persona, so he [Frank] and I are in this relationship” (Interview by Shea). She thus takes ownership of the third-person but not of the first. By creating a relationship between author/third-person-narrator and character/first-person-narrator, she allows her characters to challenge her authorial voice. As such, both L and Frank are able to defy the conventional limits of a first-person narration.

In writing about Morrison’s early fiction, John N. Duvall identifies a similar anxiety about authorship to describe her initial “becoming” as a writer—an anxiety which I feel lays ground to her consequent creation of characters who question her narratives. He considers Morrison’s search for an authorial identity that is “complicated,” as one that has undergone multiple revisions (2). For example, he mentions two occasions when Morrison was asked to recall the moment in which she knew she was a writer, at which times she provides different answers. In 1983, she says that it was after having written *Sula* that she felt she was a writer (49). In 1985, however, she changes her response:

And it was only with my third book, *Song of Solomon*, that I finally said [...] “this is what I do.” I had written three books. It was only after I finished *Song of Solomon* that I thought, “maybe this is what I do *only*.” Because before that I always said that I was an editor *who* also wrote books or a teacher *who* also wrote. I never said I was a writer. (qtd. in Duvall 71)

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis is not making the argument that the third-person narrator of each respective novel is a character, but that it serves a specific function, rather, as a representation of that romanticized version of Americanness and U.S. history with which Morrison is concerned, and which will be later discussed in this introduction and the subsequent chapters.

Morrison's first four novels, as Duvall observes, are decidedly concerned with identity formation both of the African-American self and the authorial self. The fact that she "could not claim the designation 'writer' while she was producing *The Bluest Eye*," he argues, and that "these doubts persist through the writing of her second novel" and, according to her 1985 statement, through the writing of the third, creates a body of works that "stand as written text[s] without a writer" (49). Or, at least, without the writer's consciousness of authorship.

Morrison's authorial identity, as Duvall observes, therefore, is always "becoming" in the first four novels. Her interviews, at least through *Tar Baby*, often represent "the story in which she continues to be the writer who was almost a writer" (71). Such anxiety is represented through some of the characters of her earlier fiction, and while my intention is not to provide any autobiographical readings, my project does consider certain moments in which her works provide an expression of Morrison's writerly selfhood. As Duvall comments, it is Morrison herself who authorizes such interpretations when she says: "And all those people were me. I was Pecola, Claudia...I was everybody" (28). As such, although the focus of this thesis pertains specifically to *Love and Home*, I find that a short history of Morrison's preceding works will be useful in understanding the themes that run through these two novels, as well as what drives the argument of my work. After all, it is in the anxieties of her becoming a writer that L's and Frank's challenges to her authorial voice find their birthplace.

Duvall's *Identifying Fictions* is a good place to start drafting the history of Morrison's earlier fiction in connection to her search for an authorial self. In *The Bluest Eye*, he observes, we find Soaphead Church as Morrison's "attempt to fashion a useable

racialized authorial identity.” Elihue Whitcomb’s becoming into Soaphead Church, as Duvall argues, “obversely” resembles Chloe Wofford’s fabrication of Toni Morrison as her authorial voice, for he represents those conditions which Morrison, at least in her early works, “deems necessary to writing [or creation]”: a self-induced state of solitude; writing/creating for oneself; and, interestingly, signing the name which truly depicts the creator’s identity<sup>2</sup> (29-35). In *Sula*, we encounter a character “who should have been but did not become an artist.” Thus, considering Morrison’s ambivalence in accepting the title of author, *Sula* represents that desire to be an artist and, at the same time, the fear of what such desire might demand (49-50). In terms of *Song of Solomon*, Pilate resembles a storyteller, providing a recreation of African-American history as she sings folk songs that depict her ancestors overcoming oppression. Additionally, Duvall argues, through her third novel Morrison completes her exploration of authorship as far as those aspects associated with “the cultural masculine”; the character of “Milkman is represented as having achieved an authentic identity at the very moment when Morrison begins her search for identity through her writing” (73). After all, Morrison does revise her statement about the moment in which she knew she was an author; she changes it from the completion of *Sula* to that of *Song of Solomon*. If she was unable to identify herself as a writer until after having written her third novel, then it can be said that Morrison’s search for an authorial selfhood has influenced and is directly reflected upon at least the first three of her works.

In her fourth novel, Morrison explores identity through the feminine voices of *Tar Baby*, and thus completes her fashioning of self “by overtly giving up the project of ever

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<sup>2</sup> Both Church and Morrison express a desire to come back to their birthnames. Church signs his letter to God as Elihue Micah Whitcomb. Morrison confesses, “I am really Chloe Anthony Wofford. That’s who I am. I have been writing under this other person’s name. I regret having called myself Toni Morrison when I published my first novel,” and “I write all the time about being misnamed” (qtd. in Duvall 35).

achieving a *completed* self” (Emphasis Added, Duvall 101). Through *Tar Baby*, Morrison acknowledges that while she may claim a feminine, African-American authorial voice, that self is never quite “completed.” This is an important point in her writing career, for, as we will see in the following chapters, it is this idea of “unfinalized” subjects, as Michael Bakhtin posits, which allows Morrison to create thinking characters who grow through their first-person narrative rather than being defined by the author’s vision. It is, thus, the “intertextual dialogue between *Song of Solomon* and *Tar Baby* (in which self is figured first as male and then as female),” argues Duvall, that “allows Morrison to fashion a usable racial identity by narrating the difficulties of coming to such an identity” (117). To identify herself as an author, she must first understand the meaning of her womanhood as well as her African-American self against the context and history of such designations. Therefore, the first four novels’ exploration of selfhood; whether it is masculine, feminine, and/or African-American; function as Morrison’s own doubts and workings toward a feminine, African-American authorial self. And these difficulties in arriving to such authorial identity, certainly take center stage in the creation of L and Frank, who she envisions as authentic voices, separate from her.

Numerous other critics along with Duvall have recognized the project of self-fashioning reflected by Morrison’s first four novels. Speaking about *The Bluest Eye*, for example, Rebecca Hope Ferguson observes in *Rewriting Black Identities* that “[t]he relation of author to protagonists entails a reestablishing of ‘me’ through ‘we’; not the undifferentiated collective ‘we’ of Movement slogans, but the ‘we’ of a complex, multifaceted self which finds expression through the fictional selves of the novel” (26-27). While this figuration of “‘me’ through ‘we’” does become the focus of Morrison’s early

fiction, her concern with African-American identity and her own authorial identity runs through her later novels as well, but under a slightly different light. Her works, thus, can be somewhat divided into three different stages—the first one which Duvall considers in detail. *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, and *Tar Baby* represent the search of identity which lends itself to modernist interpretations. As Duvall points out, however, these texts also lend themselves to postmodernist readings concerned with the *making* of the self, just like Morrison creates her own authorial identity through her writing. Now, *Beloved*, *Jazz*, and *Paradise*, what critics call the historical trilogy, are very much postmodernist texts exploring deconstructed identities that have been affected by the nation's history. Having “authorized” herself with a feminine, African-American voice through the first four novels, as Duvall calls it, Morrison, now in the second stage of her writing, considers the role that her work should play, particularly, for the African-American community. In her assessment of *Beloved*, for example, Ferguson claims that “[t]he novel itself...represents Morrison's effort, as a black writer, to ‘reconstruct,’ or at least to re-address in imaginative terms, the ‘disremembered’ past of the race, and to assess the possible outcomes of such a project” (133-34). Thus, Morrison's historical trilogy moves from the reconstruction of the personal to the communal identities and pasts of African-Americans.

If Morrison's early fiction reveals a concern with finding/making an authentic African-American identity, as well as her own authorial identity (as a woman and as an African-American herself), and if the second stage of Morrison's writing is preoccupied with the socio-political impact that her novels produce in the African-American community, then the question which my thesis addresses has to do with the role of her contemporary fiction. Four novels make-up the body of works of contemporary Morrison.



As mentioned earlier, however, my project will focus primarily on *Love* and *Home*, due to the conflicting conversations found between first-person and third-person narrators, and the involvement of the author herself. This is not the first time that Morrison juxtaposes first and third-person. Yet, in other works, the reader's role is to piece back together the tales of the different voices in order to understand the overall story—a technique which Morrison utilizes to criticize master narratives. In *Love* and *Home*, however, the reader must, additionally, deal with the discrepancies and sometimes overt lies, particularly in *Home*, of both the first-person narrator and the “traditionally” reliable third-person. As such, the contemporary Morrison of *Love* and *Home* can be described as a deconstructionist of her own authorial power position. While her fiction up until *Paradise* presents multiple voices to portray a criticism of master narratives, these two novels challenge her authorial voice altogether. Frank, for example, openly calls her narratives of certain events untrue: “*Not true. I didn't think any such thing*” (69). While the authorial anxiety of her earlier fiction involves claiming authorship as an African-American woman, the anxiety of her later fiction reflects her desire to set the multiple voices of her characters free, even of her own power position as a writer/third-person-narrator.

My view of such authorial anxiety, however, is linked to an overall critique of power structures embedded in the novels' general concern with the discrepancies of our nation's historical narratives. In an interview with Dr. François Noudelmann, Morrison says that “so much of our history has been erased, distorted and reconstructed to a level of fantasy. It's as though avoiding the truths of the past is somehow so degrading that no one can function” (37). There exists an overall denial in regard to issues of race, gender, and nationality, which distorts the truth about our nation's history and, in turn, the

identity of its people. Morrison's concern with master narratives does not belong exclusively to fiction. Her anxiety functions much in the same way in which she allows her fictional characters to reach outside the text into the real world of the reader. The playfulness of her narrative techniques not only create a sort of symphony of voices, truths, and fictions, it serves as a critique of the dominant national narrative that for so long has been romanticizing much of the nation's historical past<sup>3</sup>. "Each book tries to move aside a curtain or a door that's been closed in order to enlighten or to shed some light," explains Morrison about her literature. "It is about reconstructing the memory and its context," she continues (Interview by Noudelmann 37). As such, the deliberate challenges of the first-person narrators to her authorial voice become tools of "subversion." My quotation marks here are purposeful, for I do not intend "subversion" as the replacement of an overthrown master narrative with a different, yet another, master narrative; Morrison would certainly not advocate it. But I do mean it in the sense of it being moved down from its pedestal position and placed alongside other narratives. So I question: what might, then, the conversation sound like?

The following two chapters expose the interaction and exchanges between Morrison's novels, *Love and Home*, and United States national history. Along with these novels I consider some of her non-fiction—essays, interviews, forewords to the novels, etc.—in arguing a (perhaps purposeful) authorial anxiety that drives Morrison to place great emphasis on the unconventional agency she provides to her first-person narrators,

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<sup>3</sup> Even though the romanticization of U.S. history, particularly of the 1950's onward in the context of the novels, has been significantly deconstructed in the realm of academia, Morrison is dealing with a popular notion that is very much alive in people's day-to-day lives, as opposed to the academic world. As such, this thesis considers the romanticized and hidden histories that make-up such popular notion, rather than those found in academia.

and those overt attacks on the third-person which drives readers to question its objectivity. Chapter One provides a layout of the meta-fictional nature of both novels to illustrate the unconventionality of the first and third-person narratives. I offer a reading of *Love and Home* through Jorge Luis Borges's assessment of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, whose fictional characters read about themselves in Cervantes novel. As Morrison's first-person narrators become readers/spectators of the novel for which they have been created, they question and correct the narrative of the third-person. As such, this chapter expounds on the unreliability of the third-person narrators, showing moments in which either omissions or misrepresentations disrupt the truthfulness of the overall story. It is, thus, the subjective voice of the first-person who has to issue corrections to the master narrative. In addition, this section provides an overview of the historical context for each novel and considers how the government's version of U.S. history has managed to maintain narrative control. In the vulnerability of the third-person, this chapter argues, there is a critique of the nation's powers of storytelling. In turn, Morrison steps down from her own authorial power position by allowing L and Frank to question her third-person narration, in order to challenge the hegemony of the nation's historical narratives.

Chapter Two, then, considers the narratives of *Love and Home* in terms of the first-person narrators. Through Bakhtinian philosophy, this chapter explores L's and Frank's subjectivity as well as a couple other major characters—Christine and Heed Cosey, and Frank's sister, Cee—who either become the focus of or influence the first-person narrators in a significant way. As such, I consider those aspects of Morrison's characters which makes them distinguishable from her own authorial voice, and that depict her novels as “dialogical,” in Bakhtinian terms. Through these two novels,

Morrison sets the voices of her characters free, both from herself as the author and from the master narratives of the state that threaten to define them. In addition, therefore, I explore those moments in which the first-person narration offers a counter story to the “monologic” historical narratives of the state. Having established the ways in which the government achieves narrative control in the first chapter of this thesis, I now illustrate how their romanticized versions of history affect the individual characters driving them to expose certain degeneracies that provide an alternative story. The second chapter, then, becomes a discussion of the healing and subversive powers of storytelling, and its ability to re-shape personal and national identities. Thus, the larger implication of this thesis considers the premise that fiction can fill the gaps and reconstruct the narratives which history leaves open.

## Chapter 1

### Questioning the Master Narrative: The Unreliable Third-Person

“Why does it disturb us that Don Quixote be a reader of the *Quixote* and Hamlet a spectator of *Hamlet*? I believe I have found the reason: these inversions suggest that if the characters of a fictional work can be readers or spectators, we, its readers or spectators, can be fictitious. In 1833, Carlyle observed that the history of the universe is an infinite sacred book that all men write and read and try to understand, and in which they are also written.”

– Jorge Luis Borges, “Partial Magic in the *Quixote*”

Morrison’s novels, *Love* and *Home*, call upon varying voices of both a fictional and non-fictional nature. Worlds become entangled as author, readers, and characters begin a conversation. What happens during such exchanges Jorge Luis Borges calls “Partial Magic,” and can, therefore, be easily explored through his work on Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*. In his study of narratology, particularly in writings of a metafictional nature, Bruce F. Kavin highlights a paradox between characters and readers that had been postulated by Borges around the 1960’s, but which proves relevant even to Morrison’s latest fiction. “[I]f the characters of a fictional work can be readers or spectators,” he posits, “we, its readers or spectators, can be [in turn] fictitious” (17). The novel, which depends upon the participatory role of the reader and its author to tell its story, inevitably points at what Robert Altar identifies as “the problematic relationship between real-seeming artifice and reality” (qtd. in Kavin 16). When Morrison involves the reader, and herself as the author, in the active process of narration, the line between fiction and reality begins to blur. In dealing with the different storylines and their varying

degrees of truthfulness, Morrison's reader enters the narrative and may very well be read as part of that fictitious world that he or she has acquainted. Both *Love* and *Home* create a fictive space within which reality resides, and propose questions about that reality which are, in turn, addressed through such fiction.

Through Borges one may begin to visualize the exchanges between imagined characters and the realities of African-American history with which Morrison is concerned. Borges's conception deals, essentially, with questions of time and space. In his essay, "Partial Magic in the *Quixote*," he explains his position through Cervantes's *Don Quixote*:

Cervantes takes pleasure in confusing the objective and the subjective, the world of the reader and the world of the book...In the sixth chapter of the first part, the priest and the barber inspect Don Quixote's library; astoundingly, one of the books examined is Cervantes' own *Galatea* and it turns out that [the priest] is a friend of the author and does not admire him very much, and says that he is more versed in misfortunes than in verses and that the book possesses some inventiveness, proposes a few ideas and concludes nothing. [The priest]...passes judgment on Cervantes. (188)

Here, the imagined world of Cervantes starts to cross paths with the real-life author.

Cervantes's own character claims to know him personally and, furthermore, becomes the judge of the author. Whether this scene represents the writer's own authorial anxiety, I leave to Cervantes's scholars, but I do want to point at the way in which fictive characters transcend the limits of a traditional narrative by critiquing the work of their author. Here the priest considers Cervantes's narrative not good enough, but recognizes in it a

potential to become so in a sequel, thus, saves the book from burning. In *Love and Home*, Morrison's characters pass judgment on the accuracy of the narrative; they comment on whether the third-person leaves gaps while storytelling, and whether the narrative is truthful. Spacially, as Borges suggest, both authors and readers continue to inhabit two worlds, one of fiction and one of reality—the authors because they write themselves as subjects of their characters' gaze, and the readers because they engage in the play set up by the authors.

Each of Morrison's novels illustrate Borges's ideas of inversion, between the fictive and real worlds, in slightly different manners, but they do so with a common goal. When, in *Love*, Morrison presents a first-person narrator whose knowledge of the Cosey's story surpasses the omniscience of the third-person narrator, she toils with the reader's preconceptions about narrative reliability and, in turn, brings him/her to reevaluate his/her own notions of reality and his/her own role within and outside fiction. In *Home*, we find a similar situation to that of Cervantes's fictional character having knowledge of the real author, Cervantes. Typically, one does not attribute the third-person voice to that of the author's, but it is safe enough to do it here with *Home*, at least in the sense that character and author hold a certain meta-fictional relationship. Morrison has mentioned, in various occasions, that when Frank interrupts the third-person narrator, he is talking to her, the author: "[Frank] and I are in this relationship" (Interview by Shea); "I liked talking to him. You know, when he was talking to me, and telling me to shut up, that, I didn't know what I was talking about" (Interview by Torrence Boone). In this light, Frank, like Cervantes's priest, becomes the judge of the author. In questioning the reliability of the third-person narrators, L and Frank disrupt the possibility of a master

narrative, and begin to represent Morrison's challenge to the power entities that produce hegemonic accounts of our national history—I will return to this argument in detail in the second part of this chapter.

These interferences of fiction into reality and reality into fiction do not only raise questions of space, argues Borges, but also of time. The continuity of such exchanges suggests a certain kind of “infinity” (190). These crossings do not end at the encounter of the two worlds; they further point at the fictive nature of the work itself and, in the case of Morrison's novels, they also question the reliability of narratives in general, whether they be works of fiction or non-fiction. But this theory of “infinity” is best explained through the characters. In the second part of *Don Quixote*, observes Borges, “the protagonists have [begun to] read the first part [of the novel]” (188). In other words, the characters see themselves within Cervantes's fictitious world as works of fiction. “The protagonists of the *Quixote* are, at the same time, readers of the *Quixote*,” says Borges (188). Such paradox invites the argument for “infinity”; we encounter a book within a book, characters trapped living and reading about themselves, and continuous jumps in and out of the fictive and real worlds.

Interestingly, Morrison also allows L and Frank to cross over their roles of characters and narrators to that of readers/spectators of the novel for which they have been created. Because the case of Frank is done more overtly, I will start with him first. Although there is no physical book for him to read, as Cervantes provides in his work, we may infer from Frank's commentary in the first chapter that he is aware of Morrison's writing of the novel: “*Since you're set on telling my story, whatever you think and whatever you write down, know this: I really forgot about the burial*” (5). He even has



detailed knowledge of her narration, suggesting that he has read the third-person's account of the story: "*Earlier you wrote about how sure I was that the beat-up man on the train to Chicago would turn around when they got home and whip the wife who tried to help him.*" (69). A couple chapters later, he tells her to change directions in her narrative, for he does not want to be portrayed as a hero: "*Only my sister in trouble could force me to even think about going [back to Georgia]. Don't paint me as some enthusiastic hero. I had to go but I dreaded it*" (84). Frank is able to move back and forth from his role of protagonist to that of reader; he has access, like we do, to the chapters of the third-person narrator.

L's reader-like role falls within the lines of observer as would a spectator of a play. Her ghostly state allows her to oversee the storytelling, although she does not engage the third-person narrator directly as Frank does. Her purpose is to fill the gaps of Morrison's third-person narrative. "The interior life of the characters, so full of secrets and partial insights," says Morrison, "would be interrupted and observed by an 'I' not restricted by chronology or space — or the frontier between life and death" (Foreword, *Love x*). As such, she is both character-narrator and spectator of a story in which she is also written. The fact that, in her position of narrator, she tells only the most intimate secrets and those occurrences which the main narrative omits, suggests that she is aware of the incompleteness of the third-person's tale. Again, although Morrison does not include a physical book from which L will read the story, we may conclude from L's knowledge of the third-person's partial truths that she oversees its narrative, allowing her to fit in the reader's role. Not only does she have chapters of her own, but her voice also appears within the chapters of the third-person narrator, interrupting the storytelling and

providing missing information. Her responses to each of those chapters reveal her position of spectator to the third-person narrative as much as that of narrator.

The crossings I explained above, and will demonstrate further in what follows, expose the anxieties of authorship I introduced in the previous chapter and their connection to Morrison's overall concern with master historical narratives. The fact that fictitious characters can become readers/spectators of the novel for which they have been written, and even challenge the story of the omniscient third-person narrator, invites real-life readers to question not only Morrison's storytelling but all narratives in general. Thus, the infiniteness of these crossings, as Borges suggests, outline the story within a story idea that frames the argument of this thesis: the structure of *Love and Home* mirror Morrison's own account of anxiety about authorship and what her power position as a writer entails; this story, at the same time, contains a story of larger concern about the nation's historical narratives; which narratives also present different accounts of varying truths and fictions. The regularity with which Morrison places a story within a story speaks for the active participation that her novels demand from all its parts—there is no one storyline and no guidelines for either characters, narrators, readers, and even author. To understand Morrison, one ought to look at the structure and the overall conversation among all its components: “[T]he *meaning* of a novel is in the structure,” she says (Interview by Michael Silverblatt 218). Thus, it becomes necessary to explore further what each part is saying to each other.

## I. The Powers of Storytelling: Narrative Control and Reliability

Both *Love* and *Home* are affected by the Civil Rights era, either because of desegregation's direct impact on the characters (as in *Love*) or because of its lack thereof (as in *Home*). *Love* is set during the period corresponding to, approximately, the 1930's to the 1990's. Integration, we are told by the third-person narrator, causes the fall of the Cosey's resort (although L appears to believe otherwise). Now, *Home* is set in the early 1950's, during the years leading to the Civil Rights Movement. Frank Money, who is a veteran of the Korean War, "struggles to reenter a segregated society after [fighting] an integrated war," observes Joseph Darda (95). Interestingly, Morrison's novels suggest that these fights in favor of people's civil rights, freedom, and democracy—both at the domestic and international levels—were also used to perpetrate those immoralities that they fought against. It is this paradox which maintains the inconsistency of historical narratives—a legalized discrepancy that survives due to, non-other than, the rhetorical powers of storytelling. "Morrison recognizes that narrative is among the warfare state's most powerful technologies," says Darda (81). In her interview with Boone, he further observes, Morrison stresses that "[t]he US warfare state has...always relied on its ability to achieve narrative control" (80). As such, in *Love* and *Home*, Morrison places her own narrative control over the novels on trial.

Typically, the third-person is an all-powerful narrator with varying degrees of omniscience. And since the third-person is not a character within the story, he or she is not bound by the spacial or temporal constraints of an otherwise first-person narrator. In "The Diachronization of Narratology," for instance, Monika Fludernik considers the homodiegetic narrator concluding that he or she "has few opportunities to move from one

plot strand to another. Any information about other characters would be bound to involve the experiencing self hearing about it...[He or she] cannot easily move to another location, except by physically going there” (336). Thus, in this sense, the third-person provides greater narratological flexibility to the author—a flexibility to control the narrative which places the third-person and the author in a God-like position. Of course, this is decisively not representative of *Love* nor *Home*. Sticking to such traditions of narratology would signify, for Morrison, a celebration of powerful master narratives, and all that which they hide or, to use Darda’s terminology, all that which is “narrativized away” (81). Therefore, if Morrison, as the author/third-person narrator, is herself in such power position, I wonder whether one may speculate: Can she no longer tell the story right? After all, she appears to question this as well, “things go awry. As often happens, characters make claims, impose demands of imaginative accountability over and above the author’s will to contain them” (*Playing in the Dark* 28). Yet, her narratives, although deconstructed, do not fall apart. I think she has, especially through *Love* and *Home*, figured out how to tell the story “right.”

In allowing L and Frank to hold her accountable over her third-person narration, Morrison both challenges her own power position and, in turn, the hegemony of historical narratives. To tell the story right, in Morrison’s perspective, is to present the voices of the novel in conversation and disagreement, not only between fictional characters but among all its participating parts, including author, reader, and the historical context that shapes the story. The third-person, she suggests, is but one voice that sometimes intends to represent the many voices of different characters. Of similar grounding is McCarthyism, she suggests, which originated during the late 1940’s and lasted through a good part of

the 50's. Morrison cites such practice as an example of narrative control by the state, says Darda (80). By taking into consideration accusations without the proper regard for evidence, the state is able to tell the story of many in hegemony (in this case, a story of traitors to anticommunist efforts). Today, Darda claims, PRISM—the surveillance program that collects internet data communications for the National Security Agency—has become “the digital outgrowth of this narrative logic” that controls storytelling and, as Morrison argues, the entity which “informs much if not all of American history” (81). As such, narratives of one voice, whether in fiction or non-fiction, Morrison's novels suggest, prove problematic.

The structure of these two novels, thus, become a critique of the state and its narrative powers. In a 1992 interview, for example, Morrison portrays such criticism through her novel *Jazz*, although her explanation applies very fittingly to both *Love* and *Home*:

The [book's] voice starts out believing it is totally knowledgeable. It knows everything or says it does, and begins to love its language and love its point of view...And then a character's own aria, or own soliloquy or own interior thoughts surrounded in quotes can object to what the book-voice has said, disagree with it, or even ignore it, so that along with the major sound of the voice, there are these other instruments that comment on that narrative. (Interview by Rushdie 53)

The first-person narrators of *Love* and *Home* are afforded the same freedom as those from *Jazz*, except that the master voice that they engage is not the book but Morrison's own (figuratively, in the case of *Love*, and rather literally in *Home*). This switch from object,

the book's voice, to subject, the author's voice, is rhetorically significant, for it straightforwardly removes the conventional trust in the objectivity of a third-person narrator, and relocates him/her in the realm of subjectivity. In what follows, a close reading of *Love's* and *Home's* storytelling reveals the vulnerability of the third-person and a critique of the nation's narrative powers.

## II. Omissions and Misrepresentations of Fictional and Historical Narratives

*Love's* narration is about missing information. Without L's first-person narrative, the reader is left with a story of greedy, old women, who, on the verge of the Civil Rights Movement, contribute to the fall of Bill Cosey's family and his Hotel and Resort (an exclusive spot for African-American elites located at Up Beach). L, on the other hand, offer a rather different story about a deep friendship between Christine and Heed—Cosey's granddaughter and wife, respectively—which becomes lost amid feelings of parental abandonment, premature and unhealthy sexual relations, and transferred emotions of fear and hatred. The discrepancy of storylines, here, lies in the third-person's omission of Christine's and Heed's childhood friendship during the first eight chapters of the novel. It is not until the ninth and final chapter, as most of Morrison's scholars have noted, that the third-person reveals their deep childhood bond and love for one another. The main narrative focuses on the quarrel between the two women over their love for Bill Cosey: "Each had been displaced by another," says the narrator, "each had a unique claim on Cosey's affection; each had either 'saved' him from some disaster or relieved him from an impending one" (98). In fact, all the narratives which vocalize a woman character—Christine, Heed, May, Vida, and Junior—are centered around their love for Bill Cosey. L's narrative, however, provides the missing pieces throughout that allows

the reader to arrive at the last chapter with knowledge of their once close friendship, and this, assess the story of “greedy, old women” under a very different light. Such knowledge is of utmost significance, as Jean Wyatt observes in her recent study of Morrison’s later novels, for it represents the division of narrative between 1) patriarchal discourse centered around “male desire [and] the normative of heterosexual romantic love”—namely, the third-person’s storytelling—and 2) an alternative story of girl friends’ love—that is, L’s first-person narrative (98). Therefore, centering the meaning of *Love* around Christine’s and Heed’s friendship, instead of around Bill Cosey, is important to understanding the rhetoric surrounding the fall of the Cosey family and, consequently, of their Hotel and Resort. It is thus in the rather liberal omissions of the main narrative that the reader is driven to doubt the objectivity and reliability of the third-person as he or she is made to rethink even the basics, as Wyatt notes, of “[w]hat is [the] story about?” (96).

Four very different stories justify the fall of Cosey’s Hotel and Resort. Bill Cosey, L tells us, believed it was the cannery smell which was driving guests away. But that was just an excuse to hide the “real reason” which brought shame upon him, L reveals, for guests never minded the smell before. Vocalizing Vida, a former employee and avid supporter of Cosey, the third-person proposes that quarreling women is what brings down the man’s empire: “it came to that: a commanding, beautiful man surrendering to feuding women, letting them ruin all he had built. How could they do that, Vida wondered” (36). But the story of May and her fears of desegregation is the most interesting reason the third-person provides, for, at the same time as it depicts May as crazy, it also gives her a certain level of credibility in mirroring her concerns to the increasing worry of a great

number of black business owners at the wake of integration. From her perspective, the Cosey's Hotel is brought down by the civil rights movement:

May enters the kitchen...She is carrying an institutionalize carton that once held boxes of Rinso. She is frantic with worry that the hotel and everybody in it are in immediate danger. That city blacks have already invaded Up Beach, carrying lighter fluid, matches, Molotov cocktails; shouting, urging the locals to burn Cosey's Hotel and Resort to the ground and put the Uncle Toms, the sheriff's pal, the race traitor out of business.

(80)

From inside the minds of different characters, the third-person describes a May who becomes mad by her fears: "the mold growing in her own mind, May was beyond discussion" (80), "Poor Mama. Poor old May...crazy-like-a-fox was all she could think of" (99). Yet, May's story of madness clashes with the realities of the 1960's, for her fears are historically grounded. With integration, the acceptance of African-Americans into what were once whites-only-businesses gave black people more options, diminishing the clientele of black businesses who used to enjoy a certain monopoly. Through this portrayal, Morrison divides the narrative into a few different storylines within and outside fiction. While the Civil Rights Movement brings equality, one also finds in the fictional story of the Cosey's and in the reality of the 1960's that significant losses were also suffered by black entrepreneurs in connection to the efforts for integration. These are decisively two sides of the same story, despite May's reputation, which expose the infiniteness of storylines that Borges remarks.



To merely follow the narrative of the third-person without L's account, however, would situate Bill Cosey and the Civil Rights at the center of the narrative, denying Christine and Heed a significant place in the story. There is another truth, L argues, linked to the friendship between Christine and Heed that the third-person so overtly omits. "[S]he offers a glimpse of a competing story of love," says Wyatt of L's narrative, "one that honors the love between little girls and gives priority to girlfriends' rights to an enduring relationship" (111). Unlike the third-person's narrative whose focus is on Cosey and his empire, L's focal point is on the loss of love between friends. "*When we were just the two females, things went along fine,*" recounts L, "*It was when the girls got in the picture – Christine and Heed – that things began to fray. Oh, I know the 'reasons' given: cannery smell [is what Mr. Cosey said], civil rights, integration [as May said]...It was [Mr. Cosey] marrying Heed that laid the brickwork for ruination*" (104). By taking Heed as his bride, L tells us, Christine's grandfather, plants the seed that breaks his family apart and brings forth the fall of the resort. Both Christine and May begin to feel displaced by Heed, and so a war between the three begins. "*See, he chose a girl already spoken for,*" says L, "*Not promised to anyone by her parents. That trash gave her up like they would a puppy. No. The way I see it, she belonged to Christine and Christine belonged to her*" (105). Therefore, Civil Rights do contribute to the fall of the Coseys, not because of the movement's threats or a diminishing clientele, however, but because May's worry of displacement ends up rupturing the friendship between Christine and Heed. As May's integration fears translate into her personal life, she begins to teach her daughter her own hatred against the one she deems a traitor.

Therefore, L's narration supplies the missing information that provides an understanding of May's tendency to equate the Civil Rights war with her war against Heed. She believes that both were there to take everything away from her and her daughter: "*The day Mr. Cosey told us who he was marrying was the opening day of May's personal December 7. In an eye blink she went from defense to war*" (137). While in their assessment of the novel Neelakantan and Venkatesan call L's reference to the Slavery Protocol of December 7, 1953 "the end of May's authority" (144), a protocol which they consider a contributor to the abolition of segregation, it is noteworthy to mention that May's loss of authority does not signify an "end," per say, as much as the *start* of a war. Emancipation itself, for instance, easily exemplifies this notion that the abolition of something does not necessarily constitute the end of a war. Interestingly, Cosey announces his choice for a bride in 1942, the same year the U.S. enters World War II, making L's comment on "*May's personal December 7*" even more pertinent, referencing the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Morrison's argument here falls in line with her comment about *Home* and the Korean War in which she says that war does not stay overseas but is also found at home. Because L sees beyond the hegemonic conception among the other characters who attribute May's fears to mere craziness, she is able to understand this relationship between war and people's personal lives. In fact, references to the wars fought by the U.S., domestic and overseas, are made by both the first and third-person narrators, but it is through L that the reader understands their effects on May's personal life and her drive to end Christine's and Heed's friendship. In her study of *Love*, for example, Wen-Ching Ho observes that L "provides the missing link to information that other characters are unable to access" and that "she possesses a broader,

more expansive understanding of the ‘truth’” (661). Thus, in *Love*, Morrison’s third-person narration proves to be more limited than the first.

*Love*, therefore, does not provide the author with the control of narrative that a traditional third-person narrator usually brings. Yet, it is by relinquishing such power that Morrison is able to expose and critique the limited information the state offers in their writing of American history. The historical references in the novel not only contextualize the story, but also speak for the missing information in narratives by the state. The Civil Rights is one such era, as mentioned earlier, which story is almost always told from a one-sided point of view. The official story of Civil Rights is so engrossed on equality that it neglects to speak of its consequences, Morrison suggests. “[T]hat was a good move,” she says about the war for integration, “but like all good moves, all those places—not all, but pretty much all the black stores disappeared, the black schools are desperate for money. That’s what you pay if you want this other thing. That’s the way the world works; it can’t do two things at once” (Interview with Pam Houston 236). Economically, the abolishment of segregation does open the door to more labor, business, and educational opportunities for African-Americans, but it also signifies the fall of many exclusive black establishments who now enter another war in competing with white businesses. “In depicting the fortunes of May,” observe Neelakantan and Venkatesan, “Morrison interrogates the traditional triumphalist rhetoric of the Civil Rights movement and highlights ‘the ways in which the...movement...could be experienced as a threat—not just by white people, but by black people, too’” (143-44). In the same way in which Morrison demystifies the conventional trust placed upon third-person narrators, she also questions the reliability of the state’s historical narratives.

This “triumphalist rhetoric” of the Civil Rights, however, is not limited to economic factors. Stories of gender biases and abuse are also absent from the standard romanticized version of the war for equality. Wyatt, for example, comments on certain male-centered omissions made by the third-person that protect Bill Cosey’s image from “his sexual exploitation of a child”—namely, failing to reveal until the last couple chapters that Heed was a child bride and that Cosey had touched her nipple even before she became a prospect for marriage, followed by an act of masturbation in the privacy of his granddaughter’s bedroom (109). “The third-person narrative’s withholding of damaging evidence against the race man,” argues Wyatt, “perhaps constitute[s] Morrison’s critique of a loyalty ethic in which...race always trumps gender and black women suffer” (109). Essentially, she contends, “Morrison’s narrative structure may be mimicking, and thus obliquely critiquing, a gender dynamic of African American life in which loyalty to the race prohibits the disclosure of black male abuse of black women...suppressed by an African American community reluctant to provide the white oppressors with ammunition to further undermine black men” (108). As such, the Civil Rights movement is plagued with stories in which “race trumps gender” hidden between lines about equality and fairness. In *Love*, Christine becomes disillusioned with a black male activist in the midst of the movement, who neglects to act upon the rape of a female volunteer by a colleague of the organization. These paradoxes not only expose the discrepancies between what the movement fights for and the immoralities enacted within, but they also display, as seen thus far, all that is purposely omitted from the “grand” narrative of Civil Rights.

Consequently, Borges's theories of the infiniteness of narratives become inextricably bound to each member or storyline of *Love*. In *L*, we have a character narrator, also spoken about by a third-person narrator, who additionally becomes a reader/spectator of *Love*, but is unacknowledged by the third-person as either a spectator or narrator. She also belongs to the world of the living and that of the dead, inhabiting different roles, different spaces, and infinitely "humming" (*Love* 202) to the changes of time. In the third-person narrator we see Christine, Heed, and other characters, but we also see Morrison as author of *Love* and as subject of her character's gaze. The reader is also within, bringing forth his/her own preconceptions about narrators and reliability, about the history of Civil Rights and, as Wyatt argues, the significance of "love" as a concept. So, Borges asks, "Why does it bother us that Don Quixote be a reader of the *Quixote*?" Well, what if what Quixote read was an incomplete version of himself, or not all that true?

While *Love* explores the limited information and omissions from its narratives, both within and outside fiction, *Home* considers the misrepresentations of storytelling in its fictional and historical worlds. Key events, both in the novel and in the real world, become redefined in romanticized terms and begin to signify something different altogether, something misleading. For Frank, false ideals of manliness take over. For U.S. history, ideological tales of heroes blind citizens about the country's permanent state of war. Earlier, I had noted how, according to Morrison, wars never truly end. Emancipation, for example, did not end the mistreatment of African-Americans; that war continued forward. The lynching of Emmett Till, which we are told is the cause for a lot of May's extremisms, exemplifies such continuation. Civil Rights also meant a

competitive war between black and white businesses, as well as abusive gender biased politics. Additionally, there were and still are many other wars overseas which influence these narratives—World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War. “You understand that all of our periods have been defined by war. All of them,” says Morrison, “When is it going to be over? When is the end? We talk about it like it’s a theater” (Interview by Torrence Boone). This permanence of war, argues Darda, is largely owed to a change in the state’s rhetoric, and the Korean War became the place of departure for it. “When the Truman administration characterized Korea as not a war but a ‘police action’ and its aim not empire building but ‘defending humanity,’” he observes, “it had struck on the rhetorical basis for permanent war” (81). In redefining the Korean War as a “police action” in the “defense of humanity,” the state is able to narrate a story of heroes instead of war makers, and thus establish a permanent course of “defense.” Language, as Morrison comments about *Love*, becomes rather “precious” here. Thus, at the beginning, Frank’s storytelling mirrors the state’s misleading narratives, yet, he also becomes the voice that conflicts with such powerful rhetoric, for, in diminishing the third-person’s objective view, as we will see later, he directly challenges the master narrative, in and outside fiction.

Frank mistrusts Morrison’s ability to narrate his story as he experienced it and, in doing so, he detaches himself from the heroic rhetoric of the state. Often times, he becomes sarcastic, daring Morrison to describe this or that, doubting that she will be able to write his story in a manner which accurately reflects his feelings:

*Talk about hungry. I have eaten trash in jail, Korea, hospitals, at table,  
and from certain garbage cans... Write about that, why don't you?... You*

*don't know what heat is until you cross the border from Texas to Louisiana in the summer...Trees give up. Turtles cook in their shells. Describe that if you know how...Lotus, Georgia, is the worst place in the world, worse than any battlefield...You never lived there so you don't know what it was like...[Now,] Korea. You can't imagine it because you weren't there. You can't describe the bleak landscape because you never saw it. (40-41, 83-84, 93)*

From hunger to heat to hating his home town, he arrives at his service in Korea telling Morrison that she will be unable to describe it or even imagine it. As in *Love*, the narrative structure of *Home* questions the reliability of the third-person narrator, but in a more overt manner. Frank suggests that there are certain events and feelings which can only be accurately represented by the living person itself; essentially, by a first-person narrator. Interestingly, the state's narrative of the Korean War is of a casual conflict, a "police action," a fight for global humanity, while Frank talks of a "*bleak landscape*," unimaginable and indescribable by perhaps not only Morrison but the state itself.

Frank's accusations against Morrison's third-person narrative are, indeed, grounded at least in a couple occasions. While *Love*'s third-person narrator omits information, in *Home* she mistakes Frank's thinking altogether. "*You are dead wrong if you think I was just scouting for a home with a bowl of sex in it,*" he tells her, "*I wasn't. Something about her floored me, made me want to be good enough for her. Is that too hard for you to understand?*" (69). There is also the occurrence on the train to Chicago, mentioned earlier, in which she says, "The abused couple whispered to each other...He will beat her when they get home, thought Frank. And who wouldn't? It's one thing to be

publicly humiliated. A man could move on from that. What was intolerable was the witness of a woman, a wife, who not only saw it, but had dared to try to rescue—rescue!—him” (26). To what Frank replies, “*Not true. I didn’t think any such thing. What I thought was that he was proud of her but didn’t want to show how proud he was to the other men on the train. I don’t think you know much about love. Or me*” (69). Thus the reader is asked, once again, to reconsider the traditional trust placed upon third-person narratives and the objectivity of their storytelling. What follows the misrepresentation of the third-person narrator, however, is Frank’s own lie or distortion, placing further emphasis on Morrison’s conception that no one voice presents an absolute truth: “*I have to say something to you right now. I have to tell the whole truth. I lied to you and I lied to me...I shot the Korean girl in her face*” (133). Thus both narrators of *Home* distort the story at some level, but while the third-person loses reliability in the process, Frank’s lie, on the other hand, puts into perspective the hero rhetoric of the state, urging the reader to revise his or her understanding of the Korean War. Placing himself in the position of liar and murderer, instead of a heroic veteran, he makes us question the stories the state tells of its soldiers and their acts overseas.

This narrative logic of the state in which war is redefined in terms of romanticized ideologies of a global humanity, reflects Frank’s own glorified version of manhood. “His defining beliefs about manliness,” argues Jan Furman, “grew from a seminal childhood encounter with horses and bad men” (234-35). Hiding within tall grass, Frank and his sister Cee—then, ten and six years old, respectively—witness two stallions fighting each other, which from that moment forward become, in Frank’s eyes, a representation of bravery, “*so beautiful. So brutal...[who] stood like men*” (5). This scene is immediately



followed by their encounter with a group of men burying a body. Still hiding and in fear, his sister begins to tremble at the sight of the black foot of the man being buried. With his newly found image of manhood and bravery, Frank tightly hugs his sister providing her with protection: “*In my little-boy heart,*” he recounts, “*I felt heroic and I knew that if they found us or touched her I would kill*” (104). These events of childhood establish a definition of manhood for Frank that carries on into his adulthood and which stays with him through Korea. Although it is arguable to what extent such definition sets him up for “fail[ure] in war and love,” as Furman suggests, it is clear that the image Frank carries with him about manhood does insight “false ambitions of bravery, honor, or duty” (236). His recollection of the horses and repressed memory of the burial—“*I really forgot about the burial. I only remembered the horses. They were so beautiful. So brutal. And they stood like men*” (5)—haunt Frank’s thoughts, thus, following the state’s footsteps in their redefinition of war, he creates for himself a false representation of manhood.

These redefined terms appear, both in the fiction of the novel and in the historical context that surround it, as cover-ups for certain hidden immoralities. “I was interested in taking the skin or the scab off of our view of the fifties in this country...[of] American dream stuff,” says Morrison (Interview with Boone). She highlights specific moments in U.S. history of the 1950’s which, like the Korean War, have been forgotten under the guise of the American dream, such as, McCarthyism and its anticommunist persecutions, Jim Crow racial laws of “separate but equal,” and harmful medical and scientific testing, like the Tuskegee syphilis study, “on soldiers, prisoners, and the lower classes,” particularly on African Americans. By redefining its role from war-maker to that of defender of humanity, as Darda suggests, “[t]he United States would no longer make

war” and the “Department of War would become the Department of Defense” (83). In its self-proclaimed role of defender, the United States is able to hide its own immoralities at home by controlling the narrative that defines it, by creating an image of heroes, and broadcasting the “American dream.”

Similarly, Frank hides behind his image of horses and manhood in order to cover-up his murder of the Korean child. The girl, who was around Cee’s age at the time they witnessed the burial, used to come by during Frank’s guard watch, he tells us, searching for food where soldiers dumped their garbage. During her scavenging, one day, his relief guard comes to take his shift, the child touches the soldier’s sexual organ exclaiming “*Yum-yum*,” at which point his colleague shoots her dead (95). Frank justifies the soldier saying that “*he had to kill her*” because “*he felt tempted*” (96). A few chapters later, we of course learn that the justification was for himself as we discover his own attempt at “narrativiz[ing] away” the truth. In the same manner in which the state covers-up its intent of “permanent war, creating the idea of preemptive, ‘limited’ war making in the interest of defending humanity against its own perceived ideological degeneracies” (Darda 82), Frank hides his own murder of the child by focusing on grieving over his fallen friends. The Korean child conflicts with Frank’s idea of manhood; therefore, if he is to maintain his equine ideology, he must focus his narrative on something else, like grieving his friends:

*I felt so proud grieving over my dead friends...My mourning was so thick it completely covered my shame...I shot the Korean girl in her face. I am the one she touched...I am the one she said “Yum-yum” to. I am the one she aroused. A child. A wee little girl. I didn’t think. I didn’t have to.*

*Better she should die. How could I let her live after she took me down to a place I didn't know was in me? How could I like myself if I surrendered to that place where I unzip my fly and let her taste me right there and there?...What type of man is that? You can keep on writing, but I think you ought to know what's true. (133-34)*

As he becomes sexually aroused by the Korean child, his whole notion of manliness crumbles. "Manhood was beautiful horses that 'stood like men' and, by extension, the heroic effort of protecting [his] sister," Furman contends; thus, in killing the girl, he is looking to save that image of himself as a protector (236). Mimicking the state's narrative rhetoric, Frank fabricates the story of the relief guard on whom he lays blame in order to maintain that images of the horses intact.

Frank's misrepresentation of the truth, however, differs from that of the third-person and that of the U.S. government. And the difference resides in the confession. By definition, only the homodiegetic narrator is able to issue a confession. No third-person can say what Frank says, "I lied." Therefore, in a sense, there is no point of recovery for the heterodiegetic narrator after losing reliability. He or she may be bound, in Morrisonean thinking, to the first-person narrative in order to deliver a complete and truthful story. The metafictional conversation between the two is infinite, as Borges suggests, not restricted by the novel's end. By admitting the lie, however, Frank does not merely question the third-person, as we have seen, he also challenges the hero-driven narrative of the state. Soldiers are not saviors of human rights, he suggests; they are flawed as the system is flawed in their calculated narratives that hide its own degeneracies about the wars lived at home. *Home*, therefore, asks its readers to think of

Frank, to think about Borges' question on Quixote's reading of himself, as they, themselves read the history that defines not just their country, but their selves.

## Chapter 2

### Reconstructing Narratives and Identity:

#### The “Unfinalized” Subjectivity of Major Characters

“I’m interested in characters who are lawless. [...] They make up their lives, or they find out who they are.”

– Toni Morrison, *Identifying Fictions*, Duvall 1

“I wanted to have the narrator...who intervenes in it, be a person who understands *how precious language is*...[S]he says, ‘if they only understood *how precious the tongue [is]*...’”

– Toni Morrison, “Michael Silverblatt Talks with Toni Morrison about *Love*”

In her recent study of Morrison’s seven later novels, published in 2017, Jean Wyatt considers the different narrative forms and reader-response strategies employed by Morrison through the lens of “love” as a theme. “Whereas Morrison’s earlier novels...are also didactic,” says Wyatt, “they educate the reader in straightforward ways, through plot and character—and, at important junctures, through explicit declarations on race or love made by a narrative voice difficult to distinguish from the author’s” (2). I agree with Wyatt, for I believe that Morrison’s initial search for a female African-American authorial voice—as scholars such as Duvall and Ferguson argue in their studies of *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, and *Tar Baby*—is reflected through each character in such ways that it does prove difficult to extract a distinctive Morrison, separate from her narrators’ storytelling. The author herself confesses, “all those people were me. I was Pecola, Claudia...I was everybody” (qtd. in Duvall 28). But the writer of *Beloved* through

*God Help the Child* is much more confident. These narratives engage the reader in bolder ways, not educating “straightforward[ly],” but inviting him or her to reconsider his or her own values. “The later novels call forth the reader’s own concepts,” argues Wyatt, “through an active interplay with a text that withholds judgment until the reader’s customary values are engaged—and then calls them into question” (2). Therefore, the reader of contemporary Morrison, as shown thus far and as Wyatt considers, participates in the creation of meaning through his or her active role within and outside fiction. As the author’s fictive world engages the reader’s own set of values, he or she is made to question those values and thus provide a rereading of both the story and his or her day-to-day personal judgments.

Meanwhile, Morrison involves yet another entity whose subjectivity comes into question—the author, herself. And it is precisely here where the novels *Love* and *Home* stand out within Morrison’s most recent body of works. Through these texts, she creates narrative voices that set themselves apart from hers, even if that means that they get to question her. “All those people” can no longer be her, for she longs to set them free. In doing so, she generates a dialogue not only with the reader, but between narrators and author. These conversations, however, further engage her previous writings as well. And perhaps they do so in a critical way, Wyatt suggests. Although Wyatt’s work focuses on reader-response, she does comment on Frank’s attack on the author, suggesting that her last two novels, *Home* and *God Help the Child*, “turn on” Morrison’s earlier texts by “call[ing] the notions of love in her prior works into question and demand[ing] a reevaluation” (189). In her discussion of *Home*, she says:

In the penultimate novel, *Home*, the character Frank steps out of the story-world to chastise the author Morrison for misrepresenting his thought processes; he ends his diatribe with the words, “I don’t think you know much about love. Or me”...Perhaps Morrison, through the character’s protest, is questioning the wisdom of her former writings of love, wondering if she got it all wrong—as the character accuses her of doing. Now that her previous depictions of love (especially *Beloved*) have become master narratives widely disseminated throughout the culture, perhaps Morrison thinks it is time to tear down her old conceptualizations of feeling and thinking in favor of constructing new models of love. (189-190)

Although I find myself wanting to question the extent to which Morrison may be particularly criticizing her depictions of “love” and, in turn, seek to “construct new models of love,” I believe there is great value in the backwards motion through which Wyatt represents the writer’s authorial anxiety. It is not just that Morrison wants to question her ability to tell Frank’s story, but the ways in which she told all the previous ones: *Pecola’s*, *Sula’s*, *Milkman’s*, *Setha’s*, and others. As such, the structures of both *Home* and *Love* extend Frank’s and L’s criticism of Morrison’s narratives to the entire body of her works, which arguably stand, Wyatt suggests, as master narratives.

Because Morrison refers to “love” as just “the weather” resulting from the actual theme that drives her writing, “betrayal,” I am more inclined to explore her self-questioning in terms of storytelling. “People tell me that I am always writing about love. Always, always love,” she says in her Foreword to *Love*, “I nod, yes, but it isn’t true –

not exactly. In fact, I am always writing about betrayal. Love is the weather. Betrayal is the lightning that cleaves and reveals it” (x). Through *Love* and *Home*, she invites the reader to question, similarly to L and Frank, not so much her depictions of love, but whether her previous works have allowed the dialogue to emerge. Is the narrative open enough, or has it become a master narrative? Essentially, these novels seem to consider the possibility of a “betrayal,” not centered around love, but on the writer’s storytelling abilities. In allowing her narrators and readers to inquire on the very foundation of her power position as an author, she also opens a door to other seemingly unquestionable subjects, such as the history of the nation. If a fictional character or reader is able to question the author’s narrative, then there is little a citizen cannot say in terms of the accuracy of his or her national history. Just like Morrison’s earlier novels may need a reevaluation, as *Love* and *Home* suggest, so does the past of our nation’s history.

Thus, language betrayal—that is, closed dialogues—permeates the very institution of the dominant national narrative and, as such, constitutes Morrison’s criticism at the expense of her own authorial power position. Morrison’s overall concern with master narratives transgresses the fictional world into historical territory. It thus appears that if “new models” ought to be constructed, perhaps, they should be narratives that re-inform the nation’s history. As such, through *Love* and *Home*, not only does Morrison allow her first-person narrators to question her storytelling, but she also endows them with powerful rhetoric that produces convincing accounts of a very different national narrative. L, for example, as argued in the previous chapter, offers a more complete version of the Coseys’ story and the effects that history has had on their family, even in the presence of certain prejudices on the part of the narrator. Her narrative is



filled with judgements about modern times: “when women began to straddle chairs and dance crotch out on television, when all the magazines started featuring behinds and inner thighs as though that’s all there is to a woman, well, I shut up altogether. Before women agreed to spread in public, there used to be secrets – some to hold, some to tell” (3). Behind that curtain of biased thinking, however, *L* provides information that the third-person omits, not only opening a door into the intimate lives of the Coseys, but also uncovering those racial and sexist degeneracies by the state which Morrison intends to reveal.

Freedom of storytelling for *Love and Home*, therefore, becomes a matter of what the Russian philosopher and literary critic, Michael Bakhtin, calls “the consciousness of a character” (7). In *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Bakhtin establishes certain narrative differences between characters of a polyphonic novel, a concept introduced by Bakhtin himself, and a monological one. In monologism, there is only one transcendental truth tied to the consciousness of the author; therefore, characters exist with the sole purpose of communicating the writer’s ideology. Characters of a polyphonic novel, on the other hand, which name he borrows from the musical term, polyphony, to signify two or more simultaneous voices, have ideas of their own, not subordinated to the author’s perspective. The polyphonic novel, Bakhtin further argues, is “dialogical” in nature—a notion he thoroughly explores in a subsequent work, *The Dialogic Imagination*. Such a type of novel recognizes the coexistence and conflict between different types of voices from characters, narrators, author, as well as, voices from other works and their historical context. “This dialogic imperative,” he explains, “mandated by the pre-existence of the language world relative to any of its current inhabitants, insures that there can be no

actual monologue” (426). In this sense, Bakhtin’s principles certainly apply to Morrison’s narrative techniques in both *Love* and *Home*, even if her works come about three decades later. Both texts actively dialogize with her previous writings, as Wyatt notes, as well as with the varying internal and external voices of the novels. In such light, this chapter offers a reading of L’s and Frank’s storytelling, and the rhetorical devices employed in their narratives, through Bakhtinian philosophy, which also serves to expose the monologic language of the current national narrative.

In the previous chapter, I referenced Morrison’s sixth novel, *Jazz*, because of the author’s use of multiple voices which mirror Jazz music, noting a change from object to subject in the narrative of her more contemporary works, *Love* and *Home*. *Jazz* presents a third-person narrator, whose voice is that of the book itself, in addition to certain “soliloquies” by different characters (Morrison, Interview by Rushdie 53). In *Love* and *Home*, Morrison removes the objectivity of the third-person altogether when she presents it not as a transcendental or bookish voice, but as a subjective writer who, as already seen, omits and misrepresents information. This switch from the book’s voice, the object, to the author’s voice, the subject, becomes a significant rhetorical change, as noted in my earlier chapter, not only because of the third-person’s loss of objectivity, however, but also because of Morrison’s emphasis on the true subject of a voice. Bakhtin recognizes such subjectivity in fictional characters through his analysis of Fyodor Dostoevsky’s works, a nineteenth century Russian novelist and philosopher whom he presents as the pioneer of the polyphonic novel. “To affirm someone else’s ‘I’ not as an object but as another subject,” explains Bakhtin, “is the principle governing Dostoevsky’s worldview” (7). In *Love* and *Home*, Morrison’s characters, like Dostoevsky’s, possess a

consciousness of their own and represent that capital “I” that makes them true subjects—still fictive, but authentic, independent voices.

Thus the worlds that Morrison creates in these two novels are, by Bakhtinian definition, very similar to those of Dostoevsky’s. They particularly concur in two major ways: 1) their characters’ independence of thought and, 2) the polyphonic and dialogic characteristics of their structures. The latter I will discuss later in this chapter. The conception that fashions the “I” as a “subject,” however, is best explained by Bakhtin himself:

What unfolds in [Dostoevsky’s] works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a *plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world*, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event. Dostoevsky’s major heroes are, by the very nature of his creative design, *not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse*. In no way, then, can a character’s discourse be exhausted by the usual functions of characterization and plot development, nor does it serve as a vehicle for the author’s own ideological position. (Original Emphasis, 6-7)

L’s and Frank’s stories are first-person narrations which do not appear as subordinates to their third-persons’ counterparts. They are presented, as Bakhtin explains, “with equal rights” to the third-person narrative. Morrison’s novels do not place either the first or third-person’s storytelling as complete truths of events. On the contrary, their stories complement each other as much as they oppose each other, and, during moments in

which the third-person oversteps or misrepresents a character, the first-person is able to impose his or her “own directly signifying discourse.” In their wholeness, *Love* and *Home* do communicate a particular ideological stance by Morrison, but her narrators never become mere receptacles of her ideology.

Such independence of consciousness from authorial discourse, however, should not be read as “a complete violation of the author’s artistic intent,” Bakhtin further explains (6). In fact, he later argues in *The Dialogic Imagination*, the writer’s ideas only exist when they become in dialogue with other voices, including those of his or her own characters. “[T]hese voices create the background necessary for his own voice,” he says, “outside of which his artistic prose nuances cannot be perceived, and without which they ‘do not sound’” (278). Morrison’s narrative strategies for *Love* and *Home* align with such dialogic principles as her voice begins to sound more in-company with those of her narrators than above them. Through this train of thought, then, Morrison’s novels are able to pose a question of much larger concern: since L’s and Frank’s stories can be given equal value to those of the third-person narrators, can personal narratives be placed alongside the national history that currently governs? For, in such instance, a forgotten war like the Korean War, for example, may begin to actually “sound,” in Bakhtinian terms, among these varying free voices.

In this light, slavery and freedom play an important role. Dostoevsky, Bakhtin argues, “creates not voiceless slaves...but *free* people, capable of standing *alongside* their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him” (Original Emphasis 6). Evidently, Morrison, too, follows these parameters in the creation of her characters, but she does so in direct response to what she calls a “fabricated Africanist

presence” (*Playing* 6). According to Morrison, whites have constructed a false black subjectivity in order to define their Americanness—a persona which has permanently impacted American literature in general by both whites and blacks. American writers can find “no escape,” she explains, “from racially inflected language,” and the presence or absence of either real or fabricated depictions of African-Americans becomes obvious in most of their literature (13). One of the issues that American literature faces nowadays, Morrison suggests, is overcoming the stereotyped black personas of classic authors such as Poe, Twain, and Hemingway, which inform much of our nation’s great literature. In her study, *Race, Trauma, and Home in the Novels of Toni Morrison*, Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber observes that many of the early slave narratives “failed to confront the horrific core of the slave experience.” She contends that “[b]y romanticizing personal narratives for acceptance by white culture, the slave narrative forged a literary convention that denied the traumatic aspects of slavery by ‘downplay[ing] its reality and its effects’...Essentially, by erasing the ‘witness’ to slavery’s brutality, such slave narratives reinforced white versions of slavery” (5). Morrison’s texts, on the other hand, subvert such narratives by downgrading her own dominating authorial voice. Her narrators in *Love* and *Home*, like those of Dostoevsky, are “free people.” They are not only thinking subjects, independent from their creator’s ideologies, but they are also “free” from the white perspective. Of course, “free,” in this instance, signifies the narrators’ liberty to tell a story that differs from white versions of black identity, for even Morrison’s characters are affected by white constructions of blackness.

In this sense, L’s and Frank’s narratives are not only free from a subordinating authorial voice, but from white dominating discourse as well, which, as Morrison’s long

literary legacy suggests, continues to deny the traumatic essence of slavery. Therefore, it is important to note that, although the times of slavery are further removed from the characters of *Love* and *Home* than, lets say, those from *Beloved*, slavery still plays a huge influence on these characters. As Schreiber notes, the “memory of slavery and the failure of emancipation to fully integrate American blacks would remain the point of departure of collective memory and identity formation, as the primal scene of cultural trauma” (4). As such, L’s and Frank’s corrections of Morrison’s third-person’s narrative, and sometimes overt attacks on the part of Frank, also serve to challenge the white “fabrication of the Africanist persona” born from romanticized versions of slave narratives and, in turn, hegemonic accounts of the nation’s history, including those occurring after emancipation.

Thus, *Love* and *Home* break the patterns of what Bakhtin calls monologism which governs current accounts of our national history. To do so, Morrison employs certain narratological strategies, some already mentioned, that Bakhtin incorporates into his theory of dialogism. In first instance is the characters’ subjectivity, as discussed earlier. However, the “I” now becomes significant in terms of the person’s own sense of self—that is, L’s and Frank’s attempts to recognize themselves as distinct thinking subjects. “What is important to Dostoevsky,” explains Bakhtin, “is not how his hero<sup>4</sup> appears in the world but first and foremost how the world appears to his hero, and how the hero appears to himself,” essentially, “not the specific existence of the hero, not his fixed image, but the *sum total of his consciousness and self-consciousness*, ultimately *the hero’s final word on himself and on his world*” (Original Emphasis 47-48). In a

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<sup>4</sup> Bakhtin uses “hero” to reference a main character who may or may not necessarily be a traditional epic hero; however, any mentioning of a hero in my own reading is meant to signify a heroic person.

monologic world, he further explains, characters are fixed to the image designed by their author and they act strictly within such predefined parameters (52). Morrison's characters, on the other hand, like those of Dostoevsky, are capable of change and, therefore, have access to their distinct personalities, which they are able of assessing and transforming in their continuous personal growth.

### **I. The Subjectivity of *Home*'s Characters**

Since Frank undergoes the most change in comparison to L's character, I will begin with *Home* first. "How the world appears" to Frank, according to Morrison, conflicts with the largely idealized view of the 1950s. "The fifties were understood to be Doris Day, and *Leave It to Beaver*," she says, "everybody was buying houses, [there was] post-war money, [it was] nice, comfortable, American dream stuff" (Interview with Boone). But the world that Frank encounters is very different. Frank's earliest childhood memory within the narrative, for example, is that of his family being dispossessed of their home and run out of their birth state of Texas by racist vigilantes. The journey in which they are forced to cross the border of Texas into Louisiana is filled with recollections of poverty, extreme hunger, unbearable heat, and the birth of his sister in a church's basement. "*I remember standing in line at Church of the Redeemer*," he says, "*waiting for a tin plate of dry, hard cheese already showing green, pickled pigs' feet—its vinegar soaking stale biscuits*" (40). Adulthood does not bring the American dream into reality either. The Seattle ward in which he is kept after Korea, for instance, literally becomes the institutionalized means of dehumanizing him. Patients, here, are bound to "immobilizing shots," "morphine sleep," "cuffs," and "soiling" themselves, the third-person explains (7-9). A coma or death, he understands, is the only way out: "He would

need something that stirred no feelings, encouraged no memory” (7-8). As such, Frank’s view of the world from childhood all the way into adulthood is linked to dispossessed, mindless bodies, movable like cattle across borders and apt for scientific medical testing.

Frank does not particularly perceive himself as a thoughtless experimental object, his first-person narrative is filled with too big of an agency to account for that, but he is aware of, and suffers through, the limitations imposed on his race and social status. And it is precisely this awareness about the realities of the fifties, as opposed to the broadcasted “*Leave It to Beaver*” sentiment—that is, the iconic and idealized American family representation—which allows him to save his sister’s life and gain control over his subjectivity through the narrative. His character and storytelling is a direct challenge to the state’s romantic versions of Americanness, as well as a rewrite of U.S. history. In yelling out to Morrison, “don’t paint me as some enthusiastic hero,” he does not only critique the narrative, but also evokes what Wyatt calls “the repressions of history” (154). “[T]he narrative brings back what U.S. histories of various kinds have repressed,” she argues, “the treatment of black bodies as partitionable and expendable” (154). Thus, the political and biological uses of these bodies, once more, set up a narrative of “consciousness-less,” in Bakhtinian terms, that bring back the focus to the object. In *Home*, however, as I will later expose, neither Cee’s nor Frank’s subjectivity become irretrievably lost.

Darda’s reading of the body as a “biopolitical instrument” (89) serves to exemplify the state’s attempt to objectify individuals, as well as, mark a point of departure where speech becomes the means through which both Cee and Frank break with such “instrumentation.” In his assessment of Ha Jin’s work, *War Trash*, another



Korean War novel, Darda calls attention to the main character's concern about a tattoo that was forcefully "branded on him by Nationalists." The tattoo originally reads, "FUCK COMMUNISM," but it is later modified in China to reflect, "FUCK . . .U. . .S. . ." While the tattoo protects him for years in China, he observes, he becomes worried again when entering the U.S. "about the political content of his body, as a thing to be concealed, regulated, monitored, and 'refused entry'" (89). "This biological body," he contends, "is the very locus of political power, the terrain of biopower" through which the TSA agent will categorize him as "societal" or "antisocietal" (90). The matter would evoke a racial significance based on the historical conditions that surround an anti-American message on the body of a Chinese man (91).

Similarly, Frank's and Cee's bodies become inscriptions of a forgotten U.S. history or, more accurately, of a past that has been strategically "narrativized away," to use Darda's terminology, by romanticized ideas of a prosperous 1950's America. For Frank, the forgotten history is bifold. On one end, is the Korean War, which has been dismissed as a police action, as a simple confrontation; he becomes a soldier, a veteran of some kind of not-war. As Wyatt observes, however, body parts emerge to raise consciousness. Through the vivid imagery of the battlefield in which Frank helplessly witnesses the dismemberment of his friends, she argues, "[t]he repressed of history returns, assaulting consciousness with images of body parts that are unavoidably concrete" (155). Frank's personal narrative does fill-in the gaps of U.S. history, redefining the fifties as a time of war. "It was a time of security only for some," notes Wyatt (154). Thus, in denying the label of war, the government also negates the horrors faced by the soldiers. Mimicking the tactics of early slave narratives which similarly

abate the suffering of slaves, the state seeks to reinforce its American dream version of history at the expense of its soldiers' mental sanity.

On the other end, is the repressed history of scientific medical testing to which both Frank and Cee become subjected. While Frank is being detained at the Seattle ward, Cee becomes the test subject of Dr. Beau, a eugenics doctor and scientist for whom she works as a maid. Dr. Beau's experiments leave Cee unable to bear children and result in her near death. "Americans like to associate eugenics with Nazi Germany," observes Wyatt, "and thus forget that eugenics flourished in the United States for the first four decades of the twentieth century, long before it became influential in Germany. Eugenics beliefs resulted in laws enabling compulsory sterilization in twenty-six states...[making] it eas[i]er for individual doctors to sterilize poor black and Native American women whom they considered 'unfit'" (sic 157). Here, history is being distorted, once more, on the basis of language association. Morrison goes back to the beginnings of the New World, where "black" ceases to represent just the color of a race, and becomes the signifier for "unfree" and "not-American," creating an "alliance between visually rendered ideas and linguistic utterances" (*Playing* 48-49). Therefore, by equating Nazi Germany to eugenics, the U.S. is able to obscure its practices in their own land, so that people start looking away, overseas. By the same logic in which "black" begins to mean "not-American"—at least until emancipation and perhaps sometime afterward—the term "eugenics" becomes assimilated to Nazi Germany, disassociating itself from anything American. In the end, however, Cee's injured womb appears to remind us of such hidden history. In uncovering the nation's "dirty secrets," furthermore, Cee removes the focus on her body as an object to that of a person with agency, feelings, and thoughts.

The third-person's narrative about Cee, as well as that of Frank's, portray a weak, mindless girl in need of protection from her brother, but the end comes to surprise the reader as she becomes the subject of Frank's recovery, both from war and home. There exists an interdependence between the siblings which, as Wyatt suggests, "marks the lack of boundaries [in personality], the slippage between the two" (162). In his first-person narrative, he admits, "*she was a shadow for most of my life, a presence marking its own absence, or maybe mine...Down deep inside her lived my secret picture of myself—a strong good me*" (103-04). In the statement "*or maybe mine,*" says Wyatt, he acknowledges "[his] identity is dependent on Cee's lack of identity, on her remaining an 'absence' to herself" (162). After her physical recovery, however, Cee refuses Frank's attempts to console her and shield her from her pain, "rejecting the buffering meditation of Frank's protective comfort and claiming the right to her own feelings" (Wyatt 162). "Don't," she tells Frank as she pushes his hand away. "Why not [cry]? I can be miserable if I want to. You don't need to try and make it go away. It shouldn't go away. It's just as sad as it ought to be and I'm not going to hide from what's true just because it hurts" (131). Her words epitomize Freud's conceptions of trauma and consciousness almost verbatim. Traumatic memories ought to be spoken out and uncovered, he says, even if pain inevitably returns. Thus, if subjectivity depends upon the authenticity and independence of a voice, as Bakhtin argues, Frank too, like his sister, must unbury the truth and remove his self from her shadow, even if "what's true...hurts."

The moment in which she verbalizes her pain to her brother marks Cee's beginnings as a new autonomous person, but it also signals the coming of Frank's own changing self. Up until this point, Frank's narrative agency is apparent, challenging and

correcting Morrison as he tells his story, as well as re-informing U.S. history, which accounts for his strong, albeit damaged, sense of self. Yet, Frank's dependency on his sister, as earlier discussed—"Who am I without her?" he says (103)—complicates the very nature of his subjectivity. Although he shows independence from authorial discourse, and white "fabrications" of black identity, it is not until chapter fourteen that he begins to claim complete autonomy over his self. Narrated in the italics of Frank's own voice, therefore, chapter fourteen shows up to reveal his repressed memory of the dead Korean child so that healing, in psychoanalytic terms, can commence. In "Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis: Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through," Freud argues:

The way is thus paved from the beginning for a reconciliation with the repressed material...[O]ne cannot overcome an enemy who is absent or not within range...For [the physician], remembering...is the aim to which he adheres...[H]e celebrates it as a triumph of the treatment if he can bring it about that something that the patient wishes to discharge in action is disposed of through the work of remembering. (152-53)

In other words, remembering gives way for healing. For Frank, storytelling becomes the psychoanalytic treatment that Freud considers and, in this sense, Morrison, as his listener, becomes the physician which assists him achieve self-realization.

Frank's lie, as Wyatt suggests, is purposeful in covering a "double repression" (147). First, is Frank's murder of the Korean child which remains repressed throughout most of the novel. "*I hid it from you because I hid it from me,*" he tells Morrison (Emphasis Added 133). He hides the memory to himself covering the shame he feels in

becoming tempted by the child's sexual offer. The murder, however, reveals an even deeper repression, not founded on an actual memory but on a "fantasy scenario" about sex with his sister (Wyatt 147). "The little girl's scavenging hand reminds Frank of home," explains Wyatt, of himself stealing peaches with Cee from Miss Robinson (147). Additionally, the girl's missing teeth mirror his sister's lost baby teeth which Frank preserves in a matchbox (Wyatt 149). The resemblance of the girl's hand and toothless smile to those of Cee comforts Frank with their familiarity, says Wyatt; however, "this very familiarity becomes horrific when the little Korean girl smiles and at the same time Frank feels that same hand on his penis," arousing him and triggering an unconscious sexual fantasy with his sister (149-51). For Frank, the unknown he encounters overseas as he meets the Korean girl becomes familiar only to uncover unconscious desires about such familiarity which remains at home.

Similarly, Frank's double repression exposes the country's own dualities of buried history. Frank must kill the child to hide the immoralities of his incestuous fantasy and, consequently, repress the memory of the murder which is a reminder of his perceived degeneracy and loss of manliness that he identifies in the horses of his childhood. Thus, his personal repressions lay ground to those surrounding the America of the 1950's. "If Korea was," as Darda notes, "'an experimental war, one being fought back and forth for the purpose of testing men, weapons, materials and methods, on a continuing basis,' these same men and methods were often being tested within the United States as well" (98). That "experimental war" repressed from the collective memory of U.S. history under the guise name of "policy action," becomes the familiar, the child that

must be murdered and forgotten in order to hide the immoralities of those same scientific and medical tests performed at home.

By the novel's end, it is that freedom of narrative agency, as Bakhtin envisions it, which allows Frank to begin reconciling those memories that threaten his subjectivity. Morrison, as the direct addressee of his discourse, together with the reader, help create the dialogue through which Frank is able to make meaning. And Cee, through her own personal growth, triggers the recovery of her brother's repressed memory of the Korean girl, opening his dialogue to even deeper subjects of both personal and national concerns. As Cee mourns the child she will never have, she reminds Frank of his murder: "It's like there's a baby girl down here waiting to be born. She's somewhere close by in the air, in this house, and she picked me to be born to. And now she has to find some other mother... You know that toothless smile babies have?... I keep seeing it" (131-32). Frank reacts almost instantly, opening the dialogue with a confession, "*I have to say something... I lied*" (133), and associating Cee's mourning for a baby with the Korean child. "*Cee told me about seeing a baby girl smile all through the house, in the air, the clouds,*" he tells Morrison, "***It hit me.*** *Maybe that little girl wasn't waiting around to be born to her. Maybe it was already dead, waiting for me to step up and say how... I shot the Korean girl in her face... I am the one she aroused*" (Emphasis Added 133). As Wyatt observes, "[t]he image of the little girl stranded outside life belongs to Cee's inner life, but it works on what is buried deep in Frank's inner world" (163). Admitting the truth to Morrison and to himself sets him up on the path to recovery, in psychoanalytic terms, as well as marks a change of self, someone who no longer condones the lie, who is no longer blind by that overwhelming image of horses and masculinity. Because Cee does

not need nor desires his protection anymore—“she wanted to be the person who would never again need rescue...she wanted to be the one who rescued her own self” (Morrison 129)—Frank is able to become his own person, “[h]urt right down the middle,” he says, “*but alive and well*” (147).

Thus, Frank’s change allows him to escape the “finalization” of his character, as Bakhtin calls it. In other words, his commitment to define himself in his own authoritative voice, his admittance of the murder to Morrison and the reader, but most importantly to himself, and his acceptance of Cee’s newly found agency are all indicative of personal growth and autonomous thinking. Like Dostoevsky’s characters, Frank “sense[s]” his “own inner unfinalizability, [his] capacity to outgrow, as it were, from within and to render *untrue* any externalizing and finalizing definition of [him]...seek[ing] to destroy that framework of *other people’s* words about him that might finalize and deaden him” (Original Emphasis 59). As such, Frank literally exhumes his haunting memories in the final scene of the novel as both brother and sister give proper burial to the murdered man of their childhood, thus, putting to rest his own conscious and taking hold of his identity:

He [took] the shovel and began digging. Such small bones...The skull, however, was clean and smiling...[T]hey found the sweet bay tree...Frank dug a four- or five-foot hole [and buried the bones]...Frank took two nails and the sanded piece of wood from his pocket...[with] the words he had painted on [it]...Here Stands A Man...*I stood there a long while, staring at that tree. It looked so strong. So beautiful.* (142-47)

Frank's change by the end of novel and newly found strength, therefore, indicates that he is "a man of the idea," as Bakhtin calls it (86). He does not have a fixed personality. He is a thinking man with ideologies that differ from those of Morrison, capable of changing his mind and reassessing his own selfhood. Thus, Frank is able to escape any finalization attempts by the third-person narration and the heroic stereotypes imposed on American soldiers.

This discursive power which allows Frank to achieve self-realization, therefore, further reveals those aspects of our national history absent from the current dominate narrative. As such, "discourse about the world merges with confessional discourse about oneself," posits Bakhtin (78). Frank's personal narrative intertwines with and directly challenges the state's version of U.S. history. For Morrison, similarly to Dostoevsky, "[t]he truth about the world...is inseparable from the truth of the personality" (78). Therefore, she greatly increases the value and power of individual personal narratives, presenting them as part of and in conversation with the nation's history. As the dialogue emerges both within and outside fiction, the truth, which Bakhtin defines in Socratic terms, also arises both at the personal and national levels. "Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person," he explains, and I would add, nor inside the head of an organized entity such as the government; "[truth] is born *between people* collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction" (Original Emphasis 110). Therefore, in the absence of dialogue, Morrison's novel suggests, there is no possibility of the self. The nation's identity is dependent upon its communicative predisposition with people's discourses and vice-versa. The truth of U.S. history can only be found in dialogue among varying voices.



## II. The Subjectivity of *Love's* Characters

L's storytelling differs significantly from that of Frank's in that her narrative does not focus on herself but on the Coseys', yet their presence does mark her life from its beginnings as she links her birth to the first time she sees Bill Cosey. "*I was born in rough weather,*" she says, "[my parents] *delivered me in a downpour. You could say going from womb water straight into rain marked me. It's noteworthy, I suppose, that the first time I saw Mr. Cosey, he was standing in the sea...I was five; he was twenty-four...Nine years later, when I heard he was looking for help, I ran all the way to his door*" (64). The bond between her arrival into the world and into the Cosey's household is important, for it is L who becomes the voice for the women that are unable to pass on their story onto an offspring. As such, she does not only fit the maternal figure as Schreiber argues, but also that of a child narrating the family history. Having no one to share her story with, Heed even hires a teenage girl (Junior) to write about her life, although Junior realizes early on that she actually wants to talk about it: "she guessed Heed didn't want to write a book; she wanted to talk" (61). It is L, however, the one who absorbs and carries on the story of Heed and Christine, disrupting "human temporality," as Wyatt observes (98), since L is born before either one of them.

L's birth scene, furthermore, contrasts with Heed's and Christine's empty wombs which, in a larger sense, represent a historical trauma of American culture that seeks to euthanize black women. Both women are "consistently out of phase with the biological time of their bodies," explains Wyatt:

Heed ostensibly became pregnant, but the pregnancy lasted for eleven months—and then proved false; Christine developed a desire to have a

child “too late”—in the moment when she saw the remains of her seventh abortion vanishing down the toilet bowl. Now in their sixties and thus well past menopause, “both women regularly bought and wore sanitary napkins, and threw them down the trash completely unstained.” (99)

Like Cee, the Cosey women remain unable to bear children, voicing their distress by acting out a challenge to the nature of biology itself. In wearing sanitary napkins past their sixties, they enact Cee’s words, “I can be miserable if I want to” (131). Their act does represent a temporal dysfunction through their non-menstruating bodies, as Wyatt contends, but it also enables them to issue a protest against the patriarchal culture that places men’s needs over women’s, realizing by the novel’s end that they did not live their lives, that their focus had always been Bill Cosey: “We could have been living our lives hand in hand instead of looking for Big Daddy everywhere” (189). Trapped, even after his death, within that “patriarchal domestic order” in which each spends all her time trying to prove her position as a Cosey woman, and as *the* heiress (Wyatt 102), they forget about their own desires, including that of motherhood, until it is too late. The pressures placed upon them by a culture which values the signifier of “Cosey woman,” as if it were a nobility title, over the actual woman, leave both Heed and Christine childless and, more importantly, in a continuous fight for an idealized Cosey identity.

Thus, Bakhtin’s emphasis on “how the world appears to [the] hero” becomes significant here as well. As we saw in Chapter One, both Heed and Christine have direct encounters with a racist, patriarchal world that hinder their individual development. Heed is literally purchased by Bill Cosey in a transaction that mirrors slave trade. “Cosey bought the pleasures of a slaveowner,” says Wyatt, “the absolute power over another

human being, the license to subject her to his sexual whims” (116-17). Christine becomes prey of several undeserving men who use her for sex until her youth begins to fade. This includes Dr. Rio, with whom she “still insisted her kept-woman years were the best” even “twenty years after she’d been replaced by fresher White Shoulders” (*Love* 84).

Notwithstanding their similar situations, however, “the one who had been sold by a man battled the one who had been bought by one” over that venerated position of the ruling Cosey woman (86). As such, that racist, patriarchal world that envelops these two women disables their communication abilities until the very end of the novel when, at the disappearance of the third-person narrator, both Christine and Heed begin a dialogue through which they reconnect and recover their selves.

Unlike Frank, however, who is capable of describing himself and his world in his own words, Christine and Heed are unable to verbalize themselves until the very end. The Cosey women lack agency altogether, for each dedicates her entire life fighting over Bill Cosey’s affection and validation as his “sweet Cosey child”—a denomination found in one of their restaurant menus which L passes as Cosey’s will (the legitimate will she rips apart because it would put out both Christine and Heed on the streets). Disabled by their preoccupation with the patriarchal order and their position within such world, the Cosey women are forced to rely on a third-person narrative about their story and their persona. Thus, Morrison’s narrative structure is double purposeful here as it visually portrays the dialogic impairment of both Christine and Heed.

A problem of narrative accuracy arises out of such impairment, however, as previously posed by Borges’ question of the *Quixote*’s tale. “Why does it bother us that Don Quixote be a reader of the *Quixote*?” he asks. As proposed in Chapter One, then, his

question becomes an issue if what Quixote read of himself was an incomplete version of his persona or not all that true. Invested on “the interests of the man [that is, Bill Cosey] and permeated by patriarchal assumptions about human relations,” as Wyatt argues (104), the third-person delivers an account of Christine and Heed that portrays them as money-hungry, crazy women. Ignoring the damaged friendship between the two, for example, the third-person recounts almost every fight centered around material things: “quarrels about whether the double C’s engraved on the silver was one letter doubled or the pairing of Christine’s initials...They argued about twice stolen rings and the real point of sticking them under a dead’s man fingers...[A]t the grave site...angry that her attempt to place diamonds on Cosey’s fingers had been thwarted—Christine exploded” (73,98). The third-person does not account for the parental abandonment that both suffer, as Schreiber suggests, which leads to the “aggressive and competitive behavior” that ends their friendship (139). Thus, the Christine and Heed personas that such narrative presents are incomplete and, consequently, inaccurate.

Therefore, since the Cosey women are unable of communicating until the very last chapter, Morrison endows L with the power of narrative agency to provide the missing information that challenges those “finalizing definitions,” in the words of Bakhtin, of Christine and Heed. Knowledgeable of the third-person’s narration, similar to Frank and Quixote who reads about himself, L’s own corrective narrative prompts the reader into reassessing that “money-hungry, crazy women” depiction. L’s “is an ‘embodied, participating’ voice,” observes Wen-ching Ho in her analysis of *Love*’s first-person narrator, “that counter-balances the third-person patriarchal narratives” (671). Two of the most significant pieces of information that the third-person omits in its

storytelling, as Wyatt notes, serve as examples of L's "truer" narrative. It is through those seemingly quirky comments that L reveals what the reader would not otherwise find out until the final chapter: first, that the women were childhood friends, "*See, he chose a girl already spoken for,*" she says (105); and, secondly, that Heed was a child bride bought-out like a marketable object, "*Pity. They were just little girls. In a year they would be bleeding...They had no business in that business*" (136-37). In just a few sentences, L discloses information which makes readers reconsider the third-person's "finalizing definitions" of Christine and Heed: "[A] vision of [them] as the little girls they were when Heed was forced into marriage," Wyatt observes, "a reference to the incontrovertible evidence of the body—a prepubescent body—that Heed was still a child, too young to marry; and a recognition of the 'business' nature of the marriage, an oblique reference to Cosey's purchase of Heed from her parents" (111). As such, L's first-person narrative becomes the voice that helps "undeaden" Christine's and Heed's characterizations, in Bakhtinian thinking, so that they may recover their subjectivity.

In setting the narrative toward the "unfinalization" or "undeadening" of Christine's and Heed's characters, however, L also uncovers certain historical memories collectively repressed or filed away as forgotten U.S. history. L's revelation of Cosey's purchase of Heed, for example, illustrates the imprints of slavery on the present culture about the marketability of black bodies. The transaction, furthermore, comments on the general assumption that whites had always been at the selling and buying ends, for, in this case, both seller and buyer turn out to be black. In fact, L's comments on Cosey's pedophilic desire for Heed against a community willing to tolerate both the purchase of a human being and the exertion of sexual power over a child, also reveals a chauvinist

tendency by a black community eager to demonstrate racial pride. Both Wyatt and Schreiber extensively argue about such tendency from similar perspectives which expose the contradictions of the Civil Rights era, as discussed in Chapter One. Wyatt considers a “loyalty ethic” in which defending black men’s rights from white suppression justifies the abuse of black women (109). Likewise, Schreiber notes the community’s reliance on “fond memories” of the hotel in order to “forgive ‘Cosey. Everything. Even to the point of blaming a child for a grown man’s interest in her’...For his community members, Cosey’s caretaking and success provide a reflection of their own Lacanian imaginary self that serves as a validation of themselves” (141). Thus, the fight for Civil Rights in both these cases favor black men as it disregards women, for it places greater importance in the struggle for racial identity. By ignoring Cosey’s immoralities, “the people reap the psychic benefit from [his] achievement” (141), just like U.S. history denies abuses of women during Civil Rights protests in order to maintain the purity of its ethical efforts.

Thus, two competing narratives represent very different versions of the Cosey women, in a similar manner in which we find multiple views about the history of desegregation. The third-person, on the one hand, suppresses the women’s voices by “finalizing” their characters into materialistic, crazy old women. The first-person, on the other hand, provides missing information which allows the reader to see beyond their preoccupation with socio-economics into their experiences with parental abandonment, sexual abuses, and abrupt loss of their childhood. How, then, do Christine and Heed recover their subjectivity? It is dialogue, once more, which opens the door to “the truth,” as Bakhtin argues, of their selfhood. The two final chapters make obvious the presence of two lurking ghosts, Bill Cosey and L, marking a change of focus in the narrative. Cosey’s

ghost “vanishes,” observes Wyatt, and is “displaced by the ghost of L” signaling the end of the story’s “investment in [that] patriarchal signifying system” represented in his character (116). By the end, “a human voice is the only miracle and the only necessity. Language, when it comes, has the vigor of a felon pardoned after twenty-one years on hold” (*Love* 184). And so the dialogue between Christine and Heed begins, it appears free of quotation marks “indicat[ing] the disappearance of the third-person narrator,” with no “speech tags (he said, she said)...as if the reader were privy to their dialogue directly” (Wyatt 116). Thus, Christine’s and Heed’s voices emerge to make meaning of their own, separate from the oppressive third-person’s “finalities.”

## Coda

The Morrison of *Love* and *Home* as this thesis envisions is very much like the old woman in the tale of her Nobel Lecture. Each is forced to give-up something in order to create the dialogue that brings forth meaning. The old woman “is blessed with blindness” since she “can speak the language that tells us what only language can: how to see without pictures” (206). Similarly, Morrison gives-up her control of the narratives, putting to test her own authorial voice, to create authentic characters with ideas that differ from her own. In other words, her agenda or vision does not taint their lives, even in fiction. Like the old woman, she recognizes that “language can never live up to life once and for all...Language can never ‘pin down’ slavery, genocide, war. Nor should it yearn for the arrogance to be able to do so” (203). Thus, in these two novels, any attempts at “pinning down” a character’s thinking or personality, and even a particular event—whether in Morrison’s fiction or in the historical contexts that surround her works—are continuously shutdown by a first-person whose narrative powers reach outside the text.

Readers are here reminded of both the powers and limits of language in their everyday lives. One may wonder the significance of the race and ethnicity question, for example, in government forms. The “yes” answer to being a U.S. citizen is not enough. The white, black, Asian, Hispanic, etc. subcategories of Americanness take precedence over the actual individual. Therefore, in the “finalization” of people’s subjectivities, in the words of Bakhtin, comes not only the death of the individual but of a nation whose subjects it does not know. When Frank’s blackness causes his displacement across the



border of his place of birth, for instance, one ponders on that discrepancy of storytelling about a nation that fights overseas for human rights, but that celebrates the forceful movement of its people based on their color. As such, Morrison endows her first-person narrators with not only the conventional powers of storytelling, but with agency to question both her third-person narration and the dominant historical narratives of the state.

Morrison's works, therefore, are self-reflective at two different levels. On one hand, she analyzes the nation's historical narratives against people's individual experiences. On the other hand, she meditates upon her own writing and narratives, placing her authorial identity under the microscope. Thus *Love* and *Home* are exceptional texts among Morrison's vast body of works, because they look back at her previous literature in a unique manner, urging readers to self-reflect along the way as Wyatt, Darda, and other such scholars have argued. These two novels look back wanting to dialogue with earlier works; wanting to ask questions. What would Sula have to say if she were a reader of *Sula*? Or Setha a reader of *Beloved*? When the structure of the craft serves its purpose, as we see it done in *Home* and *Love*, the dialogue has no boundaries as the texts begin to exist somewhere between the written fictional world of characters and the real world of the author and readers.

Therefore, by inviting her readers to question her narratives, Morrison urges us into ripping apart the grand narrative of American history, and to rewrite. Silverblatt makes a comment to Morrison in his interview on *Love*:

In a hotel, many people are living and it takes the efforts of an entire staff to chart who's on the dance floor, who's at the foyer, who's in the kitchen,

who's cleaning, who's hidden the deed, and where will this all go? And it's almost as if the Toni Morrison, implied by this book, is a vast staff of arrangers whose job is to get everything immaculately in place and then disappear! (Laughs). (*Conversations* 218)

Morrison responds, "I hope I disappeared. I hope I did" (218). And that had been the premise all along—to make a statement, as a writer must, but then disappear. Disappear so that other voices can emerge; for the truth, as Bakhtin proposed about three decades earlier, is only found in dialogue.

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