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THE ARTIST AS OUTSIDER: LOSS AND CREATIVITY IN THE NOVELS  
OF VIRGINIA WOOLF AND TONI MORRISON

by

Lisa Williams

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
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**For my Mother and Father**

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## Introduction

In Toni Morrison's master's thesis on "Virginia Woolf's and William Faulkner's Treatment of the Alienated," she argues that for Woolf isolation is "the one state of mind in modern existence which allows man to understand and triumph over his position" (2). She emphasizes that Woolf "found in isolation 'the freedom the attached can never know'" (23). Morrison's early interest in Woolf is important to this study, since I will argue that both writers create narrative structures that problematize the very existence of the female artist. If isolation gives the artist freedom to imagine a vision that is at odds with the world around her, it also, at the same time, can thwart her ability to find a form for her creativity. This dilemma becomes the starting point for many of their novels.

In this dissertation, I examine the dialogic nature of their aesthetic to show how Morrison and Woolf are both critiquing and finding new forms for language in order to express female subjectivity.<sup>1</sup> Whether it is Mr. Ramsay's obsession with the letters of the alphabet he cannot reach, or Schoolteacher's studies of slaves, Woolf and Morrison are subverting sexist and racist language that has become the vehicle for self-centered egoism and domination. While the

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<sup>1</sup>For a further discussion of dialogism and the novel, see M.M. Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays. Bakhtin maintains that "the novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voice, artistically organized" (262).

artist may find freedom in her ability to remain unattached to such discourse, she must create new language with which to speak and write.<sup>2</sup>

While Morrison and Woolf are working within vastly different cultural contexts, the themes of female sexual initiation, female bonding, and personal memory and history are linked to their construction of artist figures. By reading these authors together, it becomes possible to see all the more clearly the very cultural constraints that limited Woolf, even as she wrote against Britain's expanding empire. At the same time, this study will examine the contrasting circumstances of black and white female artist figures in their novels.

In addition to the narrative and linguistic innovations they pioneered in their novels, I believe Virginia Woolf and Toni Morrison are two of the most important thinkers of the twentieth century. In Playing in the Dark, Morrison announces her intention to "maneuver ways to free up the language from its sometimes sinister, frequently lazy, almost always predictable employment of racially informed and determined chains" (xi). By analyzing the Africanist presence in American literature, Morrison creates a discourse that examines how white people and white writers,

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<sup>2</sup>See Anne Herrmann, The Dialogic and Difference: "An/Other Woman" in Virginia Woolf and Christa Wolf. In this study, Herrmann examines how Woolf and Wolf employ a double-voiced discourse to rewrite sexual difference.

in particular, are dependent upon their construction of the African or African-American in order to maintain their own self-identity. Morrison explains that

for the settlers and for American writers generally, this Africanist other became the means of thinking about body, mind, chaos, kindness, and love; provided the occasion for exercises in the absence of restraint, the contemplation of freedom and aggression; permitted opportunities for the exploration of ethics and morality, for meeting the obligations of the social contrast, for bearing the cross of religion and following out the ramifications of power. (48)

White Americans constructed an Africanist presence in order to meditate upon themselves. Morrison argues that the "new white male can now persuade himself that savagery is 'out there'...and a life of regularized violence is civilized" (45).

In a similar manner, in a Room of One's Own, Woolf looks at how men have constructed the female in order to maintain a self-identity of superiority. In Woolf's famous quote, she asserts that "women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" (35). Woolf draws parallels between the construction of "the female" and aggression between countries when she sarcastically says:

Whatever may be their use in civilised societies, mirrors are essential to all violent and heroic action. That is why Napoleon and Mussolini both insist so emphatically upon the inferiority of women, for if they were not inferior, they would cease to enlarge. (36)

This idea of "woman" gives men a self-identity that enables them to carry out their supposedly "heroic" and "civilised" activities. The tone Woolf employs allows her to expose the violent reality of these actions. She sharply asks:

How is he to go on giving judgement, civilising natives, making laws, writing books, dressing up and speechifying at banquets, unless he can see himself at breakfast and at dinner at least twice the size he really is? (36)

Both Morrison and Woolf associate the recognized writers and makers of culture with lawmakers and colonizers, thus bringing to the fore the complex relationship between culture and the production and transmission of knowledge and art. This analysis questions the very conditions that have led to a marked absence of writers due to their race, gender, and class, since Woolf and Morrison see the relation between material circumstances and the opportunity to create art. Moreover, a further connection between these two writers can be made when Morrison argues that it is helpful to look at how women have been treated in literature in order to better understand the scholarly indifference to racial issues. She writes:

An instructive parallel to this willed scholarly indifference is the centuries-long, hysterical blindness to feminist discourse and the way in which women and women's issues were read (or unread). (14)

Just as Morrison examines how white writers have constructed an Africanist presence in their novels, Woolf looks at how male writers create an heroic and romanticized

female presence in their novels that has nothing to do with the reality of women's lives. Woolf sees that while "she dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction, in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger" (45).<sup>3</sup> Like the Africanist presence that enabled white writers to meditate on their own self-contradictory impulses, the female presence served as a fictional muse that spurred on male creativity and justified their ways of perceiving the world.

While Woolf concentrates on the gender constraints that limit the female artist, Morrison analyzes issues of race and class as well; despite, however, the vast differences between them, both writers offer important insights into the nature of abuse and domination and its effect on the female artist. In A Room of One's Own, Woolf declares: "For surely it is time that the effect of discouragement upon the mind of the artist should be measured" (54). Woolf and Morrison create narrative structures that take on this very issue.

These writers often double their artist figures with characters who are either silent or mad, characters who speak a fragmented and traumatized language that the artist must translate into a creative form.<sup>4</sup> This can be seen in

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<sup>3</sup>Jane Marcus has noted that in A Room of One's Own, Woolf "uses the tropes of slavery to make the case for women's oppression" ("Registering Objections" 175).

<sup>4</sup>In The Problem of Dostoevsky's Poetics, Bakhtin sees that Dostoevsky creates a doubling effect in his short novel, The Double, by "the transferral of words from one mouth to another,

the relationship between Pecola and Claudia, as well as Septimus and Clarissa Dalloway. Claudia and Clarissa are linked to mad characters whose pain they attempt to interpret. In addition, the pairing of such characters as Mrs. Ramsay and Lily, or Sula and Nel, allow these writers to examine what conditions are necessary for the artist to overcome in order to create. As Michele Wallace aptly notes, "Sula's and Nel's individual characterizations are less important than the roles they play in the novel's larger problem of working out how black feminist creativity will be written" (Invisibility Blues 229). Mrs. Ramsay and Nel are women whose creativity is stifled by the limitations of the domestic realm.

In a conversation with Gloria Naylor, Toni Morrison equates the act of writing with giving words to the dead girl inside herself:

It wasn't that easy being a little black girl in this country--it was rough. The psychological tricks you have to play in order to get through--and nobody said how it felt to be that. And you knew better. You knew inside better. You knew you were not the person they were looking at. And to know that and to see what you saw in those other people's eyes was devastating. Some people made it, some didn't. And I wanted to explore it

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where the content remains the same although the tone and meaning are changed" (217). In a similar but distinctly different manner, Morrison and Woolf use repeating images or refrains to link their characters together. For instance, both Sula and Shadrack echo the word "Always" on three different occasions in the novel. Woolf uses the repeating image of dogs barking in descriptions of both Clarissa and Dalloway; and the "noondreams" where Nel and Sula meet as young girls suggests there exists a unity between them that transcends notions of time and space.

myself. (Southern Review 577)

Morrison writes about the condition of invisibility caused by racism and uses the metaphor of a dead girl who has been silenced by hostile stares. In fact, she includes an afterwards to the published conversation, where she links the wish to recover the dead girl with the desire to write:

It was a conversation. I can tell, because I said something I didn't know I knew. About the "dead girl." That bit by bit I had been rescuing her from the grave of time and inattention. Her fingernails in the first book; faces and legs, perhaps, the second time. Little by little bringing her back into life. So that now she comes running when called--walks freely around the house, sits down in a chair; looks at me, listens to Gloria Naylor and anybody else she wants to. She cannot lie. Doesn't know greed or vengeance. Will not fawn or pontificate. There is no room for pupils in her eyes. She is here now, alive. I have seen, named and claimed her--and oh what company she keeps. (593)

For Morrison, writing is an act of defiance that heals the state of invisibility, since what has remained unseen is brought finally into language. The dead girl Morrison speaks about can be seen replicated in the character of Beloved, who does literally come alive. Pecola Breedlove is another dead girl who knows in her state of invisibility that she is not the person people are looking at. Instead, she finds hate in the eyes that stare at her. The connection between Morrison, the writer of lyrical prose, and the dead girl inside whom she has finally "seen, named, and claimed," represents a type of doubling that ultimately emphasizes the artist who finds words for the silenced

invisible parts of herself. In a similar way, for example, in the relationship between Pecola and Claudia, we can see how Claudia becomes the storyteller who names Pecola's brutal experience of incestuous rape. Pecola, without words to speak, cut off as she is from the storytelling tradition of her ancestors, can only descend into the language of madness.

In a similar manner, but in a very different cultural context, the young Virginia Woolf felt herself divided between the public and private parts of herself. In her memoir, A Sketch of the Past, Virginia Woolf describes the room she was brought up in as being divided into two halves, the living and the sleeping half, as though to dramatize, like Morrison's description of the dead girl, that her sleeping half was the unseen part of herself that the living half would eventually bring into existence. In addition, the sleeping and living halves represent the split Woolf felt in herself between the gender and class constraints of Victorian society that demanded she go out and socialize, and the wish to have the quiet necessary to be an artist. Woolf explains that in the sleeping half of the room there was a looking glass placed there by her half-brother George, so she could look at herself and be more conscious of her appearance, while in the living half, her writing table and Greek books were to be found. Woolf writes:

Which should I describe first--the living half of the room, or the sleeping half? They must be

described separately; yet they were always running together. How they fought each other; that is, how often I was in a rage in that room; and in despair, and in ecstasy; how I read myself into a trance of perfect bliss; then in came--Adrian, George, Gerald, Jack, my father; how it was there I retreated to when father enraged me; and paced up and down scarlet; and there Madge came one evening; and I could scarcely talk for happiness, and there I droned out those long solitary mornings reading Greek...And it was from that room Gerald fetched me when father died. There I first heard those horrible voices... 123

The room is a place where Virginia goes to retreat from the stormy rages of her father. It was her place of solitude where she can ecstatically study Greek and struggle against the interruptions of the men in her family.<sup>5</sup> Her room gave her refuge from the constraining social obligations of Victorian teas and the pressures her brothers, particularly George, placed on her to "go out in society."<sup>6</sup> On the one hand, the room symbolizes Virginia's wish to descend into the quiet of her mind, that place of creativity; however, the pressures to meet the social obligations associated with her class and gender made her feel a sense of being split into two halves. Virginia Woolf continues her metaphor of doubling as she reflects back on her adolescent room that went on to become a hotel room used mainly by Birmingham businessmen and Cheltenham ladies:

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<sup>5</sup>For a study of the role of interruption in Woolf's novels, see Lucio Ruotolo, The Interrupted Moment: A View of Virginia Woolf's Novels.

<sup>6</sup>Virginia's early feelings about her room yield insight into the very discourse she creates in A Room of One's Own.

But of course I was not thinking when I lived in my back room at H[ylde] P[ark] G[ate] of Birmingham business men or ladies from Cheltenham. But I was thinking; feeling; living; those two lives that the two halves symbolized with the intensity, the muffled intensity, which a butterfly or moth feels when with its sticky tremulous legs and antennae, it pushed out of the chrysalis and emerges and sits quivering beside the broken case for a moment; its wings still creased; its eyes dazzled, incapable of flight. 124

As a young woman wanting to be an artist, Virginia felt herself torn between the silent and the spoken, the seen and the unseen parts of herself.<sup>7</sup> She likens herself, as a young female artist, to a butterfly or moth, fragile and tenuous, with "eyes dazzled" and "incapable of flight," as though to suggest that it is difficult to discern whether she is alive or dead.

In addition, the young Woolf saw herself as possessing two lives, two halves, the social and the solitary, the writer and the daughter, and such contradictory pressures made her feel "incapable of flight."<sup>8</sup> This inner as well as outer sense of conflict would only increase with the sudden death of her half-sister, Stella, coming only two years after her mother died.<sup>9</sup> Virginia writes: "the blow,

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<sup>7</sup>In Mrs. Dalloway, like the young Virginia, Clarissa has "the oddest sense of being herself invisible, unseen..." (14).

<sup>8</sup>For a study of the complex relationship between Woolf's inner life and the world of society, see Alex Zwerdling, Virginia Woolf and the Real World.

<sup>9</sup>For a further discussion of Virginia Woolf's childhood, see Jean O. Love, Virginia Woolf: Sources of Madness and Art. According to Love, the tragic theme of the entire Stephen family was "that life is likely to betray one, just when it seems to

the second blow of death, struck on me; tremulous, filmy eyed as I was, with my wings still creased, sitting there on the edge of my broken chrysalis" (124).<sup>10</sup> The image of the young girl as a butterfly, shattered, sitting on the edge of a "broken chrysalis" is similar to Morrison's invocation of the dead girl inside her. Both girls are silent and mute, unable to move; and it is only the adult writer who can bring what has been dead back to life.

As the mature artist, Woolf maintains a creative vision that consists of moments of being when she realizes "that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. Hamlet or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words, we are the music; we are the thing itself. And I see this when I have a shock" (72).<sup>11</sup> As a writer, Woolf translates the painful

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promise great happiness" (70).

<sup>10</sup>For a psychoanalytic study of loss and creativity in Virginia Woolf's life and art, see Elizabeth Abel, Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis; Alma Bond Halbert, Who Killed Virginia Woolf? A Psychobiography; Thomas C. Caramagno, The Flight of the Mind: Virginia Woolf's Art and Manic-Depressive Illness; Shirley Panken, Virginia Woolf and the "Lust of Creation": A Psychoanalytic Study.

<sup>11</sup>For a study of Virginia Woolf's philosophic vision of reality, see Mark Hussey, The Singing of the Real World.

silence of her childhood into art.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, she posits a communal vision of art that seems to suggest that artistic vision belongs to all who can apprehend a sense of unity with the universe.<sup>13</sup>

Her description of herself as a girl with creased wings unable to fly is similar to Morrison's description of Pecola, at the end The Bluest Eye, as the grounded bird, left to forage among the garbage pails of the town. This image links the theme of sexual abuse to these two writers. This is especially significant since earlier in her memoir, Woolf describes being sexually abused as a young girl by her half-brother, Gerald. The image of birds echoes the Philomela and Procne myth, a myth, which I believe, vividly portrays the dilemma of the female artist. In this myth, Procne's husband, Tereus, rapes her younger sister, Philomela, and then cuts out her tongue when Philomela threatens to tell the story of her violation. After this horrifying act, Tereus returns home and reports to his wife that her sister has died. Without words to tell her tale of loss, Philomela weaves her story into a piece of tapestry and sends it to Procne, who comes immediately to rescue her

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<sup>12</sup>For an in-depth study of the role of silence in Virginia Woolf's fiction, see Patricia Oudek Laurence, The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition.

<sup>13</sup>According to Maria Battista, Woolf's "writing is a species of mediumship, a complex species emerging out of the auspicious mating of Shakespearean negative capability and the historical practice of feminine anonymity" (21).

from her cell. As revenge, Procne kills her only son and cooks and serves him to Tereus. Once Tereus realizes what he has eaten, Philomela and her sister Procne appear and are turned into nightingales who fly away, while Tereus becomes a war bird. Procne and Philomela's flight is a flight away from domination, from silence. Their unintelligible song becomes a language of resistance. After her rape, Philomela is left mute, and yet she creates another form to express her loss.<sup>14</sup> But it is her sister, the one who can speak, who ultimately saves Philomela and plans a revenge that privileges her relationship to her sister over her maternal bond to her son.

Jane Marcus argues that in Philomela's case, "the voice of the nightingale, the voice of the shuttle weaving its story of oppression, is the voice which cries for freedom; an appropriate voice for women of color and lesbians, it speaks from the place of imprisonment as political resistance" (Art and Anger 215). In Sula, for example, the character Sula is often identified with birds in flight who return with her after her ten year absence from Medallion, Ohio. Morrison uses the metaphor of flight itself, which is continuously associated with Sula's demand for sexual and emotional freedom, to reconstruct a new vision of black

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<sup>14</sup>Maya Angelou was also silent for an entire year after she was raped by her mother's lover. For a further discussion of this, see Christine Froula, "The Daughter's Seduction: Sexual Violence and Literary History" (139-162).

female subjectivity. Like Sula and Nel, Procne and Philomela are doubles who represent the struggle of the female artist to find new language with which to speak. Philomela's isolation is overcome only when she can find an artistic form to express her loss. Sula, on the other hand, remains "an artist with no art form (Sula 121)," whose death emphasizes the extreme obstacles the black female artist faces. Just as Woolf stresses in A Room of One's Own that the female artist needs money and a room in order to write, Morrison underscores in Sula that creativity is thwarted by the material constraints associated with sexism and racism.

In Writing a Woman's Life, Carolyn Heilbrun argues that Woolf realized early on that the narratives provided for women were insufficient for her own artistic purposes (120). According to Heilbrun, Woolf "knew that when Chloe and Olivia worked side by side in a laboratory, when women had a room of their own and money of their own (which is power), the old story of women's destiny, the old marriage plot, would give way to another story for women, a quest plot" (121). Anticipating Morrison's concern with female bonding in Sula many years later, Woolf considers in A Room of One's Own what it would mean for her imaginary woman novelist, Mary Carmichael, to capture the experience of two women

liking each other.<sup>15</sup> Woolf notes the enormity of the project, realizing that "Chloe liked Olivia perhaps for the first time in literature. Cleopatra did not like Octavia. And how completely Antony and Cleopatra would have been altered had she done so" (Room 86). Woolf urges the woman novelist to create new narratives for women's lives that include even the taboo theme of lesbian relationships. She writes: "For if Chloe likes Olivia and Mary Carmichael knows how to express it she will light a torch in that vast chamber where nobody has yet been. It is all half lights and profound shadows like those serpentine caves where one goes with a candle peering up and down, not knowing where one is stepping" (88).

In an interview with Claudia Tate, Morrison underscores the pioneering nature of her own work when she says, "I wrote Sula and The Bluest Eye because they were the books I had wanted to read. No one had written them yet, so I wrote them. My audience is always the people in the book I'm writing at the time" (122). Morrison creates a new form in order to express the lives of those who have been left out of literature. Similarly, in "Women and Fiction," Virginia Woolf states that a woman artist must alter "the current sentence until she writes one that takes the natural shape

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<sup>15</sup>Barbara Smith argues that Sula "works as a lesbian novel not only because of the passionate friendship between Sula and Nel but because of Morrison's consistently critical stance toward the heterosexual institutions of male-female relationships, marriage and her family" ("Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" 175).

of her thought without crushing or distorting it" (Granite and Rainbow 81), since the sentence made by men "is to loose, too heavy, too pompous for a woman's use" (81). Both writers are aware that new narrative forms must be created in order to express the isolation of the female artist. While Woolf is concerned with the creation of a woman's sentence, Morrison is aware that the language of the African-American writer must capture the linguistic melody of black culture.<sup>16</sup>

In her pacifist manifesto, Three Guineas, Woolf links the domination women are experiencing from men in their homes with fascist male aggression abroad. She calls on women to form a Society of Outsiders and urges the woman writer to create an aesthetic that attacks war. Woolf writes: "In short, if newspapers were written by people whose sole object in writing was to tell the truth about politics and the truth about art we should not believe in war and we should believe in art" (97). Woolf believes that for the daughters of educated men, "the profession of literature is still that which stands widest open to them-- to prevent war," thus calling on the woman artist to create a new script that denounces the violence of war. While

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<sup>16</sup>Elliott Butler-Evans contends that in texts by Morrison, Walker, and Bambara "both subject and narrative are fragmented as the works of these women become the locus of a struggle between the totalizing impulses of racial and gender political discourses, and that this struggle is a necessary development in generating the text's ideology" (5).

Woolf has clearly limited her audience to the daughters of educated men, she does draw important connections between art and politics, a theme that links her to Morrison's insistence that "the best art is political and you ought to be able to make it unquestionably political and irrevocably beautiful at the same time" ("Ancestor as Foundation" 345).<sup>17</sup>

All of Morrison's novels indict the domination and violence associated with white supremacy. At the same time, the lyricism of her novels creates a communal vision that celebrates the African-American oral and folk tradition.

Morrison writes:

If anything I do, in the way of writing novels (or whatever I write) isn't about the village or the community or about you, then it is not about anything. I am not interested in indulging myself in some private, closed exercise of my imagination that fulfills only the obligation of my personal dreams--which is to say, yes, the work must be political. It must have that as a thrust. That's a pejorative term in critical circles now: if a work of art has any political influence in it, somehow it's tainted. My feeling is just the opposite: if it has none, it is tainted. (344-5)

Both Morrison and Woolf understand that domination has its own discourse, and art must be created with language that offers an alternative vision. In a 1981 interview, Thomas LeClair asked Morrison what makes her fiction distinctive.

Morrison replied:

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<sup>17</sup>For a Marxist analysis of Toni Morrison's fiction, see Doreatha Drummond Mbalia, Toni Morrison's Developing Class Consciousness.

The language, only the language. The language must be careful and must appear effortless. It must not sweat. It must suggest and be provocative at the same time. It is the thing that black people love so much--the saying of words, holding them on the tongue, experimenting with them, playing with them. It's a love, a passion. Its function is like a preacher's: to make you stand up out of your seat, make you lose yourself and hear yourself. The worst of all possible things that could happen would be to lose that language. (Conversations 123)

Morrison and Woolf are concerned with what happens when people lose their language and then remain excluded from the dominant discourse. Characters such as Rachel Vinrace, Pecola Breedlove, Septimus Warren Smith, Shadrack, and Beloved problematize this dynamic. These characters speak a fragmented language that underscores their alienation.<sup>18</sup> Even Mrs. Ramsay has "no language" with which to speak of her isolation. Instead it is up to Lily, her surrogate daughter and painter, to find a form for her silence. Just as Bernard in The Waves longs "for some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words like the shuffling of feet on the pavement" (238) in order to write, Lily strives to translate Mrs. Ramsay's "inarticulate words" into art.

Morrison's novels are rooted in a distinctly oral

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<sup>18</sup>In her excellent study of Sarah Orne Jewett and Toni Morrison, Marilyn Mobley notes, "Narrative is a means of affirming the identity of those whose stories have been untold or unheard; it provides information to those seeking knowledge; and provides healing, transformation, and coherence for the self and the community" (14).

African-American tradition. Just as the Philomela and Procne myth tells the story of women's flight from silence and sexual violation, the African-American folk tale about flying back to Africa tells a tale of the power of the spoken word. In this tale, as recounted by Julius Lester, a pregnant African slave faints in the fields from overwork and is whipped by the white overseer. An enslaved African witch doctor whispers a word in her ear, which she, in turn, whispers until all the slaves in the fields have heard it. When another slave faints, the overseer comes over again with his whip. The witch doctor shouts Now!, and then utters the word. With that utterance, "the person who had fainted rose from the ground, and moving his arms like wings, he flew into the sky and out of sight" (Black Folk Tales 150). Each time the overseer was to whip a slave, the doctor followed the same procedure, and the slave began to fly. This happened until finally the doctor yelled and uttered his "strange word" so all the slaves could drop their hoes and fly back to Africa.

This tale honors the power of language to defy domination. According to Trudier Harris, it forms the basis for Milkman's flight at the end of Song of Solomon (Fiction and Folklore 13). In a very different context, in her short story, "Kew Gardens", Woolf associates images of aborted flight with a language that cannot contain the depth and complexity of her characters' inner feelings when she writes

of "words with short wings for their heavy body of meaning, inadequate to carry them far"...(The Complete Shorter Fiction 94). Indeed, both Morrison and Woolf write with the conviction that language has an incantory, healing effect. Like the African witch doctor who can free the slaves with his utterance that is unintelligible to the white overseer, the black female artist will break the shackles of a discourse that has left her out. In a similar manner, in A Room of One's Own, Woolf resurrects the sixteenth-century female genius by reviewing the fate of Shakespeare's imaginary sister. She asserts that "any women born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at" (51). Woolf then goes on to give voice to the countless lost female artists, as her essay acts as an elegy that honors their unrecognized and undeveloped potential.

This tale about flying back to Africa further underscores the invisibility of the black artist, since the witch doctor's words are discounted as incomprehensible by the white overseer. In addition, the tale emphasizes the importance of the ancestor in the creation of a black aesthetic. In her essay, "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation," Morrison stresses that the presence of an ancestor is central to novels by African-American writers.

Morrison states that ancestors are not related to just the parents, but "are sort of timeless people whose relationships to the characters are benevolent, instructive and protective, and they provide a certain kind of wisdom" (Evans 343). By looking at contemporary African-American novels, Morrison found

that whether the novel took place in the city or in the country, the presence or absence of that figure determined the success or the happiness of the character. It was the absence of an ancestor that was frightening, that was threatening, and it caused huge destruction and disarray in the work itself. That the solace comes not from the contemplation of serene nature as in a lot of mainstream white literature, nor from the regard in which the city was held as a kind of corrupt place to be. Whether the character was in Harlem or Arkansas, the point was there, this timelessness was there, the person who represented the ancestor. (343)

In Virginia Woolf's short story, "The Ancestor," which is part of the collection entitled, Mrs. Dalloway's Party, a mature woman laments the staleness of upper-class white culture, as she stands at a party with a man talking about cricket matches. This woman dreams of her parents long dead, as she weeps and realizes they were the only ones "who had ever seen all that she had it in her to be; who had known her..." (46-7). She longs to be away from the party and its talk of cricket matches and back in "the serene nature" of the garden with her parents.

In this story, the ancestor is limited to a generation of parents, while for Morrison the ancestor is part of an oral folk tradition that reaches back to rural African

society.<sup>19</sup> For Woolf, the idea of ancestor can be traced back to her Aunt Emelia Caroline, a mystic and a Quaker who gave Woolf the inheritance that enabled her to write. Woolf's great-grandfather wrote the anti-slavery bill, while her grandfather, James Stephen, honored his father's wishes and reluctantly passed it (Marcus "Registering Objections" 183).<sup>20</sup> In this story, however, Woolf's ancestor is class-bound, and her character's emptiness has to do with her isolation within the confines of upper class white society. The female character is both insider and outsider; she is a guest at a party, yet she remains invisible to those around her. This type of contradiction runs through Woolf's work and forms the tension in the doubling she creates in her novels. For instance, in Mrs. Dalloway Woolf pairs Septimus Warren Smith, a shellshocked war survivor to Clarissa Dalloway, a upper-middle class hostess, who spends the course of the novel planning and giving her party. In To the Lighthouse, Mrs. Ramsay is another partygiver who is linked to Lily, the artist who is chastised for her indifference to marriage.

Both Woolf and Morrison use the party and the

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<sup>19</sup>For a discussion of Morrison's immediate ancestors, see her essay, "A Slow Walk of Trees (as Grandmother Would Say) Hopeless (As Grandfather Would Say)" (104-105, 150-164).

<sup>20</sup>In "Britannia Rules The Waves," Jane Marcus points out that James Stephen, the permanent undersecretary for the Colonies, was referred to as "Mr. Mother-Country-Stephen" by the press because he promoted the metaphors that linked colonial subjects to children who needed the protection of a kindly mother country (148).

carnavalesque as a means of expressing the contradictions inherent in being an insider as well as an outsider. Parties and carnivals bring to the forefront the experience of being in conflict within oneself as well as the environment. It becomes a way of structuring memory, as characters such as Baby Suggs and Clarissa Dalloway recall the losses of the past in the midst of a celebration. In particular, for Morrison, the carnivalesque becomes a way of representing the alienation of the black female artist who stands outside of white society. At the same time, it also symbolizes her defiant stance against the traditional roles engendered by both racism and sexism.

In The Souls of Black Folk, W.E.B. DuBois writes of the state of double consciousness, "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's self by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (45). In her novels, Morrison problematizes this state of double consciousness.<sup>21</sup> For instance, in The Bluest Eye, Pecola's Breedlove's internalized racism renders her mute. It is only through her double, Claudia, a character who rejects

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<sup>21</sup>For a further discussion of this, see Denise Heinze, The Dilemma of "Double-Consciousness": Toni Morrison's Novels.

self-hatred and is rooted in a sense of the ancestor, that Pecola's story can be told. Morrison's use of the carnivalesque in Sula to portray the sexual and emotional freedom of three generations of Peace women, serves as a means of expressing a subjectivity that will not be "torn asunder" by internalized "contempt and pity." In addition, DuBois writes of the difficulty the black intellectual will face because of American racism:

The would-be black savant was confronted by the paradox that the knowledge his people needed was a twice-told tale to his white neighbors, while the knowledge which would teach the white world was Greek to his own flesh and blood. The innate love of harmony that set the ruder souls of his people a-dancing and a-singing raised but confusion, and doubt in the soul of the black artist; for the beauty revealed to him was the soul-beauty of a race which his larger audience despised, and he could not articulate the message of another people. This waste of double aims, this seeking to satisfy two unreconciled ideas, has wrought sad havoc with ten thousand people--has sent them wooing false gods and invoking false means of salvation, and at times has even seemed about to make them ashamed of themselves. (96-7)

Like the dead girl Morrison brings to life, Morrison maintains the black female artist must shatter the silence that comes from embracing double aims; and she creates a narrative structure in which this theme is woven into the plot of her novels. Moreover, her novels honor the forgotten ancestor whose roots to go back to the African women who most often fulfilled "the role of tale teller and instructor." These women were the ones primarily responsible for the "oral transmission of customs and value

from one generation to the next" (Wilentz xix).

While the sexism Woolf experienced was obviously not as debilitating as the effects of racism, I believe she was concerned with creating an aesthetic that would undermine all forms of domination. Her very sentences speak of the double aims of her female characters, and this is no more apparent than she when places them in parties where they enjoy the conversation of society members, and at the same time, experience the depth of their own isolation. All of Woolf's novels tell the story of the "unvoiced longing" of her female characters.<sup>22</sup>

In her essay, "The Narrow Bridge of Art," Woolf writes that "in the modern mind beauty is accompanied not by its shadow but by its opposite" (Granite & Rainbow 16). She anticipates Morrison when she says that in the future the novel will have many of the attributes of poetry. Woolf writes that the future novel "will give not only or mainly people's relations to each other and their activities together, as the novel has hitherto done, but it will give the relation of the mind to general ideas and its soliloquy in solitude" (18-19). Woolf and Morrison's soliloquies in solitude become conversations different characters speak that echo the contradictions of each others' lives.

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<sup>22</sup>In A Room of One's Own, Woolf writes that most early nineteenth-century novels by women had a flaw at its center, because the author felt she had to alter "her values in deference to the opinion of others" (77).

Recently, Barbara Christian has commented on the use of these lovely soliloquies in both Woolf and Morrison's novels:

As a reader of Virginia Woolf you, Toni, were clearly alert to the world evoked by her imagination. As a writer, you were confronted with some of the same issues of narrative technique with which she had to contend. In your first novel, The Bluest Eye, you would use soliloquies as she had, in order to capture the inner lives of your characters. However, you had to do with an additional problem, for readers were not used to focussing on the inner lives of black characters. ("Layered Rhythms" 493-4)

Barbara Christian's words highlight the similarity in Woolf and Morrison's narrative technique as well as the vast differences that exist between the black and white female artist. In a 1983 interview with Nellie McKay, Toni Morrison comments further on this issue:

It is generally true that contemporary black women writers consistently look back to their mothers and grandmothers for the substance and authority in their voices. I suspect that this is an important and distinguishing element of black women's approach to their art. In contrast, many white women writers say they are inventing the authority for the voices pretty much from scratch in an effort to break the silence of Shakespeare's sisters. Black women writers--having the example of authoritative mothers, aunts, grandmothers, great-grandmothers--have something to contribute to the world. They have a distinctive and powerful artistic heritage. It is not white, and it is not male. (Conversations 141)

Morrison's reference to the "silence of Shakespeare's sisters," seems to refer to the ending of A Room of One's Own, when Woolf declares that Shakespeare's imaginary sister lives in the lives of women waiting to be born. They must

work for her by having the courage to write what they truly think (118). While Woolf's ancestors do not come from a peasant, folk tradition, she writes against the confines of patriarchal British culture, and, in effect, creates her own female tradition. She aligns herself with the forgotten, invisible women who have come before her and turns to the model of her Quaker aunt for inspiration.<sup>23</sup> In addition, just as Woolf creates narrative structures that are in opposition to the rigid realism of Bennett and Galsworthy, Morrison also grasps that she is living in a moment in history when the Afro-American novel is in transition. In 1981, she told Thomas LeClair:

Now my people, we "peasants," have come to the city, that is to say, we live with its values. There is a confrontation between old values of the tribe and new values. It's confusing. There has to be a mode to do what the music did for blacks, what we used to be able to do with each other in private and in that civilization that existed underneath the white civilization. I think this accounts for the address of my books. I am not explaining anything to anybody. My work bears witness and suggests who the outlaws were, who survived under what circumstances and why, what was legal in the community as opposed to what was legal outside of it. All that is in the fabric of the story to do what the music used to do. The music kept us alive, but it is not enough anymore. (121).

As the architect of her novels, Morrison counters the state of double-consciousness by not needing to explain anything to anybody. Instead, her audience is the people

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<sup>23</sup>For a further discussion of this, see Jane Marcus, Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy. See also, Barbara Christian, "Layered Rhythms" (497).

inside her books. By looking at the similar themes and narrative structures of both Woolf and Morrison, it becomes possible to engage in a dialogue about how issues of race and gender influence the creation of art. By actually problematizing the very existence of the female artist, I believe Woolf and Morrison create a new script that privileges the healing power of language and narrative over the cultural annihilation caused by a static, sexist as well as racist discourse.

This dissertation opens with a comparison of female sexual initiation in The Voyage Out and The Bluest Eye. While Rachel Vinrace has no double to speak of her loss, she and Pecola Breedlove, can find no way to express their experience of violation. In addition, I use Morrison's Playing in the Dark to read The Voyage Out in order to highlight Woolf's own ambiguities about issues concerning class privilege and sexuality. Chapters three and four shift to themes of female bonding and creativity in Mrs. Dalloway and Sula. Both Morrison and Woolf frame their novels with the story of female friendship, as they simultaneously tell the tale of the destruction of a World War I veteran who has returned home shattered and mad. The use of the party in Mrs Dalloway and the carnivalesque in Sula convey both alienation and rebellion from traditional modes of being. Chapters five and six look at Morrison and Woolf's aesthetic. I also examine the theme of personal

memory and historical loss in To the Lighthouse and Beloved, as it relates to the problematic mother/daughter relationship and the self-identity of the female artist.

I believe this study will yield greater insights into the reasons for Morrison's early interest in writing about Virginia Woolf. Individually Morrison and Woolf have produced a large body of literary criticism as well as lyrical and technically innovative novels. By reading them together, it becomes even more apparent how these writers are concerned with how the female artist must construct a self-identity that will enable her to reclaim and transform the very language that has excluded her from its discourse.

### The Voyage Out

In the first novels of Virginia Woolf and Toni Morrison, both writers create artist figures whose primary story is the painful tale of female sexual initiation. In The Bluest Eye, Pecola's silence is broken only by Claudia's willful narration, and this relationship between two little girls, one without words, and the other as artist who weaves melodies out of Pecola's violation, becomes a metaphor for the creative act itself. Morrison's landscape is a sterile northern mill town of Ohio, far away from the lost close-knit black community of the South. It is here where she traces the moment that has led up to the incestuous rape of a poor black girl, "the most vulnerable member of the society." Pecola's sexual abuse by her father and the deep loss that accompanies it is one link in a hierarchical, racist, social structure where the weak prey upon the weaker. Claudia's ability to speak as narrator of the novel is part of her defiant stand against American white supremacist society. As artist, she refuses to accept a racialized self-hatred.

Woolf's artist figure, on the other hand, is a white upper-class English woman of twenty-four, who was raised in a sheltered environment by protective aunts and an abusive father. The novel traces Rachel Vinrace's journey from Britain to South America, where she gets engaged and dies. Music, and more specifically the piano, acts as solace for

the longing Rachel feels for her mother who died when she was only eleven. Through music, Rachel can find form for her own interiority that remains invisible to those around her. When Rachel is alone in her room with music, her mind is like thistledown blending with Beethoven's opus 11; she achieves a romantic communion with the sea and sky; this reveals Woolf's own literary heritage, and some critics, such as Madeline Moore, for example, see The Voyage Out as Woolf's most romantic novel (The Short Season 25).<sup>1</sup> In The Bluest Eye, however, Claudia, the storyteller, is connected to the music of her mother's songs; this bond links her to the language of her African and African-American female ancestors, a cultural heritage which provides her with the words to tell Pecola's story.

While Morrison's narrative structure pairs victim and artist as opposites, Woolf does not employ the use of the double until Mrs. Dalloway. Instead, she uses the solitary character of Rachel Vinrace to examine what conditions are necessary for the female artist to create. Rachel clearly lacks confidence; she speaks in sentences that hesitate and stammer. In contrast to Claudia's healing connection to her mother's songs, Rachel's love for music does not help her to

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<sup>1</sup>Avrom Fleishman notes the novel's romantic tone (1). See also, Anca Vlasopolos, "Shelley's Triumph of Death in Virginia Woolf's Voyage Out" (130-153). Vlasopolos argues that "like "Adonais," The Voyage Out subverts itself in its skepticism about art, which is both incapable of controlling mutability and inadequate as a consolation for the painful delusions of living" (141).

assert a self-identity that is separate from the gendered expectations of her father, aunt, and most importantly, her fiancée, Terence Hewet. At the same time, both Rachel Vinrace and Pecola Breedlove cannot find a form in language to express themselves. As a result of this, Pecola descends into madness, and Rachel falls into delirium and then death.

Just as Toni Morrison wrote The Bluest Eye after her divorce, Woolf's writing of The Voyage Out spans the years leading up to her engagement and subsequent marriage to Leonard Woolf. According to Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos, Morrison implies in a film for the "Writer in America Series," "that writing the novel during the evenings after her children were in bed helped to heal her," (31) from the pain of her divorce. In a recent New York Times interview, Morrison goes on to say that when she began to write seriously, she realized she could no longer organize her exterior and interior self for the approval of men ("Chloe Wofford" 75). Similarly, in her first novel, Woolf uses the character of Rachel Vinrace to examine issues of self-identity and creativity.

In Playing in the Dark, Toni Morrison states that many American writers use a racialized subtext to examine their own chaotic "self-contradictory features of the self" (59). Morrison argues:

The fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly consciousness.

It is an astonishing revelation of longing, of terror, of perplexity, of shame, of magnanimity. It requires hard work not to see this. (17)

Morrison's statements are central to my analysis of The Voyage Out, since I argue that Virginia Woolf racializes the plot of her first novel by having Rachel Vinrace journey from England to South America.<sup>2</sup> Given the sheltered nature of Rachel's upbringing, it is doubtful that she had much of an opportunity to ever meet or encounter anyone other than white Britons on the streets surrounding her home.<sup>3</sup> In this way, she voyages away from the enclaves of whiteness she is familiar with, as she travels to the darker continent of South America. Woolf encodes the theme of sexual abuse into the text; at the same time, she links a traditional marriage with colonialism and hints at Rachel's repressed erotic feelings for women.<sup>4</sup>

Using Morrison's text to read The Voyage Out underscores Woolf's own ambiguity about her class privilege, since Rachel both objectifies and identifies with the native

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<sup>2</sup>Tuzyline Allan argues that Woolf re-enacts "Conrad's Heart of Darkness, locating in South America (rather than in Africa) the jungle that strips away from English men and women the civilizing qualities of communication, personality, consciousness, memory, self-control and replaces them with untamed, illogical emotions and, eventually, death" (22).

<sup>3</sup>See Gretchen Gerzina, Black London: Life Before Emancipation, for a discussion of the history of blacks in London.

<sup>4</sup>Karen Lawrence aptly notes, "Woolf's narrative telescopes colonial and sexual aggression, reminding us that Europe's 'voyages out,' to the New World were male penetrations of virgin spaces" (Penelope Voyages 158).

women of South America.<sup>5</sup> By having Rachel descend self-protectively into delirium and then death, Woolf creates a powerful metaphor that problematizes the very existence of a female artist who has no aesthetic tradition to look back on and no one to protect her from male aggression.

#### A Silence too Terrible to Break

In her essay, "Nameless Atrocities," Lisa Tyler argues that by naming Rachel's father, Willoughby Vinrace, Woolf is alluding to Willoughbys in both Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility and Fanny Burney's Evelina who abuse women. The Willoughby in Sense and Sensibility publicly insults Marianne, the heroine, and leaves suddenly once all of her friends think they are engaged. Like Rachel Vinrace, Marianne gets feverishly ill, although she does not die. Marianne also finds out that her fate could have been a lot worse, since she discovers that Willoughby had previously seduced and then abandoned a sixteen year old girl, leaving her pregnant, impoverished and disgraced (33).

The reference to Jane Austen's Willoughby is especially significant since The Voyage Out is Woolf's novel that most resembles Austen's novels. Woolf's use of a third person omniscient narrator and her plot that centers around the theme of marriage undoubtedly echoes Austen; and yet while

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<sup>5</sup>In Conceived with Malice, Louise DeSalvo attributes Leonard Woolf's scathing portrait of Virginia in his novel, The Wise Virgins, to his wish for revenge because of the class differences between them, the anti-semitism he found in his wife and her family, and his wish for celibacy (75).

Woolf begins her career by writing a novel that resembles Austen's nineteenth-century novel of manners, she rewrites Austen by having Rachel die rather than marry. In this way, Woolf consciously subverts the nineteenth century Austen novel with its plot that always ends in marriage (DuPlessis 47-53) . At the same time, Woolf uses the name of Willoughby to encode the theme of an abusive father-daughter relationship into her text, as well as the potentially destructive nature of romantic liaisons between men and women.<sup>6</sup>

Fanny Burney's Evelina is also insulted by a Willoughby who tries to "abduct her in his carriage." Like Rachel and Marianne, Evelina falls seriously ill after he continues to act deceitfully (Tyler 40). The allusions suggested by these names are important in deciphering the meaning of The Voyage Out, especially since Woolf chose her characters' names carefully, often changing them several times over the course of a novel's draft.

Rachel's illness echoes the feverish delirium of Austen and Burney's young women, who get sick in response to the physical and emotional abuse from men called Willoughby. Unlike Morrison's realistic and unrelenting description of Pecola's rape, Woolf encodes the theme of sexual and emotional abuse into the text through the use of literary

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<sup>6</sup>For a further discussion of the father-daughter relationship in English literature, see Lynda Maria Zwinger, Daughters, Fathers and the Novel.

allusions.<sup>7</sup> The silence surrounding Rachel's life suggests something terrible has occurred that she cannot speak of; instead, she descends into the healing melodies of music.

According to Louise DeSalvo, Rachel's Aunt Helen suspects that Willoughby has committed "nameless atrocities" in regard to Rachel, but she does not understand that Rachel is "stuck in childhood" due to her upbringing and this nameless, horrible abuse. Rachel suffers all the more because her memory is not available to her; her past is lost in "sealed pockets," that surface in nightmarish dreams and feverish delirium (Impact 168). While it is not possible, based on the text, to verify whether Rachel's relationship with her father was incestuous, Woolf leaves many clues that certainly suggest some type of terrible abuse occurred.

It is, however, clear in the text that Rachel's mother was badly mistreated by her father. In Melymbrosia, an earlier version of the novel, Rachel tells her fiance, Terence Hewet, that her feelings about men come from "the way my father treated my mother. I once heard him abuse her when she asked him for money. Feelings come in flashes like that and last all one's life. That was one flash. Then dishonesty. He never treated me fairly" (151). This passage reveals Willoughby's controlling nature. In the final version of The Voyage Out, Rachel's father looks at a

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<sup>7</sup>For a further discussion of how nineteenth-century women novelists encoded their themes into their texts, see Gilbert and Gubar, The Mad Woman in the Attic.

photograph of his dead wife and acknowledges "he had not been particularly kind to her while she lived" (85).

Rachel's lack of confidence, her inarticulateness that causes her to speak hesitantly and stammer her words, her child-like behavior, and the description of her as an unprotected "victim dropped from the claws of a bird of prey" (37), all suggest that she has suffered some kind of abuse. What is most significant is not the specific nature of the abuse, but Woolf's depiction of a colonized psyche that has been dominated and broken by men. By racializing the plot, Woolf brings the theme of domestic abuse into the larger framework of Britain's colonial domination of South America. At the same time, Rachel's unique position as both oppressed and privileged highlights the specific situation of the white Western woman who has suffered greatly because of her gender and yet often reaped benefits due to her class and race.

### **Marriage and Colonies**

From the very first pages of the novel, Woolf announces her theme that a traditional marriage is equivalent to colonization. Helen Ambrose weeps inconsolably because she has been forced to leave her children for several months in order to accompany her husband, Ridley, on a voyage that will give him the privacy and quiet to complete his scholarly work. As a traditional wife, Helen has no choice but to place her husband's needs before her children's and

her own; she clearly does not want to be separated from them. In her grief, Helen notices and identifies briefly with the poor, since "what with her misery for her children, the poor, and the rain, her mind was like a wound exposed to dry in the air" (13). Ridley makes a feeble effort to comfort her, but once he realizes this is not possible, he walks away since he feels "it awkward to stand beside a grief that was greater than his" (10). Ridley does not want to compete with his children for his wife's attention. While he narcissistically completes his work that requires such intense self-absorption, he demands a separation that will only bring harm to his wife and children.<sup>8</sup> In this way, Ridley, although an insignificant spoke in the wheel of British society, becomes identified with the British Empire that will stake its claim within the public and private spheres.

Even the very ship they board is connected to British colonialism. The Euphrosyne is a cargo ship belonging to Willoughby Vinrace, a wealthy merchant with rubber plantations scattered throughout the coast of South America.<sup>9</sup> It is significant that Rachel's voyage into

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<sup>8</sup>Louise DeSalvo notes: "In this novel, Woolf demonstrates that the greatest threat to an imperialist state is a warm, loving, intact family, in which parents share equally in child rearing, in which contact between parents and their children are maximized, an idea she developed fully in Three Guineas" (Impact 166).

<sup>9</sup>Euphrosyne is also the name of a collection of poems by Bloomsbury men.

adult sexuality and impending marriage, a journey that ultimately claims her very life, takes place on her father's ship that is en route down the Amazon where he will participate in more lucrative business transactions.

When Helen Ambrose first meets Rachel, she concludes that she "might be six years old" (25). It shocks her that a young woman of twenty-four barely knows how babies are born. Having lived a sheltered existence with her shallow aunts since her mother died when she was only eleven, Rachel has no political consciousness. She has never received a formal education that might have helped her understand the domination she sees around her.

Her mind was in the state of an intelligent man in the beginning of the reign of Queen Elizabeth; she would believe practically anything she was told, invent reasons for anything she said. The shape of the earth, the history of the world, how trains worked, or money was invented, what laws were enforced, which people wanted what, and why they wanted it, the most elementary idea of a system in modern life--none of this had been imparted to her by any of her professors or mistresses. (34)

Helen wants to take it upon herself to teach Rachel about life, since she has been purposely shielded from any harsh realities and has very little knowledge about anything. The image of Rachel as a simple child who needs a protector echoes the long history of racist ideology that sees blacks as children who cannot learn or live independently from the beneficent colonialists, missionaries, and slave traders. For example, Livingstone, the famous British explorer saw Africans as "children" and "savages" (Brantlinger 197). In

fact, the rise of British colonialism went hand in hand with racist ideology that supported the "idea of 'imperial trusteeship' for the betterment of backward peoples'" (Fryer 165).

While I am not positing that Rachel's oppression is in any way equivalent to the suffering of slaves and the people of colonized countries, I am arguing that Woolf is making these parallels in order to articulate the pain of sexual and emotional abuse of women by men. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Woolf makes similar comparisons in A Room of One's Own. Rachel's very sheltered upbringing has only served to infantilize her and prevent her from establishing a healthy self-confidence. (Impact 167). In addition, in this novel, Woolf equates male aggression and sexuality with the very same forces of colonialism that will subjugate an entire country as well as individual women. This is seen most strongly in the scene in which Richard Dalloway intrusively kisses Rachel, as he discusses Britain's responsibility to her childlike colonies. Just as Sander Gilman writes that "the colonial mentality which sees 'natives' as needing control is easily transferred to woman" (256), Woolf is warning the female artist that she must seek protection from any gender or class of people that will see her as a helpless child in need of control.

In "Writing Race and the Difference it Makes," Henry Louis Gates asserts that Western philosophers believed

Africans had no culture or memory. Hegel, in particular, "claimed Africans had no history, because they had developed no systems of writing and they had not mastered European languages" (11).<sup>10</sup> Western philosophers posited that unless a group of people participated in their system of knowledge or their way of recording history, then there existed no culture, memory, or intelligence. They believed memory only existed if a record of the past could be found recorded in Western languages. This is relevant to The Voyage Out, since very often the same tropes for the primitive are also used to depict women (Torgovnick 17).<sup>11</sup> Moreover, I believe Woolf uses the trope of primitivism in this novel to expose the dangers of marriage for the female artist.

Rachel is judged to be simple and lacking because she is inarticulate and has not had access to the Western canon of knowledge. This becomes particularly evident in her interactions with St. John Hirst when he chides her for not

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<sup>10</sup>Gates writes that "in judging civilizations, Hegel's structures with respect to the absence of written history presume a crucial role for memory, a collective, cultural memory. Metaphors of the childlike nature of the slaves, of the masked puppetlike personality of the black, all share the assumption about the absence of memory" ("Race", Writing 11).

<sup>11</sup>Maria Torgovnick argues that "global politics, the dance of colonizer and colonized, become sexual politics, the dance of male and female" (17). In addition, in 1910, while Woolf was writing this novel, Roger Fry, who was interested in primitive art, organized the famous Post-Impressionist exhibition. As Torgovnick argues, Woolf's statement that "in or about December 1910, human character changed," points to her acknowledgement that because of this exhibition and through Roger Fry's agency, primitive objects came to be regarded as high art in England (87).

having read Gibbon's History of the Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire. Hirst doubts whether Rachel even has any intellectual capability to understand the material; and unfortunately, Rachel listens to his words and doubts her own abilities. Both Hirst and Terence Hewet judge women by their white, male standards and adamantly conclude that they are "so stupid" (VO 107).

While Rachel has moments when she can see herself, a "vision of her own personality, of herself as a real everlasting thing, different from anything else, unmergeable, like the sea or the wind" (84), her image of an eternal, immutable self is threatened by the chorus of men's voices who discuss women and conclude that they are inept. Hirst, the caricature of the male intellectual, believes the problem with women is that one must find an "appropriate object" (108). Women are hens one must choose, an attitude that is not surprising from someone whose sister is described by Hewet as a woman who is left to feed the rabbits, a woman no one takes seriously.

One problem for Rachel is that she has no sense of an artistic past to draw upon, especially since she has received no formal education; as an artist, she has no real roots, and as a motherless daughter, she does not succeed in "thinking back through her mother" (A Room of One's Own 79), in order to establish a community of women that could nurture her growth. While according to Susan Stanford

Friedman, Rachel is like the common reader who "cannot negotiate in words the difficult border between established tradition and the tradition of the outsider" (119), she is also psychologically connected on a deep unconscious level to the privileges associated with her class. Alienated from the natives because of her class, and alienated from the wealthier people she does associate with, Rachel is truly alone.

And yet Rachel wants to be an artist, a musician who can descend into melodies that offer an escape from the harsh judgments of her family and other people around her. When Rachel meets her aunt and uncle, they see her only in terms of how she may differ from or resemble her dead mother. No one on the ship perceives that Rachel has a self-identity that is separate from being a naive young woman who will most certainly marry. Her father, in particular, views Rachel as a commodity that can help him in his business transactions. Without any community of support, Rachel's isolation seems unending and unendurable. She has no friend to speak with and no mother who can help her decipher the legacy of abuse that exists between them.

At the same time, Rachel's actions toward Mrs. Chailey are shameful. When the elderly maid complains that her allotted cabin is too near the boiler and that it will be bad for her heart, Rachel responds by angrily yelling "Lies! Lies! Lies!...What's the use of telling me lies" (29).

Although Rachel is used to being treated like a child by others, she in turn becomes angry "that a woman of fifty should behave like a child and come cringing to a girl because she wanted to sit where she had not leave to sit" (29). Despite her own experiences with abuse, in relation to her maid, Rachel ultimately identifies with the aims of the empire, and reinforces the class divisions between her and Mrs. Chailey. It is clear from the earlier manuscript that Woolf was consciously struggling with these issues, since in Melymbrosia, Rachel tells Mrs. Chailey: "But of course, if it's bad, you must change" (14). Rachel's dead mother then becomes the woman who would have indignantly refused Mrs. Chailey's request. I believe Woolf changes The Voyage Out manuscript in order to emphasize Rachel's insensitivity to class issues. Without even thinking, based on her class privilege, Rachel egregiously mistreats another woman who is certainly old enough to be her mother. In this way, Woolf shows the hierarchical social relations that cause Rachel to assert her own superiority over her maid in a novel in which she, herself, is portrayed as a victim of male aggression.

In fact, in this novel notions of male superiority go hand in hand with assertions that glorify Britain's imperialist empire. This is seen most clearly in the characters of Richard and Clarissa Dalloway, the upper-class couple who literally become the voice of the empire. Mrs.

Dalloway says: "Being on the ship seems to make it so much more vivid--what it means to be English. One thinks of all we've done, and our navies, and the people in India and Africa, and how we've gone on century after century, sending out boys from little country villages--and of men like you, Dick, and it makes one feel as if one couldn't bear not to be English" (VO 50). The Dalloways articulate the colonialist ideology that sees Britain as nobly saving and protecting the "backward" peoples of the world. Woolf describes Richard as sentimentously listening to his wife's words, overcome with the long expansionist vision of British history, its policy "that gradually enclosed, as though it were a lasso that opened and caught things, enormous chunks of the habitable globe." His own conservative aims as a politician are expressed when he proudly says: "It's taken a long time, but we've pretty nearly done it...it remains to consolidate" (51).

The arrival of this politician and his wife also causes Rachel to feel that somehow her face does not measure up to Britain's standard of female beauty. As Rachel glances in the mirror, she sees an expression of "tense melancholy, for she had come to the conclusion, since the arrival of the Dalloways that her face was not the face she wanted, and in all probability would never be" (41). Rachel is saddened when she sees her face because she has been raised to accept the gender roles that go along with being British and upper-

middle class, despite her assertion to Mrs. Dalloway that she doesn't intend to marry. When Rachel looks into the mirror, she feels her physical lack, and this further erodes her self-confidence.

Woolf's use of the mirror here is especially significant, because mirrors in her fiction often reveal the disquieting difference between the inner and outer realms of a character's being.<sup>12</sup> In addition to wishing her face was more acceptable, Rachel also senses that when people glance at her, they do not perceive her complex internal world, and it is this truth that Rachel comprehends when she stares in the mirror. One of Rachel's problems is that she lacks the necessary self-affirmation to assert a creative, artistic identity in a society where her inner life is invisible to those around her. Like Pecola Breedlove, she passively accepts the very values that will cause her to suffer all the more.

The relationship between a predatory masculine sexuality that is expressed in individual relationships among men and women and Britain's lucrative expansionist project to subjugate entire countries of people is best depicted in Richard Dalloway's interactions with Rachel. As the proud agent of the empire, Dalloway and his wife have been wandering around Europe looking at factories and

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<sup>12</sup>For a further discussion of mirrors and reflection in Woolf's fiction, see Hermione Lee, "A Burning Glass: Reflection in Virginia Woolf" (12-27).

studying the ways of the Spanish natives in order to ascertain if they are "ripe for a rebellion" (39). Richard Dalloway is identified with the very machines that pump out money for the wealthy factory owners, which in turn bring more wealth and development back to Britain. He is a man who "seemed to come from the humming oily center of the machine where the polished rods are sliding, and the pistons thumping; he grasped things so firmly but loosely" (47).

When Rachel first meets him, she is enchanted by his power, and is complimented and surprised that such an important man would want to talk with her. Having lived all her life in an upper-middle class sheltered garden, alone and indoors most of the time with her music, she has no sense of history or the world; and as a result, she naively admires him, especially his meticulous, clean appearance that is associated with an upper-class lifestyle. She mistakenly admires Richard's ideals of "unity of aim, of dominion, of progress. The dispersion of the best ideas over the greatest area" (64).

Dalloway's words echo the very racist ideology that was used to justify Britain's empire building, since by the early 1900's English people believed without questioning it that "Europeans were the top race" (Fryer 183). This attitude was the culmination of the work of nineteenth-century phrenologists and anthropologists who sought to prove to the British that it was inherently natural for them

to rule over races "which, unlike themselves lacked character or morals" (171). In fact, almost every nineteenth-century British intellectual and scientist believed that only white skinned people had the potential to think or govern (169). This ideology can be seen in Dalloway's statement that "the English seem, on the whole, whiter than most men, their records cleaner" (VO 64). He presents himself as one who helps those poor, backward, child-like natives.<sup>13</sup>

Since Rachel has barely even walked down a poor street without being escorted by her father, maid, or aunts, and has certainly never seen a factory, it is difficult for her to understand the political and social significance of his words. When Dalloway boasts that due to him, "thousands of girls in Lancashire--and many thousand to come after them--can spend an hour every day in the open air which their mothers had to spend over their looms," Rachel sees him "as a battered martyr," and not the arrogant, imperialist politician that he is.

In helping the Lancashire girls, Dalloway says he is "prouder of that, I own, than I should be of writing Keats and Shelley into the bargain" (65). Dalloway sees his role

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<sup>13</sup>Dalloway's words are reminiscent of Rudyard Kipling's call to "Take up the White Man's Burden-/ Send forth the best ye breed-/ Go, bind your sons to exile/ To serve your captives' needs;/ To wait in heavy harness,/On fluttered folk and wild-/ Your new-caught sullen peoples,/Half devil and half child" (Fryer 187).

as empire-builder as being infinitely superior to the role played by poets and artists. It is difficult for Rachel to hold on to her own belief that her art is important, overwhelmed as she is by him, since she concludes it must be painful indeed to "write Keats and Shelley into the bargain. She liked Richard Dalloway and warmed as he warmed. He seemed to mean what he said" (65). Rachel easily abandons her former belief that it is necessary for herself and other artists to live in a world of their own; she devalues the introspection and solitude that is needed for art, as she is led by Dalloway's language into a world that is, in reality, antithetical to her own. Since Rachel has no words to express her own subjective reality, it seems natural for her to admire Dalloway's reality that eloquently reaffirms itself in language.

Rachel does, however, make one attempt to verbalize an idea, to "expose her shivering private visions," that are in opposition to Dalloway's reality when she asks him to consider the poor widow shut up in her room: "In London you're spending your life, talking, writing things, getting bills through, missing what seems natural. The result of it all is that she goes to the cupboard and finds a little more tea, a few lumps of sugar, or a little less tea and newspaper. Widows all over the country I admit do this. Still, there's the mind of the widow--the affections; those you leave untouched. But you waste your own" (66).

Rachel's attempt to personalize the plight of the many widows in London is met with Dalloway's proclamation that there is no more exalted aim than to be a citizen of the empire, and "the state is a complicated machine; we citizens are part of that machine" (66). Dalloway sees himself as a powerful man at the helm of a vast machine, and he reminds Rachel that women have no political sense; they do best, when, like his wife, they busy themselves with domestic activities for the poor. In this way, he posits that women, like the natives of Britain's colonies, have no ability to govern or think critically.

At the same time, Clarissa Dalloway has much in common with the white southern wives of American slaveowners, who were confined to manage the home, and though dominated by their husbands, they in turn, maintained the hierarchical institution of slavery by their oppressive relations with the male and female slaves on the plantation. While Clarissa is subservient to her husband, she enjoys her status as a privileged white British woman who feels the government is doing right by helping and controlling the dark-skinned children of Britain's colonies.

Rachel responds to Dalloway's mechanized metaphor by concluding that their attempt at communication had failed. For a moment, she thinks of the nameless poor, the old, and realizes "it was impossible to combine the image of a lean black widow gazing out of her window, and longing for some

one to talk to, with the image of a vast machine, such as one sees at South Kensington, thumping, thumping, thumping" (66). Rachel, like the poor woman she thinks about, also longs for someone to talk to, and is, in effect, silenced by the loud thumping of the vast machine that cannot hear or even decipher the meaning beyond the words she chooses. Despite her attraction for Richard Dalloway, Rachel senses that she, like the widow dressed in black, will always be the perpetual outsider in the scheme of things. Her identification with the black widow is a moment of clarity that exists alongside other moments when she slips into her class prejudices and scorns not only Mrs. Chailey but Mr. Bax, the minister in South America, who asks the congregation to act respectfully towards the natives and realize that all people, despite their skin color, are essentially the same. It is Rachel's confusion about whom she should align herself with that ultimately mars her art and makes it difficult for her to succeed as a musician. She, like the black widow, fades into obscurity, silence, and ultimately death.

Rachel's first sexual contact with a man, the sudden kiss by Richard Dalloway after he lurches into her room to escape the storm out at sea, leaves her feeling as though her body has been invaded by a hostile, alien energy. In kissing Dalloway, Rachel becomes the colonized subject who will be discarded in favor of his prosperous, matronly wife.

In fact, Dalloway blames Rachel for the kiss by telling her that she tempted him. Her body is seen only in relation to men's desire; she becomes object or symbol, and this experience brings her deeper into terror and reactions so intense that it seems natural to conclude Rachel must have been abused at an earlier time.

She dreamt that she was walking down a long tunnel, which grew so narrow by degrees that she could touch the damp bricks on either side. At length the tunnel opened and became a vault; she found herself trapped in it, bricks meeting her wherever she turned, alone with a little deformed man who squatted on the floor gibbering, with long nails. His face was pitted like the face of an animal. The wall behind him oozed with damp, which collected into drops and slid down. Still and cold as death she lay, not daring to move, until she broke the agony by tossing herself across the bed, and woke crying "Oh!" (77)

Sexually predatory men like Richard Dalloway are compared to gibbering animals who trap Rachel inside tunneled vaults that ooze with a pus-like, destructive substance; in her dreams, sexual contact with men is equated with a still, cold death. All night long, strange men invade Rachel's sleep, wanting to possess her body, and even in the morning the horror of her vision does not go away.

She felt herself pursued, so that she got up and actually locked her door. A voice moaned for her; eyes desired her. All night long barbarian men harassed the ship; they came scuffling down the passages, and stopped to shuffle at her door. (76)

In Rachel's dreams, she clings to the safety of British civilization as opposed to the barbarism of unknown natives, even when the nightmare is in reaction to the transgression

of a British politician. Rachel's dreams arise from the symbols of the culture she knows well, even if she is at the same time responding to the violence British culture has produced. She tells Helen that she hates men, that they are brutes and finally understands why she has been forbidden to walk alone all these years, forced to live under the sheltered protection of her aunts.

By this new light she saw her life for the first time a creeping hedged-in thing driven cautiously between high walls, here turned aside, there plunged in darkness, made full and crippled forever--her life that was the only chance she had--the short season between two silences. (82)

Rachel's epiphanic realization marks the beginning of her developing consciousness. She begins to see that to be a young British woman is to be sheltered and "crippled" by threats of male aggression; having lived her life for so long as a "hedged-in thing" plunged in darkness, it is difficult for Rachel to find words to shatter the silence surrounding her experiences.

#### **Art and Marriage**

In the Ambrose's villa in South America, Rachel is given over to Helen's care, so she can be initiated into the ways of young womanhood. Instead of remaining with her father on the Euphrosyne as he travels down the Amazon selling his goods, Willoughby gives Rachel permission to stay with her aunt, because he wants Helen to make a woman out of Rachel, "the kind of woman her mother would have liked her to be" (86). Willoughby would like Rachel to

become a Tory hostess, someone who can help him in his business, and he assumes his daughter, like her mother, will passively accept a man's dominion over her.

The masculine, imperial world of Willoughby, Dalloway, Hirst and Hewet is always in sharp contrast to the protective solitude Rachel seeks as a female artist. In South America, Helen provides Rachel with a sanctuary to expand her artistry. Shut off in a room of her own, Rachel can wander freely inside her own mind:

Among the promises which Mrs. Ambrose had made her niece should she stay was a room cut off from the rest of the house, large, private--a room in which she could play, read, think, defy the world, a fortress as well as a sanctuary. Rooms she knew, became more like worlds than rooms at the age of twenty-four. Her judgement was correct, and when she shut the door Rachel entered an enchanted place, where the poets sang and things fell into their right proportions. (123)

While Helen's room gives Rachel a sanctuary away from male aggression, Rachel seeks a creative solitude that specifically distances herself from the natives on the street. Rachel exists, as Andrea Lewis argues, "in the domestic spaces of the hotel and villa only" ("Visual Politics" 113), in spaces that "are enclaves of Englishness." Even though Helen wants Rachel to make up for the time lost to those "interminable walks round sheltered gardens, and the household gossip of aunts" (VO 124), she, too, sees the natives as "other," as people to gaze upon from a protected English villa. Helen wants to expel Rachel from her sheltered garden in order for Rachel

to learn more about the world, and men, in particular.

On the one hand, Woolf sets up a duality between Rachel's introspective female world and the masculine one that surrounds and threatens her; on the other hand, there is another duality between Rachel's dreamy imagination that flourishes in beautiful rooms and the poverty and invisibility of the natives. At the same time, while Rachel lives in a clean, "ivory tower" world of music and melody, she still nonetheless remains isolated and alienated from the people of her same class, because they only see her as a vague symbol of femaleness.

Still Rachel craves the solitude that will enable her to discover the melodies beneath sound waiting to form larger musical patterns. In a journal entry written when Virginia Woolf was just twenty-two, she writes about sound and language in a way that sheds light on the future character she creates in Rachel Vinrace. She describes how "a river in summer is as though made of plates of translucent glass, the top one of which slides. Mystery of sound reaching one through the trees; the distant music of hounds running. The note of the huntsman horn, & far away voices of men shouting, all sound as in some distant romantic dream; as though falling through an ocean of waters". (Passionate Apprentice 215). In this passage, Woolf identifies how language is to be found in oceans of water that echo sound from some faraway dream. It is no accident,

then, that Rachel journeys over water, voyaging through dream and memory as an artist; and yet her journey into young womanhood is a harsh initiation into dark tunnels where dwarf-like men with slimy skin dwell. It is a journey that ultimately cuts short any artistic goals she may have cherished.

In addition, the many years Rachel has spent with her provincial aunts, those women "who tidy their drawers a great deal" (142), has severely limited the scope of her vision and the range and depths out of which she can create. Through the character of Rachel, Woolf is emphasizing that the female artist needs not only protection from male aggression in order to create, but she also requires experience. While shelter is important, if she is confined solely to a domestic sphere that shuts the larger world out, her vision and consequently her work will suffer. I believe Woolf is saying that the female artist, like the many famous male artists, must venture out into the world, and yet she is aware how dangerous such a journey will be.<sup>14</sup>

Although Rachel wants to stay in her sheltered garden, she is forced out of it, as she begins to fall in love with Terence Hewet. In their dialogues about marriage, about men

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<sup>14</sup>In order to express this, Woolf subverts the traditional quest novel, and writes, according to DeSalvo, a "female version of the Odysseus" in order to suggest "that Rachel Vinrace would not come home alive to England because the negative attitudes towards women that prevailed there were so malevolent and so deeply ingrained that they now had the status and sanction of myth" (Melymbrosia xxxix).

and women, Rachel expresses the terror that heterosexuality represents for her. In Melymbrosia she tells Terence: "What's the use of men talking to women? We're so different. We hate and fear each other. If you could strip off my skin now you would see all my nerves gone white with fear of you" (50). While in The Voyage Out, Rachel does not speak so directly about her fears, she still tells Terence that men and women should "live separate; we cannot understand each other; we only bring out what's worst" (VO 156).

Rachel's comments to Terence that men and women should live separately are especially significant, since Woolf edited out of The Voyage Out any homoeroticism between Helen and Rachel that appeared in the earlier manuscript. Critics such as DeSalvo and Susan Stanford Friedman have noted how Rachel Vinrace is decidedly more passive and less vocal about her terror of men in The Voyage Out than in Melymbrosia.<sup>15</sup> What strikes me, however, is that in Melymbrosia the pain of Rachel's voyage into heterosexuality is also characterized by the loss of female bonding, which is expressed primarily in the relationship between Rachel and her aunt, as well as in the continual yearning to reconnect with her dead mother. Rachel's death at the end

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<sup>15</sup>See Louise DeSalvo, Virginia Woolf's First Voyage, and Susan Stanford Friedman, "Virginia Woolf's Pedagogical Scenes of Reading: The Voyage Out, The Common Reader, and her "Common Readers" (101-126).

of this early novel seems to be part of her unwillingness to move from a more female centered world to one of marriage, even if it is to an almost "maternal" male.

In The Voyage Out, Rachel is more solitary; there is no eroticized female bonding. Instead, Woolf draws attention to the emotional brutality that will accompany her traditional marriage to Terence. When Rachel expresses her hesitation to attend an engagement party that has been planned for them, Terence flies into a rage:

'Fiddlesticks, Rachel.' Terence replies. 'Who wants to look at you? You're consumed with vanity! You're a monster of conceit! Surely, Helen you ought to have taught her by this time that she's a person of no conceivable importance whatsoever--not beautiful or well dressed, or conspicuous for elegance or intellect or deportment. A more ordinary sight than you are,' he concluded, 'except for the tear across your face has never been seen.' (308)

While this passage does not exist in Melymbrosia, the intense bonding between Helen and Rachel does. Rachel tells Helen, "'Every day I love you better...It is wonderful that you should now be living. It is not because of anything you do,' she continued. 'It may be at breakfast, or merely when we're in the room together; suddenly it comes over me: this is happiness'" (Melymbrosia 192). The strongest expression of eroticism between Helen and Rachel occurs after Rachel is engaged to Terence:

Without thinking of her forty years, Helen cried "Spring on! I'm after you"! Whereupon Rachel took longer leaps and at last ran. Helen pursued her. She plucked tufts of feathery blades and cast them at her. They outdistanced the others. Suddenly

Rachel stopped and opened her arms so that Helen rushed into them and tumbled her over onto the ground. (209)

Once Helen has overcome Rachel, she says to her: "'I've never told you, but you know I love you my darling,' ...'Sometimes.' the words were spoken with Rachel pressed to her--you're so like Theresa, and I loved her" (209). Helen's love for Rachel is reciprocated, for Rachel tells Terence after they are engaged that Helen is "the oddest woman in the world...She fills me with pleasure!" In another passage, Rachel tells Terence, "My mother was the person I cared for..and now Helen. When she speaks it's like the beginning of a song" (197). Woolf has Theresa become the pivotal person linking Helen and Rachel together, and suggests, that female bonding, despite Helen's overwhelming need for Rachel, is an alternative to the domination of heterosexual relations.

It is, however, important to address Why Woolf took these passages out of The Voyage Out. In addition, we ask, what is Woolf trying to say about the sexual initiation of a young British woman by having her journey to a darker continent and die there? Sander L. Gilman's essay, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature" has helped me begin to unravel and interpret Woolf's complex and racialized plot. It also sheds light on the cultural context out of which Woolf was writing.

In this essay, Gilman demonstrates how by the eighteenth century, the sexuality of both black men and women was associated with deviance. In European art, the presence of a black figure was often used to sexualize the environment created in the painting. We can see this expressed in such nineteenth-century art as Manet's "Olympia" and Franz von Bayros, "The Servant," where a black figure is often paired with a white woman who is foregrounded in the painting, thus suggesting that the overt sexuality of the black child or servant "indicates the covert sexuality of the white woman" (231). In addition, in order to justify their claims of the innate moral purity and overall superiority of the white race, European intellectuals created racist myths about the black woman, in particular, that associated her "concupiscence" with the sexuality of the lesbian (237) and the prostitute (240).

In The Voyage Out, the drama of Rachel's initiation into young womanhood and the actual proposal and marriage engagement take place as she and the other British tourists journey up the river to the native Spanish village. Mrs. Flushing, the organizer of the expedition says she wants to buy cheap trinkets. In Melymbrosia, she also indicates that she wants to see the native women in their camps (167). The very structure of this novel sets up a plot that would allow Rachel to experience covertly her sexuality by falling in love and getting engaged to Terence as she is surrounded by

the more overt sexuality of the natives; Woolf, however, manages to subvert this by having Rachel look at the women and realize the unhappiness that awaits her in marriage.

At the same time, Rachel's apparent sexual coldness in relation to Terence and her own declaration that men and women should live separately, along with the homoerotic passages of the earlier manuscript, imply that Woolf is encoding into the text the suggestion that a lesbian sexuality may be a more appropriate choice for a female artist, since it will give her the nurturing, maternal protection she needs in order to create. Creativity for Woolf, is, as Jane Marcus argues, "a catacomb in which to cloister the imagination, a snowfield on an inaccessible glacier. If this cloister is to remain unsullied, 'maternal protection' is necessary from male aggression, male sexuality" (Centennial Essays 42).

Just as Gilman says that the "concupiscence" of the black woman is linked to lesbian sexuality, and that "the perception of the prostitute in the late nineteenth century thus merged with the perception of the black" (248), Rachel also identifies with the degradation of prostitutes after she experiences her nightmarish reaction to Dalloway's kiss (Tyler 29). She swings back and forth from the privilege of her race and class to an identification with the 'other' because of the abuse she suffers due to her gender. Although Rachel has kept herself separate from the native

women, confined as she has been to the hotel and villa, she is still in their environment, and the trip up the river brings her closer to them than ever before. Just as the women in Manet's "Olympia" and Franz von Bayros's, "The Servant," covertly experience their sexuality against the background of their darker servants and children, Rachel's erotic play with Helen takes place amidst the background of the native village. The presence of the darker women allows the British women to express their erotic feelings for one another and to venture safely into what might be considered a dangerous realm. What I am suggesting is that by racializing her plot, Woolf felt more freedom to write about these complex issues of female sexuality and creativity, even if she ultimately self-censored herself by editing out all homoerotic references. In addition, Woolf creates moments in the text, although short-lived, in which Rachel's sexuality also becomes linked to the sexuality of the lesbian and the prostitute. What does remain, however, in the final text is a scathing attack on the British imperial mentality.<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, Woolf objectifies and exoticizes the South Americans when she describes the English tourists in

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<sup>16</sup>As Louise DeSalvo observes: "If Rachel has, in fact, caught her mysterious illness upstream...her death is directly traceable to the mercantile machinations of the Flushings, which echo those of Willoughby Vinrace...Rachel's death underscores the cost in lives of running the Empire; one young woman's life is sacrificed for the imperialistic aims of her elders" (Melymbrosia xxxix).

the native village as "tight-coated soldiers among these soft instinctive people" (VO 285). While the native women stare at the English, they, are, at the same time, "far beyond the plunge of speech" (285), occupying a space beyond language.<sup>17</sup> In these passages, whiteness is associated with dominion and a barren emptiness, while the dark natives are gentle and intuitive. Their fertile creativity is distinguished by their singing in voices "that settled upon the same low and melancholy note" (VO 285). In fact, the British see the natives as occupying a space that would allow them to get closer to their own primitive, instinctive emotions. While Hirst becomes even more self-absorbed and bitter, realizing his solitude in the midst of his own sterile, British environment, Helen gazes at the village women and is overwhelmed by a knowledge that the engagement between Rachel and Terence will only bring disaster.

Moreover, in Melymbrosia, when Rachel observes the native women, she sees them as an undefined, yet interesting 'other.' They become the empty object that enables her to see the reality of her own impending marriage:

Rachel tried to understand their faces, for she had thought that her own happiness would have made it easy for her. From one to the other she looked, as they plaited the straw or shouted at the girls who were going in and out of the huts. Their faces were an oil brown, and this perhaps

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<sup>17</sup>Drawing upon Edward Said's analysis, Patrick Brantlinger points out that "in imperialist discourse the voices of the dominated are represented almost entirely by their silence, their absence" (186).

explained why they did not look like faces; They seemed neither old nor young, neither clever malicious women, or sweet sympathetic women; they seemed more like fruit hung up high in their own forest trees. She owned that she knew nothing about them. (211-12)

Rachel observes these women through the lens of her upper-class British culture. Their dark "oil brown" faces do not look like faces to her. Instead, she perceives the women as merely pieces of fruit hanging on trees. However, once Rachel realizes that "she knew nothing about them" she feels that "her happiness was dashed, as if it were a pool and a great stone had fallen which the waters could not embrace" (212). She watches Mr. Flushing bargain with the natives in the hope of increasing his profits and moans to Terence, "Loving you is like having iron thrust through one" (212). Seeing the native women and then witnessing the Flushing's mercantile transactions gives her a sense that marriage will have its own rules of domination and profit. The pool in which her happiness is dashed becomes the same sticky pool Rachel falls into as she lies dying in delirium and fever.

Once the British return to their English enclaves of hotel and villa, Terence, does, in fact, seem different. The same man who has sympathetically acknowledged that marriage on the whole seems worse for women than men (VO 241), arrogantly tells Rachel she is essentially feminine because she has no respect for facts (291). After they are engaged, Terence thoughtlessly interrupts her enthusiastic piano playing by reading some notes he has made on the

definition of women: "Not really vainer than men. Lack of self-confidence at the base of most serious faults. Dislike of own sex traditional or founded on fact? Every woman not so much a rake at heart, as an optimist because they don't think" (291).

When Terence asks for her opinion, she responds by silently ascending the staircase of Beethoven's sonata, in an effort to escape his words, despite the fact that this was not possible, since once she reached the top of her imaginary staircase, she could only return "with a run to begin at the very bottom again" (291). Rachel uncharacteristically defines herself as the best musician in South America, and perhaps even in Europe and Asia, and complains that she cannot concentrate with his interruptions. Terence, in turn, tells her that it has been his intention to interrupt her. He cannot conceive of a woman as an intellectual or creative equal who has the right to work apart from him.<sup>18</sup> Although he hasn't written much, Terence defines himself as a writer and expects that Rachel will always put his work before her own.

Rachel reacts to Terence's words by admitting that she has never fallen in love with him: "I never fell in love if

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<sup>18</sup>In The Bonds of Love, Jessica Benjamin argues that "domination and submission result from a breakdown of the necessary tension between self-assertion and mutual recognition that allows self and others to meet as sovereign equals" (12). If Terence cannot see Rachel as a separate person with her own distinct needs, then he must dominate her.

falling in love is what people say it is, and it's the world that tells the lies and I tell the truth. Oh, what lies-- what lies" (293)! This passage echoes the very same words Rachel used when she angrily accused Mrs. Chailey of telling her "lies, lies, lies," in order to get her cabin changed. But this time, Rachel realizes that the lie belongs not to the maid, but the myth of romantic love that has led her to an impending marriage that promises to destroy her ability to create as an artist. She also sees that a marriage to Terence will offer her neither happiness nor protection from male aggression.

Rather than live in a conventional marriage with Terence, Rachel gets feverishly ill and dies. Her illness, like her ascent up the staircase of Beethoven's sonata, is a self-protective action that allows her to finally escape from a social order characterized by oppressive relationships:

There was the morning to get through and then all the afternoon, and at intervals she made an effort to cross over into the ordinary world, but she found that her heat and discomfort had put a gulf between her world and the ordinary world which she could not bridge. At one point the door opened, and Helen came in with a little dark man who had-- it was the chief thing she noticed about him--very hairy hands. (329)

In illness, Rachel, like the native women she has observed, finally occupies a place "beyond the plunge of speech." She voyages into the subterranean, murky depths

beyond sound and meaning, the place where words originate.<sup>19</sup> For it is in the ordinary world that the doctor, a dark man with hairy hands enters, an image that is similar to the horrifying man with long nails who invades Rachel's dreams after Dalloway's intrusive kiss. The dark man, like the barbarian men in her nightmare, become images of male brutality that will disrupt her civilized order. Woolf also uses the racist construct that equates blackness with a deviant brutal sexuality as she represents the violation inherent in Rachel's initiation into female sexuality. She does this even as she has just established parallels that link Rachel's oppression in marriage to the subjugation of the natives under British colonialism. These contradictions inherent in the text reflect the cultural biases that Woolf, as a citizen of England living at an historical time of colonialism, had internalized. At the same time, this novel expresses outrage against Empire-building, and especially through its caricature of Richard Dalloway, derides the racist ideology that has led to British expansionism.

In addition, images of being trapped in dark tunnels with oozing walls are present in the Dalloway section as well as the end of the novel, and serve to underscore that

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<sup>19</sup>Patricia Laurence notes that "illness brings the solitude, the gulf between the outer and inner worlds that is the prerequisite for creativity. Rachel's outward, spatial voyages are metaphors for her psychic voyaging in dreams and delirium" (148).

as she lies dying, Rachel is able to confront her rage at being abused and her disappointment in romantic love.<sup>20</sup>

When Terence kisses her, Rachel hallucinates an old woman "slicing a man's head off with a knife" (339), and then playfully exclaims, as though she has gone mad, "There it goes."

While her illness may allow Rachel to descend into an almost mystic, creative consciousness, a state in which, as, Woolf describes in her essay, "On Being Ill," "the body smashes itself to smithereens and the soul (it is said) escapes" (The Moment and Other Essays 10), her death ultimately represents Rachel's failure to establish an artistic self-identity.<sup>21</sup> Because Rachel cannot find words, she lives in the silence of her own abused psyche. Woolf emphasizes that unless the female artist can create an alternative to the hierarchical social relations that surround her, she will have no choice but to suffer a muted creativity and die in obscurity, trapped ultimately by her silence.

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<sup>20</sup>Louise DeSalvo points out that "in the delirium preceding her death, images refer overtly to her dream and phantasy after Dalloway's kiss." Based on these repeating images, DeSalvo argues that "Rachel's death is the logical extension of her response to Richard Dalloway's kiss" (Virginia Woolf's First Voyage 102).

<sup>21</sup>Christine Froula observes that "in these scenes, Woolf advances the plot of the female artist-novel, representing not the death of the body but the symbolic death that her heroine undergoes when she finds no language in which to live" ("Out of the Chrysalis" 85).

### The Bluest Eye

In Morrison's first novel, she constructs a duality that exists between Claudia MacTeer, the narrator who defies the hierarchy of domination and submission by nurturing her own life and finding words for grief, and Pecola Breedlove, another little girl who is raped and then silenced by her own internalized self-hatred. As the artist figure in the novel, Claudia affirms that there are melodies in grief and to write and speak of those experiences that have remained unrecorded is to begin to heal the invisible wounds created by silence. Claudia is connected to the oral tradition of her ancestors, which is communicated to her through her mother's songs.<sup>1</sup> Pecola, on the other hand, is the stranger in the wasteland of the North, isolated from both the black and white communities. As a result, Pecola longs for the bluest eyes, believing these white features will help her gain entry to all that has excluded her; and yet ultimately her madness becomes her way of self-protectively imagining an interior world that is immune from both the internal and external manifestations of racism.

Both Pecola Breedlove and Rachel Vinrace are invisible to those around them, and as a result, live outside of

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<sup>1</sup>Gay Wilentz aptly notes, "For African and African-American women writers, generational and cultural continuity--"to look back through our mothers" is seen as a woman's domain. Orature and, consequently, literature are part of many women's daily struggle to communicate, converse, and pass on values to their own and other children, and one another" (Binding Cultures: Black Women Writers in Africa and the Diaspora xiv).

language. Pecola's madness and Rachel's delirious, feverish illness, that allows her to imagine slicing a man's head off with a knife, become powerful metaphors for the destructive nature of silence.<sup>2</sup> These characters can only retreat into a world of their own creation where they can find form for their muted anger.<sup>3</sup> Morrison does, however, have Claudia find the words for Pecola's pain. By doubling the mad and self-hating little girl who has been silenced by sexual abuse and internalized racism with the resistant artist storyteller, Morrison examines the very conditions that are necessary for the creation of art.

#### One Writer's Beginnings

Critics such as Michael Awkward and Trudier Harris have commented that Morrison's themes of racialized invisibility and incestuous rape place her novel in direct dialogue with Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man. According to Harris, the reverberating question of Invisible Man, "What Did I Do to Be so Black and Blue?" must be continuously present in Pecola's mind as well, since she is continually "confronted with people who emphasize to her that she must "stay back" because of her blackness" (26). Awkward, who deals directly

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<sup>2</sup>Belenky et al. maintain that silent women "believe that the source of self-knowledge is lodged in others--not in the self" (31). See also, Robin Lakoff, "Language and Woman's Place" (280-91). Lakoff argues that the very language a woman is brought up to use acts to submerge her personal identity (283).

<sup>3</sup>bell hooks notes: "Madness, not just physical abuse, was the punishment for too much talk if you were female" (Talking Back 7).

with the incest issue, argues that Morrison is criticizing Ellison for marginalizing the rape of the black female victim. At the same time, according to Awkward, "Morrison writes her way into the African-American literary tradition by bringing to the foreground the effects of incest for female victims in direct response to Ellison's refusal to consider them seriously. So while the victims of incest in both novels ultimately occupy similar asocial, silent positions in their respective communities, Morrison explicitly details Pecola's tragic and painful journey, while Ellison, in confining Matty Lou to the periphery, suggests that her perspective contains for him 'no compelling interest'" (Critical Essays 66). The important point here is that Morrison establishes her own identity as a writer by giving words to the erased presence of a poor black girl, who is the ultimate "other," the most "outsider" member of the world Morrison represents. I believe, that she does, in fact, write against Ellison's silenced incest victim. In a New York Times interview Morrison explains that she chooses to often write about sexual violation in her novels, "because when I began to write, it was an unmentionable. It is so dangerous, it is so awful, so wicked, that I think in connection with vulnerable black women it was never talked about" ("Chloe Wofford" 75). In her first novel, Morrison takes on the theme of black women's vulnerability to sexual violence.

The narrative structure of The Bluest Eye creates an aesthetic that specifically analyzes how both racism and sexism lead to Pecola's destruction. In fact, in her afterward to The Bluest Eye, Toni Morrison writes that "the novel tried to hit the raw nerve of racial self-contempt, expose it, then soothe it not with narcotics but with language that replicated the agency I discovered in my first experience of beauty. Because that moment was so racially infused (my revulsion at what my school friend wanted: very blue eyes in a very black skin; the harm she was doing to my concept of the beautiful), the struggle was for writing that was indisputably black. I don't yet know quite what this is, but neither that nor the attempts to disqualify an effort to find out keeps me from trying to pursue it" (211). Through the character of Claudia, Morrison emphasizes that the black female artist will transcend the silencing effects of racialized self-hatred by speaking and writing of it. Morrison explains:

...the assertion of racial beauty was not a reaction to the self-mocking humorous critique of cultural/racial foibles common in all groups, but against the damaging internalization of immutable inferiority originating in an outside gaze. I focused, therefore, on how something as grotesque as the demonization of an entire race could take root inside the most delicate member of society: a child, the most vulnerable member: a female. In trying to dramatize the devastation that even casual racial contempt can cause, I chose a unique situation, not a representative one. The extremity of Pecola's case stemmed largely from a crippled and crippling family--unlike the average black family and unlike the narrator's. But singular as Pecola's life was, I believed some

aspects of her woundability were lodged in all young girls. (210)

By singling out a poor black girl, Morrison specifically indicts a society in which race, class, and gender prejudices destroy its most vulnerable members. But since Morrison believes this woundability is present in all girls to some extent, she creates a narrative structure that forces the reader to examine what part she plays in upholding the devastating effects of racism and Western notions of beauty. In this way, Morrison's aesthetic takes on a distinctly choral nature in which the reader is forced to participate in the story.

Like Woolf's words, Morrison's lyrical language becomes its own antidote to loss. She explains that "the weight of the novel's inquiry on so delicate and vulnerable a character could smash her and lead readers into the comfort of pitying her rather than into an interrogation of themselves for the smashing. My solution--break the narrative into parts that had to be reassembled by the reader--... (211).<sup>4</sup> The seasons quietly and imperceptibly changing, the stirring of fall merging into winter, into spring, that border the chapters of this novel create many silences the reader must fill in through the painful process of self-examination. As the creator of this text,

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<sup>4</sup>Shelley Wong sees that Morrison's narrative practice involves a two-fold process, "the practice of taking apart and then pouring back together to form the ground of a new order of signification" ("Transgression as Poesis in The Bluest Eye" 472).

Morrison's attempts "to shape a silence while breaking it are attempts to transfigure the complexity and wealth of Black-American culture into a language worthy of the culture" (216). By giving form to silence, by voicing what has remained mute and invisible in the lives of black women, Morrison transcends silence through language, and in the process transforms the novel as she reinforces her own identity as a writer who uses words to shatter silence.<sup>5</sup>

In a similar way, through the cautionary tale of Rachel Vinrace, Woolf links language to the construction of a self-identity that will support the creation of art. Both Morrison and Woolf are concerned in their first novels with what happens when the effects of domination are internalized. How can their characters speak if there is no one present to listen to them? Carol Gilligan points out that loss of voice is symptomatic of an absence of a relationship with the external environment, since speaking is dependent on listening and being heard ("Remembering Iphigenia" 15). Rachel and Pecola retreat into illness and madness because there is a split between their inner reality and the external world around them that renders them invisible. In the chasm between inner and outer worlds,

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<sup>5</sup>See Audre Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," for an eloquent discussion of the relationship between healing, writing, and breaking silence (Sister Outsider 40-44).

language gets lost and buried.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, Claudia, as the storyteller, has the close bonds of her family, as well as a connection to the land itself, to help sustain her voice.<sup>7</sup> In The Bluest Eye, Morrison structures her novel so that the adult Claudia, who looks back on the events of her childhood, tells the story of Pecola's destruction. In the telling, Claudia as narrator, becomes the voice of the artist who uses language to analyze the effects of internalized racism and affirm her own resistance to self-hatred and white Western notions of beauty.

While The Bluest Eye centers on the rape of a young black girl by her father, the novel is layered with the many hierarchical layers of domination and submission, and greater and smaller rapes that occur throughout its pages. Pecola's rape and the complete annihilation of her person has a long history that dates back to slavery. As bell hooks writes: "The significance of the rape of enslaved black women was not simply that it 'deliberately crushed' their

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<sup>6</sup>Daniel N. Stern maintains "that the very process of learning to speak is recast in terms of forming shared experiences, of re-establishing the 'personal order,' of creating a new type of 'being-with' between adult and child" (205). Both Rachel and Pecola suffer from the absence of close familial bonds.

<sup>7</sup>Barbara Christian aptly notes, "Mrs. MacTeer and her circle of friends maintain their strong woman ties as well as an equally strong sense of family. As they absorb the different cycle of seasons that they now experience, they begin to see the town as their town. As a result, one of their daughters, Claudia, is able to tell us the story of Pecola Breedlove's tragedy and is able to wrest understanding rather than waste out of this new land" (Black Feminist Criticism 49).

sexual integrity for economic ends but that it led to a devaluation of black womanhood that permeated the psyches of all Americans and shaped the social status of all black women once slavery ended" (Ain't I A Woman 52).

It is precisely this social structure, as it is internalized in the lives of the black community, that Morrison dismantles and exposes through the critical voice of Claudia and an impersonal narrator who appears throughout the novel. Morrison starts off her own writing career by analyzing in her first novel how the construction of white womanhood serves to affect negatively such female characters as Pecola and her mother, Pauline, who consider themselves ugly when compared to white Western standards of femininity. Ann Scott describes the white woman in The Southern Lady, From Pedestal to Politics, as a submissive wife who wanted to please her husband and manage his household:

Physically weak, and 'formed for the less laborious occupations,' she depended upon male protection. To secure this protection she was endowed with the capacity to 'create a magic spell' over any man in her vicinity. She was timid and modest, beautiful and graceful,' the most fascinating being in creation... the delight of every circle she moves in....It was her nature to be self-denying, and she was given to suffering in silence, a characteristic made to endear her to men" (Qtd. in Ain't I A Woman 47).

This cult of white womanhood permeating the nineteenth century further devalued black women since the social and economic reality of slavery made it almost impossible to live up to these so-called feminine virtues. Black women

worked alongside the men in the fields, even though they aspired to such qualities associated with white womanhood as "modesty, sexual purity, innocence and a submissive manner" (48-9). In addition, they were systematically raped by white slaveowners.

In order for the delicate white lady to exist, it was necessary to create another figure, the mammy figure. Barbara Christian describes her as a "tougher, less sensitive" black woman who would care for the children of her mistress as well as her own (Black Women Novelists 8). In The Bluest Eye, Morrison recreates this figure in the character of Pauline Breedlove, who neglects her own children, as she cares for the little girl of a white woman. Moreover, it is in the construction of white womanhood that Pecola's desire to have blue eyes is born, since both she and her mother long for a white middle class conception of beauty and grace that has been communicated to them through the portrayal of white women in the movies.<sup>8</sup>

While Rachel Vinrace is obviously British and not American, a comparison of The Bluest Eye and The Voyage Out sheds light on how Virginia Woolf constructs the white woman. Like the Southern lady Ann Scott describes, Rachel Vinrace is a middle class white woman who has been raised to

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<sup>8</sup>For an in-depth study of the relations between black and white southern women, see Elizabeth Fox Genovese, Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South. Genovese shows how white ladies "reinforced slaveholding ideology even as they reformulated it in feminine guise" (45).

find a man to protect her. Even the fact that she gets sick in the tropics of South America suggests her frailty and physical weakness. I believe, however, that through the character of Rachel Vinrace, Woolf is writing against the Victorian ideal of womanhood. By killing Rachel off, Woolf is, in effect, killing off the selfless angel in the house, a concept of Victorian womanhood that she goes on to define in her essay, "Professions for Women."<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, in The Bluest Eye, Morrison is emphasizing that when black women accept white middle class values of womanhood and strive to become like the image of the Southern white lady, the inevitable result will be destruction and silence. In contrast, Morrison posits the healing language of the African-American oral tradition and has Claudia translate Pecola's muted tale into story and narrative.

#### **The Artist as Storyteller and Survivor**

The language of The Bluest Eye takes on the up and down cadenced rhythms of mourning in the same way that the seasons bordering each chapter heading move from autumn through winter and back out into summer, as if to document the spiritual dying and subsequent effort to heal that has taken place over the course of these pages. Claudia's childlike voice is interspersed with the knowing adult voice who can look back on the events of her life and begin to

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<sup>9</sup>Barbara Christian aptly notes that while Virginia Woolf had to "kill the angel in the house," Morrison had to "kill the mammy in the Big House" ("Layered Rhythms" 487).

interpret them. Remembering back to all that led up to Pecola's rape, Claudia reflects on the seeds she and her sister planted in the earth in their attempt to keep alive Pecola's baby that was conceived from Cholly's rape: "For years I thought my sister was right; it was my fault. I had planted them too far down in the earth. It never occurred to either of us that the earth itself might have been unyielding." Claudia takes the moment of rape as the starting point and then moves backward with the tale so she can uncover the roots of the earth's unyielding barrenness.

The earth of Ohio after Pecola's rape echoes the fallow earth that remains after Persephone's rape and abduction in the underworld, a metaphor which both generalizes Pecola's experience and then proceeds to make it specific to the ways race, class, and gender oppression define this particular rape. In fact, Morrison says it is her intention to have the novel "open with its close; a speculation on the disruption of nature' as being a social disruption with tragic individual consequences... (TBE 214).

In The Voyage Out, Woolf rewrites the Demeter and Persephone myth in order to express the emotional violence associated with female sexual initiation. Like Pecola, Rachel has no mother who can shield her from male aggression. Rachel's death can be seen as her attempt to journey to the underworld in order to find her lost mother. Instead of being raped and abducted in the underworld, as

Persephone was, Rachel experiences an emotional violation on earth and then returns to the underworld in order to seek the protection of her mother.

In The Bluest Eye, just as nature is disrupted by abuse, Morrison frames the novel with words from the classic Dick and Jane reader that represent mother as very nice and father as big and strong. She then subverts the influence of this white Western text by using the printed page to run all the letters together in such a way that the reader feels its message spiraling frantically forward toward a destructive conclusion. The mother, father, Dick, and Jane living happily in the pretty green and white house have assigned the role of silenced other to Pauline, Cholly, Pecola, and Samuel who live outside in no house or stay in a ramshackle storefront home. Morrison takes this famous schoolbook primer and exposes the real lives of those who live beyond the false pages of this text. In this way, Morrison shows how the language of this classic reader is used to promote a reality that has nothing to do with the actual lives of her characters.

Moreover, from the very first pages of the novel, Claudia announces that the theme of sexuality as the place where hatred and rage are enacted between oppressor and oppressed will be central to the story. With the beginning sentence, "nuns go by as quiet as lust, and drunken men and sober eyes sing in the lobby of the Greek hotel," Claudia

speaks of a sexuality that is perverse in its quiet deceptiveness that all is not what it seems. She then proceeds to describe the immigrant girl and their hatred for her that is also infused with the suggestion of sexuality.

Rosemary Villanucci, our next-door friend who lives above her father's cafe, sits in a 1939 Buick eating bread and butter. She rolls down the window to tell my sister Frieda and me that we can't come in. We stare at her, wanting her bread, but more than that wanting to poke the arrogance out of her eyes and smash the pride of ownership that curls her chewing mouth. When she comes out of the car we will beat her up, make red marks on her white skin, and she will cry and ask us do we want her to pull her pants down. We will say no. We don't know what we should feel or do if she does, but whenever she asks us, we know she is offering us something precious and that our own pride must be asserted by refusing to accept. (9)

The class differences between Rosemary Villanucci, and Frieda, and Claudia become apparent with the bread and butter she eats while they are hungry, and the 1939 Buick she sits in. Their rage at her is not internalized but is aggressively acted out, and Rosemary's reaction to their anger is to offer to pull her pants down. She seems to react intuitively to their beating by feeling she should further sexualize it. The red marks on Rosemary's skin, her tears, and then her question imply that Rosemary has learned somewhere else that physical violence and sexuality go together. These lines are ambiguous enough to make the reader wonder if Rosemary, herself, has ever been sexually abused. Despite the race and class differences between them, as a little girl, Rosemary, too, is vulnerable to

sexual transgression that is based on the weak preying on the weaker. Her question about pulling her pants down is especially disturbing in that it alludes to a place, perhaps, inside her home, where Rosemary came to know that sexuality is often infused with issues of violence and domination.

In the opening pages of The Years, Virginia Woolf also writes of the sexual violation of a young girl. Rose Pargiter steals out of her house, where her mother lies dying, against her older sister's wishes, and imagines she is a soldier on a "desperate mission" to deliver a secret message to a General. The stationery store she wanders out to, becomes, in her fantasy, the central tower holding the British flag. But Rose's fantasy is soon intruded upon when she meets a white peeled and pock-marked man who leers at her and pushes out his arm to grab her as she races past him. Woolf links war and female abuse together, just as Morrison draws parallels between a white supremacist society and Pecola's violation. Rose sees, in reality, she "was herself again, a little girl who had disobeyed her sister, in her house shoes, flying for safety to Lamley's shop" (28). The man serves to teach young Rose, that as a little girl, she is powerless against the predatory sexuality of men. This is brought home to her once more when she is leaving the safety of the stationery store and is heading back to her house:

Suddenly, as she passed the lamp-post, she saw the man again. He was leaning with his back against the lamp-post, and the light from the gas lamp flickered over his face. As she passed he sucked his lips in and out. He made a mewling noise. But he did not stretch his hands out at her; they were unbuttoning his clothes. (29)

Without even a scream, Rose flees past him, hoping as she enters her house, that someone would speak to her; and yet, the violation she experiences when the man exposes himself to her is marked by silence and solitude. Woolf, like Morrison, is interested in the moment when little girls come to understand their own sense of powerlessness and vulnerability.

It is precisely this problem that Claudia describes and then analyzes as she traces all that led up to Pecola's rape by her father. It is the act of telling and her critical reflection that enables Claudia to transcend the very oppression that destroys Pecola. As narrator, Claudia speaks of the loss of self that occurs when racialized self-hatred is internalized, when little girls are powerless before men who can exercise some dominion in their abuse of them. Her words also tell of the loss of the South, where Aunt Jimmy and other warm hearted black women have remained, women who live close to the land and are healers who understand the powers of herbs and roots. The South is a place of magic, sensuality, and community, while the North is a wasteland where Rosemary Villanucci, the daughter of a white working class immigrant family, sits in her Buick,

behind closed windows, apart from the transplanted black neighbors. Despite their anger at Rosemary, Claudia still describes her as their friend, as if to suggest that she understands, that as children, they are only mimicking the aggression of the community's adult members.

In this novel, Morrison creates her own portrait of the black female artist as a young girl. As the adult narrator, Claudia says a sense of being different defined her memories of childhood, as she reflects that "being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about anyway on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate our weakness and hang on, or to creep singly up into the major folds of the garment" (17-18). As an adult, Claudia understands that she must take conscious actions in order to prevent the annihilation of her self. She does precisely this when she spurns the annual Christmas gift of a "big blue-eyed baby doll." Claudia, unlike her sister Frieda and friend Pecola, hates the Shirley Temples of her world and refuses the concept of beauty she is given by actively dismembering these dolls. She is repelled by the images she finds in textbooks of little girls sleeping with their Raggedy Ann dolls, since she was repulsed by "those round moronic eyes, the pancake face, and orangeworms hair" (20). As Claudia looks at those little white girls, she rejects the gender roles that reinforce the moronic, sweet stares of Raggedy Ann. Instead of hating herself, Claudia transfers her disgust onto the

little white girls she would like to destroy on the street. Although she has observed the way black women possessively and yet gently handle these little white girls, she refuses to take her allotted subservient last place in society's hierarchical relations.

As she hears her mother sing of those bad times she's endured, Claudia realizes that "misery colored by the greens and blues in my mother's voice took all of the grief out of the words and left me with a conviction that pain was not only endurable, it was sweet" (26). The ability of her mother to sing of pain, to tell her stories through song, makes Claudia long for hard times without "a thin di-i-ime to my name," as she looks forward "to the delicious time when 'my man' would leave me, when I would 'hate to see that evening sun go down...' cause then I would know 'my man has left this town.'"

Through her song, Claudia's mother communicates to her daughter the beauty of the African-American folk tradition of storytelling. By listening and then speaking, Claudia becomes a modern day griot who affirms, as she participates in storytelling, the culture that the white society would like to destroy. Her positive self-identity is nurtured by her continuing relation to a maternal oral tradition. In addition, by telling her story in language that sings of an eerie beauty in the midst of pain, Claudia confirms that loss has its own melodic, harmonic rhythms that can only be

unearthed through the speaker's desire to link her experience with words.

Claudia not only rejects white female beauty, but she declares that she will create a life that is different from what the women in the song experience. She takes the melodies she has learned from song and colors the sadness of her story with the greens and blues of the seasons changing and the earth dying, as she criticizes the desire for blue eyes and the idea that to be male is to be constantly in flight. She affirms that the lyrical nature of her storytelling originates in the melodies of her mother's grief turned into song. She is the voice in the novel that dares to imagine a world where children will be protected, where young girls will not be raped by fathers or fondled by fraudulent preachers. Claudia narrates the story of what happens to those who have been marked as "other", as "ugly," those whose experiences do not exist in any text, whose lives lie far outside the words of the Dick and Jane primers that serve to erase their reality.

As the artist figure who gives form to Pecola's pain, Claudia explains how the Breedloves, in sharp contrast to her own family, lived in a storefront house "because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly" (39). It is their belief in their ugliness, more than the reality of their poverty, that paralyzes them. Pecola hides behind her ugliness:

"Concealed, veiled, eclipsed--peeping out from behind the shroud very seldom, and then only to yearn for the return of her mask" (31). Pecola becomes a mark; she is the symbol, the depository where the eyes of others render her invisible. "She would never know her beauty. She would only see what there was to see: the eyes of other people" (46-7). And like Rachel Vinrace, Pecola longs to disappear, to have her body fade away and her eyes evaporate into air; and yet, try as she might, Pecola cannot leave her body and the staring faces who tell her she is ugly. Unlike her brother, she cannot go away in pursuit of new faces and pictures. She knows "it wouldn't have worked anyway. As long as she was ugly, she would have to stay with these people. Somehow she belonged to them" (45). She is deemed ugly by virtue of her race and passive because of her gender.

If Pecola is made invisible by the white gaze, she seeks agency in the ownership of inanimate objects. "She owned the crack that made her stumble; she owned the clumps of dandelions whose white heads last fall, she had blown away; whose yellow heads, this fall, she peered into. And owning them made her part of the world, and the world a part of her." Inside her mind, Pecola creates a world no one can destroy, where she can fuse with the objects around her and thus reinforce her own subjectivity, her own personhood. Pecola imagines a place for herself where she is not hated

or ignored because she is a poor black girl. She lets her mind blend with the clumps of dandelions in an attempt to name a self that will in the next moment be erased by Mr. Yacobowski, a "fifty-two year old white immigrant store-keeper," who "does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see" (48).

Yacobowski, a working class white immigrant is divided from Pecola by virtue of his race. His "sensibilities blunted by a permanent awareness of loss," he can dream of America's riches and ease the disappointment of his own migration to this country by defining Pecola as other, as black and ugly. His suspended glance at her is a vacuum of vague whiteness in which he communicates his dislike for her. Pecola "has seen it lurking in the eyes of all white people. So. The distaste must be for her blackness. All things in her are flux and anticipation. But her blackness is static and dread. And it is the blackness that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes" (49).

In order to mitigate his own oppression as an immigrant, Yacobowski defines his white privilege against Pecola's blackness. Pecola receives his gaze and internalizes it as self-hatred. While Pecola's self is "flux and anticipation," she takes in his gaze and defines her blackness as "static and dread," characteristics Yacobowski assigns to her as a means of easing the emptiness

and alienation of his experience in America.

With the stares of white people lodged deep inside her, Pecola longs for whiteness, for the static empty gaze of blue eyes that she sees in the Mary Jane Candies. In Mary Jane's smiling white face, Pecola finds "blond hair in gentle disarray, blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort" (50). In defining herself against Mary Jane's clean, comfortable world of blond hair and blue eyes, Pecola negates her own self and disrupts the previous harmonic relationship she has had with inanimate objects, since once she is away from Yacobowski, she can look at the same dandelions, but this time they "do not look at her and do not send love back," because she sees them as ugly weeds, an image that becomes a metaphor for her own self-definition. In relinquishing her ownership of the dandelions she had admired before encountering Yacobowski's stare, Pecola fuses instead with the Mary Jane candies, since "to eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane" (50).

As Pecola eats her candies and has her nine lovely orgasms with Mary Jane, Morrison examines the moment when sexual desire becomes infused with issues of dominance and subjugation. If Pecola wants to be Mary Jane, a metaphor for the oppressor's code of beauty, then this desire reinforces her own self-hatred, since this wish can only be fulfilled in fantasy or madness. Sexual desire becomes

linked to the wish to abandon her own black self and enter this pretty, clean, powerful, white world that has shut her out. If she cannot be Mary Jane, then she might as well eat her. In that moment of pleasure, Pecola can forget her own outsider status. And yet this yearning becomes infused with a sexual longing that can ultimately only lead to her own sense of powerlessness, since she will always remain the outsider subject to Yacobowski's hateful stares.

Pecola becomes the colonized person in the moment when she has those nine lovely orgasms with Mary Jane, since that is the moment when she denies her own black self and desires to possess what the stark whites stares define as beauty. The longing for Mary Jane becomes part of a greater desire to have Yacobowski's empty eyes see her as beautiful. In internalizing this indifferent gaze of muted dislike, Pecola longs to transcend the invisibility, the erasure of self, and this yearning becomes part of a sexual desire that can only be fulfilled through the further negation of her self, because Pecola craves what she cannot attain: the blue eyes and blond hair that would make it possible to be seen and admired. Pecola defines her own world as feeble and inferior against the white place where the stare originates.

In a vastly different context, Rachel Vinrace also longs to be accepted by Richard Dalloway. As a politician on a tour of Britain's colonies, Dalloway represents power, and Rachel, in turn, looks up to him. Dalloway inhabits a

world Rachel would like to enter, and yet his sudden kiss, and his accusation that she had tempted him into this transgression, can only remind Rachel that she will never be seen as anything more than an object or symbol of femininity. Dalloway lets Rachel know that the ideal woman, like his wife, will be confined to the home and will venture out into the world only to do charitable work. His kiss teaches Rachel about her proper place in the social hierarchy. She responds appropriately by descending into nightmares, understanding finally why she has been forbidden to go out alone at night. While Rachel may have more consciousness about her situation than Pecola Breedlove does, in the end, this does not save her from illness, delirium, and ultimately death. Both characters internalize the perceptions of those around them and, as a result, become further alienated from language. They exemplify Paulo Friere's assertion that when "the oppressor is located within" people can take no action (145). Rachel must, like Pecola, descend self-protectively into a world of her own imagining, because she lacks the words with which to assert a self-identity that is separate from being a mere passive, silent object.

Just as Rachel's illness at the end of the novel is linked to Dalloway's kiss, as I have already discussed, the moment when Pecola is raped by her father has to be traced back to Yacobowski's candy store and all that takes place

inside her then. Pecola relinquishes her attachment to the material world of weeds and cracked cement, she lets go of the small place she has claimed for herself, and becomes a passive object, a depository for the collective stares and refuse that both white and black people dump into her. As Claudia explains, all who knew Pecola "felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her" (205).

Through the character of Pecola, Morrison warns the black female artist of the obscurity and madness that will befall her if she internalizes the racism that is infecting her surroundings, while through the character of Claudia, Morrison demonstrates the actions the black female artist must take, so she can construct an environment in which she can create. The different ways Claudia and Pecola react to their harsh surroundings becomes particularly evident when Claudia tells the story of Maureen Peal, "a high yellow dream child," whom all their class loved because she was so pretty; and yet Claudia remembers how she only wanted to kick her. Maureen is liked by her classmates for her light skin and nice clothes, while Pecola becomes the opposing double, who is tortured by these very same children. A band of boys circle around her and scream, "Black e mo. Black e mo, Yadaddy sleeps nekked." As narrator, Claudia understands that "it was their contempt for their own blackness that gave the first insult its teeth. They seemed to have taken all of their exquisitely learned self-hatred,

their elaborately designed hopelessness and sucked it all up into a fiery cone of scorn that had burned for ages in the hollows of their minds--cooled--and spilled over lips of outrage, consuming whatever was in its path" (65).

While Maureen at first rescues Pecola from her tormentors, her kindness is transformed when she asks Pecola if her father does, in fact, sleep naked, a remark that emphasizes the conditions of poverty that separate her from the blacks who do not live in spacious enough homes to insure privacy. The rage her question provokes in Frieda and Claudia, because they have seen their father naked, causes Maureen to retreat back into the privilege of her prettiness. She runs off shouting, "I'm cute, and you're ugly."

Pecola's role as victim standing in a circle surrounded by boys who want her to absorb their own self-hatred is quite different from Claudia and Frieda's ritualistic celebration of their very being that marks their reaction to the coming of spring: According to Claudia, "Long before seeds were stirring, Frieda and I were scuffing and poking at the earth, swallowing air, drinking rain" (64). Claudia and Frieda create a self through their interaction with the earth. Pecola, however, is cut off from the land and the community. She cannot articulate her pain; instead, she folds "into herself like a pleated wing." Pecola's quiet agony only antagonizes Claudia, who "wanted to open

her up, crisp her edges, ram a stick down that hunched and curving spine, force her to stand erect and spit the misery out on the streets. But she held it where it could lap up into her eyes" (73-4).

In fact, Claudia and her sister refuse to take in Maureen's taunts. They reject the importance that is ascribed to beauty. While Maureen's words enter Pecola and make her long all the more to have her dark eyes turn into the deepest shades of blue, Claudia questions the assumptions that comprise the hateful stares. Pecola may be folded and contorted, but Claudia is consistently defiant.

If she was cute--and if anything could be believed, she was--then we were not. And what did that mean? We were lesser. Nicer, brighter, but still lesser. Dolls we could destroy, but we could not destroy the honey voices of parents and aunts, the obedience in the eyes of our peers, the slippery light in the eyes of our teachers when they encountered the Maureen Peals of the world. What was the secret? What did we lack? Why was it important? And so what? Guileless and without vanity, we were still in love with ourselves then. We felt comfortable in our skins, enjoyed the news that our senses released to us, admired our dirt, cultivated our scars, and could not comprehend this unworthiness. Jealousy we understood and thought natural--a desire to have what somebody else had; but envy was a strange, new feeling for us. And all the time we knew that Maureen Peal was not the Enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The **Thing** to fear was the **Thing** that made her beautiful, and not us. (74)

Claudia's question "And so what?" demonstrates her indifference to the attention the Maureen Peals of the world will get. Claudia decides to revel in her scars, in her skin that goes unnoticed. By being in love with herself,

Claudia, unlike Pecola, refuses to allow the core of herself to be erased. By identifying Maureen Peal with the society that has designated dark as ugly, Claudia seeks to unpeel the effects of race, gender, and class, and in the process she is able to transcend the destructiveness of this gaze through her astute political analysis.

In addition, Claudia and Frieda's parents have helped their children establish a positive self-identity. Mr. MacTeer shoots at Mr. Henry after he molests Frieda, until he is chased away forever. Despite the whippings from their parents, these girls are taught by their father's actions that they should resist abuse and fight back. Nonetheless, Frieda is afraid that she may now be ruined by those intrusive hands that have fondled her breasts when she overhears an adult neighbor voice this very concern to her mother. Claudia and Frieda's quest to understand what being ruined means leads them first to the fat and swollen prostitutes living above Pecola's house. As Claudia imagines Frieda turning into a grotesque with a "face surrounded by layers of rouged skin," they conclude that only alcohol can save Frieda from such a fate. Mr. Henry's sexual transgression makes even Claudia and Frieda fear ugliness that is marked by a large, fat body.

They frantically want to avoid falling into the grotesque world that the prostitutes and Pecola inhabit, since Pecola is, as Keith Byerman argues, a grotesque who

dwells in and is formed by the larger grotesque society obsessed with whiteness ("Intense Behaviors" 447). Their quest to escape this fate leads them to Pecola, since they figure she must have some access to her father's whiskey. And their search for Pecola takes them into another world, a white one where the "soft gray houses leaning like tired ladies" (105) of the black neighborhoods are replaced by sturdier houses, where the sky was always as blue as the eyes Pecola longed for. Frieda's sexual initiation is marked by her journey into whiteness in search of the dark little girl who can help her avoid a ruined fate.

We reached Lake Shore Park, a city park laid out with the rosebuds, fountains, bowling greens, picnic tables. It was empty now, but sweetly expectant of clean, white, well-behaved children and parents who would play there above the lake in summer before half-running, half-stumbling down the slope to the welcoming water. Black people were not allowed in the park and so it filled our dreams. (105)

As little black girls, they are extremely vulnerable to sexual assault from men who want to prey on their weakness. Their journey into whiteness, into a neighborhood with parks that have shut them out, implicates the rich white supremacist society for this assault on those who stand at the bottom of the hierarchal order. Claudia can dream of entering this white upper-class world, but, unlike Pecola, she does not negate herself. She can long for the privilege that is contained in the pretty, segregated Park, but still she can return to herself. In fact, Claudia finds Pecola

sitting alone on the stoops at the back of the house where her mother works as a maid. Inside this house, Pauline Breedlove is able to enter whiteness, even if she comes as an underpaid servant. She gets a nickname, Polly, and feels "power, praise, and luxury," in this household, since "the creditors and service people who humiliated her when she went to them on her own behalf respected her, were even intimidated by her, when she spoke for the Fishers" (129).

When Pecola accidentally knocks over the berry pie Pauline has made for the Fisher family, she is deserted by her mother for the little white Fisher girl dressed in a pink bunny rabbit outfit. Pauline's abandonment of Pecola is another harsh and violent emotional rape that makes her more vulnerable to the future violations that await her. Claudia describes how "in one sharp gallop she was on Pecola, and with the back of her hand knocked her to the floor. Pecola slid in the pie juice, one leg folding under her. Mrs. Breedlove yanked her up by the arm, slapped her again, and in a voice thin with anger, abused Pecola directly and Frieda and me by implication" (109).

In sharp contrast, Pauline Breedlove gently soothes the tears of the little white girl and does not even acknowledge her daughter's existence when the Fisher girl asks who were those children. In order to keep her marginal footing in the white world, Pauline negates her black daughter. Alone and cut off from any community, Pecola can only long for

blue eyes that would give her entrance into all that has excluded her, since Pauline has passed on her own values to Pecola; both mother and daughter view the white blue-eyed world as superior to the one they inhabit.

#### **The Journey from South to North**

After exposing the violent nature of this mother/daughter relationship, Claudia's first person voice is replaced by an omniscient narrator who takes on the role of the mature story teller. In this way, As Trudier Harris notes, Morrison introduces the voice of the ancestor who helps Claudia complete her narrative. (Fiction and Folklore 23). In addition, Morrison subverts the myth of the North as the promised land. Instead, the transition from the rural South to the northern city echoes the "ancient pattern" of displaced peoples who enter the cities in search of wealth, only to find themselves surrounded by dirt, poverty and overcrowded living conditions (Raymond Williams 283). While Cholly appears as Pauline's dream-like Presence, the long awaited "Stranger" who takes her away forever to the North, life does not turn out like the fairy tale. The North was filled with hating whites who were everywhere, and Pauline found "Northern colored folk was different too. Dicty-like. No better than whites for meanness" (117). Instead of riding off into the sunset, Pauline enters the barren North, and experiences the most intense loneliness ever, spending her days waiting for Cholly to come home, without even " a

cat to talk to."

The real tragedy of the Breedlove family is that they have been cut off from the wise and protective ancestors of the South. For Morrison, authentic beauty can be found in the lives of the old southern black women, and her language celebrates the mystery and magic that surrounds them:

But they had been young once. The odor of their armpits and haunches had mingled into a lovely musk; their eyes had been furtive, their lips relaxed, and the delicate turn of their heads on those slim necks had been like nothing other than a doe's. Their laughter had been more touch than sound. (138)

In leaving these women behind, Cholly and Pauline leave community and the sensuality of the earth, as they enter the mechanized North and become strangers to the land and to themselves. The emptiness of the North is contrasted to the southern black women who are described as the freest characters in the novel:

Then they were old. Their bodies honed, their odor sour. Squatting in a cane field, stooping in a cotton field, kneeling by a river bank, they had carried a world on their heads...They were through with lust and lactation, beyond tears and terror...They were old enough to be irritable when and where they chose, tired enough to look forward to death, disinterested enough to accept the idea of pain while ignoring the presence of pain. They were, in fact, and at last, free. (139)

Although Pecola's rape is linked to her parent's departure from the South, Morrison harshly indicts the larger white society and the immediate family and neighbors that have let Pecola slip self-protectively into madness, for it is in Pecola's destruction that historical and

personal loss come together. Unlike her father, Pecola has never had any contact with an older, healing ancestor (Harris 40). Even though Cholly is deserted by both his mother and father, he is taken in by his Aunt Jimmy and surrounded by a nurturing community of old black women. As a child, listening to their chatter, "the lullaby of grief enveloped him, rocked him, and at last numbed him" (TBE 139); and yet while grief and its melodies soothe him at first, Cholly's failure as a man is that ultimately grief made him devoid of feeling.

Cholly's first erotic feelings are for M'Dear, the old midwife who could solve any medical problem with herbs and roots from the earth. In a dream, his "penis changed into a long hickory stick, and the hands caressing it were the hands of M'Dear" (139). This world is lost forever to Cholly when his Aunt Jimmy dies and the playful innocence of his first sexual experience in the woods after the funeral is abruptly interrupted by the white hunters who shine a flashlight on his awkward lovemaking, and force him to continue as they watch. Instead of hating the hunters, Cholly hates the young girl, Darlene, "the one who had created the situation, the one who bore witness to his failure, his impotence, the one whom he had not been able to protect, to spare, to cover from the round moon glow of the flashlight. The hee-hee-hees" (150-1).

While Cholly was the victim of emotional rape by the

white hungers, he then becomes the perpetrator of rape with his daughter years later. When he sees her by the sink, he wonders why does she have to look so whipped; her vulnerability stirs his hatred and tenderness. As he watches her leg scratching itself in the same way that Pauline did when he first saw her in the South, Cholly seeks to recreate what has been lost in a horrifying act that is described in language that is surprisingly soft and sensual:

The rigidness of her shocked body, the silence of her stunned throat, was better than Pauline's easy laughter had been. The confused mixture of his memories of Pauline and the doing of a wild and forbidden thing excited him, and a bolt of desire ran down his genitals, giving it length, and softening the lips of his anus. Surrounding all of this lust was a border of politeness. He wanted to fuck her--tenderly. (163)

Morrison says that "the most masculine act of aggression becomes feminized in my language, 'passive,' and I think more accurately repellent when deprived of the male glamour of shame, rape is (or once was) routinely given" (Afterward TBE 215). Rape, too, is rewritten in Morrison's language, since she does not want to tell the story of male shame, which is only romanticized by the culture. By describing Cholly in sympathetic terms, she makes his aggressive act all the more violent. Even as she silences Pecola by telling the rape scene from Cholly's point of view, Morrison writes Pecola's experience into literature, since it is Pecola's muted scream that lies beyond the pages where Dick, Jane, Mother, and Father live happily ever after

in their white world.<sup>10</sup>

Pecola becomes the maimed grotesque flailing without words. The only sound she can make during the rape is "the hollow suck of air in the back of her throat. Like the rapid loss of air from a circus balloon" (163). Pecola descends naturally into madness where she can finally hallucinate a self she can see. While Morrison purposely does not depict the rapist as a one dimensional villain, at the same time, Pecola's silent loss echoes and rewrites the Procne and Philomela myth. As Madonne M. Miner argues:

To enforce this silence, Cholly need not cut off Pecola's tongue or imprison her behind stone walls. The de-presencing of Pecola Breedlove takes a different form from that of Philomela. Upon regaining consciousness following the rape, Pecola is able to speak; she tells Mrs. Breedlove what has happened. But as Mrs. Breedlove does not want to believe, Pecola must recognize the futility of attempted communication. Thus when Cholly, like Tereus, rapes a second time, Pecola keeps the story to herself; in silence this eleven-year-old girl steps across commonly accepted borders of reason and speech to enter her own personal world of silence and madness. (Conjuring Miner 180)

Pecola's madness can also be seen as part of a wish to heal, since she is finally able to construct a self, even if it is out of the fragmented shards of consciousness reflected in her birdlike movements among the garbage and refuse of both the black and white communities that have

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<sup>10</sup>Jane S. Bakerman aptly notes, "For Pecola, the healthy sexual encounter symbolizing initiation into the adult world is forbidden, for when someone does see her as lovable, it is her father, and he rapes her" (547).

excluded her.<sup>11</sup> Left to have imaginary conversations with herself, Pecola becomes "a winged, but grounded bird, intent on the blue void it could not reach--could not even see--but which filled the valleys of her mind" (TBE qtd.in Miner 181). As the narrator, it is Claudia who finds words for the pain the nightingale cannot voice, the sounds the severed tongue would like to make. Claudia, like Procne, becomes the loyal sister who will avenge Pecola's destruction by telling of it. The lyrical language of this novel becomes the song the nightingale longs to sing.

Claudia does not have to step into madness in order to create a life that can transcend the self-hatred that knaws away at Pecola and Pauline Breedlove. She can participate in the creative act of storytelling and maintain a positive self-image precisely because she has been raised in a family that has not severed their ties with their ancestors. In contrast, Pecola expresses the loss of the migrant, the uprooted, who does not even know her past. If Morrison's intention is to "shape a silence while breaking it (Afterward TBE 216)," then Pecola's madness reflects the fragmentation of this broken silence, while Claudia's storytelling is her effort to give it a shape that can transform loss into language.

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<sup>11</sup>bell hooks notes: "And many of us are daily entering the realm of the insane. Like Pecola, in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye, black folks turn away from reality because the pain of awareness is so great. Yet it is only by becoming more fully aware that we begin to see clearly" (Black Looks 6).

### Mrs. Dalloway

In Virginia Woolf's fourth novel, *Clarissa Dalloway*, an "artist with no art form," a phrase Toni Morrison uses to describe Sula peace, gives a party in order to reconnect to an earlier lost garden of women that is in direct contrast to her present isolation. In this way, partygiving becomes metaphoric for the creative process of the female artist. In addition, by doubling the characters of Septimus Warren Smith and Clarissa Dalloway, Woolf is concerned with the devastating effects of war and the difficulties of translating historical as well as personal loss into an enduring art form.

In Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf continues the project she began in Jacob's Room; that is, she exposes the violence and senselessness of war. Septimus Warren Smith, like Shadrack in Sula, symbolizes as Tuzyline Allan points out, "the inexorable convergence of war and self-destructive passions" (26). Septimus and Shadrack represent the nameless, countless young men who return from war completely shattered. Moreover, in Mrs. Dalloway and Sula, the story of female bonding frames the tale of a shell-shocked veteran, who comes home only to find himself in perpetual exile--alone, isolated, and bereft of language.

### The Party Consciousness

In 1925, just as Mrs. Dalloway was about to be published, Woolf wrote in her diary: "But my present

reflection is that people have any number of states of consciousness and I should like to investigate the party consciousness, the frock consciousness, etc. The fashion world of the Becks...is certainly one where people secrete an envelope which connects them and protects them from others, like myself, who am outside the envelope, foreign bodies" (McNichol 11-12). Woolf writes that she gropes for words in order to describe this very difficult state, nonetheless, she is "always coming back to it. The party consciousness..."

In Mrs. Dalloway's Party, a collection of short stories written during and after the publication of the novel, Mrs. Dalloway, and collected together in a book by McNichol, Woolf's fascination with the party as a vehicle for self-revelation and a metaphor for the complexities of the creative act becomes evident. In these stories, her characters, many of whom are actual guests at Mrs. Dalloway's party, have an intense moment of realization when they see that they are, in fact, outside an envelope. They are solitary observers peering in at the fashion world around them, surrounded by people who do not actually perceive them; and yet it is this epiphanic moment that leads to a deeper self-revelation and stimulates creativity. Often the world of society, or the party, is in direct contrast to a garden where a character might go and escape from her isolation, as in "A Summing Up," where the

character sits in Dalloway's Garden and realizes that her soul "is by nature unmated, a widow bird" (70), perched aloof on a tree. These images of gardens as a refuge from isolation become important to understanding how Woolf uses the party as a metaphor to reveal the internal world of the female artist. The longing for a communal garden of women that is in opposition to the isolation of heterosexual power relations becomes a distinctive part of Woolf's aesthetics.

Woolf's ambivalent feelings about parties are expressed in the journals she kept while she was writing Mrs Dalloway. On the one hand, she writes: "This social side is very genuine in me. Nor do I think it reprehensible. It is a piece of jewellery I inherit from my Mother--a joy in laughter, something that is stimulated, not selfishly wholly or vainly, by contact with my friends. And then ideas leap in me" (D 2 250). For Woolf, language is to be found in the rush and movement of people gathering together, in the rise and ebb of voices. In Leonard Woolf's Downhill All the Way, he too noted how much Virginia was inspired by a party: "The idea of a party always excited her, and in practice she was very sensitive to the actual mental and physical excitement of the party itself, the rise of temperature of mind and body, the ferment and fountain of noise" (qtd. from McNichol 11).

Party going or partygiving becomes another way of reconnecting to an earlier unity with her mother that

coincided, as Madeline Moore argues (The Short Season 10), with her sense of mystical harmony with the natural world, and more specifically the sea at St. Ives. It is this state that Woolf strives to reenter as she writes. In her diary she notes: "Often now I have to control my excitement--as if I were pushing through a screen; or as if something beat fiercely close to me. What this portends I don't know. It is a general sense of the poetry of existence that overcomes me. Often it is connected with the sea & St. Ives. Going to 46 continues to excite" (D 2 246). This poetry of existence is connected to the sound of waves that once lapped against her nursery window, as she lay in bed at St. Ives and her mother stood on the balcony surrounded by passion flowers (MOB 66). It is this initial memory of a female centered garden that becomes the starting point for Woolf's pageant of language.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, Woolf compares the process of writing without the fear of praise and censure to the happy moment when the party was over: "I become anonymous, a person who writes for the love of it...I feel as if I slipped off all my ball dresses & stood naked--which as I remember was a very pleasant thing to do" (D 2 248). The image of Woolf standing naked after taking off all of those ball dresses becomes central to what she is actually doing in her

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<sup>1</sup>For a further discussion of Woolf, women, and gardens, see Ellen Hawkes, "Woolf's 'Magical Garden of Women'" (New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf 31-60).

writing. When she is free to write without fear of praise or censure, writing instead from the deepest parts of her mind, her fictional landscape is composed of sensual language that seems to recreate the experience of pleasure the body takes in discovering herself.

It is, however, necessary to stress the alienation that the party metaphor evokes since Woolf knew all too well that in reality, she is outside the envelope, alone and isolated in the midst of society. Even if the social side is a jewel inherited from her mother it is important to remember how much the young Virginia Stephen suffered from parties and the social demands that her half-brother George Duckworth inflicted upon her, as he forced her to dress up and come out into society. In "22 Hyde Park Gate," Woolf describes his actions once they were back in their house and the endless social evening was over:

Sleep had almost come to me, the room was dark. Then, creaking stealthily, the door opened; treading gingerly, someone entered. "Who? I cried. "Don't be frightened," George whispered. "And don't turn on the light, oh beloved. Beloved--" and he flung himself on my bed, and took me in my arms.

Yes, the old ladies of Kensington and Belgravia never knew that George Duckworth was not only father and mother, brother and sister to those poor Stephen girls; he was their lover also.  
(Moments of Being 177)

The party can only remind Woolf that her status in society is marginal, as it brings her back into the true hypocrisy of her brother's gentlemanly appearances, and the

reality of his sexual abuse. As part of her own healing process, Woolf's language refers back to a time that existed before her mother died, a time before her half-brothers molested her. By writing Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf can create a party where there is no sexual assault afterwards, no brother to leap inside her bed. She can rearrange her past and attempt to extract the grief by rewriting the story of her life.<sup>2</sup> In this way, party going and partygiving is linked to language and recuperation.

In Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf creates a fictional form that evokes the sense that time has been suspended as the past becomes contained in the present moment, and all that has been lost, is finally accessible through memory. She writes: "I should say a great deal about The Hours and my discovery: how I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters: I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth. The idea is that the caves shall connect and each comes to daylight at the present moment" (D 2 263). These beautiful caves can be seen not only as a metaphor for female sexuality, but more importantly serve as a symbol of what a distinctly feminine aesthetic consists of, as Woolf uses her technique to capture the inner isolation of women that is beneath the chatter and glitter

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<sup>2</sup>John Mepham aptly notes, "It seems more fruitful to treat her insight into the connections between literary form and forms of mourning not as a symptom but as an achievement, an achievement which has cultural and historical rather than purely personal significance" ("Mourning and Modernism" 143).

of the present moment.

For Woolf, the party becomes an arena where she can meet other intellectuals and display her brilliance. It becomes a means to lift her gloom and observe life while still slipping in and out of it. She writes in her diary:

But its not the money trouble that worries us: but something psychological. The gloom is more on L.'s side than on mine. Mine is a gloom like a mist that comes & goes. One is unsettled. I dip into different circles--like Mary's, E. Sands', the Richmonds' concert, & come home either exalted or depressed. My chairs look dirty. Then the social question rises between L. & me. Are we becoming 'respectable'? Shall we dine with the Richmonds. L. says no. I regret it. Yes, some how I regret it seriously, this shutting of the door upon suburban studies. I love the chatter & excitement of other peoples houses. Have I not just said that it depresses me too? But then I wanted to meet Percy Lubbock & show myself off as a woman who can talk sense & so on. I ask people here too often. In short I must take the social side into my own hands. I have, I think, got Reading, on its feet, & hope to make way, & find my solace in that. But still I want to make life fuller & fuller. (D 2 237)

This passage reveals Woolf's own insider/outsider status as an upper-middle class British woman and female modernist contending with the male ego of her counterparts. In a letter to E.M. Forster, Woolf described the critic, Percy Lubbock, as "an able and painstaking pedant...who doesn't know what art is" (Bell 134). Woolf believes she has proven him wrong, as she discovers her tunneling process in the process of writing Mrs. Dalloway, whereby she tells the "past by installments," since Lubbock had asserted this

could be done consciously (D 2 272).<sup>3</sup> For Woolf, the party becomes a script she can create, a place where she can assert her integrity as an artist and intellectual. These social activities let life get "fuller & fuller" for Woolf, as it balances the solitude the writing requires of her and the many physical and social constraints Leonard placed on her in his effort to protect her health.

The party also becomes part of a power struggle not only with her husband's well-meaning but controlling behavior, but with the artists and critics who do not take her work seriously. Woolf uses the party to meet people like Lubbock so she can show him that she is a woman who can talk sense, a woman whose ideas must be considered. She writes: "I have been reflecting about society again, & think one of its merits is that it needs courage. The going into rooms properly dressed is alarming. No one cares for one; that snubs vanity; one is on equal terms with one's fellows" (D 2 239-40). As someone who is acutely aware of the marginal position women occupy in society, Woolf sees the party as a place where she can renegotiate and reassign power; however, at the same time, Woolf reveals her own class blindness when she writes that one is on "equal terms with one's fellows." Woolf both identifies as one who is

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<sup>3</sup>See Bonnie Kime Scott, Refiguring Modernism: The Women of 1928 Vol 1: Scott notes that Woolf compared Lubbock's preoccupation with method to an x-ray that dissolved everything but the bone. Instead, Woolf let form "gradually emerge in the writing process," thus discovering her "tunneling process" (xxvii).

outside the envelope of life, but then she feels she is on equal footing with other upper-middle class or wealthy members of society.

This contradiction also becomes evident in Mrs. Dalloway. As Tuzyline Allan argues in Womanist and Feminist Aesthetics: A Comparative Review, this novel "illustrates Woolf's vacillation between disapproval and support for, the ruling class" (24). On the one hand, Clarissa is excluded from Millicent Bruton's lunches. She is solitary in her marriage that is symbolized by the small, narrow bed she sleeps on, and is left only with the memory of Sally Seton's sensual kiss. At the same time, Clarissa is an upper-middle class woman who enjoys mixing with the upper crust of society.

Still, in writing Mrs. Dalloway, I want to argue that Woolf's overriding intention is to expose the social structure and criticize it at the same time (D2 248). She writes that she wants to "bring in the despicableness of people like Ott," (D 2 244), which of course, refers to Lady Ottoline Morrel, Woolf's friend and wealthy patron of artists and writers. Woolf writes that she wants to depict "the slipperiness of the soul." In fact, Woolf told Vanessa that the portrait of Mrs. Dalloway in The Voyage Out was based on Kitty Maxse (Gordon 99), a socialite who also gave many parties, entertained important men, and had an unhappy marriage. Although Woolf admitted that even after Mrs.

Dalloway was published, some distaste for both Clarissa Dalloway and Kitty Maxse persisted (192), it is nevertheless difficult to understand why Woolf chose the character of Clarissa to represent the internal world of the female artist. Especially since Woolf so clearly satirizes Clarissa and her husband in The Voyage Out as empty mouthpieces who celebrate the British empire. I believe that this contradiction mirrors Woolf's own awareness that her class privilege gave her the confidence to translate the devastating effects of sexual abuse and those early deaths of family members into art. Her class privilege enabled her to situate herself in an environment where she could write. Moreover, the social occasion of the party, as I mentioned previously, helped Woolf to reconnect with her mother, thus providing her with the maternal nurturance which acted as a stimulus for creativity.

In this way, Woolf used the party metaphor to create a modernist novel which was in opposition to the work of her male counterparts. According to Elizabeth Abel, Woolf's novel, begun just after she had completed reading Ulysses, is in part a response to the egoism of Joyce. Woolf regarded him as a "callow school boy, full of wits and powers, but so self-conscious and egotistical that he loses his head" (qtd. from The Voyage In 337). Abel sees Mrs. Dalloway as the "female counterpart to Ulysses epic form" (164) since both

books unfold over the course of a day.<sup>4</sup>

Her foregrounded domestic plot unfolds precisely in shops and drawing rooms rather than on battlefields, and substitutes for epic quest and conquest the traditionally feminine project of giving a party, of constructing social harmony through affiliation rather than conflict; the potentially epic plot of the soldier returned from war is demoted to the tragic subplot centering on Septimus Warren Smith. (164-5)

In her modernist experiment, Woolf redefines epic from a female perspective. It is clear Woolf was thinking about the epic form as she was writing Mrs. Dalloway since she was working on her essay, "On Not Knowing Greek" at the same time. She was concerned with the idea of art as a realm related to the reality of one's daily life and writes: "It is not to the cloistered disciplinarian mortifying himself in solitude that we are to turn, but to the well-sunned nature, the man who practices the art of living to the best advantage, so that nothing is stunted but some things are permanently more valuable than others" (CR 1 33). Woolf takes her notion of the man practicing "the art of living" and translates it to the character of Clarissa Dalloway, the "artist with no art form" but the party she creates in the course of a day.

In a novel reflecting so many contradictory impulses and allegiances, Woolf hopes to create an aesthetic that

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<sup>4</sup>For a discussion of Bloomsbury and women's modernism, see Bridget Elliot and Jo-Ann Wallace, Women Artists and Writers: Modernist (im)positionings (56-90). See also, Mary Ann Caws, Women of Bloomsbury: Virginia, Vanessa, Carrington.

captures precisely what it is that she loves about Homer's Greek heroes: "With the sound of the sea in their ears, vines, meadows rivulets about them, they are even more aware than we of a ruthless fate. There is a sadness at the back of life which they do not attempt to mitigate." (38).

While writing Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf directly responds in her diary to Arnold Bennett's criticism that she didn't succeed in creating characters that survive in Jacob's Room. While Woolf acknowledges that she may not have "that reality gift" (D 2 248), the truth is she distrusts reality and "its cheapness." Instead, through the metaphor of the party, Woolf aims to get at the reality of the spirit, the underneath emotions and memories that are stirred by the actual party. In her essay, "Modern Fiction," which was also written while Woolf was at work on Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf asks: "Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible" (CR 1 150)?

The character of Clarissa Dalloway, with her fluid ego boundaries that merge with the sea and city about her, and her memories that are stimulated by the preparation of the party itself, is reminiscent of the ethereal Mrs. Brown Woolf described in her 1924 essay, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," her famous treatise against the narrow realism of the Georgian novelists. Woolf says of Mrs. Brown: "The most

solemn sights she turns to ridicule; the most ordinary she invests with beauty. She changes the shape, shifts the accent, of every scene in which she plays her part" (CE3 387). In Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf strives to create character "from the gleams and flashes of this flying spirit."

The party as a device for narrative structure allows Woolf to create a fictional form that makes order from the chaos of dream and memory.<sup>5</sup> It also allows her to posit the female world of Clarissa against the British war machine mentality that is reflected in such characters as Holmes and Bradshaw. Woolf uses her "tunneling process" to capture the secret and passionate relationships women develop with one another. As Woolf was revising Mrs. Dalloway, she wrote in her diary: "If one could be friendly with women, what a pleasure--the relationship so secret and private compared with relations with men. Why not write about it? Truthfully?" (D 2 320). As another subplot that resonates throughout the text, Woolf does just that in her novel.

#### **Longing for the Lost Garden**

Clarissa seeks to make an ornamental party to ease away the emptiness that underlies her external cheerfulness. Such an emptiness includes Clarissa's own lesbian longing that has been repressed and only occasionally rises back into consciousness as she remembers Sally Seton's kiss on

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<sup>5</sup>For a further discussion of the function of parties, see Patti White, Gatsby's Party: The System and the List in Contemporary Narrative.

her lips in the garden as "the most exquisite moment of her whole life" (MD 52). Clarissa is, as Jane Marcus argues, "the lesbian who marries for safety and appearances, produces a child, cannot relate sexually to her husband, and chooses celibacy within marriage, no sex rather than the kind she wants" (Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy 118). Woolf excavates the untold story of women's desire for one another, which becomes part of a joyful past that Clarissa recalls even as she accepts the solitude of her marriage.

The strange thing, on looking back, was the purity, the integrity, of her feeling for Sally. It was not like one's feeling for a man. It was completely disinterested, and besides, it had a quality which could only exist between women, between women just grown up. It was protective, on her side: sprang from a sense of being in league together, a presentiment of something that was bound to part them (they spoke of marriage always as a catastrophe), which led to this chivalry, this protective feeling which was much more on her side than Sally's. (50)

Sally tells Clarissa a society must be founded to abolish private property, and Clarissa envies her freedom from the traditional gender constraints that go along with being a polite, well bred young woman, since Sally had that quality of abandonment, "as if she could say anything, do anything" (43). Through their friendship, and their unspoken romance, Clarissa was able to see how sheltered and provincial her own world truly was since she, like Rachel Vinrace before her, "knew nothing about sex, nothing about social problems" (49). Sally is free and wild; she is

female sensuality, a woman whose beautiful voice "made everything sound like a caress" (52). Instinctively it is Clarissa who wants to protect Sally, since she knows it is marriage that will break this freedom, will constrain such joy, and make any more kisses on the lip impossible.

In creating her party, Clarissa hopes to regain what has been lost as she longs in the privacy of her room to reenter that Edenic, adolescent garden filled with Sally's kisses and the unified beauty of nature. Years later, sifted through the memories of a fifty year old woman sitting in the quiet of her room, Clarissa can recall the thrill of knowing and then needing to say aloud, Sally is beneath my room, even when those very same words in the present moment no longer carry the immediate sensation of ecstasy with them. Instead her memories of the past help her finally to make sense and acknowledge the truth of her emotions that lie buried beneath the present moment.

No, the words meant absolutely nothing to her now. She could not even get an echo of her old emotion. But she could remember going cold with excitement, and doing her hair in a kind of ecstasy (now the old feeling began to come to her, as she took her hairpins, laid them on the dressing-table, began to do her hair, with the rooks flaunting up and down in the pink evening light, and dressing, and going downstairs feeling as she crossed the hall "if it were now to die 'twere now to be most happy." That was her feeling--Othello's feeling, and she felt it, she was convinced, as strongly as Shakespeare meant Othello to feel it, all because she was coming down to dinner in a white frock to meet Sally Seton. (51)

Through her memories, Clarissa is finally able to admit

to herself that her emotions for Sally constitute the deepest, most exquisite passion of her life, and her mind's avid descent into the past represents Clarissa wish to revisit that lost feeling, to re-experience it once again; her memories unravel at first slowly and then picking up velocity the past is brought vividly into the present moment. In the privacy of her dressing-room, Clarissa can finally say, "But this question of love (she thought, putting her coat away), this falling in love with women. Take Sally Seton; her relation in the old days with Sally Seton. Had not that, after all been love" (48)? The simple act of putting her own coat away, and more importantly the sight of the hairpins, the ritual of doing her own hair in preparation for the party, all bring back that past excitement from more than thirty years before when the teenage Clarissa dressed, crossed the hall, and wore a white frock to meet Sally. Female sexuality becomes encoded in very private objects, a comb, a brush, that silently evoke the repressed passions of the past. In creating her party, Clarissa wants to transcend the loneliness of her marriage and revisit a more joyful time.<sup>6</sup>

The pastoral scene of Bourton, with its garden and kisses between women, recalls a pre-oedipal female world that has been replaced by Clarissa's present day social

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<sup>6</sup>Rachel DuPlessis observes: "The bond Clarissa and Sally make is like the party, a network of pleasurable connections" (59).

reality of male dominated heterosexuality. This story echoes, as Elizabeth Abel argues, "the broader sweep of history from matriarchal too patriarchal orientation" (Voyage In 164). It is important, however, to point out that even the female centered garden of Bourton ultimately gives way to male ascendancy, since it is Peter Walsh who abruptly interrupted their kiss in the garden. He made Clarissa feel she was "running one's face against a granite wall in the darkness" (MD 53), and yet Clarissa knew his appearance was inevitable, "as if she had known all along that something would interrupt, would embitter her moment of happiness."

It is at Bourton that Justin Parry, Clarissa's father, carelessly causes the death of her sister, Sylvia, by a falling tree. The father prevents Sylvia from successfully leaving the female garden and entering adult womanhood, a theme that echoes the plight of the older Rachel in Woolf's early novel.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Sylvia's tragic story is told through Peter Walsh's stream of consciousness as he ambles about London and notices the unhappy couple, Septimus and Reiza, on a bench. The fact that it is Peter who gives Sylvia's life a voice rather than Clarissa, further emphasizes the silence that surrounds the story of women's development from a female centered universe to the isolation

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<sup>7</sup>Citing the story of Iphigenia, Carol Gilligan argues that "the father's sacrifice of his adolescent daughter is woven into the fabric of civilization" (11).

of adult male-dominated relations.

To see your own sister killed by a falling tree (all Justin Parry's fault--all his carelessness) before your very eyes, a girl too on the verge of life, the most gifted of them, Clarissa always said, was enough to turn one bitter. Later she wasn't so positive perhaps; she thought, there were no Gods; no one was to blame; and she evolved this atheist's religion of doing good for the sake of goodness. (118)

Peter's mediation and interpretation of Clarissa's experience becomes metaphoric for her own silencing, since she is not given the chance to directly comment on her sister's death and the effect it has had on her. Peter becomes the person who brings the dark granite wall in front of Clarissa's life, and his penchant for playing with knives can be seen as a powerful symbol that resonates the intrusiveness of male sexuality.

#### The Artist With No Art Form

As Bonnie Kime Scott points out, the narrator of Mrs. Dalloway becomes the outsider who is identified with the sea ("The Word Split" 374). By having the narrator dip into the different characters' minds, and then sometimes appear to comment without an identifiable gender, the narrator remains amorphous and outside of constricting narrative structures.<sup>8</sup> In this way, Woolf blends form and content, since Mrs. Dalloway captures the internal world of the female artist who is defiant against the British Empire

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<sup>8</sup>Christine Froula made this point in a paper she delivered at the fifth annual Virginia Woolf Conference.

which participates in wars and upholds men like Bradshaw with their frightening ideas of proportion and stability.

As the novel opens, Clarissa's memories are linked to water, as she thinks, "how fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning: like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling as she did something awful was but to happen; looking at the flowers, at the trees with the smoke winding off them, and the rooks rising, falling" (MD 3). As the day begins and Clarissa prepares for her party, she remembers once again the garden at Bourton and Peter's abrupt interruption of her introspective musing. The memory of the garden is in stark contrast to London and her married life that has left her cut off from close ties with other women. The sensual kiss of a wave that is reminiscent of Sally's kiss is replaced with the solemn feeling that something terrible is about to happen, as Clarissa anticipates the loss of this Edenic garden to the confines of marriage. Her isolation in the present moment stimulates memory and the desire to give a party that will enable her to connect back to her adolescence, that time before Richard Dalloway appeared with his proposal of marriage, and Peter Walsh's abrupt interruption of her kiss with Sally Seton.

Clarissa makes it clear that she prefers the solitude of her marriage with Richard to the possessive love of

Peter. At least with Richard she had "a little license, a little independence" (10) in which to live in her memories. Clarissa's fluid consciousness that merges with the sea, never claiming to be this or that, has been compared by many critics with Julia Kristeva's idea of an egoless, semiotic self.<sup>9</sup> Jean Wyatt, for example, argues that one reason many readers overlook Clarissa's class-bound snobbishness is that the novel hits the reader not at a level of social consciousness, but at a level of more primitive oral impulses that recall a pre-oedipal, oceanic self that resists definition ("Avoiding Self-Definition" 121). Although Clarissa's class status define her as an insider, her rhythmic blending with the waves, her sense of "being out, out, far out at sea and alone" (MD 11), and her "feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day" make her an outsider who ultimately identifies with Septimus and not the rigid Bradshaw and Holmes.

Clarissa has had no formal education because of her sex. "How she had got through life on the twigs of knowledge Fraulein Daniels gave them she could not think. She knew nothing; no language, no history; she scarcely read a book now, except memories in bed, and yet to her it was

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<sup>9</sup>For one Kristevan reading of Virginia Woolf, see Makiko Minow-Pinkey, Virginia Woolf & The Problem of the Subject. Minow-Pinkey argues that "by disrupting linearity and achieving simultaneity, she modifies the status of the subject," and expresses a self or "subject in process" (61), a term Deborah McDowell also uses to describe Sula.

absolutely absorbing; all this; the cabs passing; and she would not say of Peter, she could not say of herself, I am this, I am that" (11). Clarissa becomes doubled with her sister Sylvia who on the verge of life, "the most gifted of them," dies. Clarissa does not have the opportunity to be exposed to the canon of Western knowledge that the prestigious universities give its young men; and Sylvia in her identification as gifted echoes the young Jacob Flanders of Jacob's Room who was one of England's selected best and brightest young men suddenly killed in a senseless war. Unlike Jacob, Sylvia would not have gone to Cambridge. Sylvia, like her sister Clarissa, who has managed to stay alive, remains uneducated. Woolf underscores here how difficult it is for the female artist to create when she has not had the same training and education as men. In fact, this situation only increases her sense of isolation. Similarly, Morrison is concerned with the means by which racism influences the creation and dissemination of knowledge. In The Bluest Eye, the Dick and Jane reader can only further alienate Pecola, since the reality of her life is left out of this commonly used primer. In these contexts, both Woolf and Morrison associate isolation with being excluded from dominant discourses.

As Clarissa walks along Bond Street she is invisible; no one sees her. She is simply Mrs. Richard Dalloway, not "even Clarissa anymore" (14). She has a sense of being

"unseen; unknown" (14). Her party as a type of art is self-expression; and the lines from Cymbeline, "Fear no more the heat o'the sun/ Nor the furious winter's rages' (12-13), that repeat throughout the text are, according to Phylliss Rose, "the leitmotif of Clarissa's underlying despair, of her wish for easeful death, and recalls too, more indirectly, the miraculous world of Shakespeare's romances in which what is lost may yet be found again" (127).

This wish is expressed at the end of the novel when Clarissa's adolescent friends, Peter and Sally, are resurrected from the past to appear at the party. Even if they are older, even if Sally Seton no longer kisses women on the lips, having become Lady Seton with a wealthy husband and five kids, Both Sally and Peter seem to step out of the dream world of memory to make their appearance at Clarissa's party, a gathering that enables those attending to identify what it is they are longing to recover, even if it not possible to fully recapture all that has been lost. Still, in having Clarissa reconnect through her party to an earlier unity with women, she maintains a communal vision of society that is an alternative to the power relations that surround her in the form of Bradshaw, Holmes, and the recurrent theme of war that echoes through the novel.

#### **Women and War, Loss and Creativity**

By pairing Clarissa Dalloway, an upper-middle class wife of a London politician, who spends her day preparing

for a party, with Septimus Warren Smith, a shell-shocked ex-soldier who lost his close friend Evans in the war, Virginia Woolf creates, a single consciousness that consists of two opposing characters. On the one hand, we have a female artist with no art form whose partygiving becomes, as Rachel Brownstein notes, an affirmation of "life as opposed to war" (Becoming a Heroine 284); on the other hand, we see a shattered grieving young man calling out to the voices of the dead that invade his mind with their fragmented calling. Clarissa Dalloway's avid partygiving and her subsequent identification with Septimus' suicide at the end of the novel become metaphoric of the artistic process that is tied to loss itself and the desire to make unity from the fractured utterances of the dead.

In a letter written after completing Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf says that Septimus is "the most essential part of Mrs. D: and this certainly did mean--that Septimus and Mrs. Dalloway should be entirely dependent on each other" (L 3 189). I believe Septimus and Clarissa Dalloway represent one consciousness that seeks to examine how loss and mourning become translated into art. By introducing the character of Septimus who is tied to the present moment and the public violence of war, as opposed to the lost garden of women that is part of Clarissa's private past, Woolf expands the world of the party so it can contain the fragmented consciousness caused by war as well as the creative longing

for a time of peace that is associated with a sensual eroticism between two adolescent female friends amidst a pastoral setting. In Mrs. Dalloway, the present becomes identified with war as the ultimate outcome of a male controlled civilization's quest for power and domination, while the past, as evoked through Clarissa's memories, is identified with nature and a unity between women. If, as Woolf states, "Septimus is the most essential part of Mrs. D," then I believe she is saying that it is the artist's task to find a unified form that can capture fragmentation.

In her essay, "UnSpeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," Toni Morrison asserts that "the trauma of racism is, for the racist and the victim, the severe fragmentation of the self, and has always seemed to me a cause (not a symptom) of psychosis--strangely of no interest to psychiatry" (16). Since all wars are implicitly racist, Woolf's creation of a psychotic character whose mental illness has been caused by the war echoes Morrison's very concerns. Woolf's use of multiple voices and shifting points-of-view that shuffle back and forth from the past to the present creates a sense of displacement for the reader that is tied to the effects of war. Woolf, like Morrison, indicts the field of psychiatry in her portraits of Holmes and Bradshaw as rabid, devouring men who see Septimus' psychosis as a mere symptom that is divorced from social reality.

If Clarissa longs for the lost sensuality contained in her love for Sally Seton, then Septimus, as her psychological double, resonates as a metaphor for what it means to be a lesbian in a society that denies one's very existence. The status and experience of the lesbian and the wounded soldier are similar. Each are outsiders; each are society's pariah, and each know a truth that is at odds with the very structure of an imperial British Empire.<sup>10</sup> When Clarissa finds out about Septimus' death at her party, her reaction is to remember the very lines from Othello that she had once quoted to describe her passion for Sally:

But this young man who had killed himself--had he plunged holding his treasure? "If it were now to die, 'twere now to be most happy," she had said to herself once, coming down in white. (281)

"Coming down in white" refers to the white frock Clarissa wore to meet Sally Seton in Bourton. The image of Septimus' death and its linguistic reference to Sally reveals the sadness of Clarissa's repressed sexuality. Her party also becomes her defiant act against the Bradshaws and Holmes who will make young men mad. The only way Septimus can assert his selfhood is through death, while Clarissa negotiates her status as an outsider through the planning of a party, where she can at least stand on top of the stairs. She can claim a small vestige of power that will mitigate the invisibility she feels in the present as Mrs. Richard

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<sup>10</sup>Another student in my dissertation workshop pointed out this connection to me.

Dalloway.

Septimus, like Clarissa, remains unseen, and he follows the call of invisible voices. Like Orpheus, he journeys into a symbolic underworld to reclaim the dead, and his consciousness becomes divided precisely because he could not properly mourn the sudden death of his friend Evans. He could not feel and even congratulated himself for this achievement. Septimus wonders, "Why could he see through bodies, see into the future when dogs will become men? It was the heat wave presumably, operating upon a brain made sensitive by eons of evolution. Scientifically speaking, the flesh was melted off the world. His body was macerated until only the nerve fibres were left. It was spread like a veil upon a rock" (MD 102-3). It is the denial of feeling that destroys his ego boundaries and enables him to see through bodies far into the future. Septimus takes on his dead friend's consciousness and feels his own body torn apart, just as Evans was literally ripped asunder by war.

But he himself remained high on his rock, like a drowned sailor on a rock. I leant over the edge of the boat and fell down, he thought. I went under the sea. I have been dead, and yet am not alive, but let me rest still. (104)

By denying his grief, Septimus becomes the drowned sailor, the living dead, the man who has journeyed into the mythic realm of the sea to die along with his friend, and then rise up slowly to speak his fragmented words. Language and writing comes from this communication with the dead--

this Orphic journey deep into memory, where ultimately the dead lie buried, surrounded by melodies that come to the surface of thought in fragmented voices. And what Septimus finds in the realm of the dead is "beauty, that was the truth now. Beauty was everywhere" (105).

The doctors who try to cure Septimus only cause him to descend deeper into the abyss of chaos. When Septimus' wife, Reiza, tells him it is time to see Dr. Bradshaw, her word becomes like the shells falling from planes:

The word "time" split its husk; poured its riches over him; and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane; without his making them hard, white, imperishable words, and flew to attach themselves in an ode to Time; an immortal ode to Time. He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly. Evans sang among the orchids. There they waited till the War was over, and the dead, now Evans himself-- (105)

In this passage Woolf plays upon the meaning of time. The rigid time of Dr. Bradshaw and his sterile prescriptions for health become transformed in Septimus' mind to an immortal ode to Time, where the divisions between past, present and future are blurred, and the dead live in the timeless realm of Thessaly. Through the reference to Thessaly, Woolf evokes a pastoral realm where the dead, in the form of Evans and Clarissa's sister Sylvia, dwell. Their melodies that rise up from behind trees, filtered then through memory and dreams become translated into language. The songs of the dead that intrude into consciousness become

the starting point for writing.<sup>11</sup> In fact, before the war, Septimus left his hometown in Stroud and made his way to London, because he could see no future as a poet there. While Septimus does not succeed as a poet, mainly because his life is cut short by madness and then suicide, through his character Woolf is examining the way in which the dead become timeless in memory.

In an insightful analysis of the above passage, Bonnie Kime Scott sees that the "spontaneous flowing and splitting" ("The Word Split" 379) of the husk of time refers back through image to Clarissa's unexpressed love for Sally in the garden. Scott cites Clarissa's rapturous explanation of how "she could not resist yielding to the charm of a woman" (MD 46), and could understand what it is men must feel. This revelation made "the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores!" (qtd. by Scott 377). While Clarissa's words evoke a life-affirming sensuality, Septimus' language is associated with the destruction of war. The connection of their thoughts through imagery, reinforce Woolf's intention of joining together their consciousnesses as a metaphor for the way loss and creativity, death and life, become translated into

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<sup>11</sup>Helene Cixous maintains that for writers "the dead are our first masters, those who unlock the door for us that opens onto the other side, if only we are willing to bear it" (9).

art.

In her Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Toni Morrison said that "oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence" (World Literature Today 6). She defines the way language is used to maintain power relations: "Ruthless in its policing duties, it has no desire or purpose other than maintaining the free range of its own narcotic narcissism, its own exclusivity and dominance. However moribund, it is not without effect, for it actively thwarts the intellect, stalls conscience, suppresses human potential" (5). Septimus' death by flinging himself from the window, so he could escape the treatments of Dr. Holmes, represents his own inability to speak and the violent measures he must take in order to escape from his constrained silences that are ultimately expressed in fractured utterances. As Septimus sits on the window sill he realizes, "He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun was hot. Only human beings--what did they want" (226)? It is the approach of Holmes at the door that catapults him out of the window. At least he can disappear, become truly invisible and join the mourned dead, rather than submit to the will of these cruel doctors who embody the arrogance of men who will not listen to his seemingly inarticulate words. Even his last words, "I'll give it you!" and his omission of the word to are indicative of the fragmentation of his speech. Septimus' violent death is his defiant action

against the way language has been appropriated by men like Holmes and Bradshaw and used to exclude him, making him an eternal outsider.

In his madness, Septimus perceives a universe where all life is interconnected, but he lacks coherent language to express what he knows. It is precisely this way of viewing the world that makes him invisible to the materialistic doctors who treat him.

But they beckoned; leaves were alive; trees were alive. And the leaves being connected by millions of fibres with his own body, there on the seat, fanned it up and down; when the branch stretched, he, too, made that statement. The sparrows fluttering, rising, and falling in jagged fountains were part of the pattern; the white and blue, barred with black branches. Sounds made harmonies with premeditation; the spaces between them were as significant as the sounds. A child cried. Right far away a horn sounded. All taken together meant the birth of a new religion--(33)

Septimus' ego boundaries expand to become the leaves, the branches, the sparrows, and the very sounds that create harmony from the disparate elements of thought and grieving. His idea of a new religion comes from this perception of unity, of a self that is unbounded and melting into living objects. The normal subject object relations that differentiate self from other are blurred and exploded open; and it is this condition that enables him to hear the voices of the dead who, according to his perceptions, inhabit the same realm as the living.

Septimus laments his fate to feel that "eternal suffering, that eternal loneliness" (37), that evokes the

vast sweep of historical loss invading his consciousness. He feels connected to the many wars that have eternally shattered young men like himself. Clarissa, too, feels "there was an emptiness about the heart of life" (145), and senses a more opaque type of loss as she sits in her room drawing a needle into gentle green folds.: "Fear no more says the heart, committing its burden to some sea, which sighs collectively for all sorrows, and renews, begins, collects, lets fall. And the body alone listens to the passing bee; the wave breaking; the dog barking, far away, barking and barking" (58). The barking of the dog echoes the desire to let all sorrows, renew, collect and fall. It becomes the very sound of loss. While Clarissa's sadness commits itself to the sea where she is not pulled underneath, Septimus is the outcast "who lay, like a drowned sailor on the shore of the world" (140). Still, he, like Clarissa in the solitude of her dressing room, understands "that it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning" (133). In the quiet of his own apartment's sitting room, Septimus has a moment of realization that in both language and imagery links him to Clarissa's sorrow:

Outside the trees dragged their leaves like nets through the depths of the air; the sound of water was in the room and through the waves came the voices of birds singing. Every power poured its treasures on his head, and his hand lay there on the back of the sofa, as she had seen his hand lie when he was bathing, floating, on the top of the waves, while far away on the shore he heard dogs barking and barking far away. Fear no more, says the heart in the body; fear no more. (211)

Clarissa and Septimus are linked together through the image of the dogs barking far away, barking and barking, as if what is lost can be heard only in the sound that is carried from distant, inaccessible places. Septimus floats on top of waves, an image that is associated with Clarissa's recollection of Bourton in the present moment. In this context, the consciousness of Clarissa and Septimus seems interchangeable, and yet ultimately Septimus' moment of floating is replaced by his "falling through the sea, down, down into the flames" (216). It is Clarissa who remains to create a beautiful ornament of a perfectly constructed party from their mutual desire to "fear no more."

Clarissa's party is symbolic of the wish to reclaim the static language used by Holmes and Bradshaw; she strives to find a creative form for Septimus' fragmentation. In her Nobel speech Morrison says "the vitality of language lies in its ability to limn the actual, imagined, and possible lives of its speakers, readers, writers...It arcs toward the place where meaning may lie.[..].Its force, its felicity is in its reach toward the ineffable"(6,7). Woolf uses the metaphor of partygiving to posit a life affirming creativity and its use of language that is in contrast to the dominance of Holmes and Bradshaw and the violent silencing of Septimus.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Mary Ann Caws aptly notes, "Virginia Woolf, like Proust, wrote in part to let each reader read the self; the kind of language she was looking for was already in fragments when she

In Morrison's master's thesis, she comments specifically about the desire of both Clarissa and Septimus to transcend the constraints of time. It is the state of isolation that brings these characters closer to what is eternal and enduring:

She (Woolf) suggests that by isolating oneself into the fragmentary experiences and sensations as they come, the dread of time eating at the edges of life can be avoided. One can live outside time, as it were. Septimus is outside time in a tragic way, and Clarissa struggles, in her rational way for the same condition. (23)

Morrison recognizes how Woolf doubles the characters of Clarissa and Septimus, and specifically comments on Clarissa's rational approach to life that is in contrast to Septimus' tragic way. As the artist character, Clarissa translates Septimus fractured consciousness into a creative form that is symbolized by the party. Septimus' madness is also similar to Pecola's mental breakdown at the end of The Bluest Eye. Although Pecola does not commit suicide, she too is excluded from language, and the image of her wandering alone searching among the garbage for discarded refuse resonates an alienation that joins her to Septimus' frantic fall from the window into Mrs. Filmer's railings. Septimus as the victim of war and Pecola as the victim of racism have no place in a rigidly hierarchal society based

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found it, and helped remake it, but not in ruins. Self-writing takes a language that will accept the partial, having the spunk to abjure the holistic, in fiction or in any other form" (Women of Bloomsbury 8).

on domination. Their inability to claim a self by means other than madness has to do with their failure to speak of what they know. They have both been locked out of language and self-protectively turn to madness where they can hallucinate voices that express in fragmented utterances the truth of their outsider status.

Morrison and Woolf indict the larger imperialist, racist society for their characters' destruction. At the same time, they also create an artist figure in their novels who seeks to translate their double's pain into an enduring creative form. Both Claudia and Clarissa represent the artist's desire to resist the violence of oppressive language. For Claudia, this happens through the actual telling of Pecola's story, while Clarissa is the survivor who at once identifies with Septimus' pain and then affirms the desire to create through her partygiving. In fact, when Clarissa hears about Septimus' death at her party, she sees how "death was defiance. Death was an ability to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre, which mystically evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death" (281).<sup>13</sup>

Clarissa's desire to create through partygiving is related to her wish to ease her present isolation and return

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<sup>13</sup>For a further discussion of this novel's ambiguous ending, see Deborah Guth, "Rituals of Self-Deception: Clarissa Dalloway's Final Moment of Vision" (35-42).

to the once peaceful pastoral garden of Bourton. Partygiving becomes a way of recreating the pleasurable bond she once had with Sally Seton that has been irretrievably lost, since the Sally she finds at her party is pre-occupied with her identity as a proud wife and fertile mother of five boys.

While Morrison's novel, Sula, does not unfold in domestic scenes of shops and drawingrooms, like Mrs. Dalloway, the story of a female friendship foregrounds the "tragic subplot" that centers on the destruction of Shadrack, a shell-shocked war veteran. Just as Septimus prides himself on feeling nothing when he witnesses his friend Evans die in the war, Shadrack, too, cannot let himself experience terror as he sees another soldier's face fly off during World War I.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, Morrison's carnivalesque descriptions of the Peace household, where men are taken into the cellar for spontaneous lovemaking, become representative of female alienation and rebellion from traditional notions of identity.<sup>15</sup> Even Shadrack's celebration of National Suicide Day becomes his way of

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<sup>14</sup>For a further discussion of Shadrack and Septimus, see Eileen Barrett, "Septimus and Shadrack: Woolf and Morrison Envision the Madness of War" (Emerging Perspectives 26-32).

<sup>15</sup>According to Bakhtin, During carnival, "what is suspended first of all is hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it--that is, everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people (including age)" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 123).

"making a place for fear as a way of controlling it" (Sula 14).

Similarly, the idyllic world of Sula and Nel's friendship is posited against the racism that has destroyed both Shadrack and the mythic Bottom community, which has been razed and replaced by a golfcourse. At the same time, Morrison indicts a sexist society that has caused Sula and Nel's bond to be replaced by husbands and male lovers. While the friendship between Sula and Nel does not have the homoeroticism that exists between Clarissa and Sally, its memory will sustain Nel at the end of the novel, when she realizes it was Sula she was missing all those years, and not Jude, the husband who deserted her. As Robert Grant points out, in Sula, "memory repeatedly enacts a creative and creatively healing function." It becomes a way of addressing one who is not there. This becomes particularly evident when both Sula and Nel's last statements are addressed to the "absent other across the breaches of space and time" (Critical Essays 100). In addition, both Nel and Clarissa hope to overcome the isolation of the present moment through the memory of their girlhood friend. These issues will be discussed further in the following chapter.

In Mrs. Dalloway, through the narrative structure of the party, Woolf captures both the chaos of war and plot of female development. She tells the story of woman's ascent

from a pre-oedipal unity and erotic sensuality between female friends to the solitude of marriage and the fractured consciousness caused by war. These earlier, joyful memories give the female artist the inspiration to create a form to capture the reality of modern fragmentation.

By choosing the party as the central activity for Mrs. Dalloway and by having Clarissa survive, while Septimus, the victim of war, takes his life, Woolf ultimately affirms life over death, health over illness, and her own ability to create despite the interruptions of her periodic breakdowns and illnesses. In killing Septimus off, Woolf kills off the ill part of herself that causes her work to be interrupted, postponed, and threatens the quiet she needs with the intrusion of a chaotic, fragmented consciousness.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Woolf has Clarissa defend her wish to have a party to Richard and Peter when she reflects that she gave her parties because "what she liked was simply life" (MD 183). Clarissa's party becomes her own offering "for the sake of offering. Anyhow it was her gift." As the writer of this novel, Woolf becomes the ultimate architect of the party. She is the "hostess-novelist" (Brownstein 281), who shatters the oppressive constraints of the realistic novel, as she creates a fictional form that explores the female artist's internal world.

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<sup>16</sup>Thomas C. Beattie argues that Woolf "worked toward an ending that would celebrate sanity over insanity, life over death, Clarissa over Septimus" (529).

## Sula

In a recent Paris Review interview, Toni Morrison specifically distinguishes Sula from Virginia Woolf's "covert" lesbian novels. Morrison stresses that she wanted to write a novel about female friendship, especially since women aren't supposed to like each other much, and bonds between women are always considered secondary to the primary relationship of a man and a woman. In writing Sula, Morrison specifically aims to subvert the idea that female friends were useful for those times "when the man was not there" (108). Instead, she says: "We had to be taught to like one another. Ms. Magazine was founded on the premise that we really have to stop complaining about one another, hating, fighting one another and joining men in their condemnation of ourselves--a typical example of what dominated people do." Because Morrison sees that the dislike of women by women is part of a larger internalized hatred that constitutes the psyches of oppressed people, her intention in writing Sula is to disrupt the state of self-hatred that has kept women separate from one another:

When much of the literature was like that--when you read about women together (not lesbians, or those who have formed long relationships that are covertly lesbian, like in Virginia Woolf's work), it is an overtly male view of females together. They are usually male dominated--like some of Henry James's characters--or the women are talking about men, like Jane Austen's girlfriends...talking about who got married, and how to get married and are you going to lose him...To have heterosexual women who are friends,

who are talking only about themselves to each other, seemed to me a very radical thing when Sula was published in 1971. (PR 108)

Just as Woolf sought to subvert the nineteenth-century Austen novel with its plot that always ends in marriage, Morrison too fundamentally emphasizes the importance of female friendship rather than the primacy of heterosexual relationships. However, her need to separate herself from Woolf's "lesbian novels." reveals how dangerous it must have felt for her to write about female bonding. Given societal attitudes and taboos, she too ran the risk of being seen as writing a lesbian novel.

In her Paris Review interview, I believe her reference to Woolf's novels must specifically refer to Mrs. Dalloway, since Clarissa and Sally's exquisite kiss is an explicit description of the erotic bond between them, and Clarissa's memories of Sally at Bourton are linked to the present moment in London by more than thirty years. Clarissa and Sally's bond certainly qualify as a "long relationship." My concern, however, in this chapter, is not with whether or not Sula is a lesbian novel, but rather with the importance of female bonding in both Woolf's and Morrison's work, and its central connection to their creative vision.

Both Morrison and Woolf are concerned with the developmental plot of girls whose identification with one another is lost to the possessiveness of heterosexual relationships. It is also important to note that despite

the eroticism of their early bond, when Clarissa and Sally finally meet at the party, they talk mainly about men. Sally cheerfully tells Clarissa about her five boys and her wealthy landowning husband. The primacy of the bond between these women belongs irretrievably in the past. Of course, Nel and Sula encounter a similar fate. In fact, Morrison identifies Sula's theme "as what happens when a relationship between women is not taken seriously" (Russel 44). In doubling Sula and Nel, Morrison creates a single consciousness that strives to incorporate the opposite "other," and the ultimate failure of their friendship is one of the tragedies of the novel.

In Sula, I wanted to throw that relationship into relief. There is such a thing as 'the other'...the friend that is the other, and women must hang on to that. In the last half of the book, Sula is gone. When Nel misses her, we miss her. What was valued was their friendship...it was spiritual, of first order priority; the 'other I.' (44)

If Nel accepts the traditional values of the community, and Sula is the subversive adventurer, then as opposites their fusion and acceptance of one another represents a state of spiritual unity that is broken by their separation. Moreover, their spiritual unity defines a black female aesthetic that is central to Morrison's creative vision. In her essay, "Speaking Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition," Mae Gwendolyn Henderson sheds further light on Morrison's aesthetic when she writes about the specific dialogic quality of black

women's writing. Drawing upon Bakhtin's notions of dialogism and consciousness, Henderson stresses the multiplicity of self in process as black women emphasize rather than repress the 'other' found in the self:

What is at once characteristic and suggestive about black women's writing is its interlocutory, or dialogic, character, reflecting not only a relationship with the "other(s)", but an internal dialogue with the plural aspects of self that constitute the matrix of black female subjectivity. The interlocutory character of black women's writing is, thus, not only a consequence of a dialogic relationship with an imaginary or "generalized Other," but a dialogue with the aspects of "otherness" within the self. (Reading Black, Reading Feminist 118)

While Sula constitutes Nel's other that is outside of her, by doubling these characters and suggesting that they are in fact one, Morrison then creates a metaphor for "aspects of 'otherness' within the self. Morrison defines Sula and Nel as "those two women--that too is us, those two desires, to have your adventure and safety. So I just cut it up" (Southern Review 577). Both Sula's rebelliousness and Nel's acquiescence to the values of the community are aspects of self that must be acknowledged; and this dialogic process defines the "seamless" unity of Morrison's creative vision. At the same time, this "spiritual, first order priority," Morrison speaks of represents the fertile, creative nature of the bond between two women. It is therefore not surprising that the rupture of Sula and Nel's friendship by their entry into adult heterosexuality results in the inner death of Nel and the actual death of Sula.

In an interview with Robert Stepto, Morrison criticizes Nel's conventionality because it circumscribes her ability for self-examination: "So that living totally by the law and surrendering completely to it without questioning anything sometimes makes it impossible to know what questions she's asking" (Amistad Literary Series 381). Sula, on the other hand, "examines herself, she is experimental with herself, she's perfectly willing to think the unthinkable thing and so on" (382). In criticizing Nel's wish to find safety by selflessly fusing with a man, Morrison emphasizes the artist's need to experiment, to think and do the outrageous, which must manifest itself in a radical rejection of dominant, hegemonic values. Even as Morrison unifies the two opposing viewpoints of Nel and Sula into characters that represent one consciousness, she simultaneously subverts Nel's values, regarding them as ways of being in the world that will ultimately stifle the artist.

Sula, as the outsider outlaw, is also Morrison's response to the black literature about men that valorizes the man in flight, "that going from town to town or place to place or looking out and over and beyond and changing and so on" (391-2). Morrison identifies this as one of the major themes of black male writers, and sees that while in sociological terms, this characteristic may be seen as one of the weaknesses of black men, on the contrary, "in the process of finding, they are also making themselves" (392).

Sula becomes the character who dares to pick up and leave, as she defies traditional gender roles and instead acts in ways that are usually associated with men. Morrison says:

She picks up a man, drops a man, the same way a man picks up a woman, drops a woman. And that's her thing. She's masculine in that sense. She's adventuresome, she trusts herself, she's not scared, she really ain't scared. And she is curious and will leave and try anything. So that quality of masculinity--and I mean this in the pure sense--in a woman at that time is outrage, total outrage. She can't get away with that--unless she were in this sort of strange environment, this alien environment--for the normal--which would be the theater world in which you realize, the people are living, even there by laws. (392)

It is this sense of adventure that Morrison associates with the successful black female artist, women such as Billie Holiday and Bessie Smith who "were outside of that little community value thing" (393). In Sula, flight is power and freedom from the everyday routine that a character such as Nel embraces. In contrast, both Sula and Shadrack are the characters who stand outside of the community. Shadrack has taken his flight into war and come home destroyed, and Sula's sense of flight manifests itself in the ease in which she leaves and returns to Medallion, and more importantly, in the multiple lovers she collects and discards.

In addition, despite their differences in gender, Shadrack and Sula very closely mirror each other's alienation. In fact, Morrison says: "With Shadrack, I just

needed, wanted, a form of madness that was clear and compact to bounce off of Sula's strangeness...They're both eccentrics, outside the law, except that Shadrack's madness is very organized" (338). This observation aptly describes Septimus Warren Smith as well. Moreover, Morrison creates a carnivalesque setting that is theatrical in its use of "the strange" and the "mad." As one consciousness Shadrack and Sula became a type of female grotesque that represents the isolation of the woman artist. In addition, the uncanniness that surrounds the Peace family, from their lost legs and sudden deaths, is indicative of, as Mary Russo argues in The Female Grotesque, a "generalized alienation from the world which has become strange" (9).<sup>1</sup> Both Morrison's carnivalesque world and Woolf's use of the party represent alienation and rebellion against hierarchical structures of authority.

By drawing on an oral and folk tradition, Morrison creates a black community in the mythic bottom that will be replaced by golf courses and white greed. The black community is alienated from the racist whites, and Sula and Shadrack, are, in turn, further cut off from their own community. They become metaphoric for those outrageous

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<sup>1</sup>Susan Willis points out that Morrison often creates alternative social worlds where "the space created by otherness permits a reversal of domination and transforms what was once perceived from without as 'other' into the explosive image of a utopian mode. These utopian households in Morrison's fiction often consist of three women, as in the case of the Peace family and the three prostitutes in The Bluest Eye (Specifying 105-6).

artists who are tragic in that they have found no proper artistic form for their restlessness. Shadrack, of course, becomes specifically emblematic of the destructiveness of war and the fragmentation that is a causal result of racism.

Just as the separation of Nel and Sula can be read as the fracturing of the female imagination from its former state of unity, Shadrack's madness is a self-protective flight from the white supremacist society. With Nel and Sula, Morrison criticizes sexism and the loss that results when heterosexual relations are privileged over female friendship; and in Shadrack's plight, Morrison is concerned with the insidious, destructive nature of racism that is linked to war.

While many African-Americans hoped that participating in World War I and willingly giving their lives for their country would lead to economic and social equality, they soon learned this would not be the case. Black soldiers were segregated from whites, and at home, violent acts of lynching continued unabated. In 1918, seventy-eight African-Americans were reported lynched across America. Returning home from the war, African-American veterans found race riots in dozens of cities and counties, lynchings, a resurgence of the Klu Klux Klan, and a severe shortage of jobs (Levering Lewis 3-24). Shadrack's shell-shock becomes metaphoric for the way African-American soldiers were ravaged by the war both abroad and at home. Similarly,

Septimus' fractured consciousness represents the total displacement caused by war. Both Septimus and Shadrack go off to war as young men with their futures ahead of them; yet they return, remembering only the past atrocities they witnessed in war. Left in a perpetual state of exile and without a real home, they can find comfort only in madness.

In Sula, loss and creativity is examined by Morrison in a racial and gendered discourse that is distinguished by multiple doubling and voicing that portray a self in internal dialogue with the 'other' of self and the 'other' as reflected in society. These voices come together as one self, as Morrison explores the internal world of the black female artist.

#### **Female Bonding and Creativity**

From the very beginning of her childhood, Nel had no chance to develop an imagination. Under her mother, Helene's, guidance, "the girl became obedient and polite. Any enthusiasms that little Nel showed were calmed by the mother until she drove her daughter's imagination underground" (Sula 18). But if Nel is given no opportunity to rebel, she is certainly exposed to the insidiousness of racism when she accompanies Helene, who wants to pay her respects to an equally protective yet dying grandmother; and yet before several generations of women come together in one house, Nel sees her mother humiliated by the white conductor. He addresses Helene as gal when she mistakenly

enters the white car. Instead of getting angry, Helene's way of dealing with her fear that manifests in her trembling hands is to believe that somehow she must be the one who is flawed. She, like Pecola and Pauline Breedlove before her, internalizes the hatred she finds manifested in the environment.

Knowing how brutal white racists can be, Helene becomes submissive and smiles at the conductor: "Like a street pup that wags its tail at the very doorjamb of the butcher shop he has been kicked away from only moments before, Helene smiles" (21). It was an action that Nel could not then or even later understand, an action that provoked an intense derisive glare from the black soldiers on the train who reject Helene's self-hating action. Nel realizes that if her mother really was custard inside, then perhaps she was too; and in that moment, Nel determines to have a separate life from her mother, even if her imagination has been driven underground.

Upon leaving the train, Nel meets the woman who is the opposite of her mother, that is, her grandmother, the person Helene was snatched away from as a little girl, the "Creole whore," who smells good and feels soft as she greets Nel in a canary-yellow dress. The bird-like dress suggests flight from conventionality, and even if their meeting is brief, Nel is exposed to a world that is in contrast to the circumscribed one her mother has forced on her. The death

of Helen's grandmother and Nel's great-grandmother becomes symbolic of a submissive mode of behavior, adopted in response to the threat of white violence, that should die off. In addition, Morrison exposes how the desire to adopt white middle class values that are reflected, for example, in the wish to "look white" only results in further racial degradation.

Nel's journey leaves her with a new feeling. She sees: I'm me. I'm not their daughter. I'm not Nel. I'm me" (28); and it is precisely this realization that prepares Nel for her friendship with Sula, the younger version of her sensual Creole grandmother, who dares to reject all conventionality. Once Nel meets Sula, she no longer wants to pull her nose, as her mother had instructed. Instead she "slid the clothespin under the blankets as soon as she got in the bed, and although there was still the hateful hot comb to suffer through each Saturday evening, its consequences--smooth hair--no longer interested her" (55). Sula's wooly, noisy house filled with man-loving women is the opposite from Nel's world, and together, the friendship between Nel and Sula creates a complementarity that enables each one of them to grow. Their friendship becomes metaphoric for a unified female imagination that is defined by the "noon dreams" where they meet in an effort to ease their loneliness.

Even their individual dreams are opposite and

contrasting. Nel's dreams are similar to Pauline Breedlove's longing for a presence, an invisible, ethereal man who will take her away from the bleakness surrounding her.

When Nel, an only child, sat on the steps of her mother's incredibly orderly house, feeling the neatness pointing at her back, she studied the poplars and fell easily into a posture of herself lying on a flowered bed, tangled in her own hair, waiting for some fiery prince. He approached but never quite arrived. But always, watching the dream along with her, were some smiling sympathetic eyes. Someone as interested as she herself in the flow of her imagined hair, the thickness of the mattress of flowers, the voile sleeves that closed below her elbows in gold-threaded cuffs. (51)

At the same time as Nel dreams of a prince who approaches but never arrives, she also sees "smiling sympathetic eyes" who can perceive her life. The friend who can understand her is accessible and near, while the princely man never makes it there to end her loneliness. Even in Nel's dreams, she longs for a man and simultaneously acknowledges his limitations and the failure inherent in that desire, since he always remains faraway, while the friend who is interested in the details of her life is in the foreground of her imagination. Nel's erotic fantasy of lying on a flowered bed, sensuously tangled in her own hair remains unfulfilled by the man. In fact, she stays tangled in herself since he never arrives, a state of being that prepares her for the more satisfying friend who will appreciate the thickness of the mattress and her beautifully tailored sleeves.

While Nel dreams of a man and a vague someone who does come near, Sula escapes from the noise and disorder of her house by spending hours in an attic "behind a roll of linoleum galloping through her own mind on a gray-and-white horse tasting sugar and smelling roses in full view of a someone who shared both the taste and the speed" (52). Sula is in flight, galloping deep inside her imagination. Both girls desire a someone who can watch and nurture their own minds. The fusion of their contrasting personalities into a greater friendship eases the alienation that haunts their "noon dreams," the isolation that comes with being both female and black.

So when they met, first in those chocolate halls and next through the ropes of the swing, they felt the ease and comfort of old friends. Because each had discovered years before that they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them, they had set about creating something else to be. Their meeting was fortunate, for it let them use each other to grow on. (52).

Their friendship becomes, as Elizabeth Abel argues, "both the vehicle and product of self-knowledge, the uniquely valuable and rigorous relationship" (Signs 429). Morrison disrupts the accustomed idea that friends "lean on each other," by having them instead, "using each other to grow on." Their friendship, is in itself, subversive. It becomes the one place where Sula and Nel find an emotional intimacy. This closeness certainly does not exist in the relationships they form with men as they grow older; and as

girls, the bonds with their parents, particularly their mothers, are also distant and strained: "Daughters of distant mothers and incomprehensible fathers (Sula's because he was dead; Nel's because he wasn't), they found in each other's eyes the intimacy they were looking for" (52). Their friendship becomes an alternative to an unsatisfactory mother/daughter bond as well as future heterosexual relations, relations that bring little intimacy and only disrupt the complementary friendship that helps each one to discover a way of being in the world, especially since Sula and Nel reinforce the sense in one another that "there was something else to be" besides white and male.

As one consciousness, "Nel seemed stronger and more consistent than Sula, who could hardly be counted on to sustain any emotion for more than three minutes" (55). As a metaphor for a unified creative imagination, Nel is stability and consistency, while Sula is the daring, impetuous adventurer. Morrison further clarifies her intentions in doubling Nel and Sula when she says in an interview with Claudia Tate that black women's writing differs specifically from white women's in that "aggression is not as new to black women as it is to white women. Black women seem able to combine the nest and the adventure. They don't see conflicts in certain areas as do white women. They are both safe harbor and ship; they are both inn and trail. We, black women, do both. We don't find these

places, these roles, mutually exclusive" (122). As one character, Nel and Sula are able to embody both "nest and adventure," and "inn and trail."

Moreover, Morrison's comments about white women's writing, certainly apply to Woolf's character, Clarissa Dalloway, who as a female artist figure, cannot combine the safety of marriage with a life outside of partygiving. Her world is solely relegated to the domestic.<sup>2</sup> As Morrison says, "White women often find if they leave their husbands and go out into the world, it's an extraordinary event. If they've settled for the benefits of housewifery that preclude a career, then it's marriage or a career for them, not both, not and" (122-3). These observations draw attention to the vast cultural differences that separate Woolf and Morrison as they both write novels that are concerned with the developmental plot of girls voyaging into young womanhood. Morrison's words are relevant to Rachel Vinrace's dilemma, since Rachel knew all too well that marriage would definitely preclude having a self-identity that was separate from her husband. He would be the artist, and she the angelic helpmate. However, both Morrison and Woolf write about the ways in which the brutality of heterosexual romantic love can proscribe the female artist. Morrison also says:

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<sup>2</sup>For a further discussion of these issues, see Morrison's essay, "What the Black Woman Thinks About Women's Lib" (14-15, 63-66).

There's a male/female thing that's also different in the works of black and white women writers, and this difference is good. There's a special kind of violence in writings by black women--not bloody violence, but violence nonetheless. Love, in the Western notion, is full of possession, distortion, and corruption. It's a slaughter without the blood. (123)

These comments highlight how Morrison tends to write realistically about the violence of romantic love, while Woolf, who was also pre-occupied with this theme, often encoded her message into the text. As I discussed in the first two chapters, this is particularly evident in the ways in which Woolf and Morrison portray both sexual abuse in the family and the emotional violence between men and women who are supposedly in love. It is worth noting that in Mrs. Dalloway, Peter Walsh, the prototypical "romantic," is portrayed as a colonialist clerk who likes to play with his knife. The slaughter of romantic love often occurs in scenes that exist outside of the text. We can only wonder what fate waits Walsh's young fiancee in India. Or we are left to imagine what has happened to Reiza Warren Smith once Septimus is dead. Her marriage was marked by a bleak loneliness, an isolation where there was no one to hear her muted realization that "to love makes one solitary" (Mrs. Dalloway 33). She just as silently and abruptly leaves the pages of the novel once Septimus is no longer there; and perhaps even more obvious is Clarissa's choice of a loveless marriage that is a safe alternative to Peter's possessive, romantic love.

Morrison, on the other hand, attacks Western notions of love with scenes of brutality that include incest and ugly scenes of domestic quarreling and empty lovemaking in The Bluest Eye; and in Sula there is the haunting image of Eva's beautiful one leg that is her reminder of what measures a poor, single mother who has been deserted by her husband will have to take to feed her family. It also serves to painfully undercut the playful sexuality so characteristic of the Peace women. Still, both Morrison and Woolf frame their novels about female bonding with the theme of war, a leitmotif that contrasts the innocence of girlhood and its disruption by heterosexual relations with the larger racist and imperialist outbreaks of mass destruction. In Sula, this becomes particularly evident in the scene in which Chicken Little dies.

This scene starts off with a description of a sensual, pastoral innocence between the two girls: "Sula lifted her head and joined Nel in the grass play. In concert, without ever meeting with each other's eyes, they stroked the blades up and down, up and down. Nel found a thick twig and with her thumbnail, pulled away its bark until it was stripped to a smooth, creamy innocence" (58). Their erotic play with leaves and twigs is soon interrupted by Chicken Little, the younger boy who wants to be a part of their fun; and his accidental drowning by Sula can be read as the privileging of their adolescent female bonding over the intrusion of the

male. Both Nel and Sula want to kill off the male who will eventually rupture their Edenic playfulness; however, once Sula realizes that Chicken Little is dead, that his small body has sunk beneath water and will no longer bob up with laughter, she is forced to face her other double, Shadrack, the wounded war victim whom both girls fear has observed the drowning. •

In the moment that they meet, it is Shadrack, in his mad and fragmented state, who coherently understands Sula's fright. Sula does not have to speak; there is no need to formulate a question, because Shadrack "was smiling, a great smile, heavy with lust and time to come. He nodded his head as though answering a question, and said in a pleasant conversational tone, a tone of cooled butter, "Always" (62). The half-uttered word, "always," lets Sula know that forever, for eternity, Shadrack will seek to protect her, since he understands her. The wisdom of the shell-shocked war victim borders their own terrible and new found knowledge of death. And just as war and racism has shattered Shadrack's youth, Sula and Nel will soon lose each other too. Unfortunately, Chicken Little becomes the victim of their wish to hold on to the primacy of their friendship despite the inevitability of growing into young womanhood with its greater emphasis on heterosexuality. In this way, Morrison engages in a discourse against both racism and sexism.

In addition, Chicken Little's drowning occurs right after Sula overhears her mother tell a friend that she may love Sula, but that doesn't mean she likes her. Sula seeks her friend to heal the rejection she feels from her mother. Nel is also receptive to Sula's friendship after she decides to separate herself from this "custard-like" woman, the mother who bows like a submissive puppy to the racist conductor. Nel wants to chart a new identity for herself. Both girls seek each other as a haven from the distance they now feel with their own mothers.

According to Marianne Hirsch, "Although the novel is clearly not written from the perspective of the mother, its generational structure allows it to serve as an emblem for the relation of an emerging feminism (new generation of women), to the maternal (oral tradition of the past)" (Reading Black, Reading Feminist 418). While I agree with Hirsch that Sula's and Nel's friendship can be seen as a feminist alternative, a female centered place that can heal the rupture with their mothers and the dissatisfaction they see with the way the older women around them express their sexuality with men, I don't believe Morrison is ever positing an emerging feminism against maternal oral traditions. Instead, Morrison shows how an internalized racism can cause Helene to act like an acquiescent pup. She portrays how economic hardships drive Eva to cut off her leg, and poverty makes it impossible for either Hannah or

Eva to enjoy childrearing. Morrison depicts the difficult reality of childrearing in the powerful scene in which Hannah has to stuff her fingers inside her baby boy in order to get the pebble out of his bowels and save his life. By the time her son has grown and returned from the war a drug addict, Hannah's decision to kill Plum by setting him on fire is the outcome of her rage against a world with its wars that make adult men into babies who want to crawl back into their mother's womb.

Nel and Sula's friendship is their defiant act against the very world their mothers have inherited and passed down to them. Their friendship allows them to recreate the pre-oedipal unity they once had with their mothers, a unity which, as Nancy Chodorow points out, is not replicated for women in their sexual relations with men (The Reproduction of Mothering 194). Chicken Little's drowning represents the girls' wish to rewrite the developmental plot of women, to bury the encroaching adult emphasis on heterosexual relations as opposed to female friendship deep within the water, in that unconscious, timeless realm.

Water is also a leitmotif that runs through the novel, particularly as it defines Sula's character. As Mae Gwendolyn Henderson points out: "Etymologically, Sula's name is derived from the designation of a genus of seabird, again an image associated with a dual environment--aquatic and Ariel. These contrasts suggestively position Sula at the

crossroads or intersection of life and death, land and sea, earth and air. Thus both the mark and the designation are particularly appropriate for the black woman as one situated within two social domains (black and female) and, as such, implicated in both a racial and gendered discourse" (Reading Black 129). The mark Henderson refers to is Sula's birthmark, the "tadpole" above her eye that is associated with water and the multiplicity of identity. Sula's self is, as Deborah McDowell argues, "multiple, fluid, relational, and in a perpetual process of becoming" (Critical Essays 81). Images of water in both Woolf and Morrison define the artist's internal world and characterize the artist's self-identity as one which is in process. Despite the obvious class differences between them, nonetheless, Sula, like Clarissa Dalloway, cannot say she was "this, or that."<sup>3</sup> Instead they are both constantly becoming. Images of water also define their own outsider status that is in opposition to a linear, rational means of looking at the world.

Nonetheless, Nel, unlike Sula, has a more static self-identity. When she has their friendship to "grow-on," she is the stable force that balances out Sula's impetuosity that results in such actions as cutting off a piece of her finger in order to scare away the racist white boys. But

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<sup>3</sup>As Clarissa walks down Bond Street, she muses, "she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that" (11).

once Nel is separated from Sula and becomes Jude's wife, she reveals herself as Helene's daughter whose imagination has truly been driven underground. Nel marries with the desire to become "one Jude" (83). Even Ajax notices how "her parents had succeeded in rubbing down to a dull glow any sparkle or splutter she had. Only with Sula did that quality have free reign but their friendship was so close they themselves had difficulty distinguishing one's thoughts from the other's" (83).

Sula, on the other hand, is both water and bird; fluid and in-flight, forever unbounded and alienated from those around her. She leaves when Nel is married to Jude and returns ten years later for a meeting with Nel that is "thick with birds" (85), since her unexpected arrival back to Medallion was "accompanied by a plague of robins" (89).

As they grow away from their girlhoods, Sula and Nel are forced to recognize that they are not one and the same consciousness. They are indeed separate; and yet without their friendship to complement each other, they remain incomplete and fragmented. Sula seeks what is considered a rebellious sexuality with men, and Nel becomes the victim of her own unsuccessful desire to be one Jude. Their incompleteness without each other is also expressed in the fractured consciousness of Shadrack, since he mirrors Sula's state of mind, and at the same time, he is linked to Nel at the end of the novel when they are joined together by

simultaneous memories of Sula, even though they walk away from each other in opposite directions.

#### An Artist With No Art Form

As Hortense Spillers so aptly notes, "Sula is specifically circumscribed by the lack of an explicit tradition of imagination or aesthetic work, and not by the evil force of "white" society, or the absence of a man, or even the presence of a mean one" (Amistad 212). In this novel, Morrison portrays the black, female artist figure as an urgently rebellious figure. Her outlawry, as Spillers argues, "may not be the best kind, but that she has the will toward itself is the stunning idea. This project in liberation paradoxically, has no particular dimension in time, yet it is for all time" (239). By specifically describing Sula as an artist who has no art form, Morrison deconstructs the conditions that are necessary for the black, female artist to find a form.<sup>4</sup>

In a way, her strangeness, her naivete, her craving for the other half of the equation was the consequence of an idle imagination. Had she paints, or clay, or knew the discipline of the dance, or strings; had she anything to engage her tremendous curiosity and her gift for metaphor, she might have exchanged the restless and pre-occupation for whim for an activity that provided her with all she yearned for. And like any artist with no art form she became dangerous. (120-1)

An artist needs, as Woolf posits in A Room of One's

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<sup>4</sup>For a further discussion of this, see Renita Weems, "'Artists Without Art Form': A Look at One Black Woman's World of Unrevered Black Women" (48-58).

Own, a tradition to look back on, a room with a lock so no one can tell her what to write or think, and enough money so she can be secure enough to create art. Sula is the ultimate outsider; and in her isolation she chooses an experimental life that is a response to her mother's harsh words and Chicken Little's sudden death. " The first experience, taught her there was no other that you could count on; the second that there was no self to count on either. She had no center, no speck around which to grow" (118-9). Without a center, Sula is chaos, a void that contains the semiotic, as she longs to return to a primal unity that was recreated in her friendship with Nel.

In fact, Sula does not understand why her short-lived affair with Jude had to end her friendship with Nel, since they had always shared everything before. If the adult Nel becomes the spider dangling in dark places, hanging by her "own spittle" (120) because she is finally worn down like all the other women in the community, then Sula is the one ready to take the "free fall," to invent her life with wings. Sula does not want to be like the women she sees around her, wives who "had folded themselves into starched coffins...Those without men were like sour-tipped needles featuring one constant empty eye. Those with men had the sweetness sucked from their breath by ovens and steam kettles" (122). Instead, Sula not only echoes the theme of flight from African-American folk tales, but she becomes

like the nightingale of the Philomela Procene myth who longs to speak of the rape and destruction she sees all around her.

Despite the fact that her arrival and departure from Medallion is bordered by birds, we know very little about her ten year absence from the bottom, except that she went to college and travelled around to different cities, until she was tired of seeing the same sweat, the same poverty, and the "same language of love" (120) everywhere she went. As migrant and wanderer, she is a stranger in the land, an exile who remains on the periphery of all boundaries. In her travels, Sula "had been looking all along for a friend, and it took her a while to discover that a lover was not a comrade and could never be--for a woman. And that no one would ever be that version of herself which she sought to reach out to and touch with an ungloved hand" (121). It becomes evident to Sula that she cannot find the unity she had with Nel in any of her lovers. Instead sex with men becomes a way of reconnecting to the silences inside herself, a way to hear the muted cry of the nightingale who sings in tongueless phrases. She is forced to face her own isolation, since frequent sex fulfilled her yearning to feel deep sorrow.

And there was utmost irony and outrage in lying under someone, in a position of surrender, feeling her own abiding strength and limitless power. But the cluster did break, fall apart, and in her panic to hold it together she leaped from the edge into soundlessness and went down howling, howling

in a stinging awareness of the endings of things: an eye of sorrow in the midst of all that hurricane rage of joy. There, in the center of that silence was not eternity but the death of time and a loneliness so profound the world itself had no meaning. For loneliness assumed the absence of other people, and the solitude she faced in that desperate terrain had never admitted the possibility of other people. (123)

Sula's howl represents her desire to disrupt the exclusive symbolic order of language (Henderson 136), to leap into silence that circumscribes her alienation, since Sula finds herself outside of all communities.<sup>5</sup> After sex, Sula can face the privacy of her emotions; intimacy with men brings her into the truth of her solitude, and it is only then that she can join herself "in matchless harmony" (123). Since Sula has no art form where she can direct her energies, she feels her creativity in that post-coital moment when the starkness of her isolation is where she can finally hear all that has been muted and unexpressed. The way Sula expresses her sexuality becomes part of a defiant wish to repair the destruction caused by an oppressive language that has left her out. Just as Morrison describes creative language as one that "arcs toward the place where meaning may lie," (WLT 6), as it reaches "toward the ineffable" (7), Sula's new-found harmony that is born from the solitude of intimacy is her creative act to step into that nameless place where meaning may lie.

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<sup>5</sup>For a further discussion of semiotic and symbolic language, see Julia Kristeva, Revolution in Poetic Language.

Sula dares to transgress all boundaries. Upon returning to Medallion she lets Eva know that she doesn't intend to get married and have a baby. She says, "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself" (92).<sup>6</sup> But Sula dies shortly after she too falls victim to the possessive wish to keep a man around. Despite "the high silence of orgasm" (130) with Ajax, her real pleasure was that he talked to her and seemed to want to know her. Yet once Ajax senses Sula's uncharacteristic longing to make a home with him, he is the man in-flight, gone just as easily as he arrived, and Sula becomes the grounded nightingale who yearns for the uninterrupted sleep of death.

As Sula lies dying, it is Nel she thinks of, remembering that Nel had told her as a little girl that unlike the necks of her little paper dolls, her own neck would not fall off. But Nel's childlike wisdom was wrong. Sula realizes, "I did not hold my head stiff enough when I met him and so I lost it just like the dolls" (136). The adult Nel who visits Sula on her death-bed continues to give advice, telling Sula she has no right to act like a man: "You can't do it all. You a woman and a colored woman at that. You can't act like a man. You can't be walking round all independent-like, doing whatever you like, taking what you want, leaving what you don't" (142).

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<sup>6</sup>Barbara Christian notes that "Sula has the distinction of being herself in a community that believes that self-hood can only be selfishness" (Black Women Novelists 167).

Sula's death proves how difficult it is for a black female artist to dare to rebel and survive. Like the Bottom community that had taken Sula in despite their criticisms of her, only to be replaced by a manicured golf course, Sula's death also echoes the larger death of the mythic black community which was tricked into taking bottom land by a racist farmer that was really valley land, only to lose all their land to the greed of capitalist expansion. Sula's death emphasizes the slow, spiritual death of the women in the community, women like Nel whose life is a starched blouse waiting to be buried in a dull-colored coffin. In fact, Sula tells Nel that every colored woman in the country is dying "just like me. But the difference is they dying like a stump. Me, I'm going down like one of those red-woods. I sure did live in this world" (143). Sula dies alone, separate and cut-off from Nel, who can only voice her disapproval of Sula's life choices. As Nel leaves her, Sula has only the memory of their girlhood friendship, that time long ago when they were "two throats and one eye" (147) with no price; and after she is dead, Sula has one last conscious thought, which is her wish to tell Nel that dying wasn't so bad after all.

But as the pain invades Sula's body, she is more than ever before sharply depicted as being both bird and water. The process of dying is distinguished by a fluttering of doves inside her body, as she falls past dream and memory

into the darkness of water. The image of Sula floating down tunnels and walls where she can finally curl into water is eerily similar to Rachel Vinrace's delirious condition as she dies:

It was as though for the first time she was completely alone--where she had always wanted to be--free of the possibility of distraction. It would be here, only here, held by this blind window high above the elm tree, that she might draw her legs up to her chest, close her eyes, put her thumb in her mouth and float over and down the tunnels, just missing the dark walls, down, down, until she met a rain scent and would know the water was near, and she would curl into its heavy softness and it would envelop her, carry and wash her tired flesh always. Always, who said that? she tried hard to think. Who was it that had promised her a sleep of water always. The effort to recall was too great; it loosened a knot in her chest that turned her thoughts to pain. (148-9)

Like Sula, the dying Rachel was "isolated and alone with her body" (VO 330). When she shuts her eyes, as the fever moves through her, she sees a mythic woman playing cards, "only she sat now in a tunnel under a river, and the light stood in a little archway in the wall above her" (331). Rachel's death is described as the process by which "she fell into a deep pool of sticky water, which eventually closed over her head. She saw nothing and heard nothing but a faint booming sound of the sea rolling over her head. While all her tormentors thought that she was dead, she was not dead, but curled up at the bottom of the sea" (341). While Sula dies thinking of Nel and Shadrack, Rachel is completely alone, her fiance and aunt, those people closest to her, become identified as vague and amorphous tormentors,

she can find refuge from only in death. And yet Sula's death is her escape from a white supremacist society that demands black women's slow and agonizing death, a society that will literally bury alive black men and women in a tunnel below the earth when they dare to protest against the racist policies that have denied them work.

Just as Rachel's death can be interpreted as the result of her wish to be reunited with her lost mother, Sula puts her thumb in her mouth as she travels down tunnels into rain scented water, an image that suggests birth and a return to the mother. If Rachel chooses death over marriage, and Sula dies once she becomes emotionally attached to a man, then both Woolf and Morrison link their characters' deaths to the implicit destructiveness inherent in women's sexual relations with men. In addition, as artist figures who lack an aesthetic tradition, it seems only natural that both Sula and Rachel sink almost gladly into death.

As Sula dies, Morrison's intention to double her character with Shadrack becomes most evident, since she dies repeating Shadrack's promise of "always," wondering "who was it that had promised her a sleep of water always" (149). The primary story of Nel's and Sula's friendship is framed by the story of Shadrack that begins and ends the novel. Shadrack's character functions not only to link a discourse against sexism with one against racism as well, but he also mirrors how historical loss is reflected in an individual

life. Sula's vague memory of him indicates that as she dies, she too, realizes that her death is emblematic of the many unrecorded deaths of black women, and most importantly, her death is the outcome of an intense frustration that occurs when a female artist does not indeed find an appropriate form for her creativity.

When Shadrack finds Sula dead, he remembers how "he had said "'always' to convince her, assure her of permanency" (157), and yet the truth is that there was "no always at all." Instead, there was just "another dying away of someone whose face he knew." In the first few pages of the novel, Morrison describes Shadrack's experience in the war, when he witnessed the faces flying off of soldiers hit by shells. Sula's dead face becomes one with those he saw in war, those nameless men, buried beneath earth, and yet alive in Shadrack's memories. To Shadrack, Sula becomes just another casualty of the war.

And Shadrack, like Septimus Warren Smith, represents a consciousness torn apart by the larger, historical implications of war that are manifested in a single life. Like Septimus, Shadrack is tormented by the memories of war. Both of them entered World War I as youthful men with a large span of future ahead of them, only to return with a past they cannot bear to remember. For Shadrack, "the drunk times were becoming deeper, but more seldom. It was as though he no longer needed to drink to forget whatever it

was he could not remember. Now he could not remember that he had forgotten anything" (155). Both Shadrack and Septimus need to numb themselves, to erase and deny all grief, and as a result they glide easily into a madness that succeeds in ordering the chaos they see all around them. Shadrack's call for a yearly National Suicide Day, that immediately follows Sula's death, results in the actual death of many in the community when they decide to protest against the company that promised them work on a tunnel and then denied it to them. Just as the racist farmer in the beginning of the novel tricked the slave into accepting inferior land, at the close of the novel, the capitalist corporation deceives the community once again. The same hopeful, subservient attitude that characterized Helene Wright's behavior has been discarded by the community, as they join Shadrack and march to the tunnel that will, in fact, bury them.

As Trudier Harris notes, Shadrack "brings a knowledge to his people, but the ironic price of his experiences is that he has lost the ability to communicate in a language they understand" (Fiction and Folklore 61). Shadrack, like Septimus stands outside of the oppressive, symbolic order of language, and yet neither of them find any alternative words to speak. Unlike Sula, they do not leap into a howl or construct an impromptu poem about black men; yet it is Sula and many of the Bottom residents who die tragically in an

avalanche of actions that foreshadow the loss of the entire Bottom community with its hills and trees to the white manicured gold course that will replace it.

By killing Sula and the community off, Morrison indicts the larger racist and sexist society for their deaths. She shows how difficult rebellion is against entrenched structures that uphold domination, even as the novel insists that such alternative actions must be taken. Sula, like Sylvia in Mrs. Dalloway, echoes the long history of Western myth that requires the sacrifice of the female in order to wage war.<sup>7</sup> Just as Iphigenia died at the hands of her father, Agamemnon, so that Artemis would grant him the winds to get back to Troy (Gilligan 6), Sula and Sylvia ultimately recede into the silence and obscurity of death in novels that are inherently anti-war.

As a survivor, Shadrack becomes the mad prophet, who like Aeschylus's Cassandra, speaks the truth of war in fractured phrases; and Nel's final realization that it was Sula, and not Jude she was missing all these years, marks the beginning of her decision to recover her own buried imagination, as she is joined once again to Sula by memories that make her incantory words, "O Lord, Sula...girl, girl, girlgirlgirl (174)" erupt into the healing sounds of song and story.

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<sup>7</sup>For a further discussion of this, see Christine Froula, "The Daughter's Seduction: Sexual Violence and Literary History" (139-162).

### To the Lighthouse

In Paula's Bennett's essay, "The Mother's Part: Incest and Maternal Deprivation in Woolf and Morrison," she argues that in The Bluest Eye and To the Lighthouse, these writers are examining the role mothers play in allowing their daughters to be victimized. Drawing on such feminist theorists as Dinnerstein, Chodorow, Gilligan, and Benjamin, Bennett analyzes how "Woolf reveals the strategic role which the mother-daughter bond plays in helping lay the groundwork for the daughter's abuse" (127). In To the Lighthouse, Woolf writes as the daughter and recreates Julia Stephen in the character of Mrs. Ramsay, a mother figure who always puts men's needs before her own.<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Ramsay chastises Lily for her disinterest in marriage and her preference for art. Bennett posits that both Pauline Breedlove and Mrs. Ramsay are women who believe that connection to other people must come at "the expense of a self." These women have no sense of a bounded subjectivity, and because of their gender identification with their daughters, they can offer them only limited protection or nurturance.

In Pecola's silence at the moment of her rape lies a world of words. Don't, the mother's message reads, get angry at those who abuse you, "don't expect a life much different from mine." There is no small irony in the fact that this is the message both racism and traditional modes of

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<sup>1</sup>For a divergent discussion of the influence of Woolf's father on this novel, see Ellen Tremper, "In her Father's House: To the Lighthouse as a Record of Virginia Woolf's Literary Patrimony" (1-40).

mothering instill in their victims--or in the fact that Pecola's subsequent fictional life mirrors in its madness and disorganization the path Virginia Woolf's life actually took. For both, the mother's failure to protect (that is, to insist upon the integrity of the self, whether self as woman or self as black) is a necessary precondition for the daughter's destruction. (134)

While Bennett's analysis concentrates on the psychological dimensions of abuse, rather than the political power structure that reinforces women's vulnerability, her study sheds light on the difficulty the daughter will face when she decides to become an artist. Just as Woolf believed that the female artist must kill off the angel in the house before she can create, Jessica Benjamin's work clarifies that this angelic, selfless state leads to female masochism. Morrison describes this masochism in great detail when she places Pecola in Yakobowski's store, where she longs for his approval and wants to become the blue-eyed Mary Jane. Pecola loses any sense of her own bounded self, because she wants to enter what is white, wants to fuse with and gain approval from the very people who despise her.

Even if Morrison portrays how Pecola's victimization is reinforced by her relationship with Pauline, I believe that ultimately Morrison indicts the larger white supremacist society for this abuse. At the same time, Claudia as artist figure, does have a bounded self; she has decided that she needs no approval from whites, and if they want to view her as ugly, then she will revel in and celebrate her very being. Claudia's mother has taught her to respect her black

self, which enables her to reject the self-hating role that Pecola has learned from her mother.

Similarly, Lily Briscoe has rejected the traditional path of marriage in order to become an artist. She does not want to acquiesce subserviently to men. In Lily's case, the disapproval she receives from Mrs. Ramsay does little to foster her already weak self-esteem. She sees herself as a spinster, a failure with men, even as she attempts to give Mr. Ramsay comfort at the end of the novel, despite her better judgment against it. Still, Lily can only conclude, that unlike Mrs. Ramsay, she has no talent for soothing men's wounds.

While Bennett's comparison of Virginia Woolf to Pecola Breedlove may seem like an extraordinary imaginative leap, given their radically different class and racial backgrounds, I believe she does this in order to understand the dynamics of sexual abuse. Her surprising comparison raises some important questions: how can a silent and abused psyche heal itself? How can the female artist shatter the silence that accompanies her abuse? Both Morrison and Woolf are concerned with these issues, and both writers devise narrative techniques that pair an artist figure with another character who has been silenced in order to examine this very problem. Linking Woolf and Pecola together, serves to underscore Woolf's own class privilege, which I believe was the determining factor that enabled her to

ultimately find the self-confidence to translate her loss into a creative form.

Both Woolf and Morrison tell their stories from multiple points-of-view that are mediated by a silent narrator whose voice sometimes merges with the character and other times imperceptibly disappears from the text. As Mitchel Leaska notes in his study of To the Lighthouse, "because its authors are bid to 'silence,' the multiple-point-of-view novel is the product of a literary rhetoric which, in its obscure multiple layers of meaning, stretches language to unprecedented limits of complexity to express the unlimited and the inexpressible" (164). Similarly, in her interview, "The Site of Memory," Morrison says that the narrator must be a guiding voice that slips in and out of the text:

But the guide can't have a personality; it can only have a sound, and you have to feel comfortable with this voice, and then the voice can easily abandon itself and reveal the interior dialogue of a character. So it's a combination of using the point of view of various characters but still retaining the power to slide in and out, provided that when I'm "out" the reader doesn't see little fingers pointing to the text. (121)

Both Morrison and Woolf use impersonal, selfless narrators who blend with the characters in the text, a technique which reveals the inner lives of the characters. In actuality, the very form of their novels consists of an omniscient narrator that gives voice to the silenced experiences of the characters. In this way, Morrison and

Woolf problematize the very issue of silence, and the extreme difficulty of translating loss into creativity. They do this by creating a multiple-point-of-view novel that is distinguished by huge gaps of silence formed by the sudden appearance and disappearance of a narrator and the shifting points of view of the characters.

At the same time, these silences allow the voices of the many characters to speak of a present that has been created from the sense of a timeless past.<sup>2</sup> Just as Mrs. Ramsay and Lily are paired with each other, the impersonal, voiceless narrator is paired with characters who, as Mae Gwendolyn Henderson would say, "speak in tongues," in voices that seem to transcend any fixed notion of time and suggest the multiple and shifting subjectivities of their characters. In addition, Carol Boyce Davies, uses the term "migratory subjectivity," to define black women's identity and writing:

Migrations of the subject refers to the many locations of Black women's writing, but also to the Black female subject refusing to be subjugated. Black female subjectivity then can be conceived not primarily in terms of domination, subordination or "subalternization," but in terms of slipperiness, elsewhere-ness. Migratory subjects suggests that Black women's writing cannot be located and framed in terms of one specific place, but exist/s in myriad places and times, constantly eluding the terms of the discussion. (Black Women, Writing and Identity 36)

Davies sees Black women's writing as occupying a space that

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<sup>2</sup>According to Patricia Laurence, Woolf believed "that silent observation and listening is often a 'ritual of truth'" (60).

lies outside of dominant discourses. Moreover, the Black female self is not static, but is, like Sula Peace, a "self in process."

Although the landscapes of Morrison and Woolf's novels are vastly different, the use of multiple voices reveals the fragmentation and isolation which are at the very core of their female characters' interior lives. The problematic issue of female creativity, that is, creating out of extreme alienation, becomes a theme that is encoded into the very structure of the text, in the dialogic interplay between narrator, reader, and characters. As James Naremore has observed: "Usually the interplay between characters is twice removed from direct presentation: every scene is refracted through the minds of the characters, and their thoughts in turn are refracted through Mrs. Woolf's elegant voice" (91).

In Beloved, which will be discussed in the following chapter, the shifting perspectives of the characters across time and space reveal how the horrors of slavery are recorded in the memory of an individual. And just as Toni Morrison says that for her the image must come first and tell her what the memory is about (Site 114), Woolf uses objects to evoke the emotion not only of the present moment but the past as well.<sup>3</sup> Woolf's object and Morrison's

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<sup>3</sup>See Harvena Richter (66-82). She notes: "It is the emotional experience of the object, rather than the object itself, which is known. Thus the object may be altered or colored by the character's mind and emotions; it becomes a mirror-image, an extension of the self" (67).

image, which she says is a picture and not a symbol, create a sense that the present is distilled by the past; and the object or image is not only the site of memory, but of perception itself. As Mary Ann Caws notes: "The constant temptation to be absorbed by the object perceived with poetic concentration--that gift Woolf has and shares--is countered by the shifting side of the high perception itself" (Reading Frames 249). While the object for Woolf also often acts as a symbol, and Morrison makes it clear that symbolism is not her artistic intention, it is still useful to compare how both writers use repeating images to encode their themes of loss and creativity into their texts.<sup>4</sup>

In The Bluest Eye, the seeds Claudia and Frieda plant to save Pecola evoke the desolation of her rape and the barrenness of the North. These seeds that never do grow into flowers become a repeating poetic motif, a picture that links the themes of the novel together, as it expresses the larger loss the migration brought to the black community, as well as the individual loss Pecola suffers from her rape by her father and her subsequent abandonment by both parents. This picture joins past and present together, and links Claudia, the artist figure who plants the seeds, with Pecola, the person she wants to save; and while Claudia

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<sup>4</sup>For a further discussion of Woolf's artistic technique, see Christopher Reed, "Through Formalism: Feminism and Virginia Woolf's Relation to Bloomsbury Aesthetics," (Gillespie 11-35).

fails in her endeavor, she does give voice to Pecola's pain. Claudia's lyric voice that starts the novel with, "Quiet as its kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941," is mediated through an invisible narrator who adds the poetic language to Claudia's meditations. This becomes apparent in the first sentence of chapter one that begins: "Nuns go by as quiet as lust, and drunken men and sober eyes sing in the lobby of the Greek hotel" (9).

In To the Lighthouse, the lighthouse itself is the poetic motif that thematically unites the novel and joins past, present and future in the novel's respective three parts. I believe Mrs. Ramsay's desire to fuse with the beam of light emanating from the lighthouse represents her wish to blend with the female centered world of nature.<sup>5</sup> When Mrs. Ramsay is in town, for example, the light becomes a refuge from the "beak of brass, the arid scimitar," of Mr. Ramsay, "the egotistical man," that "plunged and smote, demanding sympathy" (TL 38). The male scimitar repeats throughout the chapter, just as the motif of light acts as a mirror that reflects Mrs. Ramsay's isolation, "the wedge of darkness" she feels once she is left alone with herself. In this way, both Woolf and Morrison use repeating images in

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<sup>5</sup>As I have argued in the Mrs. Dalloway chapter, Woolf often associates gardens and other forms of nature with the female, and more specifically the maternal. Jane Marcus notes that Woolf chooses to recreate St. Ives, rather than Hyde Park Gate, in this novel in order to associate the mother with nature (Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy 6).

their texts as a means to express the alienation of their female characters. This chapter will focus on Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe, in particular, in an effort to examine Woolf's own ideas about female creativity.

### **Mothers and Art Forms**

Woolf often posits a sterile, emotionally violent male world against a creative female world whose very existence is threatened by male aggression. As Mrs. Ramsay sits quietly, her peaceful moment is interrupted: "into this delicious fecundity, this fountain and spray of life, the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself..." (38).

According to Patricia Cramer, this constant juxtaposition of patriarchal and matriarchal values in Woolf's fiction parallels "the exorcism of evil and introduction of good" that are a part of the matriarchal fertility rites described by Jane Harrison, the classical anthropologist ("Virginia Woolf Seeking" 182).

Mrs. Ramsay, with her Hellenic beauty and her spray of "delicious fecundity" becomes linked to the fertility of Demeter and Bacchus (Moore 64-5,85). She is the matriarchal figure who dominates the pages of the novel; and yet while her son, James, sees her "rise in a rosy-flowered fruit tree laid with leaves and dancing boughs" (38), he recognizes that she will be plundered by his father's overwhelming demands for sympathy. Through the figure of Mrs. Ramsay, Woolf evokes the sense of a past matriarchal order that has

given way to the present, where the displaced goddess is now a wife and mother subjugated by the patriarchal father/husband.

At the same time, Mrs. Ramsay encompasses the ideal of Western beauty. At fifty years old, she is admired by all of the men in the novel, except Carmichael. Charles Tansley, for example, romanticizes her as "the most beautiful person he had ever seen" (14). She is the goddess "with stars in her eyes and veils in her hair, with cyclamen and wild violets." A poet who inscribed a book for Mrs. Ramsay referred to her as "the happier Helen of our days" (27). Mr. Bankes sees her as "very clearly Greek, straight, blue-eyed" (29). With her "perfect features," she is the type of woman Pecola and Pauline Breedlove would love to be; and yet when Mrs. Ramsay is alone with herself, her life hardly seems ideal, since "there was scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know herself by; all was so lavished and spent" (38) with caring for other people. "They came to her, naturally, since she was a woman, all day long with this and that; one wanting this, another that; the children were growing up; she often felt she was nothing but a sponge sopped full of human emotions" (32).

In fact, Mrs. Ramsay certainly resembles, as many critics have pointed out, the angel in the house that Woolf describes in her essay, "Professions for Women." Mrs. Ramsay is the angel who is intensely sympathetic, immensely

charming, and utterly unselfish:

She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it--in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all--I need not say it--she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty--her blushes her great grace. In those days--the last of Queen Victoria--every house had its Angel. (Death of the Moth 237)

As Sander L. Gilman has pointed out, this ideal of Western beauty that a woman such as Mrs. Ramsay embodies, is measured against non-white women who are, in turn, labeled ugly. In fact, the so-called radical empiricists of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Europe created a paradigm "that would technically place both the sexuality and the beauty of the black in an antithetical position to that of the white" ("Black Bodies, White Bodies" 231). Hence the white English woman is chaste, beautiful and pure precisely because the African woman is seen to be "lascivious," "apelike," hideous, and even grotesque by the West. The white woman is elevated and set apart from the darker woman in order to reinforce racist ideology that would make Britain's colonial expansion acceptable to the general population. In addition, by having British middle and upper-class women remain uneducated and confined to the domestic realm where they are to be protected by the husband/father of the household, the colonial domination that is maintained abroad is further entrenched in the home

through the institution of rigid gender roles. If white women are frail helpless creatures who float gracefully through rooms, then white men must take charge of them.

Within this paradigm, Woolf creates the angelic, selfless, beautiful white woman in the character of Mrs. Ramsay. In "Professions For Women," Woolf declares that this internalized construction of womanhood, this angel in the house, had to be killed off before she could write, since the angel is the voice of self-censorship who will not let her write anything that might offend or shock men. Mrs. Ramsay does, in the middle of the novel, get suddenly killed off, an action that enables her surrogate daughter, Lily Briscoe, to finally finish her painting; and yet while Mrs. Ramsay is alive, on the one hand, she is put on a pedestal, where she is idealized for her beauty, as well as the ability to sympathize, nurture and charm those around her. On the other hand, she falls victim to the rages of her egotistical, scholarly husband. Mrs. Ramsay, like Woolf's own mother, is overworked by the care of so many children; she is overwhelmed by her husband's insistence that she soothe his wounded ego and pacify his feeling of frustration that his mind, though sufficient enough, could never make it past the letter Q.

Even in a blissfully domestic scene that should be filled with a feeling of peace and maternal joy, Mrs. Ramsay feels a sense of horror that is beneath it all. The fall of

waves on the sea that accompanies the cradle song she sings to her son can suddenly change from a "soothing tatum to her thoughts," to another sound, concealed beneath harmony, that "suddenly thundered hollow in the ears and made her look up with an impulse of terror" (16). Just as a sound evoking danger is concealed beneath nature's apparent harmony, Mrs. Ramsay's inner world of isolation and darkness is well covered and invisible to most, since this core of self lies beneath her external cheerfulness. Through the narrator's description of Mrs. Ramsay, sound, touch and sight come together to form a three dimensional mirror-like picture that enables the reader to peer deep within her interior life.

According to Jane Lillienfeld, Mrs. Ramsay exhibits many of the characteristics of an emotionally battered wife. She must endure Mr. Ramsay's temper, his angry retort of "Damn you," simply because she disagrees with him about the weather report and wants to give James hope that he might make it to the lighthouse after all. Mrs. Ramsay's reaction to Mr. Ramsay's outburst is not anger but passive acquiescence, since she nonetheless reveres him more than anyone and feels she is not good enough to even tie his shoelaces ("Like a Lion Seeking" 155).<sup>6</sup>

Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that

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<sup>6</sup>See also Lillienfeld's essay, "Where the Spear Plants Grew: The Ramsays' Marriage in To the Lighthouse (New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf 149-169).

Mrs. Ramsay is an artist figure with no art form but the lovely dinner party her cook prepares. The environment she finds herself in is certainly not conducive for creating art, even if the images that surround her evoke the very essence of fertility and creativity. But Mrs. Ramsay will staunchly uphold the seemingly oppressive institution of marriage, even as she undercuts such resolve when she notices the "hoary lighthouse" that is next to sand dunes with wild flowing grass, "which always seemed to be running away into some moon country uninhabited of men" (TL 13). These images reflect her wish to fuse with the world of nature, which remains a realm uninhabited by men. Still Mrs. Ramsay will ceaselessly insist on her matchmaking activities, leading her innocent victims to the underworld of marriage, as she pushes Minta and Paul together, and hopes Lily will one day marry Mr. Bankes. She can acknowledge that perhaps "she was driven on, too quickly, she knew, almost as if it were an escape for her too, to say that people must marry; people must have children" (60); and yet Mrs. Ramsay will persist in her belief that women must marry in order to be happy. It is precisely these expressions of ambivalence that create a sense that there are layers to Mrs. Ramsay's character that are like the sounds of terror heard from the beach that lie concealed, beneath the softer sounds of water. Mrs. Ramsay seems like a modern day Demeter figure who is captive in marriage, and

although she has lost much of her power, she still evokes a ritualistic sense of ancient fertility rites. At the same time, she also seems like the meek, emotionally abused wife who can only insist that her daughters, both real and symbolic, perpetuate the same life she has lived.

These contradictions become particularly evident at Mrs. Ramsay's dinner party.<sup>7</sup> Virginia Woolf was especially pleased with this section of the novel. In 1927, she wrote in a letter to Vita Sackville West: "The dinner party the best thing I ever wrote: the one thing that I think justifies my faults as a writer: this damned 'method.' Because I don't think one could have reached those particular emotions in any other way" (L 3 373-4).

The party links Mrs. Ramsay to her own mother as well as her daughter Rose, since the dinner becomes the occasion when Rose can help Mrs. Ramsay pick what jewels to wear. In this way, it becomes the creative ornament that joins the generations of women together, and the piece of jewelry itself is the object that reveals the inner life of both mother and daughter.

What was the reason, Mrs. Ramsay wondered, standing still to let her clasp the necklace she had chosen, divining, through her own past, some

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<sup>7</sup>According to J.J. Wilson, "The party has the potential for joining outer and inner experience, the individual with humanity, the instant with the constant... We are at that place then where all the terms meet, where as Kandinsky promised, the internal sound and the abstract meaning are one, sounding together in full resonance" ("A Comparison of Parties, With a Discussion of Their Function in Woolf's Fiction" 216-217).

deep, some buried, some quite speechless feeling that one had for one's mother at Rose's age. Like all feelings felt for oneself, Mrs. Ramsay thought it made one sad. (81)

Just as Woolf identified her social side as the jewel she inherited from her own mother, Rose too, will inherit her mother's life through the moments they share choosing jewelry. And just as Mrs. Ramsay finds that any thoughts that are for herself make her sad, since she is accustomed to think only of others, she figures that Rose too "would grow up, and would suffer, with these deep feelings" (80). Like her mother, Rose will, in all probability marry, have many children, and share her mother's isolation. Through the object of jewelry, past, present, and future come together in this quiet, still moment both mother and daughter share. Moreover, beneath the beauty of this dinner party, the candles flickering, the perfect Boeuf en Daube, which was a French recipe of Mrs. Ramsay's mother, Mrs. Ramsay can only wonder, what had she, in fact, done with her life. Even as she transfers her life to her daughter, Mrs. Ramsay briefly admits that the roles of wife and mother that she so staunchly supports would not have been the life she might have chosen.

But if Mrs. Ramsay's silence finds some rare expression at the dinner party, the servants who are ultimately responsible for the dinner party's success slide silently through the scene with a barely perceptible note of recognition. After all, the Boeuf en Daube is, as Mrs.

Ramsay acknowledges, her servant Mildred's masterpiece, even if none of her guests give much credit to any of the servants who have made the event possible. During the actual party, the servants make their appearance and are spoken to in half sentences before exiting as invisibly as they entered. When Paul and Minta finally enter the party, they come in together with a maid carrying a large dish in her hands, who fades unnoticed into the background. And while Mrs. Ramsay acknowledges that her servant Martha must have spent three days preparing the dish she serves the guests, she imperiously notes that Martha must take care to choose an especially tender piece for Mr. Bankes. The servant, who is virtually unseen, helps Mrs. Ramsay perform her role of being the perfect hostess catering to men's needs. At the same time, Mrs. Ramsay's own silence in relation to her domineering, yet adoring husband, is measured against the larger silence of the servants who have made her creative feat conceivable.

Her own physical beauty gives Mrs. Ramsay a power and privilege that sets her apart from both her servants and Lily Briscoe, the artist whom no one takes seriously since she is, by western standards, a plain spinster. As Mrs. Ramsay enters her party, she is like a queen taking her rightful place at the throne.

And, like some queen who, finding her people gathered in the halls, looks down upon them, and descends among them, and acknowledges their tribute silently, and accepts their devotion and

their prostration before her (Paul did not move a muscle but looked straight before him as she passed) she went down, and crossed the hall and bowed her head very slightly, as if she accepted what they could not say: their tribute to her beauty. (82)

Mrs. Ramsay is beautiful, precisely because Lily is considered plain; Mrs. Ramsay is noticed and revered, because it is the servants who are invisible. As a queen who looks down on her people, Mrs. Ramsay plays a conservative role in upholding the very gender roles that have created the discontent at the very core of her interior life. She passively accepts the role of the sympathetic, angelic woman who soothes men's wounded egos. As irascible as Charles Tansley is, she pities him for his awkwardness and does her best to draw him into conversation at her party. She finds emotional reassurance from the masculine intelligence that she sees as foreign, incomprehensible, and yet supremely admirable.

In fact, "she let it uphold and sustain her, this admirable fabric of the masculine intelligence, which ran up and down, crossed this way and that, like iron girders spanning the swaying fabric, upholding the world, so that she could trust herself to it utterly, even shut her eyes or flicker them for a moment, as a child staring up from its pillow winks at the myriad layers of the leaves of a tree" (106). Mrs. Ramsay is at once queen and child, who stands outside of the masculine world, an adoring spectator.

When she detects that her husband might be reminded of

his failure because of Minta's remarks that most people don't enjoy reading Shakespeare, Mrs. Ramsay is ready to see to it that he is taken care of; she must "praise him, somehow or other. But she wished that it was not necessary: perhaps it was her fault that it was necessary" (108). Her belief that her husband's outbursts of anxiety are her fault seem more likely to come from an emotionally battered wife than a powerful, regal queen. Still Mrs. Ramsay will, in the next moment, compare her daughter Prue to the newly engaged Minta and conclude, "You will be as happy as she is one of these days. You will be much happier..." (109). On a conscious level, Mrs. Ramsay will always defend the institution of marriage, even as the text reveals her deeper unhappiness. In this way, the party scene itself acts as a mirror that enables the reader to see aspects of Mrs. Ramsay's interior life that she, herself, cannot perceive:

Now all the candles were lit up, and the faces on both sides of the table were brought nearer by the candle-light, and composed, as they had not been in the twilight, into a party round a table, for the night was now shut off by panes of glass, which, far from giving any accurate view of the outside world, rippled it so strangely, that here, inside the room, seemed to be order and dry land, there, outside, a reflection in which things wavered and vanished, waterily. (97)

Pre-feminist Woolf criticism emphasizes Woolf's preoccupation with death and impermanence, this "world without a self," as James Naremore says. Recently Christopher Ames has seen Woolf's partygiving as a means to

ward off the specter of death.<sup>8</sup> I would like to argue, as I have done in the Mrs. Dalloway chapter, that Mrs. Ramsay's partygiving becomes a defiant act against the sterile ego-bound realm of men, an act she may not consciously acknowledge, but the text itself supports with Mrs. Ramsay's brief moments in which she can admit, at least to herself, that she feels isolated, alone and emotionally depleted by the very gender roles she purports to uphold. Partygiving affirms Mrs. Ramsay's capacity for creativity; it becomes the vehicle that enables her to perceive her isolation, as the party joins her through memory with the past. At the same time, the very environment of the party, and the idea of Mrs. Ramsay as the hostess/artist, underscores the upper middle class terrain of this novel, in which such virtues as beauty, purity, and chastity are revered and held up against a silenced and ugly 'other.' By killing Mrs. Ramsay off, Woolf not only rejects this hierarchical paradigm, but stresses that these very roles are deadly to the female artist.

Mrs. Ramsay is a woman who in one moment looks to the male intellect for support, and in another glances at her frowning husband at the dinner table and wonders "how she had ever felt any emotion or affection for him. She had a sense of being past everything, through everything, out of

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<sup>8</sup>See Christopher Ames, The Life of the Party: Festive Vision in Modern Fiction.

everything, as she held the soup, as if there was an eddy--there--and one could be in it, or one could be out of it, and she was out of it. It's all come to an end, she thought, while they came in one after another...and meanwhile she waited, passively, for someone to answer her, for something to happen. But this is not a thing, she thought, ladling out soup, that one says" (83). As the perfect charming British hostess, Mrs. Ramsay has learned well what should or should not be said; she sits and waits passively, although she knows no one will answer her, since her silence will be left to future generations to decipher. In perceiving that it has all come to an end, Mrs. Ramsay intuits her immanent death. The very act of ladling out the soup enables Mrs. Ramsay to understand more and more clearly that, like a "fallen shade," she was outside the eddy. When she watches her guests take their places, gazing at the dinner party she has created, in that moment she can see "things truly:"

The room (she looked round it) was very shabby. There was no beauty anywhere...Nothing seemed to have merged. They all sat separate, and the whole of merging and flowing and creating rested on her. Again she felt, as a fact without hostility the sterility of men, for if she did not do it nobody would do it, and so giving herself the little shake that one gives a watch that has stopped, the old familiar pulse began beating, as the watch begins ticking--one, two, three, one, two, three. And so on and so on, she repeated, listening to it, sheltering and fostering the still feeble pulse as one might guard a weak flame with a newspaper. And so then, she concluded, addressing herself by bending silently in his direction to William Bankes--poor man! who had no wife, and no

children and dined alone in lodgings except for tonight; and in pity for him, life being now strong enough to bear her on again, she began all this business, as a sailor not without weariness sees the wind fill his sail, and yet hardly wants to be off again and thinks how, had the ship sunk, he would have whirled round and round and found rest on the floor of the sea. (83-4)

In this passage, Mrs. Ramsay's ambivalent feelings and inclinations become most evident. While Woolf has Mrs. Ramsay ready herself for her task of providing sympathy to all, there also exists in the text these other sentences that reveal her distaste for the task at hand.<sup>9</sup> Mrs. Ramsay knows that it is up to her to create a hospitable, amiable feeling at her party. While she acknowledges without anger the sterility of men, she has to force herself, to shake herself, to assume her "angelic" role. Her spirit, like "a watch that has stopped," is weary and feeble; she is so much like "a weak flame" that has expended its energy and vitality on others. Still, Mrs. Ramsay rouses herself to consolingly address and pity Mr. Bankes. Even the image of her bending silently in his direction suggests that Mrs. Ramsay is a fatigued woman who has learned to mute and deny her deepest feelings. Once Mrs. Ramsay starts her sympathetic actions towards Mr. Bankes, life is "strong enough to bear her on." The word bear

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<sup>9</sup>Beth Rigel Daugherty argues that "the assumption that Mrs. Ramsay had a view of the world that might not be the same as her publicly expressed views, the acceptance of Mrs. Ramsay as a person in her own right, constitute a feminist understanding that allows Mrs. Ramsay to be in the world once more" (300).

suggests the extreme drudgery of the ordeal. Mrs. Ramsay is like a weary sailor who does not want to be off again in her role as sympathizer to all mankind, but instead wishes the ship could sink so she could finally rest, like Rachel Vinrace and Sula Peace, on the floor of the sea. Even if Mrs. Ramsay cannot see the extreme sadness at the core of her life, Woolf layers her sentences with enough contradictory impulses, thus creating a sense of an interior life that, like a cubist painting, is not limited to a single dimension of time and space. This type of technique enables the reader, as I mentioned earlier, to perceive what remains hidden to Mrs. Ramsay.

In fact, Mrs. Ramsay finds refuge in the past memory of her friend, Carrie Manning. Like Morrison, Woolf presents an image that leads her character back into the past; Mrs. Ramsay sees the Mannings clearly, twenty years ago, on a riverbank, killing a wasp with a teaspoon. In the present, it seemed as though the scene must still be going on, "as if, while she had changed, that particular day, now become very still and beautiful, had remained all these years" (87). The image serves to evoke the realization that Mrs. Ramsay had changed, even if the memory belongs to a realm that is outside of time.

The past that contains the Manning's drawing room from twenty years ago is a place "where one moved about without haste or anxiety, for there was no future to worry about."

In a similar way, Mrs. Ramsay's dinner party provides her with an escape from the worry and the fret of the present and the future. As Mrs. Ramsay peers into the depths of the earthenware pot, this object serves to reflect that "there is a coherence in things, a stability, something she meant is immune from change, and shines out (she glanced at the window with its ripple of reflected lights) in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby; so that again she had the feeling she had had once today, already, of peace, of rest. Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that endures" (105). This, of course, is the creative vision Mrs. Ramsay's dinner gives her. Knowing that the Boef en Daube was triumphant, she can feel, "the still space that lies about the heart of things;" and it is precisely this "still space," as Mary Ann Caws has pointed out, that lies at the heart of Woolf's aesthetic.<sup>10</sup>

The poem Mr. Ramsay and Augustus Carmichael read about "Luriana, Lurilee," refers once more to a magical garden path, where "The China rose is all abloom and buzzing with the/yellow bee," that Luriana is urged to climb. In this image, as in the gardens that occur throughout Woolf's fiction, Woolf once more evokes the sense of a lost garden that holds the untold, unacknowledged creative acts of

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<sup>10</sup>In the fall of 1994, Mary Ann Caws gave a paper at the Cuny Graduate Center in which she spoke about the relationship between French Impressionist "still life" and Woolf's aesthetics. My discussion of Woolf's aesthetics in this chapter have been influenced by her insights.

women, that at the same time, serve as inspiration for the mature female artist, in very much the same way Alice Walker describes the inspiration she finds from the gardens her mothers and the women before her have planted.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, Luriana is an observer who can only watch as "the kings go riding by/Over lawn and daisy lea" (111). This poem becomes a perfect metaphor for Mrs. Ramsay's life. She can stand outside the eddy of masculine intelligence and phrase-making, a silent observer who longs for the rest the sea might provide her; and yet, the party gives her access to a past that stands apart from the sympathetic angelic role she must play in the present. While the past Mrs. Ramsay gains access to is a mythic place, a place where Demeter once stood plowing the fertile land, in the present, Mrs. Ramsay, unlike Demeter, can offer no protection to her daughters. She can teach them only to pity, flatter, and marry men.

Nonetheless, Mrs. Ramsay understands that the party, like the quiet scenes she has just remembered, has an artistic form and a shape that, as she leaves the scene of her banquet room, has become "already the past." As "an artist with no art form," Mrs. Ramsay creates scenes of dinner parties, in very much the same way Woolf, the writer,

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<sup>11</sup>Walker states: "And so our mothers and grandmothers have, more often than not anonymously, handed on the creative spark, the seed of the flower they themselves never hoped to see: or like a sealed letter they could not plainly read" (240).

etches these scenes into language. If Woolf is the daughter/writer of this novel who recreates a fertile mother who can only transfer the traditional gender roles down to her daughter, then it is Lily Briscoe, as surrogate daughter, who will, like Woolf the writer, find an aesthetic form that can contain the deceased Mrs. Ramsay's muted sorrow.

### **The Artist as Daughter**

As Mrs. Ramsay walks into town with Charles Tansley in the beginning of the novel, she looks at the lovely view of the lighthouse and notices how Mr. Paunceforte, the prototypical male artist, paints his scene quite differently from the older female artists who were her grandmother's friends. Mr. Paunceforte set the standards for how to paint this idyllic natural scene; he had been observed at work by ten little boys, and since he left three years ago all of the pictures were like his. Each one was painted in soft shades of "green and grey, with lemon-coloured sailing-boats, and pink women on the beach" (13).

But the female artists, on the other hand, "took the greatest pains; first they mixed their own colours, and then they ground them, and then they put damp cloths to keep them moist." This description, along with Tansley's defensive comments to Mrs. Ramsay, as he asks her if she meant to say that the man's picture was skimpy, that his colors were not solid, imply that the female artists paint in sharp, vivid

colors that they painstakingly create, colors that are in contrast to the softer, vaguer hues of Paunceforte. This passage is especially significant, since in Part I, when Lily Briscoe looks at her picture, she measures it against the standards set by Paunceforte:

She could have wept. It was bad, it was bad, it was infinitely bad! She could have done it differently of course; the color could have thinned and faded; the shapes etherealised: that was how Paunceforte would have seen it. But then she did not see it like that; the light of a butterfly's wings lying upon the arches of a cathedral. Of all that only a few random marks scrawled upon the canvas remained. And it would never be seen; never be hung even, and there was Mr. Tansley whispering in her ear, "Women can't paint, women can't write..." (48)

With absolutely no encouragement or support for her art, Lily can only conclude that Paunceforte's faded and etherealised shapes and colors are superior to her own dramatic vision of butterfly "wings flying upon the arches of a cathedral." With little belief in herself, and with Tansley's words repeating in her head, it is not surprising that Lily fails to translate her vision to her canvas; the paltry "few random marks scrawled" there mirror her own isolated, impoverished spirit.

Lily knows that Mrs. Ramsay did not care "a fig for her painting" (49); in fact, Lily understands all too well that Mrs. Ramsay believes "an unmarried woman has missed the best of life." While Lily's decision to remain unmarried has enabled her to be an artist, (a decision which Rachel Vinrace was unable to make and survive), her self-esteem has

suffered greatly. As a symbolic daughter to Mrs. Ramsay, she receives little affirmation. Lily has to confront Mrs. Ramsay's serious stare that communicates her certainty "that her dear Lily, her little Brisk, was a fool" (50). Lily always remains a child in Mrs. Ramsay's eyes because she has not taken on the traditional female gender roles that include, above all else, marriage.

Although I have been reading Lily's bond with Mrs. Ramsay in terms of a mother/daughter relationship, I also believe that there exists an eroticism to her longing for Mrs. Ramsay that always remains unrequited, and becomes, at the same time, the inspiration for her painting while Mrs. Ramsay is alive. "Sitting on the floor with her arms round Mrs. Ramsay's knees" (51), Lily seems like the supplicant daughter pleading for Mrs. Ramsay's attention. She can only ask: "What art was there, known to love or cunning, by which one pressed through into these dark chambers? What device for becoming, like waters poured into one jar, inextricably the same, one with the object one adored?" Lily's art is created from her longing to fuse with Mrs. Ramsay, the object she adores. In this way, Lily's erotic feelings for Mrs. Ramsay, that are also mixed with maternal longing, echo Rachel Vinrace's feelings for Helen Ambrose in Melymbrosia. Both Rachel and Lily look to an older woman for inspiration. In Rachel's case, the eroticism was deleted in the final draft of the novel, and with Lily, her yearning remains

unfulfilled. Lily must turn to art in order to represent precisely the very person who eludes her in reality. For Lily, Mrs. Ramsay represents "the ineffable;" she becomes the creative muse, the linguistic center, the "place where meaning may lie" (Morrison WLT 6).

And yet, she knew knowledge and wisdom were stored up in Mrs. Ramsay's heart. How then, she had asked herself, did one know one thing or another about people, sealed as they were. Only like a bee, drawn by some sweetness or sharpness in the air, intangible to touch or taste, one haunted the dome-shaped hive, ranged the wastes of the air over the countries of the world alone, and then haunted the hives with their murmurs and their stirrings; the hives which were people. (51)

Although Lily knows Mrs. Ramsay's heart holds both knowledge and wisdom, she also understands that Mrs. Ramsay is, at the same time, sealed and inaccessible. And yet as the artist, Lily is like a bee drawn to the intangible; her loneliness, her isolation, is acute as she "haunted the dome-shaped hive, ranged the wastes of the air over the countries alone." Lily's desire to haunt the hives filled with "murmurs" and "stirrings" becomes a representation of her own aesthetic process. Although Lily is a painter, the "murmurs" and "stirrings" represent Woolf's language of nuance and ambiguity created from her own longing for maternal protection.<sup>12</sup>

Mrs. Ramsay becomes for Lily the site of dream and

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<sup>12</sup>According to Elizabeth Abel, "Rather than pivoting on a climactic fall into language, the story disclosed through Lily's paintings highlights prelinguistic experience of the mother" (Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis 47).

memory. In fact, Lily follows after Mrs. Ramsay, like an unrequited lover, haunted for days afterwards by Mrs.

Ramsay's alluring presence:

Mrs. Ramsay rose, Lily rose. Mrs. Ramsay went. For days there hung about her, as after a dream of, more vividly than anything she said, the sound of murmuring and, as she sat in the wicker arm-chair in the drawing-room window she wore, to Lily's eyes, an august shape; the shape of a dome.  
(51)

As an "august dome," Mrs. Ramsay is just as isolated as Lily. As a symbol of feminine beauty and fertility, romanticized and adored by men, and at the same time emotionally battered by their tempers and demands, Mrs. Ramsay, does, in fact, seem adrift and far, far out at sea. For this reason, as the daughter, Lily must contend with the taunting words of Charles Tansley alone. Since Mrs. Ramsay can never reject the very gender roles that ultimately lead to her death, even if there exists a subtext of ambivalence about her life and choices, she can only communicate to Lily that she, too, should expend her energies pitying and making men comfortable.

At the dinner party, when Lily notices Charles Tansley's social awkwardness, she knows it is her duty to offer him solace: "There is a code of behavior, she knew, whose seventh article (it may be) says that on occasions of this sort it behooves the woman, whatever her own occupation may be, to go to the help of the young man opposite so that he may expose and relieve the thigh bones, the ribs of his

vanity, of his urgent desire to assert himself" (91). While Lily wants to refuse him sympathy and the opportunity to "relieve his thigh bones," she must renounce her experiment of refusing to be nice to the very man who had told her she cannot paint or write, because she sees Mrs. Ramsay's imploring eyes. In Mrs. Ramsay's glance, Lily understands she must "apply some balm to the anguish of this hour," and comply with Mrs. Ramsay's wishes that she not ignore Tansley. In this way, the mother communicates to her daughter through the subtle movement of her eyes the very gender roles she will be expected to perform. While Lily wants to outright reject such roles, her love and attachment to Mrs. Ramsay prevents her from completely doing so.

Even though Lily rejects marriage in order to be an artist, the lack of support she receives from Mrs. Ramsay only further erodes Lily's self-confidence. Lily creates amidst a backdrop of men telling her she will fail, and the one person she would want affirmation from deserts her by communicating that she should act the role of the sympathetic angel. Torn between her attachment to Mrs. Ramsay and her wish to paint, Lily can only expect to experience conflict: "For what happened to her, especially staying with the Ramsays was to be made to feel violently two opposite things at the same time; that's what you feel, was one; that's what I feel was the other, and then they fought together in her mind, as now" (102).

When Lily looks at Mrs. Ramsay, she can only contrast "that abundance with her own poverty of spirit" (107), even as Lily realizes that Mrs. Ramsay's endless matchmaking, specifically in regard to Paul and Minta, only results in leading her victims to the altar. Just as Lily sees herself as impoverished next to Mrs. Ramsay's abundant fertility, she also contrasts the destructive nature of heterosexual relations with her own creative drive to paint.

In the midst of Mrs. Ramsay's party, it is the object of the salt shaker catching her eye that leads her back to her own creative vision.<sup>13</sup> In the first instance, this occurs after Lily bends to Mrs. Ramsay's wishes and pays attention to Tansley:

She had done the usual trick--been nice. She would never know him. He would never know her. Human relations were all like that, she thought, and the worst (if it had not been for Mr. Bankes) were between men and women. Inevitably they were extremely insincere she thought. Then her eye caught the salt cellar, which she had placed there to remind her, and she remembered the next morning she would move the tree further towards the middle, and her spirits rose so high at the thought of painting tomorrow that she laughed out loud at what Mr. Tansley was saying. Let him talk all night if he liked it. (92-3)

Like Rachel Vinrace, Lily must contend with a chorus of men's voices telling her she cannot be an artist, that women are stupid and inept; however, unlike Rachel, Lily can assert the integrity of her artistic vision despite the many

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<sup>13</sup>Again, my discussion of the role of the salt shaker is influenced by the paper delivered by Mary Ann Caws.

doubts she may have about what she is doing. Unlike Rachel, Lily is able to clearly recognize and even verbalize, if only to herself, that a traditional marriage would result in the death of her artistic self. In addition, the object of the salt shaker links her internal subjective world to the external objective environment she wants to recreate with paint. The salt shaker, becomes in Morrison's terms an image or a picture with "feelings that accompany" it (Site 112). And if for Morrison, the image comes first and then tells her what the memory is about (114), the salt shaker links the realistic picture of the dinner party with Lily's subjective, creative vision. In this way, Lily is able to insulate herself from the unsupportive, critical environment in which she finds herself, something which Rachel, and for that matter, Sula Peace, could only accomplish by dying.

When Lily hears of Paul and Minta's engagement and offers to help find Minta's missing brooch, she feels Paul's aggressive disdain as he turns to her. Once again, her ability to recognize aggression in the environment instead of internalizing his mocking gaze, helps Lily to sustain a self-identity that will allow her to paint:

He turned on her cheek, the heat of love, its cruelty, its unscrupulosity. It scorched her, and Lily, looking at Minta, being charming to Mr. Ramsay at the other end of the table, flinched for her exposed to these fangs, and was thankful. For at any rate, she said to herself, catching sight of the salt cellar on the pattern. She need not marry. Thank Heaven: she need not undergo that degradation. She was saved from that dilution. She would move the tree rather more to the middle.

(102).

Although she is surrounded by others, Lily creates in total isolation. While her self-esteem is harmed by her inability to gain affirmation from anyone in regard to her art, nonetheless Lily does succeed in persisting in her painting. Unlike Rachel Vinrace, she will not become engaged to a man who constantly interrupts her while she is at work; however, it is important to stress that Lily's alienation does mar her art. She has little confidence in her work and is content to remain obscure and unknown. In fact, she expects nothing short of that. While Paul's hateful glance on her cheek does not prevent her from painting and only reinforces her belief in the inevitable destructiveness of marriage, she does take in his gaze and then comes to the conclusion that she is ugly.

This dynamic becomes particularly evident after Mrs. Ramsay's death when Lily cannot fill her place and give Mr. Ramsay the sympathy he demands from her. She does not want to imitate Mrs. Ramsay's look of rapturous "self-surrender," and yet by refusing to act the role of angel, Lily sees herself as the world must perceive her, someone who is "not a woman, but a peevish, ill-tempered, dried up old maid, presumably" (151). Like Pecola, she accepts the negative perceptions others have of her, especially in regard to her appearance, since neither Pecola nor Lily conforms to white western notions of womanhood. However, unlike Pecola and

Septimus, Lily can sustain a relationship with the objective world that does nurture her art. While because of Yacobowski's hateful gaze, Pecola finds herself cut off from the cement and flowers she was once unified with, Lily can catch sight of a salt shaker and fuse her imagination with the object, thus gaining access to an interiority she can translate into art. Characters such as Sula, Septimus and Pecola do not find a form that can express the knowledge of their subjective world, and for this reason they become "dangerous" (Sula 121). Septimus and Pecola, unlike Lily, descend into madness because the boundaries that divide their subjective interiority from the objects in the environment have become distorted.

In fact, as Mr. Ramsay bears down on Lily in "the Lighthouse" section, and she is silent, "the whole horizon seemed swept bare of objects to talk about" (152). His presence and his demands reduce Lily to a mute stance, since she does not want to engage in the selfless talk of giving him sympathy. In that moment, by refusing to use language on Mr. Ramsay's terms, Lily refuses domination, and yet his very presence dulls the objective world around her since "his gaze seemed to fall dolefully over the sunny grass and discolour it" (152). Lily descends into silence as a means of protest, but at the same time, she loses her unified connection to the world of objects that is only restored when she begins to paint.

In sharp contrast, Mr. Ramsay's relationship to the objective world is empirical; there are no jagged edges or nuances in his vision. The kitchen table that he reflects upon night after night is "visionary, austere, something bare, hard, not ornamental. There was no colour to it; it was all edges and angles; it was uncompromisingly plain" (155). However, even when Mr. Ramsay leaves and Lily can finally confront her canvas, his presence has left a stain that lingers in her mind long after he has gone away:

Always (it was in her nature, or in her sex, she did not know which) before she exchanged the fluidity of life for the concentration of painting she had a few moments of nakedness when she seemed like an unborn soul, a soul reft of body, hesitating in some windy pinnacle and exposed without protection to all the blasts of doubt. Why then did she do it? She looked at the canvas, lightly scored with running lines. It would be hung in the servants' bedrooms. It would be rolled up and stuffed under a sofa. What was the good of doing it then, and she heard some voice saying she couldn't paint, saying she couldn't create, as if she were caught up in one of those habitual currents in which after a certain time experience forms in the mind, so that one repeats words without being aware any longer who originally spoke them. (159)

Fortunately, Lily can, however, lose consciousness of outer things and dip deep into her mind, "throwing up from its depths, scenes, and names, and sayings, and memories and ideas, like a fountain sporting over that glaring, hideously difficult white space while she modelled it with greens and blues" (159). Like Claudia MacTeer, Lily can ultimately chart a path for herself that is different from the women around her; and although her self-esteem is hurt by the

battle, Lily can descend into an internal world where Mr. Ramsay and Tansley have no place. She does ultimately represent her female centered vision composed of nuance and ambiguity. In addition, the very process of painting becomes a way of expressing and celebrating the eroticism of female sexuality:

With a curious physical sensation, as if she were urged forward and at the same time must hold herself back, she made her first quick decisive stroke. The brush descended. It flickered brown over the white canvas; it left a running mark. A second time she did it--a third time. And so pausing and so flickering, she attained a dancing rhythmical movement, as if the processes were one part of the rhythm and the strokes another and all were related. (157-8)

While Lily is viewed as a sexless spinster by the men around her as well as herself, the act of painting evokes an eroticism that is tied to a feminine aesthetic composed of pause and flicker, as she attains a "dancing rhythmical movement." It is also important to stress, as I mentioned earlier in the chapter, that Lily is able to finish her painting only after Mrs. Ramsay dies. In fact, it is at this point in the novel that the relationship between the image, memory, and creative vision is further emphasized. For instance, Lily remembers a scene on the beach when Mrs. Ramsay sat writing letters and Charles Tansley squabbled playfully alongside her. It is this pictorial scene that remains in Lily's mind in the present and becomes the site where emotions are recollected and then represented in art. It is the image of Mrs. Ramsay sitting on a rock that

"resolved everything into simplicity" (160) for Lily, enabling her to even refashion her memory of Charles Tansley so she could recall a moment in which she actually liked him, a moment that remains in the present "affecting one almost like a work of art." Once Lily has this scene in her mind, she can feel her loss and longing for Mrs. Ramsay. She can ask herself, "What is the meaning of life," since the scene itself unlocks the emotions of the past, and one scene replaces another, as Lily strives to translate what has been lost into art:

This, that, and the other; herself and Charles Tansley and the breaking wave; Mrs. Ramsay bringing them together; Mrs. Ramsay saying, "life stand still here"; Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent ( as in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent)-- this was of the nature of a revelation. In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing (she looked at the clouds going and the leaves shaking) was struck into stability. Life stand still here, Mrs. Ramsay said. "Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!" she repeated. She owed it all to her. (161)

As an artist, Lily does make life stand still. She gives form to Mrs. Ramsay's unsaid wish to make something permanent of the moment, a desire that manifests itself when she gives her dinner party.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the picture of Mrs. Ramsay on the beach, "visible to the last detail" (171) preserved in the present moment through memory is the

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<sup>14</sup>Rachel Bowlby notes, "The unification of bringing together of disparate things, of the 'discomposed', which Mrs. Ramsay seeks to achieve by marryings and motherings, is also what Lily attempts in the field of art" (73).

starting point for Lily's creative vision. From the memory of the beach, Lily faces her canvas and looks at the sand in front of her: "She rammed a little hole in the sand and covered it up, by way of burying in it the perfection of the moment. It was like a drop of silver in which one dipped and illumined the darkness of the past" (172). The scene of Mrs. Ramsay on the beach illumines the sand in the present and becomes the image that evokes Lily's yearning for Mrs. Ramsay. And as Lily "dipped into the blue paint, she dipped too in the past there" (172), all the time connecting the brush on the canvas to a scene from the past, even if the scene becomes something she makes up in order to more truthfully remember the reality of the past:

And this, Lily thought, taking the green paint on the brush, this making up scenes about them, is what we call "knowing" people, "thinking" of them, "being fond of them! Not a word of it was true; she had made it up; but it was what she knew them by all the same. She went on tunneling her way into her picture, into the past. (173)

Just as the point on the canvas forms images that represents reality as Lily knows it, the memory itself, like art, is an artifice that can evoke the past through the use of scene and imagery that may not actually correspond to the actual events of the past, but instead aims to capture the emotional truth that lies buried beneath the present moment.

What has been lost to the past is both personal and historical. In part II of the "Time Passes" section, the deaths of Mrs. Ramsay and Andrew and Prue Ramsay are

recorded in parenthesis, set off from the text, as if to highlight the impersonal way history invades the present moment and alters its very configuration.<sup>15</sup> Andrew is killed by an exploding shell in the war, Prue dies in childbirth, and Mrs. Ramsay too dies suddenly, leaving Mr. Ramsay "stumbling along a passage one dark morning" (128), his arms stretched out, holding only the emptiness of Mrs. Ramsay's absence. Prue and Mrs. Ramsay's death, in particular, signify an historical moment when the myth of the happy Victorian marriage and family has been replaced by the death of the angel in the house and the reality of war.

In addition, Lily's memories of Mrs. Ramsay have an historical context. She dips her paintbrush into the past, as a way of remembering and recreating a time before the fragmentation of war. As she stands outside, longing for Mrs. Ramsay, Lily becomes the daughter "in search of her mother's gardens".<sup>16</sup> The fertility and spirituality of Mrs. Ramsay that has been lost to the past will find finally a form in the abstract lines Lily etches into her canvas, since Mrs. Ramsay's unrecorded creativity becomes the

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<sup>15</sup>J. Hillis Miller sees that this novel turns on Mrs. Ramsay's death, on "the vanishing of her consciousness from the world and from the lives of other characters. Her vanishing coincides with the vanishing in the catastrophe of the Great War of all that Victorian and Edwardian world of assured social order" (169).

<sup>16</sup>See Alice Walker's essay, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" (231-243).

inspiration for Lily's art.<sup>17</sup> In this way, Lily seeks to heal the distance and lack of affirmation she experienced from Mrs. Ramsay through the very act of painting.

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<sup>17</sup>Madeline Moore notes, "It will remain for Lily to give a voice to Mrs. Ramsay's silence--to make it speak in the silent colors of her canvas" (72).

### Beloved

In a 1988 interview with Marsha Darling, Toni Morrison states that the character Beloved represents Sethe's murdered child as well as the collective grief of the Middle Passage. Beloved is a ghost, a child returned from the dead, and yet she is also, as Morrison says, "another kind of dead which is not spiritual but flesh, which is, a survivor from the true, factual slave ship. She speaks the language, a traumatized language, of her own experience, which blends beautifully in her questions and answers, her pre-occupations, with the desires of Denver and Sethe" (Conversations 247). Sethe's personal loss is tied to the loss of those who died on the slave ship, since as Morrison says, "the language of both experiences, death and the Middle Passage--is the same."

The "traumatized language" Beloved speaks, blending beautifully with the desires of Denver and Sethe becomes the voice of historical loss that has been severed brutally from both mother and country. Beloved is the dead girl Morrison describes in a conversation with Gloria Naylor, the forgotten and silenced black girl Morrison will bring back to life through language. At the same time, she encompasses all those unrecorded people who died en route to America. Morrison explains:

The gap between Africa and Afro-America and the gap between the living and the dead and the gap between the past and the present does not exist. It's bridged for us by our assuming responsibility

for people no one's ever assumed responsibility for. They are those that died en route. Nobody knows their names, and nobody thinks about them. In addition to that, they never survived the lore; there are no songs or dances or tales of these people. The people who arrived--there is lore about them. But nothing survives about...that.  
(247)

By creating a character that is a ghost, Morrison incorporates into her novel African beliefs in the continuing presence of the dead. Beloved represents the unvoiced horrors that took place on the slave ship. She emerges from water; her fragmented language that finds form in poetry and monologue comes from the voices of the drowned. According to Carol Boyce Davies, Beloved is like "the legendary Abiku children of Yoruba society or the Ogbaje in Igbo culture, who die and are born repeatedly to plague their mother" ("Motherhood" 198). While Beloved is the vengeful child returned to the dead seeking mother love, Sethe becomes both mother and daughter in the act of killing Beloved, since she was the only surviving child; the rest were thrown overboard by her mother. As a small girl, Sethe had been told by Nan, the woman who cared for her: "She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names, she threw them" (62). Sethe's mother remained nameless also, identified only by the mark on her rib, "a circle and a cross burnt right in the skin" (61). Although Sethe was instructed by her mother to know this mark in case anything ever happened to her, at the time of

her hanging, she was indistinguishable from the pile of slaves who had died and lay together. In killing Beloved, Sethe is the daughter who blends with her own mother, as she too chooses to murder her child rather than have them undergo the horrors of slavery.

Morrison acknowledges in the Darling interview that the act of dwelling on the atrocities of the Middle Passage could destroy someone and make it impossible to move forward in life. The unspoken grief of the past would obliterate both the present and the future. She says, "The act of writing the book, in a way, is a way of confronting it and making it possible to remember" (248). Morrison gives voice to those thrown overboard without names, as well as those nameless bodies burnt and marked by slavery.

As in her previous novels, Morrison narrates what has been left out of language; she accomplishes this by structuring the novel so that history and memory are what define the present moment.<sup>1</sup> "Rememory," as Sethe describes it, is the process by which memory becomes a repetitive act; The past enters the present moment in fragments, so that history is ever present in the consciousness of Morrison's characters, even if it is absorbed by the mind frame by frame, in scenes and pictures that come clearly into focus

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<sup>1</sup>See Marilyn Sanders Mobley, "A Different Remembering: Memory, History and Meaning in Toni Morrison's Beloved." Mobley argues that this novel expresses the "unsaid" of the slave narrative, exploring "the psychic subtexts that lie within and beneath the historical facts" (Modern Critical Views 193).

through the touch of a hand, a kiss on a brutalized back, or the sight of snow falling on familiar land.

For instance, as Denver dresses and sees the "thin and whipping snow" (Beloved 29), she is reminded of another picture, the one "her mother had painted as she described the circumstances of Denver's birth in a canoe straddled by a white girl for whom she was named." Morrison creates an aesthetic in which a painterly image captures the way the grief of the past is always part of the present. And it is this picture or image that actually makes the past accessible through memory. Sethe explains this very process to Denver:

I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forgot. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place--the picture of it--stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened. (36)

It is difficult for Sethe to believe in time, because she understands the boundaries between past, present and future are blurred. As Rafael Perez-Torres aptly notes: "Readers are placed generationally in a space that floats somewhere between an absent past and an absent future. Into this static fictional present a ghostly past perpetually attempts to insert itself" (MFS 691). The picture that represents the past exists not only in the mind but in a

timeless dimension that transcends any linear definition of past, present or future. This explanation by Sethe also describes Morrison's aesthetic since she paints images that repeat throughout the novel and enable her to tell her story in fragments. The novel itself becomes a painting composed of similar pictures tied to stories told by various people that come together as a unified whole. Like a cubist painting, notions of time and space are interrupted and reconceived. The past is omnipresent and yet invisible; it can only be understood and seen through pictures that reside in the mind and connect the wounds of the past to the present. When Denver asks Sethe if other people can see these pictures, she responds:

Yes, you can bump into a rememory that belongs to someone else. Even if the whole farm--every tree and grass blade of it dies. the picture is still there and what's more, if you go there--you who never was there--if you go there and stand in the place where it was it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. So, Denver. You can't never go there. Never. Because even though it's all over--over and done with--it's going to always be there waiting for you. (36)

For Sethe, "the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay" (42), while for Denver, "the job Sethe had of keeping her from the past that was still waiting for her was all that mattered" (42). The past will continually inform the image both inside the mind and out in the environment. This becomes especially apparent after the carnival when Paul D. Denver and Sethe are finally united in a happy, familial unity. In reality, however, there is an eerie

difference between what their shadows are doing and what is actually occurring among these three people, since "they were not holding hands, but their shadows were" (47). This picture links the novel together structurally, just as the lighthouse does in Woolf's novel, since much later on, Sethe will remember this moment and realize the shadows must have represented Denver, herself, and Beloved, and not Paul D: "Right after she saw the shadows holding hands at the side of the road hadn't the picture altered? And the minute she saw the dress and shoes sitting in the front yard, she broke water. Didn't even have to see the face burning in the sunlight. She had been dreaming it for years" (132). Sethe returns to the image of the shadow on the road once again after Paul D leaves, and she, Beloved and Denver are left alone to form a powerful community of storytelling women:<sup>2</sup> "Obviously the hand-holding shadows she had seen on the road were not Paul D., Denver and herself, but 'us three.' The three holding on to each other skating the night before; the three sipping flavored milk. And since that was so--if her daughter could come back home from the timeless place-- certainly her sons could, and would, come back from wherever they had gone to" (182). The shadow is the leitmotif repeating throughout the novel, as gradually Sethe sees there is a distinct separation between the shadow and the

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<sup>2</sup>Trudier Harris analyzes the dynamic storytelling community these three women comprise (Fiction and Folklore 166).

reality she thinks is right in front of her.

The shadow represents the layers of memory and meaning lurking beneath the surface of words and images that elude language. It is the past that will not "be kept at bay." Instead, "on the way home, although leading them now, the shadows of three people still held hands" (49). The shadow is also the unrecognized, barely perceived presence of the unvoiced, unremembered dead, the millions who died during the Middle Passage, the dead who have not been properly buried, and whose murder represents a catastrophic interruption in the universal order. Like Antigone's unburied brother or Wole Soyinka's King in Death of the King's Horseman, the dead's improper burial will result in a frightening disharmony for both the living and the dead.

Morrison is concerned, in particular, with the massive destruction of culture, of language and identity, and its effect on the present moment. If Morrison says in her Nobel Prize Speech that words can never properly express the horrors of slavery, the 600,000 dead in the Civil War, but can only "arc toward the place where meaning may lie" (6), then the shadow that holds hands while the people do not becomes symbolic of the necessity of using language to suggest meaning. The constraining nature of a static language is incapable of capturing the unvoiced and unrecorded grief of the dead.

Loss and mourning, and "history that will not be kept

at bay," all come together in the ghost of Beloved, the fully dressed woman who "walked out of the water" (50). While Septimus Warren Smith longs to drown and revisit his lost friend, Beloved emerges from the place where drowning occurred. It is important to note that Sula Peace and Rachel Vinrace also die and are pulled beneath water where they can reconnect to an interiority they could find no words for while alive. Beloved arises from the murkiness of water, and her wrath, which becomes directed at her mother, is at the same time, the rage of those who despite the process of rememory, live outside of static language and the records of history. In creating Beloved, Morrison, on the other hand, uses language that is, as Iaian Chambers describes, "always shadowed by loss, an elsewhere, a ghost" (4).

As a ghost, Beloved is the true migrant, the one with no home, no borders, not even between the living and the dead; and her restless and frustrated wandering evokes the pain of the unburied dead who have found no peaceful passage. Beloved echoes the cry of Soyinka's Yoruba praisesinger, who mournfully says:..."the white slavers came and went, they took away the heart of our race, they bore away the mind and muscle of our race. The city fell and was rebuilt; the city fell and our people trudged through mountain and forest to found a new home but..."(1825). Beloved links African and African-American experience. As a

totally displaced human being, she becomes the voice of the hybridization of African culture that occurred during slavery (Gates Signifying Monkey 4).

She exists in a watery realm that is neither fully dead nor alive. Her exquisite monologue is told in poetic fragments, without punctuation, as though to accent the absence of borders between the past, present and future, as well as the living and the dead. Her language evokes the homelessness and loss created by history.<sup>3</sup> She gives voice to her own experience as well as the collective grief of those who died during the Middle Passage. Beloved says in her "traumatized language":..."now there is room to crouch and to watch the crouching others it is the crouching that is now always now inside the woman with my face is in the sea a hot thing" (211).

Like Septimus Warren Smith, Beloved speaks in a fractured language. She remembers the loss of her mother amidst the large scale brutalities taking place: "in the beginning the women are away from the men and the men are away from the women storms rock us and mix the men into the women and the women into the men that is when I begin to be on the back of the men for a long time I see only his neck and his wide shoulders above me I am small I love

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<sup>3</sup>For a discussion of Beloved and the Demeter and Persephone myth, see Marianne Hirsch, The Mother/Daughter Plot, (6-8). Hirsch maintains that Morrison's novel allows "Beloved to return, like Persephone, so that mother and daughter can speak to each other" (8).

him because he has a song when he turned around to die I see the teeth he sang through his singing was soft his singing is of the place where a woman takes flowers away from their leaves and puts them in a round basket" (211). Beloved's prose poem moves from the horrors of a ship to the longing for her mother. She wonders: "how can I say things that are pictures I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop her face is my own and I want to be there in the place where her face is and to be looking at it too a hot thing" (210).

Beloved's words blend the present experience of finally finding her lost mother with the past losses associated with slavery. The very spaces between words evoke African religious belief in an eternal universe unbounded by space and time (Mbiti 34). This way of viewing the world leads naturally to a concern primarily with the past and present, since the future is expected to continue without ever ending (34). In fact, Beloved's words shift back and forth through time, echoing the ravages of history and the wish to be reunited with her mother.

This monologue, told from the daughter's point of view, speaks of what it is like to be ruptured from one's point of origin. As Wole Soyinka's character, Elesin says: "We cannot see/ the still great womb of the world--/ Yet who denies it's there? Coiled/To the naval of the world is that/Endless cord that links us all/To the great origin. If

I lose my way/ the trailing cord will bring me to the roots" (1831). Her song and her appearance at 124 represent her struggle to find "the trailing cord," that has, in fact, brought her back to her roots.

Beloved's sudden arrival from the world of the dead emphasizes the belief in parts of Africa that the next world may be invisible, but it exists in a realm that is very close to the living with its own share of lakes, forests, mountains and animals that can be seen only by the dead (Mbiti 116-117). Rigid divisions do not exist between the earth and the places where the dead dwell (32). Moreover, improperly buried and mourned for, torn from her mother and the country of her ancestors, Beloved's extreme thirst and overwhelming fatigue upon her arrival at 124 suggest the long length of time she has spent in search of her home.

Septimus Warren Smith's language also evokes the sense of complete rootlessness. Unlike Beloved, he has no place to wander back to; instead, Septimus hurls himself out of a window to escape the violation caused by the static, one dimensional language and practices employed by Holmes and Bradshaw. Still Septimus seeks to find a place of origin by following the voices of his dead friend that come to him in incoherent utterances. Ultimately in Woolf's depiction of Septimus' world, he is doomed to wander, adrift, and seek the comforts of the underworld, where the cries of the war dead will await him. However, there is no universal womb to

embrace him in either life or death. On the other hand, Beloved's poetry is her call to both her individual mother and her chant to the universe as mother. At the same time, her language encompasses the grief of those who have fallen beneath the sea in search of that "trailing cord," whose lives have been erased and forgotten.

### **The Uses of Language**

It is most important to emphasize that Morrison and Woolf are critiquing the way language is used to justify violence and enforce domination. Morrison tells her story through multiple voices and points-of-view, each one filling in the gap of the story and making it a unified whole composed of the sum total of disparate fragments. Like her repeating pictures that are painted anew by the differing perceptions of her characters, the voices themselves create a dialogic unity that transcends Western notions of time and even life and death.<sup>4</sup>

Through the character of Schoolteacher, Morrison shows how brutality and violence are justified and maintained through the use of a static language. Schoolteacher studies and records the characteristics of his slaves, noting their animal traits in a separate column on his page. Like the dangerous European phrenologists, he uses language and what

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<sup>4</sup>Marilyn Sanders Mobley aptly notes, "In that the fragments constitute voices which speak to and comment on one another, the text illustrates the call and response pattern of the African-American oral tradition" ("A Different Remembering" 359).

he considers rational and scientific means to establish a biologic argument justifying slavery. The way he uses language to establish dominion and a sense of white superiority and entitlement encourages his fieldhands to brutally steal Sethe's milk, since she is seen as an animal they have the right to enslave and violate. Just as Morrison says in her Nobel Prize Speech that "sexist language, racist language, theistic language...all are typical of the policing languages of mastery" (WLT 6), Sethe's inhumane treatment is linked to this type of discourse. The power and mastery of the slaveowner is communicated to her as she overhears Schoolteacher speak about his study of her. She understands then, as Paul D does, that her life is considered less significant than even a rooster. Her escape from slavery is also her escape from those "whose evacuated language leaves them with no access to what is left of their human instincts, for they speak only to those who obey, or in order to force obedience" (6).

When Schoolteacher witnesses Sethe's murder, he believes it is "all testimony to the results of a little so-called freedom imposed on people who needed every care and guidance in the world to keep them from the cannibal life they preferred" (151). In this way, he echoes nineteenth-century philosophy, that in order to justify slavery, argued that the white man must take care of the cannibalized darker children. His response to Sethe's act is condescendingly to

think: "see what happened when you overbeat creatures God had given you the responsibility of--the trouble it was, and the loss" (150). Schoolteacher uses the language of racist ideology to enforce obedience.

Unlike Woolf, who admits she never succeeded in writing the truth about the body, the brutality Morrison's characters suffer from is tied to the scarring of the body. Sethe is pinned down by men and robbed of her milk, and then beaten until her back becomes a chokecherry tree. Schoolteacher thinks Sixo's explanation that he took and ate the plantation's shoat so he can eat and consequently work better is clever; nevertheless he "beat him anyway to show him that definitions belonged to the definers--not the defined" (190). According to Schoolteacher, black bodies can only hold definitions; they have no right to agency.

In contrast, Morrison's novel creates narrative out of the scarred and silenced bodies.<sup>5</sup> As Valerie Smith argues:

To the extent that the novel undertakes a project so elusive--representing the body, speaking the unspoken--I would suggest that its dominant mode of articulation is analogical. Unable to resolve the paradox of narrating the body, uttering the unutterable, it's as if the novel replicates that paradox. For it sets up and explodes an array of dichotomies; those between life and afterlife, living and dead, oral and written, self and other, and so on. (Amistad 350)

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<sup>5</sup>For a further discussion of Morrison's representation of the body, see April Lidinsky, "Prophecy Bodies: Calling for a Politics of Collectivity in Toni Morrison's Beloved" (191-216).

In sharp contrast to the statist language she critiques in her novel, Morrison writes a multiple-point-of-view novel that links language with healing. In discussing the way each character tells his or her story in Beloved, she says: "And no one speaks, no one tells the story about himself or herself unless forced. They don't want to talk, they don't want to remember, they don't want to say it, because they're afraid of it--which is human. But when they do say it, and hear it, and look at it, and share it, they are not only one, they're two, and three, and four, you know? The collective sharing of that information heals the individual--and the collective" (Conversations 248). Right from the beginning of Beloved's appearance, "Sethe learned the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling" (Beloved 58). Even after weeks had passed, "they still had not got used to the gravelly voice and the song that seemed to lie in it. Just outside music it lay, with a cadence not like theirs" (60). At the end of the novel, Beloved's cadence finds a form in the poem that interrupts the narrative. Her voice and her story must find a form in language that resists any linear use of words.

In Beloved, Morrison employs a "double-voiced" discourse, to borrow Henry Louis Gates's term, in which "the oral and the written play itself out in one form as the two dominant narrative voices" (Signifying 21-2).<sup>6</sup> If Beloved

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<sup>6</sup>This term comes originally from W.E.B. Du Bois.

encompasses the oral that defies any representation in the realm of printed language, then her sister, Denver, embodies oral language that will find a form in the written. Denver expresses Morrison's aim to make the printed language sound oral.<sup>7</sup> Denver, unlike *Beloved*, learns how to read and write from Miss Jones. Writing is seen as a positive gesture, since Denver is left notes with the gifts of food from the neighbors after her mother stops working (Davies, "Motherhood" 54). Miss Jones, in sharp contrast to schoolteacher's brutality, is a teacher who enables Denver to express herself in written language that does not alienate her from the oral culture of her ancestors. Morrison suggests that as Denver continues to grow up, she will be able to negotiate a relationship to written discourse that will not force her to represent the past or the world around her as a place filled with rigid facts and itemized information.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, like *Beloved*, Denver too has known a yearning that defies the ability of language to pin down. Once *Beloved* appears, Denver recognizes her and begins to

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<sup>7</sup>In "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation," Toni Morrison writes: "There are things that I try to incorporate into my fiction that are directly and deliberately related to what I regard as the major characteristics of Black art, wherever it is. One of which is the ability to be both print and oral literature: to combine those two aspects so that the stories can be read in silence, of course, but one should be able to hear them as well" (Evans 341).

<sup>8</sup>As Walter Ong elucidates, "Orality knows no lists or charts or figures" (98).

worry she will lose her once more. When Denver protectively asks Beloved not to let their mother know who she is, Beloved gets angry and withdraws from her; and in response, "Denver's breath steadied against the threat of an unbearable loss" (76). But Denver is also a stabilizing presence for Beloved, who feels the core of her being implode before falling away:

Beloved looked at her tooth and thought, this is it. Next would be her arm, her hand, a toe, Pieces of her would pop maybe one at a time, maybe all at once. Or one of those mornings before Denver woke and after Sethe left she would fly apart. It is difficult keeping her head on her neck, her legs attached to her hips when she is by herself. Among the things she could not remember was when she first knew that she could wake up one day and find herself in pieces. She had two dreams: exploding and being swallowed. When her tooth came out--an odd fragment, last in the row-- she thought it was starting. (133)

Beloved turns to Denver to keep herself from becoming pieces of fragment, hoping "Denver's arm around her shoulders would keep them from falling apart" (134). Denver and Beloved are like sound and echo. For two years, Denver was unable to hear sound after she was asked by her schoolmates about her mother's murderous act; and when her hearing returned, Beloved's ghost had become suddenly spiteful, as if to draw a clear relation between the two sisters. In fact, Denver's ability to decipher sound is connected to Beloved's ability to express anger.

In her Nobel Prize Speech, Morrison says that "narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is

being created" (WLT 8). For this reason, it is important "to make up a story," since "language alone protects us from the scariness of things with no names. Language alone is meditation." By having each character participate in storytelling, Morrison posits a language that has the capacity to heal and create self-identity against the language of dominion upheld by Schoolteacher. Storytelling can heal the yearning of both Beloved and Denver. In addition, the process of re-memory and the courage to speak of the unspeakable becomes a means to reconnect to lost origins. Carol Boyce Davies argues that this is central to the creation of a black aesthetic:

Because we were/are products of separations and dislocations and dis-memberings, people of African descent in the Americas historically have sought reconnection. From the "flying back" stories which originated in slavery to the "Back to Africa" movements of Garvey and those before him, to the Pan-Africanist activity of people like Dubois and C.L.R. James, the need to re-connect and re-member, as Morrison would term it, has been a central impulse in the structuring of Black thought. Thus, Toni Morrison in Beloved makes re-memory central to the experience of that novel; the recalling of what she calls the "unspeakable thought, unspoken" and the re-membering or the bringing back together of the disparate members of the family in painful recall. Morrison is clearly talking here about crossing the boundaries of space, time, history, place, language, corporeality and restricted consciousness in order to make reconnections and mark or name gaps and absences. (Black Women, Writing and Identity 17)

Morrison uses the multiple-point-of-view novel to express a black female subjectivity that is defined by migrations and boundary crossings. The very language she

uses at once exposes the brutality of a character such as schoolteacher and, at the same time, heals violation, and creates identity through the act of storytelling. In her essay, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," Morrison asks what is it that makes a work of literature "Black":<sup>9</sup>

The most valuable point of entry into the question of cultural (or racial) distinction, the one most fraught, is its language--its unpoliced, seditious and unmasking language. Such a presentation will entail the most careful study, one in which the impact of Afro-American presence on modernity becomes clear and is no longer a well-kept secret. (Michigan Quarterly Review 11)

This "unpoliced, seditious and unmasking language" is contained in Baby Suggs words to her congregation: "The dark, dark liver--love it, love it, and the beat and beating heart, love that too. More than eyes or feet. More than lungs that have yet to draw free air. More than your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize" (Beloved 88-9). Baby Suggs is concerned with the inner condition of freedom and defiantly uses language to inspire the community to love their own lives. She becomes, as Trudier Harris argues, "a communal poet/artist, the gatherer of pieces of her neighbors' experiences and the shaper of those experiences into a communal statement. Her role is in many

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<sup>9</sup>See Michael North, The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language & Twentieth-Century Literature for a further discussion of race and modernism.

ways like that of a ritual priestess" (Fiction 174). Grandma Baby tells Sethe not to listen to those who tell her "slaves not supposed to have pleasurable on their own; their bodies not supposed to be like that, but they have to have as many children as they can to please whoever owned them. Still, they were not supposed to have pleasure deep down" (Beloved 209). Instead, Sethe learns from Baby Suggs that she should always listen to her body and love it. Her words encourage Sethe to strive to be a subject rather than a defined object. As an artist and priestess, Baby Suggs taught her congregation that "freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (95).

#### **Partying and Loss**

The party Grandma Baby gives to celebrate Sethe's safe passage to freedom begins with buckets of blackberries and other bountiful images of food and ends with the appearance the following day of schoolteacher. Like Mrs. Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay's dinner parties, Grandma Baby's party starts out as a joyful act of defiance that reverses itself and culminates in death.<sup>10</sup> Grandma Baby's neighbors felt insulted by the party's excess; they did not believe an ex-slave had the right to such demonstrations of abundance. They did not, however, understand that the party was her way

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<sup>10</sup>Bakhtin writes: "And all carnivalistic symbols are of such a sort: they always include within themselves a perspective of negation (death) or vice versa. Birth is fraught with death, and death with new birth" (Problems 125).

of "claiming ownership of that freed self." The party itself and her neighbors' response to it causes Grandma Baby to review once again the deep losses of her life. Amidst the sense of a "dark and coming thing" (139), which was Schoolteacher approaching, Baby Suggs remembers "the last of her children, whom she barely glanced at when he was born because it wasn't worth the trouble to try to learn features you would never see change into adulthood anyway. Seven times she had done that; held a little foot, examined the fat fingertips with her own--fingers she never saw become the male or female hands a mother would recognize" (139). While the party begins with a desire to claim freedom, it ends with an epiphanic acknowledgement of loss that blends naturally into Sethe's murderous act.

Morrison and Woolf's parties deal with polarities, contradictions of life and death, solitude and community, silence and voice. It is significant to note that *Beloved* appears after the carnival Paul D, Sethe, and Denver attend earlier in the book. The carnival, which is certainly a another type of party, also starts out with a celebration of the harmony between Sethe, Denver, and Paul D, and also ends with its own reversal. The shadows that I mentioned earlier in the chapter eerily suggest another type of reality that eludes representation, an otherworldliness, that presages *Beloved's* dramatic appearance from the murky, watery world of death.

Nonetheless, for Baby Suggs, her party forces her to see her own desolation that much more acutely. The memories of her lost children, the neighbors' disapproval and the odor of schoolteacher's impending presence make Grandma Baby, the articulate preacher realize that "the sadness was at the center, the desolated center where the self that was no self made its home. Sad as it was that she did not know where her children were buried or what they looked like if alive, fact was she knew more about them than she knew about herself, having never had the map to discover what she was like" (140). Grandma Baby remembers that as a slave in Mrs. Garner's kitchen at Sweet Home, "she talked as little as she could get away with because what was there to say that the roots of her tongue could manage" (141)? Her life as a slave was marked by silence; it was as a freed woman that she became a preacher who attained the status of priestess in her community. But the occasion of the party, however, changed all that, since the smell of Schoolteacher pervading the celebration from afar becomes a presence that brings the cycle of death and loss to a horrifying conclusion.

#### **Mothers and Memory**

In this novel, Morrison portrays the grief Black mothers experienced due to slavery. In fact, Toni Morrison says that her novel is about, "among other things, the tension between being yourself, one's own Beloved, and being

a mother" (Conversations 254). While Sethe may have been able to escape from slavery, she could not escape from the strangling confines of motherhood.

In her article, "The Meaning of Motherhood in Black Culture and Black Mother/Daughter Relationships," Patricia Hill Collins argues that the cult of true womanhood emphasizes motherhood as a woman's highest calling. It stresses a motherhood that is confined to the home and children, under the protection of a husband. This concept of motherhood, due to the economic realities of racism, is usually limited to white women. In To the Lighthouse, we can see how many of the other characters romanticize Mrs. Ramsay and admire her distinctly fertile beauty. Like the mother Collins describes, Mrs. Ramsay is certainly confined to the care of home, husband and children. While Woolf also critiques motherhood, demonstrating Mrs. Ramsay's isolation and muted silence that is at the core of her life, her portrayal of motherhood is limited to this white middle class ideal.

For Black women, the experience of motherhood is defined in very different terms. Many African slaves were influenced by the practices of West African society. There, while the individual mother is valued, mothering itself is more of a collective activity that is shared by different women in the community. At the same time, as Collins notes, "While the idea of the cult of true womanhood has been held

up to Black women for emulation, racial oppression has denied black families significant resources to support private nuclear family households" (3).

For Sethe, the robbing of her milk, an act that is a direct attack on her as a Black mother, only makes her cling more strongly to her children (Davies, "Motherhood" 52). The realities of slavery and the isolation she experiences from the community after the murder of Beloved forces her to raise her children alone. Even after Beloved's murder, she reluctantly lets Baby Suggs hold Denver. And when Sethe stops going to work because she cannot bear to leave the dead child who has returned to her, her happiness is short-lived. The glee she feels while skating on the ice with her children is soon replaced by the pain of Beloved's vengeance. Like the other carnivalesque episodes in the novel, joy turns suddenly into its opposite. Beloved's need for maternal love is rapacious, and her demand for reparation leads to Sethe's deterioration.<sup>11</sup> This self-contained community of storytelling women is transformed into a household where it is now up to Denver, as the stabilizing force for both Beloved and Sethe, to save her

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<sup>11</sup>See Trudier Harris, "Escaping Slavery But Not Its Images." Harris asks: "Has Sethe, in spite of fighting so valiantly to escape from slavery, allowed her own value to slip until she becomes the "nigger-slave" to Beloved's "masterful," authoritative presence? The coinage of exchange, the dynamics of value have now come to undermine the mother/daughter relationship that Sethe sought so desperately to release from the bartering of human lives" (Amistad 337).

mother.

The isolation of Sethe's mother-love gives way to the community's intervention at the end of the novel. In the last pages of Beloved, each character looks at the present surroundings and can only see the images of the past. The thirty women who come to Sethe's house to save her do not see Denver sitting on the steps, but themselves, "younger, stronger, even as little girls lying in the grass asleep" (258). Even Baby Suggs arises from the dead as a testament to the ritualized and eternal nature of memory:

Baby Suggs laughed and skipped among them, urging more. Mothers dead now moved their shoulders to mouth harps. The fence they had leaned on and climbed over was gone. The stump of the butternut had split like a fan. But there they were, young and happy, playing in Baby Suggs' yard, not feeling the envy that surfaced the next day.. (258)

The party too resurfaces again to form a major image that links the novel together. Time, like language itself, is cyclic and cannot conform to rigid definitions of chronology. As Ella hollers at the thought of Sethe's dead daughter, "coming back to whip," the sound Ella makes brings the women back into an awareness of a time that is pre-linguistic:

Instantly the kneelers and the standers joined her. They stopped praying and took a step back to the beginning. In the beginning, there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like. (289)

The beginning is a place where there is sound without words. At the end of Between the Acts, Woolf too describes a place

of primordial beginnings, as Isa Oliver drops her sewing and faces her estranged husband before they speak:

The window was all sky without colour. The house had lost its shelter. It was night before roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks. (219)

Both Woolf and Morrison evoke a sense of time that existed before human experience was recorded in language, whether it is a time when there was sound without language, or a time when cave dwellers observed life from among rocks. The very melodic cadences of their sentences are strikingly the same.

In addition, in To the Lighthouse and Beloved, the images that defined the novels' beginnings make a cyclical appearance at the end. The Ramsays reach the lighthouse filled with memories from ten years ago that were recorded in the first section of the novel. As James nears the lighthouse, he recalls his father's interruptions as he sat peacefully with his mother years ago. Lily finishes the painting she began and abandoned in the first part of the novel while recalling images of Mrs. Ramsay described in the novel's beginning. In a similar, but more horrifying way, the characters in Morrison's novel must confront "the past that will not be kept at bay." Edward Bodwin, the owner of 124, and a prospective employer for Denver, returns to the house to pick her up, understanding as he gazes at the house he had not seen in thirty years, "perhaps it was his

destination that turned his thoughts to time--the way it dripped or ran" (259).

As Sethe gazes at the women approaching her, she can hear the healing sounds of Baby Suggs in their voices:

For Sethe it was as though the clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash. (261)

It is the sounds from the community of women that have the capacity to heal, to break "the back of words," used to justify violence. The women communally build a choral sound that can wash the wounds inflicted by people like Schoolteacher. But if Sethe sees Baby Suggs' congregation in the faces of the women, that image is replaced by Bodwin's black hat, an object bringing Schoolteacher back into the present. Sethe cannot distinguish the non-threatening hat of the present from the violation that hat had brought her in the past. She believes "he is coming into her yard and he is coming for her best thing" (262). In a similar way that Baby Suggs' party from years ago blended into the arrival of Schoolteacher, this same process takes place in Sethe's memory in the present moment. She first recalls Baby Suggs and then believes Schoolteacher is back when she sees Bodwin's hat. Each time the memory is related to an object that brings the past clearly into the

present. At the same time, the language of healing, of sound without words is posited against Schoolteacher's violent acts, his brutality that is justified by his rational, linear use of sexist, racist language.

Even the incantory effect of Morrison's repeating phrase in the last pages of the novel, "it was not a story to pass on," suggests a meaning that is its very opposite. Beloved disappears once she witnesses her mother's attempt to murder Bodwin, as though the re-enactment and subsequent desire to rewrite the past leads Beloved back to the place where the dying dwell. Although Beloved may be "disremembered and unaccounted for," a footprint that comes and goes around the stream of 124, the novel finds form for her fragmented story, form for the sound beyond the silence, ultimately affirming by its very structure, that this is a story that must and will be passed on.

### Epilogue

By having their characters reach back through memory to revisit what has been lost, Morrison and Woolf equate the act of remembering with healing. Clarissa Dalloway can reconnect with her adolescent love for Sally Seton, as she sits alone in her room. Similarly, at the end of Sula, Nel and Sula speak to the other that is absent, as they reach into the past to find the bond that remains severed in the present. Even Lily Briscoe needs to wait ten years to finish her painting, for it is the memory of Mrs. Ramsay that is recreated in her canvas.

Moreover, the narrative structures Morrison and Woolf create in their novels defy any type of linear analysis, since Western notions of time and space are reconceived and reformulated. Past, present, and future come together to form a single moment--whether it is through Woolf's "tunneling process," or Morrison's use of "rememory." In a similar manner, the self-identity of the female artist is always "in process."<sup>1</sup> Characters such as Clarissa Dalloway and Sula Peace are associated with images of water; their selves are fluid and unbounded; and they defy, in their divergent ways, traditional notions of female self-identity.

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<sup>1</sup>Deborah E. McDowell comments that in Sula, "we enter a new world here, a world in which we never get to the 'bottom' of things, a world that demands a shift from a dialectical either/or orientation to one that is dialogical or both/and, full of shifts and contradictions, particularly shifting and contradictory conceptions of the SELF" (The Changing Same 104).

While Woolf is interested in killing off the "angel in the house," Morrison dismantles the "mammy in the big house."<sup>2</sup> In this way, Woolf and Morrison redefine female self-identity even as they problematize the dilemma of the female artist. Through the characters they create, they implode the stereotype and urge the female artist to reject selfless and self-hating ways of being.

Morrison and Woolf see the female artist as a rebel, someone who must lead, as Sula Peace does, an experimental life. In order to survive, however, the female artist must find a form for those experiences that lie outside of language, a form for the fractured consciousness caused by war, or the silence of internalized racism. And yet this way of life leads also to isolation, which becomes, as Morrison implies in her master's thesis on Virginia Woolf, the necessary starting point for the creation of art.

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<sup>2</sup>As I mentioned in The Bluest Eye chapter, Barbara Christian makes this important observation.

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