

IDENTITY AS ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY: A MANIFESTO FOR SOCIAL
CHANGE IN TONI MORRISON'S FICTION

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First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.

- Martin Niemöller

ABSTRACT

Reading Morrison's fiction at the hand of Bakhtin and Levinas, as well as considering her own non-fiction, led to the conclusion that sufficient evidence exists to argue Morrison's novels present identity as ethical responsibility that can advocate for a manifesto for positive social change.

Analysis focused on the investigation of identity construction in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Paradise* (1997), and *A Mercy* (2008). Through her fiction Morrison can be argued to construct identity in a fashion similar to the philosophies of Bakhtin and Levinas, which present the subject's identity as an ethical responsibility for the other/Other. Morrison's non-fiction, such as her Nobel lecture, her academic writing, her social commentary and interviews provide further support to strengthen the aforementioned claim.

An investigation into the subject's identity construction indicates it is always-already in relation to other people. The notions Self, other and Other are thus used throughout this study. The Self, should be understood to refer to the subject, the I. The lower case "other" should be understood as referring to any "other" person who is not the Self, while the capitalised "Other" refers to the marginalised, the binary opposite of the Self.

This study is comprised of three components of analysis. The first component concerns the Bakhtinian theory of dialogism. Analysis of the acts of looking, seeing and naming demonstrates the Self's identity is constructed in relation to the other/Other.

The second component of analysis involves viewing the four novels through the Levinasian notions of responsibility and infinity. Revealingly, all four novels deal with the theme of responsibility and stylistically portray a grappling with infinity.

Applying the concept of answerability, which functions in the theories of both Levinas and Bakhtin, further demonstrates Morrison's focus on responsibility as signified by the pariah figures, function of community and her stylistics that invite reader responsibility.

The contribution of this study is in having articulated the humanity and commonalities the exploiting and abusing Self shares with the exploited and abused other/Other, in order to demonstrate it is in the Self's interest to value the other/Other.

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my son, Angus Christopher Links.

DECLARATION

I, Vida de Voss, hereby declare that this study is a true reflection of my own research and that this work, in whole or part, has not been submitted for a degree in any other institution of higher education.

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Date:.....

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Orientation of the study

This study is an inter-textual exploration of fictional and non-fictional texts by Toni Morrison to uncover readings of identity construction and responsibility, which together propagate a particular philosophy, or to borrow a term from Bloom, “a manifesto for social change” (2005, p. 2) that remains otherwise unarticulated in all of Morrison’s novels, though, as this study will show, evident in her entire oeuvre. This study will, however, focus only on *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Paradise* (1997), and *A Mercy* (2008).

Morrison’s exploration of identity, given the distinct historical bearing of her work, can be argued is not only about her characters, but also by extension that of individual life beyond the fictional text. Considering Morrison’s stated political agenda (Schappell, 2008, p. 70; Childress, 1994, p. 3), hermeneutical questions concerning the significance of the work and how the imagined worlds reflect the lived world are invited by both the text and the author. Additionally, Morrison acknowledges in *Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American presence in American literature* that “stories are the vehicles we use to share, translate, and interpret the human experience” (Morrison, 1989, p. 8; Carlacio, 2013, p. 133).

Following Christian’s argument that “people of colour have always theorised – but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic” through “narrative forms, in the stories [we] create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language,”

(1988, p. 68), this study ultimately makes a case that a philosophy, equal to that of two leading Continental thinkers, can be drawn from the “narrative theorising” of Morrison’s stories. Morrison’s fiction will, moreover, be defended as having a very definite moral and ethical contribution to make in the non-fictional world. This bold claim stems from the analysis of Morrison’s four mentioned novels, which are drawn from her eleven novels that have been written over a period of forty-five years. Despite the settings of both the novelist and the novels (spanning the period between the civil rights movement to the 1600s) it can be argued that Morrison consistently propagates for a specific ethical construction of identity.

Identity politics in relation to the slave history of the United States of America (USA) form the primary impetus of Morrison’s work with explorations of identity construction of African Americans and African American women in particular. This study builds on arguments that claim Morrison’s work is an ongoing commitment to redefine (African American) personhood with the intention of producing a new consciousness regarding race (Carlacio, 2007, p. xv), to assist African Americans to recover the lost or diminished selves resulting from slavery and its “lingering inheritance” (Christiansë, 2013, p. 33; Seward and Tally, 2014; Conner, 2013).

The emphasis in Morrison’s work to “re-memory” history and to explore identity makes of Morrison a modern-day literary prophetess as she considers historical events in the context of the present to provide critique, warning, and/or a challenge to her readers about the consequences of slavery and racism in America and the human need for reformation to prompt both races to escape the destructive effects of this heritage (Watson, 2009, p. 1) – and by extension *all* races. This study reads Morrison’s work

as presenting society with a figurative mirror to view itself critically and recognise what is profoundly human in all people (Watson, 2009, p. 3; Fultz, 2013, p. 19; Rigney, 1991, p. 2) and thus reveal Morrison's work as "an ethical mandate to break the cycle of racism, sexism and other oppressions" (Bassard, 2014, p. 119). Goulimari argues Morrison draws on the "pure potential of the past for the sake of the future" (2011, p. 142). This prophetic thinking is once again evident when Morrison explains in an interview with Neary that *A Mercy* is an effort to uncouple slavery and racism in an effort to imagine a pre-racist society. Whereas Morrison is uncomfortable with the notion of a post-racist society, her pre-racist portrayal is an emphasis on alternative, non-hierarchical race relations and thus holds constructive potential for the present.

On a first reading Morrison's novels can certainly be analysed on moral grounds since value judgements regarding racism, infanticide, rape, murder and other shocking themes are rife in all her novels. For purposes of this study I am, however, not concerned with the general understanding of morality as portrayed or questioned in Morrison's novels. The term ethics in this study is informed by the phenomenological work of French philosopher Levinas who propagates the idea of "ethics as first philosophy," (1981), which does not concern laws or moral rules nor some form of morality. Levinas's concern is with an exploration of conditions that enable the ethical relation, and ultimately form the foundation of identity construction.

The intention of this study is to demonstrate how Morrison's fiction gives rise to the Levinasian argument that identity is constructed in relation to an ethical responsibility for the other. Supporting arguments for this claim is found in Morrison's academic non-fiction, social criticism, speeches and a myriad of interviews.

This study seeks to show that Morrison's work offers local and global communities a philosophy, hinged on an ethical construction of the subject, that can ultimately enhance peace and mutual progress in human society. While Morrison's work has been widely analysed and various approaches followed to do so, the argument to be made in this study has not yet come to light and will therefore not only add to the body of critique on her work, but also offer a manifesto for social change.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Whereas Morrison writes novels populated by fictitious characters this study argues Morrison's novels are responses to various kinds of injustice of which race and gender discrimination take precedence. The problem of discrimination, which leads to social injustice can be tied to identity construction, by which the Self fails to consider others. The problem Morrison thus addresses and this study addresses through analysis of her fiction is that of discrimination in an effort to promote social justice.

Social injustice has plagued human societies since time immemorial when Cain asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9). This attitude of not being responsible for one's brother shares a similarity with the non-recognition and consequent rejection of the otherness of the (br)other as displayed through sexism, racism, ageism, religious discrimination, xenophobia, classicism and homophobia, amongst other forms of discrimination. This same non-recognition of the other and their value are similarly at the heart of discrimination when it infiltrates political, economic and social spheres.

In a world of injustices such as corruption, oppression, discrimination, exploitation fueled by selfishness and egocentrism with those holding power exploiting the weak,

Morrison writes about the marginalised, the abused, the silenced and the voiceless. Like Shakespeare, in her portrayal of African American life and especially women, Morrison holds up the same mirror to her readers which Shakespeare held up to his anti-Semitic society when he speaks through the otherwise deplorable Jewish Shylock. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Act III, Scene I, Shylock asks Salanio and Salarino:

Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why revenge.

It can be argued that Morrison's fiction poses similar questions: Does the slave, the African American, the female not "also have eyes and affections, and whether they do not also bleed when pricked and laugh when tickled". Whereas Shakespeare continued to ask if the Jew would not also feel like taking revenge as others do, Morrison's work hinges on no threat for retaliation. And yet her work is an ongoing engagement with the injustice of slavery – and thus discrimination – and its political, economic, social and psychological aftermath.

When Morrison portrays the constitution of the self she generally does so in relation to race as well as gender, which is often also the primary categories critics use in their analyses. Whereas feminist theories generally analyse Morrison's work as a binary opposition and challenge to patriarchy (Rigney, 1991, p.1), French Feminist perspectives reveal that Morrison undermines the notion of a unitary identity (Rigney, 1991, p. 36) and thus overthrows patriarchal domination. As if her own problem statement, Morrison's fiction dismantles not only patriarchy, but any totalising system of domination that prevents human equality to inform human relations and progress. Rigney claims, "for Morrison to recognise the other as one's 'self', to come to terms with one's own otherness, to enter willingly the forbidden zones of consciousness (and unconsciousness) that lie through and beyond the mirror of gender and race, is to become more fully human, more moral, and more sane" (1991, pp. 2-3). The numerous and various social injustices that exist in most societies today suggest humanity is a long way off from solving the problem of our own self-centredness.

A further problem Morrison's fiction responds to is that of the white gaze. Whereas Morrison consciously set out to write without the "white gaze" (Houston, 2003), thus portraying African Americans and women as the centre, normal, accepted and non-Other, her novels present a clear awareness of the influence of the gaze by the other on the Self.

1.3 Research questions

This study explores Morrison's construction of identity as a portrayal of a Levinasian philosophy as it answers the following questions:

1. To what extent do arguments about language and the purpose of writing in Morrison's non-fiction form a foundation in support of her fictional portrayals of identity construction?
2. How does Morrison's fiction portray a relationship between the Self and other/Other that can be understood in terms of Bakhtinian dialogism?
3. How do the themes covered in Morrison's novels build the philosophical argument embedded in her fictional identity constructions?
4. How does Morrison's open-ended style of writing further her argument on responsibility?
5. What is Morrison's contribution to "a manifesto for social change"?

1.4 Significance of the study

This study firstly contributes towards that great body of research that exists on the novels of Morrison. The specific contribution this study makes is found in the claim of its title by which I assert Morrison's fiction has a meaningful contribution to make toward human society beyond the world of the novel. I argue Morrison's fiction puts forth a specific philosophy, which needs to be uncovered through analysis. This study's primary contribution is in articulating Morrison's portrayal of the Self's identity construction that forms the foundation to a philosophy promoting greater humaneness.

Whereas "manifesto" is usually understood to be a public declaration of objectives or opinions by a political party, it is not limited to political parties. Morrison's philosophy can be likened to a manifesto as it is a public declaration of opinions and objectives by the very nature of it being a novel, sold widely, translated into

numerous languages and taught at universities across the globe. The social change it promotes is, however, not self-evidently public. As this study will show, it is expected of the reader to discover Morrison's argument in her novels.

While this study argues Morrison's novels provide a specific submission for social change, her proposal does not involve instructions. Instead, it offers the Self a mirror portraying its own identity construction in relation to the other/Other. This consciousness raising exposure has the potential to further humane interaction with the other/Other.

In 2011, at a memorial service for victims of a shooting attack in Tucson, Arizona, the then President of the USA, Obama said, "the forces that divide us are not as strong as those that unite us". Similarly, while Morrison's fiction confronts forces such as slavery and racism that divide and destroy, it also presents the reader with the forces that unite humanity. Various thinkers are of a similar opinion.

For Women's Studies professor Grewal and historian LaCapra, Morrison is a "novelist-healer" whose abiding subject is the healing of self and community as she continually works through trauma in her novels (2013, p. 40).

In the Preface to *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, Gates contends that Morrison's novels offer a philosophy for healthy human relations beyond the borders of her novels. He contends that Morrison's texts "make the African American 'experience' the basis for a representation of humanity *tout court*" (Gates and Appiah, 1993, p. xi).

In line with Gates, Fultz (2013, p. 19), expands this perspective when she writes that Morrison's novels, "provide a template for the study of American life" and "offer readers some paths toward understanding the role of race, gender, class, social, political, economic status as well as definitions of self and community", which "posit a spectrum of human life that encompasses and transcends the African American experience. Combined, they expose the frailties and virtues, the selfishness and generosity, and ultimately what is profoundly human in all people".

Morrison's novels, given their complicated structures and the unarticulated philosophy this study claims she advances, can be seen, in the words of Christiansē as a "performative enactment" enabling a new ethics (2013, p. 63).

For Conner, Morrison's novels present a "narrative theology" as her stories erupt the mundane world with the divine as found in the "phenomenology of the other" and replace a "willed forgetfulness" through remembering (2014, pp. 27–29).

According to Fultz, Morrison's fiction appeals to consciousness and conscience. Morrison's poetics of racism and prejudice challenges our thinking around difference and the ways in which otherness affects relationships (2003, p. 103). At the same time Morrison's fiction urges reflection on our moral values and a revising of our attitudes and behaviour, should this be necessary – given her work concerns those principles that speak to the humanity of all people (Fultz, 2003, p.104).

For Clay Bassard, Morrison's novels, which are always about the absence or presence of love, explores love "as an ethical mandate to break the cycle of racism, sexism and other oppressions (Clay Bassard, 2014, p. 119).

The above-mentioned perspectives concur that Morrison's fiction performs acts of healing and calls for readers and societies to become critically conscious of their responsibility for a healthier humanity.

In her article, "How Can Values be Taught in the University", Morrison argues that we teach values by having them, for although they may be unspoken we cannot hide them (2008d, p. 195). Similarly, Morrison's ethics are portrayed through her fiction though not explicitly articulated.

No society is exempt from gender-based violence. No country is immune from political and economic abuse. Wars and poverty which have caused mass migrations add to the growing religious, cultural and political intolerance plaguing many nations. This study reveals the humanity and commonalities the exploiting and abusing Self shares with the exploited and abused other/Other as portrayed by Morrison.

This study therefore envisions contributing to the debate on the value of fiction to raise consciousness of the Self's identity construction as fundamentally in relation to the other/ Other. The significance of this relation, moreover, provides the logic that can promote positive social change.

1.5 Limitation of the study

All eleven Morrison novels, published between 1970 and 2015 are referenced throughout this study as I claim that all her novels propagate for a manifesto for social change. Only the four novels, *The Bluest Eye*, *Tar Baby*, *Paradise* and *A Mercy* are, however, closely analysed in conformance to the scope of this study. These novels

were selected based on their publication dates spanning across the forty-five years of Morrison's publication, with publications in 1970, 1981, 1997, 2008, to provide room for cross-checking the claim about the manifesto's pervasiveness. Much in Morrison's thinking and historical setting could have caused the claimed manifesto to be modified or discarded. Whereas all eleven novels cannot be analysed in detail, arguments that could challenge or that do affirm the claims made from the analysis of the other four novels are duly considered.

Theoretical support for the arguments made in this study will be drawn from the work of Bakhtin and Levinas, but also from Morrison as theorist. Morrison's theories and non-fictional arguments are limited to her Nobel lecture, two essays on social criticism and an academic book. The interviews are primarily found in *Conversations with Toni Morrison* (Taylor-Guthrie, 1994) and *Toni Morrison: Conversations* (Denard, 2008a); *What Moves at the Margin: Selected Nonfiction*, (Denard, 2008b); the social critique she has delivered in *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas and the Construction of Social Reality* (1992) and *Birth of a Nation'hood: Gaze, Script, and Spectacle in the O. J. Simpson Case* (1997), as well as her academic work, *Playing in the Dark, Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), which is an expansion on her *Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature* (1988).

1.6 Theoretical framework: Significance of the other/Other

1.6.1 Introduction: Minor theorists on the other/Other

Discussion around the significance of the other (person), the look of the other, and the other in Toni Morrison's non-fiction will be discussed in this section.

The theoretical framework will distinguish between the “other” and the “Other”, and the primary arguments of Bakhtin, Levinas and Morrison that relate to the other/Other in the identity construction of the subject. The “Look” as an instrument of analysis will also receive consideration before being employed extensively in Chapter Three. By way of introduction, critics who have analysed Morrison’s fiction in relation to the other or Other will be considered first.

Critics who consider Morrison as constructing the subject’s identity in binary opposition with the other/Other are Davis and Terzieva-Artemis. Another theorist whose work deserves mention for constructing identity of the African American as informed by a double-consciousness, is Du Bois, who will be addressed through the work of Ryan.

Yet another group of Morrison critics exist that reject such a view of a dual dialectic of subject formation in favour of more expansive considerations. These critics include LeSeur, Henderson and Page.

In the final instance the three primary theorists, Bakhtin, Levinas and Morrison herself will be discussed and then the “Look” as analytical instrument.

Davis employs the Sartrean subject-object dialectic to analyse Morrison’s characters in *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and *Song of Solomon*. At the hand of Sartre she argues many of Morrison’s characters try to define themselves through the eyes of others, yet by either refusing to recognise the transcendence of the other or by synthesising the other, which in both cases are mere objectifications of the other (Davis, 1982, p. 325).

Davis' article is essentially a critique of the African American ontological experience of internalising the "Look" of the majority culture and not recognising this. She further holds "One who really accepts the external definition of the Self gives up spontaneous feeling and choice" (1982, p. 326). Davis also argues that the Self can be reactive to the other, but then labels this as "second-hand identity" (1982, p. 326). While Davis makes a case for the power of the other's Look to inform the subject's identity as well as the freedom to either accept or reject the Look, portrayed by examples she offers of defiance, she ultimately recognises the influence of the other; in negative terms only. Both Bakhtin and Levinas, we will shortly see, conversely recognise the positive and constructive value of the other ('s Look).

According to Terzieva-Artemis, analysing Morrison's *Beloved*, *Jazz*, and *Paradise*, identity or individuation for what she calls a new subjectivity comes about through a double process of deconstructing the self by re-evaluating the past with its poor choices and failures as well as constructing the new self through reinterpreting messages of the past in order to achieve self-actualization as "individuals in the present" (2010, p. 201). For Terzieva-Artemis the individual continually strives towards a future where the need for love and compassion is satisfied (2010, pp. 186, 201). The value of Terzieva-Artemis' analysis for this study is the recognition of characters portrayed as evolving beings in Morrison's novels.

"Contested Visions/ Double-Vision in *Tar Baby*" by Ryan uses and extends Du Bois's concept of (racial) double-consciousness to analyse the various conflicts between Jadine and Son in *Tar Baby*. Ryan argues this novel demonstrates the necessity of extending Du Bois's emphasis on race to also consider gender and class as sources of

double vision. She argues that Morrison's novel shows how Du Bois's concept of "double-consciousness" can instead of being debilitating "be transformed into an empowering 'double-vision' in which competing visions are accompanied by a sense of choice and agency" (1997, pp. 8, 71).

In "Moving Beyond the Boundaries of Self, Community, and the Other in Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *Paradise*," LeSeur rejects binary oppositions as constructive of identity and instead appropriates Bhabha's theory of hybridity (King, 2014, pp. 8–9). This entails rejecting "the binary oppressed/oppressor, us/them, self/other" relationships, considered a paralysing colonial discourse, for the uniqueness of each person and context and instead acknowledging it as a hybrid due to complex intersections of multiple places, historical temporalities, and subject positions (King, 2014, p. 9). For Bhabha, subjects are formed "in-between", or in excess of, the sum of the "parts" of difference (usually intoned as race/ class/ gender, etc.) (1994, p. 2). As much as *The Bluest Eye* may seem to display a strong sense of us/them and *Paradise* seems to be a serious critique of patriarchy in its contrasting male/female portrayals, Morrison equally rejects the paralysing binaries in favour of an excess of meaning created in the space between and beyond binary confinements.

Terzieva-Artemis furthermore points to African American feminists's challenge to the illusion of oneness of black women's definition of Self. Quoting from Henderson, she points out black women's definition of Self is always through a triple process. According to Henderson, black women's identity is dialogically forged in relation to black men as women, to white women as black women and to white men as black women (2010, p. 187).

As the title of Page's book, *Dangerous Freedom: Fusion and fragmentation in Toni Morrison's novels*, suggests, he recognises in Morrison's novels that any entity is simultaneously unified yet divided, a whole yet an aggregation of parts. For Page Morrison's identity constructions resemble what Ralph Ellison calls "the puzzle of the one-and-the-many" (2010, p. 3). Page uses the concept "fusion and fragmentation", as well as a comparable phrase like "plurality-in-unity", to indicate this simultaneous and overlapping unity and differentiation of identity constructions. His argument that Morrison's novels are post-modern moreover capture Morrison's style that explodes closed and totalising thinking around meaning and identity. An extensive quote by Page summarises much of what will be argued regarding Morrison's work as it pertains to her engagement with otherness. For Page, Morrison's novels privilege:

polyvocalism, stretched boundaries, open-endedness, and unraveled binary oppositions. In her novels, time is nonlinear, the forms are open, multiple voices are heard, and endings are ambiguous because Morrison insists on the necessity of continual and multiple reworkings for characters, narrators, author, and readers. Forming an identity, authoring a text, telling a story, and reading or listening to a text must be ongoing, not fixed in time, place, or position. Since wholeness is illusory and division is endemic, one must explore the fragmentations through multiple visions. (2010, pp. 34–35)

1.6.2 Definitions of the other/Other

Before considering definitions of the other/Other, a brief understanding of the Self is necessary as the other/ Other is to be contrasted with the Self. As this study is not a philosophical analysis of the consciousness behind Being, Self is to be understood as the subject, the I, the person identified in contrast to the person who is othered. Self

will nonetheless be capitalised as it functions as a key reference point of analysis in this study.

There is no singular definition for the “other”. Different writers and theorists mean different things by it. It is interchangeably written as other, “other” and Other. At the same time different meanings could be attached to the same choice of writing. Feminist, postcolonial, religious minority authors and theorists use the term and often define the term “other” very specifically. Germane to this study is a brief consideration of used meanings.

Fanon develops the idea of the Other in his writing as a key concern in postcolonial studies. To understand the concept of the Self and the Other the formalistic approach of binary opposition is usually followed. This principle of contrast between two mutually exclusive terms argue that the perceived dichotomy between civilised/savage has perpetuated and legitimised Western power structures favouring “civilised” white men (Fanon, 2008, pp. 6, 146). This concept of Otherness thus sees the world as divided into mutually excluding opposites: if the Self is ordered, rational, masculine, good, then the Other is chaotic, irrational, feminine, and evil.

For Du Bois, the other is the Self. The term other had not come to mean what it had subsequent to his writing, but an understanding of otherness is evident in his much-quoted *Souls of Black Folk*. He writes,

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, – a world which yields him no true

self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,— 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. (1989, p. 8)

De Beauvoir defines the Other in terms of gender. She argues:

Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being... She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other”. (1956, pp. 15 – 16)

In “Orientalism”, Said explicates that the Orient signifies a system of representations constructed by the West and in relation to the West. He argues the Oriental is described as “Other” in comparison to the West, being “irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, ‘different’; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, ‘normal’” (2003, p. 40).

From the examples above it is clear to see the Other can be defined as the non-white, non-male, non-Western. The (Western) Self thus inevitably views this Other as inferior: unfamiliar, uncanny, unauthorised, inappropriate. More important to note, is that these dichotomies presume opposing terms.

The issue of othering is, however, a much more complicated matter when one considers the phenomenon of the “pariah” in Morrison’s texts because as Said points out, Orientalism is a constructed term where otherness becomes imbued with meaning. Hence, even those who are like the Self, can be othered through constructing them as different. The Self thus turns the pariah’s status from “‘another other’ comparable to me” into that of a stranger, an unrecognisable foreigner – or even a specie unimaginable in likeness to me.

Analysing Morrison’s fiction, Page reminds us that “Othering” (with a capital letter) is not limited to black and white relations with the latter being privy to othering the former. “Pariahs” in the African American communities of Morrison’s novels are common. Characters, described as “pariahs,” are those othered by their own community who end up existing on the periphery of the accepted norm in the community’s estimation. Morrison’s pariahs can be described as “a measuring stick[s] of what is evil and, ironically, inspires goodness in those around [them]” (Tate, 1994, p. 156). Pariahs function as scapegoats on whom others can “clean themselves” and in relation to whom selves can define themselves as better, more moral, amongst other things (Page, 1995, p. 82).

A further distinction worth bearing in mind is that unintended meanings are used interchangeably by the same author as evinced in Michele Saracino’s opening of “On being human: A conversation with Lonergan and Levinas”. She writes,

“The history of the Other has been a history of suffering. The Shoah, the Middle Passage, the Crusades, and now the rise of international terrorism are instances in which humanity continues to cause the Other’s suffering. One

wonders why suffering still occurs. This is perhaps most surprising considering the progress made in the areas of rights, freedom, and justice since the Enlightenment. Could it be that humanity has become anaesthetised to suffering? Or maybe, we have become forgetful of the anguish of the past, and blind to that of the present. While these questions influence our engagement with others, they are mere symptoms of a deeper problem: an inability to deal with difference” (2003, p. 13).

Here she equates “the Other” with others. The Other, as capitalised, carries connotations of the likes of Fanon, De Beauvoir and Said’s definitions from a very political binaried perspective. The other, uncapitalised connotes “any other human being” and not necessarily one viewed in opposing terms – other only than not me, yet possibly sharing the same gender, race, class, and so forth.

In this study I will make a distinction between other with capital and lower case letters. The “other” will refer to another person or character who is not the subject of the “Self” or the “I”. This other belongs to no generic grouping in contradistinction to the subject. This other is thus simply any other person irrespective of different or shared class, race, religious, gender, political, economic, educational – or any other – grouping. As this other person is merely distinct from the self and not necessarily viewed as one on the periphery and therefore negatively, he or she can be viewed in a positive, negative or neutral light. In contrast, the “Other” should be understood in the political sense as the disenfranchised, the incomprehensible, different from the majority or the norm, thus belonging to “them”, not to “us”.

The purpose for distinguishing between the two uses is to argue that the other – to be understood as any other person – can be rejected as well as accepted. The Other, on the other hand, will be deemed in the political light of inequality where the Other is discriminated against for being non-centre, non-rational, non-accepted, non-free, non-virtuous.

In his phenomenology, Levinas's notion of the other becomes capitalised in *Otherwise than Being*, referring to the other person, recognised as neighbour who can neither be reduced to objectification nor known completely. It is the godlikeness of the next person that requires the distinguishing marker of the capitalisation. For Levinas "Other" significantly gains in value compared to the "Other" of Fanon's understanding where the capitalisation spells the extreme negation of value.

Despite critique regarding Bakhtin's limited vision of the other for excluding gender and race – since he does not explicitly discuss it – it should be noted that he not only does not expressly exclude gender or race, he in fact argues that all speakers and listeners communicate dialogically and so form their identity dialogically or reflexively. His use of other is therefore simple. He employs the denotative meaning that simply refers to any and all other people.

Unlike the Other in the understanding of Levinas, Morrison's Other relatively shares the double-consciousness with Du Bois and the negation with Fanon, De Beauvoir and Said. Since the prevalent view of the Other is that of the marginal figure, prone to discrimination or rejection, it was necessary to retain such a definition in order to grapple with issues of racism, sexism and classism presented in Morrison's novels.

And because Morrison questions, revises and rewrites the idea of both other and Other, drawing the distinction in this study enables analysing otherness on various levels to identify the worth of the other to inform and benefit the Self, yet acknowledging the prejudice towards the Other as well as working through it to arrive at a constructive value of otherness.

We will now consider in more detail the theories of Bakhtin and Levinas to understand their arguments on the other and the Other in relation to the construction of identity in more detail.

1.6.3 Introduction to Bakhtin and Levinas

Before defending the choice to use the theories of two dead white men: Bakhtin and Levinas, I want to acknowledge an important argument made by bell hooks. For hooks, post-modern theory suffers from a fundamental shortcoming. She writes,

It is sadly ironic that the contemporary discourse that talks the most about heterogeneity, the decentred subject, declaring breakthroughs that allow recognition of otherness, still directs its critical voice primarily to a specialised audience, one which shares a common language rooted in the very master narratives it claims to challenge. (hooks)

For the most part, hooks is correct in her assessment that postmodern criticism remains the domain of predominantly white, male intellectuals whose language remains exclusionary.

It must thus be admitted that Bakhtin and Levinas do in fact speak to specialised audiences – students of linguistics, philosophy and literary theory, amongst others. Be

that as it may, their theories provide language for the lived experience of *all* people. Morrison's novels demonstrate what Bakhtin and Levinas theorise about. By reading Morrison through the lenses these two theorists provide, it is possible to get a better handle on Morrison's fiction.

Given the title of this study, *Identity As Ethical Responsibility: A Manifesto for Social Change in Toni Morrison's Fiction*, the work of Bakhtin will assist in connecting the language of the fiction to the construction of the identity of characters, and the work of Levinas will assist in connecting "linguistically born" identity to responsibility for the other, which is both ethical and practical.

1.6.4 Bakhtin's dialogism

Holquist sums up what he uneasily refers to as "Bakhtin's philosophy" as "a pragmatically oriented theory of knowledge; more particularly, it is one of several modern epistemologies that seek to grasp human behaviour through the use humans make of language" (1990, p. 13). Bakhtin demonstrates the dialogic concept of language as fundamental to identity. Since I analyse the language in Morrison's novels to derive at her unarticulated philosophy around identity of the Self, the value of Bakhtin's theory for this study is its provision of a clear link between language and identity with his argument that "self" is fundamentally a relation. In fact, the very capacity to have consciousness is based on otherness (Holquist 1990, p. 18). Thus dialogue, as a clearly discernable relation between two different entities, can help us understand the dialogic Self.

Bakhtin highlights that our language is not our own when he considers everyday speech: “of all words uttered . . . no less than half belong to someone else (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 339). His observation is that we constantly use the speech of another through already established discourse that is connected to a past, which include for example the religious, political and moral authoritative words of adults, teachers and others that invade our language at every turn (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342; Messent, 1998, p. 232). Our expressions are therefore neither unique nor novel, they are always derived from others and in response to other interlocutors.

The following terms by Bakhtin assist me to build the case for the Self’s identity as constructed dialogically with the other. These terms are: “addressivity”, “dialogism”, “answerability”, “polyphony” and “heteroglossia”. In discussing Bakhtin’s theory, the terms “reflexive” and “reciprocal” will also occasionally be used to expand the discussion. These dynamics will be found in the language used by characters in speech and thought, especially as portrayed in inner dialogue and motivations; changing concepts of Self and other/Other will be traced from a Bakhtinian perspective.

An utterance is marked by what Bakhtin terms “addressivity” and “answerability” (1986, p. 95). This means it is always addressed to someone and anticipates a response and/or an answer. Chains or strings of utterances are therefore fundamentally dialogic and historically contingent, i.e. positioned within, and inseparable from a community, a history, and a place.

According to the Bakhtin Reader, “addressivity” refers to:

“... my unavoidable state as a human being; as such I have ‘no alibi for my existence’, I must engage in a constant dialogue with the world as it is given to me; only in this way can I give my own life meaning and value. In *Author and Hero*, Bakhtin suggests that only through such a dialogue can I hope to complete myself in what he calls the ‘absolute future of meaning’. As a consciousness addressed by the world beyond my borders I must answer, for I have the responsibility to do so (the Russian word carries the same capacity for double meaning as the English term, being formed from the word ‘otvet’, meaning ‘an answer’). My answer, furthermore, will always have an ‘addressee’. (1994, p. 245)

Addressivity, as can be seen from this explanation, is moreover another form of unavoidable responsibility following one’s response-ability. Speaking into a vacuum is thus not possible. The Self’s choice of language is firstly influenced and enabled by the other given the historical nature of language and, secondly, in the present the other influences the choice of language the Self resorts to.

Any understanding of live speech, a live utterance, is inherently responsive in this that the listener agrees or disagrees, adds to it or responds in some or other form. Bakhtin further argues, “the listener becomes the speaker” (1984, p.68). Thus the speaker himself/herself is oriented precisely toward such an actively responsive understanding of agreement, sympathy, objection, execution, and so forth (1984, p. 69).

It is Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism and consciousness that provides the primary model for his approach. According to Bakhtin, each social group speaks in its own “social dialect” — possesses its own unique language — expressing shared values,

perspectives, ideology, and norms. These social dialects become the “languages” of heteroglossia “intersect[ing] with each other in many different ways... As such they all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically” (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 291–292).

The principle of “polyphony” literally means multiple voices. Bakhtin reads Dostoevsky’s work as containing many different voices, unmerged into a single perspective, and not subordinated to the voice of the author. Each of these voices has their own perspective, own validity, and own narrative weight within the novel. The author does not place his own narrative voice between the character and the reader, but rather, allows characters to shock and subvert (Robinson, 2011). It is thus as if the books were written by multiple characters, not a single author’s standpoint (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 112). Instead of a single objective world, held together by the author’s voice, there is a plurality of consciousnesses, each with its own world. The reader does not see a single reality presented by the author, but rather, how reality appears to each character (Robinson, 2011).

“...the unique speech experience of each individual is shaped and developed in continuous and constant interaction with others’ individual utterances. This experience can be characterised to some degree as the process of *assimilation* – more or less creative – of others’ words (Bakhtin, 1986, p.89). Our speech is thus filled with the words of others, varying degrees of otherness and varying degrees of “our-own-ness”. For Bakhtin “the immense, boundless world of others’ words constitutes a primary fact of human consciousness and human life” (1986, p. 143).

The characters are able to speak for themselves, even against the author. The role of the author is fundamentally changed, because the author can no longer monopolise the ‘power to mean’ (Robinson, 2011). It can be said Morrison’s novels are open-ended through being polyphonic and the author specifically means not to monopolise the power to mean, but indeed for author, characters and reader to create meaning polyphonically.

The argument extracted from Bakhtin’s theory, is captured in the following extract from the Introduction in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*:

We come into consciousness speaking a language already permeated with many voices – a social, not a private language. From the beginning, we are “polyglot”, already in process of mastering a variety of social dialects derived from parents, clan, class, religion, country. We grow in consciousness by taking in more voices as “authoritatively persuasive” and then by learning which to accept as “internally persuasive”. Finally we achieve... , a kind of individuality, but it is never a private or autonomous individuality in the Western sense;... we always speak a chorus of languages. ... each of us is a “we” not an “I”. Polyphony, the miracle of our “dialogical” lives together, is thus both a fact of life and, in its higher reaches, a value to be pursued endlessly (1984, p. Xxi).

Despite Bakhtin’s widely encompassing theory, critique of it as limited exists. Henderson argues Bakhtin’s interpretive model is limited to class, religion, generation and profession. And the model she proposes rereads his theory and extends it to include race and gender. She is correct to add these categories could not be found in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1981), *Speech Genres and Other Late*

Essays (1986) or *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* (1984). Yet, while this absence is gaping, his arguments on the dialogic lend themselves to easily add those categories since he does not explicitly exclude those categories; he simply does not specifically focus on them. The fact is Bakhtin imbues all voices with legitimacy and validity, evinced by his foundational arguments on polyphony, addressivity and answerability.

As identity is constructed as a result of the aforementioned principles and via the influence of various social dialects, so the construction of characters' identities via the impact of various others/Others will be traced in the analyses of Morrison's novels.

1.6.5 Levinas

In "Modernity and the Homeless", Conner, argues that the ethical quality in Morrison's writing consists in "beholding the other, in facing the other and feeling her call in one's own being, what Levinas terms the 'irreducible relation' of the phenomenology of the other, the 'ultimate situation' of 'the *direct* and *full face* welcome of the other by me" (Conner, 2014, pp. 26–27). Conner continues that when we gaze into the face of the other, we realise that we cannot comprehend or totalise the other – she cannot be employed (and condemned) as mere object, as an instrument of our utility; she is not merely a being, but in her face we behold Being. In the work of Levinas this realisation demands a radical confrontation with both ethics and ontology. The "face of the other" enables Levinas to argue the other's face reveals its infinity and vulnerability by which the Self is confronted and called to acknowledge our responsibility for our brother and sister (Levinas, 1969, pp. 79–80; Conner 2014, p. 27).

Bakhtin and Levinas draw a close conclusion in their acknowledgement of the value and place of the other/Other in the construction of the subject. Bakhtin's linguistic explanation offers a more concrete tool to trace this dependency in literature while Levinas's phenomenology, although more abstract, enables a clearer challenge to ontology and thus presents a more solid argument connecting identity to responsibility.

The core of Levinas's position is found in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (1969) and *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence* (1974). *Totality and Infinity* is firstly a critique of totalising thinking as exemplified by Western philosophical systems that precede post-structuralism and secondly an investigation into the question of what lies outside of totality to found subjectivity in the idea of infinity (1969, p. 26). In *Otherwise Than Being*, Levinas goes beyond *Totality and Infinity* to focus less on otherness, and instead on the existential implications of what this otherness means for selfhood. In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas shows totality thinking as reductive theory since it objectifies everything to a finite, knowable object (1969, pp.13, 43). In *Otherwise Than Being* he claims that subjectivity is ultimately not a being for-the-self, but a being for-the-other (1974, pp. 69-70).

Whereas Western philosophy, according to Levinas, considered knowledge as capable of being all-inclusive and ultimate in comprehension, he argues that not all meaning can be made intelligible (1969, p. 80). While Western philosophy assumed it was heading toward ever-increasing forms of enlightenment through scientific and philosophical discoveries that were revealing the existential and moral advancement of humanity, World War I and especially World War II proved the flawed nature of

this assumption. It is amongst others this reductive thinking that saw great thinkers such as Heidegger objectify Jews in a manner that would justify their extermination.

In rejecting reductive thinking, Levinas instead proposes a modality of reflection that is both receptive and responsible to what he calls “exteriority” or infinity, that reveals a trace of what is beyond perception, judgement and knowledge (1969, pp. 194–201; 1985, p. 86). This exposure to what he calls ‘infinity’ or the irreducible nature of the other person is discovered in the “face” of the other person, and forces the subject to respond to the presence of the other. For Levinas the other person’s being is recognised before any ontological detail of the other person is necessary. This recognition of the other person puts the Self before the choice to ignore or acknowledge, to harm or not to harm.

For Levinas the relation to the face is immediately ethical, as it spells the first mode of “knowing”, as a facing or responding to the other (1985, p. 87). In *Ethics and Infinity* Levinas claims that “responsibility [which] is the essential, primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity” (p. 95) is afforded to the Other to give an identity to the Self. Alterity is thus the ground for subjectivity. Bakhtin agrees with this stance (Nealon, 1997, p. 133).

Not only is a responsibility discovered in the face-to-face, but an inability to reduce the Other ontologically to the Same or Self is also discovered. As such Levinas’s theory of “ethics as first philosophy” connects the relationship between the Self’s identity and the Self’s responsibility for others.

1.6.6 The Look

In this study, the notion of “the look” will be capitalised to elevate it to a theoretical instrument.

Guerrero expands on the work done on what has become known as “the Look”. Psychoanalytic feminists argue the Look is an appropriation of women as eroticised, fetishized, and generally commodified objects that are displayed for the enjoyment of a controlling male look or gaze (1990, p. 761). Guerrero takes a look at Morrison’s more complex exploration of the Look, which goes beyond the limits of the dominant male gaze to include the dominant racist and classist gaze on the Other. In Morrison’s novels the gaze includes these three –isms, but additionally extends to the looks characters give each other as the other. This study will thus explore these various forms of impactful and identity-constructing Looks.

Guerrero recognises the impact of the Look when he extends his analysis beyond the sexual, racist and classist objectifying of the Self by which it performs an Othering of the other. He moreover explores how the white gaze is internalised by the African American characters and how they construct themselves through – as well as *against* – the gaze of the dominant society (1990, p. 762). Guerrero thus argues the Self can Other itself as well. Unlike Terzieva-Artemis, Guerrero argues the dominant gaze can also be resisted.

Davis points to the Look by way of Sartre’s argument that human relations revolve around the experience of the Look, for being “seen” by another both confirms one’s reality but also threatens one’s sense of freedom” (1982, p. 324). For Sartre, this

recognition and confirmation of the Self raises a concern with freedom, for another's Look makes the subject recognise its transcendence as transcended by the perception of the other (Sartre as cited in Davis, 1982, p. 325). Davis, in following Sartre, argues the Look is an inescapable ontological experience. Without the Look of the Other, the Self can see him/herself as pure consciousness in a world of possible projects, whereas the Look of the other is acknowledged as "my transcendence transcended" because the subject then becomes an object in another's perception (Davis, 1982, p. 324–325). Morrison's novels have numerous examples of this construction of Self, but not as a Sartrean grasping to exert freedom or reducing the other to possible projects. It should also not be confused with the "dialectical" notion of Hegel, which is a totalising concept whereby subjectivity privileges sameness over difference (Nealon, 1997, p. 133).

When the look is negative, one can agree that it could be problematic, but the fact of the matter remains – the Self defines itself in relation to another – whether fearing judgement, wishing for approval, it is still a self-other dialogic identity construction. In Morrison's novels the Look functions to construct identity from different perspectives.

1.6.7 The Other in Morrison's non-fiction and short story

Beyond her novels Morrison has explored the notion of the other/Other in what can be argued a theoretical manner. Included in this section is published works of non-fiction on the notion of the other in fiction and popular media by Morrison as an academic (Princeton University Professor) Morrison as well as her conversation with Angela Davis and a disability studies analysis of Morrison's only short story, *Recitatif*. It is

for the arguments held in the aforementioned works that this researcher views it justified to consider Morrison as a valid contributor to the theoretical framework for this study.

Morrison's *Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature*, based on her 1988 Tanner lecture on Human Values, was published in 1989. In 1992 *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* would be published, based on her 1990 Massey Lectures at Harvard University on the History of American Civilization and 1990 Clark Lectures titled, "Studies in American Africanism" at Trinity College, Cambridge. For the scope and purpose of this study, only *Playing in the dark* is called upon for Morrison's acknowledgement of the invisible presence of the Other in performing a fundamental role in the construction of the Self's identity.

In Section I, "Black Matters", Morrison argues that the basic themes during the formative years of American literature derived from an unacknowledged "Africanist" presence. She coins the phrase "American Africanism" to inform her discussion of how white American writers "invented" a blackness for their own needs. "American Africanism" refers to the "denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify including the assumptions, readings and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people" (Morrison, 1992, pp. 6–7). Morrison argues that the construction of the "new white man" was inseparable from the encounter with an African presence that moved and enriched the literature in various ways (1992, pp. 15–16). Morrison further argues that "the championed characteristics of American literature – individualism, masculinity, social engagement

versus historical isolation; acute and ambiguous moral problematics; the thematics of innocence coupled with an obsession with figurations of death and hell” are in fact “responses to a dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence” (1992, p 5).

In “Black Matters” as in her discussion with Angela Davis, Morrison expresses concern over the consequences of racism on the victim but also for the perpetrator. This issue is vital to note: Morrison’s concern is not limited to the victim.

Section II, “Romancing the Shadow” considers the “silences” in American criticism by focusing on topics that reveal black presence, including blacks as “surrogates” and “enablers”, the “Africanist idiom” being used “to establish difference” and “to signify modernity”, how the Africanist character is used to “enforce the invention and implications of whiteness”, and manipulation of “the Africanist narrative” as indirectly a meditation on white humanity. Young America, Morrison points out “understood itself to be pressing toward a future of freedom, a kind of human dignity believed unprecedented in the world” and yet it was established in the presence of slavery. Morrison argues that nothing highlighted freedom like slavery and American Africanism – a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire that is uniquely American (1992, p. 38). Important to notice too is that this fabricated, reflexive black persona as savage and subjugated other, is a means for whites to define themselves as new, free and powerful (Morrison, 1992, pp. 43–44). Africanism stood, therefore, not only for the “not-free” but also for the “not-me” (Morrison, 1992, p. 38). Given the ideals Europeans came to the New World with, be it to escape poverty and class or religious oppression, the construction of blackness in America buttresses whites against their fears of enslavement, powerlessness and wrongdoing.

Morrison holds it was the Africanism that also provided the staging ground for the elaboration of the “quintessential American identity” (1992, p. 44). The novel *A Mercy* portrays numerous examples of the world Europeans coming to America wished to escape.

Section III, "Disturbing Nurses and the Kindness of Sharks", highlights race as a metaphor for disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division (Morrison, 1992, p. 63). It furthermore argues that blackness is intertwined with sexual suppression as well as sexual expression. She shows how blackness and the black body have been used to speak the unspeakable about issues such as illicit sexuality, chaos, madness, impropriety, anarchy, strangeness, and helpless, hapless desire (Morrison, 1992, p. 81).

Throughout her discussion, Morrison identified the persistence of a “willful critical blindness” (1992, p. 18), by which authors and critics denied the presence and purpose of black characters in white texts. Important to highlight for this discussion is Morrison’s theory of American Africanism by which white American authors project their personal concerns onto non-white characters and use them to perform a kind of surrogacy as a vehicle for their own fears and desires (Morrison, 1992, pp. 13, 17).

These points from *Playing in the Dark* present a solid argument to substantiate the interdependence of the Self and other by way of the presence and function of the other/Other in Morrison’s own novels. A more fundamental point demonstrated by *Playing in the Dark* is Morrison’s acute awareness of the function of the other – whether portrayed as present or absent – in relation to which the Self is constructed.

A further valuable argument from Morrison's non-fiction is her social criticism articulated in *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality* (1992) and her second essay collection, co-edited with Claudia Brodsky Lacour, *Birth of a Nation'hood: Gaze, Script, and Spectacle in the O J Simpson Case* (1997). Both these trials present classic cases of othering and Morrison takes the opportunity to interrogate the racist attitudes undergirding the media in present day America.

Racing-Justice, Engendering Power is a Morrison-edited collection of essays, which appeared after the controversy about appointing Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court although he had been accused of sexual harassment by Anita Hill, a fellow African American. In her introduction Morrison states her desire to contribute to a new conversation about race and gender as they shape the lives of men and women of all races. For Morrison and her contributors, the Hill/Thomas controversy is yet another text in which African American bodies are the battleground for the establishment of white American male identity and the protection of white and patriarchal privileges (Hall, 2003, p. 286). The essays show how dominant narratives of race and gender erase African American women's experience of both racism and sexism by conceptualising all African American people as male and all women as white (Hall, 2003, p. 286).

Morrison, analysing the media coverage on Thomas and Hill, concludes they were described in the media through the lens of racial stereotypes instead of being individualised. She argues, "Without individuation, without non-racial perception, black people, as a group, are used to signify the polar opposites of love and repulsion.

On the one hand , they signify benevolence, harmless and servile guardianship, and endless love. On the other hand, they have come to represent insanity, illicit sexuality, and chaos. In the confirmation hearing the two fictions were at war and on display” (Morrison, 1992, p. xv). As such, Thomas was presented as the loyal and loving American while Hill was presented as the opposite – mad, sexual and explosive (Morrison, 1992, pp. xv–xvi). At the same time Thomas was discussed in terms of his body and his sexuality and not in terms of his mind (Morrison, 1992, pp. xii–xiv). Hill too was deprived of a rational Self as the truth of her accusations were treated as if inconceivable, given she was deemed a contradiction in itself – as an African American woman she was a mixture “not recognised in the glossary of racial tropes as an “intellectual daughter of African American farmers; an African American female taking offence; an African American lady repeating dirty words” (Morrison, 1992, p. xvi). Hill’s description of Thomas’s behaviour toward her did not ignite a careful search for the truth: her testimony simply produced “an exchange of racial tropes” (xvi).

Morrison therefore concludes that because the participants were African American they were therefore treated as ““known, serviceable, expendable in the interest of limning out one or the other of two mutually antagonistic fabulations” (1992, p. xvii).

Morrison’s arguments as well as the other essays in *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power* share the view that an articulation of the racial dimensions of sexism and the gendered dimensions of racism remained glaringly absent in the media focus on Thomas and Hill because they appear totalised and thus known in the psyche of media practitioners and even the judicial system. Morrison’s analysis of this present-day

appropriation of the other strengthens the claim that the other/Other be recognised as infinite and that the response-ability towards them be just.

Birth of a Nation 'hood, published in 1997 is a collection of interrogations of what the OJ Simpson case entailed. Morrison once again insists that within the media-generated narratives around Simpson, he “stands in for” some other – found in some form of racialised stereotype(s) or fears heaped upon the backs of African Americans (1997c, p. xxiv). Morrison explores theories, conspiracy and otherwise, in an attempt to better understand the culture’s desire to simplify the legal and societal issues emerging from the Simpson case, including domestic violence, police brutality and abuses of power, sexual assault, equal treatment under the law, freedom of information, and freedom of speech, amongst others. This move to simplify these matters once again showcased a totalising view of the Other.

In addition to the two social criticism pieces discussed above, which demonstrated classic cases of othering, the discussion to follow further illuminates the dialogic dependence at the heart of othering.

In October 2010 Morrison and Angela Davis conducted a public talk at the New York Public Library on “Literacy, Libraries and Liberation”. Morrison and Davis touched on the issue of the impact which torture, enslavement and violence has on the perpetrator (read the Self). Morrison admits this is something that she has always wondered about but “either never had the time, or patience or intellect to explore”. It seems to Morrison, when one destroys someone else (read, the other/Other) through vengeance or severe forms of justice, that the true object of the pain really is the Self.

Morrison refers to the mundaneness of the menace when she thinks of slave owners – or any other savage response. She mentions an example Frederick Douglass refers to in his autobiography, *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass*. Morrison and Davis agree that the slave owner, Covey, reacted towards Douglass in response to something in himself – some existing self-contempt and self-loathing. Having read the diaries of slave owners, Morrison concludes, that though they are not cruel people they do cruel things “but what they obviously are doing is working out some relationship that is so damaging to them, really damaging, it’s really a form of self-destruction, it’s a powerful form of self-destruction.”

Morrison also looks at the prison system and says it is so easy to block off the criminals and see them as people over there – as the Other. Yet it seems the way we corral them stems from something we, the system, wish to redeem in ourselves.

Morrison thus holds abusive people (read, the Self) project onto others (read, the other/Other) what they loathe in themselves and abuse that element about themselves, but as apparently characteristic of the other person. Although Morrison says she has not had time to truly think through this issue, the crux of her tentative conclusion is in line with her argument in *Playing in the Dark* regarding the surrogate relationship between white and non-white relations in early American literature.

This study will show the Morrison novels studied, in fact demonstrate, or rather, advise that the Self’s recognition of being ethically responsible for the other/Other, steers clear of ultimate self-destruction and rather towards the Self being humanised.

Drawing from Morrison's notion of Africanism articulated in *Playing in the Dark*, Kumamoto Stanley analyses Morrison's only short story, *Recitatif* from a disability studies perspective. In her article, "Maggie in Toni Morrison's 'Recitatif': The Africanist Presence and Disability Studies", Stanley focuses on the neglected figure of Maggie and what she means to other characters. Morrison completely avoids the racial Other as the reader is never told who is black and who is white between Twyla and Roberta, though race clearly matters in the text.

With *Recitatif* Morrison extends her exploration of "the other" from racist, sexist and classist discourse to how the disabled are thought of and treated as Other. In this short story, the "serviceability of the Africanist presence" that Morrison analyses in *Playing in the Dark* is transposed to the serviceability of the disabled presence of Maggie, who is read by the characters and critics alike as a signifier for the "bound, fixed, unfree, and serviceable" (Stanley, 2011, pp. 73–74).

Each meeting between Twyla and Roberta becomes a restaging of the repressed ideological and psychological interactions during their time in the orphanage and the cleaner Maggie (Stanley, 2011, p. 80). Twyla associates both her mother and Maggie with the mother who is unresponsive to her needs (Morrison, 1983, p. 260). Thus, Maggie with her disabilities comes to represent Twyla's own disabling moments and in her epiphany, Twyla realises how she had projected her own feelings of inadequacy and the powerlessness stemming from her mother upon Maggie for both women were "deaf" and "dumb" to her needs (Stanley, 2011, pp. 76; 81–82). Despite their differences in race and class, both Twyla and Roberta agree in their readings of Maggie as a "shadow figure" that embodied their projected and conflicted visions of

themselves and their mothers and they have used the disabled subject as an arena for their own enablement (Stanley, 2011, pp. 83–84).

1.7 Methodology

This section presents the method that has been used to conduct this study and also presents the chapter outline of the study.

1.7.1 Research design

This study has been a qualitative, desktop research where Morrison's fiction and non-fiction have been brought into a space of dialogue that can add further findings to the great body of work done in analysing the construction of identity as a site of ethical debate in Morrison's novels. Qualitative research was used because it is characterised by its aims, which principally relate to understanding certain aspects of social life. Qualitative research is concerned with gathering and analysing information available in print form and in this case it is the fiction and non-fiction of Toni Morrison. The relevance of qualitative research in this study lies in its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of characters and Morrison's construction of their identity in order to argue for a particular universal subject-other responsibility as foundational to human relations and ordering a better world. In addition, qualitative research provides information about the humanity of humanity. Qualitative methods are effective in identifying intangible factors in fiction, which are otherwise not apparent. Therefore, since a qualitative method was used, there had not been any fieldwork, but rather a literary analysis of various fictional and non-fictional texts by Morrison and other critics.

The chosen novels that present identity formation as an ethical responsibility were purposefully selected and critically examined in relation to the evidence they yield for the unravelling of this philosophy or agenda for social change.

Analysis of identity construction will be done through exploring the following elements: the other/Other and pariahs, seeing and being seen, naming, community, and responsibility. Morrison's stylistics that invite interpretation will receive brief discussion. In addition to the four main novels analysed, the remainder of Morrison's oeuvre will receive an overview as to lend meaning to the proposition that *all* Morrison's novels support the claim made in this study. Works by literary critics, journals, the internet, media sources, and different publications have also been extensively referenced as to build knowledge for the interpretation of this claim, which aims to positively inform a positive social agenda. This study is not only interested in *how* Morrison constructs identity but *why* she does it as she does. In order to answer this second question one will have to go beyond the novels and investigate her non-fictional arguments about identity, race and gender.

Five research questions will be answered concerned with identity construction and identity dependence between the subject/ Self and the other/Other. The researcher will consider the Bakhtinian identity theory to read and analyse the identity of various characters. The Levinasian theory will be employed to identify Morrison's use of responsibility in relation to identity construction.

Qualitative content analysis will be done on four Morrison novels: *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Paradise* (1997), and *A Mercy* (2008).

It should be noted going beyond Morrison's novels is only to add credit to the political assessment of Morrison's work. But the novels themselves will be used to prove the point of the argument that Morrison reveals that the Self's identity is truly dependent on the other/Other as well as morally responsible for the other/Other.

1.7.2 Population

A prolific writer, Morrison has written eleven novels between 1970 and 2015. These are: *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Beloved* (1987), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Paradise* (1997), and *A Jazz* (1992), *Love* (2003), *A Mercy* (2008), *Home* (2012) and *God Help the Child* (2015). Only four of these novels will be analysed in depth: *The Bluest Eye*, *Tar Baby*, *Paradise* and *A Mercy*. The non-fiction and even her short story will be drawn on but only in so far as these function as contributing to the theoretical instruments that will be used in the analysis of the fiction.

1.7.3 Sample

Out of Morrison's eleven novels to date, the four novels that will receive in-depth analysis include *The Bluest Eye*, *Tar Baby*, *Paradise*, and *A Mercy*, each published in a different decade. While only these four novels will be foregrounded through detailed analysis, reference will be made to the other seven novels. Important arguments will also be gleaned from her numerous interviews, the short story, *Recitatif*, and one work of non-fiction, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*.

The samples to be studied in this work include written texts only. The major texts for analysis will be Morrison's novels. Her novels are not limited to one or two main characters or to one or two historical periods within each novel. The lives of diverse and seemingly unrelated characters are interwoven stretching across personal and community histories. The sampling will thus not be restricted to main characters or major events, but will include minor characters and events as well to accommodate Morrison's polyphonic style of writing. Furthermore stylistics and themes of significance will be identified for analysis.

The sampling method used is purpose sampling, which means only novels by Morrison were selected for this research. As Morrison has written eleven novels between 1970 and 2015, one novel per four decades were chosen in order to test the claim made by the researcher. Whereas the scope of this study does not allow for all Morrison's novels to be analysed in depth, the final chapter of analysis will consider the novels beyond the four primary novels to test whether they support, contradict or complicate the claim regarding Morrison's novels offering arguments for a social manifesto. The sample selection has been purpose driven to test the plausibility and depth of claim captured in the title of this study, which reads "Identity as ethical responsibility evince a manifesto for social change in Toni Morrison's fiction".

1.7.4 Research instruments

Key concepts will be analysed throughout the novels. These include key terms used by Bakhtin that build the case for the Self's identity as constructed dialogically with the other. These are: "dialogism", "addressivity", "answerability", "heteroglossia", and "polyphony". I will also look at "the look/ the gaze of the other". These

dynamics will be found in the language used by characters in speech and thought, especially as portrayed in inner dialogue and motivations; changing concepts of the Self and the Other. The key concepts from Levinas's work are: "totality thinking", "totalising others", "infinity", and "ethical responsibility", which assist an understanding of the justification of discrimination, but also reveals the foundation of the Self's ethical responsibility.

Instruments used to direct the research include academic journal articles, newspaper articles, critical studies, encyclopaedias, audio and written interviews with Morrison.

Whilst the theories of Bakhtin and Levinas provide the primary assessment tools for investigation, arguments by Homi Bhaba, WEB Du Bois, Simone de Beauvoir, bell hooks, Frantz Fanon and Edward Said also contribute to the analysis of the other/Other in literature. Morrison's own non-fictional interviews and writing provide a fourth source of arguments that function to support what analysis will reveal from her fiction.

1.7.5 Procedure

The first matter to be established is the reality of Morrison as a social critic. This will provide credibility for arguing that the novelist is making a profound philosophical, ethical and political argument through her fiction.

The theoretical arguments of Bakhtin and Levinas are to be established as they offer the concepts as investigation instruments that enable the pointing out and articulation of the ideas Morrison presents but does not formulate in her fiction.

The novels will then be read in relation to the key concepts as analytical tools as provided by the theorists.

1.7.6 Research ethics

The researcher will critically analyse the proposed primary texts and secondary source materials to utilise a content analysis approach to extract data and formulate conclusions. Since the primary texts in this study are novels this research is primarily an analysis of works of fiction, making the literary criticism that of fictional characters and events, which will also be treated as purely fictional. Personal biases will be avoided at all costs especially in light of this study treating sensitive topics of gender and race.

The researcher pledges to adequately acknowledge all sources and to uphold scholarly ethics of academic honesty and transparency within her study and critical production of new knowledge. In this way the researcher pledges to conform to the ethical codes of the University of Namibia.

1.8 Chapter outline

This study is comprised of six chapters. Chapter One introduces the research aims and provides an overview of the study to follow. It provides direction through brief presentations on the orientation of the study. These include the problem statement; the five research questions; the significance of the study; limitations of the study; the theoretical framework that consists of an overview of the two primary theorists – Bakhtin and Levinas, who provide foundational arguments to this study; methodology and research ethics.

The literature review is captured in Chapter Two. Morrison's novels have often been classified as historical fiction and revisionist. It was therefore appropriate to provide an overview of the African American history in the United States of America. Following the historical background, the historical background on Morrison will be provided in the form of the critical reception of her work and the approaches that have been followed in analysing it. This chapter is furthermore a defence of Morrison herself as a theorist, whose non-fiction and political stylistics provide theoretical keys in addition to the primary theorists.

Chapters Three, Four and Five form the analysis component of this study. Chapter Three considers identity construction as portrayed by Bakhtinian dialogics. All four novels are studied in relation to Bakhtin's terms with a focus on specific characters in each novel. The investigation into dialogics will take place under the themes of looking, seeing and naming.

Chapter Four takes the overall argument a step further by investigating the theoretical keys of responsibility (foundational to Levinas) and answerability (foundational to Bakhtin) in the four Morrison novels in relation to key characters, as well as pariahs. The function of communities will be analysed in terms of their identity construction or their influence on individual identity construction. Given this study argues Morrison's construction of identity advocates a manifesto of social change, the reader's responsibility is investigated through the analysis of specific aspects of Morrison's stylistics.

Whereas Chapters Three and Four dealt with the selected novels individually, Chapter Five emphasises commonalities and underscores evidence for Morrison constructing identity as responsibility.

In Chapter Six, the final chapter, the research topic and research questions are revisited and responded to via an overview of relevant arguments provided in previous chapters. The title of this study is revisited to evaluate the manifesto for social change as this study argues, Morrison advocates.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In order to appreciate the richness and complexity of Morrison's narratives this section will consider three aspects that can assist the reader in achieving this aim. Firstly, a brief overview of political and cultural matters in African American history will be provided to enable a better understanding of contextual references Morrison may draw on or respond to in her own fiction. Secondly, literary analysis of Morrison's fiction spans an array of approaches and could be a study on its own. This research considers nine approaches, whilst leaving numerous other equally important approaches unmentioned. The various approaches not only attest to the richness of Morrison's work but also to the wide reach of critical analyses her work invites. She is both studied widely and appreciated widely as her awards and prizes prove. Comprehensive discussion on these first two topics are inevitably impossible for reasons of space limitations. In the final analysis, a literary review of Morrison's fiction would be incomplete without a review of Morrison's own position as theorist. Morrison's non-fiction will thus be considered thirdly to provide further analytical instruments in the exploration of her fiction.

It would be beyond the scope of this study to have comprehensive discussions of these three components, especially the first two. As this study is not a historical investigation it will not focus on pointing out relevant historical connections. The relevance of providing contextual African American history is to understand the import of Morrison's response to the situatedness of a racial and gendered world. This study, moreover, extends a reading of Morrison's response to such a racial and

gendered world, to include the world of the Other as discriminated against.

2.2 Morrison and African American history

Whereas Morrison's narratives are historicised, this chapter does not intend to extrapolate the historical references. The reason for reviewing this history, however, is because Morrison writes from a place of deep recognition and revisiting of this history as the legacy of slavery continues to influence African American identity and American history. The various approaches followed in analysing her work attest to its richness, which allow for numerous lenses through which to interpret her work.

As already mentioned, the reader of Morrison's fiction should bear in mind that historical setting in her fiction is significant and covers two simultaneous time frames: her own contextual time when she wrote the novel as well as the setting in the novel. As such Morrison sets *Beloved* in the nineteenth century addressing the issue of slavery then, but also its aftermath and the position of African American in the 1980s during Ronald Reagan's presidency when she writes the novel. A further example is *A Mercy*, set in 1690 and considered a meditation on the political ideals of the modern Western world – before slavery was tied to race. *A Mercy*, published in 2012 also addresses the reader's responsibilities in the twenty first century. Except for her latest novel, *God help the child*, where the setting of the novel and the author's writing are contemporary, her other novels have a strong historical component with stories easily spanning a few decades (*Love* spans 60 years, *Sula* reaches from 1917 to 1965, *Paradise* stretches from the 1870s to the Civil Rights Movement) or a few generations (*Song of Solomon* spans four generations), references specific historical events (*Jazz* draws from the Harlem Renaissance) and various wars (*The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*,

Paradise, and *Home*). These examples do not include a comprehensive list of dates or events, as they simply serve to demonstrate the wide historical reach of Morrison's fiction.

2.2.1 Slavery, the American Civil War and Reconstruction

The story of African American history is argued to begin with millions of Africans forcefully captured, sold, and transported to the Americas. Voluntary and forced migrations took place to the Americas with the opening-up of Atlantic World commerce in the early fifteenth century (Rucker, 2005, p. 48). Whilst accurate figures are impossible to attain, historians have estimated that 6 to 7 million slaves were imported to the New World during the eighteenth century alone.

The debate regarding the origins of American slavery nonetheless remains unclear for had more evidence been available historians could have reached definite conclusions long ago (Young, 2005, p. 143). Even so, two streams of thought exist regarding the matter. According to the one group, economic factors, in particular, the rise of plantation slavery, led to institutionalised slavery and racism (Young, 2005, p. 143). The other group argues that discrimination existed against Africans long before slavery in British North America (Young, 2005, p. 143). Oscar and Mary Handlin's "Origins of the Southern labour system" argue that coerced labour was not a new institution for the English who settled in the New World. The Handlin's point to the fact that British authorities extracted labour from avenues including conviction for vagrancy, debt, and vagabondage – as we learn from *Beloved* and *A Mercy*. Moreover, wrongdoers were subject to servitude as a form of punishment, while children and wives could be sold into forced labour by the head of a household as we learn from

Scully who is sold by his father to pay for his mother's debt (*A Mercy*).

For much of the seventeenth century, black labour was not marked as especially different from other forms of labour. Like other servants, some black servants worked for the duration of their term, to be freed upon its completion. This explanation is important to comprehend the presence of the black blacksmith in *A Mercy*. While Africans were not automatically regarded as slaves during the origin of what would become the USA, the English (as well as other European nations) had the idea of the African as other – as lesser and as savage. Europe's colonising history across the globe attests to this argument. The decision to enslave the African thus most likely flowed from this pervading sense of superiority coupled with equally compelling economic motives (Young, 2005, p. 156).

Despite its origins, it is undeniable that slavery and its impact arguably intersect with probably all aspects of African American life.

The Middle Passage was the transportation of Africans from West African ports across the Atlantic to the New World. Estimates of lives lost vary immensely, but it is established that overcrowding, poor hygiene and nutrition, diseases and even suicide cost millions of lives during this voyage. Morrison dedicates *Beloved* to the "Sixty million and more" Africans she learned from historians who lost their lives during slavery – of which half possibly already died during the Middle Passage (Angelo, 1994, p. 257).

Many well-known figures, such as David Hume, Immanuel Kant and Thomas

Jefferson, had been of the opinion that black people were incapable of intelligence. Relying on developing racist science that defined Africans as being of inferior character proslavery theorists like Josiah Nott and Samuel Cartwright claimed that African Americans were not fully human and, therefore, did not deserve all the rights belonging to humanity (Tallant, 2006, p. 829). This theory of biological racism came in response to the contradiction in the American Constitution guaranteeing “unalienable Rights’ for all,” yet endorsing slavery at the same time (Anderson, 2005, p. 96).

One of the major causes of the United States War of Independence, also called the American Revolutionary War (1775–1783) was resistance to taxes imposed on the thirteen American colonies. Upon the Declaration of Independence (1776), these colonies threw off the yoke of Britain and endorsed “unalienable Rights” for all, yet the Constitutional Convention of 1787 and the resulting federal Constitution still endorsed the legality of slavery. The irony cannot be missed: the very people who would fight a bloody war to be self-governing and not to pay taxes would again fight a bloody war eighty-four years later to insist another group of people remain in bondage and not get paid for any of their labour.

The Haitian uprising of 1791 contributed to the prohibition of the slave trade first in England and then in America in 1807, but the prohibition was unenforced in America and instead led to the first American Fugitive Slave Law (1793) to facilitate the recapture of runaway slaves (Goulimari, 2011, p. 7).

Slaves were in high demand due to cotton having become the pre-eminent textile

during the Industrial Revolution. While northern states had begun to abolish slavery, the “cotton kingdom” of the South would not. Between 1800 – 1850 numerous slave narratives were published and thereby delivering a strong abolitionist message. Frederick Douglass emerged as the major spokesperson for African Americans during the antebellum period. Through his writing and his life Douglass – runaway slave, author of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave Written by Himself* (Douglass, 1845), orator, newspaper editor and journalist self-consciously worked to repudiate racist stereotypes and demonstrate the humanity of African Americans (Matijasec, 2006, p. 3). African American women who gained prominence as abolitionists, include Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth (previously named Isabella Baumtree) (Harper, 2006, p. 863). Tubman became famous for helping fugitive slaves flee the South on the Underground Railroad prior to the Civil War. Truth, who would become a popular antislavery lecturer in the North, had run away from her master when he refused to acknowledge New York’s emancipation law of 1827 (Harper, 2006, p. 863).

Various reasons are given regarding the cause(s) of the Civil War, but at bottom it concerned differences over the continued existence of slavery throughout the United States (Williams & Farrar, 2005, p. 257). In the 1850s proslavery forces became more aggressive in their defence of their plantation slavery-based economy. South Carolina was the first state to secede from the Union in 1860 and by February 1861 seven states had seceded and formed the Confederate States of America (CSA) (Williams & Farrar, 2005, p. 257). Before long, Civil War broke out in 1861 and by its end in 1865, after a loss of soldiers in excess of 620 000, saw the abolition of slavery. Knight concludes that while war abolished the institution of slavery and although the nation

embarked on an era of Reconstruction, it failed to address the inequalities created through generations of exploitation and inequality (2005, p. 173).

The Reconstruction Era (1863 – 1877) followed the Civil War. This period, according to emancipated slaves, was meant to bring about political and social change by providing civil rights to the freed slaves and to transform especially the Southern states. But African Americans were soon disillusioned by the Compromise of 1877 that ended “Radical Reconstruction and instead left in its wake a repressive political system which allowed for a demoralising and brutal social system for African Americans (Jackson, 2005, p. 313). While Reconstruction did bring about some political participation for African Americans, it brought about little real economic change for them given most African Americans remained at the bottom of the job market (Bankston, 2006, p. 306). WEB Du Bois famously stated: “The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery” (quoted in Franklin and Moss, 2000, p. 288. See Goulimari, 2011, p. 9).

While the Supreme Court had a unique opportunity to extend full constitutional rights and protections to African Americans the Courts’ conservatism ended up undermining congressional Reconstruction plans (Williams, 2006, pp. 755, 758).

It seems that in many ways Reconstruction instead gave way to a different kind of civil war. For after the Civil War, numerous white-supremacist organisations, most infamously the Ku Klux Klan, emerged in the South and “Jim Crow” or racial discrimination laws would eventually move from private spheres to the public domain. In response to the enfranchisement of black men, organisations such as the

Ku Klux Klan terrorised African Americans in order to stop them from exercising their new rights. Gradually, effective disenfranchisement was legislated, mainly through property and educational requirements that the great majority of African Americans didn't meet. From the 1870s laws for racial segregation and against intermarriage were passed. Jim Crow laws entailed the segregation of public transport, restaurants, telephone booths, residential areas, workplaces, cemeteries, public parks, and other recreational spaces (Winter, 2006, p. 477). From the late 1870s a black exodus began from the rural South to the urban North and to the West. Many all-black towns were formed during this time. *Paradise* is written with this history as a backdrop.

In the 1883 Civil Rights cases, the Supreme Court ruled that segregation in privately owned railroads, theatres, hotels, restaurants, and similar places comprised private acts of discrimination and as such did not fall under the Fourteenth Amendment. In the 1896 case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, concerning the constitutionality of a Louisiana Jim Crow law, the Supreme Court redefined segregation from a matter of private prejudice into a mandate of state law. In *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the Supreme Court approved of segregation as long as facilities were "separate but equal" (Winter, 2006, p. 477).

2.2.2 Reconstruction, Renaissance and the Depression

After Reconstruction African Americans focused their energies on education. The heated African American debate as to the nature and aims of black education crystallised in the antagonistic views of WEB Du Bois and Booker T Washington. Given the rural economy of the South, Washington advocated vocational training and

manual labour for African Americans – as compared to intellectual training and suffrage, which Du Bois advocated (Roynon, 2013, p. 103). Washington founded the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama in 1881. The first African American to receive a doctoral degree from Harvard University, Du Bois argued for higher education of “The Talented Tenth”, who in turn could become the “leaders, thinkers, and artists” endowed with the responsibility to educate and uplift oppressed, lower-class African Americans. Along with many others, Du Bois founded the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) in 1909 (Roynon, 2013, p. 103).

Du Bois’s Talented Tenth proposal was largely a response to, what he considered the accommodationist views of Washington, who emphasised industrial education as a means for African Americans to establish themselves economically and socially in a manner non-threatening to whites (Burchett, 2006, p. 919).

Du Bois’s call for a Talented Tenth was criticised for seeming like an elitist variation of the doctrine of self-help and racial solidarity that was at the core of accommodationism (Burchett, 2006, p. 919).

At the same time Du Bois’s idea of a Talented Tenth was viewed as black leadership expressing the changing spirit of black activism in early twentieth century America, revealing a new form of black protest that would influence the early Civil Rights movement (Burchett, 2006, p. 919).

In the industrial North, white and black workers were played against each other by industrialists, and labour organisations didn’t welcome black members. Between 1900 and the beginning of World War I there were more than 1000 lynchings, resulting in

white race riots occurring in both South and North. World War I (1914 – 1918) further displayed this type of racial tension, which saw the American army fight for freedom while discriminating against its own black soldiers (Goulimari, 2011, p. 10).

The African American Great Migration North, understood narrowly, refers to the decade 1910 – 1920, which saw the mass movement of black people from the rural South to the urban North. From 1912 onwards, laws for segregation of residence in cities were passed, resulting in black slums (Goulimari, 2011, p. 10). During the War, due partly to employment opportunities in the Northern munitions factories, black migration North greatly intensified.

Historians have called the summer of 1919 “the Red Summer”: there were 26 white riots against blacks, with blacks fighting back. In the course of World War I a new black leader emerged: Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican. He set up the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in Jamaica in 1914 and in America from 1916 onwards. It became the largest mass movement of nationalistic black people in the history of the nation. Garvey’s UNIA promoted the message of black pride as well as the notion of a triumphant return to Africa by displaced people of African descent (Goulimari, 2011, p. 11).

Under the auspices of UNIA, numerous of African Americans were recruited to one of the institutions and businesses he set up as alternatives to white-dominated facilities. These included enterprises such as restaurants, grocery stores, hotels, and entertainment centres and a steamship line that served to transport African Americans wishing to migrate to Africa. Most importantly, he also established the African

Orthodox Church, a religious denomination that symbolised the highest values of a people seeking freedom and empowerment. White hostility and organisational mismanagement diminished the UNIA's influence. Garvey demonstrated how separate institutions could help African Americans maintain their group identity and be empowered to express it (Osborne & Orezzaoli, 2006, p. 120).

In 1920, Garvey organised a parade of 50000 African Americans through Harlem, followed by a convention in Madison Square Garden attended by 25000 people. Garvey's populist message of black pride was an influence on the high-brow Harlem Renaissance (Goulimari, 2011, p. 11).

The Harlem Renaissance served as a symbol and a reference point as well as a stepping-stone for African American writers and artists who followed. In the years after World War I, Harlem's population was almost entirely black; the New York borough constituted the largest centre of urban African Americans anywhere. African Americans poured in from all over America and the Caribbean, a migration at once optimistic and confident. During the 1920's and well into the 1930's, Harlem produced a cultural richness that made it a mecca for New Yorkers of all colours and creeds (Berg, 2006, p. 426). Writers and musicians were the heart of the Harlem Renaissance, helping to make Harlem a social and cultural magnet. This period is also known as the Jazz Age, because of the defining role of jazz music. It is otherwise known as the Black Renaissance or the Negro Movement (post-war to circa 1930). Morrison would set her novel *Jazz* in this age with references to the impactful migration to the North.

Prominent in the Harlem Renaissance are Du Bois, the philosopher Alain Locke, the writers James Weldon Johnson, Jean Toomer, Charles Chesnutt, Jessie Fauset, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and the Jamaican, Claude McKay; also the latecomer, Zora Neale Hurston. These writers found expression and spread their ideas in the NAACP's monthly magazine, *The Crisis*, which had replaced Pauline Hopkins's *Coloured American Magazine* as the primary vehicle of black political and artistic expression (Roynon, 2013, p. 103). This writing created and reflected a cultural vibrancy, which was matched by innovation in the musical and visual arts (Roynon, 2013, p. 103).

The most popular writer of the Harlem Renaissance was Langston Hughes. A prolific writer, Hughes focused on the triumphs of the "little people" over adversity, the masses struggling to keep their American Dream alive. His characters, in both prose and poetry, suffer defeat and humiliation, but they are survivors. In such works as "The Weary Blues," "Let America Be America Again," and "Dreams," Hughes proclaims the desire and the need to save democracy for all Americans. He evokes universal values, not only African American ones (Berg, 2006, p. 427). A great admirer of Hughes, Morrison too focuses on the "little people" whilst engaging with larger historical and social issues.

Locke's edited anthology, *The New Negro* (1925), and other Harlem Renaissance texts define the "New Negro" as urban, proud to be African American, defiant, self-inventing (Goulimari, 2011, p. 11). While jazz dates from the post-Civil War era, when it was created out of a mixture of the blues, work songs and spirituals, it became well-known in the early twentieth century when New Orleans musicians such as

Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington, and Louis Armstrong employed characteristic jazz improvisations in the music they brought to New York nightclubs, where both white and black patrons embraced it ardently (Berg, 2006, p. 428). The growth of jazz was aided by the rise of the recording industry, bringing jazz to parts of America lacking live performances (Berg, 2006, p. 428).

The writing, performances and arts fostered a nationalism and an ethnic pride that strongly influenced later black writers, musicians and many others such as dancers and sculptors who contributed much to enrich black self-awareness and self-confidence (Berg, 2006, p. 427). The Harlem Renaissance thus gave rise to the “New Negro,” who projected a respectable and strong black image, proud of black culture with character triumphing over race (Berg, 2006, p. 429).

The Depression hit Harlem hard and the Renaissance suffered from disillusioned artists who failed to find a common ideology to bind them together. Moreover, African American financial institutions failed, taking with them not only financial savings but also many symbols of black aspiration. Yet the Harlem Renaissance continued until the riot of 19 March, 1935 (Berg, 2006, p. 428).

2.2.3 The Great Depression of the 1930s

The Great Depression, which began in the United States after a fall in stock prices that began in September 1929, became a severe worldwide economic depression. It brought mass suffering to all regions of the country. National income dropped by 50 percent and unemployment rose to an estimated 25 percent of the total labour force, with black urban unemployment reaching well over 50 percent, more than twice the

rate of whites (Trotter, 2004, p. 8). According to Trotter, white workers in the South rallied around slogans such as, “No Jobs for Niggers Until Every White Man Has a Job” and “Niggers, back to the cotton fields—city jobs are for white folks” (2004, p. 8). A contemporary observer stated, “The shotgun, the whip, the noose, and Ku Klux Klan practices were being resumed in the certainty that dead men not only tell no tales, but create vacancies” (Trotter, 2004, p. 8).

Both the Republican administration of Herbert Hoover and the Democratic administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt did little to aid the poor and destitute. As the “Last Hired and the First Fired,” African Americans entered the Depression long before the stock market crash in 1929, and they stayed there longer than other Americans (Trotter, 2004, p. 8).

When America entered World War II in December 1941, the military was still segregated. But the years 1939 – 1945, during World War II, saw progress for African Americans in various areas. In 1941 President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802, against racial discrimination in the defence industries; and the Supreme Court ruled that separate facilities for white and black railroad passengers must be significantly equal (Goulimari, 2011, p. 13). In 1942 the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was founded in Chicago. In 1944 the Supreme Court ruled that Southern white primaries, which barred black voters, were unconstitutional. Also in 1944 President Truman issued an executive order desegregating the military (Goulimari, 2011, p. 13).

After the war, President Truman conducted an investigation into the state of civil rights, and his Fair Deal policies supported equal rights and racial integration in all fields. Despite such advances, after the War education was still largely segregated. In the South by 1900 every Southern state had legislated separate schools for whites and blacks, with substantially lower expenditure for black schools. Northern states had both integrated and segregated schools. However, most Northern schools were effectively segregated, as many African Americans were confined to ghettos (Goulimari, 2011, p. 13).

2.2.4 Civil Rights history: From the 1950s to the 1970s

In 1950 the Supreme Court ordered an end to segregation at universities, after vigorous court actions brought by black applicants (Goulimari, 2011, p. 15). In *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) the Supreme Court ordered an end to segregated schools and overturned the “separate but equal” doctrine established in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) (Paulson, 2006b, p. 258). Desegregation in public places, such as hotels, restaurants, cinemas, bus terminals, railroad carriages and waiting rooms, was initiated in Washington in the late 1950s and slowly progressed through the 1960s. Having been born in 1931, Morrison was an adult by the time these changes started taking place. That said, she grew up on the stories of her parents and grandparents, recounting the world before these civil improvements began to take place.

In 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white male passenger who embarked after her. After her arrest, African Americans boycotted Montgomery’s bus lines for 381 days, supported by the

local branch of the NAACP, until the city changed its bus laws (Goulimari, 2011, pp. 15-16).

Martin Luther King, Jr. arose as a new civil rights leader during this boycott. In 1957 the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) was established by King and others to promote civil rights amidst the resistance to desegregation.

The first civil rights act since 1875, which Congress passed was the Civil Rights Act of 1957. International pressure to address the civil rights abuses mounted on the USA with the end of colonialism and the emergence of independent sub-Saharan states (Goulimari, 2011, p. 15).

On 1 February 1960, the Sit-in Movement was launched in Greensboro, North Carolina, when four black students insisted on being served at a segregated lunch counter. The Sit-in Movement was a black and white peaceful protest movement against segregation staged in libraries, hotels, beaches and other segregated public spaces (Goulimari, 2011, p. 16). Related to the Sit-in Movement, in April 1960 the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was founded inspired by Gandhi's nonviolent tactics (Goulimari, 2011, p. 16).

As of 1961, CORE (The Congress of Racial Equality) initiated the "Freedom Rides." Thirteen (both black and white), so-called "Freedom Riders" travelled from the North to the South, in order to challenge segregated interstate transport. Attacked and viciously beaten by white mobs outside Anniston, Alabama, and in Birmingham, the

Freedom Riders focused the attention of the nation on the failure of southern states to protect passengers in interstate travel (Paulson, 2006a, p. 210).

The NAACP launched its “Free by ‘63” campaign in view of the forthcoming centenary of the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, abolishing slavery (Goulimari, 2011, p. 16). The year 1963 was one of intense political activism. In a large demonstration in Birmingham, Alabama, led by Martin Luther King, Jr, the police used dogs and water hoses on demonstrators, an act which sparked a wave of further demonstrations (Goulimari, 2011, p. 16). On 28 August 1963 the “March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom” saw numerous organisations and about 200 000 people – both black and white – took part and witnessed King delivering his “I have a Dream” speech (Goulimari, 2011, p. 16). The March on Washington is also known as “The Poor People’s March” (Davis, 2006, p. 450). Its purpose was to call for the need to increase jobs and economic opportunities for African Americans, in order for them to realise racial equality (Davis, 2006, p. 450).

In 1964 Martin Luther King, Jr won the Nobel Prize for Peace for leading non-violent demonstrations for civil rights, and in 1965 he led 30000 people on a march in Alabama. Also in 1965 congress passed the Voting Rights Act, enfranchising thousands of Southern blacks who had never before voted.

In 1960 Kennedy was elected President with African American support. He proposed legislation that eventually became the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which called for equal opportunities in education and employment and prohibiting private discrimination in places of public accommodation, including hotels, motels,

restaurants, and theatres. President Kennedy was assassinated in November 1963, while the bill was working its way through Congress. Upon succeeding to the presidency, Lyndon B Johnson made the civil rights bill his major legislative priority (Smith, C. E., 2006, p. 444).

By the mid-1960s, Malcolm X (1925–1965), proclaimed the interconnected themes of psychological liberation, Pan-African unity, and institution-building. He held that there could be neither peace nor true freedom in the world until “every man is in his own country” (Lincoln as quoted in Van Deburg, 2006, p. 270). When he disavowed the philosophy of non-violence, proclaimed Black America’s right to self-defence “by any means necessary” and labelled white liberal allies of the civil rights movement as hypocrites and deceivers, many African Americans agreed (Breitman as quoted in Van Deburg, 2006, p. 270). After he had informed his audiences that they were a colonised people firmly linked to other black world communities by white exploitation, some began to formulate a new understanding of realpolitik. In highlighting the need for a spiritual and cultural back-to-Africa movement, as well as the expansion of black-run businesses and educational institutions, he was planting the seeds for what would later become the Black Power movement (Van Deburg, 2006, p. 270).

Along with Martin Luther King, Jr Malcolm X was the other outstanding black political leader of the 1960s. King believed that the fight for civil rights should be non-violent while Malcolm X believed that racism was too entrenched to be fought by non-violent means and espoused the political use of violence (Goulimari, 2011, p. 16–17). On 21 February 1965 Malcolm X was assassinated.

Younger African Americans became dismayed over the disputes among civil rights organisations such as the NAACP, SCLC, CORE, and SNCC with respect to tactics and objectives as well as the slow pace of change and, as a result, favoured more militant tactics (Paulson, 2006a, p. 212). In 1966 the SNCC, in spite of its non-violent Gandhian origins, came under the posthumous influence of Malcolm X and began to advocate black separatism and Black Power. The emergence of the Black Power movement in 1966, led by young leaders such as Stokely Carmichael of SNCC, was a direct assault on the approach of King and other moderates and inspired by various sources: the post-colonial theorist, Frantz Fanon, who was closely linked to the national liberation struggle of Algeria against France in the early 1960s; Malcolm X, and socialist ideas. Black Panthers believed that African Americans were “a colonised people within the United States” (Horton and Horton as quoted in Goulimari, 2011, p. 18); espoused extremist forms of activism; and stressed the cultural significance of Africa for African Americans (Goulimari, 2011, p. 18). On 4 April 1968 King was shot dead in Memphis and wide-scale violence erupted. In 1968 the mood among civil rights activists across the political spectrum became more pessimistic especially because numerous civil rights activists were murdered and the criminals went unconvicted (Goulimari, 2011, pp. 18–19).

In the meantime the Vietnam War (1961–75) was escalating. It started inconspicuously in 1961, developing to become one of the defining events of the decade and provoking a strong anti-war movement. African American war casualties were disproportionately high, and many African Americans, including Martin Luther King, Jr and Muhammad Ali, opposed the war (Goulimari, 2011, p. 19).

By the 1970s white Americans were moving to the suburbs in large numbers while African Americans remained in the inner cities with high rates of unemployment amongst African American men, which put black families under severe pressure (Goulimari, 2011, p. 19).

In 1981 Ronald Reagan was elected President, and the situation for African Americans worsened. The Reagan years (1981 – 1989) were years of reaction, and the reaction continued during the George H W Bush administration (1989 – 93) (Goulimari, 2011, p. 19).

Clinton's presidency from 1993 to 2001 changed the political climate. There was a substantially increased presence of African Americans in the administration. However, while middle-class blacks were now leaving the inner cities for affluent suburbs, social and economic discrimination against African Americans continued. Franklin and Moss (2000) write that in 1995 two million black men were in prison, on probation, or on parole (Goulimari, 2011, p. 19).

During the second and highly unpopular term of George W. Bush's presidency (2001 – 2009) the world witnessed the emergence of Barack Obama. His election was a hopeful sign for envisaging a post-racist society (Goulimari, 2011, p. 19).

Sadly, despite people believing a new day had broken over the USA with the presidency of Obama (2009-2017), the former hope was dashed with the election of Donald Trump revealing a very divided American society. It moreover revealed a society in which the majority of the Electoral College voters voted to return to what

Morrison describes as keeping alive the perception of white superiority (Morrison, T, 2016, para. 2).

2.2.5 The Black Aesthetic Movement and African American literature from 1965

Based on the cultural politics of black nationalism, which were developed into a set of theories referred to as the Black Aesthetic, the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s to early 1970s sought to create a populist art form to promote the idea of black separatism. The Black Arts Movement, which can be dated roughly to 1965 through 1976, has often been called the “Second Black Renaissance,” suggesting a comparison to the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and ’30s. The two are alike in encompassing literature, music, visual arts, and theatre (Smith, DL, 2006, p. 247). Both movements emphasised racial pride, an appreciation of African heritage, and a commitment to produce works that reflected the culture and experiences of black people. The Black Arts Movement, however, was larger and longer lasting, and its dominant spirit was politically militant and often racially separatist (Smith, DL, 2006, p. 247).

Many adherents viewed the artist as an activist responsible for the formation of racially separate publishing houses, theatre troupes and study groups. The literature of the movement, generally written in black English vernacular and confrontational in tone, addressed such issues as interracial tension, sociopolitical awareness, and the relevance of African history and culture to African Americans (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2016, para. 1).

Leading theorists of the Black Arts Movement included Houston A Baker, Jr, Carolyn

M Rogers, Addison Gayle, Jr, (editor of *The Black Aesthetic*; 1971), Hoyt F Fuller (editor of the journal *Negro Digest*, which became *Black World* in 1970), and LeRoi Jones and Larry Neal (editors of *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing*; 1968). Jones, later known as Amiri Baraka, wrote the critically acclaimed play *Dutchman* (1964) and founded the Black Arts Repertory Theatre in Harlem (1965) Haki R Madhubuti, known as Don L Lee until 1973, became one of the movement's most popular writers with the publication of *Think Black* (1967) and *Black Pride* (1968) (Black Arts movement, 2016). Morrison emerged as a writer and published her first novels during the period of the Black Arts Movement.

The Black Arts Movement has been considered as one of the most politically militant aesthetic movements in African American cultural history, advocating resistance, autonomy and difference (Goulimari, 2011, p. 23). It revived and radicalised a tradition of African American writers claiming the right to speak for themselves and address not society at large – i.e. white society – but each other. The Black Arts Movement rejected universalism and called for the representation of black experience by African Americans for African Americans. Following this it renewed the call for distinctively black art forms, emerging out of African American oral or folk tradition, drawing on writers such as Du Bois, Frederic Douglass and Charles Waddell Chesnut as well as 1920s writers of the Harlem Renaissance who made use of black folklore in their work (Goulimari, 2011, p. 23).

The Movement further argued for specifically black criteria by which to judge black art forms. Du Bois, in “A Negro Theatre” (1926), had also argued that black art forms must be judged by black standards and black critics (Goulimari, 2011, p. 23). In this

way the Black Arts Movement self-consciously formalised earlier black aesthetic traditions and debates into principles of black art, and argued that black art is and must be political art.

Perhaps what was novel and without obvious precedent in the 1960s Black Aesthetic Movement, at least in the context of African American thought, was a black essentialism: grounding positive black stereotypes, this movement polemically asserted the value and the superiority, of blackness. One of the limitations of black essentialism, in its use of positive black stereotypes, is that it is just as reductionist as white racism, transforming the complexity and heterogeneity of African American experience into a narrow repertoire of types (Goulimari, 2011, p. 23–24). Some critics even viewed the Black Aesthetic Movement as sexist and homophobic.

The Black Arts Movement was fundamentally concerned with the construction of a “black” identity as opposed to a “Negro” identity, which the participants sought to escape. Those involved placed a great emphasis on rhetorical and stylistic gestures that in some sense announced their “blackness.” Afro haircuts, daishikis, African pendants and other jewellery, militant attitudes, and a general sternness of demeanour were among the familiar personal gestures by which this blackness was expressed. In many cases these activists dropped their given “slave names” and adopted instead Arab, African, or African-sounding names, which were meant to represent their rejection of the white man and their embracing of an African identity. Silly fads as well as profound art derived from this impulse to discover and create black modes of self-expression (Smith, D L, 2006, p. 247).

Morrison, at the beginning of her literary career, endorsed many of the tenets of the Black Aesthetic Movement. In 1971, reviewing Addison Gayle's *the Black Aesthetic* and two other anthologies of Black writing, she praised all three works and embraced the principle of Black art as a form of psychic liberation. In interviews she has always insisted that she writes about African Americans for African Americans. In her novels she has made extensive use of African American folk traditions (Goulimari, 2011, p. 24). She has also argued for the need for black criteria in the judgement of her own works, and for black critics of her work: "Black people must be the only people who set out our criteria for criticism" (Childress, 1994, p. 6); "Critics of my work have often left something to be desired, in my mind, because they don't always evolve out of the culture, the world, the given quality out of which I write" (McKay, 1994, p. 151). In 1984, she defined her own version of Black art (McKay, 1994, p. 145).

Simultaneously, Morrison has distanced herself from aspects of the Black Aesthetic Movement. She has defined herself as a black *woman* writer, "placing women centre stage in the text" and *speaking to* black women (Davis, 1994, p. 231). In her novels, she has avoided the use of unambiguously positive black stereotypes by the Black Arts Movement. She has stressed the heterogeneity of black experience and acknowledged divisions: "the *enormous* differences are more interesting to me than the similarities because it's too easy to get into the trap of the monolithic black person" (Davis, 1994, pp. 227–228). Against black essentialism, she has argued that "Being Black now is something you have to choose to be. Choose it no matter what your skin colour (Jones & Vinson, 1994, p. 186).

In the 1960s and early 1970s many significant African American women poets emerged, including Nikki Giovanni and Sonia Sanchez, who were members of the Black Aesthetic Movement; the poet Audre Lorde; and the poet, autobiographer and civil rights activist Maya Angelou.

In the 1970s, Morrison emerged as a member of a loose group of African American women writers concentrating on fiction and setting out to present African American women in their complexity and diversity. The group included Toni Cade Bambara, Gayl Jones, Gloria Naylor and Alice Walker and Paule Marshall. The popularity and critical acclaim of this group internationally – especially Morrison and Walker – were unprecedented in the history of African American literature (Goulimari, 2011, p. 25).

Over the years Morrison has articulated her relation not just to the Black Aesthetic/Arts Movement but, more generally, to African American aesthetic traditions. In her essay “Memory, Creation, and Writing” she summarised what she considered valuable in these traditions: “antiphony, the group nature of art, its functionality, its improvisational nature, its relationship to audience performance, the critical voice which upholds tradition and communal values and which also provides occasion for an individual to transcend and/or defy group restriction (Goulimari, 2011, p. 25). Indeed Morrison, as a critical thinker, would not endorse any movement wholly even if she agreed with most of its tenets. Similarly, once she became a public artist, she would not accept the analysis of her work based on criteria, which may have overlooked the tradition from which she writes.

2.3 Approaches and critical reception of Morrison's novels

2.3.1 Introduction

The socio-economic and political landscape in 2016 is significantly different compared to what it was in the 1970s when Morrison began her writing career. The acclaim, accolades and applaud Morrison receives today were once inconceivable then.

Morrison's novels are published in numerous languages and taught in numerous universities and schools across the globe from Finland to South Africa to Japan, amongst others. The official website of the Toni Morrison Society boasts with hundreds of articles, chapters in books, theses and dissertations on the work of Morrison's fiction and non-fiction. Given the significant amount of academic works that have been generated on Morrison's works it cannot be denied that numerous writers across continents regard Morrison's work as both "revelationary and revolutionary" (Peterson, 2006, p. 261) and yet others view her work less favourably.

The different approaches have brought new insights to her texts. The approaches inevitably interlink and overlap, hence classification will not be strict or tediously broken down into various components. It can, however, be agreed that Morrison criticism reflects fascinating debates about the very definition of American identity and American literature and therefore necessarily pertain to discussions on race, gender, and class. Approaches that will be covered in this section include: Africanist and African Americanist, intertextual, feminist, historical, psychoanalytic, metafictional, postcolonial, postmodernist, theological, Marxist, Bakhtinian and

Levinasian. Approaches such as ecocritical, modernist and pedagogical approaches will, however, not be covered for reasons of space limitations.

It is not possible to attempt a comprehensive overview of the copious and always-growing scholarship on Morrison's work. What follows is a broad overview of the reception of Morrison's work as well as a broad account of key lines of inquiry and of dispute in the critical field over four and a half decades.

It should also be noted that the "story" of Morrison criticism has not, of course, followed a logical, systematic progression, nor is it characterised by the predominance of any approach over another. It is furthermore related to broader developments in fields of race, gender, comparative literary studies, and other developments.

2.3.2 Africanist and African American approaches

Africanist and African American approaches have been of the earliest approaches followed, beginning in the 1970s when Morrison published her first novel. In the introduction to *Toni Morrison: Critical and Theoretical Approaches* (1997), Peterson gives a useful account of the earliest scholarly responses to Morrison. The first academic article on Morrison, "The Novels of Toni Morrison: Studies in Thwarted Sensitivity" by Bischoff's was published in 1975 in a now-defunct journal, *Studies in Black Literature* (Peterson, 1997, p. 3). This article, like several of the earliest mainstream reviews of *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* struggles to reconcile Morrison's specific focus on African American experience with her universalism. A white Euro American subject position is assumed in these early responses, to which Morrison's concerns are always cast as relative. In December 1973, Blackburn writes about *Sula*,

in a *New York Times* article, titled “You Still Can’t Go Home Again” that “one continually feels its narrowness, its refusal to brim over into the world outside its provincial setting,” and that the author is “far too talented to remain only a marvelous recorder of the black side of provincial American life.”

Peterson records that the first critical analysis of Morrison by black scholars appeared in the now-difficult-to-locate glossy magazine *First World* (winter 1977). Royster addresses *The Bluest Eye* and Martin writes on *Sula*. Their placing the author alongside Du Bois, Hurston, and others insists that Morrison be viewed first and foremost as an African American author, who emerged from a specific context, reveals that her work be judged from exactly the milieu from which she writes. Morrison’s own role in that process of dealing with the limitations of categorical confinements is evident in her 1976 interview with Stepto, in which she encourages specific new directions in criticism such as analysis of how contemporary black women writers treat “the stereotype of the black woman” or a focus on the black female adventurer, or on the black parent as “culture bearer” (Stepto, 1994, p. 27).

An early overview study of African American writing in which Morrison appears, is the edited anthology *Black Women Writers 1950-1980: A Critical Evaluation*, edited by Evans. It includes Morrison’s “Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation”, “The Quest for Self: Triumph and Failure in the Works of Toni Morrison” by Lee and “Theme, Characterisation, and Style in the Works of Toni Morrison” by Turner (Evans, 1984).

Another early publication of the 80s is McKay's edited *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison* (1988). McKay's introduction argues for an "essence of ancient, authentic blackness" in Morrison's work, based on its affinity with black music (1).

"African Tradition in Toni Morrison's *Sula*" argues that the novelist writes from an African point of view – an African "aesthetic" (Braxton, pp. 316 – 25, as quoted in Roynon, 2013, p. 119). Other articles building on an African aesthetic analysis include that of Wilentz: one "African Heritage as Cultural Discourse" (1992), and "An African-Based Reading of *Sula* (1997). These early studies of Morrison's use of West African traditions seems to suggest this as her primary, most important, and even exclusive cultural resource (Roynon, 2013, p. 119).

Widdowson, in "The American dream Refashioned" (2001), argues that *Paradise* can be read both as "a black history of the USA" (Widdowson, 2001, p. 316) and as a "fictional intervention in contemporary American historiography" (Widdowson, 2001, p. 318). Setting *Paradise* from the mid-1960s to 1976, Widdowson points to the irony of this "paradise" for this period is punctuated by events such as Watergate, the assassinations of John F and Robert Kennedy, Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, as well as the Vietnam war (Widdowson, 2001, p. 326). Morrison presents Ruby as a microcosm of American history evinced particularly as the novel engages with the Pilgrim Fathers and the Founding Fathers, in the form of Ruby's Old Fathers and New Fathers (Widdowson, 2001, p. 319). It suggests that the Declaration of Independence (1776) is still unfulfilled – especially from an African American perspective – in that the attack on the Convent in July 1976 coincides with the Bicentenary (Widdowson, 2001, p. 321). It comments on the Civil Rights Movement

(the so-called Second Reconstruction), and highlights it as “American’s Unfinished Revolution” for having failed the political, economic, and particularly the humanitarian goals of Reconstruction (Widdowson, 2001, p. 321, quoting Eric Foner).

Yet another African American/ historical reading is that of Dalsgård. Dalsgård’s “The One All-Black Town Worth the Pain: (African) American Exceptionalism, Historical Narration, and the Critique of Nationhood in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*” (2001) reads *Paradise* as a critique of American exceptionalism. One of the dominant narratives in American history has been the European American narrative of a “Chosen People and a Promised Land,” initiated by the Puritans and inspired by the Bible (Dalsgård, 2001, p. 234). Dalsgård points to the similarities of the discrepancies between this white utopia and the harsh realities of life in the New World arguably led to the Puritan witchcraft trials in the New World (1692 – 93) and the attack on the Convent, which suggests that Morrison “discerns an exceptionalist strain in African American discourse”, problematically adopted from white American ideology (Dalsgård, 2001, p. 235). Instead of only focusing on the male scapegoating of the females, Morrison additionally suggests both white and black Americans display a violent marginalisation and repression of its non-exceptionalist and imperfect other (Dalsgård, 2001, pp. 237; 241).

A more contemporary Africanist and African American reading includes that of Jenkins’s “Pure Black” (2009), which proposes that *Paradise* be read as a critique of black American nationalism despite the fact that critics have often read it as commentary on white American exceptionalism and the Puritan roots of white America (p. 274). This study will read *Paradise* from yet a third perspective. If all

three perspectives find support in the text, it simply speaks of the complexity of the novel for surely there is no necessity for only one correct interpretation.

According to Jenkins' reading, *Paradise* is an engagement with 1990s African American intraracial politics. Black US nationalism has been defined by Wanheema Lubiano as involving "racial solidarity, cultural specificity, religious, economic, and political separatism" (Jenkins, 2009, p. 274). Jenkins recognises that it would be easy to contrast the difference between Ruby as an all-black town with the interracial Convent, yet *Paradise* intentionally overlaps the interrogation of (black) patriarchy with the interrogation of a form of nationalism obsessed with racial exclusion, when compared to the Convent (2009, p. 275). As such, Jenkins argues *Paradise* explores the contradictions of black American nationalism and the unacknowledged multiraciality of the "pure" type of black body in America (Jenkins, 2009, pp. 274, 276; 289).

2.3.3 Intertextual approaches

Intertextual readings are similarly abundant, yet only a small number will be mentioned. Authors having used intertextual analysis to read the work of Morrison include Cowart (1990), Cutter (2000), Knadler (2004), Roynon (2011), Pruitt (2011), and Barr (2011), amongst others.

Whilst an interest was growing in Morrison's engagement with African and African American aesthetics, traditions and folklore, there was a growing interest in her engagement with Graeco-Roman traditions. In the 1980s critics such as Holloway and Demetrakopoulos or Jones and Vinson had discussed the allusions to Ovid and to

Greek tragedy in Morrison's novels, in 1991 Benston published "Re-weaving the 'Ulysses Scene'" (Roynon, 2013, p. 119). Benson interpreted Morrison's revisionary perspective on classical paradigms in both literary-aesthetic and psychoanalytic terms (Roynon, 2013, p. 119).

Cowart expressed the racial sentiment that Morrison "deserves emancipation from her own literary ghetto" whilst arguing for thematical and formal affinities between Morrison, Joyce, and Faulkner (Cowart, 1990, p. 87). Despite the racism inherent in his sentiment, his arguments demonstrated Morrison's position as a literary figure of global significance whose focus is the black American experience, in other words, as one who transforms the canon by her presence within it (Roynon, 2013, p. 120).

Drawing from Propp's classic Formalist account, *Morphology of the Folktale*, Harris, in *Fiction and Folklore* (1991), situates *The Bluest Eye* in relation to folktales. According to Propp, some folktales involve a questioning hero ("seeker") whose quest encounters obstacles but is eventually successful; others involve a "victimised" hero who is eventually rescued (Goulimari 2011, p. 159, quoting Propp, 1968, p. 36). In Pecola's case in *The Bluest Eye*, "the ugly duckling [however] does not become the beautiful swan" (Goulimari, 2011, p. 159, quoting Harris, 1991, p. 11).

In 1996 Weinstein published *What Else but Love?*, which, in a series of pairings of the novels, compares Morrison and Faulkner's treatment of the "disaster" of "race relations" in the United States (xxviii). Another article by Weinstein *Unflinching Gaze: Faulkner and Morrison Re-Envisioned* once again compared Morrison and Faulkner (Roynon, 2013, p. 120).

For Grewal's *Circles of Sorrow, Lines of Struggle* (1998), Morrison rewrites Shakespeare's *The Tempest* with *Tar Baby*. Grewal likens characters in *Tar Baby* to those in *The Tempest* from Valerian and Prospero to Jadine as Miranda and Son and Gideon as the earthly servant Caliban (1998, p. 83). Comparing Jadine to Frances Harper's Iola Leroy, Grewal argues Jadine presents "the bitter fruits of assimilation: an ignorance of black history, an alienated and alienating sense of individualism, and the breakdown of any notion of responsibility", in line with Fanon's lament that the educated middle class disappears and does not return to the community to foster progressive change there (Grewal, 1998, pp. 90–92).

In *Toni Morrison's (Hi)stories and Truths* (1999), Tally explores the intertextuality of *Paradise* considering numerous allusions to the Bible, allusions to the U.S. debate around canon versus multiculturalism, and allusions to silencing historiographies (Goulimari, 2011, p. 234, referencing Tally, p. 53).

The critical divergence about the aesthetics-versus-politics question reached something of a resolution in an important collection edited by Conner: *The Aesthetics of Toni Morrison: Speaking the Unspeakable* (2000). The essays here address a range of aesthetic elements in the oeuvre and demonstrate the inseparability of these elements from her political project. It is a book that exemplifies the kind of "both/and" approach, the exegesis of nuance, duality, and ambivalence or conflict within the fiction that has slowly begun to replace the "either/or" approaches of earlier years (Roynon, 2013, p. 122).

Duvall, in *The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison* (2000), argues for the intertextual communication between Ellison's *Invisible Man* and *The Bluest Eye* as Ellison's protagonist and Pecola are both invisible, in the sense that people only recognise a type and see these two individuals as stereotypes only (p. 27).

In Duvall's 2000 study *The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison: Modernist Authenticity and Postmodern Blackness* he argues Morrison combines "a modernist concern with authenticity" with "post-modern fictional practices" (p. 17). He furthermore analyses many of the novels in relation to other texts, characters or authors when he discusses the relationship between *The Bluest Eye* and Ellison, and between *Song of Solomon* and Faulkner, and the relationship between *Sula* and Virginia Woolf. Williams also published a comparison between Morrison and Woolf in 2000: *The Artist as Outsider in the Novels of Toni Morrison and Virginia Woolf*.

Peach, in *Toni Morrison* (2000), situates *The Bluest Eye* at the intersection of several discourses. First, resonating with Roland Barthes and Louis Althusser, Morrison's use of the Dick and Jane primary school story shows that language is "enmeshed with power structures" so that ideology is embodied in language and in social institutions such as the school, media and family (Peach, 2000, p. 26). An "ironic interplay" is evident in the novel between different discourses such as the dominant discourse of the white middle class nuclear family, the black nationalist discourse that assumes the homogeneity of black experience and the burden of African American women (Peach, 2000, pp. 30, 38).

Peach also explores intertextual connections in *Paradise*, with allusions to Stoker's *Dracula* in the presentation of Connie; the open-road genre and "post-1970 feminist revisions of it" (of Mavis and Gigi); the small-town novel, community fiction and the family/ dynasty chronicle as well as contrasting the Western frontier of US mythology with the terrifying "Out There" of black mythology (Goulimari, 2011, p. 234).

Another reference to classical texts is that of Miner, in "Lady no Longer Sings the Blues." Miner argues that *The Bluest Eye* is structured by the classical myths of Persephone and Philomela and shows the similarities in the "sequence(s) of rape, madness, and silence" underlying Morrison's novel with these two mythologies (Bloom, 2005, p. 12).

Ferguson's, *Rewriting Black Identities: Transition and Exchange in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2007) analysis "the multiplicity of African American identities" in the successive historical epochs configured by Morrison (p. 11). Ferguson illuminates Morrison's interest in both "transitional eras" and "the interconnected lives of individuals" (p. 18), as well as the critic's incorporation of a wide range of critical approaches and resources – from psychoanalytical theory through questions of narrative and generic form to intertextuality.

In 2012, when Roynon delivered her lecture entitled "Parsing the Classical Toni Morrison" at Princeton University, Morrison herself was among the audience. Morrison, again, as in interviews, mentioned she was a Classics minor as an undergraduate and whether or not her intertextual references to classical texts are conscious or motivated she can't tell. Hence Morrison would not confirm or deny any

deliberate intertextual relation with classical works. She did, however, acknowledge that everything she has read seeps in. In 2013 Roynon published, *Toni Morrison and the Classical Tradition: Transforming American Culture*. The book explores the ways in which Morrison harnesses the classical tradition to her own ends. Roynon argued Morrison's texts display a "strategic, dialogic classicism", which allows for a significant contribution to the reconceptualisation of tradition itself (2013, p. 187). In Roynon's words, "the book demonstrates Morrison deploys the classical tradition to highlight contradictions, to challenge apparent cultural consensus, and to exploit irresolvable difference (2013, p. 187).

2.3.4 Feminist approaches

The critical attention paid to Morrison became slowly but steadily more extensive in the early 1980s; that increase was partly due to the emergence of black feminist discourse and partly to the fanfare that greeted *Song of Solomon* in 1977 (Roynon, 2013, p. 115).

In 1980 Christian included an extensive chapter on Morrison's first two novels in the first book to include critical analysis of Morrison, which was her groundbreaking study *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition 1892 – 1976*. Another early feminist reading is again by Christian, who, in *Black Feminist Criticism* (1985), argues Morrison critiques the oppressive unnaturalness of the equation of beauty with virtue and of love with romance (Goulimari, 2011, p. 161).

In *Black Women Novelists*, Christian answers Morrison's suggestions to Stepto, in that it aims "to trace the development of stereotypical images imposed on black

women” (Christian, p. x). Christian’s chapter “The Contemporary Fables of Toni Morrison” raises many of the key issues that later critics go on to develop. Christian describes Morrison’s first two novels as “fantastic earthy realism,” “rooted in history and mythology,” and observes that their themes develop “in much the same way as a good jazz musician finds the hidden melodies within a musical phrase” (Christian, p. 137 quoted in Roynon, 2013, p. 116).

Davis’s study “Self, Society and Myth” appears in 1982. This is a discussion of Morrison’s first three novels: *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and *Song of Solomon*. It briefly references *Tar Baby* as well. It distinguishes Morrison’s project from Ellison’s *Invisible Man* and taking its cue from there analyses the ways in which Morrison reveals black visibility amidst the presence of a white culture.

Willis’s essay “Eruptions of Funk: Historicising Toni Morrison” also appeared in 1982 and also addresses Morrison’s first four novels. Willis argues “sexuality converges with history and functions as a register for the experience of change, i.e. historical transition” (Gates and Appiah, 1993, p. 308). Defining “funk” as the “intrusion” of a not-so-distant social mode” into “the present” Willis examines each novel’s subversive engagement with the specific era in which it is set (Gates and Appiah, 1993, p. 325).

In a 1983 interview with McKay, Morrison articulates the wish that critics should bring an understanding of cultural specificity to her work; her words have been much discussed ever since. In asking for “pioneering work to be done in literary criticism,” Morrison insists, “I am not *like* James Joyce; I am not *like* Thomas Hardy; I am not

like Faulkner. I am not *like* in that sense” (McKay, 1994, p. 152). Despite this rejection, Roynon argues that the question of Morrison in comparative context, of the authors to whom she might be compared without a diminishing of her own project, has never gone away but rather has grown in complexity and nuance over the decades (2013, p. 116).

The reason Morrison rejects these comparisons is that the comparisons detract from the value and context her novels make available independent of such comparisons. Her point is that her aesthetic innovativeness and specific politics should be recognised first and even enter the discourse of such critics, instead of being overlooked and only the similarities noticed between her and some well-known author. Such reference points do not make it possible to give Morrison her due. As Morrison explains to McKay, she and her writing evolved out of the culture and world of black cosmology which is most probably very different to the European and European American authors her writing is compared to (1994, p. 151).

The first book to devote itself entirely to Morrison – *The World of Toni Morrison: Explorations in Literary Criticism* by Jones and Vinson (1985) – locates Morrison intertextually in its first chapter within “the grotesque as an American genre in the tradition of writers which include Sherwood Anderson, ... Flannery O’Conner, Eudora Welty and William Faulkner” (Jones & Vinson, p. 16 quoted in Roynon, 2013, p. 117).

This same comparative thinking is reflected in the title of the second book to appear on Morrison. *New Dimensions of Spirituality: A Biracial and Bicultural Reading of*

the Novels of Toni Morrison, by Holloway and Demetrakopoulos (1987). The authors even identified their own racial identities and the “bicultural” nature of their critical approach. At the same time, they see their work on Morrison as an experiment in “feminist, biracial scholarship” (p. 6). In 1992 Demetrakopoulos writes “Maternal Bonds as Devourers of Women's Individuation in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*” analysing motherhood in *Beloved* from a feminist perspective. For Demetrakopoulos, one of Morrison's gifts to (American) women is her “honouring of the enlightenment that living out female experiences can give” (1992, p. 58) – especially in the midst of a culture or a history that would deny and suppress it.

Awkward published *Inspiriting Influences: Tradition, Revision, and Afro-American Women's Novels* in 1989 in which he reviews the genealogy of black American writing by women at this time.

By the end of the 1980s the issues of how to and who to and why to compare Morrison to other authors have received much attention. Also, whether to and how to position her as an African American woman writer has been receiving serious consideration.

At the start of the 1990s Morrison appears in Bloom’s collection, *Modern Critical Views: Toni Morrison* (1990). This publication is indicative of the prominence her work is starting to garner since Bloom’s is one of the makers and guarders of dominant American canon. Bloom’s introduction, “Morrison’s five novels...are possible candidates for entering an American canon founded upon what I insist would be aesthetic criteria alone, if we still retain any such criteria after our current age of

politicised response... has passed” (p. 1) suggests he is aware of the fact that Morrison’s type of writing is going to make a bigger demand on the reading public than mere comparisons or agreements to critique it by taking African American aesthetic principles into consideration.

Rigney’s *The Voices of Toni Morrison* (1991), an overtly politicised study places Morrison’s work within “a black feminine/ feminist aesthetic” and claims “a common ground for theory, race and gender” (p. 5).

Feminist analysis of Morrison’s work was also published internationally, with Japanese academic Aoi, publishing *Toni Morrison and Womanist Discourse* in 1999 (Roynon, 2013, p. 121).

According to Widdowson, *Paradise* is both a historical and feminist novel. As a feminist novel it imagines a Third Reconstruction brought about by women if we extend this argument from the Civil Rights Movement that is the so-called Second Reconstruction (2001, p. 333). Widdowson proposes a “new women’s movement” as “the way forward to a transformed future society” (2001, p. 334).

Michael’s “Re-imagining Agency” (2002) argues that *Paradise* re-imagines agency through a new feminist model of coalition. This new model goes beyond coalition as theorised and practised within the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left, which was male and had gained dominance through processes of othering (Michael, 2002, p. 643). The form of coalition explored in *Paradise* entails processes that are more accommodative, caring, loving, and that are aimed principally at survival and at

moving toward a new, alternative form of non-hierarchical justice, rather than at maximising power and winning (Michael, 2002, p. 644).

O’ Reilly, in *Toni Morrison and Motherhood* (2004), deconstructs the “master narrative” of motherhood based on the “sensitive mothering” model (2004, p. 30–31). In analysing the contrast between Pauline Breedlove and Mrs MacTeer. O’Reilly argues critics have failed to appreciate Mrs MacTeer’s mothering because of their unthinking adoption of the middle class “sensitive mothering” model, whilst hers is a “preservative love”, which, though not playful, is an essential and “integral dimension of motherwork” (O’Reilly, 2004, p. 32). The model of “sensitive” and playful mothering moreover presupposes affluence and should not be used to label as bad mothers those who have to struggle to keep their children alive – as black mothering is often first and primarily preservation and nurturing under the social and financial realities of their families (O’Reilly, 2004, p. 32–33). O’Reilly argues that, unlike the role of women in the white patriarchal nuclear family, black femininity and motherhood encompasses othermothering, matrifocality, social activism, providing a homeplace, and cultural bearing (O’Reilly, 2004, p. 18). Thus O’Reilly argues Morrison views motherhood as a “site of power” for black women, and views its aim as the “empowerment of children” through preservation, nurturance and healing through teaching resistance and resilience in a racist world (2004, pp. 30–42).

With reference to Michael, Goulimari (2011) argues that through the Convent, *Paradise* portrays anti-essentialist perspectives in this that it outlines “reconceptualised forms of agency, community and justice based on affinity rather than identity; difference and diversity rather than similarity; communitarianism rather

than individualism; empathy and care rather than self-interest” as well as “openness rather than exclusionary separatism; non-hierarchical relations... and (the) dynamic nature of community and agency (Goulimari, pp. 230–31).

2.3.5 Postcolonial approaches

For postcolonial readings, Grewal is a good place to start. Grewal, in *Circles of Sorrow, Lines of Struggle* (1998), reads *The Bluest Eye* as a study of internal colonialism, claiming “the profound value of this novel lies in its demystification of hegemonic social processes in its keen grasp of the way power works, the way individuals collude in their own oppression by internalising a dominant culture's values in the face of great material contradictions” (1998, p. 21). The novel makes “an impassioned case for decolonising the mind” through Claudia who “struggles to claim ownership of her freed self” (Grewal p. 20-1).

Goyal’s “The Gender of Diaspora in Toni Morrison’s *Tar Baby*” (2006) argues against critics’ reading of *Tar Baby* as a “defence of tradition” (p. 393). Goyal does not agree that Morrison simply “warn[s] against the dangers of losing touch with racial and ancestral memories” by way of a symbolic contest between Son, the black man in tune with “nature, family, and history” and Jadine, the modern and cosmopolitan woman (Goyal, 2006, p. 393). Instead of only considering the usual focus on class and gender in the novel, Goyal considers *Tar Baby* as very specifically also meditation on diaspora, questioning a unified black identity, the simplicities of Afrocentrism and nationalism and thus challenging essentialist ideas (Goyal, 2006, 393–4).

For Goyal, Morrison presents “two distinct generic strains, those of myth and realism” (2006, p. 394). At the mythic level the reader is presented with talking butterflies, blind horsemen, swamp women, night women and an animist nature, which is a mode outside of rationality that suggests a reality beyond the particulars of time and space, which suggests black culture as “authentic, confident, and everlasting” (Goyal, 2006, p. 394). In contrast the second realist mode Morrison presents is that of black culture and diaspora as fraught with conflict. For starters, *Tar Baby* reveals the conflict and disunity between Afro-Caribbean and Afro American characters, and between the Philadelphia Negroes and the ‘undocumented men’, urban and rural, men and women which destabilises any notion of an essentialist diasporic African identity (Goyal, 2006, pp. 395, 408). *Tar Baby*, analysed accordingly, complicates and displaces any simple view of African American identity and tradition as either unified and essentialist or fractured only (Goyal, 2006, pp. 395, 410).

Goyal shows that *Tar Baby* offers an “ambivalent” reading of tradition, suggesting the notion that “the past may threaten individual identity as well as nurture it” (2006, p. 399). Whereas Jadine is often analysed as “a race traitor, or the tar baby captive to white culture” Goyal concludes that in the final instance neither Son nor Jadine can be “upheld as a reliable authority on race or gender” (Goyal, 2006, pp. 399, 405–6). The reasons for this is the objectionable portrayal of Son’s black nationalism as masculinist, gender-biased, policing of gender roles and sexuality and his fetishisation of tradition is often an objectification of women (Goyal, 2006, pp. 405–6). At the same time, analysing Jadine’s mobility and cosmopolitanism from a black nationalist

perspective reveals her rejection of tradition as questionable (Goyal, 2006, pp. 407–9).

Further critics who followed a postcolonial approach include Jennings (2008), Durrant (2006), Elliott (2000), Koolish (1995), Mohanty (1993), Rice (1999) and Schreiber (1996), amongst others.

2.3.6 Psychoanalytical approaches

Matus, in *Toni Morrison* (1998), offers a psychoanalytic interpretation of racism as historical “trauma”. Rushdy explores “primal scenes” in Morrison’s novels from a Freudian perspective and argues memory and “rememory” offers “an opportunity and affective agency for self-discovery (1990). Critics like FitzGerald (1993), Rubenstein (1993), Burton (1998), and others have examined conflicts related to subject formation, boundaries, and repression in the novels, applying Freudian and post-Freudian frameworks (Dunn, 2010, p. 65).

Guerrero, in “Tracking ‘The Look’ in the Novels of Toni Morrison” (1990), takes the work of psychoanalytic feminists on “the look” as his starting point, which demonstrates that women are portrayed as objects for consumption by the dominant male gaze. Guerrero then argues Morrison’s treatment of the look is more complex, extending it to include society’s dominant gaze as racist, classist as well as sexist (1990, pp. 761–762).

Among the many psychoanalytical readings of Morrison is Fitzgerald’s essay on selfhood and community in *Beloved*, which appeared in the *Modern Fiction Studies*

special issue on Morrison in 1993. The appearance of this double issue was a landmark in the field – at once a demonstration of the existing breadth and sophistication of existing critical approaches and a catalyst to future scholarship (Roynon, 2013, p. 119).

In *Quiet as It's Kept* (2000), Brooks Bouson analyses Morrison's novels in the context of psychoanalytic and psychiatric work on trauma and shame. For Brooks Bouson, *Paradise* reveals the shameful secrets and humiliations hidden under the excessive and “reactive pride” of Ruby (pp. 195 -96; Goulimari 2011, p. 230). Brooks Bouson further shows both Ruby and the Convent are havens from trauma, though the Convent is more successful in healing trauma compared to the “excess of commemoration” by the Ruby patriarchs, which is in contrast a symptom of enduring trauma (Brooks Bouson, 2000, p. 154; Goulimari, 2011, p. 230).

A few other authors having used psychoanalytic theories to analyse the work of Morrison include Koolish (2001), Visvis (2008), Spohrer (2009), Henton (2012) and George (2010).

2.3.7 Metafictional approaches

In “Furrowing All the Brows” (2001), Page argues that *Paradise* is a novel metafictionally addressing interpretation and, in the last four chapters, “construct[ing] an elaborate model of reading and interpretation” (2001, p. 643). Page holds Patricia's interpretations are based on “logical deductions” (2001, p. 644) and painstaking notes and charts, being insufficient knowledge, as Morrison will yet reveal (Page, 2001, p. 647). In line with Morrison's open-ended philosophy of knowledge, characters like

Lone and Connie base their interpretations on intuition and leaps of the imagination (Page, 2001, p. 649). *Paradise*, like Morrison's other novels, make possible numerous interpretative possibilities and instead invite multiple responses for characters and readers (Page, 2001, p. 649).

Fultz's *Playing with Difference* (2003) is concerned with Morrison's "ethics of responsibility, which she ultimately bestows on both author and reader (pp. 98, 110). Fultz builds this case by exploring Morrison's "narrative techniques" and "aesthetic intention" (2003, p. 9). For Fultz these textual strategies are designed to engage readers intimately in the narrative process and enhance the reader's active participation (2003, p. 78). Whereas analytical Patricia's perspectives and Anna's eyewitness experience after the murders are revealed to the reader, the reader is left in the position to consider both perspectives and add his or her own interpretive reading to it too, thus Morrison's strategy leaves the reader little room to avoid confrontation with her ethics of responsibility and the metafictional.

For Mbalia's *Toni Morrison's Developing Class Consciousness* (2004), *Paradise* is Toni Morrison's "most class-conscious novel to date" (2004, p. 125). At the centre of Mbalia's reading is Misner's comment on the Ruby men who attacked the Convent. Misner's assessment is that the men "think they have outfoxed the whiteman when in fact they imitate him" (Morrison, 1997a, p. 306). Mbalia holds the reason for the failure to maintain African collectivism and egalitarianism was caused by the adoption of capitalism. Ruby had turned into the kind of place where the leaders were "the men who won and control ... major resources" (Mbalia, 2004, p. 129) and thereby "imitate their original... oppressors" (Mbalia, 2004, p. 132). While Mbalia

acknowledge the strong focus on gender oppression, she views capitalism as the cause of patriarchy (Mbalia, 2004, p. 139). In response to the recognition of his failure, Deek understands he needs to wage a class war to see things turn around in Ruby and the community restored (Mbalia, 2004, p. 163). Labour and production, according to Mbalia's Marxist reading thus drive relations and morality at the end of the day.

Krumholz, offers a metafictional reading of *Tar Baby* in "Blackness and Art in Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby*" (2008). Morrison engages with inherited white constructions of blackness – as either absence or excess – and translates them in "aesthetic choices" and "rhetorical strategies" of her black aesthetic to transform how blackness has been used to signify the absence of light, of goodness and purity, of rationality (Krumholz, 2008, p. 267).

Analysing *Tar Baby* metafictionally Morrison wishes to transform readers through literature by revealing the intersection of art, politics and economics, to "transform cultural meanings" and "transform readers" (Krumholz, 2008, p. 267). Krumholz argues Son is a metafictional "representation of black art" (2008, p. 277), Valerian's house represents white culture, and Valerian represents the "white liberal" humanist view of culture that "mask[s] the relation between culture and power" (Krumholz, 2008, p. 283). Son's role in exposing characters from Sydney and his class consciousness to Margaret's abuse of her son as well as large-scale historical exploitation portrays Black art as an alternative and transformative "way of seeing" (Krumholz, 2008, p. 286). *Tar Baby* is ultimately about the need for metafictional awareness to assist readers recognise how tar and blackness are already saturated with

a history of cultural meanings and how prejudice blinds the one who looks through these lenses (Krumholz, 2008, pp. 279; 290).

2.3.8 Religious approaches

Otten's *The Crime of Innocence* appears in 1989. Addressing each novel from *The Bluest Eye* to *Beloved*, it identifies the importance of the Bible in Morrison's work and argues that the paradigm of the Fall in Genesis is central in every text: "Each novel describes a fall wrought with destruction but one that is still morally superior to prolonged self-ignorance and sterile accommodation" (p. 3). Otten interprets *Isle des Chevaliers* as the Garden of Eden where Morrison is argued to explore the value of a fall from innocence (Goulimari, 2008, p. 191, referencing Otten, p. 153). For Morrison "no greater crime exists than innocence when the culture is run by an oppressive order. In such a culture innocence itself is then a sign of guilt because it signals a degenerate acquiescence (Goulimari, 2011, p. 191, referencing Otten, 1986, p. 153). The crime of innocence thus relates to a paradoxical "victory in defeat", in the sense that those who "sin against the flawed order become the agents of experience and so run the risk of freedom" while those who don't are "often doomed to moral entropy" Goulimari, 2011, p.191, quoting Otten, 1986, p. 153).

The 2006 *Toni Morrison and the Bible: Contested Intertextualities*, edited by Stave includes an article by Stave herself, "The Masters Tools." The following articles are also available in the book: "Trial by Fire: The Theodicy of Toni Morrison in *Sula*," by Beverly Foulks; "Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Psalm and Sacrament" by Nancy Berkowitz Bate; "The Bible as Intertext in Toni Morrison's Novels" by Surányi; "The 'Female Revealer' in *Beloved*, *Jazz* and *Paradise*: Syncretic

Spirituality in Toni Morrison's Trilogy" by Jessee; "A New World Religion? Creolisation and Candomblé in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*" by Terry, and "Ritual and Other Religions in *The Bluest Eye*" by Degler, amongst others.

Stave's "The Master's Tools" argues that Morrison uses her novels "strategically to destabilise Christian theology and to contest its vision (Stave, 2006, p. 215) (Goulimari, 2011, pp. 235–236). The Oven points to "the Ark of the Covenant that featured significantly in the biblical Israelites's sense of identity as God's chosen people" (Stave, 2006, p. 218). Other examples in defence of this claim include Consolata giving up Christ in favour of a Visitor who is a version of her own self. The window Reverend Misner sees after the massacre cannot be "reconciled with his previous beliefs" and is "not sanctioned by mainstream Christian theology" (Stave, 2006, p. 227). The closing lines of *Paradise* outlines a paradise where both "lost and saved" arrive (Morrison, 1997a, p. 318), break with Christianity (Goulimari, 2011, p. 236).

Terry's "A New World Religion?" (2006) compares three religions: Pulliam's Old Testament African American version of Christianity, Misner's New Testament African American version of Christianity and the Brazilian Consolata's syncretic religion reminiscent of Candomblé (a Brazilian religion mixing Catholicism with African and Native cosmologies) (Goulimari, 2011, p. 235). By favouring Candomblé and enacting it in her depiction of the Convent, Terry argues Morrison embraces a "positive model of creolisation," thus a possible new religion (Goulimari, 2011, p. 235).

2.3.9 Bakhtinian and Levinasian approaches

Morrison's novels have been studied in relation to Levinas (Ryan, 2000) as well as Bakhtin (Phelan, 1989; Moore, 2011) and even the combination of Levinas and Bakhtin as can be found in articles such as *The African past in America as Bakhtinian and Levinasian other: 'Rememory' as Solution in Toni Morrison's 'Beloved'* (2000) by Angel Otero Blanco and the 2008 unpublished MA thesis, *Toni Morrison and the Levinasian other* by Theresa Amrita Hopp and 2010 MA thesis, *The identity challenge in Toni Morrison's 'Paradise'* (De Voss). This study wishes to further add to that specific body of academic literature.

Looking at Blanco's article, one could wrongly conclude that that article addresses the issue addressed in this study in some way. But this is not the case at all. The element analysed in Blanco's article relates to the issue of time only. Blanco's article considers the notion of time and the human ability to bring the past into the present. It argues that according to a particular reading, the physical and material past is "relived" through its remembrance. And through a lost/ retrieved, present/ absent, material/ metaphysical interacting or confusion the Same and the Other coincide. Blanco's article explores the spectre of the character Beloved, whose 'rememory' serves to wound and hurt Sethe and her community before laying it to rest heals them. The metaphysics of the novel will be beyond the scope of this study, but this article is an example of the possibility of bringing Bakhtin and Levinas into dialogue with Morrison's work.

In *Dilemma of "Double-Consciousness"* (1993), Heinze explores Morrison's engagement with the mythology of national ideology. Heinze thematically explores

Morrison's multiple explorations of the "double consciousness" as defined by Du Bois, but also by Morrison's Bakhtinian "double-voicedness."

Page, in *Dangerous Freedom* (1995), also offers a Bakhtinian reading of *The Bluest Eye* and argues that it thematises and moves beyond fragmentation and fusion. Page privileges Bakhtinian heteroglossia, multiple perspectives and polyvocalism and concludes that the novel moves "toward recognition of the necessity for a pluralistic perspective" (Page, 1995, p. 55).

Of *Tar Baby*, Page argues that while L'Arbe de la Croix is initially hierarchical and "resembles a stereotypical antebellum plantation" (Page, 1995, p. 112), once Valerian's authority begins to unravel, characters engage in power struggles in order to impose their perspective and make others in their image. The issues then become control, hierarchy, authority, who owns the house, who is on whose side (Page, 1995, p. 120). As a result of these power struggles, Page argues hierarchy gives way to "contention and dissolution" (Page, 1995, p. 108).

Morrison counters both hierarchy and power struggles and introduces a Bakhtinian dialogism. These means include: Morrison's "opening of the tar baby myth into ambiguous multiplicity"; Morrison's use of "suspension" (hinting at an event and periodically returning to it, as in jazz music); and her use of "image refrains like phrases that are used repeatedly, like chords or leitmotifs" (Page, 1995, p. 131). Morrison thereby creates "internal dialogue within the text as each iteration of the image, like the completion of the initial hint, is dependent on each other's iteration" (Page, 1995, p. 131). The reader is thereby required to remember, to make the

unwritten connections between the separate iterations and fuse the linguistic fragments (Page, 1995, p. 131).

Awards and prizes received by Morrison, moreover, testify to her reception and impact. As can be seen from the variety, Morrison is regularly and since early on applauded both at home and throughout the international community. To follow is a list of all the awards and prizes Morrison received since 1977.

2.2.10 Awards and prizes

Below is a table of awards and prizes Morrison has received that testify of the wide scope of her reach evinced by the acknowledgement she receives nationally and globally.

Year	Awards/ Prizes
1977	National Book Critics Circle Award American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award
1979	Honorary degree, Barnard College
1988	Pulitzer Prize American Book Award Frederic G Melcher Book Award Helmerich Award Robert F Kennedy Book Award (1987-88) Anisfield-Wolf Book Award City of New York Mayor's Award of Honour for Arts and Culture Elmer Holmes Bobst Award for Fiction (<i>Beloved</i>)

1989	Modern Language Association of American Commonwealth Award in Literature Honorary Doctor of Letters at Harvard University
1990	Chubb Fellowship, Yale University
1993	Nobel Prize in Literature Commander of the Arts and Letters, Paris
1994	Rhegium Julii Prize for Literature Condorcet Medal, Paris The Pearl Buck Award
1996	National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters
1998	Medal of Honour for Literature, National Arts Club, New York
1999	Ohioana Book Award for Fiction, Columbus, Ohio Oklahoma Book Award, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma Ladies Home Journal Woman of the Year Award Orange Prize Nomination, London, England
2000	National Humanities Medal
2001	Pell Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Arts, Providence, Rhode Island Jean Kennedy Smith NYU Creative Writing Award, New York, New York Enoch Pratt Free Library Lifetime Literary Achievement Award, Baltimore, Maryland Cavore Prize, Turin, Italy Fete du Livre, Cite du Livre, Les Ecritures, Aix-en- Provence, France
2002	100 Greatest African Americans list by Molefi Kete Asante
2003	Docteurs Honoris Causa. Ecole Normale Superieure. Paris, France

2004	NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work (Fiction)
2005	Doctor of Letters Degree; Oxford University, Oxford, England Coretta Scott King Award; American Library Association
2006	Honorary Doctorate of Letters; the Sorbonne, Paris, France. <i>Beloved</i> chosen as one of the best works of American Fiction in the last 25 years by the <i>New York Times</i>
2007	Lifetime Achievement Award and named one of 21 Women of the Year by <i>Glamour Magazine</i>
2008	New Jersey Hall of Fame inductee
2009	Norman Mailer Prize, Lifetime Achievement
2010	Officier de la Legion d'Honneur
2011	Library of Congress Creative Achievement Award for Fiction Honorary Doctor of Letters at Rutgers University Graduation Commencement Honorary Doctorate of Letters from the University of Geneva
2012	Presidential Medal of Freedom
2013	The Nichols-Chancellor's Medal awarded by Vanderbilt University
2014	Ivan Sandrof Lifetime Achievement Award given by the National Book Critics Circle
2016	PEN/Saul Bellow Award for Achievement in American Fiction.

Table 1: Morrison's Awards and Prizes

It must be acknowledged once that nothing could be said of the disability studies, pedagogical, modernist, ecocritical, post-structural, and cultural approaches nor of the thematic or stylistic analyses that have interrogated Morrison's fiction. It can,

however, be said that the array of approaches testify of the richness and reader-responsive quality of Morrison's work.

2.4 Morrison as theorist

2.4.1 Introduction

Morrison is an academic, social critic and novelist whose non-fiction is valuable in its own right and worth consideration in the analysis of her fiction. The non-fiction, which will be discussed in this section, includes comments on her fiction as captured in interviews, but also theories and critique not directly related to her own fiction, as these focus on African American political and socio-economic conditions. This subsection thus underscores the legitimacy of Morrison's non-fiction as legitimate theorising that supports the premise of this study.

While the death of the author became accepted with Barthes' 1976 essay with the same title, which argues against the practice of incorporating biographical and intentional material of the author when analysing a text, critics incorporate or reject Morrison's commentary regarding her fiction and motivation for writing, to varying degrees. For the purpose of this study, the necessity of considering Morrison's non-fictional writing – not her personal biography – is to supplement the argument, which can otherwise be convincingly drawn from the fiction itself. A further defence for such a consideration is Goulimari's (2011) assertion, in line with that of Christian (1988) that Morrison does a lot of her theorising in her novels with uninterrupted communication exchanges between Morrison's nonfiction and her novels (p. 142).

In support of considering Morrison's comments and arguments as gleaned from interviews to assist with the analysis of her fiction, I want to draw on the reasoning by Dunn. Dunn (2010) highlights the fact that one of the most interesting and complicated issues in criticism of Morrison is the figure of Morrison herself. Dunn argues, "Given Morrison's own academic work on literature, her public eminence and the fact that she has discussed her novels in numerous interviews, it is tempting to turn to her commentary and have it guide interpretation (2010, p. 62). Whereas "the death of the author" is acknowledged, the reader cannot ignore the fact that Morrison is African American and a woman, and that her work foregrounds the complex intersections of race, gender, class and national and cultural identity. For, according to Dunn, to do so would divest Morrison, as author, of agency and to gloss over the historical, cultural, and political specificity of her texts (2010, p. 63).

Peach (1995) also makes a vital point when he argues:

Black literary criticism has been resistant to the various trends, such as structuralism, in Euro-American critical practice, which posits the separation of the literary text from its author, partly because reclaiming an identity and (narrative) voice to counter centuries of denial and misrepresentation is central to much post-colonial writing. However, a major reason for this reluctance to divorce text completely from its social and political context is that literature would lose its social function. For African and African-American writers the novel has been an important vehicle to represent the social context, to expose inequality, racism and social injustice. (p. 2)

With reference to Peach's words about critical theories concerning separating text from the author's biography and social context, Dunn cautions that it would be "a European sleight of hand" that would rob African Americans from reclaiming their (narrative) voice, at the very moment when black writers have taken possession of the voice denied them by imperialism and racism (2010, p. 63).

Irrespective of the sound argument for recognising the social situatedness of the African American writer, critics such as Bloom remain insistent on separating text and author. Morrison has made it clear that her writing is always political and always for the group. In an interview with Schappell, Morrison says, "It is not possible for me to be unaware of the incredible violence, the wilful ignorance, the hunger for other people's pain. I'm always conscious of that..." (2008, p. 70). According to Morrison she wants to be part of the solution. In light of this acknowledgement of the state of the world and humanity, Morrison's writing is a response with a solution. As much as Bloom recognises Morrison may have a social purpose, an ideology and polemics that inform her writing, he adamantly insists on focusing on the text and its literary elements only (2005, p. 2). Choosing to discard extra-textual elements, Bloom argues, "Morrison's early novels leave us with literature, and not with a manifesto for social change, however necessary and admirable such change would be" (2005, p. 2).

I want to disagree with Bloom and argue Morrison's texts indeed leave us with a very specific manifesto for social change – should readers be willing to uncover it and take responsibility for their discovery. Duvall (2000) and Roynon (2013) would similarly agree that Morrison's extra-textual writing is important in analysing her fiction – and it would not detract from what Bloom calls its "authentic aesthetic dignity" (2005, p.

2). According to Duvall, Morrison's personal biography as an African American woman who grew up in pre-civil rights America and became a writer in post-civil rights America, cannot be separated from her novels, given her primary themes of African American and female identities (2000, pp. 1–2). For Roynon, Morrison's essays, speeches, interviews, public letters, and forewords to her own work compel acknowledgement of Morrison as a “a serious player in intellectual history; as a key figure in modern thought; as a writer, thinker, and commentator on literature, politics, and society” (2013, p. 91). Roynon thus recognises Morrison's influence beyond the neatly packaged limited world of literature only.

2.4.2 Morrison's views on language and writing

2.4.2.1 Responsibility of language

In her Nobel Lecture in Literature, delivered in 1993, Morrison interweaves narrative and interpretation to offer a meditation on the function of the artist and the responsibility of the language user.

She opens with the story of an elderly, blind, wise woman and the young people who visit her, seeming to make a mockery of her reputation as a clairvoyant. Knowing that she is unable to see, they ask her if the bird they are carrying is alive or dead. After a long pause, the woman replies: “I don't know whether the bird you are holding is dead or alive, but what I do know is that it is in your hands. It is in your hands” (Morrison, 2008e, p. 199). Morrison chooses to read the bird as language and the woman as a practised writer who thinks of language as partly a system and partly as living enabling acts with consequences (Morrison, 2008e, pp. 199–200). As Morrison explains, the old woman's response to the children's question shifts attention away from assertions of power to the instrument through which that power is exercised

(Morrison, 2008e, p. 199). She asserts that the future of language, and by extension of humanity, is in the hands of the young people (Morrison, 2008e, p. 200).

When Morrison holds that language is “an act with consequences” (2008e, p. 200), she means language and its productions are acts rather than products or artifacts (Lester, 2010, p. 125). In other words, language cannot be limited to things called words that are of no consequence and therefore lacking in impact. Furthermore, language used ethically can have numerous aims including grappling with meaning, expressing love or providing guidance, which can all affect relationships with others, ourselves, and our past (Lester, 2010, p. 125–6). Morrison reminds every reader – as language users – of the power, agency and responsibility we hold in our hands when we use language.

According to Morrison all users and makers of language are accountable for what language accomplishes, whether for good or not. She expresses herself strongly when she writes:

Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge. Whether it is obscuring state language or the faux-language of mindless media; whether it is the proud but calcified language of the academy or the commodity driven language of science; whether it is the malign language of law-without-ethics, or language designed from the estrangement of minorities, hiding its racist plunder in its literary cheek – it must be rejected, altered, exposed. (Morrison, 2008e, p. 201)

In contrast to policing languages of mastery such as sexist language, racist language, theistic language, which does not permit new knowledge or encourage the mutual exchange of ideas, Morrison pursues a transactional relationship between artist and reader, that will permit new knowledge (2008e, p. 201). Indeed, as Brodsky puts it, “Morrison is dedicated to the proposition that the reader of her work *lives*” (italics in original) (2014, p. 207).

With her silence the old woman transformed the children's criticism into proof of her wisdom, for it encouraged them to speak their yearning. Their initial mocking turns serious in response to her long silence to which they ask if there is “no song, no literature, no poem full of vitamins, no history connected to experience that [you] can pass along to help us start strong?” (Morrison, 2008e, p. 205). Lester’s meditation on Morrison’s lecture concludes that what Morrison asks of word workers is, first, to trust enough to tell their audience what the world has been to them and, second, to create an opening, a space, for readers to make meaning themselves (Lester, 2010, p. 134).

Similarly for Smith, Morrison’s story expresses “confidence in the wisdom that emerges from paradox rather than the reliance upon false certainties” (2013, p. 14). This stance allows for language that is alive and exerts the power to represent the “richness, the mystery, the contradictions, and the uncertainties of individual and communal lives... of its speakers, readers, writers” (2013, p. 14). This allegory in Morrison’s Nobel speech, as well as her fiction, embody language willing to grapple with contradictions and uncertainties, yet aggressive in its rejection of oppressive language.

The concluding sentence of Morrison's lecture is: "I trust you now. I trust you with the bird that is not in your hands because you have truly caught it. Look. How lovely it is, this thing we have done – together" (Morrison, 2008e, p. 207). Interesting to note is that the narrator in *Paradise* also speaks of doing the work to create paradise – together – with the reader and the narrator in *Jazz* similarly reminds the reader that he/she is holding the words and the power of words in their hands.

2.4.2.2 Black art invites reader interpretation

The notion that Morrison's fiction as well as her non-fiction invites the reader to interpret the text and make meaning with the author is a matter of great significance for this study. That this invitation is often made by Morrison and is referred to by numerous critics, underscores the unsaid in Morrison's work and thus invites the discovery of that which Morrison deliberately kept from expressing overtly and that which she left open for interpretation.

In 'Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation', for example, Morrison writes:

[...] having at my disposal only the letters of the alphabet and some punctuation, I have to provide the places and spaces so that the reader can participate. Because it is the affective and participatory relationship between the artist or the speaker and the audience that is of primary importance. [...] to have the reader work with the author in the construction of the book – is what's important. (Morrison, 2008a, p. 59)

As late as the 1990s work by African American artists were still judged on the characteristics of "white" art. Morrison's "Rootedness" makes a case that criticism of

her work should include criteria based on the paradigm of art according to the Black Arts Movement principles from which she writes (2008a, p. 60). She expressed disappointment over her novels not being judged in the language, using the terminology and references of the culture within which she writes. With the help of Morrison herself critics have begun to judge Morrison's work on a set of criteria relevant to her fiction. In "Rootedness" she lays down a number of fundamental values and characteristics that constitute Black art. These Black art principles include:

- an oral quality;
- an "affective and participatory relationship" between writer and reader;
- gaps for the reader to step in and actively contribute to the meaning of the text – "What is left out is as important as what is there";
- the presence of a chorus "commenting on the action;"
- the presence of ancestor figures as legitimating and sense-making resource;
- a hybrid genre combining the powers of the imagination and realism: blend[ing] the acceptance of the supernatural and a profound rootedness in the real world"

(Morrison, 2008a, pp. 59–64; Goulimari, 2011, p. 145)

Morrison likens the participatory relationship between reader and text to that of a black preacher whose congregation joins the sermon through their response by standing up, weeping, acceding or modifying the sermon (2008a, p. 59). In addition to building her "theory" on this type of analogy, Morrison has spoken of her aim to create an author/reader relationship analogous to the protagonist/chorus relationship in Greek tragedy and to the soloist/group relationship in jazz (Jones and Vinson, 1994, p. 176). And as Raynor and Butler rightfully point out, Morrison's novels read

as if the narrator is speaking directly to the reader, evoking response (2007, p. 176). In line with these analogies Morrison aims to create “places and spaces for the reader to participate” (2008a, p. 59). For Morrison, “what is left out is as important as what is there” (2008a, p. 59). In analysis this issue of places and spaces left unsaid becomes vital as sites inviting the creation of meaning.

While Morrison considers interpretation by the reader as a principle of Black art, this position is not only found in Black art. The 1970s saw the emergence of reader response theory. This theory contends that what a text is cannot be separated from what it does, hence highlighting as Morrison does, that the text is not the final word. Despite divergent views of the reading process, reader-response theorists share two beliefs: (1) that the role of the reader cannot be omitted from our understanding of literature and (2) that readers do not passively consume the meaning presented to them by an objective literary text; rather they actively make the meaning they find in literature (Tyson, 2006, p. 170). Once again, in line with Morrison’s own thinking and Christian’s argument regarding African Americans’ theorising through story, the big contribution of the Western form of reader-response theorists is to call attention to the importance of the reader in making of literary meaning.

Morrison’s novels, however, call for the making of both literary meaning as well as political meaning. Smith points out that as a writer, Morrison “may not be inclined or equipped to intervene in the policy arena to bring about social change, but she seeks to use her artistic talents to illuminate and transform the ways in which discursive practices enshrine structures of inequality” (2012, p. 4). The significance of this study, however, is partially to make Morrison’s work available to those in the policy

arena who can indeed affect social change via their understanding of Morrison's "manifesto for social change" that will be made explicit through this study. In order to reach this position through the reading of Morrison's novels, Morrison does not spoonfeed meaning to her readers but, as Smith puts it, Morrison expects them to be willing to re-read and to work at interpretation (2012, p. 4), while Page mentions the necessity for readers to become active participants who need to rework the tensions between bi-polar opposition in the novels as they try to make sense of the fusion and fragmentation in them (Page, 1996, p. 26).

Morrison is more than deliberate; she intends to subvert the reader's general nonchalant stance towards texts. Smith quotes Morrison who says, "I want my fiction to urge the reader into active participation in the non-narrative, non-literary experience of the text, which makes it difficult for the reader to confine himself to a cool and distant acceptance of data" (2013, p. 5). Morrison continues by saying "I want to subvert [the reader's] traditional comfort so that he may experience an unorthodox one: that of being in the company of his own solitary imagination (Smith, 2013, p. 5).

The reason it is so important to interpret is also because the author works from the stance that good art needs to be political. From various analysis as well as her own forewords and interviews, it is important to recognise Morrison's work as always political.

The usual distinctions between author, narrator, characters, and readers are called into question via the "holes and spaces" in Morrison's novels (Page, 1995, p. 34). In the

final words of *Jazz* this strategy becomes explicit when the narrator confesses her secret love for the reader and urges the reader to "make me, remake me" (Morrison, 2005b, p. 229). The narrator also says the kick in this relationship with reader and novel is that the novel/narrator talks to the reader and "hears the reader answer" (Morrison, 2005b, p. 229). But although the narrator claims the reader is free to remake it, the call for interpretation is a call to responsibility, not merely an open invitation to misconstrue as he/she pleases. This invitation to interpretation is not merely as a characteristic of Black writing, but is in line with Morrison's purpose with writing, which requires action from the reader's side beyond actively engaging with the novel as a first step.

As Morrison explains:

My language has to have holes and spaces so the reader can come into it. He or she can feel something visceral, see something striking. Then we [you, the reader, and I, the author] come together to make this book, to feel this experience. (Tate, 1994, p. 164)

Ultimately, reading and responding to literature not only promotes engagement between author, novel and reader, it involves understanding the text better, it should include understanding the Self (reader) better too, but also taking responsibility for what has been understood.

2.4.3 Potential and purpose of writing

Morrison's performance with writing captures her purpose with writing. This section provides an overview of conclusions drawn by critics on the function of Morrison's

novels, as well as explicit statements by Morrison herself, drawn from interviews over the years. These descriptions of the role of Morrison's fiction function as foundational arguments supporting the thesis statement of this study.

Before I look at the role Morrison's writing fulfils, it will add value to the discussion to consider arguments around the role literature can generally play as natural conduits for understanding the human experience. Carroll (2003) makes a simple point that underscores the worth of literary studies and highlights the intertwined relationship people have with art in "Art, Narrative and Moral understanding". Carroll points to the existence of the human tendency to be "naturally inclined" to evaluate novels, short stories, poems, plays and movies when engaging with such texts. Pointing out poststructuralists will most certainly dismiss the notion of being "naturally inclined", talking about the characters and events in moral terms, considering the ethical significance in terms of whether or not characters are virtuous or vicious, and about whether the work itself is moral or immoral, and perhaps whether it is sexist, racist, classist or otherwise, does in deed seem to come naturally (Carroll, 2003, p. 270). At the same time readers's moral assessments are inevitably variable (Carroll, 2003, p. 271). The inclination to morally assess art, and in particular literature can be argued to be a natural response by readers despite a certain kind of theoretical aversion to such a claim.

Supporting the moral value of literature, theorists of narrative ethics, such as Adam Zachary Newton and Martha Nussbaum concern themselves with the intersections between the domain of fiction and that of moral values. For them life stories in fiction form a basis for moral reflection and learning for the reader since moral values, as an

integral part of the stories, implicitly or explicitly ask the author, narrator, character and/or audience how to live.

Booth, Newton and Nussbaum have joined ethical inquiry to literary criticism. They propagate valid arguments regarding the ethical value of examining the implications of the situational conflicts within the lifeworld of the novel and the questions these conflicts pose for readers. For Newton and Nussbaum narrative ethics entails readers making judgements about the fictional characters and their actions (Carlacio, 2013, p. 129).

For Nussbaum stories and narratives “spea[k] *about us*, about our lives and our choices and emotions, about our social existence and the totality of our connections” (Nussbaum as cited in Carlacio, 2013, p. 130). Booth argues along similar lines when he says, “[I] can think of no published story that does not exhibit its author’s implied judgements about how to live and what to believe about how to live” (Booth as cited in Carlacio, 2013, p. 130). According to Booth “stories are our major moral teachers” (Carlacio, 2013, p. 130).

On a first reading Morrison’s novels can most definitely be analysed on moral grounds. Racism, infanticide, rape, murder and other shocking themes are evident in all her novels and invite responses from readers. For purposes of this study, the researcher is, however, not concerned with ethics as morality in terms of the good and bad portrayed or questioned in Morrison’s novels.

The notion of ethics in this study differs significantly from Carroll, Newton,

Nussbaum and Booth as it does not concern any form of moral judgement. The term ethics in this study is informed by the phenomenological work of French philosopher Levinas, who propagates the idea of “ethics as first philosophy,” (1981) in other words “ethics is an optics” (1969) – prior to epistemology. It should be noted that Levinas does not define ethics as the deontological, utilitarian or virtue ethics of general understanding. Derrida said it best in *Violence and Metaphysics: An essay on the thought of Emmanuel Levinas, Writing and difference* when he explained, “Levinas does not seek to propose laws or moral rules, does not seek to determine a morality, but rather the essence of the ethical relation in general” (1978, p. 163).

The ethical relation as foundational to identity construction will form the primary concern in this study. Despite the difference in the general definition of ethics and the definition as employed in this research, the argument that literature enables the reader to gather a meaningful moral and or ethical perspective, is nonetheless not disputed. This general argument is, moreover, relied on by numerous critics who will be cited in this study. Yet the distinction will become relevant at a later stage in this study.

Numerous critics have described Morrison’s novels as writing that is healing (Fultz, 2003; Grewal, 2013; Krumholz, 2008; King, 2010; Mbalia, 2004; Taylor-Guthrie, 1994; Thomas, 2014; Wagner-Martin, 2015, Dunn, 2010). Morrison herself acknowledges that music, which used to be the art form that was healing to Black people, had been replaced by the novel (2008a, p. 58).

For others, Morrison’s novels bear witness to the lives and history of African Americans (Carmean and Matus in Wagner-Martin, 2015). As such, Morrison’s

novels can be “seen as ceremonies of proper burial” to put painful events of the past to rest (Wagner-Martin, 2015, p. 104).

Morrison recognised slavery was an event many black and white Americans seemed to have wanted to erase from their past and to have whitewashed. For this reason, while researching *Beloved*, Morrison found it a difficult task as not much was available on the topic. It seemed slavery was an event many black and white Americans wanted to erase from their past and to have whitewashed and even slave museums seemed “upbeat and cute” with the focus on things like quilts the slaves produced and not on the horrors slaves experienced (Kramer, 2013, p. 41). Yet Morrison saw a danger in not remembering. “You are condemned to repeat the mistakes if you do not fully understand them,” Morrison warned in a conversation with Horn (Kramer, 2013, p. 41). Her novels, as Watson pointed out are thus to remember the past in order to caution (readers) about the future.

A metaphor Morrison likes to use is that of “clearing cataracts” to help readers see better (Jones & Vinson, 1994, p. 183). This kind of healing is very much in line with effecting change and improvement, for Morrison holds the Black writer’s job is to “enlighten and to strengthen” because novels need to be “socially responsible” (Jones & Vinson, 1994, p. 183). And as such, Morrison acknowledges to Koenen, that her “mode of writing is sublimely didactic” (1994, p. 74). At the same time, Morrison is also clear that her novels should only suggest what the conflicts and problems are without necessarily solving them. Like a good playwright, Morrison does not “tell” in her novels, but “shows”.

Morrison explains her point of didactic writing when she says,

it's more important to make a reader long for something to work and to watch it fall apart, so that he will know what, why and how the dangers are, more important than to show him how they all solved all their problems. (Koenen, 1994, p. 74)

Morrison says, "I can only warn by taking something away" (Koenen, 1994, p. 74). The last two points thus demonstrate Morrison's writing is very intentional in creating gaps and leaving issues unresolved, and instead being purposeful with presenting experiences of loss and failure. Morrison wants the reader to discover answers for his or her own healing or improvement. It can thus further be argued that Morrison intends an ethics of fiction and that Wagner-Martin is correct to conclude Morrison's fiction is a "sharpening [of] the moral imagination" (2015, p. 121).

Morrison is as much interested in the general and moral imagination of her reader as she is with the reader "exercising interpretive agency" (Ryan, 2007, p. 151). She intentionally writes in line with qualities of Black art such as open-endedness, which affords the reader interpretive liberty and is in line with her stance, "I want to make a novel in which one of the principles of the discipline is to enlighten without pontificating" (Ruas, 1994, pp. 108–109). Morrison says the wide-open nature of her book endings is because she does not want to stop the imagination of the reader by closing the novel (Ruas, 1994, pp. 108–109). In other words, Morrison actually intends to pontificate without directly doing so. She instead uses the method of open-ended writing and other stylistic devices to get readers to engage with the text and so discover the sermonising hidden within.

Since her first novel, Morrison has focused on the ongoing African-American struggle for genuine emancipation and equality, making identity in relation to US history her primary concern (Roynon, 2013, p. 99). As such, the key impetus of her work is to be political and thus have her writing not only enlighten but also humanise readers.

Of the reader, Morrison says,

Let him make up his mind about what he likes and what he thinks and what happened based on the very intimate acquaintance with the people in the book, without any prejudices, without any prefixed notions, but to have an intimacy that's so complete, *it humanises him* in the same way that the *characters are humanised* from within by certain activity, and in the way in which *I am humanised* by the act of writing. (Ruas, 1994, p. 109) (My italics).

This could be read that Morrison only means for the reading and writing to be about the fiction and for the reader's imagination to complete the story according to his/ her imagination and experiences. But I think "creating meaning" in the completion of the fiction calls for more than flights of imagination. It calls for political engagement as well because Morrison sees fiction as serious work.

In Chapter One, under the heading of the "Theoretical Framework" we considered the Look. It should be added that Morrison's teacherly vision is a conscious response to the racialised gaze that has informed the discursive practices, interpretive habits, and moral competence of the society-as-readers, and that has been the root cause of particular failures of democracy (Ryan, 2007, p. 151) as evidenced in the media coverage around the OJ Simpson and Thomas/ Hill trials. Morrison's teacherly vision

is thus a concern with, what Ryan explains as “the relationship between interpretation and ethics, or, more specifically, for the ways in which interpretive competence increases ethical competence and supports ethical agency” (2007, p. 152). Despite everything that can go wrong in entrusting the reader to interpret, this is a value Morrison absolutely insists on, just as she insists that she cannot write works that are not political.

Morrison’s stance concerning the social and political vision that informs her art provides the first clue that her novels are to be functional when she writes, “the best art is political” (Morrison, 2008a, p. 64). In expansion of this claim, the reader learns, “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 fulfils only the obligation of my personal dreams – which is to say, yes, the work must be political (Morrison, 2008a, p. 64).

The political impetus of her work closely relates to a certain understanding Morrison holds of identity as she says, if the work is not about the next person, it is about nothing. Ferguson notes the Self is “necessarily relational” for Morrison (2007, p. 5). Morrison has admitted that the “search for love and identity runs through most everything I write” (Micucci, 1994, p. 278) and “all the time that I write, I’m writing about love or its absence” (Bakerman, 1994, p. 40).

In her 2011 commencement speech at Rutgers, Morrison, furthermore, argues a life that is only or primarily in pursuit of happiness and personal success would be trivial

and devoid of meaningfulness. Instead she recommends the graduates consider pursuing some commitment to social justice. Can it not also be argued Morrison's work is her commitment to social justice?

2.4.3 Functional stylistics

2.4.3.1 Telling and retelling

As already mentioned, Morrison creates holes and spaces that need to be filled by the reader. These gaps are generally made possible by numerous structural and stylistic devices, that afford Morrison the scope for iteration in a manner of saying and resaying, telling and retelling, showing and reshowing of her text. Examples of these enabling devices include her narrative point(s) of view and the time settings of her plots, which all contribute to create open-endedness for the reader to discover a surplus of meaning in addition to the written word. Sitter explains that the intentions and actions of characters as well as scenes afford Morrison's writing expanded meanings (Sitter as quoted in Fultz, 2003, p. 10). Sitter adds that Morrison's use of the narrative point of view and multiple time frames do not only require close reading but a suspension of judgement until all facts are revealed, for meaning is often continually revised and new perspectives continually made possible on the same matter which means a final and closed version of "truth" is often suspended (Sitter as quoted in Fultz, 2003, p. 10). This open-endedness is further supported by the narration, which is frequently subdivided among multiple points of view so that each novel projects a collection of perspectives (Page, 1995, p. 4).

Despite the open-endedness of her novels and even her limited use of adjectives and adverbs, Morrison's worlds are vivid. As with the stylistic devices already mentioned,

the reader is further obliged to participate due to the blurred distinction between myth and reality in Morrison's novels. Tools as these allow Morrison to "strip language to its essence, so that all the original force is there" and "readers [can] enter in and supply some of the emotion and colour for her stories" (Harris, 1995, p. 329).

The holes and spaces are furthermore complemented by excess so that the reader needs not only fill the blanks, but also has to deal with too much information, which removes the possibility of reaching simplistic meanings. An example that stands out is the functions and connotations of the words "look" and "see" in *The Bluest Eye*, "tar" in *Tar Baby* and "twin" or "double" in *Paradise*.

2.4.4.2 Silences in Morrison's writing

To be considered in this section include the silences around the unspoken – that which can be said, but which Morrison chooses not to overtly articulate because of her trust in and invitation to the reader to fill the gaps and actively participate to interpret her silence – as well as the unspeakable – namely, that which is too deep or too painful or too beautiful for words to pin down.

Morrison explains that the plot generally conveys information in terms of "what" happened, but the "meaning" of the novel is more often revealed through the structure. Morrison does not limit her writing to merely transfer information but to disclose information strategically and structurally in order to enable the reader to also feel and discover what is being expressed. In an interview with Silverblatt, Morrison acknowledges that she works very hard at the "deep structure" of her novels, in other words at what happens underneath the activity in the novels (Silverblatt, 2008b, p. 218). In another interview with Silverblatt, Morrison refers to often providing a sort

of “undertow” or “urtext”, where the reader may or may not recognise its presence, yet she as author had worked hard at including it (2008a, pp. 176–177).

Morrison refers to “writing on the surface and writing underneath” (Neustadt, 1994, p. 92). The context in which she says it is in arguing that writers ought to be able to enter worlds and sketch characters, which they significantly differ from demographically, and at the same time understand the significance of what can be said and what should be shown about these characters and worlds. Much of Morrison’s “underneath” writing would be a trusting of the reader to recognise the subtleties and bringing his or her own imagination to complete the story. Evidence of valuing the unsaid, the non-present, thus the kind of saying something without articulating it can be found in the example of Morrison’s sex scenes where she trusts the reader’s sensuality and sexuality to fill the gaps. Morrison says she trusts the reader’s sexuality to be sexier than her own, admitting she relies heavily on the reader’s imagination (Ruas, 1994, p. 101; Koenen, 1994, p. 77). In another discussion on sex scenes, Morrison makes clear that she writes in such a way that meaning can operate underneath the language “so that you don’t read it” (Koenen, 1994, pp. 76 - 77). This view thus once again demonstrates that Morrison sometimes intends to cause information to be discovered because she does not simply want to hand it to the reader.

On the other hand, Morrison is acutely aware of things that cannot be said and of language that is unable to grasp certain things such as deep trauma. In these cases information is not withheld to invite interpretation. Instead, it is what Kaplan would call “(un)-representable” (2007). Morrison’s reading of slave stories confirmed the

undeniable impression that there were things ex-slaves did not say for fear of shame or not wishing to relive the trauma, and that there are things they did not allow themselves to ask, despite all the things that were said (understand recorded or written) (Morrison, 2008b, pp. 69–71). What is absent and not said is therefore often as important as what is present and articulated. At the same time even that which is explicitly articulated may not enable simple and clearly understood information, whereby interpretation is not required. Looking at history and the one-sidedness of its perspective, Morrison’s creation of places and spaces in her work furthermore allow for intertextual readings where the reader is to complete the references to historical events.

In her Nobel speech, Morrison argues language cannot displace nor substitute experience but that it indeed “arcs toward the place where meaning may lie” (2008e, pp. 202-201). As for certain experiences, Morrison holds, “Language can never ‘pin down’ slavery, genocide, war. Nor should it yearn for the arrogance to do so” (2008e, p. 203). Instead Morrison argues the force of language lies in its reach toward the ineffable (2008e, p. 203), which is nonetheless cognitive. Hence, there are things that cannot be articulated for their depth, but it does not mean these things are meaningless or non-existent.

Morrison, like Ella in *Beloved* has an ear for the silences, who “listened for the holes – the things the fugitives did not say; the questions they did not ask” (Morrison, 2005a, p. 108). These deep silences, though withholding information, are nevertheless not missed by those able and willing to listen.

Quoting from “Unspeakable Things Unspoken”, Smith shows Morrison’s intrigue

with the rich possibilities contained in the idea of absence (2013, p. 6). Morrison says:

We can agree, I think, that invisible things are not necessarily “not-there;” that a void may be empty, but it is not a vacuum. In addition, certain absences are so stressed, so ornate, so planned, they call attention to themselves; arrest us with intentionality and purpose, like neighbourhoods that are defined by the population held away from them.

In her “Introduction to *Huckleberry Finn*”, Morrison again makes clear her acute awareness of the power of the unarticulated to compel the reader to fill the gaps and thus make meaning with the author, when she writes,

Much of the novel’s genius lies in its quiescence, the silences that pervade it and give it a porous quality that is by turns brooding and soothing. It lies in the approaches to and exits from action; the byways and inlets seen out of the corner of the eye: the subdued images in which the repetition of a simple word, such as ‘lonesome,’ tolls like an evening bell; the moments when nothing is said, when scenes and incidents swell the heart unbearably precisely because unarticulated, and force an act of imagination almost against the will. Some of the stillness, in the beautifully rendered eloquence of a child, is breathtaking (Morrison as quoted in Lazenbatt, 2000, p. 198).

Lazenbatt is correct to argue that such silences are not evasions, or any failure on the part of an author who is conscious of the power of silence but rather entry routes to deeper levels of meaning and understanding, or quoting Messent, what he calls, “entrances, crevices, gaps, seductive invitations flashing the possibility of meaning” (Lazenbatt, 2000, p. 198).

An acute example of this understanding is the understated reference to the annihilation of Native peoples by European diseases in *A Mercy*. As a child, Lina and two boys were the only survivors of an entire village killed off by such a disease. Morrison leaves the reader with the profound image of “the quiet of animals sated at last,” which described the aftermath of first crows and then wolves that ate the dead of the village (2009, p. 44).

In *Dangerous Freedoms: Fusion and Fragmentation in Toni Morrison's Novels*, Page alerts us to the potential of misreading Morrison's work, as the textual gaps and holes in her novels make her fiction “dangerously free for author and readers” (Page, 1995, p. 27). As he explains,

Morrison opens and keeps open so many significant issues, readers are given the freedom to enter into the texts, to participate in the constructions of their meanings. But such freedom is also fraught with dangers, dangers that the author will provide too little direction, too much direction, or enigmatically contradictory directions, and dangers that readers will resist or abandon the active role the texts demand. (Page, 1995, p. 27)

In recognition of these dangers, one must acknowledge that Morrison's novels are provocative and multidimensional, and her meanings are multilayered and enigmatic. Though complex it is also radical and transformative. Morrison therefore requires not only participation but also “response-ability” from readers (Fulton, 1997, p. 21). Both author and reader are required to be “mindful of the places where imagination sabotages itself, locks its own gates, pollutes its vision” (Morrison, 1992, p. xi). Fulton writes, “By entering into an intimate negotiation of meaning with Morrison and the text, we can free our minds to the transformative possibilities within each

novel” (1997, p. 21). It has to be admitted that the vitality of Morrison’s writing lies in its ability to suggest rather than to imitate, and to seduce rather than to force, thus remaining a language that liberates, and not being a reductive “master” language” (Khayati, 1999, pp. 314–315).

2. 4. 4. 3 Undermining of binary opposition

A further matter for consideration in deepening our understanding of how Morrison’s stylistics furthers the argument proposed in this research involves the way her novels foreground binaries and polarities. Page sees the texts’ complex, fragmented structure as mirroring and negotiating relationships between opposites, such as division and collectivity, and past and present. The pattern of what Page calls “fusion and fragmentation” usually begins with the presentation of paired entities such as two characters, contrasting families or communities, and opposed historical or geographical settings. Each novel then examines and re-examines the complex relationships between those entities and parts. Page concludes of these relationships that “the gaps between them, their differences and their similarities, their distinctness and their inseparability, [always already] exist simultaneously in a complex and never-ending flux (1995, p. 27). Though employing binaries and polarities, Morrison always moves beyond such limitations into the more complex relationship. Here I would like to add that the opposite between Self and other also comes into play, and indeed exists in a complex relationship, which this research aims to explore in depth.

It can be agreed that instead of creating impossible dissonances or contradictions, Morrison’s modes of “pluralism-in-unity” combine to give her fiction its power and enable room for meaning making (Page, 1995, p. 34). To experience that power and

get the fullness of what Morrison's writing enables imagination to discover, readers should abandon the either/or logic and simultaneously encompass the both/and, the neither/nor, and the either/or. Readers need to hold the binary oppositions in suspension and embrace the open-endedness (Page, 1995, p. 34).

CHAPTER THREE

DIALOGIC CONSTRUCTIONS OF IDENTITY: LOOKING, SEEING AND NAMING

3.1 Introduction

Analysis of identity construction will begin with investigating the themes of looking, seeing and naming. In her study of Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Bellow's *Seize the Day*, and Welty's *The Optimist's Daughter*, Eichelberger argues that what these four novelists have in common is that “they offer readers a vision of an as-yet-unrealised democracy in which individuals acknowledge or recognise the innate worth of one another” (1999, pp. 2-3). Eichelberger calls it an “as-yet-unrealised democracy” and indeed, the recognition of the other person that will lead to social change is what this study argues Morrison aims to put forth through her fiction. What this chapter aims to demonstrate is the revelation of identity for both Self and other through the looking relation. According to Ryan, “looking relations are always already reciprocal” (2007, p. 154). It is this embedded functionality of reciprocity this chapter wants to explore. The argument put forth is that how the Self sees the other/Other is always already in relation to the Self, hence the Self's viewing is informed by the Self's own self-perception. Analysis of Morrison's novels evinces such a reading.

In her study Eichelberger borrows Ricoeur's term “hermeneutics of suspicion” to describe and unmask a phenomenon of inhumane social and cultural conditions beneath the surface of a self-proclaimed democracy (Eichelberger, 1999, p. 3). The so-called democracy at the foundation of the USA was coupled to the concept of individualism. Yet this individualism, which is coupled with the notion of success

resulting from competition between equals, was not afforded to everyone in society since black people were not afforded an equal opportunity to take ownership of their own fate. Instead Eichelberger and Morrison, in *Playing in the Dark*, point out African Americans were subdued and exploited as the bedrock to enable the very success and individual happiness of the white man reaching his full potential under the concept of individualism. Through exploring dialogical relations as reflexive in this chapter, this study aims towards realising Eichelberger's as-yet-unrealised democracy in which readers recognise the innate worth of their neighbour as well as recognise where the Self's identity becomes what it is in relation to the "hidden presence" of the other – though unacknowledged or unrecognised.

Morrison, as will be argued in this chapter, constructs identity relationally. Both her fiction and non-fiction support this claim. In an interview with Houston, Morrison reveals her intention in *The Bluest Eye* to show the interconnectedness of humanity and our individual responsibility for the other when she says she decided to write a story about "the most helpless creature in the world—a little black girl who doesn't know anything, who has never been centre stage. I wanted it to be about a real girl, and how that girl hurts, and how we are all complicitous in that hurt" (Houston, 2003). In the same article Morrison's stance that good art is always political is expressed as working towards the greater common good. She further underscores this point when she shares this view with her students at Princeton, "I tell my students, 'When you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else. This is not just a grab-bag candy game'" (Houston, 2003, p. 4). Morrison's personal political stance off the page

– whether fictional or non-fictional – thus also endorses a philosophy of the other in which positive mutuality between non-equals is called for.

Unlike the Du Bois notion of double consciousness, which suggests an entrapment to the acceptance of a negative perception of the Self as Other, Morrison shows the Self can be an accomplice in the devaluing as well as empowerment of the other/Other. Morrison furthermore argues that a character has the ability to either accept or reject the influence exerted on it by external forces and people. Whereas Pecola, in *The Bluest Eye*, accepts the rejection of the dominant culture that treats her as Other, Claudia rejects that rejection. Interpretation of Jadine's identity, in *Tar Baby*, similarly complicates the relation between Self and other/Other for her rejection of certain identity expectations. *Paradise* has its own range of complex relations between Self and other/Other that portray various degrees of reciprocity, reactivity and rejection. Identity construction in *A Mercy* furthermore exhibits its own kinds of dialogical constructions.

Looking relations will be analysed to explore how looking, seeing, being seen, naming, thinking about and behaviour towards others, reflect how an action as seemingly neutral as viewing another either reflects the identity of the Self or is experienced as informing the identity of the Self as Other.

Overall, Morrison's readers must realise that objective reality is under constant inspection in her fiction. This study aims to analyse Morrison's writing in order to expose the new ways of seeing Morrison captures in her fiction, but also to enlighten the reader to view the world through a different lens by the end of this study.

3.2 Looking relations in *The Bluest Eye*

As already mentioned, in “Tracking ‘the look’ in the novels of Toni Morrison” (1990), Guerrero took the work psychoanalytic feminists have done on “the look” where women are turned into objects to be consumed by the dominant male gaze as his starting point. Guerrero argues Morrison explores a more complex understanding of “the look” by extending his analysis beyond the sexist look to society’s dominant gaze as racist and classist as well.

Unlike Guerrero who draws from feminist analysis, Davis analyses *The Bluest Eye* in terms of Sartre’s existential theory, arguing “human relations revolve around the experience of being ‘seen’. For Sartre being seen by another both confirms one’s reality and threatens one’s sense of freedom (1982, p. 324). According to Sartre, the other's look makes me see myself as an object in his or her perception (Davis, 1982, pp. 324–325). For Sartre this means, “the Other as a look is only that – my transcendence transcended” (Davis, 1982, p. 325). This relation, according to Sartre, is problematic and leads to the Self striving to recover him or herself through aiming to transcend the other transcending the Self. The way to transcend the other, is to make him or her an object in the Self’s world. Again quoting from *Being and Nothingness*, Davis holds that the Self’s project fundamentally becomes one of “absorbing the Other” (1982, p. 325). The result is thus a cycle of conflicting and shifting subject-object relationships in which both sides try simultaneously to remain in control of the relationship and to use the Other's look to confirm identity (Davis, 1982, p. 325). The argument made in this research does not involve one of Sartrean control although it does agree with the idea that looking and seeing plays a fundamental role in identity construction.

The theme of looking is introduced early on in *The Bluest Eye* through the primer urging the reader to see – to “See Jane”, to “See Mother”, to “see Father”, to “See the cat” and to “See the dog” as well as to “Look, look” (Morrison, 1999, p. 1). Ironically, it is looking and seeing that function as the very instruments that lead away (for the Breedloves) from the smiling, laughter, playing and fun the primer promises. Morrison’s invitation to look is in fact an imperative to see as well as to become cognisant of what looking can do.

Playing in the dark not only demonstrates the hidden presence of the other, but also that language has been used in much of American literature to “powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive ‘othering’ of people” (Morrison, 1992, p. x). The primer in *The Bluest Eye* certainly functions to other and thus exclude most of the African American community who cannot identify with the happy home and pretty house, presented as an objective and simple tale when in fact the reality for Dick and Jane does not correspond with the world of nearly all the characters in the novel.

This analysis will start off with considering Pecola’s identity construction in relation to looking and being seen. Like many members of her African American community, Pecola has “internalised white supremacist values of beauty and accepted a way of “looking and seeing the world that negates her value” (hooks, 1992, p. 3).

3.2.1 Pecola’s identity construction through seeing and being seen

For a year Pecola prayed for blue eyes every night because she believed that having blue eyes would make her lovable, beautiful, noticeable, and acceptable to both her

family and society. Blue eyes symbolise beauty and happiness for Pecola. For this reason she believes that having blue eyes would mean that she would no longer have to look at “bad things” and that others will not do bad things in front of her pretty (blue) eyes (Morrison, 1999, pp. 34–35). Pecola believes her blackness is the reason a vacuum edges the distaste in white eyes when they look at her (Morrison, 1999, pp. 36-37). It is not only her lack of blue eyes that causes Pecola to believe she is ugly, it is also the way others look at her and treat her, which confirms this negative sense of Self. The narrator holds, “she would see only what there was to see: the eyes of other people” – looking at her and judging her not worthy of looking at (Morrison, 1999, pp. 35–36).

Ryan argues looking relations, irrespective of being asymmetrical or hierarchical, are always already reciprocal (2007, p. 154). This notion of looking as *always already reciprocal* will be explored fully in all four novels. One powerful example occurs when Pecola recognises that Mr Yacobowski chooses not to see her:

He urges his eyes out of his thoughts to encounter her. Blue eyes. Blear-dropped. Slowly, like Indian summer moving imperceptibly toward fall, he looks toward her. Somewhere between retina and object, between vision and view, his eyes draw back, hesitate, and hover. At some fixed point in time and space he senses that he need not waste the effort of a glance. He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see. (Morrison, 1999, p. 36)

As much as this excerpt describes Pecola not being seen, Morrison shows the reader, Yacobowski’s response is not solely based on who Pecola is, but also on how his experiences have shaped him. For his history predisposes him to see her through his

conditioning as an immigrant trying to escape his own misery.

In the description of Yacobowski unseeing Pecola, Morrison describes him as:

How can a fifty-two-year-old white immigrant storekeeper with the taste of potatoes and beer in his mouth, his mind honed on the doe-eyed Virgin Mary, his sensibilities blunted by a permanent awareness of loss, *see* a little black girl? Nothing in his life even suggested that the feat was possible, not to say desirable or necessary. (Morrison, 1999, p. 36)

Yacobowski's not seeing Pecola is thus not solely based on Pecola's identity, but on his in relation to hers. And at the same time his unseeing her marks her profoundly, contributing to her sense of worthlessness.

Pecola does not have the critical capacity to judge Yacobowski's judgement of her as flawed. Instead she recognises it as common assessment of her and her blackness, although maybe of her age and gender.

According to Samuels and Hudson-Weems, Yacobowski essentially denies Pecola's existence by refusing to see her and by avoiding physical contact with her. In their analysis, Yacobowski's reifying look transforms Pecola from subject to object (Samuels and Hudson-Weems as quoted in Page, 1995, p. 50). In his glazed, vacant look she senses his racial contempt and distaste for her black skin, which seems to make him unable to see her. This scene is sketched as follows:

She looks up at him and sees the vacuum where curiosity ought to lodge. And

something more. The total absence of human recognition – the glazed separateness. She does not know what keeps his glance suspended. Perhaps because he is grown, or a man, and she a little girl. But she has seen interest, disgust, even anger in grown male eyes. Yet this vacuum is not new to her. It has an edge; somewhere in the bottom lid is the distaste. She has seen it lurking in the eyes of all white people. So. The distaste must be for her, 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 a distaste in white eyes. (Morrison, 1999, pp. 36–37)

For Guerrero this encounter demonstrates the construction of a circuit of looking relations as that between “Master and non-white Other, in which the Master looks upon the Other and sees an absence of humanity. In turn, the Other looks upon the Master and sees omnipotence and the negation of self” (1990, p. 766).

Before Pecola encountered Yacobowski there was a certain harmony she experienced in relation to nature and the dandelions that she saw on her walk to the shop. Evidence of the dialogical impact Yacobowski had on Pecola is found in the drastic change in her feelings towards the dandelions. On her way to the shop the reader learns, “Why, she wonders, do people call them weeds? She thought they were pretty. But grown-ups say, ‘Miss Dunion keeps her yard so nice. Not a dandelion anywhere’” (Morrison 1999, p. 35). As she walks she is in touch with the inanimate world, enjoying it, considering it strong and capable of holding on to. The narrator tells us “[Pecola] 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 part of her” (Morrison, 1999, p. 36).

Yet her experience with Yacobowski, where she recognises him unseeing her, unwilling to touch her hand to take the money from her, cause an ”inexplicable shame [to] ebb” (Morrison, 1999, 37). Her first thoughts when she gets outside are: “Dandelions. A dart of affection leaps out from her to them. But they do not look at her and do not send love back. She thinks, ‘They *are* ugly. They *are* weeds’” (original emphasis. Morrison, 1999, p. 37).

Pecola’s first response when she sees the dandelions is to revert back to her affectionate thoughts towards them. For a moment she aims to return to that harmony with nature. But the impact of her social environment causes her subconsciousness to project onto them what she had experienced moments ago from Yacobowski. Whereas nature cannot greet us or ignore us, as it is inanimate, it is a person’s inner sense of well-being and harmony with life that perceives nature to be friendly or not. Therefore, when Pecola’s well-being received a severe dosage of rejection she projected her sense of hurt and rejection on to the dandelions. Instead of affording them animate characteristics and allowing herself to draw comfort from their tranquility, she objectifies them and reduces them to a discrediting judgement, just as she had been moments ago.

As Page points out both Pecola and the dandelions are judged by external, imposed standards of appearance and are found wanting (1995, p. 50). Whereas Page argues it is ironic that Pecola would adopt the judgemental role of dismissing the dandelions in

her anger (1995, p. 50), this projection in fact demonstrates the dialogic relation inherent in relationships, which is always already reciprocal. When Pecola was feeling in tune with nature she looked kindly on the dandelions, yet when she experienced shame for not being afforded human recognition or touch, she projects her own feelings of ugliness and being like weed – unworthy and unvalued – onto the dandelions.

The narration underscores the depth of Pecola's thought through the emphasis of the verb "are" in italics, for she thinks the dandelions *are* ugly and *are* weeds by calling it a "revelation". "Preoccupied with that revelation, she trips on the sidewalk crack" (Morrison, 1999, p. 37). The distinction between a thought and a revelation is that a revelation is not only fleeting and easily forgotten. A thought can moreover be discarded as based on unsound information or replaced by other thoughts with little competition. A revelation, however, suggests the recognition of a weighty insight, comparable to the discovery of a truth, timeless and universal. Unlike a thought, a revelation would not be rejected as easily as a thought could. Revelations can bring about paradigm shifts, firm convictions and simply hold more power to influence one's outlook on a matter and on life. The narrator says Pecola is "preoccupied" with the revelation, implying she can think of nothing else, there are no thoughts at this time that can compete with this "revelation", nothing can challenge this thought. Not only does this revelation alter Pecola's relation towards and harmony with the dandelions and her environment, it also functions as yet another confirmation of her own sense of being ugly and rejected.

As Morrison puts in the Afterword to *The Bluest Eye*, she was interested in exploring

“the damaging internalisation of assumptions of immutable inferiority originating in an outside gaze” (1999, p. 168).

In a manner reminiscent of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, *The Bluest Eye* shows how the epistemic violence of treating people as Other does not only function on the outside, but inside as well where it operates through the Self's internalisation of Otherness in the experience of “self-as-other”. Fanon writes of experiencing his own blackness as “sealed into that crushing objecthood” whereby he finds himself “fixed” through “the attitudes, the glances, of the other” (2008, p. 82). In similar logic, one can argue Pecola experiences herself as objectified by the gaze of various people looking upon her as Other.

Other looking relationships that confirm Pecola's ugliness and unwantedness are the teachers and children at school who don't look at her. She pins this on her ugliness, although she herself cannot see the ugliness as she tries to discover the secret thereof by searching for it in the mirror for long hours (Morrison, 1999, p. 34). Her evidence does not lie in what she can discover in the mirror image of her own observation, but in the reflection from other people. She thinks, “[it is] the ugliness that made her ignored and despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike.... [Her teachers] tried never to glance at her, and called on her only when everyone was required to respond” (Morrison, 1999, p. 34).

Despising her black identity, Pecola imagines that she can cure her ugliness — that is, her racial shame — only if she is miraculously granted the same blue eyes that adored white girls possess. This desire for blue eye demonstrates the devastating impact of

racial contempt on Pecola that she would believe such a Caucasian feature as blue eyes would change her world. Blue eyes would mean she would not only see differently, since she hopes certain things like her family situation would change, but of course, she would be seen differently and then treated differently. Pecola argues if she looked different her parents would also be different and “Maybe they’d say, “Why look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn’t do bad things in front of those pretty eyes” (Morrison, 1999, p. 34). One can conclude Morrison shows it is not only internalised white contempt that drives Pecola, but also contempt and disregard from the very people who share her skin colour as well as the behaviour of her parents – especially her mother’s treatment of the daughter of her employers.

Concluding Pecola’s train of thoughts about having blue eyes, Morrison through the narrator employs an extra-representational act and explains “... she would never know her beauty. She would see only what there was to see: the eyes of other people” (Morrison, 1999, p. 35). In effect this statement further strengthens the argument that identity is constructed dialogically.

In line with the thinking that having pretty blue eyes will take away her unhappiness Pecola wills herself invisible when faced with unhappiness and in the face of trauma. When her parents fight Pecola covers her head with the quilt and prays, “Please, God,... Please make me disappear” (Morrison, 1999, p. 33). She then proceeds to squeeze her eyes shut and imagine little parts of herself disappear until only her tightly squeezed eyes remained. The reader learns that she could never get her eyes to disappear (Morrison, 1999, p. 33). Attempting to become invisible in the face of trauma or praying to appear different than she is, are thus her usual methods of

dealing with difficult situations such as trauma, devastation and rejection. In effect the reader finds Pecola wants to disappear to avoid looking on trauma, just as she wants her black Self to disappear to avoid being looked upon as Other. A further example of Pecola's response to the traumatic is to wish to not see it. Therefore, when Bay Boy and his three buddies dance a macabre dance around her, chanting "Black e mo Black e mo Ya daddy sleeps necked" Pecola drops her notebook and covers her eyes with her hands (Morrison, 1999, p. 50).

Brooks Bouson, quoting shame theorist Wurmser explains Pecola's methods of withdrawing and hiding witnessed in squeezing her eyes shut and imagining the physical disappearance of her body is an attempt to defend herself and to prevent further exposure to hurt and rejection (2003, p. 305). Wurmser holds, "If it is appearance (exposure) that is central in shame, disappearance is the logical outcome of shame (Brooks Bouson, 2003, p. 305).

Pecola can furthermore be argued to "appear", in other words to reveal herself, to others in relation to who they are and what they allow her to be. As such, conversation between Pecola and other characters is very telling.

Morrison's portrayal of Pecola with the three whores is significant when compared to all other characters she engages with in the novel. She never once has a conversation with her father or brother and the one conversation with her mother consists of her mother asking questions, giving commands and scolding Pecola with her answering in phrases when she does respond. It can be said Pecola's engagement with her peers such as the MacTeer sisters and Maureen Peal is friendly, yet compliant. From school

the reader learns teachers don't engage with her and that she sits alone both in class and on the playground. Her encounter with Junior is also limited to phrases in response to his luring her into their house. His mother, Geraldine only barks insults at Pecola. Yacobowski's unseeing of Pecola renders her speechless as the reader witnesses her unable to answer his questions and instead resort to pointing, nodding and showing. When she does speak up once, her one word "is more sigh than sense" (Morrison, 1999, p. 37). By the time she speaks to Soaphead, she is already broken and no longer her self.

Important to note, is, of all the interaction between Pecola and other characters she is most expressive and one can therefore argue, most completely herself, in the company of the three whores, Marie, China and Poland. Only in response to them does the reader encounter Pecola as confident, relaxed and spontaneous. For the first time the reader experiences Pecola as an inquisitive child. She not only takes initiative to ask questions, she also repeats them thereby insisting on having her questions answered. Besides Mary giving Pecola random nicknames such as "dumplin'" and "puddin'" Pecola experiences herself as not despised by these women (Morrison, 1999, pp. 38; 40). These women do not display the distaste lurking in the eyes of all white people (Morrison 1999, pp. 36–37) nor the rejection of bullying and gossiping from members of the black community.

The Bakhtinian construction of identity as dialogic is thus clear to witness in Pecola's construction and revelation of Self , as witnessed in the company of the various characters in *The Bluest Eye*.

3.2.2 Looking identity constructions for the Breedloves

At the centre of the Breedloves' psyche is a debilitating self-hatred:

They believed they were ugly. Although their poverty was traditional and stultifying it was not unique. But their ugliness was unique. No one could have convinced them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly.... – Mrs. Breedlove, Sammy Breedlove, and Pecola Breedlove – wore their ugliness, put it on, so to speak, although it did not belong to them. (Morrison, 1999, p. 28)

This passage suggests their ugliness is constructed as it follows the acceptance of an outward evaluation of themselves, which nonetheless does not seem to be an objective fact as the narrator explains, “you looked closely and could not find the source” (Eichelberger, 1999, p. 63; Morrison, 1999, p. 28). Their Self-hatred manifests in various ways, from Pecola's desire for blue eyes, to Pauline's preference for the little white daughter of her employer, to Cholly's rape of his own daughter (Bassard, 2014, p. 126).

According to Morrison “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 internalisation of assumptions of immutable inferiority originating in an outside gaze” (Morrison, 1999, p. 168).

A central concern in *The Bluest Eye* is a critique of Western beauty. In the section primarily dealing with Pauline, the narrator tells us that romantic love and physical beauty are “probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought

(Morrison, 1999, p. 95). This idea is explored through the portrayal of the Breedlove's sense of themselves as aggressively ugly people:

You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly: you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realised that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, "You are ugly people". They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. "Yes," they had said, "you are right". And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it.

(Morrison, 1999, p. 28)

Analysing *The Bluest Eye*, Guerrero points out the clear demonstration of the ideological apparatus of the Look through popular cinema, advertising and other forms of media which confront the Breedlove's with how they do not match up to the dominant society's gaze and subsequently show the break-down of their self-esteem (1990, p. 764). The internalisation of this dominant look is exposed as particularly informed by cinema shaping the "looking relations" found in *The Bluest Eye* (Guerrero, 1990, p. 765). The cinematic effect on Pauline is that "she was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen" (Morrison, 1999, p. 95). Indeed, Morrison, through the narrator in an extra-representational act, makes the claim that physical beauty is the most destructive idea

in the history of human thought (Morrison, 1999, p. 95). This idea is further demonstrated through Claudia's narration.

Davis points to Claudia as a child who recognised the falseness of imposed white ideals via dolls, billboards and movies that had no relevance to her life (Davis, 1982, p. 328; Morrison, 1999, pp. 15–16). As an adult Claudia acknowledges her disinterest and sadism towards white images eventually floundered in shame until she converted to “fraudulent love” (Morrison, 1999, p. 16). Of significance is Davis's argument that Claudia the adult narrator sees that:

Shirley Temple cannot really be loved or imitated because she is just a doll, an image without a Self behind it. The crime of the racist society is not only the theft of black reality; it is the substitution of dead, external classifications for free self-definition. A society based entirely on the Look, on the absolute reification of the Other, reifies itself. If blacks are defined as slaves, whites are defined as masters. (Davis, 1982, p. 328)

The significance of Davis's argument is that the media and the various dominant institutions present a Look with no one behind it because the movie stars and pinup girls of the white culture are not models of selfhood (Davis, 1982, p. 328). And in the final analysis the African American can never attain this standard despite its inundating message. Lastly, the message of the Look carried by popular culture is that “human life is being and appearance – not choice” (Davis, 1982, p. 328). While Davis holds that when one models oneself on false/ empty images one loses the responsibility to create oneself in a world of others and to “love” these images is to deny the equal freedom of others to create themselves (Davis, 1982, p. 328). For

purposes of this study, it can nonetheless be argued that both false and “true” images function as significant contributors to the identity construction of the Self. Thus, the other – as other relatable people – can be considered genuine models capable of imitation while the Other – as false models, which are unattainable empty images because of their Otherness – can nonetheless function to impact identity construction. Again noting this argument only considers consenting to the ideal of the other/Other in – whereas the possibility for constructing identity in a motion of rejecting the other is another option too. In both cases, however, Morrison’s characters are constantly constructed dialogically in relation to the other/Other.

The passage quoted earlier on the Breedlove’s sense of their ugliness made it clear that the sense of their ugliness did not result from innately inferior qualities, but “from conviction, their conviction” (Morrison, 1999, p. 28). The conviction takes hold when external events repeatedly confirm the Breedlove's position as ugly.

External visual messages thus function to “teach” the Breedloves their inferior position in society, being echoed by “every billboard, every movie, every glance that expresses “support” for the Breedloves’ sense that they are “ugly people” (Morrison, 1999, p. 28).

As Guerrero has pointed out, Morrison explores the Look of racism, sexism as well as classism in her novels. This point is best demonstrated by Pauline’s visit to the cinema. He writes,

[W]hile many white feminist critics argue that women suffer negation of self by having to identify with a sexual object displayed for the pleasure of the

male gaze at the screen, Pauline... must suffer this negation in a compounded sense... She is... forced to look and apply to herself a completely unrealisable, alien standard of feminine beauty.” (Guerrero, 1990, p. 764).

Ultimately, the dominant gaze built into the classic cinema experience means Pauline experiences the triple devaluation of being female, black, and poor (Guerrero, 1990, p. 764). Morrison, moreover, shows the idea of the devaluing dominant gaze is not only limited to African American women but that African American men are also turned into objects by the dominant gaze. Cholly is permanently scared when the dominating, racist society shows him his “place” when two white men come upon him and Darlene and force him to copulate in the glare of their flashlight under their voyeuristic and sadistic gazes (Morrison, 1999, p.116).

3.2.3 Seeing Cholly’s identity construction

A key moment in Cholly’s identity formation occurs when he suffers the humiliation of having two white men watch his first sexual encounter (Morrison, 1999, p. 116). As a consequence of this experience, Cholly makes Darlene the object of his displaced fury. After his sexual humiliation, he does not look at his tormentors, but at his partner, with hatred.

By despising Darlene, Cholly is able to hold on to his sense of Self. It was easier, safer, in the short term, to displace his hatred onto her rather than the men whom he saw were big, white and armed, compared to him as small, black and helpless (Morrison, 1999, p. 118). Hating the white men would have “consumed him, burned him up like a piece of soft coal” (Morrison, 1999, p. 118). Cholly seemingly never

overcomes this humiliating experience. Fulton points out that this experience infects Cholly's relationships with Pauline and Pecola and defines his sense of Self so that with time, it tragically restricts him to expressing affection through acts of violence (1997, p. 38).

Morrison shows the Look taking on monstrous proportions as the humiliated black male makes the black woman the object of his displaced fury (Davis, 1982, p. 8). Cholly therefore displaces his sexual humiliation by hating Darlene instead of their abusers. The truth that Cholly's conscious mind cannot yet face is that it would have been too much for his ego to despise the white men, because that would have meant he had to face himself and acknowledge that HE failed and not his Darlene, his pariah:

Never did he once consider directing his hatred toward the hunters. Such an emotion would have destroyed him. . . . For now, he hated 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. (Morrison, 1999, p. 118)

Davis points out that Cholly's desire to "protect" Darlene was the desire to create himself as her protector, but the impotence the encounter left him with instead meant for him to restore his selfhood he had to deny hers (1982, p. 330). At times a similar kind of dialogism can be found in Morrison's employment of naming.

3.3 Naming as dialogical identity construction in *The Bluest Eye*

Davis's notion that naming as a two-sided identity construction can be found in Morrison's fiction further supports the argument for dialogical construction of identity.

Davis argues the power to name defines reality and perception for Morrison as there is a clear discrepancy between name and reality when looking at the three novels she analyses: *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and *Song of Solomon* (1982, p. 323).

Pauline Breedlove grew up thinking her family did not value her because they did not treat her with consideration for her little idiosyncrasies. Not only does her family not tell any "funny jokes and anecdotes about funny things she had done", they also do not accommodate her food preferences by doing little things like "saving of the wing or neck for her" or "cooking of the peas in a separate pot without rice because she did not like rice" (Morrison, 1999, p. 86). More hurtful than the fact that nobody teased her, she, of all the children, had no nickname (Morrison, 1999, p. 86). According to Eichelberger, this lack of special accommodation, but also equal playfulness, teaches Pauline she has no intrinsic value (1999, p. 72).

Harris has noted nicknames for African Americans have functioned as markers of individuality. Through the nickname the community recognises and makes a place for a person's distinctive nature; Morrison emphasises that this recognition, an established cultural practice, has been denied Pauline (Eichelberger, 1999, p. 72).

In the Fisher household where she works, Pauline had become the ideal servant for

she felt the role of ideal servant “fulfilled practically all her needs” and that “all the meaningfulness of her life was in her work” (Morrison, 1999, pp. 98, 100). In comparison to giving her best in the Fisher household, her own family was seen as the “dark edges” that made life with the Fisher’s more lovely (Morrison, 1999, p. 99). To top the experiences of power, praise and luxury she received from or via the Fishers they also gave her what she never had: a nickname (Morrison, 1999, p. 99). Despite Claudia frowning on the little white girl calling Mrs Breedlove, “Polly”, when even her own children and husband call her Mrs Breedlove, Pauline herself welcomes the nickname, because here she feels that special sense of recognition she had always craved for (Morrison, 1999, p. 84). Hence, Pauline becomes kind and caring, “with honey in her voice” at the Fishers (Morrison, 1999, p. 85).

Two further characters whose identity construction is greatly influenced by the naming paradigm is that of Geraldine and her son, Junior. Though minor characters, Morrison takes the time to discuss their “type” in order to give the reader a clearer picture of Pecola’s world and community. Geraldine is the type of African American woman who wants to get rid of her funk – that which reveals her blackness – “the dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of the wide range of human emotions” (Morrison, 1999, p. 64). Having named this “blackness” by a specific term, “funk,” they have a concrete grasp on it and therefore manipulating it becomes more manageable. Who Geraldine becomes, Morrison shows, is greatly in relation to this notion of Funk.

Geraldine went to a land-grant college and learned how not only to do certain things correctly, but how to erase or suppress her own spontaneity and naturalness of body

and emotion. Fighting the funk is described as follows:

Wherever it erupts, this Funk, they wipe it away; where it crusts, they dissolve it, where it drips, flowers, or clings, they find it and fight it until it dies. They fight this battle all the way to the grave. The laugh that is a little too loud; the enunciation a little too round; the gesture a little too generous. They hold their behind in for fear of a sway too free; when they wear lipstick, they never cover the entire mouth for fear of lips too thick, and they worry, worry, worry about the edges of their hair. (Morrison, 1999, p. 64)

Morrison capitalises Funk, turning an adjective into a proper noun as something Other such as the devil or another menacing character. Capitalised, funk is viewed as if it is not an inherent, unshakable quality of the Self, but a distanced Other which relentlessly haunts – or attacks – the Self. It is for this reason that she has her son's hair "cut as close to the scalp as possible to avoid any suggestion of wool" (Morrison, 1999, pp. 67-68).

Geraldine, moreover, teaches Junior the difference between coloured people and niggers. According to her the two were easily identifiable with coloured people being "neat and tidy", while "niggers were dirty and loud" (Morrison, 1999, p. 67). And yet Junior longs to play with those very boys and say and do things that his mother may consider as Funk. His mother therefore watched him closely to ensure the subtle and tell-tale signs did not threaten to erode her hard work of fighting the Funk (Morrison, 1999, p. 68). Yet the narrator shares how Junior pined for friendship with the black boys and longed to *do* things with them especially play King of the Mountain and have them push him down the mound of dirt and roll over him so that he could feel

their hardness pressing on him and smell their wild blackness (Morrison, 1999, p. 68). He wanted to casually swear with them, sit on curbstones, spit and talk nonsense and do other boy things like compare who can pee the furthest and the longest (Morrison, 1999, p. 68). Yet his mother's watchfulness and training through naming, thus classifying people as niggers-to-be-avoided and decent coloured people, lead to Junior turning to bullying girls (Morrison, 1999, p. 68). By naming and defining people as Other, Geraldine turned Junior from a boy who wanted to play with other boys to a boy who bullied girls.

The use of these three words, Funk, nigger and coloured, thus function to shape and direct both Geraldine and Junior's worlds and thus see their identities constructed in relation to the perspectives they hold on these basic names.

3.4 Dialogical constructions of identity in *The Bluest Eye*

Dialogical constructions concern all elements that influence the construction of the Self whether consciously or unconsciously perceived by the Self. The primer, as an unconscious influence, functions as a structural device, in *The Bluest Eye* and exhibits the use of the education system as a site for transmitting ideologies that objectify Blacks as the Other (Pal, 1994, p. 2440). Analysis shows the impossibility of Pecola recognising herself in the narrative of the pretty house and happy family of the primer. Fultz (2003) points out that *The Bluest Eye* was published at the height of the Black Aesthetics movement and calls into question the much-touted slogan, "Black is beautiful" (p. 7). The primer additionally functions as a device that reveals the impossibility of African Americans reaching the white standards implied as normal by the primer.

The Other is generally seen as an anomaly and justifiably rejected, while the other can be either rejected or accepted since it can be seen as both negative and positive. Whereas Pecola accepts the rejection of the dominant culture that treats her as Other, Claudia rejects that rejection. She rejects it on both racist and sexist fronts. In both cases she admits her resistance only goes so far and yet listening to the adult Claudia, the reader knows she is not destroyed by these gazes as she has resources unavailable to Pecola.

Matus, in *Toni Morrison* (1998), offers a psychoanalytic interpretation of racism as historical “trauma” and argues Pecola, Claudia and Frieda are all exposed to the trauma of racism yet react to it very differently. Pecola’s reaction is shame, which internalises the world’s devaluation of her and leaves her defenceless (Morrison, 1999, pp. 37, 56, 57). Claudia and Frieda’s reaction is anger and questioning the logic that brings an obedient or slippery light to the eyes of peers and teachers (Morrison, 1999, p. 57). For they see how people look at and treat the Maureen Peale’s of the world and it makes them want to bully Maureen. Unlike Pecola’s anger, which only lasts for a moment, it is their anger, which allows Claudia and Frieda to resist the devaluation of themselves as seemingly lesser (Morrison, 1999, p. 57). When Pecola experiences a brief moment of anger in response to Yacobowski, she recognises that anger creates an “awareness of worth” (Morrison, 1999, p. 38) yet her sense of worth is clearly minimal as her anger dissipates fairly quickly.

Whereas Pecola accepts the devaluing judgement from the white gaze and even the sexist and classist gaze, Claudia and Frieda have more capacity to occasionally reject some of the devaluing gazes. But they would eventually also accept and desire white

images of beauty and other forms of accommodation, as adult Claudia acknowledges (Morrison, 1999, p. 16). For the reader witnesses Claudia's childish rebelliousness that saw her hack blue-eyed, blonde-haired dolls in rejection of the white beauty standard she recognised only to conform to a "fraudulent love" (Morrison, 1999, p. 16) under the social pressure of the message endorsed by adults and other children alike as she grew older.

It can be argued that through the character of Claudia, Morrison portrays the possibility of refusing the type of idealisation of girlhood or motherhood, endorsed by both the culture through its advertising and the community through its adoration and making the loving gift to a girl child the blue-eyed dolls (Morrison, 1999, p.13). Claudia furthermore challenges the indoctrination of white standardised values. She displays a sense of critical awareness when she asks, "What made people look at [little white girls] and say, "Awwwww," but not for me?" (Morrison, 1999, p. 15). She wonders why "all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured", while she could not "find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped... apparently only [her]" for she "had only one desire: to dismember it" (Morrison, 1999, p.14).

Adult Claudia also acknowledges that her anger at Maureen Peal for calling her, Frieda and Pecola black and ugly, may have been misdirected for "all the time we knew that Maureen Peal was not the enemy. The *Thing* to fear was the *Thing* that made *her* beautiful" (Morrison, 1999, p. 58; original emphasis).

Claudia is, however, alone in questioning and resisting this acceptance and love of the white standard of beauty imposed upon the African American child by adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs and even by the African American community who has adopted it – as when parents gave their daughters the blond, blue-eyed dolls as presents. The invisible other exists in countless forms to impress upon the African American individual a standard she could never live up to. Because Claudia is alone in this thinking – against a pervasive other via the media, the education system and even those in authority in her life, Khayati (1999, p. 317) is correct to say *The Bluest Eye* is built upon a dualistic perspective of the “dominant” versus the “dominated,” leaving little space for resistance.

In light of Claudia’s initial aggression towards Shirley Temple-like dolls, Khayati points out Claudia’s resistance to the oppressive forces is not extended to the rest of the community (1999, p. 317) as Claudia is one of very few characters who portray a certain measure of resistance to the dominant gaze. Although a valid point, *The Bluest Eye* is not a resistance novel, and instead shows the difficulty of standing alone against oppressive powers and indoctrinating messaging. Claudia’s resistance is also short-lived, for she admits “I had not yet arrived at the turning point in the development in my psyche which would allow me to love her,” but she learned “much later to worship her” (Morrison, 1999, pp. 13, 16). A question that needs answering is what are some of the things that enable Claudia to resist the dominant white gaze, while Pecola is seemingly defenceless.

Fulton (1997, p. 32) argues the crucial difference that enables Claudia to challenge white ideological values while Pecola is systematically destroyed by it is the degree of stability and self-love fostered within their home environments.

Pecola's experience of her mother is not one of nurturing. This distance is already evinced in the fact that the daughter is required to call her mother Mrs Breedlove. In comparison to the sweet cooing love Pecola witnesses her mother bestow on the little blue-eyed, blond-haired Fisher girl whom she nannies, she herself is humiliated and rejected in front of this girl and the MacTeer sisters. The reader furthermore learns from unnamed gossipers that Pecola is "lucky to be alive" after the beating her mother gave her when she discovered Cholly had raped Pecola (Morrison, 1999, p. 149). The Pecola-gone-mad tells her imaginary friend that she did not tell her mother when Cholly raped her a second time because Mrs Breedlove did not even believe her the first time (Morrison, 1999, p. 158). Mrs Breedlove's rejection of Pecola's word is a denial of her daughter's pain and results in an increase in her vulnerability and further exposure to be hurt – both to be abused by Cholly as well as society at large – in the form of a madman such as Soaphead Church.

Unlike all the other characters whom Morrison examines, Claudia and Frieda receive unconditional love from "somebody with hands," able-bodied adults who have the power to care for them. Such nurturing is conspicuously absent in the lives of especially the Breedloves (Eichelberger, 1999, p. 73). Cholly was abandoned on a dump heap when he was only four days old. He marries Pauline who feels isolated and uncared for by her family because of her broken foot. As the daughter of these two people, Pecola's is perhaps the most vulnerable character in the novel.

In contrast to Pecola, who is starved for (parental) love, Claudia is nurtured and enveloped by family love that is clear to experience. She experiences not only her mother's love but also her father's love and her sister's companionship that enforce the worldview that Claudia is not alone, that there are others whom she is a part of whom she can draw strength from or with whom she can be stronger than she is individually.

Unlike when Mrs Breedlove yanked, slapped and fiercely scolded Pecola in front of her friends and the Fisher girl, without a thought of comforting her then or later (Morrison, 1990, pp. 84-85), Mrs MacTeer had the capacity to apologise when she punished her children unfairly, as when Pecola began "ministration" and Mrs MacTeer began giving them a hiding without asking questions because she thought her daughters were "playing nasty" (Morrison, 1990, p. 22). Afterwards Mrs MacTeer admitted her mistake by taking them into her arms and looking at them with eyes "that were sorry", recounts Claudia (Morrison, 1990, p. 22).

Claudia's experience to when she is sick also contrasts significantly from Pecola's to when she is sexually violated. The older Claudia recounts that being sick as a child caused her mother to shake her head in disgust at her lack of consideration and treating the cold with contempt (Morrison, 1999, p. 6). She describes her mother's rough hands rubbing Vicks salve on her chest until she was rigid with pain and massaging her until she felt she would faint (Morrison, 1999, p. 6). Yet the older Claudia asks, "Was it really like that? As painful as I remember?" (Morrison, 1999, p. 6). She then admits that experience there was "love, thick and dark as Alaga syrup" and the hands that would put the covers back over her when she kicked them off in

the night she realises was, “somebody with hands who [did] not want her to die” (Morrison, 1999, p. 7). Thus, although it did not feel like she was treated with adoring and considerate love, she was cared for by someone who loved her.

Further confirmation of family support that instils a sense of worthiness – though perhaps not consciously acknowledged during childhood – but which nevertheless enables a resistance to the internalising of worthlessness or ugliness – include their parents’ reaction when Mr Henry touched Frieda inappropriately. Her parents physically attacked him, with the father throwing an old tricycle at Mr Henry, then knocking him off the porch and their mother hitting him with a broom before their father shot at him as he ran away (Morrison, 1999, p. 77). The MacTeer parents’ protection provides an inner sense of defence against the world as the parents’ behaviour teach the children that they have a support system.

In addition to support, care and protection from her family, Claudia, unlike Pecola, has a sister – an other – whose presence makes her stronger and more confident. When Claudia says she does not want to go somewhere where they might run into the feared Soaphead Church, Frieda responds, “So what? We’re together. We’ll run if he does anything at us” (Morrison, 1999, p. 59). On another occasion when the sisters were confronted by another feared character they “automatically reached for the other’s hand” (Morrison, 1999, p.79) Nowhere does Pecola get the message, “we’re together” as she is avoided in the classroom, taunted on the playing field and ignored or rejected in the community through the likes of Yacobowski, Junior’s mother, Geraldine, who tells her in a quiet voice “You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house” (Morrison, 1999, p. 72). Even Pecola’s brother does not think of taking her

along when he runs away (Morrison, 1999, p. 34). Her mother thinks nothing of slapping her twice in front of Frieda and Claudia, while caring more about her floor that is dirtied than Pecola's burnt legs. But worst of all is Mrs Breedlove not acknowledging Pecola as her daughter when the Fisher girl asks who she is (Morrison, 1999, pp. 84-85).

For Pecola there is no "us" to present a stronger front, and there is no "you and me" supporting each other. Unlike Pecola's isolation, Claudia's confidence and strength thus comes from the presence of significant others, which primarily include her parents' care and protection and her sister's presence. While Claudia is younger by two or three years from Frieda and Pecola, she recognises that she was still in love with herself, which made racial discrimination incomprehensible to her although she recognised there was something that somehow made the Maureen Peal's of the world worthy, yet not others like her and her sister or Pecola (Morrison, 1999, p. 57). On the other hand, Pecola's suspicion that it is her blackness which renders her unworthy in the eyes of others – both black and white – grows stronger on a regular basis.

Lastly, Claudia has the image of her mother, which strengthens her as her mother's daughter and thereby informs her identity too. From her mother Claudia has gained the knowledge that suffering is an inevitable part of life against which one stands in defiance to overcome. Whereas Claudia learnt defiance from her mother, Pecola learned rejection. What Claudia learns imbues her with value, informs her character that she can be like her mother and enables her to resist the imposed white standard, to question it and feel repulsed by it (Fulton, 1997, p. 33).

Sensing the intensity of Pecola's misery, Claudia wants to "open her up, crisp her edges, ram a stick down that hunched and curving spine, force her to stand erect and spit misery out on the streets" (Morrison, 1999, p. 57). In effect, Claudia wants to imbue Pecola with the strength and wisdom she has learned from her mother.

The powerful image Claudia has of her mother is one of Mrs MacTeer as a "slim young girl in a pink crepe dress" waiting for the arrival of an intense summer storm (Morrison, 1999, p. 147):

One hand is on her hip; the other lolls about her thigh – waiting. The wind swoops her up, high above the houses, but she is still standing; hand on hip. Smiling. The anticipation and promise in her lolling hand are not altered by the holocaust. In the summer tornado of 1929, my mother's hand is unextinguished. She is strong, smiling, and relaxed while the world falls down about her. (Morrison, 1999, p. 147)

For Fulton, (1997, p. 33) this vision underlines Claudia's conviction in her mother's strength, which in turn fosters Claudia's own sense of strength and self-love, which in turn, enable her defiant interrogation of white ideological values. Whereas Claudia wishes to pass these qualities on to Pecola, the legacy of self-hatred Pecola has received from her parents' valorisation of whiteness has already subconsciously convinced her of another reality (Fulton, 1997, p. 33).

Whereas Claudia's strength is greatly derived from her view of her mother as strong, Pecola's parents have a strange symbiotic relationship where the one's sense of identity lies in the weakness or weakening of the other. Mrs Breedlove considers her

life dim and unrecalled unless punctuated by her quarrels and physical fights with Cholly. For her “they relieved the tiresomeness of poverty, gave grandeur to the dead rooms” and “to deprive her of these fights was to deprive her of all the zest and reasonableness of life” (Morrison, 1999, p. 31). It is not only that Mrs Breedlove would never have forgiven Jesus if Cholly stopped drinking, the fact is she needed his sins desperately since her life had more purpose the lower he sank (Morrison, 1999, p. 31). Who she was and how she gave meaning to her existence, depended on Cholly remaining a no-count man whom she was called upon by God to punish (Morrison, 1999, p. 31). Furthermore, for Pauline, their fights define her as virtuous (Eichelberger, 1999, p. 83). More than defining her character, Pauline considers the very reasonableness of life and even “her own true Self” find expression through her violent relationship with Cholly (Morrison, 1999, p. 31).

Cholly needs Pauline as much as she needs him, inasmuch as she defines herself in contrast to him, he displaces on to her what he cannot face in himself. She comes to represent “one of the few things abhorrent to him that he could touch and therefore hurt” and he violently displaces “the sum of his inarticulate fury and aborted desires” onto her (Morrison, 1999, p 31). While Cholly needs Pauline to objectify his failure (Furman, 2014, p. 17), she needs him for a positive view of herself. Cholly’s treatment of his wife reminds the reader of his choice to hate Darlene who witnessed his emasculation and inability to protect her against the flashlight of the white men since hating them would have destroyed his sense of self. Thus by hating Pauline, he believes he can “leave himself intact” (Morrison, 1999, p. 31).

Yet the event that renders him “totally dysfunctional” is the “appearance of children” (Morrison, 1999, p.126). By the time his second child, Pecola is born, Cholly is a broken, violent alcoholic whose family signifies his powerlessness and failure as a man, husband and father to provide and nurture them (Fulton, 1997, p. 43). Instead of his children bringing out the best and the strongest in him, their appearance weakens him.

Summarising Cholly’s identity construction, one finds fundamental aspects of his identity are built on how others have treated him. Their behaviour in turn influenced his view of himself. His childhood of abandonment on a dump heap and the death of his aunt Jimmy who rescued him, taught him that there was no such thing as love nor that anyone has intrinsic value. Instead he learns as an adult that one is only as valuable as he or she is powerful. Cholly’s attitude, Morrison shows, is not natural but one adopted after the traumas of his boyhood. After his aunt’s death Cholly learns that he is virtually powerless: he cannot protect others from the evil forces that are exemplified by the white hunters who humiliate him and Darlene. His months of subsequent searching for his father produce not fatherly advice but rejection, and Cholly is reduced to the position of a helpless infant, soiling himself and weeping at the memory of his dead aunt Jimmy (Morrison, 1999, p. 125).

Shortly after this experience, Cholly realised that “abandoned in a junk heap by his mother, rejected for a crap game by his father, there was nothing more to lose. He was alone with his own perceptions and appetites, and they alone interested him” (Morrison, 1999, p. 126). Unlike Pauline, who believes that she is unloved because

she is deficient, Cholly seems to feel there is no love to be had, that the world is empty of it (Eichelberger, 1999, p. 72).

Character identities in *Tar Baby* are similarly portrayed as reflecting each other or exerting reciprocal influence over others/ Others.

3.5 Looking relations in *Tar Baby*

Four kinds of looking will be discussed in this section. I will first-off consider Guerrero's voyeuristic look; secondly, the fact that one's worldview influences what one physically perceives; thirdly, three understandings of double-consciousness with the first moving from a negative to a positive position; the second being the case of vision transformed from sight to "insightful" blindness and finally a third position where a positive view of the Self is shown to have been enabled only by a wilful blindness.

The first example of looking informing identity in *Tar Baby* concerns Jadine's identity. As a high-fashion model in Paris, cover lady in a fashion magazine and having had small roles in two films, the character Jadine can be considered the epitome of the "perfect object of voyeuristic male desire" (Guerrero, 1990, p. 771). Jadine's identity as a high-fashion model and art history graduate from the Sorbonne, suggests she has been constructed as the reified end-result of "the Look" for she had become what the dominant culture considered beautiful and accomplished (Guerrero, 1990, p. 770), considering the three marriage proposals, the classy friends and the social butterfly she is in Paris and Rome. This theoretical point of a constructed identity is reflected by Jadine wondering if the marriage proposals she has received

from white men were truly for her as Jadine, or if the men actually wanted to marry her as the image of the black model and cover girl (Morrison, 1997b, p. 45). Jadine didn't always want to straighten her hair, the truth was she thought Mingus was boring and she wished she could just be herself – the person inside – not some or other identity she had to live up to – whether black, American, smart, beautiful or anything else (Morrison, 1997b, p. 45). It is not only that Jadine wonders about the true intentions and thoughts of other people towards her. Her own treatment of others are questionable. Jadine's general thoughts regarding how to engage with white people suggest a double consciousness which understands “acceptable behaviour” that would enable one to “make it” in the white world, which includes, that “she needed only to be stunning, and to convince them she was not as smart as they were. Say the obvious, ask stupid questions, laugh with abandon, look interested, and light up at any display of their humanity if they showed it. Most of it required only charm – occasionally panache” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 127). While Jadine questions her objectification in the thought and behaviour of white people, she objectifies herself as well by presenting to them a version of herself – both visually and otherwise – especially constructed in response to what she thinks are their expectations of an “accepted black”.

A second aspect of vision portrayed in *Tar Baby*, involves the portrayal of people's differing perspectives of the same experience. These differing visions consequently inform the treatment/ reading the Self affords the other – which is not necessarily indicative of what the other/Other is, but of who the Self is. Jadine and Son's relationship exemplify this aspect best. This point is very much the visual version of the logic found in Morrison's use of naming.

Their differing perspectives of the world create much of the friction in Son and Jadine's relationship. Upon arrival in the USA from Isle des Chevaliers, Son sees that "The black girls in New York City were crying... Crying from a grief so stark you would have thought they'd been condemned to death by starvation..." (Morrison, 1997b, pp. 216-7). Two days later, Jadine arrives in New York and reflects that, "if ever there was a black woman's town, New York was it" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 223). In New York black women "gave enemas, blood transfusions and [said] please lady don't make me mad. They jacked up meetings in boardrooms, turned out luncheons, energised parties, redefined fashion, tipped scales, removed lids, cracked covers..." (Morrison, 1997b, p. 223). And Jadine herself was so happy she felt like giggling. In New York she felt her joints were oiled, her legs were longer and her neck properly connected to her body (Morrison, 1997b, p. 223). This picture starkly contrasts with Son's crying black girls in their tight jeans and high, high heels, straining against the pull of their braided hair and their mouths heavy with plum lipstick (Morrison, 1997b, pp. 216-7).

For Jadine and Son their differing perspectives go as deep as fundamentally differing in their worldview. Son wishes to "rescue" Jadine from that "blinding awe" of all things European and her city ways – which of course causes her to find delight in a place like New York and its sad and fast-paced people (Ryan, 1997, p. 67).

Jadine and Son are also on opposite ends of the spectrum considering the argument on the talented tenth by Du Bois. Jadine can be read as the representative of the "talented tenth" who rescues one of the designated untalented nine-tenths from educational, cultural and socio-political stagnation (Ryan, 1997, p. 68). Indeed Jadine's

engagement with Son is to wake him up from his traditional slumber and disconnected engagement with what she perceives as reality.

Starting with Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness which informs vision, three types of double-consciousness will now receive attention. Ryan builds on Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness but transforms and expands it quite significantly in her discussion of vision in "Contested Visions/ Double-Vision in *Tar Baby*." According to Ryan looking and seeing as informed by Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness can be used to analyse the conflicts between Jadine and Son. One of the aspects she considers is what Morrison does through presenting the reader with the blind horsemen.

As mentioned in Chapter One, Du Bois argues "the Negro is... born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world" (2007, p. 8). In *The Souls of Black Folk* Du Bois notes that "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's Self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois, 2007, p. 8). Although this difference is not articulated, Ryan points out, it is implicit in the term "double-consciousness," which refers to two distinct realities. As a process, double-consciousness refers to a state of psychological conflict between opposing cultural worldviews – what Du Bois designates as the internalisation of "two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals" (Du Bois, 2007, p. 8). Double-consciousness is, however, also generally understood as having a debilitating effect in which externally derived

perceptions of the Self constitute a *single* but alienated self-consciousness (Ryan, 1997, p. 65). This negative understanding thus comprises the first and foundational understanding of double-consciousness.

Ryan firstly expands the concept of double-consciousness beyond race to include class and gender. Hence, the Self not only sees itself as the raced Other (as well as Self, which lacks the judgemental gaze/ Look), but also the gendered Other and the classed Other. Ryan further argues that *Tar Baby* shows how Du Bois's concept of "double-consciousness," generally understood as a debilitating conflict between worldviews, can be transformed into an empowering 'double-vision', in which competing visions are accompanied by a sense of choice and agency (Peterson, 1997, p. 8). In other words, the Self need not be limited to experiencing itself as Othered and found wanting, different from the dominant ideology and vision. The very fact that it can experience itself from its own perspective as well as from another's perspective means it has two views on itself as a subject – and according to Ryan the Self can use this double vision constructively.

In *Tar Baby*, readers discover horsemen who transform sight into blindness. The story is told of a slave ship that capsized near what became Isle des Chevaliers where most of the action takes place in *Tar Baby*. The two types of African survivors included those who were partially blinded and those who were completely blinded. Both groups had washed out on the island but the former group swam towards the Europeans, thinking they would rescue them from the disaster and the unknown environment they found themselves in. But instead of rescue they were instead recaptured. The latter group became completely blind and through this in fact

achieved “second sight/ double-vision, by which they understood that “rescue” meant slavery and hid. Morrison presents this blindness as a second-sight, which enables them to escape capture and indenture (Morrison, 1997b, p. 153). Son’s rejection of Jadine’s plans to have Valerian finance his education and/or business venture signals his double-vision of the connection between “rescue” and slavery/ indebtedness (Ryan, 1997, p. 70).

This feature of transformed blindness or second-sight, is argued to be a primary strategy African peoples have devised to survive slavery. Double-vision or second sight is thus not, as one would assume upon a first reading, only negative, but also highly functional as the reader sees with the hundred horsemen still riding on the island – blind but free.

To assist with understanding this seemingly contradictory notion concerning this two-sightedness, understanding the concept of *efundesque*, is valuable. *Efun* is a ritually prepared chalk, which is used for cleansing in Yoruba religion. It is said to have the power to transform the negative energy within an entity into a positive potential. A good example of this “cleansing”/ transformation is the word “nigger” as *African Americans use it intra-communally* to express, among other things, a benevolent kinship (Ryan, 1997, p. 71). An *efundesque* transformation within African American experience does not erase the opposing signification with its original negative and derogatory definition but “clears a partial space to allow for an additional meaning, which is both revised and positive. The word “nigger” in its transformed status now encodes both the remembered history of contestation and distortion as well as offer resistance to the word as negatively understood only (Ryan, 1997, p. 71). The

efundesque transformation thus entails a double-consciousness, that initially understood “double-consciousness” negatively as characterised by a sense of self-alienating “two-ness of being” in which externally derived distorted perceptions of the African identity are dominant as Du Bois argues “measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity”, but this view is revised after the *efundesque* transformation, to make space for the additional meaning, which offers a more positive sense of double-consciousness as holding the possibility for double-vision (Ryan, 1997, p. 71).

The novel reaches its climax on Christmas Eve. During the Christmas dinner a fight starts in which Ondine expresses her anger and frustration with Margaret’s interference in the kitchen and the meal for the evening. In her outburst she expresses her contempt for Margaret on two fronts – that of lady of the house and of mother. As she stormed off in tears she exclaimed: “Yes my kitchen. Yes my kitchen. I am the woman in this house. None other. As God is my witness there is none other. Not in this house” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 210). As for her second accusation, Ondine bursts out that Margaret had abused Michael (her and Valerian’s son as a baby). The manner in which Ondine chose to deal with this abuse and the fact that Valerian chose not “to receive the message” of the abuse are significant for both their identity constructions.

Ondine blurted out, “You cut him up. You cut your baby up. Made him bleed for you. For fun you did it. Made him scream, you, you freak” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 209). Ondine then addressed the other people at the dinner table, “She stuck pins in his behind. Burned him with cigarettes. Yes, she did, I saw her, I saw his little behind. She burned him!” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 209).

A week after the outburst Margaret goes to Ondine and tells Ondine that she knew Ondine knew about what she did to Michael. And that while Ondine may have done it for the love she had for Michael, she also did it because she hated her – Margaret. Of course Ondine denies this, but Margaret’s argument seems sound, “...and you felt good hating me, didn’t you? I could be the mean white lady and you could be the good coloured one” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 242). When Margaret confronts her a second time with why she did not inform Valerian or make alarm of some sort, Ondine admits, “I guess I thought you would let us go... Sometimes I thought if you all let me go there won’t be anyone around to take the edge off it. I didn’t want to leave him there, all by himself” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 243).

Margaret’s insight that Ondine could see herself as morally superior was because Ondine compared herself to Margaret, whom she thought of as morally inferior. Yet, a critical look reveals Ondine’s actions were that of an accomplice despite her noble thoughts towards herself and her pity towards Michael. She did not save Michael. And as Margaret tells her, it would have been better had she told because then things might have changed immediately in Michael’s best interest.

On two fronts Ondine’s identity is thus constructed in relation to Margaret. Firstly, the two things Ondine saw about Margaret – her inaptitude in the kitchen and the marks she left on her own son – caused Ondine to view herself as superior to Margaret.

This discussion thus reveals Ondine’s identity as morally good or as Michael’s benefactor as having been false. She is not the only one in the house who had been living with a false identity in relation to Michael’s abuse.

The second person whose identity construction is closely tied to the facts surrounding Ondine's confession, is that of Valerian, the great benefactor in the novel. Unlike the blind horsemen who gained second-vision, Valerian's blindness truly lacked sight and was wilful.

Valerian, though a very rich man from a great fortune he inherited, sees his life as simple, modest and decent. In his estimation "his claims to decency were human: had never cheated anyone. Had done the better thing whenever he had a choice and sometimes when he did not. He had never been miserly or a spendthrift, and his politics were always rational and often humane" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 51). He also considers the two or three girls who helped him enter his fifties as nothing for his wife to have been worried about (Morrison, 1997b, p. 51).

Upon discovery of Michael's abuse, Valerian retrospectively recognises he had not been who he thought he was. He thought he was in control, that he had shaped and managed the world around him well, but this was clearly not so. Instead, he discovers he had never been in control and that through his self-absorption he had been lying to himself. And now, many years after the fact, that stance had consequences of disproportional magnitude.

As Morrison explains, "[Valerian] had preoccupied himself with the construction of the world and its inhabitants according to his imagined message. But he had chosen not to know the real message that his son had mailed to him from underneath the sink" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 245)

He thought about innocence there in his greenhouse and knew that he was guilty of it because he had lived with a woman who had made something kneel down in him the first time he saw her, but about whom he knew nothing; had watched his son grow and talk but also about whom he had known nothing. And there was something so foul in that, something in the crime of innocence so revolting it paralysed him. He had not known because he had not taken that trouble to know. He was satisfied with what he did know. Knowing more was inconvenient and frightening (Morrison, 1997b, pp. 244-245).

Because he would not look, he did not see to understand the hidden messages Michael was sending. And now, he cannot stop thinking of 1950 when he heard his son's song for the first time (Morrison, 1997b, p. 233). The picture of the beautiful boy in the laundry under the sink, singing la la la, la la la because he could not speak or cry about what was happening to him, vividly replayed itself in Valerian's mind (Morrison, 1997b, p. 236). When he finally discovers the reason for the song, it means his life had in fact been a lie as it was not based on the reality, but on a selective vision, which meant a selective, narrow, convenient and ultimately selfish vision and a true reflection of his character.

Valerian's wilful blindness/ ignorance, thus eventually reveals himself to always have been what he could not have imaged himself to be. If his perceptions of Michael were so blind, then his views of everyone, including himself, are no longer reliable. The discovery of his son's pain, his wife's abuse and his own unwillingness to have noticed it, caused Valerian to become a defeated old man overnight.

For some of Morrison's characters, the disruption of lifelong beliefs leads to the constructive rebuilding of identity, but Valerian can only excuse himself and the situation by concluding that it “is not the world at all” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 236), he withdraws into stuttering, near non-communication and incompetence (Page, 1995, p.113).

3.6 Naming as dialogical identity construction in *Tar Baby*

This section will discuss aspects of dialogical identity construction relating to Margaret, Jadine, Sydney and Ondine as well as Morrison’s employment of naming to reveal the Self’s identity in relation to the other/Other.

Ryan, Page, and Gerrig and Banaji have all picked up on the telling nature of naming that takes place in *Tar Baby*. As Ryan explains the names characters assign to each other illustrate their contesting visions and can be read as very informative to reflect social relations (1997, p. 71). Page concentrates on the fragmentation of characters, which are illustrated through being known by more than one name in the novel. For the purpose of this research, the focus will not be on the fragmented nature of identity, but on the dialogical relation between the person named and the person naming since the point I wish to illustrate here is what naming the other/Other tells about the Self’s perception of both the other, but also of itself – even though this consideration is hidden in the name used for the other/Other.

Differently put, Gerrig and Banaji argue that processes of naming contribute critically to the construction of self-identity (1991, p. 173). They further argue that names are the tools by which human categories and social realities are created (Gerrig and

Banaji, 1991, p. 173). In line with the theme of vision, looking and seeing of this study, they argue naming also illustrates the Self's vision of the other (Gerrig & Banaji, 1991, p. 173). What one names someone thus reveals and influences how the Self sees in the other/Other.

In other words, names can serve to guide the way language users experience identity because they believe “the continual, vivid use of names can hardly help but influence our construction of the world” since names function as concepts that enable mental representations (Gerrig and Banaji, 1991, p. 188). Differently put, names function as concepts of cognition and are indicative of a speaker's internal thought (Gerrig and Banaji, 1991, p. 188–189).

In essence, their hypothesis about the role of names in the construction of identity is a general one about language use, which can be found in the dialogical construction of identity according to Bakhtin.

Taking the implications of naming further, Gerrig and Banaji consider the notion of “self-identity”. They are of the opinion that “self-identities” are cognitive structures that entail more than a list of beliefs about the Self (1991, p. 175). This list of beliefs further entail the roles one assumes with respect to other individuals and serves to generate behavioural choices (Gerrig and Banaji, 1991, p. 175).

Citing Bakhtin, Gerrig and Banaji demonstrate how simple pronouns and common nouns exemplify the role of names in identity construction as a general function of language (1991, p. 175). This relational aspect of language is evinced in pronouns

such as “our”, “yours”, “theirs” and nouns like daughter. These words automatically stands in relation to others such as mine-your-their and daughter-mother/ father or parent cannot be without the other – even when the other is not explicitly acknowledged as it isn’t necessarily in pronouns such as “us” where the other is not overtly excluded.

The reader is privy to hearing what the variety of characters calls each other face-to-face, behind each other's backs, and in their private thoughts.

This analysis can begin by looking at pronouns such as “us” and “we”. When Ondine questions Sydney's efforts to patrol the house, he challenges her, “Whose side you on?” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 100). Ondine reassures him: “Your side, naturally. Our side.” The shift from “your” to “our” quickly closes the potential gap between his side and hers. But Page points out the use of “our” is problematic throughout the novel, as the question of racial unity conflicts with familial and personal loyalties, and as the characters wrongly assume that others must be either on one’s side or against it (Page, 1995, p. 121). When Jadine and Son discuss his “stealing,” Jadine says, “It depends on what you want from us” (Morrison, 1997b, p.118), thereby placing herself on the side of the household. Son is disturbed by this allegiance, taking it as Jadine's racial betrayal (Page, 1995, p. 121). He asks her, “Us? You call yourself ‘us?’” But for Jadine, the reasoning is simple and she responds with, “Of course. I live here” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 118). Son on the other hand sees Jadine as the niece of the African American servants and who should therefore not be identifying herself with the white, capitalist employer.

The relationship between Son/ William Green and each member of the Childs's family is reflected in the names they use for him. Sydney calls Son "stinking ignorant swamp nigger" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 100) and Jadine calls him an "ugly barefoot baboon" and a "river rat" (Morrison, 1997b, pp. 121, 160). These words do not only reflect their antagonism towards him, they also reflect the difference they see between him and them. Once Son apologises to them for the scare he caused them, asks for help to get his hair cut and continues to call Sydney, Mr Childs and Ondine, Mrs Childs, they soften up and begin calling him "Son". It is only after this name change that they open up to treat him as one of "us". Yet after Jadine runs away with Son, Ondine reverts back to thinking of him as "that thing" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 284).

The names Ondine, Sydney and Jadine use for Gideon and Thérèse demonstrate the Levinasian notion of totalising by objectification and thus reduction, which results in the Self's narrow definition and objectification of this other. A great irony is also at play in this naming, which demonstrates how treatment of the other ultimately reflects in the experience of the Self.

The name Mary is used generically with Ondine thinking in terms of "a Mary", "another Mary" and "them Marys" to refer to the female helpers of native women who assist them. Whenever they fire these women, Gideon brings a new lady to replace the previous person. They justify this position of calling these different women "Mary" because they believed they could never be wrong since "all the black women who had been baptised on the island had Mary among her names" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 38). "Yardman" is also not the name of the male help they use around the house, but Gideon (Morrison, 1997b, pp. 37; 39; 114). Jadine even calls Alma Estee,

“Mary” when she meets her at the airport when she clearly knows she is a younger version of the other “Marys” who occasionally works at the house.

The use of the name “Mary” is furthermore supposed to save them effort from differentiating among the “various” women. Instead, it causes them to overlook the absence of difference. This oversight could easily have been avoided if they made an attempt to establish individual characteristics they would see that their task was of replacing the women were being thwarted. Despite them firing “women” whose work they are not satisfied with, they keep on hiring her back again due to their own blindness, beginning with their assumption that all island women are called Mary. By calling Thérèse, Mary, they essentially dismiss her individuality, portraying to her that her true name and identity is not worth taking the effort over. Yet their constricted definition of her furthermore means the limitation of their observation of Thérèse. And so Gideon and Thérèse are enabled to enjoy the joke at their expense. This is a powerful example of name use guiding the perception of reality, as held by Gerrig and Banaji. It furthermore demonstrates the dialogical influence characters have on one another. For by not recognising the individuality of Thérèse and Alma Estee, Ondine rehires them every time despite being unhappy with their work performance. In essence the workers from the island keep on frustrating her, because her own blindness keeps her from ever hiring someone different who might satisfy her requirements.

The denied names of these two characters also mean the denial of their identities to a certain degree. As a result Gideon and Thérèse try to subvert this order imposed on

them (Page, 1995, p. 116) with Gideon pretending that he cannot read and Thérèse and Alma Estee rehired over and over as “Mary”.

Thérèse and Gideon similarly have names for Sydney and Ondine (Morrison, 1997b, pp. 107, 154). He is called “bow tie”. This name expresses a measure of contempt, suggesting their view of him as a puppet that just wants to please and pretends to exert a certain image, which they do not consider him to be. (The reader sees how he wears shoes that kill his feet, but because they fit his idea of a butler, he damages himself, distorting the true nature of who he is and what his feet need). Their name for Ondine is “Machete hair.” This name suggests Thérèse and Gideon think Ondine is mean and aggressive – compared to them that are kind and caring, especially towards Son. Gideon refers to Jadine as “Yalla” with reference to her skin colour and the fact that though she is black, it is difficult for her not to be white (Morrison, 1997b, p. 156). While these names seem to describe those named only, it also reveals what Thérèse and Gideon think of themselves in relation to those characters. Thérèse believes she displays characteristics authentic to her race unlike Jadine. Gideon sees himself as a man who subverts authority by playing into their view of his limited ability but this instead gives him freedom from certain tasks. At the same time they are limited in the service they can have from him. He moreover compares himself to Sydney whom he views as a puppet who mindlessly pleases Valerian. The names thus also indicate who the Self, or the ones naming the other/Other, constructs him/ herself as in relation to the other/Other.

Sydney and Ondine refer to Valerian as Mr Street – to his face and behind his back. This official address reflects a relationship of subservience, respect, gratitude, and

acknowledgement of protection (Gerrig & Banaji, 1991, p. 189). All three Childs consider Valerian to be a benevolent patron. In turn the older couple please him by doing their duty and never challenging him. Jadine, on the other hand, smiles at him, defends him and listens to him even when she is completely disinterested in what he has to say. Unlike the elder couple who have been his servants for thirty years, Jadine calls him Valerian to his face and behind his back. This direct address as well as her dining with the Street family while her aunt and uncle serve them at the dinner table show Jadine's status as well as position in the house is treated as higher than that of her aunt and uncle. As Ondine and Sydney, Valerian simply calls them by their names with no additional naming hinting at judgement of any sort. Whereas Valerian indeed treats his servants with decency and respect, the reader sees in a moment of unguardedness after he received the news of his son having been abused by his wife that Valerian actually thinks of them as "the Negroes" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 233).

Sydney and Ondine call Margaret "the Principal Beauty" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 98) for having been a beauty queen on a float when Valerian saw her the first time and married her shortly thereafter. But this name hides the motivating sentiment, which involves their thinking of her as useless otherwise and often incompetent at the simplest tasks (Morrison, 1997b, p. 208).

When the intruder who had been hiding in the house is discovered, Valerian shocks everyone by confronting the man with, "Good evening, sir. Would you care for a drink?" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 79). Valerian continues to address Son as Mister as the reader sees when he later asks, "How long have you been with us, Mister –? I'm sorry, I don't know your name" (p. 92). The intruder answers Valerian, but does not give

him his name. Instead he says, “That makes us even,”... “I don't know yours either” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 93). By thus not naming himself in response to Valerian's request, Son is exerting his independence and freedom to choose his response. Having faced a comparable situation years before, Valerian's reaction was also similar. Years before Valerian had been robbed by a group of young men and remained calm. When one commented that he probably doesn't like them, he responded with, “Gentlemen, I don't know you”. While Valerian may or may not think of Son, the intruder or the young robbers as respected men, he treats them with the necessary respect, because of how he sees himself – as a dignified man in control of his world, a gentleman at all times who cannot be reduced to the level of anyone who may steal from him or threaten him in any other way.

When they meet the next morning, Son greets Valerian with, “Good morning, Mr. Sheek”. To this he is greeted with, “Street. Valerian Street”, said Valerian. “What did you say your name was?” “Green. William Green”. “Well, good morning. Willie. Sleep well?” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 146).

As Gerrig & Banaji point out, Valerian, the wealthy white man immediately coins an uninvited diminutive, “Willie”, to refer to the black intruder (1991, p. 174). As the book progresses, the name Willie is only used by the white characters (Morrison, 1997b, p. 186). Once again, this name not only speaks to the one named, but is telling also of those who gave and use the name. The use of the diminutive automatically places Valerian and Margaret in a more authoritative and powerful position compared to William. The Childs family who have come with Valerian Street from the United

States to the Caribbean Island call Willie, Son. The natives, Therese, Gideon and Alma Estee refer to Son as “the chocolate eater”. And given the names people use for him, his concept of his function in the world, i.e. his identity, is partially defined. Gerrig and Banaji take it a step further and argue that his identity is further constructed by the names he must use to refer to those around him (1991, p. 174).

Having considered naming in this section it is clear that the process of naming and being named contribute critically to the construction of identity – for both the namer and the named.

3.7 Dialogical constructions of identity in *Tar Baby*

All major characters are portrayed at one or other point as being dialogically informed by the other/Other.

That Sydney and Ondine view themselves in relation to Valerian is evident in what they think about other people of African descent such as Son on the natives from the Caribbean island they find themselves on. Indeed, they view themselves as defined by their jobs and as “belonging” to Valerian (Carmean, 1993, pp. 68–69). It is in identifying themselves as Valerian’s servants that they view Son as a stinking, ignorant swamp nigger” and the native people of the island – as beneath their class of “proud, hardworking and industrious Negroes” (Morrison, 1997b, pp. 100, 164). Ondine and Sydney thus regard themselves as a different kind of people, namely a better class of Negro compared to the ignorant type like the Marys and Yardman or the criminal type like Son.

A vivid demonstration of the dialogical relation is found in descriptions of Son before he and Jadine (also known as Jade) become lovers. Although discovered hiding in his wife's closet on Christmas eve, Valerian invites Son to stay over in the house as an invited guest. The following morning he entered Jadine's room because he did not know how to work the shower in his bedroom. Even though their conversation started very civil it takes a bad turn. At first he is polite and shows interest in her career as a model in Europe. But then he becomes offensive in asking her how many and for whom she had to do sexual favours to get where she got (Morrison, 1997b, p. 120). When she retaliates with hitting him and calling him an ape and a barefoot baboon that stinks (Morrison, 1997b, p. 121) he responds even more disturbingly. Holding her from behind, "I smell you too'...and pressed his loins as far as he could into the muted print of her Madeira skirt" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 122). Jadine is thoroughly humiliated and shamed by this act, which made them seem in her mind like two dogs sniffing at each other, with her the female dog allowing herself to be sniffed (Morrison, 1997b, p. 123-124). The result is that "he had jangled something in her that was so repulsive, so awful, and he had managed to make her feel that the thing that repelled her was not in him, but in her. That was why she was ashamed" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 123).

This scene reveals that as much as Son did something to Jadine, her shame resulted from a combination of his act and her own experience of witnessing a bitch in heat (Morrison, 1997b, p. 124). What Jadine saw was the female dog being mounted in broad daylight for anyone to see and with other dogs circling, waiting for their chance. She would simply stand while they sniffed her, never looking in her face or communicating in any sense. When people would take a mop handle to hit her over

the head and back it was her fault – for she had allowed her hunger to show (Morrison, 1997b, p. 124). This experience had caused Jadine to promise herself at the age of twelve that she would never allow her hunger to be seen or allow herself to be broken in the hands of a man (Morrison, 1997b, p. 124). But there Son had come and said he smelled her because there was something in her to smell, which utterly humiliated her (Morrison, 1997b, p. 125).

The following day, Son apologises and explains, “You can figure out why I did it, can’t you? You were so clean standing in that pretty room, and I was so dirty. I was ashamed kinda so I got mad and tried to dirty you. That’s all, and I’m sorry” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 157).

Son’s behaviour was thus determined by a combination of his own sense of Self and how it reflected in relation to Jade. But it went deeper than what he told her. Privately he thinks, “he had insulted [her] to keep her unhinging beauty from afflicting him” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 169). What motivated Son even more was an awakening that he could not risk loving Jadine nor afford to lose her, for then he would surely lose the world. And so to keep himself safe, “he made himself disgusting to her. Insulted and offended her. Gave her sufficient cause to help him keep his love in chains and hoped to God the lock would hold. It snapped like a string” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 222).

A less dramatic display of the dialogic can be found in descriptions of the relationship between Margaret and her family. Margaret’s exceptional beauty caused her parents, especially her father to question her legitimacy. As Page argues, Margaret, like Pecola, is denied subjectivity by her parents (1995, p. 113). Because of her beauty her

parents gave her care, but withdrew attention and did not give her the strength or knowledge they gave their other children (Morrison, 1997b, p. 54). When Margaret therefore married 8 months after finishing high school, “she did not have to leave home, she was already gone; she did not have to leave them; they had already left her” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 55). Her life continues in isolation even after she marries, for she is denied friendship with Ondine the cook, only four years older than her since Valerian did not want her “consorting with the Negroes” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 57). Having been seventeen when she got married, her life experience had been minimal and she therefore felt out of place in Valerian’s sophisticated circles (Morrison, 1997b, p. 57).

Ondine and Sydney furthermore did everything in the house, which left Margaret with nothing to do but amuse herself in solitude (Morrison, 1997b, p. 56). She also believed Valerian with his calm eyes could not be wrong about anything and if there was something the matter it had to do with her – her ignorance and working class origins. Most things in her childhood and marriage left Margaret lonely, feeling that she did not belong and with a sense of being inadequate (Morrison, 1997b, pp. 55–57). It was only in the presence of her son that she felt she could be herself and with whom she “did not forget the names and uses of things” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 58).

It is ironic that her family’s response to Margaret’s beauty causes them to essentially avoid her. Valerian keeps her for himself instead of enabling her to grow in confidence and develop as a person. As a sophisticated man, who marries a teenage beauty queen, he does not invest in her to become more than she was when they met in order to fit better into his world. Instead he denies her the one easily available

friendship (with Ondine), which could have taken the edge off her loneliness and purposelessness. According to Ondine, Valerian kept her stupid and idle, which always spells danger (Morrison, 1997b, p. 281). Matus points out that though Margaret may not have been a “woman good enough for a child,” Ondine recognises Valerian contributed to her failure through keeping her a prisoner to the institution of motherhood shaped by patriarchy (1998, p. 89).

From the above it seems Margaret’s identity had been shaped to a large extent by how others have treated her. She did not go into the world and shape it according to her ideas. She was shaped by the fears, neglect, control and finally revelation of others.

According to Page (1995, p. 114), with reference to Rubenstein, the only influence Margaret can exert in her life is over her baby and thus she begins to control him through abuse. The abuse, Rubenstein argues, is to prevent him from growing beyond her control and achieving the selfhood she was denied (Page, 1995, p. 114). But her treatment of Michael does not help her achieve a healthy Self either.

As Ondine explains to Jadine, Margaret “didn’t stick pins in her baby. She stuck em in his baby. Her baby she loved” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 281). According to Carmean (1993, p. 66) and Page, with reference to House, Michael served as a helpless surrogate for Valerian, against whose controlling power Margaret tried to rebel.

How the Self treats the other/Other often has direct, albeit delayed, consequences on the self. One sees this in Margaret’s assertion of her Self in retaliation against Valerian, which is played out on their son. Because the father kept the mother dumb

and powerless to find healthier ways of expressing herself it resulted in abuse of the child, eventual estrangement from the father (for Valerian and Michael seldom see each other) and finally, revelation of the past means Valerian is forced to face himself with devastating consequences.

Two aspects of Jadine's identity construction relates directly to a dialogical construction. One concerns her treatment of others and how that is revealing of her own character. The second example concerns her confrontation with herself in relation to her African American identity. Because the latter aspect greatly involves a reading of responsibility, it will only be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

It bears mentioning in this section that Ondine belatedly explains to Jadine that “a daughter is a woman that cares about where she come from and takes care of them that took care of her” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 285). While Jadine refuses to be this kind of woman, arguing there are other kinds of ways to be a woman (Morrison, 1997b, p. 284), the person who Jadine has become up to this point, was enabled by exactly this kind of thinking – where people took care of one another. While this is Ondine's view, Jadine's identity had been shaped by Ondine and Sydney taking her in when her mother died when she was seven years old, them working for the Streets who in turn paid for her studies, travels and clothes, which in turn enabled her to enter the circles she socialised in.

As Ondine explains:

Jadine, a girl has to be a daughter first. She have to learn that. And if she never learns how to be a daughter, she can't never learn how to be a woman. I mean

a real woman: a woman good enough for a child; good enough for a man – good enough even for the respect of other women. (Morrison, 1997b, p. 283)

Ryan sums it up well when she says Ondine's explanation emphasises the reciprocal nature of daughter/ mother roles, and the symbiotic relationship between any generation and its elders (1997, p. 77), which, for the purpose of this study is viewed as a dialogical construction of identity.

It is then perhaps because she lacks this kind of connectedness that the African woman in Paris in the yellow dress makes her feel "lonely" and "inauthentic" (Morrison, 1997b, 45). As Ondine explained, you do not need your own mother to be a daughter, because all you actually need is to feel a certain careful way about people older than you (Morrison, 1997b, p. 283).

There is a kind of orphan spirit about Jadine that keeps her distant and disconnected from people. Yet when she falls in love with Son and opens herself to him and accepts him into her life, "she gradually [comes] to feel unorphaned" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 231). Although she wondered if she should hold anything back from him, she chose to keep nothing hidden from him. In the end, "there was nothing to forgive, nothing to win and the future was five minutes away [for] he unorphaned her completely [and] gave her a brand new childhood" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 231). Not being an orphan or becoming "unorphaned" can only take place dialogically. And although the relationship between Jadine and Son does not last, something fundamental shifts in her. As Morrison's novels are open-ended, the reader is left with the sense that Jadine can yet change. For Ondine says she is still young and will still settle (Morrison,

1997b, p. 285) – and thus embrace her connectedness to those who took care of her and become a daughter and a woman – according to Ondine’s relational definition of daughter and of woman.

In a further analysis of dialogical relations the reader see who Jadine is by how she treats others. For this I will take a look at her relationship with her aunty and uncle. Despite having been in their care since the age of twelve, she does not feel like a daughter to them (Morrison, 1997b, pp. 66, 90). At a later stage she specifically tells Ondine she does not want to be or learn to be the kind of woman she, Ondine, is (Morrison, 1997b, p. 284). The “kind of woman” referred to here will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

Jadine is on a journey of self-actualisation, which means although she is uncertain of what exactly she wants, she is certain that she does not want her identity to be linked to her race or nationality, thinking she wishes she could just be the person she is inside – not linked to skin colour or being American (Morrison, 1997b, pp. 159; 45). Hence, Jadine wishes to divorce herself from whatever in her physical or historical identity, which could keep her or complicate her simply being free to choose to “make herself”. Forgetting it was her aunt and uncle, as well as their employees that opened the door for her to have such unlimited choice in terms of education, career and social circles, she thinks she alone is enough for her future and security for she believes, “she was the safety she longed for” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 292).

It is because of this sense of separateness that it is questionable whether she really means it when she speaks to Sydney and Ondine about opening a shop with them

because her commitment to herself and her career goals by far outweigh any commitment to them (Page, 1995, p. 116). Even asking them if they want to go with her to Paris (Morrison, 1997b, p. 282) a minute or two after her body language made clear she had no intention of following-through on a positive response to her question. Jadine had asked Ondine in respect to their employment security after the big Christmas fall-out, “So what is your situation here?” The narrator holds “Jadine’s voice was serious, but there was pleading in it too, which is presented to the reader within parenthesis:

(Please don’t need me now, not now. I can’t parent now. I cannot be needed now, not now. I can’t parent now. I cannot be needed now. Another time, please. I have spent it all. Please don’t need me now.) (Morrison, 1997b, p. 282)

Assessing these thoughts one can argue about the truthfulness of the phrase “I spent it all” as the reason she cannot parent the people who parented her when she had none. While it is true that she has spent all her money, money is not the reason she is unwilling to “parent”/ give back at that point. It is most probably immaturity and selfishness as Ondine later explains to Sydney that Jadine is still young (twenty-five) and may come around later (Morrison, 1997b, pp. 285, 159).

That Sydney asks Ondine how much Jadine asked for “this time” suggests they are familiar with her asking money from them. And while they have spent their savings of thirty years on her and Ondine was willing to work on her swollen feet and ankles even if she couldn’t anymore so that Jadine would not have to have such a life, Jadine chooses (Morrison, 1997b, pp. 94, 285) to think of Ondine and Sydney’s money as nowhere else to go but to her (Morrison, 1997b, p. 46). The request for money and

thinking around what they spend their money on suggests Jadine is rather selfish and unwilling to acknowledge the needs of others. For while she sees Ondine will be “heartsick” if she married and lived in France (Morrison, 1997b, p. 90), Jadine thinks nothing of running away with Son without informing Sydney and Ondine. Upon her return, after the relationship fails, Ondine is convinced Jadine would probably not have returned and properly said goodbye if not to come collect the baby seal skin coat she received as a Christmas gift from her rich white boyfriend/ fiancé (Morrison, 1997b, p. 282). Jadine seems to thus be interested only in actualising herself, chooses to know, but not comprehend and respond to the needs of others she sees (such as her aunt and uncle’s aging and growing dependence on her).

Jadine’s fight against the “night women”, against the kind of woman Ondine is and the kind of woman she believes people like Michael and Son advocate is that they, “wanted her to settle for wifely competence when she could be almighty, to settle for fertility rather than originality, nurturing instead of building” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 271). Ryan, however, points out that there is nothing inherently antithetical in nurturing and building, or in fertility and originality (1997, p. 82). It is rather that Jadine has internalised an either/ or system that posits these as polemical choices (Ryan, 1997, p. 82).

Despite this position of Jadine, both Son and Ondine explain to her that one cannot – nor does one exist in isolation. Son tells Jadine:

“The truth is that whatever you learned in those colleges that didn’t include [him] ain’t shit.... If they didn’t teach you that, then they didn’t teach you nothing, because until you know about me, you don’t know nothing about

yourself. And you don't know anything, anything at all about your children and anything at all about your mama and your papa. You find out about *me*, you educated nitwit!" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 267).

For Son their identity is dependent on their history and their history tie them to each other. And an education that did not teach her that, he argues, was a waste. Jadine, however, defends her education, believing it is her ticket out of slavery, a means of making something out of her life (Morrison, 1997b, pp. 266, 274). By defending herself against his derision of her "white" education it seems that it is in rejection of others that Jadine assumes she has the biggest chance of making it in life.

There is no doubt that Son and Jadine want to be together. Yet the social class systems they come from seem incompatible. Son's unwillingness to do "white men's work", to use money directly or indirectly linked to Valerian to study or accept money from Valerian to start a business with Jadine causes her to struggle alone to make ends meet in New York, leaving her tired and worried about the future (Morrison, 1997b, pp. 269, 273). While she resorted to using her savings to fund their living in New York, Son insisted on them moving elsewhere such as Eloë or other places where his manual labour could earn him better money. In one of their fights about money and the future, Jadine asked Son "you want to be a yardman all your life?" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 267). Connected to the Yardman idea is Jadine's fear that she would have to become the kind of woman like the night woman. Jadine feared the night women would reduce her to what she fought hard not to become. For already they, like the African woman in yellow in the Parisian market who made her feel inauthentic – caused her to question her womanhood and identity. For Jadine they

“were all out to get her, tie her, bind her. Grab the person she had worked hard to become and choke it off with their soft loose tits” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 264).

It is ironic to see that both Jadine and Son relegate the other to being stuck in slavery. Jadine tells Son, “I can’t let you hurt me again. You stay in that medieval slave basket if you want to. You will stay there by yourself. Don’t ask me to do it with you. I won’t” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 274). Son, on the other hand, similarly argued Jadine is still stuck in slavery, despite the form her so-called emancipation has taken. He tells her that races don’t mix but that people abandon them or pick them. As such she would be choosing to become a mammy if she married that white man in France and have his children. Because for him, “bitches like her” have been caring for the babies of white men for two hundred years and can do it for two hundred more (Morrison, 1997b, p. 272). It is after this ranting of his that he sees her mouth “fat with disgust” and she tells him to get out of her face (Morrison, 1997b, p. 273).

It is this perspective that sees Jadine recognise their different worldviews as unbridgeable, and that sees the return of her orphan Self. It can be argued these fights are indicative of their class difference and represent the Du Bois vs Washington perspectives in terms of how the black man will attain social and economic advancement with Jadine’s academic achievements comparable to Du Bois’s position and Son representing Washington’s position of racial solidarity and manual skills.

As much as Jadine rejects Son and Ondine’s ideas around the place and worth of the other in the life of the Self, Jadine experiences the potential of such a relationship with Son. Through Son, Jadine finds herself unorphaned. But although Son has

unorphaned Jadine, making her feel like she truly belongs, making her feel safe to share her whole Self with him and willing to commit to him for the rest of her life through marriage, their worlds remained vastly different. For Jadine, Son chooses to stay in a world in which she concludes he wants her to be less than she can be and wants to become. She recognises their worldviews are incompatible. In the aftermath of their fights Jadine decides to end the relationship and the result for her is the return of the too old feeling of orphanhood. The narrator describes Jadine as a “closed-up orphan...with no place to go for Thanksgiving” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 274). The conflict thus includes that on the one hand the other can unorphan the isolated and lonely Self, while on the other hand, the Self can feel a limitation on the Self because of the presence and influence of the other/Other.

Jadine finally decides, “this is too old for me” – this feeling of orphanhood, of not having my person – so *I* will become enough for me. This sentiment had been expressed earlier when Son asked her why she counts herself as part of the “us” of the Street household, to which she answered, “Of course, I live here... I belong to me. But I live here” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 118).

Until Jadine had met Son she had felt disconnected from people, including Ondine and Sydney, despite their parental roles in her life. The reason could be because she only spent summer holidays with them whilst in boarding school or away at university the rest of the time. When she thus disconnects from Son because she thinks their worlds are too far apart to co-exist, she also widens the connection between herself and her guardian parents when she chooses to return to Paris.

Morrison thus sketches behaviours and sentiments that express characters identity and how these expressions are directly related to ideas, feelings or other dialogical aspects as informed by the dialogical relation with other characters.

3.8 Looking relations in *Paradise*

From both Levinasian and Bakhtinian perspectives the Self understands there is the other/Other with whom one necessarily has a relation of response. Various scenes in *Paradise* depict this intertwined nature of identity. Three cases in which the look of the other/Other directly impacts the Self's perception of itself will be considered as well as two cases of imaginary friends, where the Self alone sees another, which ultimately is another Self, and how this impacts the Self's identity and functioning in the world.

Consolata Sosa/ Connie, the orphan child, found in the streets of Brazil is taken to the United States by the nun, Mary Magna. Raised within an embezzlers mansion, which is turned into a convent where Catholic nuns re-educate native girls and live by strict religious rules, Connie is thirty nine years old when she falls in love for the first time (Morrison, 1997a, p. 226). In the following scene the man, Deacon/ Deek kisses Connie lightly, then says, "I've travelled. All over. I've never seen anything like you. How could anything be put together like you? Do you know how beautiful you are? Have you looked at yourself?" (Morrison, 1997a, p. 231). To this she replies, "I'm looking now." In this scene Morrison portrays the Self experiences the look of the other as a mirror. This reflection, moreover functions to define the Self as a beautiful vision, as a Self that is adored, as a Self that is comparable to many and found more beautiful – even if only in the eyes of one other. When this relationship comes to an

end, Connie laments “he and I are the same” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 241), suggesting in loving another she loved herself or even that it was herself in him that she loved (De Voss, 2010, p. 18) or that she found confirmation of her personhood, having found someone like her people whom she remembered from childhood.

In another scene, Connie compliments Mavis’s hands as beautiful and strong. Mavis had ended up at the Convent after running away from home. She not only ran away from an abusive husband, she fears her daughter whom she suspects may want to physically harm her. Besides her family, she is also running away from the media in her home town after having mistakenly caused the suffocation of her twins in the car. Coming from such a background, her confidence is low and she has little self-belief. The reader is shown, how subsequent to the compliment, Mavis watches her “suddenly beautiful hands” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 42). Even after her mind wanders off to her mission to keep heading West, she returns to admire her suddenly beautiful hands.

Not only does she begin to look at her hands differently, but her actions are also influenced by this “redefinition” for the reader notices “now, working pecans, she tried to economise her gestures without sacrificing their grace”. Until this point Mavis probably never considered positive adjectives in relation to herself. Her world consisted of a sense of incompetence and uselessness confirmed and inspired by the fear that characterised her life. This positive consideration of Self did not come about by itself or Mavis’s independent vision of her hands. It was the words – and acceptance of their possible truth – that affected a changed perspective of her hands, her potential and her identity. Whereas her self-definition leaned towards

incompetence it shifted to a greater sense of self-awareness and appreciation with Connie's simple compliment so that she now views herself as able and characterised by qualities of beauty. She moreover takes this compliment further and elevates it to the point where she finds it makes her graceful and elegant (De Voss, 2010, p. 19).

When the Ruby men invade the Convent to go shoot the women they blame for causing all the trouble in their town, one of the stalkers finds himself in a bathroom. In the bathroom all but one mirror is covered with chalky paint. The man deliberately ignores this mirror. The narrator describes the man's avoidance of this mirror as, "he does not want to see himself stalking females" (Morrison, 1997a, p. 9). The very fact that he does not want to see himself looking for women in order to kill them is worth considering (De Voss, 2010, p. 20).

Twice the reader witnesses his relief, "With relief he backs out and closes the door. With relief he lets his handgun point down" (Morrison, 1997a, p. 9). What is he relieved about? The fact that he found none of the women in the bathroom? Or is it rather that a mirror is a revelational instrument and that he wants to avoid the truth in those "eyes"? Although the mirror is not another person, seeing himself would be like looking at himself and seeing what another person looking at him would see. And what would they see? A man hunting for women to kill them in their own home. By not looking in the mirror he does not need to imagine himself accused of the crimes he is about to commit, which would make him a killer (De Voss, 2010, p. 20). By avoiding the accusation or consciousness challenging "look" of the mirror – if he has a sense of guilt about what they are doing – he can continue to believe that what they are doing, is in the interest of protecting their town. Yet had he seen himself in the

mirror of the hunted women's bathroom, he would be hard pressed not to see himself from the women's point of view – not as protector, but as killer (De Voss, 2010, p. 20). In thus choosing not to look in the mirror, he is choosing to consider his identity from his own perspective and not allow in the views of those in whose sight he would stand accused.

As was demonstrated in *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison portrays the Self as accepting or rejecting the Look of the other. In similar fashion the man in the bathroom chooses not to see himself as seen by his victim just like Claudia initially rejected loving and the adored blonde and blue-eyed dolls, whilst Pecola internalised the rejection of others.

Paradise affords two characters an imaginary friend that helps them deal with trauma, loneliness or confusion. These imaginary friends or other selves comfort or enable an epiphany for the characters.

Morrison expands the trope of creating a make-believe double, as commonly practised by many lonely and solitary children, to Dovey Morgan and Connie. Dovey's Friend visits her in her garden and Connie's cowboy comes to sit on her kitchen steps.

Dovey, married to Steward Morgan, finds herself married to a hard-headed man. Unlike with her husband, her relationship with the person she calls her Friend is one where she finds herself babbling about all kinds of things and he seems to listen earnestly to every word (Morrison, 1997b, pp. 91–92). As Dovey's interlocutor, this

friend's presence and interested listening and the fact that he seems to take serious what she says function to enable her to simply talk and be heard, which brings her immense contentment as compared to her communication with her husband where she is not given much scope to simply share her thoughts. The visits by Dovey's Friend turn out to be a comforting form of personal epiphany and stress release (Mayberry, 2008, p. 569). With her Friend, Dovey is able to give expression to a part of her, which otherwise remains hidden as her husband does not make room for her to show herself like this. In Steward's worldview he simply wants her to remain the wife of his imagination – industrious, respectful, thereby totalising and in effect minimising her into that kind of woman. And in response she limited herself to that kind of woman.

The unexpected visits of her Friend do not only serve to console her, it also encourages her to discuss unanswerable questions that block her sleep (Mayberry, 2008, p. 569; Morrison, 1997a, p. 93).

After the death of Mary Magna and afraid of “dying alone, ungrieved in unholy ground”, Connie longs for the “good death” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 251). When she starts to miss “Him”, however, she meets herself. Sitting outside one day, “a man approached. Medium height, light step . . . He wore a cowboy hat that hid his features” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 251). Because she is half blind herself, struck by a sunbeam, she asks the visitor who he is and he replies, “Come on, girl. You know me” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 252). When she tells him to simply shout for one of the girls in the house to bring him a drink, he once again says “Don't you know me better than that?... I don't want to see your girls. I want see you” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 252). The

reader soon recognises the cowboy's resemblance to Consolata when he removes his hat. "Fresh tea-coloured hair came tumbling down, cascading over his shoulders and down his back (Morrison, 1997a, pp. 252, 223). He took off his glasses then and winked, a slow seductive movement of a lid. His eyes, she saw, were as round and green as new apples" (Morrison, 1997a, p. 252). Connie herself has green eyes like apples and curly brown hair.

After this encounter the reader finds the Connie who used to reach for bottles to find them empty, was gone. She no longer feared being sober despite knowing that without wine her thoughts would be unbearable with "resignation, self-pity, muted rage, disgust and shame glowing like cinders in a dying fire" (Morrison, 1997a, p. 250). Instead the Consolata the reader meets after her visit with the cowboy, cleans, washes and cooks vigorously till deep into the night (Morrison, 1997a, p. 252). Indeed, the self-awareness that Connie acquires when she experiences her alpha-male twin allows her to become straight-backed Consolata Sosa (Mayberry, 2008, p. 573). This new Consolata looks on the women at the Convent with the "aristocratic gaze of the blind" and takes ownership of their lostness and brokenness. She tells them they will do as she says and she will teach them what they are hungry for (the faces of the women staring up at her with the "aristocratic gaze of the blind," she tells them: "If you want to be here you do what I say. Eat how I say. Sleep when I say. And I will teach you what you are hungry for" (Morrison, 1997a, pp. 262). As Mayberry puts it, "the cowboy in her has shown Connie how to use her feminine weapons of food, talk, and grace to save herself and her girls" (2008, p. 574).

Mayberry points out that like all of Morrison's survivors, male and female alike, Consolata must embrace her Self as she learns not to take herself too serious and she must look kindly on her own sins if she is to provide tragicomic consolation to others and go on living well (Mayberry, 2008, p. 573). She has to understand that “loud dreaming” and laughter can be more serious, more complicated, than quietly repressed tears (Morrison, 1997a, p. 264; Mayberry, 2008, p. 573).

Dovey, Consolata and company confirm Morrison's twin-centred approach to art and life. She almost never limits her audience to a single perception of a character or attitude (Mayberry, 2008, p. 569).

3.9 Naming as dialogical identity construction in *Paradise*

Prior to the massacre, the men of Ruby call the doomed women of the Convent Jezebels and bodacious Eves. According to Christiansë (2013, p. 164), Morrison mines the history of naming women by these names and the interplay between them to great effect. Jezebel features in both the New and Old Testament as a woman and symbol of corruption and destruction. Associations extending from the name Jezebel reminds the informed reader of the Whore of Babylon in Revelation, the mother of harlots and abominations, who tempts men, who heeds other gods and offers forbidden food to men (Christiansë, 2013, pp. 167–168). Jezebel and her actions remind one of the crime committed by the “first mother, the first temptress, namely Eve who not only consumed forbidden food, but tempted the man to do the same, which led to the expulsion from Paradise (Christiansë, 2013, p. 168).

Christiansē emphasises that calling the Convent women by these names are more than insults. With reference to Judith Butler, Christiansē contends “the act of naming can be violently constitutive” (2013, p. 168). The women are no longer like Jezebel or Eve – they *are* Jezebel and they *are* Eve – and thus already guilty of what they are accused of (2013, p. 168). For she concludes, based on these forms of patriarchal insult, “the names have been given the power of prophecy” (Christiansē, 2013, p. 168).

A further example of totalising the other/Other through naming can be found in Steward’s reference to Ruby’s youths, whom he not only sees as rebellious but calls “little illegal niggers” who have “no home training” and who “need to be in jail” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 206). And when speaking to them regarding the words of the Oven, he threatens them with the words, “Listen here . . . if you, any one of you, ignore, change, take away, or add to the words in the mouth of that Oven, I will blow your head off just like you was a hoodeye snake” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 87). Just as it is justified to protect yourself against a snake and blowing its head off, so too anyone called a “hoodeye snake” is told they deserve the treatment they will get if they continue with behaviour in line with such a snake.

Lastly, the wording of the Oven presents another interesting dialogic relationship. Significant meaning is revealed in the choice of wording when one considers who chooses the words, why they choose them and how they see themselves in relation to those words.

The actual (remaining) words on the Oven are “... the Furrow of His Brow”

(Morrison, 1997a, p. 86). The New Fathers remember it as having been “Beware the Furrow of His Brow.” The dispute between the two generations turns on whether the words – and thus the motto – should be “beware,” “be,” or “we are” the furrow of his brow (Morrison, 1997a, pp. 87, 217, 298).

Page points out that the young people’s proposed shift to “be” or “we are” suggest they want to live more participatory lives in this that they want to join their strengths with others’ strength to become involved in the larger social context of the country (2001, p. 640). The younger generation wants to change the motto to one that embraces diversity and active involvement in current affairs, in contrast to their fathers’ totalising view on the matter. For the young people, the motto does not only concern the past, it rather confines the present and robs them of a future they want to define (Page, 2001, pp. 83, 298). The young people insist, “It’s our history too, sir. Not just yours...” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 86).

The youngsters thus choose words that will enable them to be constructive participants, “instruments” in the hands of God, fulfilling his plans (Morrison, 1997a, p. 87). The elders, however, insist on the people fearing God with their choice of “beware”. And from the manner in which they insist on the past as a non-debatable precedent and threaten the youth, it is clear they act as if they are God, whom others must beware of.

Patricia underscores this idea when she considers the bargain Zechariah, one of the Old Fathers, struck with God during their search for a place to settle. The bargain she realised was that 8-rock blood had to remain unadulterated as well as unadulteried

(Morrison, 1997a, p. 217). Individuals who violate the rule, while not actually banished from the community, are subject to multiple forms of correction, such as discouragement to marry light-skinned others, lack of community support when needed and figurative expulsion of their families from the community's narrative origins (Jenkins, 2006, p. 276). Those who thus broke that bargain had furthermore been removed from history. This expulsion is portrayed in a holiday play in which children from the community re-enact the Disallowing in a format similar to the Christian nativity, but exclude those original families that may have "misbehaved" over the years (Jenkins, 2006, p. 277).

Patricia realises, "It wasn't God's brow to be feared. It was his own. Their own. Is that why "Be the Furrow of His Brow" drove them crazy?" (Morrison, 1997a, p. 217).

3.10 Dialogical constructions of identity in *Paradise*

In this section community identity construction will first be considered before individual construction as dialogically informed is discussed.

Morrison avoids the polarisation of black and white peoples. While each novel exposes the debilitating effects of white oppression, it also avoids sentimental praise for African Americans (Page, 2001, p. 193). Instead, she locates her novels in the play between the two races, but more so in the play between Self and other/Other. In *Paradise* the white presence is hidden and more than informing the black identity, the implicit juxtaposing of the two races function as a meta-critique of oppressive and totalising behaviour. In this section I will first take a look at the dialogical identity

construction of the inhabitants of Ruby as a people and then consider individual identities.

In the history of the USA, Reconstruction followed the end of the Civil War. But this did not last long. After the overthrow of Reconstruction governments, numerous all-black towns would eventually be established. The founding families had responded to the headline of a feature in *The Herald*, “Come Prepared or Not at All” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 13). They saw themselves as “smart, strong, and eager to work their own land, they believed they were more than prepared – they were destined” (Morrison, 1997a, pp. 13–14). It therefore stung them into confusion to learn they did not have enough money to satisfy the restrictions the “self-supporting” Negroes required. In short, they were too poor, too bedraggled-looking to enter, let alone reside in, the communities that were soliciting Negro homesteaders (Morrison, 1997a, pp. 13–14). While they were also rejected by rich Choctaw and poor whites, chased by yard dogs, jeered at by camp prostitutes and their children it is the Fairly rejection, which stings them most (Morrison, 1997a, p. 13) because it comes from blacks like themselves.

One of the men in the party says, “Us free like them; was slave like them. What for is this difference?” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 14). While they would have expected the opposition between rich and poor, slave and free, and sometimes white and black, they experienced the shocking division between light and dark-skinned blacks, which leaves them struck to the core and immediately hardened towards light-skinned blacks (Slaughter, 2000, p. 6). Declared unworthy by these fair-skinned coloured men who had disallowed them, the dark-skinned founders of Haven establish “the blood rule” – that holds the residents of Haven and Ruby hostage to skin colour” (Grewal, 2013, p.

43).

The reader is left with this final rejection, which also becomes reiterated by the memories of the founding families as well as the Christmas play, which is a re-enactment of the Fairly rejection that had become known as the “Disallowing”, which had burned them with an intense distrust and disapproval of light-skinned Blacks (Morrison, 1997a, pp. 189, 195).

The Fairly rejection was significant for the identity consciousness of the 8-rock men. Whereas they always had specific notions regarding the “untampered quality” of their dark skins, it was only with the Fairly rejection that they solidified their identity based on the other’s rejection of what they perceived was their skin colour. They thus came to base their identity on their take of this experience: “Afterwards the people were no longer nine families and some more. They became a tight band of wayfarers bound by the enormity of what had happened to them” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 189). As the text makes clear, Fairly’s rejection of the 8-rock families is one of numerous refusals that the group experiences on their way to Oklahoma, but it alone has the power to define the town and its descendants: “Everything anybody wanted to know about the citizens of Haven or Ruby lay in the ramifications of that one rebuff out of many” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 189).

They choose to ignore the fact that their rejection from entering the town is based on their lack of finances and instead blame it on their perceived belief that the Other rejects them based on the colour of their skin. They thus don’t consider their bedraggled looks, which confirmed their poverty, but their skin colour. They chose to believe the reason they were rejected was because the men of Fairly included light

skinned “blue-eyed, grey-eyed yellowmen in good suits” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 195). Whether this deduction is sound is debatable. What is certain is that the position of their finances is an objective and reasonable consideration for the Fairly homesteaders. Thus, if they had had enough money to be accepted into Fairly, they would not have been shamed at their inability to be able to pay for rest and food for their pregnant wives and daughters (Morrison, 1997a, p. 95). Unable to meet the minimum requirement of payment they therefore did not seem like an asset to the Fairly community. It is acknowledged that it is “the shame of seeing one’s pregnant wife or sister or daughter refused shelter that had rocked them, and changed them for all time. The humiliation did more than rankle; it threatened to crack open their bones” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 95).

Why be ashamed of something they were in fact deeply proud of – the mark of their “pure” race? Why be humiliated by this quality they see as the cornerstone of their pride? Even if the Fairly men rejected them for this reason, “shame” and “humiliation” should not have been the words they would have used to describe their rejection. Using their skin colour as the reason for the rejection is only a façade to hide acknowledging the true reason.

If they had the money, they could have expressed themselves as the men they believed they were. The symbolism of their lack of money directly reflected on themselves as inadequate. It was this failed Self, which threatened to crack their bones (Morrison, 1997a, p. 95). As a survival mechanism the 8-rocks chose to blame their rejection on the racism of Fairly and not on their own inability to live up to the image of themselves as able, hard-working and providers.

The 8-rocks no doubt had good reason to blame the rejection on their skin colour. They were, until this experience, reluctant to offer the colour of their skin as an excuse for how others treated them. In the past they “refused to believe what they guessed was the real reason that made it impossible” for them to find better work and they “suspected yet dared not say that their misfortune’s misfortune was due to the one and only feature that distinguished them from their peers” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 193). Their hesitance to accept such a view is wholeheartedly rejected in the aftermath of the Fairly refusal.

It is as if the 8-rocks had put all their faith and their very last strength into reaching Fairly. They had nothing left but their own inner strength driven by their view of themselves (De Voss, 2010, p. 37). They could therefore not risk blaming their powerlessness in the face of this adversity on their own inadequacy. In order to move on from this state of utter vulnerability they turned the until-then unutilised value of their skin colour into their strength (De Voss, 2010, p. 37). This experience was formative for them to forge their group identity on consolidating their own sense of racial superiority from this point forth (Brooks Bouson, 2000, p. 197).

From here onwards they would distinguish themselves and in turn reject those not as dark skinned as themselves. Instead of taking from the rejection that they are deemed as inferior, they take from it that from then onwards others will not be good enough for them – to accept, to marry, to help or think of kindly. This logic is a reminder of a primary contradiction, which Morrison challenges. The founding families of Haven, and later Ruby, enact another intraracial hierarchy – which, as Michael suggests, “simply reverse[s] the racism they themselves suffered by excluding all who are not

so dark as themselves” (2002, p. 648). In addition to rejecting light-skinned African Americans it should be known that Ruby is named in memory of Deek and Steward’s sister who dies when white doctors refuse to treat her. Slaughter holds that the very name of the town is therefore an ever-present reminder of the danger that exists outside the community's isolation, resolve and self-sufficiency (2000, p. 6). The men of Ruby thus believe that the “out there” which is to be feared and rejected include both white and light-skinned people.

Below is a discussion of individual relationships exemplifying identity as dialogically constructed.

Morrison describes Connie’s love for Sister Mary Magna also known as Mother, as “her rope to the world” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 247). This rope metaphor evokes an image of an umbilical chord, which implies an intimate connection of vital dependence (De Voss, 2010, p. 16). For practical reasons, losing Mother becomes a loss of identity for Connie: “She had no identification, no insurance, no family, no work” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 247). While these laments can be read literally, they can also be read figuratively. It can be argued without Mary Magna, there is nobody to attest to Connie’s identity as a Brazilian street orphan. But moreover, it may be that Connie feels herself without an identity because her identity is dependent and deeply connected to Mary Magna’s. In other words, to her sense of being she is incomplete without Mary Magna. As for insurance, though she took care of Mary Magna in her old age and on her dying bed, Connie must feel Mary Magna is her protection against losses and her guarantee against disaster simply because she existed and not because she could actually do anything for Connie in her frailty. While she laments being

without family, she never had family to begin with, she never belonged to blood of her blood. Yet, without Mary Magna, she feels more deeply orphaned and alone at fifty-four than she had ever been as a homeless child or a servant (Morrison, 1997a, p. 247). And in terms of work, there had been no real work for many, many years, so her concern is not for work, but for purpose, for direction and meaningfulness of her very existence. Without Mary Magna, Connie simply feels lost and as not being enough in herself to keep on living because the person that gave meaning to her existence had been snapped out of her life. With her rope to the world gone she discovers she is not enough for herself to keep on living. Hence, she existed because an other gave meaning to her being.

A further instance of love as a measuring rod for identity is found in Arnette's relationship with KD. The reader learns that Arnette's understanding of love concerns self-knowledge as reflected in relationship with another. "She believed she loved him absolutely because he was all she knew about her Self – which was to say, everything she knew of her body was connected to him" (Morrison, 1997a, p. 148). The descriptors, "absolute" and "all" suggest Arnette derives the greatest part of her sense of identity from the external world. The reason for this limited view on the world may be ascribed to her upbringing in a patriarchal society where fathers arrange the minds of their daughters and husbands decide how their wives will spend their time. It is most likely this world that gave rise to the consciousness that knowledge of one's body is the prerogative of another (Morrison, 1997a, pp. 8, 61). Arnette expresses further dependence on others for influencing her identity when she thinks, "Not her mother; not her sister-in-law," told her to think of herself in another way (Morrison, 1997a, p. 148). This view reveals that she learned from these women that you

passively know about yourself through your husband (De Voss, 2010, p. 18). This example is an extreme case of the dialogical influence of the other on the Self – in a way that seems to limit the Self as compared to opening it up to numerous possibilities.

Morrison, however, also counters this limited notion of the Self as solely dependent on others for self-knowledge through Billie Delia telling Arnette there was another way one could think of oneself (Morrison, 1997a, p. 148), which did not include the limitations of patriarchy and the endorsement of such a view by other women.

Yet other characters whose identity is constructed from the perspective of the men in their lives are Seneca and Mavis. While Seneca sees herself as her boyfriend sees her, for Mavis the dominant view of herself is what her abusive husband says and does to her. While Seneca believes herself to be “hopeless”, Mavis believes herself to be “the dumbest bitch on the planet,” (Morrison, 1997a, pp. 37, 131).

The characters, Mavis and Seneca, further demonstrate an aspect of identity as exhibiting agency. Mavis, generally portrayed as incompetent gets stuck in the middle of nowhere without petrol. As could be expected from the fearful and abused Mavis, she waited, dozed, waited some more and dozed some more (Morrison, 1997a, p. 37). Then “suddenly she sat up, wide awake, and decided not to starve. Would the road girls just sit there?” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 37) Her sudden sense of agency comes from her recollection of the numerous daring and adventurous girls she gave rides to on her journey. The thought that “the road girls” would not just sit there and wait for someone else to take charge on their behalf, motivated Mavis to do something

deliberate to help herself (De Voss, 2010, p. 19). One thus sees the subject discovers agency within – not from having delved deeply into her own inner resources – but from having considered the other.

Seneca acts out of character when she, motivated by her heart breaking for “a black woman crying on a country road” jumps off the back of a truck to follow a disoriented Sweetie on an unfamiliar road (Morrison, 1997a, p. 126). Agency thus follows both from the subject accepting the example of others as illustrated by Mavis, but also from the Self identifying with others as Seneca demonstrates.

As mentioned earlier, the Fairly Disallowing urged one traveller to ask: “Us free like them; was slave like them. What for is this difference?” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 14). In other words, how can these ex-slaves themselves not see that we are the same? We reflect each other. We share a social, economic, and political past and present. How can they not recognise themselves in us, how can they not take sympathy on our plight? Not long ago they were the ones knocking on doors to begin a new life and here they are rejecting us – when we are who they were not long ago.

This question of course reverberates across time and human borders. It is the universal question to each reader; how is the next person so different from you that you cannot see yourself in his or her situation? (De Voss, 2010, p. 21).

Another interesting portrayal that displays the dialogical relationships between people can be found in people’s reactions towards Anna. Her hair, worn in an Afro when she returned after years in Detroit provoked unprecedented addressivity to the degree that

she felt people would only talk about her Afro even if she walked naked down the street (Morrison, 1997a, p. 119).

The judgement of Anna's hair, in fact, says much less about her hair, than it does about the identities of the characters who express themselves regarding her hair. More significant to Anna was the fact that people's reactions to her hair enabled her to identify who her true friends were (Morrison, 1997a, p. 119). She describes the reactions she receives as measurable on a Geiger counter, registering "tranquility" in some and "the intensity of a rumbling, deep-down disorder" in others (Morrison, 1997a, p. 119).

Other than a popular hairstyle in the 1970's, Anna did not intend for it to be a statement, but it nonetheless solicited diverse and intense reactions since living in isolation as the people of Ruby did, the hair spoke of another world. The young people were eager to embrace this world and therefore admired her hair. Reverend Pulliam's displeasure with the ideas she was silently sowing in town found expression in a whole sermon preached on it (Morrison, 1997a, p. 119).

Morrison depicts Deek as experiencing a hitherto unknown incompleteness when he and Steward stop talking after the attack on the Convent (Morrison, 1997a, p. 300). Until this point "all his intimate conversations had been wordless ones with his brother" (Morrison, 1997a, p. 301). Although they were two separate individuals, their twinned relationship seems complete in its unity. One could thus read this relationship as indicative of the fact that human identity is incomplete without the other; that the Self is always a double of others.

Page (2001) argues that Deacon's life reflects the potentially positive changes for the town as his severed relationship with his twin symbolises the town's need to grow beyond its confining bond with its own legend and thus to move from "a restrictive fusion to a liberating fragmentation" (p. 645). On an individual level, the hitherto completeness of the Morgan twin's relationship is suggestive that the Self's identity in relation to other people is complete as a "you and me" (De Voss, 2010, p. 50). The Morgan twins are the epitome of unified identity as the reader sees they share one memory, one purpose, and one belief until the Convent murders divide them (Krumholz, 2002, p. 21). On a social level, the Morgan twin's relationship implies that Ruby had been in relationship with itself only, but after the break caused by the Convent attack Ruby stood a chance to grow beyond the bond with itself and thus become accepting of other societies, given Deacon reached out to Reverend Misner, thus forging a bond with someone other than his own twin (Morrison, 1997a, p. 300). Similarly the attack on the Convent reveals to the people of Ruby that their views about the Other is dangerous and need revision. The younger generation now has reason to justify their need to get involved in the Civil Rights movement.

On a more personal level, Morrison portrays through Deacon's experiences that confronting the effects of totalising the Other will bring the Self face to face with itself as totalising the Other is as much a projection of the Self than it is an assessment – true or false – of the Other. When the men are asked for a justification on their reason for attacking the Convent women, Steward replies to the question: "What manner of evil is in you?" with "The evil is in this [Convent] house" (Morrison, 1997a, p. 291). Instead of consenting and agreeing with his brother, Deacon says, "My brother is lying. This is our doing. Ours alone. And we bear the responsibility"

(Morrison, 1997a, p. 291). Whereas these twins did not need to speak to each other as they had wordless conversations a major separation is about to take place. In trying to express himself to Misner, Deacon tells him about his grandfather and his twin brother who separated over what may have seemed like a trivial incident.

Deacon tells Reverend Misner:

I always thought Coffee—Big Papa—was wrong,” said Deacon Morgan. “Wrong in what he did to his brother. Tea was his twin, after all. Now I’m less sure. I’m thinking Coffee was right because he saw something in Tea that wasn’t just going along with some drunken whiteboys. He saw something that shamed him. The way his brother thought about things; the choices he made when up against it. Coffee couldn’t take it. Not because he was ashamed of his twin, but because the shame was in himself. It scared him. So he went off and never spoke to his brother again. Not one word. (Morrison, 1997a, p. 303)

While the above conversation primarily concern Deacon’s relationship with Steward, a key matter is addressed. Coffee separated from his brother not because of what he discovered about his brother when up against it. No. Through his brother he discovered what was in *himself*. And it was the discovery of his own weakness in the other that caused him to reject the other despite the revelation of Self. What this example demonstrates is not so much dialogical construction of Self, but a dialogical *recognition* of the Self. This incident is sufficiently logical had Morrison left it at Coffee rejecting Tea for Tea’s behaviour. But Morrison adds the argument that Coffee recognised his own weakness and saw himself in his brother. And Tea certainly separated from his brother thinking it was him his brother rejected, when in fact the

reader knows it was himself through his brother that Coffee rejected.

Two generations later a similar dialogical recognition of the Self's potential for otherwise shameful behaviour is similarly portrayed through the grandsons. This narration furthermore reveals the revelation and introspection the attack on the Convent brought about in Deacon's life. "It was Deacon Morgan who had changed the most. It was as though he had looked in his brother's face and did not like himself anymore" (Morrison, 1997a, p. 300). Deacon saw that he too, like Steward, was capable of answering, "The evil is in this house" and it shamed him to realise that that is the kind of man he was (Morrison, 1997a, p. 291). It was as if he saw himself in a mirror reflection. Morrison essentially emphasises this point not only in the overall notion that the men of Ruby thought they had outfoxed the white man (and the light-skinned African American) when in fact they imitate him (Morrison, 1997a, p. 306), but in the individual detail referencing the grandfathers and then underscoring it with the grandsons – as if she does not want the reader to miss the point that the potential for evil is very much in the Self as it is in the other/Other.

Morrison need not have expressed the separation in this fashion, where a Self recognises its own vulnerability as discovered in another, which in turn exposes its own weakness or evil. But she very distinctly presents this case to the reader through the experience of one of the major protagonists. And as Page explains, whereas Morrison always engages the dynamics between black and white communities/presences, she does not do so in a polarised fashion. The fact that African Americans attack other African Americans reveal her pedagogical inclination is to address human potential for totalising the other, human potential for exhibiting the same

characteristics – whether good or bad. This point is taken further when one returns to the beginning of the founding of the two all-black towns begun by the nine founding families. Identity construction of the inhabitants of what will become Ruby takes place as a direct consequence of their treatment at Fairly.

3.11 Looking relations in *A Mercy*

A primary looking relation that concerns identity construction involves Florens. When Florens goes in search of the blacksmith to come heal Rebekka Vaark (her owner) she encounters elders of the Separatist community at Widow Ealing's cottage. This is 1690. They inspect her to verify whether she is a witch or not. Her experience reminds the reader of Pecola's experience with the shopkeeper, Yacobowski. Morrison describes this scene as follows:

They look under my arms, between my legs. They circle me, lean down to inspect my feet. Naked under their examination I watch for what is in their eyes. No hate is there or scare or disgust but they are looking at me my body across distances without recognition. (Morrison, 2009, p. 110)

In Florens's estimation swine have looked at her with more connection and the women avoid her eyes the way one would fear looking into the eyes of a wild animal that would attack when looked at directly (Morrison, 2009, p. 111). When Florens escapes this situation the reader learns that her identity is profoundly affected. Them reading her blackness as a sign of the devil contributed to their non-recognition of her as human. Florens recognises, "Inside I am shrinking....[I] know I am not the same" (Morrison, 2009, p. 113). Much later Florens says, "I know my withering is born in the Widow's closet" (Morrison, 2009, p. 158).

The witch-hunters had furthermore taken the letter Rebekka gave Florens for safety of passage. The lack of this letter leaves her vulnerable and she senses in herself, “Something precious is leaving me. I am a thing apart. With the letter I belong and am lawful” (Morrison, 2009, p. 113). But more than not belonging because of the letter that identifies her as belonging to a slave owner, Florens experiences an existential crisis in her very humanity. When she thinks “Without it I am a weak calf abandon by the herd, a turtle without shell...” (Morrison, 2009, p. 113), it speaks to more than her sudden disconnect from the Vaark estate. For it is not that she is rejected by the people on the Vaark estate, it is also not that Widow Ealing and her daughter treated her poorly. But for the first time she experiences other people questioning the given that she is human. This experience furthermore shows she is not sufficient in herself, but needs another to attest to her belonging, to her worth and usefulness somewhere. Unlike Pecola who accepts this assessment of her unworthiness, Florens shrinks at first, but then finds herself becoming hard in response, thinking, “Sudden it is not like before when I am always in fright. I am not afraid of anything now. The sun’s going leaves darkness behind and the dark is me... Is my home” (Morrison, 2009, p. 113). Whereas Pecola rejects the weeds she initially sympathised with, Florens identifies with the natural element of darkness and embraces it.

When the blacksmith eventually rejects her too, Florens walks home and Scally sees her marching down the road like either a ghost or soldier and he recognises she had become untouchable (Morrison, 2009, p. 150). From here on forward her identity has been significantly altered.

3.12 Dialogical constructions of identity in *A Mercy*

Before I discuss dialogical constructions of identity as portrayed in individual characters' identity constructions a brief standstill at the place of community would be informative.

In another extra-representational act, Morrison speaks through Lina about the necessary connections to a group. Babb points out that the Vaark farm is laid to waste because of a theme Morrison often addresses: an adherence to egocentric individualism, isolation, and removal from community (2011, p. 158). Lina observes of the Vaarks: "Their drift away from others produced a selfish privacy and they had lost the refuge and consolation of the clan. Baptists, Presbyterians, tribe, army, family, some encircling outside thing was needed.... Pride alone made them think that they needed only themselves, could shape life that way" (Morrison, 2009, p. 56). Dealing with matters like sickness and death quickly show it would be in the Self's interest to be connected to a group. Connection to a group acknowledges the interdependence necessary for survival – especially in a world as socially and environmentally untamed as the early seventeenth century was. With *A Mercy* Morrison intended to create a society "in the wilderness" and thereby represent "the earliest version of American individuality, American self-sufficiency" – and show the dangers of such American self-sufficiency (Babb, 2011, p. 159).

The case of Lina demonstrates the value of community best for Lina not only draws from community to help her survive but also to shape her identity.

3.12.1 Lina's dialogic identity construction

In Lister's view Lina is one of the most self-defining characters in *A Mercy* because she has a strong sense of heritage (2009, p. 118). Coming from a world steeped in culture, where she had the company of other children, learned from industrious mothers in beautiful jewellery, and knew "the majestic plan of life; when to vacate, to harvest, to burn, to hunt," Lina decided to fortify herself by "piecing together scraps of what her mother had taught her before dying in agony" (Morrison, 2009, pp. 46; 48). In her culture she had a defined role in a social order that gives her life meaning and purpose. After the "death of the world" when her village was destroyed by pox and fire, she was able to endure the "solitude, regret and fury" that came in her later years of captivity among the "Europes" by a self-invention that shaped her inside and out – that pieced together recollections from her past, mixed with European medicine and other useful bits (Morrison, 2009, p. 46).

Another factor that fortified Lina was her decision to become part of an alternative community. She had decided to become "one more thing that moved in the natural world; "she cawed with birds, chatted with plants, spoke to squirrels, sang to the cow and opened her mouth to rain" (Morrison, 2009, pp. 46–47). Lina thus relies on her social community and the community of the natural world to shape her new survivalist identity. It must be for this reason that she recognised the danger of the Vaark household's isolated existence.

Furthermore, comparing Lina's synthesised belief system to "the syncretism of what would become United States culture" Babb contends that, "*A Mercy* casts hybridity not as a dangerous negative but as American fact" (2011, p. 158). One can similarly

argue that identity is similarly always already a kind of hybridity.

Another character whose strong sense of heritage, which allows her to survive, is Florens's mother.

3.12.2 *Mãe's dialogic construction*

Florens's mother's name is never mentioned; only referred to as "*a minha mãe*", which means "my mother" in Portuguese. For ease of reference she will be referred to as *Mãe* for the most part.

In spite of suffering the traumas of captivity, the Middle Passage, enslavement, and sexual exploitation, *Mãe* knew a time when she was a woman of her clan and remembers what it was like to belong to a nation of her own. This memory encompasses a complete world of experiences and relations which she can compare with her new existence as chattel. On a slave block in Barbados, *Mãe* discovers that she "was not a person from her country, nor from her family. She learns she was: "negrita. Everything. Language, dress, gods, dance, habits, decoration, song – all of it cooked together in the colour of [her] skin" (Morrison, 2009, p. 163). She witnesses herself as a raced object. Having been born as a free person in Angola and having grown up as an African woman allows her to see the violence of her situation in the larger context of the violence of patriarchal society (Rice Bellamy, 2013, p. 21) for she understands her situation was brought about because of the insults that had been moving back and forth between their king and another until her people were attacked, killed or sold (Morrison, 2009, pp. 161–162). Thus she recognises that the root of her enslavement lay in the fact that "men thrive on insults over cattle, women, water,

crops” (Morrison, 2009, p. 161). Even on the slave ship she notices that the white sailors who take “pleasure to freshen us with a lash” also find it enjoyable “to lash their own (Morrison, 2009, p. 162).

Although her mother explains to Florens (who will never hear her) that to be a woman (in the new World) is to be “an open wound that cannot heal” (Morrison, 2009, p. 161), *Mãe* is, however, capacitated with more resilience because of her heritage despite the fact that her wounds will also continue to fester. Her broader range of experiences enables her to contextualise her situation and define her own worth in contrast to the role given her in the New World economy (Rice Bellamy, 2013, p. 21).

When Florens escapes Widow Ealing’s cottage it is with the sense that she is not the same, that she has a darkness inside and outside, that darkness is her home – and perhaps the thing her mother always knew about her which motivated her to reject Florens (Morrison, 2009, p. 113). Cantiello argues that the villagers’s inspection of Florens’s body resembles the treatment her mother received when she was sold in Barbados (Rice Bellamy, 2013, p. 23). *Mãe* was also made to “jump high, to bend over, to open [her] mouth[s]” (Morrison, 2009, p. 113). Unlike Florens who subsequently identifies completely with being a black, her mother recognises she is sold “as a black”, with all her heritage and characteristics “cooked together in the colour of [her] skin” (Morrison, 2009, p. 163) when clearly there is a whole unknown world about her.

3.12.3 Florens's dialogic construction

In contrast to Lina and *a minha mãe*, Florens never has the benefit of existing in a society or clan that values her as a person with a meaningful role and a place of belonging. Her life begins in enslavement, and the defining moments of her childhood and youth are scenes of rejection and abandonment (Rice Bellamy, 2013, p. 21).

While a mother's love and acceptance normally form the foundation of a child's self-worth, *Mãe's* perceived abandonment becomes the negative basis of Florens's identity so that her experience of her mother sending her away leaves her with a desperate need to be loved (Rice Bellamy, 2013, p. 22). No amount of love and care from Lina can erase Florens's memory of her mother's act. Florens grows up lamenting the image of her mother, "standing hand in hand with her little boy," giving her away to a stranger but "saying something [she] cannot hear... something important" (Morrison, 2009, pp. 1, 6). This memory continues to haunt Florens and the reader throughout the novel. The pain of her mother's sending her away, when *Mãe* keeps Florens's brother, is complicated by the permanence of the separation, the cessation of communication with her mother, the loss of her love and guidance, and the inability ever to ask why (Rice Bellamy, 2013, p. 22). This experience creates a void in Florens that causes a desperate search for love and acceptance. As a result, Florens is "deeply grateful for every shred of affection, any pat on the head, any smile of approval" (Morrison, 2009, p. 59). For a time, she and Lina comfort the "Mother hunger—to be one or have one" from which they are both "reeling" (Morrison, 2009, p. 61). Florens's desire to be loved takes on new dimensions with the arrival of the blacksmith, a free black man who comes to work for Jacob.

The blacksmith awakens an overwhelming, blinding desire in Florens: “Nothing stops it. There is only you. Nothing outside of you. ... when at last our eyes hit I am not dead. For the first time I am live” (Morrison, 2009, pp. 35, 36). Conner highlights that Florens cannot yet possess herself for she can only feel her worth if she is possessed by another (2013, p. 162). Regarding her affections for the blacksmith Florens thinks to herself, “I can never not have you have me” (Morrison, 2009, p. 135). Florens imagines the blacksmith as her “life and [her] security from harm, from any who look closely at [her] only to throw [her] away,” (Morrison, 2009, p. 155) seeing in him the satisfaction of her longing for intimate connection, release from bondage, and protection from future rejection (Rice Bellamy, 2013, p. 22).

When Florens relives the original scene of rejection as the blacksmith appears to cast her aside in favour of a little boy, a foundling he takes into his custody, Florens becomes desperate, offering the blacksmith ownership of herself: “You alone own me” (Morrison, 2009, p. 139). Repelled by her self-objectification, the blacksmith also rejects Florens, telling her to “Own yourself, woman, and leave us be... You are nothing but wilderness. No constraint. No mind” (Morrison, 2009, p. 139). With this rejection Florens becomes unhinged, attacking both the boy and the man and discovering that what truly enslaves a person is on the inside: “it is the withering inside that enslaves and opens the door for what is wild” (Morrison, 2009, p. 158). This withering, the destruction of Florens’ sense of her own humanity and worth, has its roots in her mother’s rejection, is reinforced by the blacksmith’s similar rejection, the inspection at Widow Ealing’s cottage, and finally manifests itself in the wilderness of violence and self-hatred (Rice Bellamy, 2013, p. 22).

Florens is defined and then defines herself in relation to her mother and the blacksmith – first in desire for them and then in response to their rejection of her. This is portrayed by her defining herself in the terms of the blacksmith and her mother’s rejection of her. Florens accepts the judgement “wilderness” the blacksmith pronounces over her: “See? You are correct. *A minha mãe* too. I am become wilderness but I am also Florens” (Morrison, 2009, pp. 155, 159). Conflating her two rejections, Florens assumes the identity she believes correlates with renunciation (Rice Bellamy, 2013, p. 25).

Florens also thinks about her mother who thought her fetish for shoes to be problematic. She says, “*Mãe*, you can have pleasure now because the soles of my feet are hard as cypress” (Morrison, 2009, p. 159).

Although Florens says, “my way is clear after losing you who I am thinking always as my life and my security from harm” (Morrison, 2009, p. 155) this stance is in reaction to the rejection of losing first her mother’s love and then her lover’s affections. For she narrates that those whom she found her security in have simply thrown her away and she learned she was nothing to them (Morrison, 2009, p. 155). Hence, Florens had shaped her identity in response to feeling thrown away by those she loved most, leaving her with a sense of having no tomorrow despite being better equipped for life – given the condition of her feet (Morrison, 2009, p. 2).

3.12.4 Sorrow’s dialogic construction

Another character whose life is profoundly influenced by an other is that of Sorrow. Though the details of her life are unclear, it is certain that she has endured a life of

trauma and especially one of being taken advantage of by men. As a coping mechanism she had invented Twin, her make-believe double, an identical Self whose face matched hers exactly (Morrison, 2009, pp. 114, 124). Yet when Sorrow becomes a mother the reader is told “Twin was gone, traceless and unmissed by the only person who knew her” (Morrison, 2009, p. 132). First it is Twin who stabilises her identity and enables her to cope with life. Thereafter it is her child that grounds her and informs her actions and rewritten identity (Morrison, 2009, p. 132).

3.12.5 Jacob’s dialogic construction

Comparing himself to D’Ortega, Jacob feels embarrassed by his rough clothes compared to the other man’s embroidered silk and lace collar (Morrison, 2009, p. 15). He perceives D’Ortega’s accounting of his business set-back, measured against the images of bodies piled up and carted to “where saltweed and alligators would finish off the dead bodies who sunk in the ship on the harbour, as signs of slovenly Catholicism (Morrison, 2009, pp. 14–15). Whereas he sees softness and a cloying opulence in D’Ortega’, he sees restraint, focus, and luck in himself. Whereas he sees avarice in D’Ortega, he reminds himself that he came to this new world, not for the promise of wealth, but attracted by “hardship” and “adventure” (Morrison, 2009, p. 10).

Jacob’s view of himself as just and hardworking is grounded in what Christiansē calls an anthropocentrism that finds expression in his attitude toward animals. Drawing on theories by Derrida and Rousseau, Christiansē claims Jacob considers his treatment of animals as conduits through which he distinguishes himself as human (2013, p. 208).

Jacob shows his sensitivity towards animals when he stops to gently release a trapped raccoon from a tree break (Morrison, 2009, p. 9) and the reader sees it again when his fury flares up in response to seeing a man beat a horse to its knees – for “few things angered Jacob more than the brutal handling of domesticated animals” (Morrison, 2009, p. 26).

The reader does not see Jacob express horror or feeling raw fury when D’Ortega describes discarding humans as wasted cargo and leaving their bodies to rot or be eaten by alligators. Instead he emphatically refuses D’Ortega’s offer to accept slaves instead of money for his debt owed. In the slave quarters Jacob feels his stomach seize and wonders if it is the tobacco odour or the food he ate (Morrison, 2009, p. 20). He does not think it could be the human misery he sees before him – despite the shockproof eyes of the women, the silence like an avalanche of the men and the scars on the slave bodies (Morrison, 2009, p. 20). Instead he refuses to sympathise with D’Ortega or consider his offer of accepting slaves since “flesh was not his commodity” (Morrison, 2009, p. 20) and he would not “trade conscience for coin” (Morrison, 2009, p. 26).

Despite having seen the terror in the eyes of the slave woman who offered her daughter in her stead and even begged on her knees in the dust that he do so (Morrison, 2009, p. 24), Jacob later thinks of the mother as “having thrown away” her child (Morrison, 2009, p. 32).

Jacob compares himself to both D’Ortega and the mother. Unlike the mother who throws away her child, he considers himself as benevolent for accepting this child that

was thrown away by its mother (Morrison, 2009, p. 30). The reader, however learns, he makes this exception to trade in flesh for Rebekka whom he thinks might welcome a child more or less the same age as their daughter who died from a knock to the head (Morrison, 2009, p. 24). He also acknowledges there is a deeper reason for accepting the child – as an orphan himself he knew

there was no good place in the world for waifs and whelps other than the generosity of strangers. Even if bartered, given away, apprentices, sold, swapped, seduced, tricked for food, laboured for shelter or stolen, they were less doomed under adult control. Even if they mattered less than a milch cow to a parent or master, without an adult they were more likely to freeze to death on stone steps, float facedown in canals, or wash up on banks and shoals. (Morrison, 2009, p. 30)

The questions one can thus ask is, is Jacob “saving” the girl because he sees himself and his lost state in her? For he continues immediately after this wide-reaching sketch of various scenarios that could befall waifs and whelps, to think that he will not be sentimental about his own orphan status and the years spent with children of all shades stealing food and surviving in the streets until he ended up in the poor house (Morrison, 2009, pp. 30–31). Moreover, does this act put him on a moral high ground in relation to both the mother and D’Ortega for different reasons? The reader learns this is not the first time Jacob “rescue[s] an unmoored, unwanted child” (Morrison, 2009, p. 31). A decade earlier he “could not refuse when called on” to take Sorrow off the hands of the sawyer (Morrison, 2009, p. 31) – although he did bargain to be forgiven the lumber he was buying” (Morrison, 2009, p. 31).

The reader can thus see Jacob partially informs his good sense of himself by how he treats animals and orphans. His ability to see the plight of others is moreover only partial. As Christiansē points out, Jacob chooses to ignore proximities between himself and D'Ortega and what he encounters in the slave quarters, which he should have recognised for what it is, given his sensitivity to the brutal handling of at least animals (2013, p. 210).

As much as Jacob could read the terror in the slave woman's eyes, he thinks no further about her and does not imagine what this transaction must have cost her – especially if he were to compare her loss to Rebekka over whom an “invisible ash had settled” over the death of their children (Morrison, 2009, pp. 19, 24). As much as he considers him saving Florens and providing a good distraction for Rebekka, he also thinks, “if she got kicked in the head by a mare, the loss would not rock Rebekka so” (Morrison, 2009, p. 24), thus displaying a callousness. As much as Jacob cannot imagine the loss to the mother, he also clearly cannot imagine the daughter's feelings. For the reader reads throughout the novel what the impact of losing her mother is. Moreover, the man who pauses to free a raccoon, who experiences fury over the mistreatment of a horse, who considers himself saving a young slave girl and even providing his wife the distraction of a child, he thinks that if the slave girl be kicked in the head, it won't rock his wife so (Morrison, 2009, pp. 24, 26). Furthermore, as much as he thinks himself appalled by trade in flesh he nevertheless takes the slave girl.

From these examples the reader can see that lurking in Jacob's identity is corruptibility not unlike that of D'Ortega though he despises him. Indeed, Jacob

“sneered at wealth dependent on a captured workforce that required more force to maintain” and he “recoiled at whips, chains and armed overseers” (Morrison 2009, p. 26).

Jacob is initially perceived as a prudent man and it seems at first he is unwilling to be compromised by the opportunity of slavery. As much as he looks down on D’Ortega’s opulence and sordidness, imagining him to be vicious with servants and obsequious to priests (Morrison, 2009, pp. 18, 25), Jacob leaves Jublio and “in spite of himself envied the house, the gate, the fence” (Morrison, 2009, p. 25). And he continues this thought of how much he would like it to one day, not too far away, build a house that size on his own property (Morrison, 2009, p. 25). But unlike D’Ortega he does not plan to make such a dream possible on the backs of free labour as D’Ortega does.

Things take a different turn on his way back to Virginia when he spends the evening at a tavern and engages with a man named Peter Downes. Downes sells him the idea of going into sugar trading. The reader, however, learns that prior to Downes and even long before his inheritance, Jacob thought of settling in Barbados (Morrison, 2009, p. 9). Anybody thinking of doing business in Barbados should be aware of the reality of slaves on the island. According to Downes, Barbados, known for its sugar plantations, shipped in slaves “like firewood” (Morrison, 2009, p. 28). Concerned about the high risk brought about by disease, Downes counters Jacob with the explanation that “Africans are as interested in selling slaves to the Dutch as an English planter is in buying them” (Morrison, 2009, p. 29). Despite the difficulties that could be foreseen Jacob nevertheless decided to look into the business of sugar (Morrison, 2009, p. 30).

Christiansē is correct to argue that Jacob performs “mental gymnastics” to realise his desire for wealth and the dream of his own grand house of many rooms (Christiansē, 2013, p. 214). For he argues that “there was a profound difference between the intimacy of slave bodies at Jublio and a remote labour force in Barbados. Right? Right, he thought...” (Morrison, 2009, p. 30). While he argued he does not trade in human flesh, he accepted Florens in partial payment of debt owed him and though avoiding direct contact with slaves, he would indirectly build his future fortune on slavery.

Unlike his instant anger at the mistreatment of the horse, he does not respond in anger at the scars of the slaves although he recognises it must be brutality that keeps them controlled. Instead he looks at D’Ortega and judges himself as morally superior to him and later performs mental gymnastics to justify his entrance into the slave market. While he will not directly brutalise other human beings, his endeavours will enable others to catch, buy, sell and brutalise African slaves. So how will Jacob be able to continually nourish the good opinion he has of himself, which he was so eager to attend to when he left Jublio? (Morrison, 2009, p. 25). And how would he continue to justify that his house would not be compromised as Jublio is – built on the backs of slaves? (Morrison, 2009, p. 25).

Leaving Jublio, Jacob realised “that only things, not bloodlines or character, separated them” (Morrison, 2009, p. 25) – meaning D’Ortega who seems to be gentry and him a commoner. But the truth is, the biggest thing they may have in common is their desire for wealth – and as the reader saw, they would both have it at any price. Hence, his

initial judgement of D'Ortega and his initial thought of the huge difference between them, prove to in fact be incorrect for they have much more in common than Jacob would have believed.

3.13 Naming as dialogical identity construction in *A Mercy*

As mentioned earlier the reader never learns what Florens's mother is named. This can be argued to be a stylistic move on Morrison's part where "Mãe's" namelessness is indicative of the stripping away of her identity as of when she was captured and subsequently sold into slavery. Just as Florens and her mother are never afforded an opportunity to communicate again to indicate the reality of slave families torn apart never to have any contact with each other again, so too Morrison portrays the reality of people having become nameless or identity-less in this New World in relation to the white person or the slave holder. To moreover justify this treatment of people of a darker skin pigmentation, Morrison puts forth the argument that blacks were viewed as "soulless animals" (Morrison, 2009, p. 164). By thus calling people, "soulless" justification is created to treat them as such – as moral-less and value-less creatures. This position is further strengthened by calling people animals – not even "soulless people", but soulless animals.

A second reading, however, reveals that as much as Florens and her mother are permanently separated with the unlikeliness of them ever meeting, the very fact that this character is only known as "my mother" connects them permanently as "my mother" is the only name "Mãe" is known by. The reciprocity of this naming and the identity construction brought about hereby lies in the fact that the name "mother" is defined as a woman having a child, the relationship is thus unmistakably reciprocal as

the one defines the other. Mother and child are two identities inextricably linked so that it is impossible to have the one without the other. One should, moreover, not be limited to a strict definition of mother or child, thus allowing for adoptive relationships and surrogate relationships.

In essence, this otherwise nameless person functions to portray volumes about the nameless millions of Africans and later African Americans who were slaves in the USA. The juxtaposition of this mother as a character capable of virtues as complex as foresight and sacrifice contrasted with the slaveholder that deems her and treats her as a soulless animal serve to not only disprove the slaveholder's assessment of the slave, but to reveal soullessness on the part of the slaveholder.

CHAPTER 4

RESPONSIBILITY AND ANSWERABILITY

4.1 Introduction

In the introduction to this study it was explained that the work of Bakhtin and Levinas will provide theoretical illumination for the themes and arguments found in Morrison's novels as her theories seem to be illustrated through her fiction, which in turn allows for a specific philosophy – or rather, an ethics – to be demonstrated from selected themes in Morrison's work.

Chapter Three sought to uncover the dynamics of identity formation as interdependently constructed between Self and other/Other in line with a Bakhtinian dialogism. I have now come to the second phase of analysis to consider arguments around answerability and responsibility for the other/Other as found in the fiction of Morrison.

The concept of responsibility is portrayed variously in the four novels. On the one hand, the issue of response-ability, which is akin to a dialogical influence between Self and other – or answerability – given the ability to respond or react to the other/Other will be considered. On the other hand, there is the issue of taking responsibility or failing to take responsibility, which are motivated variously in the constructions of disparate characters. At times Morrison's writing engages the reader more directly than at other times, posing questions around responsibility and answerability to the reader.

The pariah figure will also be discussed in this analysis as this figure functions as the scapegoat that operates on the periphery of society or who is either blamed or ostracised by central characters as a means of blame-shifting or self-propping. Pariahs are not to be found in all novels, but where they do exist, they exist in relation to the Self's identity.

4.2 Responsibility and answerability in *The Bluest Eye*: Introduction

Morrison's major and minor characters mutually influence one another – to varying degrees of course. As such the people on the periphery of a subject's life often engage with the subject in a way that demonstrates the Self's answerability and responsiveness to the other/Other. With her extra-textual references and open-ended style of writing Morrison makes accomplices of identity construction not only of the communities and individuals the reader encounters in her novels but also of the interpreting reader.

4.2.1 Cholly's sense of responsibility

Responsibility is a major theme explored in relation to the character Cholly. Three key aspects bear a closer look. As three aspects of responsibility will be discussed, it is important to consider the dictionary definition of "responsibility" in preparation of such an analysis. Definitions of responsibility include "a state or fact of having a duty to deal with something or of having control/ leadership/ management over someone" as well as "the state of fact of being accountable or to blame for something."

The first aspect of responsibility explored in relation to Cholly's character development is that of his own parentage and his sexual debut. Secondly, Cholly's

relationship with his wife and children will be considered – firstly in terms of the demand they make on him and secondly on his response towards this sense of obligation and accountability.

Cholly's upbringing not only teaches him nothing of raising children – “having never watched any parent raise [him]” (Morrison, 1999, p. 126), it also has the effect of stripping him of any sense of duty or accountability towards anybody else. In effect nobody other than his great-aunt ever truly took responsibility for his well-being. Cholly's sense of responsibility is, however, not informed by his aunt but his parents. From his great-aunt he learned that “when [he] was four days old, his mother wrapped him in two blankets and one newspaper and placed him on a junk heap by the railroad” (Morrison, 1999, p. 103). His one encounter with his father is disastrous as his father essentially rejects him for a game of craps, making it impossible for the nervous Cholly to tell him they might be father and son.

Leaving behind this experience Cholly saw himself as “abandoned in a junk heap by his mother, rejected for a crap game by his father” (Morrison, 1999, p. 126). As a result, “there was nothing more to lose. He was alone with his own perceptions and appetites, and they alone interested him” (Morrison, 1999, p. 126). As much as his “own perceptions and appetites” seem to hold such freedom and self-determination, it is clear these had become elevated in a response which was dialogically constructed in relation to the other. Thus, had his parents not thrown him away, his sense of responsibility and accountability could have been different – given he ascribes his freedom to the fact that he had lost the things that resultantly made him free. Differently put, his “freedom” comes in response to other people's rejection and

abandonment. As a consequence he rejects all responsibility, all ownership, all obligation, all connection. In this way, Cholly becomes careless about accountability for anybody other than himself.

In similar fashion that he responds to his parents rejection by becoming a certain type of man, so too it was his total helplessness in response to the hunters' threats that saw a certain kind of violence born in him (Morrison, 1999, p. 116).

When discovered and threatened by the hunters during their sexual encounter, Cholly subconsciously recognises he should turn his hatred towards Darlene and not the hunters because that would have destroyed him (Morrison, 1999, p. 116). The fact is his helplessness was no different from that of Darlene. In relation to the hunters they stood no chance to protect themselves. The narrator emphasises the impossibility of escaping their situation, for one reads, "They were big, white, armed men. He was small, black, helpless" (Morrison, 1999, p. 118). What is contrasted in these two sentences are "they" and "he". In Cholly's mind it was he who somehow had to stand up to them, therefore there is no comparison between "they" and "we". The racial and political tension between black and white at this time meant the white man could have sports with the black man whenever he was able to, thus the power dynamics because of the politics also made the situation an impossible match.

Two further factors that should have exempted Cholly from his intense sense of failure include the fact that the hunters had both a light and a dog, so trying to escape their presence would have been dangerous. The biggest factor rendering them trapped with no escape was the lifted gun and the clomp of the metal, which indicated the

readiness of the trigger.

But beyond the humiliation, the thing that would have destroyed Cholly is his sense of failure and impotence. He therefore chooses to hate the one “who bore witness to his failure, his impotence” (Morrison, 1999, p. 118). But more importantly, he experiences his failure in light of the fact that he felt responsible for Darlene – to protect her and spare her from the humiliation they faced together. Had he not seen himself as her protector he would have felt less humiliated and less impotent, but his sense of responsibility and his failure to live up to that sense of himself as a man in relation to her as a girl is what threatens to destroy him.

Cholly’s relationship with his wife and children further indicate how his sense of responsibility – or rather his inability to live up to his sense of duty towards them – results from dialogic interaction between them – albeit often through unspoken means.

Morrison could have presented the reader with a dominating and domineering sadist. Instead the reader is presented with a man whose failures stem from his own sense of inadequacy.

In the beginning of their marriage, Pauline’s dependence on Cholly when they remind him of his previous failures. His inability to provide for her emotional and financial needs, combined with her consequent role as the family’s breadwinner, emphasise the “myriad...humiliations, defeats, and emasculations” he has experienced throughout his life (Morrison, 1999, pp. 32, 91; Fulton, 1997, p. 43). Cholly turns to domestic

violence and the vapid oblivion provided by alcohol as relief from his feelings of entrapment and helplessness (Morrison, 1999, p. 92).

It is in relation to Pecola that the reader especially experiences the depths of Cholly's sense of a failed Self because of an inability to deliver in terms of his own sense of responsibility despite the talk of his freedom to live a life that considers his appetites and perceptions only (Morrison, 1999, p. 126). In the recognition of Pecola's love for him and her as an unhappy child, Cholly finds himself fundamentally confronted with himself.

Cholly reads Pecola's demeanour as a clear statement of sadness, helplessness, hopelessness and vulnerability (Morrison, 1999, p. 127). For him, looking at her hunched back and her head turned as if suffering from a "permanent and unrelieved blow," was a "clear statement of her misery and he wondered why she looked so whipped given she was supposed to be an unburdened child (Morrison, 1999, p. 127). The capacity to read these things in Pecola's body language belies Cholly's supposed freedom to only pay attention to his own interests and to consider himself unattached to anyone. Despite Cholly's freedom or drunkenness seeing his eleven-year-old daughter as such does not leave him unmoved.

To him her misery was an accusation of his failure to meet her needs, which left him feeling guilty and impotent (Morrison, 1999, p. 127). And in anger he wonders, "What could he do for her ever?" The knowledge that she dared be so silly as to love him as her father further displeased him. But more than her love reflects her foolishness, it reminds him of his limitations:

How dare she love him? Hadn't she any sense at all? What was he supposed to

do about that? Return it? How? What could his calloused hands produce to make her smile? What of his knowledge of the world and of life could be useful to her? What could his heavy arms and befuddled brain accomplish that would earn him his own respect, that would in turn allow him to accept her love? (Morrison, 1999, p. 127).

Cholly acknowledges to himself that the very existence of having fathered children has “dumbfounded him and rendered him totally dysfunctional,” leaving him with a deep sense of inadequacy (Morrison, 1999, p. 126). He experiences his children’s obvious needs for protection and care as overwhelming because he feels unable to properly respond or fulfil those needs.

It is thus this sense of inability to live up to the dependence, love and need of his wife and children that contribute to Cholly to drink, fight Pauline and rape Pecola because he finds he has nothing to give in line with fulfilling that responsibility.

4.2.1 Pariahs and response-ability in *The Bluest Eye*

The pariah to be discussed in *The Bluest Eye* is Pecola.

Morrison presents the reader with a long exposition of the pariah enactment where the relation between Self and Other portrays the Bakhtinian sense that the Self responds to the Other in a dialogic fashion of placing onto the Other that which it rejects in itself. Morrison elaborates and provides an overabundance of these examples to foreground this inclination. As Claudia exposes these various forms of hypocrisy she refers to the subjects of this behaviour in the plural, speaking of “we” and “our” in

comparison to Pecola, thus portraying this inclination as not limited to some individuals, but to be a communal or general human trait.

And fantasy it was, for we were not strong, only aggressive; we were not free, merely licensed; we were not compassionate, we were polite; not good, but well behaved. We courted death in order to call ourselves brave, and hid like thieves from life. (Morrison, 1999, p. 163)

Morrison thus shows this view of Self in contrast to the Other-made-pariah stems from a flawed perception of the Self in its own estimation. According to Khayati, this flawed perception is built on a dual perception of the “dominant” versus the “dominated,” (1999, p. 317).

4.2.2 Community and the pariah

In an interview Morrison claims Pecola wanted blue eyes “because of the black people who helped her want to be [Shirley Temple]. For Morrison “the responsibilities are ours. It is ours for helping her believe, helping her come to the point where she wanted that” (Stepo, 1994, p. 22). When Morrison says “ours” she is not distinguishing between the fictional world of *The Bluest Eye* and the non-fictional world of her interview with Stepto, nor of, by implication, non-fictional black communities. It can therefore be argued Morrison’s judgement is applicable and valid in her estimation in both the fictional and non-fictional world. For she further says the character Pecola would “receive” the blue eyes from would have to be a “person” whose background would agree with the idea that black people would be better off if they had more white features. Morrison thus makes the point in her non-fiction that Pecola’s desire for blue eyes stems from her interaction with her community. The

analysis of her fiction will similarly show the role of the community in creating this desire in Pecola's psyche. Claudia functions as Morrison's mouthpiece to make the case for the community's responsibility in making a pariah out of Pecola.

Scapegoating in *The Bluest Eye* is a kind of internalisation of white values, by which the Self transforms itself through a distancing of the Self where it does not recognise itself as Other. Scapegoating further includes transferring onto the Other that which is feared in the Self as the reader sees the genteel ladies and Geraldine escape their own funkiness by rejecting those who exhibit it and can't hide it behind a lighter colour skin, land grant education colleges or money (Morrison, 1999, p. 64).

The racism within the African American community that looks down on blackness has its roots in an intense self-hatred the black community has felt towards its blackness for ages. Fulton contends this self-hatred is an outflow of living within a white supremacist society and is both self-perpetuating and self-regulating (Fulton, 1997, p. 27). The reader sees in *The Bluest Eye* when Pecola falls victim to the verbal attacks of a group of black boys, they attack her blackness. Morrison once again goes into a long reverie of this scene, making it impossible for the reader to miss the dynamics and complexity of black self-hatred. The boys chant "Black e mo. Black e mo. Yadaddsleepsnekked. Black e mo black e mo ya dadd sleeps nekked. Black e mo..." (Morrison, 1999, p. 50), which they repeat:

"Black e mo. Black e mo Ya daddy sleeps nekked.

Stch ta ta stch ta ta

Stach ta ta ta ta ta

In between these chants the older, insightful Claudia reflects:

They had extemporised a verse made up of two insults about matters over which the victim had no control: the colour of her skin and speculations on the sleeping habits of an adult, wildly fitting in its incoherence. That they themselves were black, or that their own father had similarly relaxed habits was irrelevant. It was their contempt for their own blackness that gave the first insult its teeth. They seemed to have taken all of their smoothly cultivated ignorance, 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. They danced a macabre ballet around the victim, whom, for their own sake they were prepared to sacrifice to the flaming pit. (Morrison, 1999, p. 50)

Considering this scene, Fulton argues the boys' behaviour exemplify an ideology that prevents them from seeing how they have internalised white supremacist values since they do not even question their valorisation of whiteness nor their victimisation of Pecola for her blackness (Fulton, 1997, p. 27).

For Watson, the boys were filled with rage and contempt because of their own blackness and the negative connotations society associated with their skin colour (2009, p. 41). Whereas Pecola experiences the bullying to be in keeping with how others have always treated her, the truth of the matter in this instance is that they had made her an object of their own dissatisfaction. She is made the sacrificial lamb of the flaming pit in which they unconsciously try to make their own blackness disappear (Watson, 2009, p. 41). In defining themselves in contrast to them, if she is the “black

e mo”, it means they cannot be it too; by her being it, there is no room for them to occupy that same position.

As has already been seen, white ideological notions of power and representation cause many members of the community to victimise or reject Pecola. For these boys to thus humiliate Pecola and treat her with scorn, they are truly expressing their deep-rooted contempt for their own black identity.

The incident of the chanting boys is one direct case where Pecola is treated as a pariah and where Morrison goes into a pedagogic elucidation. The narrator has demonstrated how the children, being Pecola’s peers, as well as the adults in the community have defined themselves by what Pecola was not: not beautiful, not clean, not loved, not moral (Morrison, 1999, p. 163).

The tragedy and irony of Pecola’s relations and ultimate function within her community is that it is the very group of dominated and oppressed people who continues the cycle of domination. They do this by selecting members of their group to scapegoat and via this subjugation they glean a sense of power and control (Fulton, 1997, pp. 50–51). This scapegoating happens, according to Christian, because people want to see their “fears of unworthiness embodied in some form” other than themselves (Fulton, 1997, p. 51).

As spokespersons, Claudia, the narrator, and Morrison reach parallel conclusions regarding how African Americans have been forced to define themselves against white American culture. To reiterate, Claudia alone comes to the insight that she and

everyone else in the community defined themselves by scapegoating Pecola as the Other. Portraying the imposition of white standards through the unattainable world of the Dick-and-Jane text and the personal histories of characters like Cholly and Pauline, as well as the misdirected character Soaphead, Morrison documents the depersonalising effects of white culture on black lives (Page, 1995, p. 58).

Claudia therefore comes to the conclusion as an adult that no one was able to save Pecola because no one really wanted to; everyone saw in her an affirmation of their own superior place in a hierarchy. She admits, “All of us – all who knew her – felt so wholesome after we had cleaned ourselves on her” (Morrison, 1999, p. 163). Claudia says of the community's response to Pecola's final mad condition, “We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us... We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty...” (Morrison, 1999, p. 163). These excerpts underscore two things. Firstly, Morrison gets as close as possible to the Bakhtinian argument of the Self's identity being built in relation to the other/Other. This same stance, as analysed by Claudia, also ties Morrison's ultimate thinking to Levinas's stance on guilt and responsibility.

Eichelberger contends Claudia's analysis of the community's response to Pecola's treatment and ultimate descent into madness, that there is no such thing as disinterested or unselfish behaviour (1999, p. 67). Instead Claudia argues the desire to dominate or destroy others is the organising impulse for all actions. Claudia insists by comparing themselves to Pecola, people drew the wrong conclusions about themselves, which Claudia corrects when she says, “we were not strong, only aggressive; we were not free, merely licensed; we were not compassionate, we were

polite; not good, but well behaved” (Morrison, 1999, p. 163). Claudia alone profoundly recognises the part she and her black community played in Pecola’s victimisation:

All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed. And all of our beauty, which was hers first and which she gave to us. All of us - all who knew her - felt so wholesome after we had cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humour. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. Even her waking dreams we used – to silence our own nightmares. (Morrison, 1999, p. 163)

In terms of her conclusion regarding Pecola’s treatment as pariah and people’s inability and/ or unwillingness to “save” Pecola, several critics agree with Claudia that nobody deserves credit for unselfish concern for others. Eichelberger points out how his bleak view of Pecola's story is shared by Gibson, Christian and Kuenz (1999, pp. 67-68). These critics imply a Foucaultian interpretation of human society, claiming that all people harbour this kind of culturally encoded racism and other beliefs that foster hierarchy and oppression. This brings us to the radical conclusion that “all of us are equally guilty”, which implies Claudia was just as responsible for Pecola's misery as Cholly (Eichelberger, 1999, p. 68). While an analysis relying on Foucauldian argumentation is informed by cultural analysis and relations of power, the conclusion is in line with a Levinasian reading, which holds that the Self is always already guilty and thus responsible for the well-being of the other/Other. But there is, of course a marked difference.

While I concur that racism is culturally encoded and fosters hierarchy and oppression, I don't agree that *The Bluest Eye* is simply a fatalistic resignation to reflect the world as it is without engaging the reader critically. Instead, the guilt and responsibility Claudia ascribes to everyone who knew Pecola, suggests the text questions the critically engaged and active reader to ask him or herself that very question. To what extent am I guilty of similar thinking and behaviour? To what extent am I responsible for the other/Other? In Morrison's words, her work is meaningless unless it aims to politically criticise and engage in a manner that would promote healing, love and the well-being of the other/Other.

Despite quoting the Foucaultian analysers, Eichelberger also only goes as far as agreeing that Morrison emphasises the deeply rooted nature of racist and hierarchical beliefs, and that her characters often disguise or "contain" such beliefs rather than being conscious of them (1999, p. 68). Eichelberger's point with the Foucaultian worldview is that although it seems that humans tend not to cooperate with others but rather to exercise power over the other/Other, she does not see Morrison as merely presenting cultural ills from which there is no hope of recovery nor portraying repressive conditions as inevitable (Eichelberger, 1999, pp. 68-69). Instead, Eichelberger sees in *The Bluest Eye* that while Morrison acknowledges the ideology of domination and repression as a constituent condition of human nature, she presents characters as more deeply motivated by two impulses distinct from the former. In the first instance, characters long for unconditional acceptance of their unique natures and their second desire is for creative and productive activity that enhances their environment (Eichelberger, 1999, p. 69). It can thus be argued domination and repression are the results of unmet acceptance and frustrated productivity.

4.2.3 Stylistics and reader responsibility in *The Bluest Eye*

Morrison's stylistics allow for reader interpretation – especially her open-ended writing – which added to the extra-representational acts give readers much to mine in Morrison's novels.

As mentioned in chapter One, extra-representational acts appear throughout Morrison's fiction. In fact, she frequently reserves both the opening and closing paragraphs of her novels for what Ryan calls “striking displays of extra-representational acts that consolidate her discursive authority, accentuate her role as artist–teacher, and enter various contemporary debates” (2007, p. 157).

Morrison's polyvocalism is another form of her open-ended stylistic devices. In *The Bluest Eye*, as in her other novels, the multiplicity of voices and the multiple narrations alternate with each other much like jazz musicians ultimately creating an overtly polyvocal text (Page, 1995, p. 54). This means Morrison never leaves the reader with a singular possibility of interpretation for meaning creation, but intentionally presents the kind of text that would require reader involvement and decision-making. With reference to Dittmar, Page furthermore argues that the novel's multiplicity of voices ensure that “meanings get constructed dialogically” (1995, p. 55). A further dimension that allows for a dialogical construction of meaning is the incorporation of the pasts and presents of numerous characters including Cholly, Pauline, Geraldine, Soaphead and the grown-up Claudia. For Smith this revisionary narrative process forces acceptance and understanding of the past (Page, 1995, p. 55).

It can, furthermore, be argued that Morrison is writing a story in such a way that those who want to see, will recognise the influence of the past on the present as well as the interconnectedness of the white and black communities.

The influence of the white community on the black community is strikingly demonstrated through an analysis of the primer by Fulton and Kanneh. By juxtaposing the two prefaces in *The Bluest Eye* – the excerpt from the Dick and Jane primary school reader, “Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy...” (Morrison, 1999, p. 1) and Claudia’s introduction of the main story, “Quiet as it’s kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941... because Pecola was having her father’s baby” (Morrison, 1999, p. 4) and offsetting these two prefaces at the beginning of the novel, Morrison immediately suggests a relationship between the white cultural discourse of the Dick and Jane reader and Pecola’s unhappy story (Fulton, 1997, p. 28).

Morrison employs the Dick and Jane reader as a structural device. Through interpretation readers can come to the conclusion that Morrison is suggesting that Pecola learns to devalue her black cultural identity at a very young age from the white cultural discourses of “truth” and “normality” she is taught to read in school (Fulton, 1997, pp. 28–29). This normalised discourse enters Pecola’s imagination although she cannot identify with the story of such a harmonious family for two reasons: her family is dysfunctional and they are secondly not represented in the story. The result is not only a lack of recognition but also self-negation and confusion (Fulton, 1997, pp. 28–29). Morrison repeats this passage three times and with each repetition, the words

flow more closely together suggesting the move from the generally understood to a subconsciously absorbed distortion, as is demonstrated through these extracts:

Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty.

Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy... (Morrison, 1999, p. 1)

Here is the house it is green and white it has a red door it is very pretty here is the family mother father dick and jane live in the green-and-white house they are very happy... (Morrison, 1999, p. 1)

Hereisthehouseitisgreenandwhiteithasareddooritisveryprettyhereisthefamilymo
therfatherdickandjaneliveinthegreen-and-whitehousetheyareveryhappy...

(Morrison, 1999, p. 2)

The end result is that a tightly woven fabric is created, a fabric that drawing from Kanneh, Fulton contends will run deeply in the unconsciousness and be difficult to eradicate (Fulton, 1997, p. 29). All other extracts from the primer are presented in this tightly woven fashion, such as, “SEEMOTHERMOTHERISVERYNICE...” (Morrison, 1999, p. 86).

The story is presented as if it is universal and “normal.” Yet African American children like Pecola simply cannot identify with it. The tightly woven writing suggests the confusion and frustration of the young African American reader who feels painfully isolated from this “norm”. Fulton interprets the lack of spacing between the words as a lack of gaps that would provide spacing for the likes of Pecola to discover their own cultural reality in the story (1997, p. 29). Unfortunately the words close in upon themselves and reveal that there is no space for her within that

normalised world. Unlike Jane's pretty world, Pecola lives in a dilapidated house, which is both irritating and melancholy" (Morrison, 1999, p. 24). Pecola's world is comprised of an alcoholic father who rapes her and a mother who beats into Pecola "a fear of growing up, fear of other people, fear of life" (Morrison, 1999, p. 100; Fulton, 1997, p. 29).

Ultimately the education system at school and in the education of the "lived reality of the fictional world" of white images dished up by culture – shape Pecola's desire and teaches her a self-negating valorisation of whiteness (Fulton, 1997, pp. 29-30). Through the device of the primer and the portrayal of social structures unobtrusively influencing what characters value, Morrison not only illustrates that other characters in the novel are accomplices for endorsing certain values, she poses the same question to readers. How are they accomplices and thus responsible for the likes of Pecola to devalue themselves in response to measuring themselves against impossible standards of white beauty.

4.3 Responsibility and answerability in *Tar Baby*: Introduction

Responsibility, as an inescapable ability to respond, corresponds with the notion of being responsible/ answerable before you are even asked a question. According to Levinas, this responsiveness towards the other/Other is evoked/ envoked in the face-to-face encounter. This face-to-face encounter, moreover, reveals not only the infinity of the other/Other but also his or her vulnerability for it begs, "do not kill me" as well as challenge the Self's right to bread. It is thus a calling to account of the Self's place in the sun. Responsibility is a major theme in *Tar Baby* and, will be discussed through the characters of Jadine, Ondine, Margaret and Valerian. As this study aims to

demonstrate advocacy for a manifesto for social change in the novels of Morrison, it should be noted that characters are portrayed as being or failing in this area, while readers are called upon to take up the mandate for change as presented to them.

4.3.1 Jadine

The significance of Jadine's confrontation with the African woman in Paris and the night women in Eloë lies in the fact that they challenge Jadine's identity as a true African American woman. And what is the link to responsibility? It is that womanhood, in Ondine and Son's definitions, means nurturing and taking responsibility for families. Her identity would lie in caring for others, in making a home. This is bothersome to Jadine as she wants to be powerful and become all she can be and not be limited to one version of womanhood.

At the beginning of the narrative, Jadine admits to her own "orphanhood", her lack of self-conscious understanding of, and alienation from, an African woman identity. Reflecting on the woman in yellow she had seen in a grocery store in Paris, she thinks: "The woman had made [me] feel lonely in a way. Lonely and inauthentic" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 45).

When Rosa, repeatedly refers to Jadine as "daughter", it can be read as an attempt to reclaim her as a member of the cultural community and thereby revise Jadine's identity (Ryan, 1997, p. 76).

In addition to her encounters with the woman in yellow in Paris and the swamp women on the island, a culmination of these experiences takes place in Eloë when she

has a visitation from the “night women”. These women materialising from the past and present, include the woman in yellow, Jadine’s own deceased mother, Ondine and Son’s dead wife and women from Eloë whom Son holds in high esteem for their womanhood.

These women are noticeably dark-skinned, specifically African in the case of the woman in yellow, and they are associated with fertility, evinced from the woman’s eggs and the night women’s bared breasts (Page, 1995, p. 116). During this nightmarish visitation, Jadine whispered in a half voice: “What do you want with me, goddam it!” In response they pulled out their breasts to which a shocked Jadine could only plaintively say: “I have breasts too”. Without saying anything and seemingly unbelieving of her claim “they simply held their breasts higher and pushed them closer to her while looking at her intently” (Morrison, 1997b, pp. 260–61). Instead of revealing breasts the woman in yellow stretched out a long arm and showed Jadine her three big eggs,” which finally drove Jadine to tears (Morrison, 1997b, p. 261). Jadine’s experience of being haunted by the “night women,” suggest to her that they were “all out to get her, tie her, bind her. Grab the person she had worked so hard to become and choke it off with their soft loose tits” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 264).

Ryan expands on the symbolism offered by the night women by arguing Jadine perceives breasts as implements of destruction when she views them “choking off” what she had become – when in fact they are symbols of sustenance (1997, p. 77). These women are thus trying to reveal and nurture another dimension of Jadine’s identity (Ryan, 1997, p. 77). As these visitations, experiences and interpretations are Jadine’s only, the truth of the matter is they reveal Jadine’s own struggles with taking

up a nurturing role. Given she came home from Paris – not only to decide between the marriage proposals, but to find direction for her life and evaluate her own identity – in the light of her sense of feeling lonely and inauthentic after the encounter with the woman in yellow – these experiences all point to subconscious struggles Jadine is facing. What possibly prevents her from choosing to step into a traditional African American women's role is probably considerations of facing the same lack of choice, the same economic and socio-political stagnation she believes these “swamp women” and “night women” are limited to (Ryan, 1997, p. 77).

Given Jadine's experience with the night women leaves her convinced that they were out to limit her to their worlds and erase the person she had worked hard to become (Morrison, 1997b, p. 264), she fights them and resists their idea of womanhood – namely wifely competence, fertility and nurturing. In its stead Jadine asserts her own idea of what a woman can be. Instead of settling for their idea, she insists on continuing on her path of hard work and “playing the game” in pursuit of becoming powerful, original and building the life she wants (Morrison, 1997b, p. 271) – even if this would mean being alone (Morrison, 1997b, p. 277; Page, 1995, p. 127).

This decision of Jadine to reject the nurturing idea of womanhood leads her to return to her life in Paris and leave all her close ties in America or the Caribbean. Before her talk on responsibility with Ondine, Jade had a big fall-out with Son regarding the very issue of her loyalties and responsibilities.

Son had seen how Jadine felt obligated and immensely grateful towards Valerian, but he does not see the same gratitude towards her aunt and uncle. On the occasion of

their big fight he is exasperated when he argues that she distorts the years of sacrifice her aunt and uncle made on her behalf. In Jadine's view "they had gotten Valerian to pay her tuition while they sent her the rest, having no one else to spend it on" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 46). What she does tell Son is, "[Margaret] and Valerian are my patrons.... They educated me. Paid for my travel, my lodgings, my clothes, my schools" (Morrison, 1997, p. 118). The reader, however, gets a different perspective from Ondine's talk with Sydney when she remarks,

"We don't have a place of our own. And the little bit of savings went to Jadine. Not that I regret a penny of it. I don't.... I would have stood on my feet all day all night to put her through that school. And when my feet were gone, I would have cooked on my." (Morrison, 1997b, pp. 193-4)

Son puts her straight on the realities that went in to giving her the life and opportunities she has. In Son's view what Valerian gave her cost him nothing – especially since he got it on the backs of others with little consideration for them (Morrison, 1997b, p. 265). Son says Valerian's contribution was, "toilet paper, Jadine. He should have wiped his ass after he shit over your uncle and aunt...(Morrison, 1997b, p. 267). Instead she should recognise that the people Jadine should be thankful for and show proper gratitude towards are Sydney and Ondine. She should rather give back to them at this stage of their lives so that they can retire and live easy lives in their old age. And Jadine should not be so self-centred as not to see the condition Ondine's feet are, which she is clearly oblivious of since she bought Ondine such impractical shoes as a Christmas gift. Son argues Jadine should rather get Ondine to sit down and rest. And it should be Jadine to cook for them instead of her sitting at the dining table with the white couple while her aunt and uncle serve them.

In anger Son asks Jadine:

“Why don’t you ask me to help you buy a house and put your aunt and uncle in it and take that woman off her feet? Her feet are killing her, killing her, and let them live like people for a change, like the people you never studied, like the people you can’t photograph. They are the ones who put you through school, woman, they are the ones. Not him. They worked for him all their lives... You should cook for them. (Morrison, 1997b, p. 267; Ryan, 1997, p. 79)

Jadine’s self-centredness or youth or ignorance – or all of it – cause her to think of herself as the centre of Ondine and Sydney’s worlds, which results in her not seeing them for who they truly are and what they might want beyond her happiness. To illustrate this claim it can be shown that she buys her aunt shoes for Christmas that would simply increase the discomfort and pain she already experiences on her feet – thus with no regard for her aunt’s genuine needs or likes. It seems Jadine is under the impression it is enough for Sydney and Ondine to want Jadine to continue to shine and make them proud, as if that is all they want from her. She does not want to see how a foot rub or something catering for their tired bodies and old age would be even more welcome. She is nonetheless correct in her assessment that their pride lay in having “produced” someone like Jade – bragging about her making it in Paris and absolutely adoring her. Ondine says, “she crowned me, that girl did. No matter what went wrong or how tired I was, she was my crown” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 194).

It is thus Jadine’s conversation with Ondine that brings Sons’s message home but only partially as Ondine only partially shares her concerns with Jadine. While her conversation with Jadine was hard, she defends Jadine in a later conversation with

Sydney when he mentions the very things she objected to in her conversation with Jadine (Morrison, 1997, p. 285).

Jadine asks Ondine if she and Sydney want to come with her to Paris, yet her voice also pleaded “don’t need me now” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 282). Though her words can’t be believed, given the opposing message in her tone of voice, one can look at “now” as the operative word and as a genuine intent to give back to Ondine and Sydney once she is more successful – when it would require less sacrifice, when she has come home to her place in the world where she isn’t figuring things out any more. In other words, where “now” should not be read as an indefinite extension, but rather indicate that the genuine intent is at a later, accommodating time in future.

Through Ondine, Morrison explains not only the dialogical nature of identity, but at bottom the argument is made that identity is tied to caring for others.

As if this is an argument in logic, I will relay the statements as if they are premises and then state the conclusion.

- A girl has got to be a daughter first.
- A girl need not have a biological mother to be a daughter.
- A girl can learn to be a daughter.
- If a girl never learns to be a daughter, it means:
- Conclusion: She can never learn how to be a woman (See Morrison, 1997b, p. 283)

A further argument to strengthen this case for what constitutes the identity of a woman is found in continuation of the above

- A woman good enough for a child
- A woman good enough for a man
- A woman good enough for the respect of other women.
- Conclusion: Such a woman is a real woman (See Morrison, 1997b, p. 283)

When Jadine eventually truthfully tells Ondine, “You are asking me to parent you. Please don’t. I can’t do that now” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 283) the reader learns Jadine’s understanding of what Ondine is conveying is that a real daughter, who becomes a real woman is one who parents others. And she is not wrong, for despite Ondine objecting to Jadine’s conclusion, Ondine retaliates with, “I am not asking you that [to parent us]. I’m just saying what a daughter is.” She then elaborates, saying:

- A daughter is a woman that cares about where she come from
- Conclusion: [a daughter is someone that] takes care of them that took care of her (See Morrison, 1997b, p. 283)

In the final instance Ondine says, “What I want from you is what I want for you. I don’t want you to care about me for my sake. I want you to care about me for yours” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 283). According to Morrison therefore, caring about others and taking responsibility for them are vital elements required by the individual to his or her personal benefit. This argument further suggests that responsibility for others is supposed to be a fundamental element of identity – given Ondine says “I want you to want to care for Sydney and me – for your own sake” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 283).

Jadine, however, tells her aunt she does not want to be the kind of woman Ondine is, arguing, "Your way is one, I guess it is, but it's not my way. I don't want to be ... " (Morrison, 1997b, p. 284). Jadine softens this announcement when she continues, "There are other ways to be a woman, Nanadine" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 284). Ondine, however, holds "there ain't but one kind. Just one..." (Morrison, 1997b, p. 284).

In Jadine's defence, it should be remembered that early in the novel she did speak about buying a store they could all run and "live together like a family at last" (Morrison 1997b, p. 46). Their response, however, was to "smile generously, but their eyes made her know they were happy to play store with her, but nothing would pull them away from the jobs they had had for thirty years or more" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 46). When at the end of the novel Jadine chooses to return to Paris, her leaving is figured as an abduction of her responsibility (Matus, 1989, p. 99). But the matter is clearly more complicated than this.

Indeed Jadine shies away from the responsibilities of what Ondine and the night women suggest it means to be a woman and/ or a daughter as she makes it clear she does not want to be under any obligation to be the kind of daughter that would parent Ondine and Sydney. She, however qualified this statement through her previous request that they don't need her "now". Carmean, furthermore, makes a valid point when she argues Jadine's position that Ondine's way is "one way" and her way can be another way, implies that there are more ways than otherwise suggested. According to Carmean the text argues that if there is "one way" to be a whole black woman in the contemporary world, it requires "both" the ways of the "night women" and of Jadine's kind of woman (1993, p. 77). To put it another way, the text does not ask

Jadine to stay in Eloë and all it represents, but it does ask her to take with her the cultural lesson of nurturing taught by the “night women” (Carmean, 1993, p. 77).

It can be assumed Jadine’s rejection of being the kind of woman her aunt is, entails living as a dependant, as a servant with few options, with little or no success to show for her labours. Jadine does not recognise that for Ondine it was her sacrificial living that limited her own options on the one hand, but increased options for Jadine, on the other hand. Jadine also does not want to fulfil the kind of nurturing role the night women insist on. Jadine does not recognise it is Ondine’s nurturing role towards her that has enabled her the kinds of options she has before her.

More than being either the one or the other, it is also possible to be another kind of woman who is constituted by a combination of aspects of both these kinds of women. The options are not as limited as Jadine seems to experience them. Instead of functioning solely to nurture others or to completely reject community and live in self-interest only, it is possible to pursue both selfish interests but at the same time meaningfully contribute towards the care of others – in particular those who took care of you.

Returning to France, Jade is certainly a different person. She recognises the necessity to rethink the place of her culture’s view on nurturing others. Despite Jadine’s decision, which the reader will never know about, Morrison has asked the reader to consider the value of nurturing others and the degree to which the Self can or should take responsibility to care for the other/Other.

4.3.2 Ondine and Margaret

As already revealed in Chapter Three, the fatal Christmas dinner in *Tar Baby* saw Ondine not only physically attack Margaret, but blurt out the fact that Margaret had physically abused her son, Michael when he was a little boy. From this scene the reader learnt that Margaret stuck pins in Michael's little behind and burned him with cigarettes (Morrison, 1997b, p. 209). And then Ondine explained through tears, "I used to hold him and pet him. He was so scared!" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 209). Ondine truly lets go of all her frustrations and anger around the whole Margaret and Michael drama when she says,

All the time scared. And he wanted her to stop. He wanted her to stop so bad. And every time she'd stop for a while, but then I'd see him curled on his side, starring off. After a while – after a while he didn't even cry. And she wants him home... For Christmas and apple pie. A little boy who she hurt so much he can't even cry. (Morrison, 1997b, p. 210)

In this accusation she gives credence to her allegation by emphasising that her evidence lies in what she saw with her own eyes both on Michael's body and also in his behaviour. And her confession of having kept such a dark secret is essentially to explain that she fulfilled the role of the good surrogate mother who comforted the little boy afterwards.

Ondine later explains to Sydney that it is her love for Michael that kept her quiet so that she could be near to take off the edge of the damage his mother was causing him so that he wouldn't turn out a murderer as an adult (Morrison, 1997b, p. 285). The language Ondine uses makes Michael the subject who wanted Margaret to stop. She

does not mention how she as the other adult with knowledge of this situation tried to intervene. Instead, by not speaking of her own attempts at stopping Margaret, Ondine's revelation suggests she felt powerless to act, yet she seems to place the ability to exert power into Michael's hands when she says, "And he wanted her to stop. He wanted her to stop so bad" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 210). But it can be agreed that passivity or a sense of lacking power does not excuse one from responsibility. It can, moreover, be argued that Ondine tries to exempt herself from any responsibility for not having acted in Michael's best interest by having done something decisive to intervene to stop the abuse he was suffering. For her good intention, Ondine is surprised to hear Margaret say, "you should have stopped me" and "I wish you liked me enough to help me" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 243).

Ondine's shock at this request lies in the fact that to her mind her reasoning was simple, logical and good. For Ondine, her responsibility was linked to her sense of herself as the good mother, the saving and consoling mother. Not once did she see her passivity as a compelling indictment against her. Not once did she see herself as partially to blame for Michael's suffering due to her lack of intervention. All Ondine sees is how she fulfilled her responsibility towards him by taking care of him after the fact. It is for this reason that she laments to Sydney that she is not getting any thanks for having tried to ease Michael's hurt. For, she says, "Maybe it don't pay to love nothing. I loved that little boy like he was mine, so he wouldn't grow up and kill somebody. And instead of thanks, I get meanness. Disrespect" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 285). Not only does she not get any acknowledgement and gratitude for her act towards Michael, she further laments that, "He's okay now. Doing fine. But I'm not

responsible for that, no. I'm responsible for not telling nobody" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 285).

The irony is therefore that Ondine decided her responsibility lay in comforting Michael, but at the end of the day it seems her responsibility should have been to stop the trauma and abuse from taking place. By considering these two different kinds of responsibility, her view of herself becomes affected as either "good" or "bad". And the truth is, Michael would probably have been much better off had Ondine recognised her responsibility lay in protecting instead of consoling him, for the latter went hand in hand with protecting herself – for keeping quiet meant she and Sydney would not lose their jobs. Instead of risking Valerian from firing them had she revealed the secret, Ondine became an accomplice and thus a perpetrator of abuse – and not a saviour as she chose to believe for all those years.

Michael's childhood abuse implicates more than just his mother. According to Matus, Michael's trauma also involves others because the paradigm of his abuse and the relations it structures articulate the novel's concern with "parenting" and its wider collective and cultural sense by which it exposes power relations (Matus, 1998, pp. 85-86). This section will make clear the responsibility and guilt relating to Michael's abuse involve even Ondine who kept the secret and also to Valerian who conveniently remained ignorant of Michael's abuse.

The decisive point at issue connecting Ondine, Valerian and Margaret as characters whose responsibility reflect their identities, is the matter of Margaret's abuse of Michael. Morrison's sketch of Margaret's confrontation with her own responsibility

towards her son portrays to a great extent Levinas's argument of what confronts the Self when facing the other/Other's infinity as well as vulnerability.

Morrison portrays Margaret's experience as:

And she was outraged by that infant needfulness. There were times when she absolutely had to limit its *being there*; stop its implicit and explicit demand for her best and constant self. She could not describe her loathing of its prodigious appetite for security – the criminal arrogance of an infant's conviction that while he slept, someone is there; that when he wakes, someone is there; that when he is hungry, food will somehow magically be provided. (Morrison, 1997b, p. 238)

Whereas the relation between Self and other/Other is not necessarily that of parent and child, it is as absolute according to Levinas. Margaret's actions furthermore eventually have repercussion effects in both Valerian and Ondine's identities as response-able characters.

4.3.3 Valerian's innocence

Valerian thinks of himself as decent and humane (Morrison, 1997b, p. 51). In fact, he sees that his position of power and dominance has been partially responsible for his inadequate reading of the "story of his own son's victimisation". His own position of power and his pretence (false belief in his virtue) have rendered him incapable of interpreting Michael's plaintive song from under the sink. He belatedly recognises that he conveniently chose to read it as "nothing".

Valerian's sin lies in the very "innocence" that he had regarded as a primary virtue. He also realises that he never really knew either Michael or Margaret. True to his Victorian up-bringing, he tried to attain goodness through purity, separating himself from whatever he has understood to be evil or corrupt: "His claims to decency were human: he had never cheated anybody.... He had never been miserly or a spendthrift, and his politics were always rational and often humane" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 51). But as Valerian was unwilling to confront his own son's singing from under the sink, he also avoids knowing the implications of his larger capitalist, colonialist and patriarchal footprint (Matus, 1998, p. 86), which had he paid attention would have called this view of himself into question.

That Valerian chose not to understand Michael's behaviour tells us that he even chose to remain free of inconvenient information although it might have related to his own son. Thinking back, Valerian realises he assumed what he knew – when Michael was a boy – was sufficient. In other words, there was no reason to want to know more than what was convenient for him to live a decent life according to his understanding of the world. Always objective and rational, in his estimation, so that it can be argued that he thought what others experience or know are not worth paying attention to. And what he knows of them is all or enough of what there is to know. In other words, he regards others as totalised beings and treats them as such, without regard for their uniqueness and individuality or infiniteness.

After Valerian discovers the truth he avoided for so long, he comes to the painful recognition that having known more would have been inconvenient and frightening (Morrison, 1997b, 245). In protecting himself and avoiding dealing with frightening

possibilities in his life, he thus decided to pretend or rather, persist in, his ignorance. In other words, in order to protect himself, he chose to reduce the humanity of others – those he chose not to know more about – including that of his own son. But, the reader sees he eventually causes destruction to his own humanity. The devastating effect of recognising the huge part he played – through his absence – in Michael's abuse and subsequent rejection of his parents, will shortly become clear.

Upon Ondine's shocking account Valerian, who prides himself in his decency and humane behaviour, is forced to open his eyes to his own participation in the abuse and to become aware of the enormity of his wilful ignorance. Morrison calls this attitude and its consequences his “crime of innocence” and Everson coins it as “sins of innocence” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 245; Everson, 1989, p. 68).

What is thus revealed at the Christmas dinner table starkly contrasts with Valerian's opinion of the life he has lived and the realities he missed while existing in his ignorant innocence. Morrison describes his contemplation:

He thought about innocence there in his greenhouse and knew that he was guilty of it because he had lived with a woman who had made something kneel down in him the first time he saw her, but about whom he knew nothing; had watched his son grow and talk but also about whom he had known nothing. And there was something so foul in that, something in the crime of innocence so revolting it paralysed him. He had not known because he had not taken that trouble to know. (Morrison, 1997b, pp. 244–5)

His guilt stems from his recognition that it would have been easy to know, which furthermore seems to be the factor that causes him his deepest trauma. Not knowing,

he belatedly acknowledges, was a conscious decision based on a selfishness that he admits meant to shield him from a knowledge that he knew then already would have been inconvenient since the signs scared him at the time (of Michael's abuse) already. His turmoil thus primarily lies in the role he played in allowing Michael's abuse. He laments his own negligent behaviour as deeply as he does Michael's suffering.

It is interesting to note that before Valerian had any conscious knowledge of Michael's suffering he analysed Michael, the Socialist's behaviour correctly when he thinks of Michael's "treks from ghetto to reservation to barrio to migrant farm" as if they were – "searches for people in whose company the Michaels could enjoy the sorrow they were embarrassed to feel for themselves" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 145). Coining Michael's behaviour is one thing, but why not explore to understand "sorrow [Michael was] embarrassed to feel for [himself], which he displaced on the oppressed, dispossessed and the environment. This thought seems very incriminating, suggesting Valerian may have known on some level that Michael suffered some deep sorrow.

In overview, Valerian thinks, "What an awful thing she had done. And how much more awful not to have known it" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 245). He recognises that although Margaret was the director perpetrator, his role was worse than hers, for "was there anything so loathsome as a wilfully innocent man? Hardly. An innocent man is a sin before God. Inhuman and therefore unworthy" (Morrison, 1997b, p. 245). This conclusion is especially important to the overall Morrison argument regarding her work as political and the claim this study is putting forth regarding the significance of responsibility for identity construction since the treatment of the other/Other is ultimately treatment of the self – for the consequences often eventually play out in the

life of the Self. The reader learns of the devastation wrought in Valerian when he is seen unable to dress himself with buttons and zippers having become too complicated, unable to put on his own shoes or shave himself (Morrison, 1997b, p. 280) and even Sydney now feeds Valerian as well as over-rules him in terms of day-to-day decisions (Morrison, 1997b, pp. 288-289). The point of the reciprocal influence will be argued more fully in the conclusion when the various “premises” will be drawn together. Morrison therefore goes further to argue that, “No man should live without absorbing the sins of his kind...” (1997b, p. 245).

4.3.4 Stylistics and reader responsibility in *Tar Baby*

As mentioned in Chapter One, extra-representational acts appear throughout Morrison’s fiction. In fact, she frequently reserves both the opening and closing paragraphs of her novels for such acts thereby consolidating her novelist authority and role as artist–teacher to enter various contemporary debates (Ryan, 2007, p. 157). The open-endedness of Morrison’s stylistics and the “direct approach” of her extra-representational acts together allow for rich possibilities in reader interpretation.

Tar Baby, like all Morrison’s other novels, has multiple narrative voices. Each of these voices belongs to a major character and contributes to the overall message of the work. Mbalia describes the omniscient narrator as “the glue to solidify the novel’s disparate narrative voices, a type of central committee that consolidates, but does not override, the decisions of its democratic body” (Mbalia, 2004, p. 85).

Page takes the issue of the novel’s polyvocalism, which upends the possibility of a fixed perspective, even further. Accordingly, the tar baby myth itself moves the story

into ambiguous multiplicity circumventing fixed, unitary perspectives of characters. Morrison avoids closure, given the reader is left uncertain with both the future and fate of Son and Jadine. Does Son join the mythological horsemen, does Jadine marry Ryk and many more questions can be asked about how they've developed as characters and what the implications of their choices are to the reader and the debate around what they represent. *Tar Baby* complicates binary oppositions and monologic conclusions by going beyond any monologic meaning as no essentialist views are allowed to thrive (Page, 1995, p. 130). The tar baby myth, furthermore, allows for each character to have multiple selves, suggesting that reality is reflected not by any one myth or any one interpretation of a myth but by "a texture of competing myths" (Page, 1995, p. 131).

In "Blackness and Art in Toni Morrison's 'Tar Baby'" (2008), Krumholz offers a metafictional reading of *Tar Baby*. According to Krumholz, Morrison engages with inherited white constructions of blackness – as either absence or excess – and translates them into "aesthetic choices" and "rhetorical strategies" (p. 267). Krumholz thus considers an "aesthetic of absence" through, amongst others, the non-arrival of Michael; use of "secrets and untold stories" such as Michael's abuse; use of mythological figures from the swamp women to the night women and blind horsemen as well as allusions to historical events, such as the history of sugar as a large component of colonial (and neocolonial) economies in the Caribbean and the Southern USA (2008, p. 268). These absences invite readers to fill in the gaps and participate actively.

Morrison's open-ended stylistics include not only absences, but also excess as has already been hinted at via her polyvocalism. Whilst Mbalia, Page and Krumholz have discussed the multiplicity of voices – whether absent or present – the myth of the tar baby and the use of the word “tar” epitomises this excess.

The tar baby story is repeatedly referred to especially in relation to *Jadine and Son*. According to the folktale, a farmer sets out to catch a cabbage-stealing rabbit by building a baby-shaped scarecrow out of tar. When the rabbit encounters this tar baby in the cabbage field, the rabbit tries to shake hands and gets stuck. The more he tries to push or hit the fake baby away, the more he gets stuck to its tarry surface.

In her foreword, Morrison explains that she finds the mysteries and ambiguities of the tar baby story particularly compelling. She theorises that the encounter between the rabbit and the tar baby might represent a seductive woman and clever male who is initially confrontational until they become bound together. In the novel, Son sees *Jadine* as a tar baby figure. He imagines that she was set in his path by white people to arrest his progress, but, like the rabbit that also gets caught in the tar, finding himself in love with her and trapped. It reads, “So he made himself disgusting to her. Insulted and offended her. Gave her sufficient cause to help him keep his love in chains and hoped to God the lock would hold. It snapped like a string (Morrison, 1997b, p. 222).

The word “tar”, moreover, takes new and positive meanings beyond the established and negative racist connotations. One such negative meaning has been to use the word “tar baby”, as if a synonym for “nigger”, which Morrison recalls white people used for black children, especially black girls (Ryan, 1997, p. 81). On the positive,

Morrison found a tar lady in African mythology and discovered that a tar pit used to be considered a holy place because tar was used to build things since it held things together like Moses' little boat and the pyramids (Ryan, 1997, p. 81). And so, for Morrison, the tar baby came to symbolise the black woman who can hold things together (Ryan, 1997, p. 81). So on the one hand, readers may be familiar with the folktale of the stealing rabbit who is trapped by the tar baby in order for the farmer to destroy the rabbit, but in Morrison's view tar signifies the exceptional femaleness of a woman who can hold things together (Ryan, 1997, p. 80). As such, the reader is presented with excess meaning, because tar can be interpreted as either or, or both and, or neither nor – leaving the reader with excess that makes straightforward interpretation difficult. Krumholz calls this situation an “ethics of reading” since the reader discovers in this confrontation that he or she carries the “responsibility for the meanings we create” (2008, pp. 270–271).

It is generally agreed that “tar” represents blackness, and many read Jadine's and Son's responses to tar to indicate their feelings about black identity. For Jadine, tar represents both black identity and the white stereotypical beliefs about blackness that threaten her (Krumholz, 2008, p. 271), while Son embraces black identity in all its forms for both himself and Jadine.

Yet another excessive stylistic element is that of perception. From this it can also be concluded that Morrison wishes the reader to recognise his or her responsibility is assessing the facts to move towards an interpretation of a possible meaningful reality/truth. On the other hand it also says that meaning is established based on what can be known, when in fact there may be more that is in fact, not known. For the reader sees

that perception in and around the estate is problematic. The narrator – expected to be reliable – assures readers that “only the bougainvillea” saw Jadine standing naked near the window (Morrison, 1997b, p. 89), but Gideon later tells Thérèse that he saw her (Morrison, 1997b, p. 106). At the same time, all the usual residents do not realise that every “Mary” whom Gideon brings to work at the house is the same Thérèse or sometimes Alma Estee. Readers also discover that things sometimes look different at different times or to different characters. For example, the scene of Valerian and Son laughing in the greenhouse is presented three times and perceived differently by each viewer. First Jadine sees and overhears them, seeing one of them making wild gestures (Morrison, 1997b, p. 127), second when she shocks Margaret with the news (Morrison, 1997b, p. 128), and third when the narrator reports the scene directly (Morrison, 1997b, p. 146). In this last description, Valerian merely laughed shortly – compared to Jadine’s vision of a gesticulating man, which could easily have been interpreted as a man being attacked, choking or angry – given she ran towards them with a pounding heart. In this instance the reader is first presented with what Jadine saw, which then differs from what she tells of the incident and only in the final instance does the reader get a first-hand explanation from the primary characters involved.

As in the initial discovery of Son in Margaret's closet, there are frequent discrepancies between what characters see, what they report, how other characters interpret the report, and what the narrator later verifies as the truth. The reader sees Margaret becoming hysterical when she discovers Son sitting in her closet “looking like a gorilla”, touching all her things and certainly planning to rape her (Morrison, 1997b, pp. 77, 129) compared to Jadine’s rational description afterwards reporting the

same incident from his perspective, namely that he fled from the kitchen and entered the first room and first closet to hide when he heard footsteps (Morrison, 1997b, p. 128). This picture corroborates with the other version of Margaret's story when she admits that he *simply sat still* in her closet holding a box of closed souvenirs in his lap (Morrison, 1997b, p. 129; my italics). These examples of open-ended stylistic devices referenced above make it clear that Morrison asks the reader to get involved in interpretation and meaning making because she does not provide closed narratives.

4.4 Responsibility and answerability in *Paradise*: Introduction

In *Paradise* the men feel responsible as a matter of their own identity for their women and daughters not to be touched/ violated by white men. In 1890 the Old Fathers built the Oven as a communal kitchen for the residents of Haven. The significance of this oven lay in the fact that this communal kitchen testified of the ability and success the men have shown to take care of their women. It symbolised the women's freedom from exposure to white kitchens where the slave holders would have had easy access to exploit slave women who would eventually give birth to children whose skin colour revealed the "tampering", which would have been a direct indictment for the men. The Oven thus "monumentalised what [the men] had done..." (Grewal, 2013, p. 45).

The community identity thus reveals a close connection between male and female roles. As Slaughter puts it, the women are "the repository of male honour" (2000, p. 11). In turn, the women have also begun to shrink into the roles the men have assigned for them. It would take the younger generation to question these limiting roles.

4.4.1 Community and identity

Paradise, more than any other novel, makes a clear connection on community level between the Self and the other, thus between “us” and “them” compared to “me” and “you” only. In *Paradise* the men collectively feel completely responsible for their women’s safety as a matter of their personal identity.

For the Old Fathers, who would establish Haven, the true test of their triumph and achievement lay in the fact that none of their women had ever worked in a white man’s kitchen. The Oven, as a kind of communal kitchen, is in stark contrast to the white kitchens where the rape of their women was “if not a certainty a distinct possibility” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 99). The thought of this danger to their women was too much for the men to even consider (Morrison, 1997a, p. 99). It is then most probably for this reason that the men choose to believe that the blue-blackness of their skin testifies of them as a pure, “untampered” race since 1770 (Morrison, 1997a, pp. 193-4).

For both the Old and New fathers, it was necessary to reject traces of the (white) Other in themselves in order to maintain the fiction of their racial purity. For the Old Fathers this meant they had to insist on the necessary fiction of their women’s safety working in the fields and thus safe from white masters. The truth is, as slaves the women were not free from violations by white slave masters, irrespective of whether they worked in the kitchen or in the field. Gauthier points out that miscegenation was both inevitable as well as unfortunately intrinsic to slavery (2005, p. 402).

Given the men’s obsession with the safety of their women it is possible to imagine

that even before the Fairly encounter, that any light skinned children born to their women would not have been welcome in their midst since these children would be testimony to the vulnerability of their women and their own inability to provide the necessary protection. Chances are therefore that the women aborted or disposed of these children themselves. It is Baby Suggs in *Beloved* who threw away the mulatto children she bore and only kept those fathered by her own kind.

The men's commitment to their blackness equals their sense of responsibility towards their women and children as these people are the litmus test of their own character and ability. It is for this reason that the New Fathers, the founders of Ruby, reject light-skinned women, calling them fast. The fact is light-skinned children had no choice in the matter of their skin colour nor their darker skinned mothers in avoiding rape, in those cases where there was no consent.

What is the reason for rejecting these innocent women and for maintaining fictions, which, with a bit of thought would prove to be impossible? The answer lies in the notion of "out there." "Out there" is regarded as highly problematic because it spells vulnerability and defencelessness – not only for the women, but also for the men.

For the 8-rock men, light-skinned African Americans are the visible manifestation of rape and racial tampering, making lightness ill-begotten and a badge of shame (Slaughter, 2000, p. 9). It is interesting to note that in the same way white racists considered the mixing of races as transgressing a divinely ordered separation of the races, so the fathers of Haven and Ruby consider this kind of transgression as

abominable. It is thus fair to conclude that the fathers are black racists presiding over a racist “paradise” (Slaughter, 2000, p. 9).

The founders of both Haven and Ruby, however, do not view themselves as racists. Their blood rule is considered a necessary safeguard in response to their communal experience. It is consequently their ability to provide sustenance as well as safety from white “kitchen” dangers that saw them decide to build a communal Oven when they found their first town and subsequently dismantle and carry it with them when they set out to find a new dwelling. According to the women the men value the Oven to a degree that they cannot understand (Morrison, 1997a, p. 103). But as already mentioned, for the men, the value of the Oven lies in it symbolising the magnitude of their ability to protect and provide for the women and especially the idea of safeguarding their women from “racial tampering”. As such it is also the “failure to provide for their dependants” that is at the root of their hurt in response to the Fairly rejection. The reader sees the impact this experience had on the men: “It was the shame of seeing one’s pregnant wife or sister or daughter refused shelter that had rocked them, and changed them for all time. The humiliation did more than rankle; it threatened to crack open their bones” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 95).

It was thus the shame that had rocked them – this possibility of their own impotence that had come close to cracking their bones. Brooks Bouson points out that in classic shame defence, the humiliation of the Fairly dismissal was seared into the memories of the Old Fathers and the people responded with reactive pride, which consequently had a formative influence on the collective Ruby memory and group identity” (2000, p. 196). It was not only a “world shattering” experience but also resulted in a paradigm shift that led to a “new world forming” experience (Slaughter, 2000, p. 6).

LaCapra articulates a similar sentiment as Brooks Bouson, arguing that:

something traumatic, disruptive, disorientating in the life of a people can become the basis of identity-formation... All myths of origin include something like a founding trauma... indicating that through a trauma one finds an identity that is both personal and collective at the same time. (Grewal, 2013, p. 43)

It is thus this notion of their identity linked to their ability to take care of their women and children that take priority over leaving the Oven behind in favour of taking more valuables – according to the women (Morrison, 1997a, p. 103). Since interfering with the Oven means interfering with their history and their identity that the suggestion to change or reinterpret the words on the Oven cause Deek to threaten the youth with shooting anyone who dared rephrase the wording.

Even before the Fairly encounter the 8-rock men did everything in their power to keep their dependants safe and considered themselves as a group of people able to maintain their “uncorruptible worthiness” of racial purity even if it meant begging for sweatwork (Morrison, 1997a, p. 193–4). They felt very much destined to become self-determined. In maintaining this self-determination the Ruby men refuse to see they have problems with each other and that a silent war was raging between the Morgans and Fleetwoods and those who sided with either (Morrison, 1997a, pp. 149-150). Instead they blame tensions and things going wrong in their town on the Convent women. As such they move away from constructing themselves in a spirit of coalition and instead choose to preserve their own identity by keeping their own members under control and keeping others whom they can’t control – out (Michael, 2002, p.

649).

The New Fathers unfortunately take their responsibility to an extreme and totalising extent when they not only protect and provide for their dependants but usurp their power to be self-determining and instead insist on defining the role of women and children. The youth are threatened with violence when they question the authority of the elders. Steward tells the youth, “If you, any one of you, ignore, change, take away, or add to the words in the mouth of that Oven, I will blow your head off just like you was a hood-eye snake” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 86). The idea that the youth want to get involved in the Civil Rights Movement is another threatening idea to the elders, which they summarily reject. Totalising-thinking destroys the tolerance that infinity thinking encourages.

Totalising others and reducing them to the Self’s image of them, in turn, renders the Self vulnerable to similar totalising and reduction. Totalising others thus perpetuates the cycle of destruction and hampers progress. In the description of the sleepless woman, her possible thoughts are described by the man hunting down the Convent women as her thinking of “... food preparations, war, or family things, or lift[ing] her eyes to stars and think[ing] of nothing at all” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 8). While these are legitimate things to think about, they suggest that beyond domestic concerns and who was away at war the man believes the woman probably has nothing else she could think about (De Voss, 2010, p. 29). From time to time the men indeed treat the women as if their only cares are domestic and as if being good is the only moral possibility for women. The women are thus kept limited to domestic functions, making more lace than could ever be practical, yet working at it like prisoners

(Morrison, 1997a, p. 53). In comparison, when the intruders at the Convent look around they see how “slack” the women are for not having canned fruit yet or completed other domestic tasks and think, “Certainly there wasn’t a slack or sloven woman anywhere in town and the reasons”, he thought, “were clear. From the beginning its people were free and protected” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 8). One can thus argue that the men’s thinking hold that women are to do what women are meant to do in order to deserve the protection of men. For is it not their so-called slackness that confirms the justification to annihilate the Convent women? Because ultimately men, as the protectors and providers, need to do their duty to kill some women in order to protect other women and children. But of course the reader can see the Convent women are merely pariahs. They function as scapegoats for the very failure of the men to allow their women and children freedom and for their protection-become-control, which resulted in rebellion in the children and competition and animosity amongst the men. It is their own failure they are thus projecting onto the Convent women.

This notion of who deserves protection and who not is further demonstrated when one compares Steward and his brother Elder’s response to a woman who might have been a prostitute. Elder demonstrates the 8-rock instilled value of responsibility for women, which they were honed on with no slack being cut just as they were required to understand their history and their future purpose as well as the responsibility it brought with it (Morrison, 1997a, p. 94).

The day Elder returned from fighting in Europe during WWI he saw two white men beat up a black woman. Although she seemed to be a prostitute, he defended her by

beating up the two men. But he ran away in order not to be jailed. To the day he died he deeply regretted that he had abandoned the woman (Morrison, 1997a, pp. 94–95). Separating the issues, Elder's stance was that, "Whatever he felt about her trade, he thought about her, prayed for her till the end of his life" (Morrison, 1997a, p. 94). Although his wife mended the torn uniform, he had her "remove the stitches, to let the jacket pocket flap, the shirt collar stay ripped, the buttons hang or remain missing" (Morrison, 1997a, p. 94). He furthermore gave instruction to be buried in that uniform with its rips on display (Morrison, 1997a, p. 95), demonstrating that he kept this memory alive and that he judged himself by this failure. Elder's response reveals three things in contrast to Steward's reaction to this story of Elder.

Steward only sees that the woman was a streetwalker and he even imagines the man's fist as his own (Morrison, 1997a, p. 95). In Steward's view such women deserve no protection, just like the Convent women, whom he views as prostitutes. Elder's reaction reveals that he can identify with that woman as an African American, sympathise with her as the weak, but most of all, that he sees himself as her protector, irrespective of her moral standing (De Voss, 2010, p. 33). In having failed this assaulted woman, Elder felt he failed himself – his view of himself, as he was taught – to be a protector of women. Steward, on the other hand, does not easily identify with the plight of the weak or with women whom he judges to have loose morals. Elder's attitude suggests that he would have condemned the way his brothers dealt with the Convent women (De Voss, 2010, p. 33). Elder seems to have been the type of man whom the Old Fathers recommended – the type who would not judge, rout or destroy the needy, the defenceless, the different (Morrison, 1997a, pp. 301–302; De Voss, 2010, p. 33).

The novel furthermore shows the difference between “power *over*” and power *with*” as exemplified by the nurturing relations of the women in the Convent compared to the patriarchal dominant power relationships in Ruby (Michael, 2002, p. 650). Examples of this patriarchal dominance are numerous in *Paradise*. One example that perhaps best epitomises this situation is when the men meet alone to discuss and resolve the complications in KD and Arnette’s relationship. None of the women involved are invited to this meeting and least of all Arnette. At the end of the meeting it is concluded that her father will “arrange her mind” for her (Morrison, 1997b, p. 61). Upon reflection of such occurrences Billie Delia recognizes “it’s about the stallions fighting over who controls the mares and their foals” (Morrison, 1997b, p. 150). This recognition captures the practice of responsibility, which has become control. Indeed, her father and the men of the community do not only want to arrange her mind, but also her life – whether she goes to College or not and whether KD marries her or not. Her responsibility and agency to therefore make her own decisions are dependent on the men consenting or not.

On the other hand, the Convent community and its care-giving environment can be viewed as one where agency is “co-produced” in the words of Messer-Davidow (Michael, 2002, p. 656). The communal space of the Convent, which is nurturing and dialogic, enables each woman to (re)construct an identity with greater possibilities for agency and thus the women are enabled to create more dynamic identities for themselves (Michael, 2002, p. 656). One example is Mavis, who is elated when she recognises how far she has come from her old Self, who could not manage a simple meal or defend herself (Morrison, 1997a, p. 171). For Michael, *Paradise* “radically destabilises the individualistic basis of identity politics” (2002, p. 656).

Like the Old Fathers, the New Fathers base a fundamental aspect of their identity on their ability to fulfil the responsibility they feel to provide for and protect their women and children. Gauthier points out that the men not only constructed female identity on idealised images of women, but also that they reciprocally constructed their own identity and sense of masculinity as protectors of such women (Gauthier, 2005, p. 402).

One can understand the protective position of both the Old and New Fathers:

Ten generations had known what lay Out There: space, once beckoning and free, became unmonitored and seething; became a void where random and organised evil erupted when and where it chose.... Out There where your children were sport, your women quarry, and where your very person could be annulled (Morrison, 1997a, p. 16).

They therefore vigilantly guard against outside intrusion that could disturb the tranquillity of their hard-won community. When a group of strangers drive in to town and intimidate Ruby women with sexual gestures, up to 25 of the townsmen would come out from wherever they were busy and intimidate such men with their slack hanging guns until the trouble makers left (Morrison, 1997a, p. 13). The men would not only come out of houses and backyards, but out of the bank and even shops – leaving anything they were busy with in order to protect their own (Morrison, 1997a, p. 13) – whether they knew the girls personally or not.

This kind of responsibility that aims to control and direct a harmful situation is healthy and wanted. But the type that controls and limits the freedom of choice of the

very people they are supposed to protect ultimately strip people of their power to respond as directed by themselves.

What makes such a response outstanding is the fact that the girls need not have depended on their own ability only. In fact, they probably did not know how to protect themselves in such situations. Without the assistance from the townsmen these girls would have been at the mercy of the outsiders with mischief in their eyes and who thought nothing of revealing their private parts to the girls in the middle of the street in an unknown town (Morrison, 1997a, p. 13).

This scenario demonstrates the power of standing up for others, which results in no harm done to them. On the other hand, if the girls could be intimidated and harmed in the streets of their own town with their townsmen witnesses to such intimidation, the further scenario could be that it is their relatives or friends who will also not be protected by the townsfolk.

On the negative side, their obsessive sense of responsibility to keep Ruby safe from outside influence cause the men to feel justified in their decision to attack the Convent. It is therefore ironic that while stalking the women in the Convent to shoot them dead at close range that an unnamed man thinks of the degree of safety the Ruby women enjoy.

The men prided themselves on the fact that the people of Ruby were free and protected so that a sleepless woman could go for a walk in the middle of the night and know that she was not prey for ninety miles around (Morrison, 1997a, p. 8). The men

are confident that a sleepless woman on a night walk would not be afraid at all and would remain completely at ease even at a foreign or sudden sound coming from the side of the road startled by a sudden sound because indeed she believes nobody and nothing consider her prey (Morrison, 1997a, p. 8).

In another ironic twist, Deek thinks of how he and Steward had protected their sister Ruby all their lives (Paradise, 1997a, p. 113). It is then when Deek, Steward and the other men find themselves losing their grip on their ability to protect their women and children – as they experienced in the face of the Fairly rejection – that they become aggressive. The image of the Fairly rejection “threatening to crack open the bones” of the 8-rock men is very powerful. This image suggests that the supporting structure and possibly the strongest part of their identity became so vulnerable that it could split apart. The 8-rock men experience their responsibility as both the backbone of their identity, but also the thing that renders them most vulnerable and most dangerous when threatened – as the reader sees Steward’s recall of the rejection makes him want to shoot somebody (Morrison, 1997a, p. 96; De Voss, 2010, p. 29).

4.4.2 Recognition of infinity calls for protection

Interesting to note is the scene in *Paradise* where Morrison presents the reader with a Levinasian notion of the Other’s infinity. By the time the reader is confronted with Connie’s imminent death, the reader knows she and Deacon had an intense affair many years ago. While the reader knows the end of the affair consumed her for a long time with regret and intense heartache, so much so that she lost her reason to live, the reader is not privy to Deacon’s experience of the break-up. What the reader comes to learn later is that he comes to realise that the affair threatened to upset not only his

own marriage and family, but nearly had him betray his entire genealogical line by having violated every principle Ruby/Haven is founded upon: he has broken the fundamental law(s): committed the sin of adultery; above all, risked light-skinned offspring and shamed the founding father, Big Papa (Morrison, 1997a, p. 279; Slaughter, 2000, p. 12).

In a moment of truth, looking at Connie just before Steward shot her, Deacon had a glimpse of infinity, which he cannot deny nor forget. In that moment he “sees in her eyes what has been drained from them and from himself as well” and that she saw something that “made the sun look like a fool” (Morrison, 1997a, pp. 289, 301). For an instant it was clear that she was in touch with another realm (Morrison, 1997a, p. 301). He realises there are things indescribable and uncontainable about her and that having reduced her to an object of blame he has missed out on the uniqueness of her person and he sees how much she deserved not to be killed – but rather protected, for he tries to stop his brother from shooting her (Morrison, 1997a, p. 289). His attempt to protect her at this moment failed, but this revelation changed him fundamentally as the reader sees him separate himself from his brother and respond differently from him. Right before Steward shoots Connie, Deacon looks at her and his life is altered to the point where he sees himself and no longer likes who he had become. Deacon acknowledges that he had become “what the Old Fathers cursed: the kind of man who set himself up to judge, rout and even destroy the needy, the defenceless, the different” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 302). The burden of not being a protector but a destroyer makes his life “uninhabitable” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 302). It is, however, only by his confrontation with the infinite about Connie that he discovered his true identity. In Steward’s attitude to the attack Deacon recognises his old Self, for it is a

new Deacon who can see that a man destroying the defenceless is not who he wants to be (De Voss, 2010, p. 52).

The implications of Levinas's philosophical critique of totality and infinity, by which he argues that reductive thinking forms the groundwork for totalising systems such as the Nazi regime that justifies the complete destruction of otherness through genocide – as is proven with the attack on the Convent. In its stead, Levinas argues for infinity thinking, which understands that the otherness of the other person not only stretches beyond their knowable characteristics but ultimately demands the Self's protection – as Deacon discovers too late. Knowledge of the other is always a reduction and Levinas and Morrison argue that it is always incomplete and can therefore be dangerous.

4.4.3 Rejecting the other/Other

Although the 8-rock men of Ruby speak of “the dung we leaving behind” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 201) with references to light-skinned African Americans, Morrison defends the value of this other/Other by portraying the detrimental consequences wrought on the Self by an unwillingness to recognise and accept the other/Other. Another result of rejecting the other/Other is that an incestuous custom of take-overs developed, which, as can be imagined results in its own detrimental consequences.

The two characters that violated the blood rule of marrying someone other than a fellow 8-rock member include Roger Best and Menu Jury. Roger married a “hazel-eyed girl with light-brown hair” named Delia. According to Jenkins her “polluted” racial history makes her unfit for membership in the 8-rocks's black community

(2006, p. 277). The fundamental law of not mixing with African Americans of lighter skin, is a taboo of the kind where they are not treated as the mere “other”, but indeed like the lesser “Other. Pat Best’s mother, who was “a Negro so fair she could pass for white,” was seen as the “first visible glitch” in a community that saw themselves as racially pure (Morrison, 1997a, p. 196). The men’s reluctance to assist in seeking medical help for Delia ultimately led to her death during labour. Retaliation from the community – for having flaunted this rule – resulted in the death of an innocent life.

Menus Jury returned home after the Vietnam War with a girl of mixed race but allowed his father and the other men to talk him out of marrying her. They told him his “pretty redbone girl” was not good enough for him; said she was more like a fast woman than a bride” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 278). He was, however, not brave enough to say goodbye to Ruby and make a home elsewhere with the woman he loved. But the result of him losing her was that he “charged” his father a neat price for that loss: “undisturbed acceptance of his [drinking] affliction” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 278). And after the attack on the Convent, he becomes a full-blown alcoholic.

Both these cases demonstrate the loss to individuals and the price families have paid because Others were not welcome in the community.

Because the Ruby patriarchs built their identity in retaliation of the rejection by white people and light-skinned people of African American descent, they believe their paradise is maintained by their separation, “purity”, and self-sufficiency. It should be noted except for the lost travellers and the white men who are mentioned to drive through town, white people do not feature in the novel. Instead, they are present

through the absence of white people in *Paradise*. When things in Ruby start to suggest deterioration they perceive the threat as coming from within as well as without. They consider internal conflict as coming from those sympathetic to the civil rights and black power movements, with their policies of dialogue and confrontation with the white world, rather than separation from it. The ultimate irony of the novel is that the patriarchs of this paradise become just as arrogant, harsh, violent and unjust as the white society they condemn and repudiate (Slaughter, 2000, p. 5). Their perceived threat from the outside is ascribed to occasional confrontations with the five women living at the Convent. In the section dealing with pariahs, I will consider this idea of an external threat in greater detail.

The prohibition of breaking the blood-rule caused further complications extending beyond the isolated cases of Menus and Delia.

While the patriarchs made the prohibition against racial mixing as fundamental as the law against incest, Pat Best notes, theirs is a very small community, and because they maintain their isolation, marriage partners are few. The bloodlines had become increasingly complicated to the extent that it is difficult to determine what is incest, or what is permissible. As she explains, “Bitty Cato married Peter Blackhorse, and since her daughter, Fawn Blackhorse, was wife to Bitty’s uncle, and since Peter Blackhorse is Billy Cato’s grandfather – well, you can see the problem with blood rules” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 196).

It is from Fairy DuPres that Pat learns about the “takeovers” – a relationship close to incestuous among members of the 8-rock families. The families maintain this practice

in order to preserve the purity of their bloodline and lineage. Pat notes a number of examples, such as the case of Sterl Cato who took over a woman named Honesty Jones and others of which one occurred in her husband's family. "His mother, Fawn, born a Blackhorse, was taken over by his grandmother's uncle, August Cato. Or to put it another way, Billy's mother was wife to her own great-uncle. Or another way: my husband's father, August Cato, is also his grandmother's (Billy Cato Blackhorse's) uncle and therefore Billy's great-granduncle as well" (Morrison, 1997a, p. 196).

While this practice limits the freedom of women to choose their husbands, given "August Cato was an old man when he took over little Fawn Blackhorse" (Morrison, 1997a, p. 196), what is more important is that it ensures the exclusion of outsiders – at the cost of women's freedom to choose their own partners and even men like Menus to be free to be with the ones they love. At the same time one can ask whether the four frail and dying children are not a result of this kind of inbreeding?

4.4.4 Stylistics and reader responsibility in *Paradise*

Morrison's open-ended stylistics often leave readers without answers and therefore clearly function to invite interpretation. In *Paradise* the reader never learns who the white woman is who they shoot first and at the end of the novel the reader is left with fantastical speculations about the afterlife existence or non-existence of the murdered women – or escaped women. In this section a few of these devices will be considered. Fultz's *Toni Morrison: Playing with Difference* (2003) discusses Morrison's narrative techniques and aesthetic intention as they relate to her ethics of responsibility (pp. 9; 110). Morrison's "ethics of responsibility" is, unlike that of Levinas, a narrative textual strategy intended to engage readers intimately in the narrative process. In her

reading of *Paradise* Fultz argues Morrison's textual strategies solicit the reader's active participation such as when Morrison sets up the reader's expectations and prompts the reader's search for the white girl (2003, p. 78).

As an insider (on her dark-skinned 8-rock father's side) and outsider (on the light-skinned mother's), Pat has unique access to information and functions to guide the reader through her telling, reading, writing and interpreting of the history of Ruby. To an extent, the reader is asked to focalise events through Pat's perspective; though she is of course also held up for the reader's scrutiny (Goulimari, 2011, p. 233). It is especially her reflections on herself that show that she, like the reader, is not necessarily reliable and objective.

A number of stories prevent readers from siding with any one version of events and calls upon readers to stay alert and critical during interpretation. Morrison even problematises the idea of interpretation by revealing how even the characters in the novel go about differently in interpretation. Page describes *Paradise* as an "inscrutable" book with "many versions and endless interpretative possibilities" (2001, p. 649). It invites the readers to "avoid the mistakes of the men of Ruby" and acknowledge "multiple responses" (Page, 2001, p. 649). Page argues that *Paradise* is a novel meta-fictionally addressing interpretation and, in the last four chapters, "construct[ing] an elaborate model of reading and interpretation" (2001, p. 643). While Pat's interpretations that are based on "logical deductions" and painstaking notes and charts, Lone's and Connie's interpretations are based on intuition – leaps of the imagination – and empathy (Page, 2001, pp. 644; 647).

To demonstrate this element of interpretive possibilities, the reader is presented with four versions of what the cellar floor may or may not have been used for: Anna examined it as closely as her lamp permitted and saw “the turbulence of females trying to bridle, without being trampled, the monsters that slavered them,” while Misner barely glanced at it and KD described what he saw as a pornographic display and another man called the drawings, “Satan’s scrawl” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 303). The reader had, however, previously witnessed the cellar floor used for a healing ritual where Connie painted the body silhouettes of the women (Morrison, 1997a, p. 263). One of the attackers also described a letter he saw as one “written in blood so smeary its satanic message cannot be deciphered” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 7). This letter had in fact been a letter written in lipstick, which Seneca had fought over and saved from wastebaskets because it was all she had of her past when she went from foster home to foster home (Morrison, 1997a, p. 128). Whereas some multiple described incidents seem to have a probable and meaningful truth, Morrison also presents us with unsolvable mysteries.

Anna and Misner’s eye-witness accounts of the Convent after the attack reveal her as having seen or sensed a closed door, while Misner describes whatever it was they saw as a raised window (Morrison, 1997a, p. 305). Neither they nor the reader gets to know whatever it is that transfixed them on the other side of either the window or the door. Morrison thus not only cautions readers against jumping to easy interpretations, she also makes it impossible to establish the meaning of everything one finds in her novels.

Morrison makes clear that her work remains open-ended for others to make meaning

of it and that it will not be prescriptive. In an interview with Gray, Morrison maintains, “It's not my place to define paradise for anyone else. That, in one way, is what [*Paradise*] is saying. It's not anyone's place to do that”. But what her work does suggest, as Krumholz argues, is that recognition of the Self in the other/Other creates common ground just as the perception of the other/Other in the Self creates new possibilities for self-knowledge (2002, p. 30) – and healing. *Paradise* shows that discriminating rejection of difference on a group level results in a paradise that destroys itself, losing its paradisaical nature (Krumholz, 2002, p. 21). As Morrison does not want to prescribe to anyone – what paradise is or should be, she also does not want to prescribe meaning, but she does want the reader to engage and take up responsibility for co-creating meaning with her. It is thus the readers’ responsibility to engage with questions such as: How does one define paradise, what does paradise entail and similar questions.

4.4.5 Pariahs in *Paradise*

As mentioned in Chapter Three, the juxtaposition of Jezebel and Eve conjoin seduction and contamination (Christiansē, 2013, p. 167). Considering the women are compared to both Jezebel and Eve, it is important to recognise it is not their deeds calling forth such judgement – it is rather the men’s accusations – that are of significance (Christiansē, 2013, p. 167). Like these Biblical figures, the Convent women are considered to be temptresses capable of causing the community of Ruby irreversible harm and it is believed their very existence threaten the harmonious continuation of Ruby. In combination with being called Jezebel and Eve the women are also referred to as bitches and witches and therefore both what can be explained (such as a man’s desire for a woman who is not his wife) to the inexplicable are

placed at the women's feet (Morrison, 1997a, p. 276). In justifying this assessment of the Convent women, the men directly connect the Fleetwood offspring and a threat to the Morgan blood lineage, given two Morgans: KD and Steward's sexual relations with women from the Convent.

In essence the five women from the Convent are blamed for the dissension growing in Ruby, the private and public challenges the patriarchs face, which include their troubles with the youth, the dead travellers who died in a blizzard on the road between the Convent and Ruby, which the patriarchs fear could get the town in trouble with white law – and most things in between (Morrison, 1997a, pp. 54; 83; 85–86; 277-278; 54).

Morrison makes clear the act of killing the women from the Convent was placing the blame on someone other than facing the Self and its role in its own troubles. In their view, thus, “everything requires their protection” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 12), which therefore justifies resorting to any means necessary to fulfil this responsibility. It is in order to make sure the “Out There” would not rot away their town that they attacked the Convent (Morrison, 1997a, p. 5). Morrison takes this logic to its full conclusion and portrays that after annihilating the women – and therefore what they consider to be the root of their troubles – things in fact became much worse in Ruby.

In addition to having overheard the men on the night of the attack on the Convent, Lone, the aged midwife, knows the citizens of Ruby very well. It is through her character that the reader learns the opinions and misconstrued evidence, which the

men based their murderous justification on. One man asked, “You think they got powers? I *know* they got powers” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 275).

Listening to the men plotting to attack the Convent, Lone recalls reasons these very men would want to blame their problems on the women. A comprehensive list includes grievances of all kinds, but especially grievances that can be blamed on the women as tempters seducing men into powerless submission or bewitching curses that cause unnatural disasters to strike the men or their households. Sargeant covets the Convent land and will therefore believe any piece of gossip that would justify getting the women off the land (Morrison, 1997a, p. 277).

According to Lone, Wisdom Poole would be looking for a reason to explain why he lost control over his brothers and sisters who used to worship him, but now instead chose to follow their own opinion only (Morrison, 1997a, p. 277). The fact that two of his brothers were in love with Billie Delia, who was friendly with the Convent women, meant they were the reason he lost control of his siblings (Morrison, 1997a, p. 277). That his brothers were even willing to kill each other over Billie Delia was “enough reason for him to go gallivanting off for the pleasure of throwing some women in the road” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 277).

Wisdom is, however, not the only person who wishes to control others in order to retain his position of authority or admiration. Numerous of the older men feel galled that the youth question them and “backchat” the way they do.

Similar to Wisdom, Jeff and Arnold Fleetwood have been “wanting to blame somebody for Sweetie’s children for a long time” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 277). The fact

that their children had been born sickly before the first woman even arrived at the Convent was of no concern to them and trying to find fault in their own blood was not a consideration (Morrison, 1997a, p. 277). Hence, again those witches could be blamed.

While Menus led on that he drank because of the trauma he experienced in Vietnam, he became an alcoholic after his father and the men talked him out of marrying his light-skinned fiancé. And having ended up at the Convent at one point to sober out, he may be ashamed of how they had to clean him up and listen to his laments over this lost love (Morrison, 1997a, p. 277). His father, Harper, therefore begrudged women with tampered blood for they were loose and caused you the loss of your children – even when your children lived with you (Morrison, 1997a, p. 278).

Of everyone the Morgans had the most grievances they wished to pin on the women from the Convent. KD's grudge stems from the fact that he was in love with Gigi for many years and even stalked her until she threw him out (Morrison, 1997a, p. 278). As for Steward, he blames Gigi for hurting and nearly destroying KD (Morrison, 1997a, p. 279). He thus automatically takes the side of his grandnephew – the only Morgan heir – not once considering that Gigi might never have wanted any serious dealings with KD from the start. But this affair “was a floating blister in Steward's bloodstream” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 279). Steward seethed for a second, more powerful reason as well. Years ago Deacon had a relationship with Connie, which lasted for months. At that time the unthinkable threatened to invade their lives. The possibility of “that hussy” falling pregnant and having a Morgan mixed-up child would have been betrayal of all they owed and promised the Old Fathers and treason against the

Ruby blood rule (Morrison, 1997a, p. p. 279). Deacon himself wishes to erase his personal shame and blame it on the woman he believed was the source of that shame (Morrison, 1997a, p. 279). He directs his aggression against Connie and the women at the Convent, despising what he fears and is ashamed of (Slaughter, 2000, p. 12).

We find that after the women were blamed, after the attack saw them all murdered, the difficulties the town faced simply intensified. The only conclusion to draw is thus that scapegoating the Other is simply a means of delaying confronting the Self. Moreover, whilst rejecting the Other, scapegoating the Other suggests the integral part the Other plays in the Self's understanding of itself, evaluation of itself and place in the world.

Morrison provides proof that the women were indeed merely scapegoats as the town's people erupt into the dissension that had already existed between them even prior to the Convent massacre. Seventy families held Wisdom accountable and reprimanded him daily for having scandalised their forefathers' reputation; Arnette and KD worked on a life goal of making life unpleasant for the Pooles, the Dupreses, the Sandses and the Beauchamps; Luther took every opportunity to insult KD; and the wordless, intimate connection between Deek and Steward seems to have been permanently severed (Morrison, 1997a, pp. 299–300). When Reverend Misner and Anna return to town after a short breakaway, they recognise that the aftermath “looked like the total collapse of a town” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 304). Reverend Misner furthermore muses that the murderous act, intended to purge the town of the ills brought about by “those witches at the Convent” instead ended up betraying everything the town was supposed to represent (Morrison, 1997a, p. 306). Morrison offers the poignancy of

this analysis through Misner's expanded thoughts. The men's actions reveal that far from "protecting their wives and children...[they were in fact] maiming them – and worse still – instead of taking ownership for their deeds – “they look elsewhere for the cause” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 306). He concludes, “this hard-won heaven defined only by the absence of the unsaved, the unworthy and the strange” endangered itself with this philosophy as the massacre had just revealed (Morrison, 1997a, p. 306). Not only are the schisms more pronounced than before, it is clear that the discontent stemming from the tight control will no longer hold for the flaws of the leaders have been revealed, thus dethroning them from the moral high ground they previously claimed.

4.5 Responsibility and answerability in *A Mercy*: Introduction

In exploring the theme of responsibility in *A Mercy*, four elements will be considered. The first is that all Morrison's novels deal with mercy according to a re-evaluation thereof in light of the publication of *A Mercy*. I will secondly discuss the phenomenon that most characters in the novel are orphans and specifically consider the impact of this characteristic on the characters or why it is that they can be considered orphans. Thirdly, the challenge of mothering affords us a unique view on responsibility, which I will consider at the hand of Sorrow and Florens's mother. In the final instance I will consider the question of responsibility as posed through specific elements in the novel.

4.5.1 Responsibility and mercy

The publication of *A Mercy* occasioned a reappraisal of Morrison's canon as it placed this novel in conversation with Morrison's earlier novels. Then in 2011 an international conference in Paris devoted itself to a re-examination of Morrison's

writing, which culminated in the publication of a MELUS special issue dedicated to an investigation of new directions in the criticism of Morrison's work. According to Montgomery, it is Morrison herself – more than anyone else – who provides the initial impetus for a re-reading of her canon in lieu of the publication of *A Mercy*, when she describes mercy as the “heartbeat” of *Song of Solomon* (2013, p. 1). According to Morrison in “Unspeakable Things, Unspoken”, “mercy” is the “unspoken wish of the narrative’s population” (Montgomery, 2013, p. 1). Morrison substantiated this claim by explaining that,

Some grant it; some never find it; one, at least, makes it the text and cry of her extemporaneous sermon upon the death of her granddaughter. It touches, turns and returns to Guitar at the end of the book – he who is least deserving of it – and moves him to make it his own final gift. It is what one wishes for Hagar; what is unavailable to and unsought by Macon Dead, senior; what his wife learns to demand from him, and what can never come from the white world as is signified by the inversion of the name of the hospital from Mercy to “no-Mercy.” It is only available from within. The centre of the narrative is flight; the springboard is mercy. (Montgomery, 2013, p. 1).

Montgomery takes it a step further by arguing that “if mercy is the unspoken wish within or the discursive springboard for *Song of Solomon*, then it resonates broadly as the silent, albeit impassioned collective plea on part of all the fictional characters who people [Morrison’s] novelistic universe” (2013, p. 1).

I concur with this position, as it is my contention that a specific reading of mercy aligns with the notion of responsibility for the other/Other based on recognition of the

value of the other person as well as an understanding of implicit interdependence. Defining “mercy” as “compassion or forgiveness shown towards someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm” brings one close to the Levinasian position that the Self recognises infinity in the face of the other and responds to the request, “do not kill me.” And so, the definition that furthermore carries synonyms such as “pity”, “compassion”, “kindness”, “tolerance”, “sympathy” and humaneness, which all suggest Morrison proposes relations between Self and other/Other to fundamentally include mercy and responsibility.

A Mercy advocates as much for mercy and responsibility in the plot as through the novel. By revisiting the USA's origins, Morrison is not suggesting the possibility of an alternative that could have been a utopia. It can rather be held that she points to consequences contained in the act of defining the other/Other. The novel asks how different what had become the USA could have been had different choices been made in response to Bacon's Rebellion (and thereby implying other decisive battles and causes that were taken up during the founding years).

4.5.2 Responsibility and orphanhood

Upon analysis one notices the majority of characters in *A Mercy* – whether free, indentured or enslaved – are orphans. This orphan status allows for important discussions in relation to responsibility. In exploring this idea we will consider the examples of Rebekka, Jacob and Lina.

Montgomery furthermore points out that a broader reading of *A Mercy* is necessary. Readers need to recognise the numerous forms of child abandonment in a period of

tremendous social change, as early settlers explore the Americas and build new societies (2013, p. 15). The reader therefore notices that the novel is populated with characters, both male and female of various races that have been cut loose from ties to kin and culture at an early age and struggle to define themselves and their place in the New World (Montgomery, 2013, p. 15). In addition to Florens, consider the boy with the yellow pig tail whose hands are tied to his ankles which the Ney brothers transport (Morrison, 2009, p. 37) and Scully, who inherited his mother's indenture (Morrison, 2009, p. 55). In a comparable act as Scully's supposed father who leased out Scully to his master, Rebekka's father essentially sells her off at the age of sixteen to be relieved of the responsibility of feeding her (Morrison, 2009, p. 72). It should be noted that indentured servants were essentially white slaves who traded their freedom for their passage to America (Morrison in Norris interview).

Jacob Vaark is himself the illegitimate child of a Dutchman and an English girl "of no consequence who died in childbirth" (Morrison, 2009, p. 30). Vaark remembers well his life as an orphan in the streets of England, his stint in the poorhouse, and his inheriting a patroonship in New Netherlands that transformed "a ratty orphan" into a landowner (Morrison, 2009, pp. 9–10). It is perhaps this personal history of his that causes him to have a soft spot for orphans of all kinds. When he recognises orphans and the vulnerable he takes pity on them and seeks to assist or protect them. One notices this kindness about him on a number of occasions when he recognises the plight of the other/Other and responds to it.

The reader sees Jacob, on his way to D'Ortega, interrupting his own journey to free a trapped young raccoon, which "limps off...to the mother forced to abandon it"

(Morrison, 2009, p. 9). As mentioned, his mother's death in childbirth meant Vaark was abandoned to the institutional life of an orphanage (Downie, 2009, p. 56). Also, on his way back from D' Ortega he intervenes when a horse is being whipped mercilessly. Jacob steps out of his comfort zone to intervene when he might have minded his own business. But he takes it upon himself to assist those in need because he realises if someone doesn't show mercy to orphans or those in distress the results could be fatal for he is of the opinion that there is no help for "waifs and whelps other than the generosity of stranger[s]" (Morrison, 2009, p. 30). For "even if bartered, given away, apprenticed, sold, swapped, seduced, tricked for food, laboured for shelter or stolen, they were less doomed under adult control" (Morrison, 2009, p. 30).

Given this thinking, Jacob accepts Florens in partial payment of her master's debt, first, because he is "struck by the terror in her [mother's] eyes" and secondly, because he "found it hard to refuse when called on to rescue an unmoored, unwanted child" – for he had accepted Sorrow a decade ago in a similar trading fashion when the sawyer wanted to get rid of her (Morrison, 2009, pp. 24, 31).

Lina's orphan status, on the other hand, has a different effect on her identity. For one, she did not wait for someone to define her – as was the case with Florens who needed either her mother or the blacksmith to define her. Lina "fortified herself by piecing together scraps of what her mother had taught her before dying" (Morrison, 2008, p. 46). She furthermore "sorted and stored what she dared to recall" in order to "perfect... her self-invention" (Morrison, 2009, p. 48). Though an orphan, Lina had to become her own woman because she no longer had a clan where the community lived for a purpose and according to a logic of life (Morrison, 2009, p. 48). She countered

the shame of having survived the destruction of her people by vowing never to betray or abandon anyone she cherished (Morrison, 2009, p. 47). Scully recognises Lina's loyalty flows from her own self-worth and is not a kind of submission to Rebekka or Florens. He cannot know what informs her self-worth and identity is tied to her commitment to her people as seen from her vow never to betray or abandon a loved one ever again (Morrison, 2009, p. 149).

It is in this spirit that Lina also does not warn Rebekka and Jacob of the foolishness in producing a selfish privacy, which is fragile because it means they have no recourse or consolation from any group – should they ever need it (Morrison, 2009, p. 56). Instead, her loyalty and “devotion cautioned her against impertinence” (Morrison, 2009, p. 57). In the end, without Jacob's presence and protection Rebekka would have to join a group, and if she were to die, the remaining three women would be considered as illegal squatters subject to all kinds of abuse (Morrison, 2009, p. 56).

Furthermore, both Lina and Florens suffer from mother hunger, “to be one or have one,” which had “remained alive, traveling the bone” (Morrison, 2009, p. 61). Having mothered herself through her self-invention Lina was able and eager to mother others (Monk, 2013, p. 3). A story the young Florens had often requested from Lina, was that of a family of eagles in which the mother fiercely guards over her brooding young. She lays her eggs in a nest far above and far beyond the snakes and paws that hunted them (Morrison, 2009, p. 60). One can thus see her aim is to care for her young out of the reach of evil. This fierce mother has a beak “like the scythe of a war god” and talons “sharpened on rock” (Morrison, 2009, p. 60). This sharp imagery paints the picture of defensive mothers willing to do anything to protect their young. Despite

these weapons, however, she cannot defend them against “the evil thoughts of man” (Morrison, 2009, p. 60). In the end the man strikes the eagle and sends her falling into eternity” (Morrison, 2009, p. 60), suggesting that mothers will fall short of protecting their young by the very nature of their position (Monk, 2013, p. 4). As such Lina cannot protect Florens from the blacksmith, just as “a minha mae” cannot protect her from the life of a slave. But the eggs hatch and live, just as she and Florens and Sorrow and the other motherless daughters do in the novel (Morrison, 2009, p. 61). Ultimately, the characters of *A Mercy* are all “orphans” who have to find their own way (Downie, 2009, p. 58).

Not only motherless, but also lacking a male master, render Lina, Florens, and Sorrow ‘unpropertied’ subject to no one’s dominion, which means they are subject to anyone’s dominion. In the end, Lina prays that Rebekka will not die, not out of desire or love but out of terror of being unclaimed in a predatory world (Conner, 2013, p. 157). Female and illegal, they would be interlopers, squatters, if they stayed on after Mistress died, “subject to purchase, hire, assault, abduction, exile” (Morrison, 2009, p. 56). In that world, one’s very existence was dependent on others – as was true for especially women and slaves or indentured servants.

As Downie therefore points out, when Jacob dies, all the women on the farm – including Rebekka, though to a lesser extent – are “open prey” (2009, p. 56). *A Mercy* is set in the 1690s, at a time when it was perilous to be without the “protection” of a man so that even independent women could be suspected of being witches and paternalistic relations between men and women were still the norm (Downie, 2009, p. 56). Widow Ealing experiences such a threat where the nearby clergy wish to get hold

of her pasture, but uses the ploy of suspecting her squint-eyed daughter of being a witch (Morrison, 2009, p. 109).

Another group of orphans include the “Europes” whom the Native Americans view as “cut loose from the earth’s soul” and therefore orphans (Morrison, 2009, p. 52). Because of their disconnect to the earth and therefore not having mercy or respect for the earth, it can lead to their own death as it did in the case of Jacob. When Jacob builds a large house, a “profane monument to himself” and falls ill, Lina is not surprised, thinking, “killing trees in that number without asking their permission, of course his efforts would stir up malfortune” (Morrison, 2009, p. 42). The reader, however, knows he catches fever from having disregarded not only nature as the Other, but also slaves in Barbados.

Interesting to note is that while the topic of orphanhood is clearly a major theme in *A Mercy*, it becomes retrospectively clear as also featuring prominently in *The Bluest Eye* and *Tar Baby*. In the former Cholly’s orphanhood, caused by rejection, renders him incapable of caring for his children despite the innate sense of responsibility he feels for them. It is to a degree Jadine’s orphanhood that sees her reject positive aspects of her culture such as nurturing others despite it leaving her feeling lonely and inauthentic.

4.5.3 Mothering as a special kind of responsibility

Motherhood is once again a major theme in a Morrison novel. In *The Bluest Eye*, two types of motherhood are compared. Mrs MacTeer’s mothering nurtures her daughters to find their strength in her care for them whilst Mrs Breedlove’s lack of mothering

results in multiple rejections and ultimately contributes to Pecola's madness.

Tar Baby portrays motherhood as the Self's overwhelming responsibility for an other/Other who is absolutely dependent on it. This relationship exhibits the complete vulnerability of a baby, comparable to the face-to-face encounter in Levinas where the Other's presence proclaims, "do not kill me".

Motherhood hardly features in *Paradise* and the extent to which it does, it is overpowered by male dominance.

A Mercy also presents the reader with different types of motherhood. Lina is the type of mother that Ondine would understand, for though Florens is not Lina's daughter she feels a certain kind of care for her and thereby mothers her. The lack of motherhood reduces Rebekka to someone over whom an invisible ash had settled. Motherhood for Florens' mother had meant making the heart wrenching decision to beg for a mercy for a daughter even if the decision would seem heartless to that very daughter.

In *A Mercy* the reader sees the radical transformation that takes place in Sorrow when she becomes a mother and how mother love would do the unthinkable as Florens's mother did.

Sorrow, who becomes an orphan when her father, a sea captain dies is found by a sawyer and impregnated by one of his two sons at the age of eleven. A melancholic personality and prone to wandering off, talking to herself (or her imaginary friend)

and called daft by other women, Sorrow is an easy target for men who want to take advantage of her. Though she lost the baby fathered by one of the sawyer's sons she again fell pregnant from a hurried encounter in a church pew (Morrison, 2009, p. 126) and delivered a healthy baby girl. Though known to be unreliable and one to perform her tasks poorly, "Sorrow's wandering stopped [too]. Now she attended routine duties, organising them around her infant's needs" (Morrison, 2009, p. 132). Not only does she become focused and organised, Twin (her imaginary friend who helps her survive her trauma) disappeared. With the birth of her child, Sorrow no longer seems to need an Other to anchor her. The other as her daughter anchored her from then onwards. For her child, Sorrow becomes Complete and renames herself accordingly. She introduces herself to her daughter, with the words, "'I am your mother,' she said. 'My name is Complete'" (Morrison, 2009, p. 132). This name change and change of focus suggest that becoming a mother has completed Sorrow (Monk, 2013, p. 2). According to Otten this "completion" can be understood that despite Sorrow's enigmatic nature and bizarre past, motherhood transforms her into a character absolutely determined to nurture and protect her infant (Otten, 2013, p. 88).

The significance of Sorrow's story in my view is that she went from "I need another – even the invention of another – to overcome trauma, cope with life and stay relatively sane or to "I am complete now that I have someone to love, someone to take care of, someone who is mine, someone who needs me, someone who is my responsibility. Sorrow is no longer the dependent one, but the one who lives up to a higher standard where she deems herself willing and able to take care of another. It is the recognition of her daughter's dependency and her unique role to be responsible for her child that causes Sorrow's identity to change.

Another significant mother figure in *A Mercy* is Florens's mother, *Mãe*. In a world where there is no protection, her mother chooses to give Florens away as part of her mothering instinct to protect her daughter.

Just as Sethe declares “if I hadn’t killed [Beloved] she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her” (Morrison, 2005a, p. 236), Florens’ mother knows that “there is no protection” (Morrison, 2009, pp. 160–161) for her daughter unless she sacrifices her. She sees that Florens’ breasts “are rising too soon” and that “[Florens] caught Senhor’s eye” (Morrison, 2009, p. 160). While her mother is older and has experienced more in life that can sustain her through difficulties, Florens is only eight years old, an innocent child still unaware of the depth of depravity and cruelty life had in store for a young slave girl. For the mother, the rape from when she and the other women were “broken in” by the other male slaves (in a curing shed on demand from D’Ortega) resulted in a child whom she loved and therefore soothed the trauma she had endured (Morrison, 2009, pp. 163–164). But she would not want the animal which is in D’Ortega’s heart to be unleashed over her virgin daughter and then be a helpless witness to that continued rape.

Although her mother cannot provide protection, she tried to give Florens a life with “a difference” (Morrison, 2009, p. 164). The difference to which she refers is Jacob’s difference from D’Ortega. Unlike her master, Jacob sees Florens as a human child (Morrison, 2009, p. 164) without the lust, which is in D’Ortega’s look – biding his time until he cannot resist Florens’s rising breasts any more.

The use of the word difference extends to a vital distinction that should be made between the idea of “mercy” – understanding mercy as “large-scale compassion or pity or grace” and small mercies (Morrison in Neary interview). The notion of “the large world of people doing nice things or... religious versions of God’s mercy,” is thus not what is intended with the word, hence the addition of the article to talk about “a mercy” meaning simple human gestures that could make a world of difference in another’s life.

Unlike Jacob or Florens’ assumption that her mother abandoned her, *Mãe* instinctively recognised an opportunity for Florens to have a better life and she seized it. It was her motherly duty which obliged her to offer her child to a man who seemed would not cause her the type of harm she would suffer at Jublio – whether from the master himself or from rape on demand. Given she could not free her daughter from slavery, she at least attempted to postpone the harsh realities Florens would inevitably be vulnerable to.

Insightfully, *Mãe* tells the reader what she can never communicate to Florens that she recognised she had one chance to help Florens to a safer place and so she jumped at the opportunity:

Once chance, I thought. There is no protection but there is difference...
 Because I saw the tall man see you as a human child... I knelt before him...
 Hoping for a miracle. He said yes. It was not a miracle. Bestowed by God. It was a mercy. Offered by a human. (Morrison 2009, pp. 164-165)

Removing Florens from a place she knows to be dangerous, *Mãe* believes that the

pain of separation will be less damaging for Florens than the abuse she would suffer at Jublio. In *Mãe's* verbal text, Morrison explores the trauma of a parent who “has no control over what happens to [her] child” (Morrison “Bondage”, Morrison, 2008; Rice Bellamy, 2013, p. 27). After kneeling in the dust imploring Vaark to take her daughter, *Mãe* declares that her heart remains in the dust “until you understand what I know and long to tell you” (Morrison, 2009, p. 165). It is thus for no other reason than to be the best mother possible under the limiting circumstances that this mother begs Vaark to take her daughter in partial payment for D’Ortega’s debt.

Mãe's voice delivers her closing monologue to explain that the action her daughter understands as abandonment is actually “a mercy” (Rice Bellamy, 2013, p. 27). As much as there may have been no time to explain her reason for offering Florens, it might have been difficult and even incomprehensible to Florens since there is no indication in the text that Florens has experienced any sexual awakening whilst a daughter living with her mother. As she does not know of the sexual exploitation at Jublio she could not imagine that to be the reason for her mother sending her to a place she hoped would be safer. Yet, after her own experience with the blacksmith she recognises that Lina does not need to warn her of the danger of being alone with angry, drunk men, which the Ney brothers would be when they return to find their cargo of slaves and indentured servants missing (Morrison, 2009, p. 39). Thus while there was enough time to explain to her daughter why *Mãe* is sending her away, it can be argued Florens was too young to comprehend her mother’s reasoning.

The mercy her mother could arrange for her was unfortunately only that – a mercy able to protect her for a limited period of time. In due course the hardness of her

footsoles would testify of her confrontations with the thorns of life. By implication Florens' movement from tender to hard feet marks her "trajectory to complete enslavement" having become unprotected against its harshness (Cantiello as quoted in Rice Bellamy, 2013, p. 26). The hardness of her feet then becomes the physical manifestation of the internal reality of both her psychic bondage and hardened heart. Although it declares her physical presence and determination to survive, *A Mercy* leaves Florens with a very uncertain future (Rice Bellamy, 2013, p. 26). At the end of *A Mercy*, the reader recognises that Florens' trials have not ended and that she and her descendants will live in bondage for generations without the hope of release (Rice Bellamy, 2013, p. 17). Her impending sale (after Jacob's death) portends her entrance into the larger world of slavery unprotected from there onwards by her mother's efforts to place her with a master who sees her as a child (Rice Bellamy, 2013, p. 26).

4.5.4 Responsibility and answerability in and through *A Mercy*

Jacob is comparable to the wilfully ignorant Valerian in *Tar Baby* and he too reaps devastating consequences that do more than turn him into an old man in a day, but that kills him and destroys the life he and Rebekka had built. Accounting for decisions executed leaves nobody free. In the end each one is answerable for decisions they have made. As the study has shown thus far, taking responsibility and recognising the worth of the other/Other which allows for treating them as infinite, and as identifiable as constructive for the self results in answerability that is more favourable to both the Self and the other/Other. The alternative, on the other hand, often prove detrimental.

When the reader first encounters Jacob, it can be argued that he represents the possibility of an alternative white maleness that does not take advantage of arbitrarily

constructed race and gender privilege (Babb, 2011, p. 154). His view of himself, is similar to Valerian that he is a good, humane person (Morrison, 2009, p. 25). When Jacob reflects on the injustice of the trade, he chooses to believe he was “forced to settle for a child as a percentage of what was due him,” thereby rationalising the purchase as a benevolent deed (Morrison, 2009, p. 30). Yet the reader knows he quickly forgot the terror in the mother’s eyes and assumed she was throwing the child away when the reader knows this is the furthest thing from the truth (Morrison, 2009, pp. 24, 32). It is rather the seduction of material wealth that is the true motivation for his entrance into the slave trade. His visit to Jublio subverts his potential to be the kind of privileged white male who does not place his own interests at the expense of others. While Babb ascribes this seduction to excessive greed, McKee takes it a step further and argues the greed is born from a biological mis-inheritance: his orphanage” (2013, p. 93). While his personal history bespeaks his orphanage, Lina’s Native American worldview holds that like all Europeans, Jacob was “cut loose from the earth’s soul, [they] insisted on purchase of its soil, and like all orphans [they] were insatiable” (Morrison, 2009, p. 52), suggesting no amount of material gain would suffice. Indeed, at the end Jacob explains to Rebekka that it is not “need” that drives him to make more money or build a bigger house – it is simply “want” (Morrison, 2009, pp. 86–87).

Jacob fails to recognise he is already a participant in the slave trade through the captive women in his own house. But he dangerously misses the similarity between his coveting of material prestige as conveyed through his desire for a house, “not as ornate as D’Ortega’s. None of that pagan excess, of course, but fair. And pure, noble even, because it would not be compromised as Jublio was” (Morrison, 2009, p. 25).

Yet the reader learns it was only a matter of time before Jacob too wanted excess and built what Lina called “a profane monument [of a house] to himself” (Morrison, 2009, p. 42). Jacob’s naivety is actually wilful ignorance. Babb makes a valid point to argue that Jacob’s fall from grace by believing he could participate in the currency of human bodies yet still remain noble because he would not be cultivating them as an immediate cash crop (2011, p. 155).

It is, however, his direct participation in a system he initially despises, which leads him (and his wife) to contract the pox. The silent and scarred bodies of Jublio are not only to be found at Jublio, where Jacob judges D’Ortega for “trading in flesh” (Morrison 2009, p. 20), but also on the sugar plantations in Barbados where his later wealth derives from (Morrison 2009, p. 33). Hence, the judgement he metes D’Ortega for eventually not only becomes judgement he becomes guilty of, but the very guilt that leads to his own death. When judging D’Ortega he considered the Other whom D’Ortega mistreated and concludes that he is completely unlike such a character. Like Valerian, he sees himself as a good man – as the type to easily take pity on the weak and helpless. Others seem to see him as such too since the sawyer looked for someone who would not harm Sorrow and as Florens’s mother could see he “had no animal” in his heart. But at the heart of him lay the potential for greed, and at the heart of greed lies the willingness to enslave and/ exploit the other/Other in the interest of the Self.

Whereas the reader initially encounters a Jacob who intervenes to alleviate the misery of first a raccoon and then a horse, his care for nature seems to have disappeared by the time he chooses to build his third house. According to Lina, Jacob’s first house was made of green wood and had a simple dirt floor. His second house was stronger

and therefore good enough. The third house, which was “bigger, double-storied, fenced and gated like the one he saw on his travels,” was simply an invitation to malfortune for the number of trees it took and the fact that he did not ask permission for it (Morrison, 2009, pp. 41-42).

Both Lina and Rebekka saw the change in Jacob from a simple man to one who would wastefully fell trees, which reflected his gradual corruption and the house that would be a symbol of rank more than anything else – given he did not even have children to fill it with (Babb, 2011, p. 155).

More than blaming his destruction of nature in his own interest, a clearer link between his death and its cause is found in his connection to his new wealth, which enables him to build such a huge house. For it is from Barbados where he trades in rum that he catches the pox and spreads it to Rebekka.

Therefore, despite having deluded himself into thinking that “there was a profound difference between the intimacy of slave bodies at Jublio and a remote labour force in Barbados. Right? Right” (Morrison, 2009, p. 33), the truth played out as a “wrong, wrong.” After his first concession, Vaark’s fall is imminent. As Babb explains, it reveals he had become “the kind of man who set himself up to judge, rout and even destroy the needy, the defenceless, the different” (Morrison, 1997a, p. 302), as did the New Fathers of Ruby in *Paradise*.

An additional group pointed to in terms of their responsibility in the slavery saga is a group not often mentioned in this debate. The novel indirectly explores the

involvement of Africans in the process of enslaving other Africans. In effect, Morrison points out that slavery was not as simple as the Self enslaving the Other. No. Wars between African tribes lead to tribes capturing and selling each other to Europeans. *Mãe* explains:

Insults had been moving back and forth to and fro for many seasons between the king of we families and the king of others. I think men thrive on insults over cattle, women, water, crops. Everything heats up and finally the men of their families burn we houses and collect those they cannot kill or find for trade. Bound with vine one to another we are moved four times, each time more trading, more culling, more dying. We increase in number or we decrease in number until maybe seven times ten or ten times ten of we are driven into a holding pen. There we see men we believe are ill or dead. We soon learn they are neither. Their skin was confusing. The men guarding we and selling we are black. (Morrison, 2009, p. 161-162)

This was not a simple process, in fact it required great effort and extremely brutal treatment of people like themselves, and above all a great number of people being killed or dying in the process before anyone got to the “houses built on water”. And yet Africans completed their brutal tasks of selling off their own.

What this point illustrates is the same as was illustrated in *Paradise* namely that the positions of the Self and the Other can easily be exchanged as both have the potential to do the injustices – and the good – the other is capable of. This point is further emphasised by Florens’s mother’s observation that, “I know it was the [whitened

one's] pleasure to freshen us with a lash but I also saw it was their pleasure to lash their own. Unreason rules here" (Morrison, 2009, p. 162).

4.5.5 Stylistics and reader responsibility in *A Mercy*

Analysing the role of "re-memory", a term by Morrison, Rice Bellamy makes a compelling case for an understanding of the ways in which *A Mercy* leaves the characters haunted in a space of survival and the readers challenged as witnesses, hereby investigating the latter's responsibility (Montgomery, 2013, p. 8). Goulimari agrees with this position as she too argues that Morrison rethinks the political ideals of the modern Western world in *A Mercy*. For though it is set in the late 17th century it addresses the writer's and the reader's responsibilities in the contemporary world (Goulimari, 2011, p. 142).

Considering the haunting presences that remain at the end of *A Mercy* it can be argued the novel reaches from the characters in it to the readers of it. The two people whose longing to communicate reach for each other most profoundly is that of Florens and her mother. But the reader learns they never do get to hear each other as Florens declares, "I will keep one sadness. That all this time I cannot know what my mother is telling me. Nor can she know what I am wanting to tell her" (Morrison, 2009, p. 159).

Instead, more than three centuries after 1698, it is the contemporary reader who is privy to both the reasoning of what one might call an abandoning parent and the torment of her abandoned child (Rice Bellamy, 2013, p. 14). It is to the reader Morrison directs the haunting remains of a mother who wishes to explain to her daughter why she offered her in partial fulfilment of her master's debt. It is also the

reader only who reads Florens's inscription on the walls of Jacob's mansion, which is where Florens, secretly taught to read and write by a Catholic priest, writes her story.

Having survived the traumas of her childhood and youth, Florens wrote a text that asserts her subjectivity and bespeaks her growth from someone with "feet [that] are useless, will always be too tender for life and never have the strong soles, tougher than leather, that life requires" (Morrison, 2009, p. 2) to someone who tells her mother, "Mãe, you can have pleasure now because the soles of my feet are hard as cypress" (Morrison, 2009, p. 159). Despite having become hardened (her soles) and gone from docile to fearless and feral (Morrison, 2009, p. 144), thus displaying a hardened soul as well, this may not be enough for her to alter her circumstances. While some readers may call Florens' ability to tell her story a "tentative triumph," a more historically situated analysis of the text makes it difficult to imagine a happy ending for the story of a young female slave at this time in history (Bellamy, 2013, p. 26).

There is an ironic similarity between the fragile existence of Florens and the raccoon Jacob rescued. For after its rescue "the raccoon limped off, perhaps to the mother forced to abandon it or more likely into other claws. (Morrison 2009, p. 9). Not only did Florens's mother have no other means to protect her daughter against the D'Ortegas but to abandon her to Jacob, Florens's future as a female slave when the world was feral inevitably held impending danger.

Not only does the reader know Rebekka has put Florens up for sale (Morrison, 2009, p. 153), we also know the slavery was but in its infant state. The reader is haunted by

the knowledge that Florens's status would become more precarious with time as we know two centuries of slavery with its dehumanising and destructive forms of bondage and an additional century of legalised segregation of persons of African descent would still follow (Rice Bellamy, 2013, pp. 15, 26).

While the New World was fluid in the seventeenth century and it was unknown what it would become, it had since crystallised into something definite. Jacob's decision to enter the slave trade and buy into the exploitative capitalist model resulted in not only his own death but it also left each woman vulnerable to the larger forces of their social environment (Babb, 2011, p. 159). Babb argues that the Vaark farm is laid to waste by what dooms much in Morrison's work: "adherence to egocentric individualism, isolation, and removal from community" (Babb, 2011, p. 159; Rice Bellamy, 2013, pp. 19-20). By extension this study holds Morrison's work warns against the individualism by which the Self treats the Other as if the two are disconnected.

Writing on haunting in *A Mercy*, Rice Bellamy begs the questions, arguing through the words of Florens and her mother: who really is the intended audience for their words and what are we, the readers, to do with these haunting presences? (2013, p. 15). The novel makes clear that both Florens's written words, addressed to her estranged lover, and her mother's spoken words, directed toward her, will not be received by their intended audiences. I concur with Rice Bellamy, Morrison leaves these words to haunt her contemporary readers and beckons them to receive them and to restore the personal and familial losses of American slavery (2013, p. 15). I want to go further and argue it is not only the American reader being addressed, but all

readers and every individual forming part of the human population that *de facto* has relations with others/ Others. The question addressed to the contemporary reader is thus really to evaluate where “we” are today, and how far “we” have come from a world in which the systems and people who kept them in place, left a mother no recourse but to abandon her daughter in the interest of safety, which she as the mother was powerless to provide. And finally, what is the reader’s part in all of this? The reader is the “we” and includes people from all walks of life – from the individual student, to the church, to government, the club, the association, and on an on to include all who can show mercy or be shown mercy to.

With reference to the numerous orphans populating *A Mercy* the reader has seen that while Morrison’s characters struggle to define themselves against experiences of abandonment, servitude or enslavement they enable Morrison to explore the possibilities and perils of self-definition at the founding of what would still become the USA (Rice Bellamy, 2013, p. 18). Morrison, moreover, also calls attention to the continuities between that time and our own (Blondiau, 2015). As such, the question can thus be asked to the reader of *A Mercy*, what alternative future do we wish to see? Moreover, what has Morrison suggested we recognise about responsibility in our own lifetimes in relation to the other/Other – whether it be those populating the natural world or the social world?

Chapter Five is dedicated to a comparative discussion of responsibility in all four novels.

CHAPTER 5

IDENTITY AS RESPONSIBILITY IN MORRISON'S FOUR NOVELS:

CONNECTING THE NOVELS

Given this study investigated themes of identity construction and responsibility in four novels published over four decades, spanning the late 1600s to the late 1900s, this chapter aims to highlight connections between the four novels in order to demonstrate the consistency of the arguments as believed to be propounded by Morrison through her fiction.

5.1 Community as dialogical partner

The connectedness between people is advanced through the focus on and significance of communities. All four novels discussed, portray community as a large part of identity construction.

In *The Bluest Eye*, community contributes to construct a detrimental self-image for the African-American who is encouraged by the community's endorsement of media images to measure him/ herself by white standards. At the end of the novel, Claudia, the adult, places the blame for Pecola's descent into madness on the community for having treated Pecola as a pariah by having projected their own insecurities and vulnerabilities as African Americans onto her. Various aspects of community life and opinion are portrayed through various characters – from the land-grant student, Geraldine, who teaches her son the difference between coloured people and niggers and chases an innocent Pecola out of her house with the words “Get out,... you nasty little black bitch” (Morrison, 1999, pp. 67, 72) to Mr Yacobowski, the white shop

owner who chooses not to see Pecola “because for him there is nothing to see” (Morrison, 1999, p. 36). Messaging like this and treatment by the community ranging from bullying, false accusations, being ignored in school, and loneliness due to a lack of friends all contribute to Pecola losing her mind when her father rapes her and her mother fails to support her upon learning of this abuse. Whilst the community offered help in the form of the MacTeers taking Pecola in after Cholly rendered her homeless and whilst Pecola found friends in the prostitutes, this was not enough to counter the destructive messaging and experiences Pecola has been required to stand up against alone.

Community functions in a different way in *Tar Baby*. Jadine faces the dilemma of experiencing herself having to choose between two worlds, which she finds mutually exclusive, not recognising the possibility of reconciling chosen aspects from the two cultures. She experiences the African American culture and the white Eurocentric culture as two opposing cultures. Being African American herself, yet moving in white, educated and affluent circles in Europe causes Jadine to feel lonely and inauthentic in response to her confrontation with the dark-skinned African woman in the bright yellow dress. At the same time, sensing her guardians wish for her to take care of them now that they are old makes her feel obligated to take up a nurturing role she is not willing to do at the time. Similarly the night women beckon her to take up her role as a nurturer by becoming domestically and communally responsible for other people, when she, like Sula in *Sula* wants to make herself (Morrison, 2004, p. 92). Jadine experiences this option as nightmarish as it seems backward and limiting to the person she wants to be. More than questioned, she feels challenged in her identity and the person she has worked very hard at becoming. By the novel’s end it

seems Jadine can't imagine reconciling the best of these two worlds, but that she should choose between them. It seems that when she and Son end their relationship, she not only returns to Paris to get away from him but to flee back to a part of herself she is familiar with. It can be argued, however, that she returns to an "inauthentic" part of herself, which since being made conscious of it through her encounter with the spitting woman in yellow, she will have the opportunity (subsequent to her arrival in Paris) to discover – or at least work on – a more authentic identity in relation to the cultures she finds herself torn between.

Of all four novels, *Paradise* portrays identity construction in relation to community bonds the most, portraying it as an important enabler. The driving force and justification for much that happens in Ruby is motivated by group identity – as perceived by the men and challenged by the youth. Morrison leaves the reader with the clear message that community identity based on exclusion of the other/Other is dangerous. Instead tolerance of difference and the recognition of the Self's ability to display the same characteristics as the very Other they constructed their identity in response to (the light-skinned Fairly community), can result in their own destruction.

While the Ruby community rejects the other/Other, the Vaark household lives in isolation from the other/Other. For both groups the consequences are detrimental. Yet Morrison portrays the value of community for fortifying the Self by enabling identity construction through Lina and Florens's mother.

Hence, one notes the central place community plays in Morrison's fiction. It is presented as a dialogical partner in informing the Self. Whereas *Paradise* and *The*

Bluest Eye emphasise the element of responsibility as guilt, *Tar Baby* emphasises the individual's answerability in relation to communities. *A Mercy*, on the other hand, presents the reader with the risky/ detrimental consequences of living in isolation from community.

On the matter of community it is worth reiterating Levinas's stance. Levinas calls his ethics "of responsibility" an ethics of sociality. Levinas and Bakhtin insist that ethics exists in an open and ongoing obligation to respond to the other/Other. It is for this reason that Bakhtin speaks of an ethics of "answerability" and Levinas of an ethics of "responsiveness". The Self is always already obliged to respond to the other/Other even before there is a question asked as experienced in the very face-to-face encounter of sociality (Nealon, 1997, pp. 131–133). "First philosophy" – as the meaning making principle of being – for both these theorists are thus found within the "community of humanity" where answerability or responsibility is literally experienced concretely before any form of abstract ontology or prescriptive morality (Nealon, 1997, p. 134).

5.2 The humanising choice

With her wide-spanning oeuvre Morrison has been an intellectual and novelist of note. Her work offers readers a manifesto for social change through its content and stylistics that invite readers firstly to become involved in the interpretive act and secondly, to take ownership of his or her response-ability to what is understood in and through the novel(s). Morrison's authorial voice has gone beyond exclusive engagement in acts of representation, which would be limited to the mere predicating of words and actions of fictional characters. Instead, she constantly undertook various

“extra-representational” acts. These involve “reflections, judgements, generalisations about the world ‘beyond’ the fiction, direct addresses to the narrator, comments on the narrative process, allusions to other writers and texts” (Wood, 2003, p. 86). As such Morrison has reached beyond the fictional world to the non-fictional world to partake in social and intellectual debates aimed at effecting change (Wood, 2003, p. 86).

By drawing from the theories of Bakhtin and Levinas, this research argued Morrison’s fiction and non-fiction make a compelling case for the humanity of the other/Other – as based on the dialogical relationship between Self and other/Other. As such, Morrison enables the Self to recognise the humanity of the other/Other when it discovers its own reflection, its own likeness, a similar infinity – in the other/Other.

One finds an ethics of responsibility as central in Morrison’s oeuvre by which her fiction systematically destabilises the various forms of difference that function to promote inhumanity towards not only African Americans but all others/ Others (Fultz, 2013, p. 110). Fultz finally concludes that Morrison’s fiction intends to “reshape our consciousness and excite our moral sensibilities” (2013, p. 110).

Morrison’s novels challenge us to re-evaluate how we view each other’s humanity. Totalising the other/Other results in the misrecognition of both the transcendence of the other person and the Self’s dependence on the other/Other.

With the impetus of deconstructing racism driving Morrison’s political novelistic agenda, a simple definition to be recognised is that racism is privilege for the one at the expense and oppression of the Other. Racism is thus impossible without involving

a relation between the Self and the Other. Based on this linguistic analysis and real-life inevitability, it can be argued that Morrison is promoting a different kind of relation between the Self and the Other.

It can further be argued that the political import of Morrison's novels is in line with the value of "humanising" readers. The matter of "humanising" a reader and humanising characters are indicative of the purposefulness of Morrison's writing. Racism is dehumanising because it reduces a person to one characteristic of theirs, namely their race and ignores the rest of their characteristics, which include similar and different characteristics they share with those who objectify and reduce them to raced beings.

This element of dehumanising the Other corresponds with the Levinasian idea of objectifying the Other, i.e., making the other an object of the Self's thinking or analysis and seeing only part of the Other and ignoring all the rest that makes the Self conscious of the Other's irreducibility and uncapturable infinity.

There are critics that convincingly read *Paradise* as an allegory of white America. Widdowson lays out the complex historical chronology of *Paradise* and argues the novel is a fictional intervention in contemporary American historiography (2001, pp. 317–318). Drawing from post-colonial debates on identity-building Fraile-Marcos argues *Paradise* as a mirror to American history since the African American protagonists both reproduce and invert cultural codes that have been identified as "American" (2003, pp. 4, 6). For Dalsgård the Ruby community lives its own version of the American exceptionalist narrative (2001, p. 236). Gauthier also argues that

Ruby is a microcosm of [mainstream] America (2005, p. 396). Jenkins, however, argues the novel is a critique of “black American nationalism” and as such focused on intraracial concerns compared to interracial affairs (2006, p. 274). It is my contention that, in addition to both of these positions, a third is defensible as well. This third position, which has been the focus of this study, is one of interhuman relations between Self and other/Other – irrespective of race – or even gender, class or other forms of classification. This latter distinction is thus a philosophical extrapolation intended to address and inform the human-to-human relation. In addition to *Paradise* this study argues that all four Morrison’s novels put forth a philosophy of openness to difference and thus of the value of the other/Other as a dialogical necessity for both the Self’s construction and benefit.

Given this utopian vision, the question has been asked about the practicality of such a philosophy. The answer has not been straightforward. In writing about founding a social vision, Buell reminds us that Levinas holds that “the norm which must continue to inspire and direct the moral order is the ethical norm of the interhuman” because Levinas also argues that morality governs the world of political interestedness (1999, p. 15). This ethical norm, however, “cannot itself legislate for society or produce rules of conduct whereby society might be revolutionised or transformed” but which nonetheless is the “foundation” of the “moral-political order” (Buell, p. 15). This form of social justice inevitably means society “must accept all forms of society including the fascist or totalitarian” as discrimination against them would seemingly not be in line with what is being advocated. And herein of course lies the problem.

This mode of thinking invites numerous criticisms of which I will only briefly

consider two. First, it is self-contradictory: it insists on anti-foundationalism, but it supplies a foundation, namely interhumanity (Buell, 1999, p. 15). One can secondly ask how moral precepts can form the basis of social collectives and ensure a reformed society if an obligation to honour this claim of the other/Other sounds oppressively homogenising, if not totalising. According to Irigaray, Levinas's other does not include woman specifically (Buell, 1999, pp. 15–16).

Despite the critique there is much to learn from this foundationless foundation or open-endedness to be found in the literature-and-ethics conversation as advocated by Levinas and Morrison respectively. Beavers makes the valid point that presenting ethics in this fashion is not to discover the truth of ethics, but to make an appeal for ethical transformation. Levinas invites us to listen, not only to what he has to say, but, more importantly, to the voice of the other/Other, who sanctions all of our moral obligation. A similar argument can be made on behalf of Morrison's fiction when read through the lenses of Bakhtin and Levinas, for Morrison defends the decision to write open-ended stories despite critique of its insufficiency to provide clear meaning let alone moral direction.

In her Nobel Prize lecture, she acknowledges that language can never live up to life once and for all and it should not either. For "language can never 'pin down' slavery, genocide, war. Nor should it yearn for the arrogance to be able to do so. Its force, its felicity is in its reach toward the ineffable" (Morrison, 2008c, p. 203). Differently put, neither language nor language users can pin down, finally summarise or articulate the exact ethics of a social manifesto since it is an ongoing, complicated and demanding process of recognising the other/Other.

At this stage of the analysis it should be emphasised that subjectivity described as constructed in relation to the other/Other does not reduce the other/Other to categories of the Self. The other/Other should not simply be understood as “like the self” (Nealon, 1997, p. 129). The ethics encouraged thus far would not be ethical if it was built on an objectifying or totalising of the other/Other. Instead, the openness of Morrison’s writing, the polyvocal voices and perspectives are indicative of embracing the uniqueness and infinity of the other/Other.

This study has put Bakhtin, Levinas, and Morrison into conversation with each other and numerous other thinkers. Each of the three primary authors argues from a different genre. All three nonetheless endorse the idea of the other/Other as infinite, inexhaustible, uncontainable – yet, as part of the Self’s identity. Viewing otherness as such resultantly confronts one with the ethics of how to deal with that which cannot be reduced to a final totalised knowledge. Whereas the works of Bakhtin and Levinas are generally inaccessible to readers outside of theory and limited to those with tertiary level education, Morrison’s novels are accessible to a wider audience and thus able to disseminate values all three authors promote.

In this study I have analysed portrayals of identity as it is informed by relationships between the Self and other/Other. Relying on the work of Bakhtin it became evident how Morrison depicts the Self as dialogically constructed in relation to the other/Other. Relying on Levinas’s notions of totality and infinity Morrison’s illustrations of the Self as reflected and/ or discovered in the other/Other became evident.

Dialogue and answerability as the basic tropes in Bakhtin's thought argue for the undeniable dialogic nature of existence – as displayed in language as well as relations with the other/Other. In language this is detected easily, but in human relations it is more difficult to accept as it implies a responsiveness or an answerability that requires a responsibility to recognise the other/Other as fundamental to the existence, and thus well-being, of the very Self who might not recognise that harm caused to the other/Other inadvertently is/ becomes harm caused to the Self – by the Self.

As mentioned at the outset of this study, Morrison's work is always political. She does not aim to entertain. Her works are meant to impact human consciousness and affect change. Her works do not advocate specific courses of action, just as Levinas's ethics is not prescriptive. Morrison sketches an image of the Self to the Self and leaves the Self with the choice of what to do with this revelation (De Voss, 2010, p. 54). Because each reader has the ability to respond, this response-ability is challenged to become a responsibility through the reading and interpretation of discovering political meaning in the novel.

Responsibility is a theme in every Morrison novel, even those not discussed in this study: *Beloved* asks when is responsibility taken too far in light of Sethe's killing of Beloved instead of allowing her to be maimed as a slave. In *Home* Frank confesses he was not willing to admit his guilt to himself, pretending it wasn't him. He does not recognise how comparable he is to the main perpetrator of the novel – the mutilating doctor Beau.

To follow will be an overview highlighting Morrison's portrayal of responsibility and identity in the four novels analysed in this study.

In *The Bluest Eye*, the most valuable insight regarding responsibility, is provided by Claudia. She argues the whole community was guilty of seeing Pecola's identity construction and ultimate madness come about. Nobody was innocent for everyone made a pariah of Pecola in order not to face their own weaknesses and otherness in the face of white standards.

For Claudia this guilt stems from realising a lack of mercy and compassion existed amongst those who spoke about Pecola and what happened to her.

And I believe our sorrow was the more intense because nobody else seemed to share it. They were disgusted, amused, shocked, outraged, or even excited by the story. But we listened for the one who would say, "Poor little girl," or, "Poor baby", but there was only head-wagging where those words should have been. We looked for eyes creased with concern, but saw only veils. (Morrison, 1997, p. 149)

In *Tar Baby* the primary argument comes from Valerian's story. He chose to abduct his responsibility towards his son because he he did not want to get involved in something that could have been a messy affair. While fully aware there was something that drove Michael into bathroom cupboards where Michael used to sing a sad song, Valerian chose not to make the effort of understanding its significance. The consequences of Valerian's failure to take responsibility for the signs his son was sending him had fateful consequences. First for the son and then for himself, causing

him to question his whole life, based on this failure. Ultimately he concludes that the most pitiable thing for a man to be is to be wilfully ignorant.

In *A Mercy*, as in *Beloved*, it can be asked when does a mother's sense of responsibility for her child go too far. In both novels the mother's consuming sense of responsibility leads to her making a radical decision which one could argue in the case of *Beloved* oversteps the boundaries of acceptability, while in *A Mercy* the death blow came with the mother sending the daughter away without explanation. This lack of understanding led Florens to live with a fierce mother hunger and self-doubt. Yet this is not the focus in this study. That Morrison never provides either Florens or her mother the opportunity to be heard by the other is a stylistic move resembling the reality of the times when bonds between slave families were indeed severed at any point leading to severed family ties and broken identities.

The difference between Florens's mother and Valerian is that the latter chose to ignore the signs sent to him, while the former acted swiftly when she had the opportunity. *Mãe* acted swiftly aware of the impending danger for Florens in a world where there was no protection. Is it perhaps because *Mãe* had first-hand experience of being an open wound that she acts on the threatening signs appearing in her daughter's life? In contrast, is it perhaps because Valerian's life had always been simple, well provided for and even boring that he chose the easy path of staying neutral in both business and his private life? Is it because he could not imagine the world of the other/Other as damaged or damaging that he could not even suspect that something very serious was going wrong in his son's life?

What one learns from Florens's mother is that taking responsibility sometimes means making hard decisions. *Mãe* understands even though there was no protection, there was difference. This responsibility, moreover, was more than taking "ownership" of a problem Florens would eventually face. It also had to do with *Mãe*'s recognition of Florens' infinity and the fact that she was worth much more than "pieces of eight" valuable for trade and otherwise worthless and therefore free for abuse.

Mercy, as a different dimension of responsibility will be considered in the next section in an effort to move closer to the notion of a manifesto for social change, which will receive consideration in the final chapter of this study.

Morrison thus argued that guilt and responsibility have a much wider spectrum of culprits than merely the immediate perpetrator; a world of accomplices and condoners – wilful, conscious and ignorant. In *The Bluest Eye* Morrison condemns the whole community through Claudia's assessment. *Tar Baby* does not hold only Margaret responsible for Michael's abuse, but indicts Ondine the secret keeper and Valerian the wilfully ignorant, as well. Responsibility as justification for annihilation is examined in *Paradise* in the life world of the novel. *A Mercy* also presents the wilfully ignorant as did *Tar Baby* and with similarly devastating consequences. All four novels also directly pose the reader questions of responsibility. *The Bluest Eye* questions the reader as community member, *Tar Baby* (through Valerian) and *A Mercy* (through Jacob and more directly through the stylistics of Florens and her mother never able to address their speech to each other) question the reader's innocence and ignorance as a member of humanity – in a world where information is readily available.

5.3 A manifesto for mercy

An extensive discussion of the novel *A Mercy* will follow in which various factors contributing to and complicating a manifesto for mercy – as evident in all four novels – will be discussed. *A Mercy* complicates a normative vision of the “land of the free” that would become the USA by exposing that there was never a grand liberal design uniting everyone or directing the path towards a clear goal. Amidst this chaotic reality, Morrison reveals a dialogical truth concerning the individual.

As portrayed in *A Mercy* there was simply a wide variety of strangers interacting in many different and undirected ways, and the systems in place – or lack of systems – meant that most people suffered one way or another as was evident during the discussion on orphans in Chapter Four. But most importantly, Morrison highlights through Florens’s mother that there were acts of mercy. For Tedder, what Morrison does offer the contemporary reader faced with the chaos of early America, is “an ethos of human kindness, rather than faith in American goodness per se (its ideals, its principles, its laws, its historical meaning). The novel offers readers “a context for living in the present” (2013, p. 157). The value of this argument underscores the relation between the Self and the other on an individual level and inevitably as dialogical. Mercy suggests the other/Other is recognised as worth more than a reducible element, which by totalising would justify its annihilation.

Considering Ruby’s Eden is built on exclusion of the other/Other, Tedder asks “What kind of ethics can we form if ... Morrison’s work figures a moral view where solidarity is not predicated on a unitary national identity, but rather the kindness that we may show to those with whom we live?” (2013, p. 157). Given the previous point

of mercy as the hope against chaos and abusive totalising, it needs to be recognised that mercy sets out as a very individual motivation. Its subsequent expression through communal, national and international communities are, of course, equally encouraged through Morrison's fiction.

A Mercy is written when what would yet become the USA is fluid and it could therefore have become anything, but it became what it became. Can we ask ourselves at the start, now, the second decade into the 21st century, whether it is still possible to work towards difference? This reading of Morrison's novels, in combination with Levinas's theory on ethics as first philosophy suggests, yes, by considering the other, which includes nature. For ultimately we will all be affected – thus inclusive of the perpetrators and the ignorant – of the devastating effects of having made decisions that separate Self and other/Other, benefitting Self and careless of the negative impact those decisions have on the other/Other. For ultimately the decision makers and executors are also affected positively or negatively as those who had to carry the brunt of negligent decisions. The pristine new world sketched in *A Mercy* has since suffered immensely in the name of progress, which often translates into money making for the powerful. It can be argued *Tar Baby* offers a counterpoint to the virgin world described in *A Mercy*. *Tar Baby* especially highlights the destruction of the environment with examples of rivers turning to swamps and trees mourning what mankind had done to the planet. The depletion of natural resources and the destruction of the environment have given rise to global warming, natural disasters and diseases that do not discriminate between races, genders, classes or religions. The repercussions of mistreating the Other/ nature thus affects the Self in ways it could not foresee.

Considering *Paradise*, it can be pointed out that taking responsibility too serious can also have devastating consequences. In this novel the founding fathers' elevated ownership of their responsibility for their wives and children ultimately serve to justify the killing of women whom they blame for the misbehaviour of the wives and children whom they wish to control "in order to keep them safe from harm". They have lost track with the times, and misread people's desire for progress and communication as back-chatting and a loss of respect. While the initial motivation for this kind of responsibility was noble, it became controlling and in the process harmful and its protective nature, questionable.

In 1998, Morrison stated in a televised interview with Elizabeth Farnsworth that the idea of Ruby as Eden on earth is what in fact maims its creators and turns them into murderers. The reality is their stance is greatly influenced by the fact that they do not belong to the bigger Promised Land, namely America:

The isolation, the separateness, is always a part of any utopia. And it was my mediation, if you will, and interrogation of the whole idea of paradise, the safe place, the place full of bounty, where no one can harm you. But, in addition to that, it's based on the notion of exclusivity. All paradises, all utopias are designed by who is not there, by the people who are not allowed in.
(Farnsworth, 1998)

As exhibited in the novels under discussion and the defence of her open-ended writing, Morrison does not offer a ready answer to the pressing questions of justice and ethics that her characters face. In *Paradise* she is critical of the grand utopia upon which Ruby is founded, one of illusionary greatness, separatism and intolerance

(Terzieva-Artemis, 2010, p. 200). Is it a combination of this greatness thinking and exclusion of the other/Other that sees a rise in nationalism across the world that is currently responsible for the rise in right-wing politics, which is furthermore resulting in political shifts such as Brexit and the election of a man of the likes of Donald Trump, supported by the Ku Klux Klan and promoting anti-foreigner policies in his presidential election campaign?

A further question Morrison presents the reader with is, what happens when the oppressed becomes the oppressor? (Fultz, 2013, p. 21). While *Paradise* portrays the economic advancement of African Americans after Emancipation, it also examines African American identity under conditions of freedom and black leadership by questioning whether African Americans have forgotten the lessons of slavery and have become corrupted by wealth and power (Fultz, 2013, p. 21). It thus interrogates prejudices based upon colour (who is black?), class (whose forebears were among the first to build the original black settlement?), gender (who decides women's destinies?), and politics (who has power?) (Fultz, 2013, p 21). These questions permit Morrison to hold a mirror up to the Self, which in *Paradise* happens to be African Americans. The mirror is held up and the subject is asked to view themselves and ask whether they have become what they once found unimaginable of which the injustice or discrimination was once clear to see, when those actions were limited to the white man only who alone had the freedom to exclude the African American as Other? Morrison portrays the irrationality of rejecting the logic that saw the 8-rocks excluded only to exercise the same logic against the women from the Convent. This mirror is however not only held up to the citizens of Ruby, or African Americans but indeed to the reader.

Furthermore, as much as Morrison does not compare black and white, naively portraying black people as good while portraying white people as oppressors, she also does not present a simplified picture of patriarchy alone as oppressive. She complicates the understanding of patriarchal oppression by holding women as well as men accountable (Fultz, 2013, p. 46). Seneca is abandoned by her teen mother and later preyed upon by Norma Fox, a married rich woman. Runaway Mavis is let down by her mother who informs the man she is running away from of her whereabouts. Pallas is betrayed by her mother, who seduces or is seduced by Pallas' boyfriend leaving her daughter heartbroken and prey to sexual violence by strangers. Morrison never provides readers with simplified worlds.

It is worth reiterating the following confounding axiom. The harsh confrontation with Fairly saw one flabbergasted traveller ask: "Us free like them; was slave like them. What for is this difference?" (Morrison, 1997a, p. 14). In other words, how can they not see our common background and identity? For this traveller, looking at the one community should bring to mind the other community. In his opinion the communities reflect each other because they share a social, economic, and political past and present. He is confounded and hurt by the inability, unwillingness or refusal of Fairly's people to recognise themselves in the 8-rock families. This question of course reverberates across time and human borders. Morrison points to the same argument in *The Bluest Eye*, through Mrs Breedlove: "Northern coloured folk was different too. Dicty-like. No better than whites for meanness. They could make you feel just as no-count, 'cept I didn't expect it from them" (Morrison, 1999, p. 91)

When the wayfarer in *Paradise* ponders, "us free like them; was slave like them" his

questioning distinction refers both to the African descent they have in common as well as their social history of slavery. His focus is thus on the shared ancestry and social reality of enslavement. These factors, for him, are fundamental characteristics that should have ensured compassion.

In his view it thus seems the people of Fairly based their decision to reject the 8-rocks on secondary factors such as the visible difference of skin tone and social advancement whilst ignoring the more fundamental commonalities. It can be argued “secondary” characteristics of individuals provide various layers that distinguish people from one another, when in fact at the core their most shared characteristic is that of being human.

It is the universal question to each reader; how is the next person so different from you that you cannot see yourself in his or her person and/ or situation – especially those situations calling for mercy.

With the African American men themselves turning oppressor – in the aftermath of slavery and the Fairly rejection, it can be argued the Self and the other/Other share the same potential for totalising the Other. Yet *Paradise* does not only warn against intolerance. It also invites the re-imagination of more inclusive and accepting communities that counter the exclusion of the Other. According to such a reading what is called for is for the reader to stay cognisant of the Self’s potential to act like the discriminating Other or to be discriminated against by the Other. Grasping this truth will hopefully lead to social relations of tolerance for difference in all walks of life, which can inform a manifesto for positive social change because mercy and a

humanised Self informs decision makers (De Voss, 2010, p. 53).

Morrison's 2012 novel *Home* revises the argument when Frank Money asks, "Who could do that to a young girl?" with reference to Dr Beau who mutilated his sister (Morrison, 2012, p. 132). Yet shortly after he felt the pain inflicted on his family, Frank confesses for the first time – having previously blamed an unnamed soldier – for having killed a young Korean girl. Frank acknowledges, "How could I let her live after she took me down to a place I didn't know was in me?" (Morrison, 2012, p. 134). With comparable examples in the other Morrison novels, these two examples from *Paradise* and *Home* display the human capacity to act like the other/Other, this research holds Morrison's novels offer an ethical alternative for the totalising capacity of humanity that can express itself in large scale as it did in slavery or Nazism, but also on individual level as it does in every day acts that exclude mercy in favour of blind self-promotion at the cost of not recognising the infinity in the other/Other.

As the reader learned in *A Mercy*, it was Africans in Africa who captured their own people – from other African tribes – to be exported as slaves, receiving compensation hardly matching the far-fething impact of their actions. The white man similarly enjoyed flogging the other, namely his own race, as well as the Other, namely Africans. As with Morrison showing no prejudice to reveal female failure in *Paradise*, although the focus was primarily on the failure of patriarchy, she does not discriminate between African-American or European-American failure. Morrison also does not excuse the Ruby patriarchs because they are black, or victims – an ironic way of making the point that all are created equal in their capacity not only for virtue but for vice (Slaughter, 2000, p. 5). Considering the discussions on pariahs in *The*

Bluest Eye and *Paradise* revealed the Self's lack of prejudice to equally discriminate against its "own" other as against the Other. These examples furthermore emphasise the potential to recognise the Self in the other/Other – as Jacob (*A Mercy*) agreed to receive Florens as part payment for D'Ortega's debt because he thought of Florens as an orphan "thrown away" by her mother – and he recognised his own vulnerability as an orphan in her.

A further portrayal of the Other-as-the-Same is found in *Tar Baby* when the reader witnesses a father who will neglect his own son – in the name of ease and (mental) comfort by not wanting to get involved in a possibly messy affair – while maintaining his good view of himself. As already compared as well, Jacob, like Valerian chooses to maintain a good view of himself at the price of wilful ignorance or the kind of mental gymnastics that leave him innocent, chooses to believe there was a profound difference between the intimacy of slave bodies at Jublio and a remote labour force in Barbados. The reader witnessed Jacob's switch from wincing at trading in flesh to his orphan-hungry desire germinating with the envying of D'Ortega's mansion.

The point to highlight at this juncture is therefore that the ease with which Jacob enslaves people who are far away speaks to a form of enslavement still endorsed today. For are sweatshop and farm workers not well-known forms of slave labour in this day? Grossly underpaying workers are not even limited to only those far away, for economic systems worldwide allow for the financial gap to continue increasing between the rich and the poor, because it is based on national and international legislation that discriminate against the Other allowing for the perpetuation of ongoing and institutionalised slavery, oppression and exploitation. The result of this is

the perpetuation of underpayment and over-working of a great percentage of the working population in many countries, including the United States of America and Namibia.

Like Jacob who soon forgets his orphanhood and how he had to fight for survival, Rebekka quickly forgets the world she was fortunate to escape from. The England Rebekka left behind was one where “her prospects were servant, prostitute, wife, and although horrible stories were told about each of those careers, the last one seemed safest” (Morrison, 2009, pp. 75–76). There, at home she was not safe from the “leers and rude hands of any man, drunken or sober, she might walk by” and least of all the master she once worked for (Morrison, 2009, pp. 75–76). Her exposure and options seem to have much in common with *Mãe*'s, who knows to be a woman means to be an open wound forever trying to escape the hands and intentions of men with animals in their hearts. In coming to America, Rebekka then becomes part of a system that gives black women no defence in a similar world where the animal in the heart of men are licensed. Only once does Rebekka look beyond her good fortune to think of the joys, pains and history of someone else.

Morrison portrays this moment as follows, “Once, feeling fat with contentment, [Rebekka] curbed her generosity, her sense of excessive well-being, enough to pity Lina” (Morrison, 2009, p. 91). On this occasion she asked Lina a personal question about her love life before joining Jacob's farm.

These two examples of husband and wife, respectively allow the reader to see chosen ignorance on Jacob's part and a lack of seeing the infinite in the Other on both their

parts. Both Jacob and Rebekka display a lack of pity on the other/Other.

Whereas Jacob and Rebekka have looked on people and lived with people they have failed to recognise them and their infinity by instead buying into a system that totalised these people as slaves. Looking on the other failed to change them to show more mercy, which could in turn have made a difference between life and death for Jacob and continued protection for his household.

For a while, Jacob's orphanhood allowed him to take pity on Florens, because he recognised himself and his ordeal in her. But the extension of this mercy was short-lived. Consequently Jacob's lack of mercy, based on the mis-recognition of his responsibility for the nameless and faceless plantation workers lead to his grave after having contracted the pox in Barbados.

While Rebekka's feelings towards the Anabaptists can be understood given they did not baptise her dead children, the result is that she finds herself all alone in the world after Jacob's death. She therefore has no friend socially amongst the Anabaptists and she is losing the one friend she has in Lina by having begun to restrict her from engaging in simple preferences such as sleeping in a hammock and beating her for probably breaking such new rules. Though considering Florens a clever girl, Rebekka plans on selling her, which without consideration for her well-being would mean exposing her to any type of hardship in the future. Worst of all, the reader is informed that Rebekka will need to marry again soon. And while it is speculated that the church will probably provide someone, chances are it will be the friendly curator who not only frequents the household, but also gives Sorrow secret gifts. The irony is that it

will most probably be the opportunist curator she ends up marrying, whom Morrison hints at as the man whose hurried encounter in the church pew impregnated Sorrow (Morrison, 2009, p. 126).

Florens and Pecola (*The Bluest Eye*), on the other hand, both find themselves looked at – by the witch hunters and Mr Yacobowski respectively and not recognised for their humanity. In the misrecognition of their humanity they discover a devalued sense of Self. This construction, in essence, exemplifies a destruction of identity. A similar argument regarding the Self experiencing its humanity stripped by the looks of the Other can be made of Florens' mother when on the slavery block she discovers she is “negrita” and not someone who belongs to a people (Morrison, 2009, p. 163).

For Morrison joining slavery and racism in the New World was “constructed, planted, institutionalised and legalised” (Morrison in Neary interview). To demonstrate this, Morrison provides the reader with a short sketch of a boy who is tied up with other slaves, who has a “yellow pigtail” (Morrison, 2009, p. 37). Describing him as such, rather than as “white” points to his physical and not racial features and therefore represents a cultural moment when white and the race privilege it implies is still being constructed (Babb, 2011, p. 153). The reader is also made aware of their assumptions that there are no other European slaves on the wagon when it is revealed later that there were two European women in addition to the boy with the yellow pony tail (Morrison, 2009, p. 62).

The narrator informs the reader during Jacob's journey of virgin land:

Half a dozen years ago an army of blacks, natives, whites, mulattoes –

freedmen, slaves and indentured – had waged war against local gentry led by members of that very class. When that “people’s war” lost its hopes to the hangman... [it] spawned a thicket of new laws authorising chaos in defence of order. (Morrison, 2009, p. 8)

This excerpt demonstrates that there was a time during the early years of the new colony when race did not separate the various peoples. Morrison here refers to Bacon’s Rebellion of 1676, which played a major contributing role to what would lead to the process of race-ing slavery in America. According to Bennett, white elites had created racism as a strategy to keep black slaves, Indians, and poor whites from forming a unified lower class (Anderson, 2005, p. 96).

The powerful thing about this “people’s war,” Morrison emphasises in her radio interview with Neary, was that the people were not separated by race, status or class. Where there were common interests, the different races united. But the financial interest of the gentry recognised such a united front would be to their detriment. As such, “a thicket of new laws were authorised under the pretence of order. This included:

By eliminating manumission, gatherings, travel and bearing arms for black people only; by granting licence to any white to kill any black for any reason; by compensating owners for a slave’s maiming or death, they separated and protected all whites from all others forever. Any social ease between gentry and labourers... crumbled beneath a hammer wielded in the interests of the gentry’s profits. (Morrison, 2009, p. 8)

Constructing “whiteness” was not only to the benefit of the landed gentry, in other words those with money and power who wanted to protect it at all costs. Poor whites could also benefit from it in two ways. On the one hand, privileging them above the black man gave them power, which they did not have before in Europe. It also meant whites were safer from other whites. Advancing her discussion of “whiteness” Morrison explains the process of becoming “white”:

Now the poor whites were not “white” until they were deemed opposite of the slaves. They were Polish people, [Irish people], they were people, they were Brits. So the process of becoming “white” depended completely on the process of solidifying a black population that was understood to have no protection. (Goulimari, 2011, p. 249)

According to Morrison, the USA would have been Balkanised if there were no black people in the country because immigrants would otherwise have torn each other’s throats out. Morrison holds:

... in becoming an American, from Europe, what one has in common with that other immigrant is contempt for me – it’s nothing else but colour. Wherever they were from, they could stand together. They could all say, “I am not that.” So in that sense, becoming an American is based on an attitude: an exclusion of me. It wasn’t negative to them – it was unifying. When they got off the boat, the second word they learned was “nigger.” Ask them – I grew up with them. (Lazenbatt, 2000, p. 191)

Besides avoiding the Balkanisation of the “new country”, it was economically more profitable to have visible slaves by making those of African descent the primary slave

population. While Native Americans and European indentured servants were also enslaved, the latter could run away and blend into the free population. Amy Denver (*Beloved*) was as much an indentured servant as Scully (*A Mercy*) who inherited their mothers' indenture.

According to Amy Denver, a white indentured servant, "My mama worked for these here people to pay for her passage. But then she had me and since she died right after, well, they said I had to work for em to pay it off" (Morrison, 2005a, p. 40). The parallels between her experiences and those of Africans are similar. Her mother is dead and her father unknown. Her experience as a slave seems to be similar to that of black slaves when she tells Sethe, "I used to be a good size. Nice arms and everything. Wouldn't think it, would you? That was before they put me in the root cellar" (Morrison, 2005a, p. 42). Another time she says "Mr Buddy whipped my tail" (Morrison, 2005a, p. 94) for something else she had done wrong. She too has to work from pre-dawn to after dusk, for she tells Sethe, "Most times I'm feeding stock before light and don't get to sleep till way after dark comes" (Morrison, 2005a, p. 94). And not unlike the African slave women who had no protection against slave owners, it seems Amy's father may have been the slave master if Joe Nathan is correct to believe that Mr Buddy is her father (Morrison, 2005a, p. 95). The difference between the two runaways, Amy and Sethe, is skin colour. It is thus Morrison's way of emphasising this difference when Amy says, "[I] wouldn't be caught dead in daylight with an African runaway" (Morrison, 2005a, p. 95). Mbalia (2004) explains that both the economic historian Eric Williams and the historic novelist Toni Morrison hold the early capitalists had an overwhelming economic motivation for securing a non-European slave population to make running away and hiding near impossible (p. 96).

This elaborate discussion of aspects in and about *A Mercy* was to illustrate the dynamics between Self and other/Other as it relates to a bigger picture of economics and politics in a world that would become the USA. And while this was a lengthy discussion, it underscores the construction of the Self as against the other/Other on a larger scale than the individual lives of the characters in any of the novels could do. But this section also made clear the speed with which the Self forgets how it was like the other/Other – as Rebekka forgets the vulnerability of being limited to servant, prostitute or wife while constantly having to fight off sordid men.

These reminders need to be borne in mind when the research questions are revisited in order to make a final assessment of the assertion as captured by the title of this study: Identity as ethical responsibility: A manifesto for social change in Toni Morrison's fiction.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6. Introduction

Analysis of Morrison's four novels build a case for a philosophy based on the Self-other/Other relation that can enable positive social change. The study reveals that a primary component of identity construction in Morrison's novels is responsibility for the other/Other. Although factors such as gender, and race are key components that inform identity, they are more static while the issue of responsibility for the other/Other is more dynamic. Morrison's work is not focused on responsibility to the Self in pursuit of goals such as a good life, revenge, or the accomplishment of any other self-focused ideals. Morrison's metaphor for life is not beauty, adventure, survival, self-actualisation, resistance or many other possibilities, which it is for other writers. The metaphor for Morrison – despite the matricide, incest, paedophilia, maiming and other gory portrayals in her novels – is love.

Morrison has made clear that the “search for love and identity runs through most everything I write” (Micucci, 1994, p. 278) and “all the time that I write, I'm writing about love or its absence” (Bakerman, 1994, p. 40). Being politically motivated is another constant in her writing and therefore her “love” is never a romantic love. Identity in Morrison is always political and relational because she says, “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” (Morrison, 2008a, p. 64).

Morrison's construction of identity is thus informed by love, which is always relational and thus concerned with the other/Other. It is furthermore always political

and thus a responsibility aimed at recognising the worth and infinity of the other/Other. This responsibility aiming for social change, is motivated by the dialogical relationship between the Self and other/Other, which informs the subjectivity of the Self. Hence, Morrison's novels present the reader with a manifesto for a society that recognises the value of the other/Other and the benefit to the Self of recognising the other/Other.

Taking direct quotes and slight paraphrases from the four novels yield the following argument in affirmation of the titled statement of this study: "We were all guilty – all of us – (*The Bluest Eye*) especially those of us who are wilfully ignorant (*Tar Baby*), so let us shoulder the endless work we were created to do down here in paradise – together – (*Paradise*) and offer human mercies (*A Mercy*). For there is difference (*A Mercy*)."

6.1 Significance of the study: Reviewed

The historical overview provided in Chapter Two, informs Morrison's motivation to write politically inspired fiction and "rememory" the history of African American people. This term, made famous in *Beloved* refers to Morrison's novels as a collective project of historical remembrance and recovery that depict the intermingling of past and present in what she terms "rememory" (Magill, 2003, p. 20). Rememory is an acknowledgement to the African belief that present and past are united, not separate, which consequently means "rememory" includes the ever-present traumas of slavery and structural racism in the present (Magill, 2003, p. 21).

It is from this perspective that I argue Morrison's work always deals with slavery or some form of its aftermath. This presence of the slavery past can be traced throughout her work and found in simple examples such as: the structurally imposing primer in *The Bluest Eye* that functions to marginalise African Americans; the intraracial discrimination in *Paradise* with its roots in white-black race relations; and the modern-day story of Jadine in *Tar Baby* who faces the option of rejecting family and community values in a grasp for never-before allowed opportunities for a black woman in the 1980s.

Morrison's oeuvre is unmistakably an ongoing engagement with the injustice of slavery and its political, economic, social and psychological aftermath. While there are many sources to cite, I will mention but two. The ongoing campaign of "Black Lives Matter" and the 2016 election of Donald Trump prove all the reason for Morrison's engagement to continue.

It therefore comes as no surprise that Morrison would express herself strongly against the election of Donald Trump, in a November 2016 article of *The New Yorker*, whom she refers to as:

The candidate whose company has been sued by the Justice Department for not renting apartments to black people. The candidate who questioned whether Barack Obama was born in the United States, and who seemed to condone the beating of a Black Lives Matter protester at a campaign rally. The candidate who kept black workers off the floors of his casinos. The candidate who is beloved by David Duke and endorsed by the Ku Klux Klan. (2016).

Whereas Morrison and sixteen other writers responded to Trump's election in feature articles in *The New Yorker* her focus was in line with her concern with race relations in the USA. Her article, "Making America White Again" also titled, "Mourning for Whiteness", discusses not only the type of message Trump advocates, but the Americans who voted for him, which is telling of the America that still exists in the twenty-first century. Continued engagement with the topic thus remains necessary.

As mentioned in the preceding chapter – racism and slavery are dehumanising because they ignore the humanity of one person in favour of privileging another. Nobody could be a sexist or a racist if they did not Other another person and discriminate against them on the basis of their sex or race. Polarisation of the Self and the Other is indeed only possible because there is an inevitable other/Other, an always already Other present to function as one in relation to whom the Self can exert itself in dialogically constructing an identity as: a slave holder, a sexist, an abuser, and so forth. Slavery thus brings us back to the relationship between Self and Other. But Morrison wrote during the mid-twentieth century and is still writing during the first two decades of the twenty-first. Yet I am arguing the key to unlock the significance of her study lies in understanding her engagement with slavery and discrimination in the past – and present – in order to do things differently in the future.

Morrison's engagement with the past is not a simple depiction of an "us" and "them" world. As such her novels problematise binaries and her works suggest a very intentional and constructive response to interrogate discrimination and subsequent abuse. This study argues that Morrison's novels build a case comparable to the philosophies of Bakhtin and Levinas, which hold that human identity is constructed

on a specific relationship of responsibility with the other/Other. The significance of this study thus lies in exposing Morrison's invitation to the reader to recognise this philosophy of responsibility for the other/Other as portrayed through her fiction.

6.2 Significance of the theoretical framework

In this study the term "ethics" is informed by the phenomenological work of Levinas, who propagates the idea of "ethics as first philosophy," (1981), which does not concern laws or moral rules nor some form of morality. Levinas's concern is with an exploration of conditions that enable the ethical relation and ultimately form the foundation of identity construction.

The intention of this research was to demonstrate how Morrison's fiction gives rise to the Levinasian argument that identity is constructed in relation to an ethical responsibility for the other/Other. This claim in itself is a call for social change since social, economic and political systems, the world over, generally function without valuing the Self (the beneficiaries) and the other/Other equally. The reality and consequences of corruption and modern day slavery are easy examples to demonstrate this point.

More than merely placing Self and other/Other on equal footing, Bakhtin and Levinas argue that the very subjectivity of the Self is dependent on the existence of the other/Other. Before expanding briefly on Bakhtin and Levinas it is important to consider the Morrison's non-fictional arguments as the third theoretical component framing this study.

Chapter Two discusses work by Morrison herself, which I have incorporated into the theoretical framework since the non-fictional body of her work – including interviews – hold great value in illuminating the complexity of her fiction.

Bakhtin and Levinas draw a close conclusion in their acknowledgement of the value and position of the other/Other in the construction of the Subject. Bakhtin's linguistic explanation offers a more concrete tool to understand it as demonstrated from a literary point of view. Levinas's phenomenology, although more abstract, enables a clearer challenge to ontology and thus presents a more solid argument connecting identity to responsibility.

Understanding Levinas's connection between responsibility and identity construction lies with understanding the distinction between ontology and phenomenology. Ontology, as the metaphysical branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of being, differs from phenomenology, as an approach that concentrates on the study of consciousness and the objects of direct experience. If we look at the question, "who?" one notices that "who?" is generally answered with "what". To demonstrate: by the time one asks "who is it (at the door)" the person had in fact *already* been presented to us because of the footsteps approaching our door or the knock on the door. Their name furthermore only refers to a system of relations, in effect, absencing the person from his/her presence and being (Levinas, 1969, pp. 177–178). As it is, ontology aims to comprehend the verb "to be." Ontology thus objectifies and reduces the person to a containable concept (Hand, 1989, p. 244).

Though reducing the other/Other is the ontological default position, Levinas demonstrates that before the reductive “knowledge” as captured by the name given in response to the question, “who?” the Being of the other person had already been announced. For Levinas, the Self thus “always already” responds to the other/Other in saying or doing anything at all – even ignoring or dismissing the other/Other – as this is also a kind of response (Nolean, 1997, p. 132).

Levinas’s argument that not all meaning can be made intelligible despite the argument by Western philosophy that considers knowledge as absolute (1969, p. 80), bears reiteration. As mentioned in Chapter One, this Western philosophical stance assumed the ever-increasing knowledge of mankind was indicative of mankind’s advancement – not only scientifically, but morally as well. The world wars and other atrocities committed by mankind against mankind proved this argument as unfounded as objectifying the Other man had always led to justify their abuse, exploitation and even extermination.

The exposure to what Levinas calls ‘infinity’ or the irreducible nature of the other person which is discovered in the “face” of the other person, forces the Subject to respond to the presence of the other/Other.

It is this fact of response-ability (in Levinas) and answerability (in Bakhtin), which is exposed in the face-to-face encounter of the other/Other. This encounter is an “experience” that exceeds the Self’s categories of knowledge and understanding and cannot be translated into rational, conceptual thought (Nolean, 1997, p. 132). And this is the point: there is no pre-existing ethical grammars by which the Self might

respond adequately to the other/Other and yet there will always already be a response forthcoming. It is in this inescapable experience that Levinas recognises the founding of “selfhood” (Nolean, 1997, p. 132).

6.3 Restatement of the research questions

The restatement of the study’s significance reiterates the relevance of this research. The theoretical framework has not only guided the process of analysis but has enabled the researcher to recognise a positive philosophy of the other/Other in fiction by a writer, otherwise considered to have produced difficult and violent texts. To further articulate the manifesto for social change to be found in Morrison’s fiction, the research questions will be restated and linked to fictional elements and philosophical arguments that support this claim. Based on the four selected novels, considered as representative of Morrison’s oeuvre as well as her philosophy on social change, the following research questions assisted the investigation:

1. To what extent do Morrison’s non-fiction arguments about language and the purpose of writing form a foundation in support of her fictional portrayals of identity construction?
2. How does Morrison’s fiction portray a relationship between the Self and other/Other that can be understood in terms of Bakhtinian dialogism?
3. How do the themes covered in Morrison’s fiction build the philosophical argument embedded in Morrison’s identity constructions?
4. How does Morrison’s open-ended style of writing further Morrison’s argument on responsibility?
5. What is Morrison’s contribution to “a manifesto for social change”?

The questions will now be considered individually and final remarks made relating them to the preceding chapters and future courses of action for social change.

1. To what extent do Morrison's non-fiction arguments about language and the purpose of writing form a foundation in support of her fictional portrayals of identity construction?

The literature review in Chapter Two covered a section on Morrison as theorist by discussing key texts of her non-fiction and numerous interviews in which she argues the purpose of language is to *do* work. This work, according to her, has to be political otherwise she considers it to be about nothing. In the early years of her writing career she emphasised producing writing distinctly known for its "black art qualities" such as being an engagement between reader and writer to create meaning together. Years later Morrison still held this position even reiterating it in her acceptance speech upon receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature. During this speech Morrison once again emphasised the fact that language is an act with consequences that requires users to use it responsibly. Reading these dicta together thus implies the author will present responsible fiction, as she requires responsible interpretation from the reader.

This study considered a number of Morrison's interviews and other non-fiction. *What Moves at the Margin: Selected Nonfiction*, which is an expansion on *Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature* presents Morrison's awareness of the "the absent presence" of the other/Other.

The social criticism Morrison delivered in *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas and the Construction of Social Reality* and *Birth of a Nation'hood: Gaze, Script, and Spectacle in the O J Simpson Case* deal with the power of language to direct and shape thinking. As such, this non-fiction forms a substantive foundation on which to hold that Morrison herself uses her language/ fiction very purposefully to *portray* arguments as much as she tells stories. Just as a good play requires the playwright to show more than tell, Morrison's showing through her stylistics is as powerful as the telling as it invites the reader to create meaning and then reminds the reader of his or her responsibility regarding the meanings in the text.

As the claim for social change rests on the constructive role of the other/Other, which draws out responsibility from the subject, Morrison's acknowledgement of the other/Other is a valuable stepping stone affirming my reading of her fiction. Her insistence and demonstration of language as a mechanism of responsibility underscore the importance Morrison places on the value of responsibility.

2. How does Morrison's fiction portray a relationship between the Self and other/Other that can be understood in terms of Bakhtinian dialogism?

Bakhtinian dialogism and reciprocal identity informing construction formed the first stage of this study. I investigated Morrison's construction of identities and found dialogical constructions were ample. It should be noted that the dialogical relationship is not limited to a two-party structure. It is for this reason that Bakhtin's theory

includes notions such as addressivity, polyphony and heteroglossia to demonstrate the multiplicity of influences of other on Self that inform the subject's identity.

To briefly recap, Bakhtin's argument for the dialogic concept of language has been fundamental to this study. Since I analysed the language in Morrison's novels to derive at her unarticulated philosophy around identity of the Self, the value of Bakhtin's theory provides a clear link between language and identity with his argument that "Self" is fundamentally a relation as is language.

Bakhtin argues "Addressivity" and "Answerability" mark an utterance (1986, p. 95). This means it is always addressed to someone and anticipates an answer or some form of response. As mentioned earlier when discussing Levinas, even ignoring the other/Other is a form of response.

Drawing from live speech, Bakhtin shows any understanding of live speech is necessarily imbued with response. For Bakhtin, "the listener becomes the speaker" (1984, p. 68). Moreover, the speaker himself/ herself is oriented precisely toward such an actively responsive understanding of agreement, sympathy, objection, execution, and so forth from the listener (1984, p. 69). This theory of dialogue as a clearly discernable relation assisted the articulation of the dialogic Self of Morrison's characters.

In similar fashion, Morrison's fiction demonstrates the highly impactful relationship between Self and other/Other. What was especially noticeable were the negative impact of Othering characters. Additionally, the role of the other/Other to impact the

life or construction of the Self in a positive manner was also analysed.

Examples of this dialogic relationship include, amongst others, the relationship between Pecola and her community (*The Bluest Eye*), Ondine as good because of Margaret's failure as a mother and Jadine as unorphaned because of Son's love (*Tar Baby*), the Old Fathers and the New Fathers determining their manhood by their capacity to protect their women and children (*Paradise*) and Florens identifying herself as wild in response to her mother and her lover's rejection (*A Mercy*).

Further examples of the dialogic include multiple narrative voices found in the novels. In *The Bluest Eye* there are three narrators, namely the omnipotent narrator, Claudia as a child and Claudia as an adult; in *Tar Baby*: the omnipotent narrator, the voices of Jadine, Son, and nature as a narrator; the voices in *Paradise* include the omnipotent narrator and all nine women after whom the chapters are named and finally, in *A Mercy* there are the omnipotent narrator, Florens, Jacob, Lina, Rebekka and *Mãe*. Each of these characters tell of their experiences from their perspectives, thereby displaying the polyvocalism of Morrison's narratives. No one voice is privileged and therefore no one perspective functions to silence others. There are no sole protagonists as multiple threads and storylines inform the narratives. The surplus of perspectives further demonstrate Morrison's writing extend beyond the limitedness of totalising language and totalising the other. Through this one element of her stylistics, Morrison further portrays the relationship between Self and other/Other as dynamic and therefore informed by the dialogic.

3. How do the themes covered in Morrison's novels build the philosophical argument embedded in her identity constructions?

To understand this question, the philosophical argument referred to should be understood as comprised of the dialogical relationship between Self and other/Other in combination with the discovery of responsibility for the other/Other. The answer to this question proves or disproves the claim made by the title of this study.

The themes covered in Morrison's novels can be divided into two categories as they relate to the two components of the philosophical argument. On the one hand, there are those themes that demonstrate the dialogical nature of identity construction. On the other hand, the topic of responsibility itself, as variously portrayed in the novels can be argued to function as an additional theme. The themes considered are those shared by at least three of the four novels. These themes will prove to confirm evidence in the novel in support of the philosophical argument.

Not all themes covered in the novels were, however, analysed. To illustrate I will mention two examples. Though madness and incest are themes in *The Bluest Eye*, they do not appear in the other novels. They were therefore not incorporated into the analysis of this study. The theme of journeys is found in all four novels, yet it can generally be considered as a minor theme, except perhaps in *Paradise* and *A Mercy*. Although this theme was not covered for pragmatic reasons. The themes covered were specifically chosen because they presented themselves as supporting dialogical relations or the theme of responsibility.

The first category of themes includes: discrimination, racism, patriarchy, sexism, pariahs, community, whiteness as the standard of beauty, mothering, looking, seeing, being seen, naming. Each of these themes presupposes a Self and an other/Other; some more than others. Discrimination is not possible unless there is a discriminator or discriminating system, which is unjust and prejudiced against an other/Other. Racism and racial purity are all built on the premise of excluding the Other. Patriarchy favours the male Self, while sexism is biased towards one sex. Pariahs can only exist as the ostracised, the excluded, and the Other, if there is the Self as central figure. Community is a very present theme in all four novels and it functions as both the other and the Other in all four novels – a force which the individual Self has to recon with. Except for *A Mercy* whiteness as the standard of beauty either break, make or exclude characters. While the theme of mothering features in all four novels, it is particularly material to *A Mercy* and *Tar Baby*. In the former novel mothering functions powerfully to demonstrate responsibility on the part of the mother while mother hunger functions powerfully to reshape the child's identity in the latter novel. *Tar Baby* demonstrates mothering as an unwanted responsibility that involved neglect and abuse, which eventually led to the child's identity becoming one of playing saviour to the weak and powerless. Finally, looking, seeing, being seen and naming as discussed in Chapter Three demonstrated dialogical identity constructions as it captured the answerability and addressivity played out between Self and other/Other through these four acts.

Responsibility features in different forms as a major topic in each of the four novels. In *The Bluest Eye* responsibility features as community guilt for the endorsement of white standards of beauty, the numerous acts ostracising Pecola as a pariah figure and

the witnessing of Pecola's life falling apart. Ironically, Cholly's violence and alcoholism have roots in firstly having been failed by his parents to take responsibility for him and then secondly by his own deep sense of failure to live up to his own sense of responsibility for his family – and his children in particular. *Tar Baby* interrogates responsibility through three figures: Margaret, Ondine and Valerian. Of these three, Valerian's pronouncement is of most significance. Through Valerian, Morrison portrays that to be wilfully ignorant is perhaps the most crippling acknowledgement for the Self. Finally, *A Mercy* presents responsibility in three forms: as a sacrifice on the part of *Mãe*, as a mercy from Jacob and as a burden for Florens.

4. How does Morrison's open-ended style of writing further her argument on responsibility?

The open-ended style of writing has a two-fold function. Open-endedness firstly includes Morrison's stylistics, which avoids totalising of information and objectifying of people. Primary means of open-endedness include the endings of her novels, the different perspectives on singular events, the loaded historical references, the traversing between past and present, the unreliable narrators, and the fantastical.

Open-ended endings do not provide the satisfaction of clear answers to questions the reader may have of the novel. Why so many narrators in *The Bluest Eye*? What exactly is the meaning of Son in the mountains with the blind horsemen and won't he fall to his death that very night still, the reader wonders in *Tar Baby*. Are the murdered women in *Paradise* dead or alive? The fantastical also features strongly in *Tar Baby* and *A Mercy*, yet of course the reader cannot be sure of their interpretation of the meaning of steam that has a dog's profile (*A Mercy*) or swamp women from an

old wives' tale (*Tar Baby*). Will Florens be sold and Rebekka marry again in *A Mercy*? Why risk the reader missing out on historical references by providing such scant information as Bacon's Rebellion is not even mentioned by name in *A Mercy*, the Civil Rights Movement and the wars are understated in *Paradise*, and the truly historical westward move after the failure of Reconstruction could have been missed as well.

Open-endedness secondly refers to a surplus of meaning, it makes room for Morrison's polyvocal narratives and invites the reader to recognise infinity in the other/Other but also to interpret excessive information and multiple perspectives into something meaningful. The multiplicity of these factors insists on reader interpretation and meaning making. The reader is thereby forced into the position of making meaning responsibly and for taking responsibility for meaning made. Taking up that meaning – which is often a recognition of the other/Other – is thus an invitation to take responsibility in the world beyond the fictional text.

5. What is Morrison's contribution to "a manifesto for social change"?

While Fultz has written that Morrison's fiction appeals to consciousness and conscience, others have shown Morrison offers healing and Clay Bassard holds that Morrison's work is an ethical mandate to break the cycle of racism, sexism and other oppressions. To add to this list, this study has argued Morrison offers readers and societies "a manifesto for social change." A "manifesto for social change" refers to a basic principle to live by, which is for the Self to live from the identity constructing fact of being responsible for the other/ Other, of looking out for him or her, because that would mean looking out for the Self – as the Self's very identity formation is

dependent on the other/Other. This foundational principle established on interpersonal level could similarly inform interaction in other spheres.

This study has demonstrated the humanity and commonalities the exploiting and abusing or (wilfully) ignorant Self shares with the exploited, abused or neglected other/Other as portrayed by Morrison. That this discussion is still necessary in the twenty-first century is due to the fact that despite living at a time when medical science is more advanced than ever before, food production allows for more people to be fed than ever in the history of mankind, local and international law allow for the protection and freedom of more rights than were ever imaginable and other wonders brought about by the innovation of mankind, there are still no society exempt from gender-based violence, modern day slavery thrives and the gap between poor and rich continues to widen. Still most countries – if not all – suffer from political and economic abuse and corruption. Wars and poverty that have caused mass migrations add to the growing religious, cultural and political intolerance plaguing numerous nations.

By having analysed Morrison's novels and concluded that each of the novels argues for emphatic social change, this study has articulated Morrison's recommendation for the political work her fiction calls for. And more than calling on governments, international peace promoting institutions or funders of social development, Morrison's fiction appeals to the individual from the very core of his and her subjectivity.

The “quote” derived from the four novels analysed is intended to use the lessons from the past – as interrogated by Morrison herself through her fiction – for the future. This thesis argues Morrison’s manifesto is to steer away from a future of more of the same corruption, exploitation, greed, selfishness, destruction of nature, twisting of structural systems to benefit the powerful and further strangle the powerless. Morrison’s writing is thus in the interest of societies that see the folly in discrimination and individuals who will choose not to remain ignorant of its impact and unwilling to recognise the part they are called upon to play in building tolerant societies where the other/Other will not be totalised and objectified to the detriment of both Self and other/Other.

While this study had focused on literature the analysis focused on a philosophy that would be worth applying in the lived world. With its capacity to expand the reader’s imagination, sympathy and ability to understand human complexity, Morrison’s novels have offered its reader instruction in the Self’s potential to affect social change. This manifesto begins with the individual in their personal and private space. It also holds the same value for the public sphere of politics and economics, as it addresses discrimination in its various forms as well as corruption with its various causes and effects.

Having analysed various forms of corruption throughout this study, a reading of corruption through the lense of Morrison’s literary philosophy reveals: corruption, which initially seems beneficial to the Self, eventually affects the Self negatively as it threatens sustainable economic development, increases poverty, endangers the rule of law, and ultimately destabilises society. For corruption delays growth, decreases

foreign investment and contributes to the underdevelopment of a country and its people as resources intended for healthcare, education and justice are misappropriated. Although public policies and resources largely benefit the poor, the whole society is ultimately affected through the simple failure by the gatekeepers of societies to consider the other/ Other as both valuable in itself and for the Self.

Finally, a different version of references to the four novels reads as follows: As the primer invites the reader to look and see, so Morrison invites the reader to look and see. As Valerian cautions, don't be wilfully ignorant, so too *Mãe* begs, don't give away your ability to act in the interest of (merciful) difference. As a narrative voice in *Paradise* reminds us, we have the same capacity for good and vice as both the admirable other/Other and the detestable other/Other. Let us therefore – amidst the chaos of corruption and discrimination – shoulder this work together and offer human mercies in recognition of our shared humanity and our individual responsibility for this task at hand.

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