The Political Practice of Home:

The Bluest Eye, Beloved, and Feminist Standpoint Theory

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Comparative Literature
McGill University, Montreal
July 1991

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master's of Arts.

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Abstract

The larger issue of the relationship between theory, fiction and experience provides the backdrop for a study of constructions of home in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye and Beloved. Feminist standpoint theory contends that knowledge is socially and historically constructed. Using the home as a category of analysis, I show how Morrison's constructions of home are located within specific socio-economic, racial, and political contexts which mold the novels' characters. Both feminist standpoint theory and the novels develop a notion of "positionality" -- one's location within a larger social and historical network. Differences in focus do exist, however, which stem from their respective developmental and experiential contexts -- one being primarily theoretical and scholarly, and the other being the complex literary and fictional mediation of a political experience. Unlike the theoretical articulation of concepts of the standpoint, fiction offers a complex perspective that may, in turn, be used to inform discussions of political and epistemological concepts.

Résumé

Le rapport entre la théorie, la fiction and l'expérience fournit la base de cette étude sur les constructions de "foyer" dans The Bluest Eye et Beloved de Toni Morrison. La théorie de "feminist standpoint" soutient que la connaissance est construite dans un réseau social, historique et politique. En utilisant l'idée de "chez-soi" comme une catégorie d'analyse, je montre comment les constructions de "foyer" dans les deux romans sont situées dans un contexte spécifique de race, politique, et classe qui influence les personnages. La théorie de "feminist standpoint" et les romans développent une idée de "positionalité" -- sa position dans un grand réseau social et historique. Les différences entre la théorie et les romans existent, pourtant, qui se présentent de leurs contextes développementals et expérientials -- l'un théorique et l'autre la médiation littéraire et fictionale d'une expérience politique. A la différence de l'articulation théorique de l'idée de "standpoint," la fiction offert une perspective complexe qui peut être utilisée pour informer les discussions des concepts politiques et épistemologiques.

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Introduction

1. Thesis Statement

Focusing on the intersection of a fictional character's identity and a larger social and political history in Toni Morrison's novels The Bluest Eye and Beloved raises numerous questions for literary studies. Using the concept of home as a category of analysis in close readings of these two novels, I negotiate a connection between literary studies and feminist standpoint theory.

2. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

What do concepts and implications of difference -- socio-economic, racial, sexual, cultural, and so on -- have to do with the study of literature? To address this question, I frame a study of constructions of home in The Bluest Eye and Beloved at the intersection of two contexts -- one primarily theoretical and one primarily literary -- which have existed quite separately from each other in the projects of academic scholarship. The first, which can be defined as the general theoretical point of departure for this thesis, is feminist standpoint theory. The second is the unique and identifiable context of fiction by African American women writers, which I access partly through two of Toni Morrison's five novels. Both feminist standpoint theory and writing by African American women present a specific challenge to literary scholarship and form part of a larger debate on work deemed "non-canonical" that currently occupies many discussions of literature.

Theories can be neat, formulaic constructions. Fiction, on the other hand, is much more complex and multi-layered.[1] Basing an approach to a literary text in an inflexible theoretical structure may reduce the intricacies of a fictional text to a linear series of progressions or a formulaic assemblage of signs and symbols.[2] In this thesis, I attempt to negotiate a connection between theory and fiction by asking questions about both that emerge from a specific historical experience. I resist submitting Morrison's work to the directives of standpoint theory -- which is not, it is important to note, a complete, static theoretical construct but a concept which is being continually re-evaluated and changed. Fiction by many African American women writers also resists formulaic interpretations. This would efface the specific history of black experiences in the United States out of which Morrison's novels emerge by forcing the novels into a theoretical formula that has developed distinct from African American women's fiction.[3] While I do not "apply" feminist standpoint theory to

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[1] Multiple categories of analysis may be employed to examine a fictional text, such as point of view, narrative structure, plot development, character development, to name a few. Different categories of analysis offer different ways into the text, resulting in a possible variety of interpretations. Fictional texts are used to support different theories, but historically the fictional text usually outlives the usefulness of a particular theoretical approach. The complexity of a fictional text, I would argue, should inform theory, rather than reducing a text to the narrow confines of a theoretical formula.

[2] For example, Vladimir Propp, in his Morphology of the Folk Tale (1928), reduced all folk tales to seven "spheres of action" and thirty-one "functions." He argued that folk tales were simply different combinations of particular elements. Along with Propp, other structuralists, using Ferdinand de Saussure's analysis of language as a point of departure, focused on literature as a system of signs. Saussure contended that language is a system of signs to be analyzed "synchronically," as a complete system at a particular time, rather than "diachronically," in its larger historical development. Critiques of a structuralist approach to literature have been numerous in recent years. Because of the larger social and political history in which Morrison's novels are imbedded, a structuralist reading of The Bluest Eye and Beloved would be reductive.

[3] In an interview with Nellie Y. McKay, Morrison criticizes those who critique her work but have no understanding of the specific context out of which her novels emerge. Morrison says, "Critics of my work have often left something to be desired, in my mind,

The Bluest Eye and Beloved, neither do I use a black feminist literary critical approach -- articulated specifically as such during the past decade -- in a study of home in these two novels. This approach, which raises important questions for literary studies, has already been explored in relation to African American women's texts[4] -- and, indeed, the argument is made that it has emerged specifically from them.[5] The contours and implications of a black feminist criticism are still under much discussion.[6] Rather, I use feminist standpoint theory to guide my role as a student of literature and to ask questions about authority and "reinventing oneself as

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because they don't always evolve out of the culture, the world, the given quality out of which I write. Other kinds of structures are imposed on my works, and therefore they are either praised or dismissed on the basis of something that I have no interest in whatsoever, which is writing a novel according to some structure that comes out of a different culture. I am trying very hard to use the characteristics of the art form that I know best, and to succeed or fail on those criteria rather than on some other criteria. . . ." (McKay, p. 425). Morrison's comment raises questions about *whose* theory and *whose* criticism. [See Nellie Y. McKay, "An Interview with Toni Morrison," Contemporary Literature, vol. 24, no. 4 (1983), pp. 413-429.]

[4] See for example the collection of essays edited by Barbara Christian Black Feminist Criticism (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985); the critical anthology edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Reading Black, Reading Feminist (New York: Meridian Book/Penguin Group, 1990); and Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory and Writing by Black Women, edited by Cheryl A. Wall, (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

[5] I will address the relationship between the "theory" inherent within fiction by African American women in more detail in the conclusion of this thesis.
Some important critical works which address this issue include Barbara Smith's "Toward A Black Feminist Criticism," published in Elaine Showalter, ed. The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory (London: Virago Press, 1985); Alice Walker's In Search of Our Mother's Gardens (San Diego: Harvest/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983); Barbara Christian's Black Feminist Criticism, op. cit.; Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Reading Black, Reading Feminist, op. cit.

[6] See Deborah McDowell's essay "New Direction for Black Feminist Thought," included in Showalters's volume, which responds to Barbara Smith's essay "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism." See also Hazel V. Carby's Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). While McDowell critiques some of Smith's points, Carby questions the viability of a black feminist criticism and argues that "black feminist criticism has its source and its primary motivation in academic legitimation, placement within a framework of bourgeois humanistic discourse" (Carby, p. 15).

other," to use Sandra Harding's phrase. Given that I am a white woman and that many readers of fiction by African American women are not African American women, these questions are of crucial and central importance.

My interests lie primarily in studying how fiction by African American women writers may transform literary studies and inform discussions of political and epistemological concepts.[7] While feminist scholars have developed recently the methodological and epistemological framework of the standpoint in feminist analyses, fiction by many African American women such as Toni Morrison is based in an understanding of social relations similar to that of standpoint theory. Differences in focus do exist, however, which stem from their respective developmental and experiential contexts -- one being primarily theoretical and scholarly, and the other being the complex literary and fictional mediation of a political experience. I will conclude this thesis with a discussion of how fiction by African American women writers invites a re-conceptualization of the relationship between theory, fiction, and experience.

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[7] The relationship between fiction and politics in feminist thinking was especially strong during the emergence of the "second wave" of feminism. Two influential books, Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex, published in North America in 1953, and Kate Millett's Sexual Politics, published in 1969, use analyses of literary texts to support their argument about the social and political role of women. De Beauvoir studies the "myth of woman" in literary texts by Montherland, D. H. Lawrence, Claudel, Breton, and Stendhal in order "to confirm [her] analysis of the feminine myth as it appears in a general view." [The Second Sex (New York: Vintage, 1974), p. 224.] Millett critiques texts by D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer and Jean Genet as part of her analysis of patriarchy as a political institution and of the political manifestations of sexuality. [See Kate Millett Sexual Politics (New York: Ballantine Books, 1969).]

2. 1. Standpoint Theory

Standpoint theory has provided the methodological and epistemological framework for many recent feminist analyses of concepts and implications of difference. The theory, which has been developed by white North American academic feminists primarily within the context of the social sciences, focuses on the relationship between experience and knowledge. Sandra Harding, who has explored the concept of the standpoint in feminist thinking, philosophy and science, describes feminist standpoint theory as "one of the two main theories of knowledge that have been developed to account for the fact that research guided by feminist political interests has been able to produce less partial and distorted accounts of nature and social life than the sexist and androcentric claims that were produced, we are told, through value neutral research procedures."[8] Feminist standpoint theory is founded in concepts explored by Hegel and later by the political philosophers Marx, Engels and Lukacs. Against notions of an absolute "Truth" or the natural progression of "History," feminist standpoint theory emphasizes the individual's position within a historical network of social and political relations and one's perspective, determined by one's position, of that network. Nancy Hartsock -- who is concerned with formulating a specifically feminist historical materialism -- uses Marx's understanding of the influence of the process of production on human beings and theories of knowledge as a means of conceiving of a multi-layered network of social relations wherein

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[8] Sandra Harding, "Starting Thought From Women's Lives: Eight Resources for Maximizing Objectivity," Journal of Social Philosophy, vol. 21, nos. 2 & 3 (Fall-Winter 1990), p. 140. The other feminist theory of knowledge that Harding described is feminist empiricism, which "attempts to show that this same feminist research is simply the consequence of 'good science' feminist research in biology and the social sciences simply follows more rigorously and carefully the existing methodological norms."

the survival of superficial layers depends upon the domination of subordinate levels. Whereas Marx distinguishes between the workers and the proletariat, Hartsock focuses on the systematic differences between men and women's lives -- a difference which Morrison's novels complicate with the introduction of other forces such as race and class. Hartsock argues that the concept of a standpoint recognizes that material life "not only structures but sets limits on the understanding of social relations."[9] Knowledge, one's view of the world, is structured by one's complex position in a social framework -- one's "positionality." One's social location determined by one's sex is envisioned, then, as an interested, biased and, most important, an engaged position. Like Marx, Hartsock argues that subordinate layers of social relations -- in this case gender -- "both includes and explains the 'surface' or appearance, and indicates the logic by means of which the appearance inverts and distorts the deeper reality."[10]

One of the projects of feminist scholars has been to use women's experiences as a basis for critiquing oppressive and dominating systems. Sandra Harding recognizes that feminist theorists have borrowed from and re-worked "liberal political theory and its empiricist epistemology, Marxism, critical theory, psychoanalysis, functionalism, structuralism, deconstructionism, hermeneutics and the other theoretical frameworks."[11] She argues, however, that "it has never been women's experiences that have provided the grounding for any of the theories from which [feminists]

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9 Nancy Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," Feminism and Methodology Sandra Harding, ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), p.159

10 Ibid.

11 Sandra Harding, "The Instability of Analytical Categories of Feminist Theory," Signs, vol. 11, no 4 (1986), p. 283-4

borrow. It is not women's experiences that have generated the problems these theories attempt to resolve, nor have women's experiences served as the test of the adequacy of these theories."[12] Rather than merely appending the specialized category "women" to research projects or to existing methodological and epistemological frameworks, feminist standpoint theorists are concerned with using women's lives as a point of departure for asking questions about knowledge, nature and social life.[13] Evelyn Fox Keller calls for a critique of science based in the standpoint of women. She illuminates the historical pluralism of science and the influence of particular social and political contexts on scientific understanding. Keller links scientific objectivity with notions of autonomy and masculinity and, in turn, she connects the "goals of science with power and domination."[14] Using a historical and transformative feminist critique based in the standpoint of women, Keller contends that "feminists can bring a whole new range of sensitivities, leading to an equally new consciousness of the potentialities lying latent in the scientific project."[15]

One of the primary complications standpoint theorists have had to contend with is the difficulty of basing a feminist political unity on the "standpoint of women" without effacing the very real differences, and the implications of those differences, among women. The concept of "the standpoint of women" suggests that all women occupy the same position because of their sex. It effaces differences among women of different

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[12] Ibid., p. 284.

[13] For more on this see Sandra Harding, "Starting Thought from Women's Lives: Eight Resources for Maximizing Objectivity," op. cit.

[14] Evelyn Fox Keller, "Feminism and Science," Sex and Scientific Inquiry, Sandra Harding and Jean F. O'Barr, eds. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 238.

[15] Ibid.

races and classes, for example. Sandra Harding, while she acknowledges the "destructively mythical character of the essential and universal 'man' which was the subject and paradigmatic object of nonfeminist theories," also rejects any analysis which has "essential, universal woman as its subject or object -- as its thinker or object of its thought."[16] Linda Alcoff has argued that the idea of the standpoint inherently refuses reductionism and essentialism because it conceptualizes "woman" and "women's experiences" as very fluid and changing. She examines how the concept of a standpoint empowers women to define themselves and identifies two feminist theoretical approaches which have dominated feminist analyses, but which have resulted in overly inclusive definitions of "woman." Alcoff defines "cultural feminism" as that which claims that "feminists have the exclusive right to describe and evaluate woman. . . . [They] have not challenged the defining of woman but only that definition given by men."[17] Post-structuralists, on the other hand, refuse any possibility of defining "woman." They deconstruct "all concepts of woman and argue that both feminist and misogynist attempts to define woman are politically reactionary and ontologically mistaken."[18] Alcoff uses the concept of "identity politics" introduced by the Combahee River Collective which problematizes the relationship of identity and politics to develop a notion of positionality -- refering to the implications and fluidity of one's social

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16 Harding, "The Instability of Analytical Categories of Feminist Theory," p 284.

17 Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," Signs, vol. 13, no. 3, (Spring 1988), p. 406.

18 Ibid., p. 407.

position -- which informs political and individual identification.[19] A "positionality" of woman

> makes her identity relative to a constantly shifting context, to a situation that includes a network of elements involving others, the objective economic conditions, cultural and political institutions and ideologies, and so on. If it is possible to identify women by their position within this network of relations, then it becomes possible to ground a feminist argument for women, not on a claim that their innate capacities are being stunted, but that their position within the network lacks power and mobility and requires radical change. The position of women is relative and not innate, and yet neither is it "undecidable."[20]

Alcoff's understanding of what it is to be a "woman" is an empowering and active concept. She argues for self-determination rather than definition by external value systems. Being a "woman," Alcoff contends, "is to take up a position within a moving historical context and to be able to choose what we make of this position and how we alter this context. From the perspective of that fairly determinate though fluid and mutable position, women can themselves articulate a set of interests and ground a feminist politics."[21] Alcoff sets up a dialogue between individual identity and history, as well as the evolving moment. Rather than define "woman"

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[19] The Combahee River Collective published their "Black Feminist Statement" in the1981 collection This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, editors. (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1981), pp. 210-218. The statement asserts that the only effective politics are those that emerge directly from one's experience and identity. "We believe that the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression."(p. 212). The Collective argues that African American women have been forced to deny their own concerns in movements for social change such as the Women's Movement and the Civil Rights Movement.

The developmental relationship between the Combahee River Collective's Statement of identity politics and the primarily academic expression of feminist standpoint theory has yet to be fully examined.

[20] Alcoff, pp. 433-34.

[21] Ibid., p. 435.

according to essential, static characteristics, she locates the position of women in the dynamic intersection of elements, such as race and class, which carry historical and political significance. Gender, race, class, are envisioned not as essences or constants but as changing, fluid forces that carry political, social, and historical implications. Furthermore, Alcoff places the power of self-definition within the hands of a woman who can "choose" to alter the dynamic of her position. Such power for change is vital for political action.

There is much discussion about the implications and articulations of a feminist standpoint theory. For the purposes of this thesis, however, feminist standpoint theory offers three points that are useful in studying the relationship between experience and fiction, and which, in turn, are problematized within a fictional text. Standpoint theory contends that 1) social relations are multi-layered and that subordinate layers, as Sandra Harding describes, "can provide a more objective view than the perspective from the lives of the more powerful."[22] It conceptualizes 2) human experience as a changing and dynamic intersection of various forces, themselves fluid rather than constant -- such as sex, class, race and so on -- that carry political implications in the material world . The idea of positionality, defined by Alcoff, refers to this relatively fluid though identifiable location, an idea that encompases the possiblilty of movement and change that the idea of "position" does not necessarily imply. 3) Knowledge, according to standpoint theory, is socially and historically located and constructed. It is grounded in human experience and human lives. Although the perspective of the less powerful is not any less biased,

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[22] Sandra Harding, Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 270.

impartial, disinterested or impersonal, as Harding reminds us, than that of the powerful, the knowledge gained from their experience is not, by nature, invalid, incorrect, or somehow deviating from an absolute "Truth." These three aspects of the concept of the standpoint empower the vision and voice of the less powerful and validate the significance of their existence. It places the power to speak about the subordinate or marginal positions within those who occupy those positions.

2. 2. Standpoint Theory and Fiction

How do these three aspects of standpoint theory relate to the study of fiction? They can be articulated within a fictional text as well as outside the text, in the author and reader. In relation to the term "African American woman writer" the concept of a standpoint or "positionality" suggests that "African American" and "woman" partially articulate a specific social experience which influences one's view of the world. The relationship between this positionality -- or any other -- and fiction is much more complicated. Although Toni Morrison's novels emerge out of the specific context of the history of African Americans, they are nonetheless fictional representations of this experience.

One of the main projects currently underway in feminist scholarship and politics is, as Sandra Harding describes, how to reinvent oneself as other in an effort to make connections between different perspectives and to work toward ending oppression. Little, to my knowledge, has been done on the relationship between fiction and standpoint theory in scholarly projects. Fiction has not been used extensively to inform standpoint theory nor has literature been widely envisioned by standpoint theorists as a space

to "reinvent oneself as other." A one to one correspondence between experience and fiction is reductive and simplistic. But complicated questions do exist about how literature may be studied from different standpoints, how different standpoints may function within a text, and how connections can be made between the various positionalities inherent within author, text, and reader. The Bluest Eye and Beloved are appropriate contexts in which to address these issues because the perspectives developed in the novels force the reader to see from a specific positionality. As Morrison has said, "The point is to try to see the world from their [the characters'] eyes and I think that is probably what causes readers some dismay."[23] This complicated "reinvention" demands a great deal of imagination and conscious effort.

2.3. The Home

The home is one area in which to study the fluid relationship between collective and individual identities. It is an appropriate place to field questions about social difference and is often the physical and psychological manifestation of one's positionality. In chapters two and three, I study constructions of home in Morrison's The Bluest Eye and Beloved in order to understand the specifc standpoint developed in each novel. The home has been the focus of many feminist critiques of the role of women, but remains a complicated and paradoxical environment. Before I look at Morrison's two novels, I establish home as a category of analysis by illuminating some of its complexities as they have been articulated in feminist analyses. While the home is critiqued as a political environment, it

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[23] Toni Morrison as quoted in Nellie McKay, "An Interview with Toni Morrison," Contemporary Literature vol. 24, no 4 (1983), p. 423.

is also envisioned as a safe place of humanization. It is possible to remove Morrison's constructions of home from the context of the novel and speak about them solely on a sociological or political level. To do so here, however, would be to ignore the connection between the home and fiction.

Chapter 1:

The Political Practice of Home

1.0 The Home: Critiqued as a Political Place . . .

2.0 . . . vs. Envisioned as a Safe Space

3.0 Home as a Central Concern in The Bluest Eye and Beloved

> "I had no understanding of the limits I lived within, nor of how much my memory and my experience of a safe place to be was based on places secured by omission, exclusion or violence, and on my submitting to the limits of that place."
> -- Minne Bruce Pratt "Identity: Skin Blood Heart"[24]

> There is nothing more important to me than home." -- Barbara Smith, Introduction to Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology[25]

1.0 The Home: Critiqued as a Political Place . . .

The above quotes illustrate the paradoxes and hint at the complexities inherent within the idea and experience of home. Pratt critiques her childhood home as a place of repression while Smith identifies her home as the most important part of her life. Although Pratt and Smith regard their respective homes differently, each home plays a tremendously influential role in their lives and is intricately related to a larger political and social history. Pratt and Smith's studies of home -- which I examine more closely below -- combine personal experience with critical thinking. The home is, in these instances and in a wide range of feminist analyses from highly theoretical to personal and autobiographical, a category of analysis. It is well known that feminists have critiqued the conception of home as a safe haven from the political activity of the public realm, and have argued that locating womenhood exclusively within the home is a means of denying women social and political power. Ideologies of gender, race, and class

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[24] Minnie Bruce Pratt, "Identity: Skin Blood Heart," Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism (New York: Firebrand Books, 1984), pp. 25-26.

[25] Barbara Smith, "Introduction," Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983), p. xix.

function in the home as well as their institutionalized and systematized manifestations: sexism, racism, classism. Yet, the desire for home as a safe haven persists. Patricia Hill Collins, Betty Friedan and bell hooks are three feminists who have illuminated the influence of ideologies of gender, race, and class within the home. Their critiques identify the home as a political environoment.

Collins' critique of the 1965 Moynihan report and the 1986 Moyers documentary -- both studies of the perceived deteriorating state of the black American family -- demonstrates how ideologies of race, gender, and class mold conceptions of the home.[26] Both Moynihan and Moyers blame the illiteracy, illegitimacy, poverty and irresponsibility, which they define as particularly present in black homes, on an absent father and an incompetent single mother who is forced to work outside of the home. Moynihan contends that

> [b]roken homes and illegitimacy do not necessarily mean poor upbringing and emotional problems. But they mean it more often when the mother is forced to work (as the Negro mother so often is), when the father is incapable of contributing to support (as the Negro father so often is), when fathers and mothers refuse to accept responsibility for and resent their children, as Negro parents, overwhelmed with difficulties, so often do, and when the family situation, instead of being clear-cut and within defined roles and responsibilities, is left vague and amibiguous (as it so often is in Negro families).[27]

Their reports are structured around an idealized image of home embodied by white, educated, middle- to upper-class families. Although Collins

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[26] Bill Moyers encouraged the undertaking of what came to be known as the Moynihan report. The report formed the basis of President Johnson's 1965 commencement speech at Howard University. See Signs, vol 14, no. 4 (Summer 1989), p. 740

[27] Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 50.

outlines four other areas in the reports that invite critical analysis, she focuses on the intersection of race, class, and gender ideologies in Moynihan and Moyer's conceptions of home and family life. In both the Moynihan report and the Moyers documentary, Collins argues, "racial difference was used to explain class disadvantage while gender deviancy was used to account for racial difference."[28] Black poverty was based in race and gender ideologies which, in turn, relied upon the specific conception of social class as a dependent variable, "as something that is an outcome of other more basic variables such as cultural values and family structure . . . . "[29] Collins' critique of the two reports shows how intertwined race, class and gender are in the assumptions of researchers as well as in the "object" of study. She argues that neither of the elements can be removed from an analysis "without seriously jeopardiz[ing] a full understanding of the experiences of any group of people."[30]

Ideologies of race, gender, and class have, in part, framed feminist analyses of the home as well. Although The Feminine Mystique is widely considered liberal in its assumptions, Betty Friedan offered one of the most radical critiques of the home.[31] Friedan de-mystifies feminine ideals by locating their origins in social, political and historical realities and submits the "private" sector of the suburban home to public scrutiny. She argues that the suburban home is the bastion of patriarchy and capitalism, and is

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[28] Patricia Hill Collins. "A Comparison of Two Works on Black Family Life," Signs, vol. 4, no. 4 (Summer 1989), p. 882.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., p. 884.

[31] For a version of different feminist frameworks, from conservative, to liberal, to radical, see Alison Jaggar and Paula Rothenberg's Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations between Women and Men (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1978).

therefore a site of women's oppression. She compares the monotony and boredom of housewifery for women whose education prepared them for more intellectually challenging work with the systematic "deterioration of human character" that prisoners of war experience. Rather than a safe haven from political activity of the social sphere, the suburban home is a "comfortable concentration camp."[32]

Friedan conducted her study within and for a specific audience, but she spoke of "the American woman" as if she were easily identifiable and categorizable.[33] The over-inclusiveness of Friedan's book has been well documented by feminists of color such as bell hooks. hooks argues that Friedan "actually refered to the plight of a select group of college-educated, middle-to-upper class, married white women -- housewives bored with leisure, with the home, with buying products, who wanted more out of life."[34] Although she acknowledges and applauds the impact of Friedan's book in the re-kindling of feminism, hooks, like Sandra Harding, rejects any exhaustive account of "woman" and "women's experience." Friedan's critique, according to hooks, did not condone a radical restructuring of society, but merely demanded that women, at least financially privileged white women, be permitted entrance into the white man's public arena. The upkeep of suburban homes, once housewives abandoned housecleaning

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[32] See chapter twelve of The Feminine Mystique, "Progression Dehumanization The Comfortable Concentration Camp," (New York. Dell Publishing Co., 1963), pp. 271-299.

[33] Friedan's experience was primarily in journalism and she wrote for "women's magazines" such as The Lady's Home Journal and Mademoiselle, magazines whose average reader corresponded to her "all-American" housewife. It was for and within this audience that Friedan conducted her study of the "way American women are trying to live their lives today."

[34] bell hooks, Feminist Theory from Margin to Center (Boston: South End Press, 1984), p. 1.

and childcare for careers, would be maintained by working-class women who, because of their class and often their race, were denied access to the feminine mystique that Friedan critiques as well as to the liberatory women's movement.

hooks uses a critique of Friedan to rethink feminism from the marginalized experience of African American women both in liberatory movements -- the Women's Movement and black liberation movements -- as well as in institutionalized systems.[35] Like standpoint theorists, she bases her analysis on an understanding of a multi-layered network of social relations and argues that the subordinate experiences and perspectives of black women can transform feminism. hooks examines the relationship between central and marginal experiences and develops a notion of positionalities in her analysis of the intersection of multiple oppressions. Race, gender and class are not exclusive categories but mutually influential forces. She does not, however, use the term "standpoint." Published in 1984, hooks' study appeared several years before many of the earlier texts on standpoint theory.[36]

2.0 . . . vs. Envisioned as a Safe Space

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[35] Although one of the most visible feminist theorists, hooks is not the only one to explore the over-exclusivity of the 1960 and 1970s women's movement. Other important critiques include France Beal's "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," in Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement, Robin Morgan, ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1970); Deborah King's "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology," Signs, vol. 14, no. 1 (Autumn 1988). See also Barbara Smith's Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology and Moraga and Anzaldua's This Bridge Called My Back, op. cit.

[36] Both Nancy Hartsock's "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism" and Dorothy Smith's The Everyday World as Problematical were published in 1987.

Minnie Bruce Pratt, Barbara Smith, and bell hooks further problematize conceptions of the home in studies based in personal experience which acknowledge the powerful desire for a "home." While these writers recognize the political significance of the home, they also conceive of the home as a safe place of humanization which acts as a metaphor for a vision of society without discrimination. The tension between these two conceptions of home is explored in The Bluest Eye and Beloved.

Minnie Bruce Pratt studies the intersection of race, gender, class and religion as systems of exclusion in her study of identity derived from the home. She refuses what Biddy Martin and Chandra Tolpade Mohanty call "purely personal, visceral experiences of identity," and works toward "a complicated working out of the relationship between home, identity, and community that calls into question the notion of a coherent, historically continuous, stable identity and works to expose the political stakes concealed in such equations."[37] She analyzes the home both as a negative environment based in systems of inclusion and exclusion and also as a positive, constructive space of interaction across differences. Pratt rejects specific manifestations of home, but she uses it as a metaphor for a world which encompasses rather than rejects or effaces difference. Home is envisioned not as a static construct but as an active participant in individual and social identity. Narrative in form, Pratt's essay uses her own experience as the basis for her analysis, thereby combining personal experience and careful, critical analysis. As a result, the essay is neither

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[37] Biddy Martin and Chandra Tolpade Mohanty, "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got To Do With It?" Feminist Studies/Critical Studies Teresa de Lauretis, ed (Bloomington Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 195.

purely autobiographical nor purely academic in its form and approach. This integration of personal experience and theorizing is a feminist approach based in standpoint theory and offers an example of what scholarly work can be, beyond the traditional "subject of study / objective researcher" dichotomy.

Pratt's study focuses on three stages in her life: her experience as a Southern-born, Christian-raised white girl in Alabama, a married graduate student with two young sons, and a feminist active in the women's movement who comes to terms with her lesbian identity. At each of these very complex stages, Pratt works to uncover the political and historical backdrop which frames her understanding of herself, others and the world. She forces herself to re-examine the past and expand what she calls her "constricted eye" in order to reveal systems of inclusion and exclusion that frame her experience of home. Pratt writes, "I had no understanding of the limits that I lived within, nor of how much my memory and my experience of a safe place to be was based on places secured by omission, exclusion or violence, and on my submitting to the limits of that place."[38] Pratt's analysis is guided by a general distinction between "being home" and "not being home." She defines "being home" as the feelings derived from being in a false place of security, comfort and familiarity. "Not being home" demands an understanding of the systems of inclusion and exclusion operative within the home; of the "illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within oneself."[39]

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38 Pratt, pp. 25-26.

39 Martin and Mohanty, p. 196.

Pratt refects upon an important past experience, one that, she later realizes, symbolizes the complex, paradoxical relationship she had with her Alabama, rural home and that reveals the political element of social relations so often effaced by idealized, privatized notions of home. As a child, her father took her to the top of the town courthouse where he wanted her to climb up the tower and look down upon the town, a town whose history Pratt's father and grandfather were influential in forming. Too afraid to ascend to such heights and look down, Pratt refused to climb up. What her father intended was to present her with his world, a world he helped engender. Pratt reflects, "I think now that he wanted to show me a place he had climbed to as a boy, a view that had been his father's and his, and would be mine. But I was *not* him: I had not learned to take that height, that being set apart as my own: a white girl, not a boy."[40] Had she climbed to the top Pratt would have seen, among other important buildings, the Methodist church, the Health Department, the Board of Education, the doctor's office with one door for blacks and one for whites, the market, the yellow brick Baptist church which, she makes clear, was built with the same kind of yellow brick as the jail. What she would not have seen, had she gone to the top, was "the sawmill, or Four Points where the white mill folks lived, or the houses of Blacks in Verneer Mill quarters."[41] The architectural structures represent institutionalized ideologies: Christianity, the judicial system, the health care system, for example.

Pratt later understands how her identity was molded by the demographic and geographic aspects of her childhood home. What is visible and invisible to the eye of the examiner helps to determine one's

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40 Pratt, p. 16.

41 Ibid.

view of the world. Pratt writes, "I was shaped by my relation to those buildings and to the people in the buildings, by ideas of who should be working in the Board of Education, of who should have the guns and the keys to the jail, and who should be *in* the jail; and I was shaped by what I didn't see, or didn't notice, on those streets."[42] Looking back and examining the relationship of her father to the buildings and people visible from the courthouse, Pratt expands her constricted eye so as to see the buildings and people marginalized in her father's vision. As she expands her perception of the world, Pratt understands that "what was presented to [her] as an accurate view of the world is frequently a lie."[43] She realizes how her conception of home was formed by the idea of a natural superiority. Pratt writes,

> I was taught to be a judge, of moral responsibility and of punishment only in relation to my ethical system; was taught to be a martyr, to take all the responsibility for change, and the glory, to expect others to do nothing; was taught to be a peacemaker, to mediate, negotiate between opposing sides because I knew the right way; was taught to be a preacher, to point out wrongs and tell others what to do. . . . I realized how habitually I think of my culture, my ethics, my morality, as the culmination of history, as the logical extension of what has gone before. . . .[44]

Pratt learns that these positive roles of judge, martyr and peacemaker conceal an ideology of superiority. She writes, ". . . [G]roup identity in my culture has been defined, often, not by positive qualities, but by negative characteristics: by the absence of: . . . we have gotten our jobs, bought our houses, borne and educated our children by the negatives: no

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42 Ibid., p. 17.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., p. 19.

niggers, no kikes, no wops, etc."[45] To increase the span of her vision demands that she consciously *choose* to see the diversity of positionalities that her upbringing taught her to ignore.

As her experience on the steps of the courthouse manifests, Pratt's understanding of home was narrowly limited to relations between people of privileged races and religions. It also demanded the superiority and subtle control of white men as fathers and husbands. Pratt writes,

> . . . [T]he physical, spiritual, sexual containment which men of my culture have used to keep "their women" pure, our wombs to be kept sacred ground, not polluted by the dirty sex of another race, our minds, spirits and actions to be Christian, not "common," but gentlewomanly, genteel, gentile; thereby ensuring that children born of us are theirs, are "well-born," of "good" blood, skin, family; and that children raised by us will be "well-raised," not veering into wild actions, wayward behavior.[46]

Pratt later accepts her lesbianism and, subsequently, is vehemently rejected by her husband and the courts who award her ex-husband custody of her two sons. Divorced and a lesbian, Pratt broke out of the containment men of her culture used to control her, but not without the price of freedom -- total ostracism. This rejection led her to search for a new home in women's groups and lesbian communities. But often these versions of home were based in similar ideologies of race and class that her childhood home maintained. To be a lesbian and associate only with lesbians is not to live in the world as it is. Pratt again struggles to reject constructions of home based in narrow definitions of "woman."

Yet the desire for a home as a safe haven is real. While Pratt critiques the political and social implications of the relationship between blood, skin,

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45 Ibid.

46 Pratt, p. 36.

heart, and the home, she acknowledges the power and appeal of those connections. As Martin and Mohanty note, there is in Pratt's text and in her struggle an "irreconcilable tension between the search for a secure place from which to speak, within which to act, and the awareness of the price at which secure places are bought, the awareness of the exclusions, the denials, the blindnesses on which they are predicated."[47] While she struggles against limits that define home, she also works toward a utopian vision. She envisions the ultimate home, a world which encompases difference rather than rejects it. Rather than falling into a narrow, static view of the world, she tries to "live on the edge" which as Martin and Mohanty note "is what characterizes her "being in the world as it is," as opposed to remaining within safe, bounded places with their illusion of acceptance."[48] And "it is her situation on the edge that expresses the desire and the possibility of breaking through the narrow circle called home without pretense that she can or should "jump out of her skin" or deny her past."[49] Pratt intentionally places herself in a position of responsibility and action, responsibility for uncovering the truths and histories of her past as well as actively creating a new way of functioning in the world -- one that, for Pratt, is based in love for other women.

The word struggle is used throughout her essay and is part of the title of the collection of essays: Yours In Struggle. It suggests action, an engaged position, and work -- constant efforts to reject uninformed assumptions and prejudices and accept the existence other approaches to life. Martin and Mohanty locate the integrity of Pratt's narrative and her

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47 Martin and Mohanty, p. 206.
48 Ibid., p. 197-8.
49 Ibid.

sense of self in the "refusal to make easy divisions and with the unrelenting exploration of the ways in which the desire for home, for security, for protection -- and not only the desire for them, but the expectation of a right to these things -- operates in Pratt's own conception of political work."[50] Martin and Mohanty study Pratt's text as a point of departure for raising questions about "how political community might be reconceptualized within feminist practice."[51] Pratt's essay shows how identity, community and conceptions of home are neither "the product of essential connections" nor "the product of political urgency or necessity."[52] She defines them as a "constant recontextualizing of the relationship between personal-group history and political priorities."[53] Home mediates between collective history and individual identity.

There are, however, other ways of conceiving home. In their analysis of Pratt's text, Martin and Mohanty make this clear. "We might usefully keep in mind," they write, "that the approach to identity, to unity, and to political alliances in Pratt's text is itself grounded in and specific to her complex positionalities in a society divided very centrally by race, gender, class, ethnicity, and sexualities."[54] And, indeed, in works by black American women writers, home is often constructed in a significantly different manner. Although the vision that guides the work of both Pratt and black women writers is similar, their relationship to their home is contingent upon the larger issues of, for example, race and class.

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50 Ibid., p. 206.
51 Ibid., p. 210.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid., p. 210-11.

Barbara Smith and bell hooks, who as black women from working-class backgrounds have had very different experiences of home than Pratt, envision the home as a positive site of resistance. In the introduction to Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology, Barbara Smith locates the roots of her politics and her sense of self in her experience of home. "There is nothing more important to me than home," she begins.[55] Home is first a small five room house with a small dirt yard hidden behind other houses on "83rd Street between Central and Cedar Avenues in what was called the Central Area, one of Cleveland's numerous ghettoes,"[56] then a ten-room, two-storey house in a "better" neighborhood. The move to the new house brought her closer to white people, "mostly Italians and Jews" who soon left the neighborhood.[57] Classmates, however, were white: "Polish, Czech, Yugoslavian, or Hungarian."[58] The working-class Cleveland neighborhood and the "new" old house harbor memories of home for Smith. Like Pratt, Smith specifies the demographic, ethnic, geographic, architectural elements of her childhood home, each of which corresponds to a history of political relationships.

Whereas Pratt's memory of her childhood home was dominated by the image of her father, Smith and hooks recall the women of their families. Smith remembers that her sister, mother, aunt and grandmother did "everything necessary to maintain a home. They cleaned, cooked, washed, ironed, sewed, made soap, canned, held jobs, took care to business downtown, sang, read, and taught us to do the same."[59] hooks associates

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55 Smith, p. xix.
56 Smith, pp. xix-xx.
57 Ibid., p. xx.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.

women with homes; houses were not women's property, but were "places where all that truly mattered in life took place -- the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of bodies, the nurturing of our souls. There we learned dignity, integrity of being; there we learned to have faith. The folks who made this life possible, who were our primary guides and teachers, were black women."[60] Smith and hooks's experiences of home -- as a result of the women, rather than as a result of the location and condition of their houses and neighborhoods -- were positive and empowering.

Both Smith and hooks locate their politics in the daily lives of these women. Smith writes, "I learned about Black feminism from the women in my family -- not just from their strengths, but from their failings, from witnessing daily how they were humiliated and crushed because they had made the 'mistake' of being born Black and female in a white man's country. I inherited fear and shame from them as well as hope."[61] The women of Smith's home instilled in her a sense of past, a feeling of pride in her origins and consequently a framework through which she could begin to conceive of the future. An understanding and connection with the past is, however, fraught with contradictions. Pride in the African American tradition must not translate into passive acceptance of the submissive and oppressed role black Americans have historically been forced to play. Nor must it erase the obstacles black women, as women, have been forced to negotiate and surmount, even within the African American community. Smith locates her politics, her active construction of who she is and how

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60 bell hooks. "Homeplace," Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics. (Boston: South End Press, 1990), pp. 41-2.

61 Smith, p. xxii.

she functions in the world, in the tension between fighting systems of oppression based in race and in gender while finding a voice for her experience as a black American woman. "These conflicting feelings about being a Black woman," writes Smith, "still do battle inside of me. It is this conflict, my constantly '. . . seeing and touching/Both sides of things' that makes my commitment real."[62] She gathers the strength for her struggle from her home. Smith writes, "Black feminism deals in home truths, both in analysis and action."[63] Similarly, hooks defines the home as a place were black women created a space of "care and nurturance in the face of the brutal harsh reality of racist oppression, of sexist domination."[64] Black women created homes a spaces "where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world.[65]

Although their initial experience of home was quite different, both Pratt and Smith struggle to work toward a future that does not use race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion as indications of value and as political divisions between people. They use their specific position in the network of social relations to formulate a feminist approach to the present and future.

3.0 Home as a Central Concern in The Bluest Eye and Beloved

In the above examples, the concept of home is analyzed as a complex point of tension between self and society. The exclusive, discriminatory

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62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., p. xxxv.
64 hooks, "Homeplace,"p. 42.
65 Ibid.

aspects of home are critiqued, while the positive elements -- a space of support which counters oppression outside the home -- are celebrated. Home plays this problematic, even paradoxical, role in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye and Beloved, examined in the following chapters. Rather than simply a theme, motif or structural device, the home in these novels can be seen as what Susan Willis calls a "central concern." It "enables a critical perspective upon the past, the present and sometimes into an emerging future."[66] The perspective is clearly grounded in the specific standpoint of a black woman or girl. Morrison takes pains to articulate the geographic, architectural, demographic, historical, cultural and socio-economic aspects of the home in the novels. The home appears variously as a house, a storefront, and a plantation, but also as women and black culture struggling against systematic oppression by the dominant white culture. While the various homes structure the narratives, they are firmly grounded in the material realities of race, class, history, and politics. The homes partially define a specific positionality. Linda Alcoff relates identity to "a constantly shifting context, to a situation that includes a network of elements involving others, the objective economic conditions, cultural and political institutions and ideologies, and so on."[67] The home mediates between this larger historical context and individual identity. Studying the relationship of the characters to their respective homes results in a more

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66 Susan Willis, "Black Women Writers: Taking a Critical Perspective," Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism. Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn, eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 1985), p. 220.

67 Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," Signs, vol. 13, no. 3, (Spring 1988), p. 433. Refer back to p. 8 of the introduction for Alcoff's definition of "positionality."

subtle and intricate understanding of the complexities in the concept of a standpoint than the theory offers on its own.

Chapter 2:

"Here is the house....Here is the family....They are very happy": The Destructive Effects of the "Dick and Jane" Ideology on the Home in The Bluest Eye

1.0 The "Dick and Jane" Ideology of Home

2.0 Locating Black Experience in the Margins of the Primer Ideology

3.0 Making the Unseen Visible: Illuminating the Influence of the White Home on the Black Home

4.0 Validating Marginalized Perspectives and Knowledge

5.0 Choosing the Margins

The Bluest Eye explores the destructive effects of dominant ideologies of the home on the socially marginalized experiences of young black girls. The home in the novel is embodied in four different family units: the primer family of Dick and Jane, the Breedloves, the MacTeers, and the three prostitutes. The novel's epigraph, an excerpt from a Dick and Jane primer story which structurally frames the novel, defines the ideal home according to three elements: the house, the family, and harmony. The three other homes are evaluated against the ideological backdrop of this familial paragon. Morrison defines specific positionalities by grounding the narrative in the perspectives of three young black girls whose experiences are marginalized by the primer paragraph. By illuminating and validating their experiences, she critiques the racist assumptions inherent in the dominant "Dick and Jane" construction of home.

After a violent but temporary family breakup, Pecola Breedlove is deposited by social workers at the home of Claudia and Frieda MacTeer. During a transformative year in which they are thrust into adolesence, the three girls endure a change that far exceeds a "loss of innocence" theme in the magnitude and finality of its destruction. Recognizing the difference in social attitudes toward white and black girls, Pecola attributes the total absence of love and affection in her life to her appearance. Pecola is "ugly." Her ugliness does not stem from a grotesque physical deformity, but is rather a quality arbitrarily assigned to her by a dominant culture that equates worthiness with skin color. Pecola internalizes this ugliness, twists

it until it becomes, in her mind, the cause of the violence and cruelty she daily endures. She equates beauty with blue eyes and, in turn, whiteness. Her desire to be accepted and loved translates into a desire for blue eyes. By the end of the novel, Pecola is pregnant by her father, Cholly. In opposition to the collective desire for her unborn baby to die, Claudia and Frieda plant marigold seeds with the hope that if the seeds sprout, then Pecola's baby will live. "I felt a need," says Claudia, "for someone to want the black baby to live -- just to counteract the universal love of white baby dolls, Shirley Temples, and Maureen Peals."[68] The seeds, which symbolize Pecola and her child, do not sprout. The baby dies and Pecola, deluding herself into believing that she has blue eyes, slips quietly into insanity. Claudia and Frieda's symbolic self-assertion is powerless against the collective social denigration of black girls represented by the unyielding earth. Later, Claudia connects Pecola's destruction to racism: "This soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear."[69] Morrison examines who these "certain seeds" are and the process of their social, and finally self-, rejection.

1.0 The "Dick and Jane" Ideology of Home

Standpoint theorists contend that social relations are multi-layered. Dominant layers depend upon, but refuse to see, subordinate layers as Pratt's narrow, childhood view of social relations did not include, and therefore marginalized, groups from different classes and races. Morrison establishes a clear distinction between two social layers -- blacks and whites -- and charts the psychological effects of the radical marginalization of

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[68] Morrison, The Bluest Eye (New York: Washington Square Press, 1970), p 148.
[69] Ibid., p. 160.

young black girls by the white culture and even within the black culture. The superficial, dominant layer of social relations is equated with the Dick and Jane ideology of home. A paragraph from the Dick and Jane scenario opens and frames the novel. It describes three aspects of the home: the house, the family, and the harmony of familial interaction.

> 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. See Jane. She has a red dress. She wants to play. Who will play with Jane? See the cat. It goes meow-meow. Come and play. Come play with Jane. The kitten will not play. See Mother. Mother is very nice. Mother, will you play with Jane? Mother laughs. Laugh, Mother, laugh. See Father. He is big and strong. Father, will you play with Jane? Father is smiling. Smile, Father, smile. See the dog. Bowwow goes the dog. Do you want to play with Jane? See the dog run. Run, dog, run. Look, look. Here comes a friend. The friend will play with Jane. They will play a good game. Play, Jane, play.[70]

The architectural manifestation of the home is a house, colorful and pretty. The family consists of Mother, Father, Dick and Jane who, as representatives of the archetypal American family, are necessarily white and middle-class. The parents are physically present, married and properly male and female -- the concept of same-sex parents is inconceivable within the ideology of the primer. The relationship between Jane and her parents is harmonious: Mother laughs and Father smiles. Jane's primary concern is who will play with her, a desire soon satisfied with the convenient introduction of "the friend." The pretty house, white family and harmonious interaction represent the ideal home.

The paragraph is repeated three times; the second time without punctuation and capitalization, and the third time without spacing. The

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[70] Ibid., p. 7.

change is from an ordered, controlled description -- contained in short, precise noun-verb-object sentences -- to a garbled mass of letters. The disintegration of the grammatical structure and punctuation of the epigraph foreshadow Pecola's ensuing psychic fragmentation. Excerpts from this unstructured version of the Dick and Jane paragraph preface specific chapters. Morrison creates, as Michael Awkward notes, "an inverse relationship between pretext (the primer) and text (her delineation of Afro-American life)."[71] Lines from the paragraph that describe Jane's house preface the chapter in which the third-person narrator describes Pecola's house; the lines "SEEMOTHERMOTHERISVERYNICE . . . ."[72] correspond to the chapter on Pecola's mother, Pauline, and the lines "SEEFATHERFATHERISBIGAND STRONG . . . . ."[73] correspond to the chapter that describes Cholly's past, and so on. The central elements of the primer paragraph -- the house, the cat, mother, father, the dog, the friend -- appear as plot elements in the novel, but only after being subverted to correspond with Pecola's reality.[74]

The use of the primer paragraph as an epigraph and a structuring device emphasizes the influence the Dick and Jane ideology exercises on the characters. The collective Women on Words & Images published a study of gender ideologies in grade school primer two years after the publication of The Bluest Eye. The collective argues that primers, historically used for religious and later scholastic education, are institutionalized means of

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71 Michael Awkward, "Roadblocks and Relatives: Critical Revision in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye," in Critical Essays on Toni Morrison Nellie Y. McKay, ed. (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1988), p. 58.

72 Morrison, The Bluest Eye, p. 88.

73 Ibid., p. 105.

74 Awkward, p. 58.

disseminating specific beliefs to a wide audience of impressionable children.[75] Their study concludes that children, during their most malleable stage of development, assimilate the content and values of their books without critical understanding. In the primers, the mother is a "limited, colorless, mindless creature."[76] The father is repeatedly portrayed as "big and strong," mysteriously fast at work "at jobs that cannot be done by children and children have little idea just what their fathers do for a living."[77] Girls are encouraged to be passive, docile, dependent, and self-effacing. They "need not apply for personhood" for they are not complete and independent persons.[78] Girls are regarded as stupid; victimizing and humiliating them is a rite of boyhood. Morrison explores the subtle indoctrination of self-abnegation and self-abhorrence in the lives of Claudia, Frieda and Pecola. In the novel, a group of boys circle Pecola and harass her with accusations that her "daddy sleeps nekked."[79] Morrison complicates the boys' abhorance of Pecola, locating it in their own self-hate, for it is "their contempt for their own blackness that gave the first insult its teeth.[80] Nevertheless, the boys assume an active, dominant role, while the girls, especially the black girls, clutter the

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75 Primers were originally a book of devotions. The origin of the name is obscure but probably refers to the fact that prayers were read early in the morning, before 6 a.m. or the prime. In North America, the most frequently published and widely used primers were the New England Primers which were said to teach "millions to read and not one to sin." See A Cyclopedia of Education, Paul Monroe, ed., vol. 5, (New York: MacMillan Co., 1913), and The Encyclopedia and Dictionary of Education, Foster Watson, ed., vol. 3. (London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, Ltd., 1922).

76 Women on Words & Images, Dick and Jane as Victims: Sex Stereotyping in Children's Readers (Princeton, NJ: Women on Words & Images, 1972), p. 26.

77 Ibid., p. 11.

78 See Women on Words & Images, pp. 16-24.

79 Morrison, The Bluest Eye, p. 55.

80 Ibid.

background. Girls are spectators, not participants in readers, and "black girls, along with their mothers and white sisters, are used as scenery."[81]

This critique locates the harmonious familial interaction in racist and sexist stereotypes of "Mother, Father, Dick and Jane." Despite the "smiles" and the "laughs," Women on Words & Images argues that "neither girls nor boys in the readers exhibit any realistic range of human emotions, but even the few permitted are off-limits to boys. Emotions belong to the lesser sex, something that weak, foolish people alone experience."[82] Michael Awkward suggests that, although the primer paragraph describes the "bourgeois myths of ideal family life," "the emotional estrangement of the primer family members (an emotional estrangement suggested by that family's inability to respond to the daughter Jane's desire to play) implies that theirs is solely a surface contentment. For despite . . . [the] suggestion that this family is represented as "healthy" and "supportive," it appears to be made up of rigid, emotionless figures incapable of deep feeling."[83] Although the Dick and Jane ideology of home is established as the dominant social and political force, it is presented as a restrictive environment -- similar to the limits of Pratt's home. Later Morrison uses Pecola and Claudia's perspectives to critique this oppressive environment further.

Sterile and obsessed with order and control, the "white" homes in The Bluest Eye correspond to Awkward's reading of the primer family. The financially-privileged white woman Pauline originally worked for is preoccupied with petty concerns and is unable to develop and maintain honest and meaningful human relationships. Pauline recalls:

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81 Women on Words & Images., p. 31

82 Ibid., p. 22.

83 Awkward, p. 58-59.

> It wasn't so much her meanness as just simpleminded. Her whole family was. Couldn't get along with one another worth nothing. You'd think with a pretty house like that and all the money they could holt on to, they would enjoy one another. She haul off and cry over the leastest thing. If one of her friends cut her short on the telephone, she'd go to crying. She should of been glad she had a telephone. I ain't got one yet.[84]

Economically secure white people in the novel are ungrateful for, if not simply oblivious to, the luxury of material comforts. Their inability to manage and evaluate the unpredictability of life is juvenile. The Mother-Father-Dick-Jane familial ideal is devoid of what Morrison calls "funkiness," an essential and vital aspect of life: "the dreadful funkiness of nature, the funkiness of the wide range of human emotions,"[85] a funkiness that the black community, in its ideal manifestations, celebrates. Furthermore, Pauline's recollection illustrates the intersection of race, class and gender as forces in the construction of identity. Although both Pauline and her employer are women, their experiences of gender are markedly different and depend upon the implications of race and class. This dynamic intersection of changing forces -- rather than essences or constants -- corresponds to Alcoff's definition of positionality.

2.0 Locating Black Experience in the Margins of the Primer Ideology

Pecola's home is the very antithesis of the "Dick and Jane" ideology of home. Both Jane and Pecola live with their parents and brother. Yet, the harmony of Jane's home -- however superficial it appears -- is radically subverted in Pecola's home. Pecola's family name, Breedlove, ironically

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84 Morrison, The Bluest Eye, p. 94.

85 Ibid., p. 68.

contrasts the reality of her home life. The Breedloves do not, in fact, breed love. Their love is contorted into acts of violence and cruelty as when, for example, Cholly and Pauline physically fight over who should fetch wood for the stove, and Cholly repeatedly rapes Pecola. The Breedloves' mutual hatred stems perversely from mutual dependency. By hating each other, each could remain intact. Pauline "needed Cholly's sins deperately. The lower he sank, the wilder and more irresponsible he became, the more splendid she and her task became."[86] Unlike Jane's mother, Pauline is not present, both physically -- she spends most of her time working in the kitchen of her white employers, and emotionally -- she is detached and formalized as evinced by her insistence on being called Mrs. Breedlove by her own children. Like Jane's father, Cholly Breedlove is heterosexual; but unlike Jane's "big and strong" father, Cholly, an alcoholic, releases his mixture of love and hate for what his daughter represents into incestuous sexual abuse.

Pratt, Smith and hooks each connect the architectural and physcial appearance of their homes to the specific social forces of race and class. And, in The Bluest Eye, both Jane and Pecola's respective houses are the physical embodiment of the dominant forces in their lives. Whereas Jane lives in a pretty green-and-white house, Pecola lives in an ugly storefront located on the "southeast corner of Broadway and Thirty-fifth Street in Lorain, Ohio."[87] The demographic, geographic, architectural and historical details describe these different forces. Morrison relates the plan of the living quarters -- one bedroom for four people, a coal stove, no bath facilities and a toilet bowl which was "inaccessible to the eye, if not the ear,

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[86] Ibid., p. 37.
[87] Ibid., p. 30.

of the tenant,"[88] -- as well as the store's history: who built it -- a first generation Greek landlord; what businesses operated in the store -- first the "base of operations" for a gypsy family, then a real estate office, then a Hungarian bakery, then a pizza parlor.[89] After this string of occupants, the store is finally abandoned. The empty structure does not "recede into its background of leaden sky, nor harmonize with the gray frame houses and black telephone poles around it."[90] Instead, it assumes the role of an active character, "foist[ing] itself on the eye of the passersby in a manner that is both irritating and melancholy."[91]

In 1941, before the long list of occupants, the store is inhabited by the Breedloves who live there not because of temporary financial setbacks, but because of their class and race. The family is positioned outside the institutions of social interaction because of their appearance and financial state. With no position as producer or influential consumer, they are disinherited from the capitalist system. They did not buy their make-shift home; they do not use the store to sell goods. This marginalization is reinforced daily in the lives of the characters. Looking back on her childhood, Claudia understands that she was marginalized by caste and class: "Being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about anyway on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate our weaknesses and hang on, or to creep singly up into the major folds of the garment."[92] The abuse that she, like others in the black community, endure is considered a frustrating but accepted aspect of life. When Cholly, as a young boy, went

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88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid., p. 18.

to "the colored side of the counter" to buy his train ticket to Macon, he is called a "lying nigger" by the ticketmaster. Yet, to Cholly, these "insults were part of the nuisances of life, like lice."[93]

Black experience is the "unseen" in the gaze of those in positions of power. Mr. Yacobowski, the owner of "Yacobowski's Fresh Veg. Meat and Sundries Store" where Pecola buys candy, is so repulsed by Pecola because she is black that he erases her presence from his view of the world. He regards her with a "vacuum" in his eyes, "the total absence of human recognition -- the glazed separateness."[94] He, whose "lumpy red hand" is compared to the "agitated head of a chicken outraged by the loss of its body," is unable to "see her view -- the angle of his vision, the slant of her finger," which points inoffensively to the candy she wants, "makes it incomprehensible to him."[95] Although he is clearly the one who, because of attitude and bodily movements, is repulsive to the reader, in his mind Pecola warrants disgust. As owner of the store, he occupies a relative position of power over Pecola; he dictates who is served, and how, in his store. Yet, despite his abhorance of her, he depends upon her business and takes her money. This scene in the novel illustrates the political elements in an encounter between two people as simple as a girl buying a piece of candy. Even in such a brief exchange, ideologies of race, class and gender predominate.

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93 Ibid., p. 121.
94 Ibid., p. 42.
95 Ibid.

3.0 Making the Unseen Visible: Illuminating the Influence of the White Home on the Black Home

The origins of the Breedloves' consuming self-hate are located in their rejection of their own culture and the internalization of the "Dick and Jane" ideology. The commodity culture of the United States inflates and disseminates this ideology not only through educational materials, such as the primer, but also through Hollywood, the media, advertising, storeshelves. Shirley Temple memorabilia, advertisements, blond-haired, blue-eyed dolls make frequent appearances in the novel. Claudia's parents buy her a blond-haired, blue-eyed doll for Christmas. "Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs -- all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured . . . . "Here," they said, "this is beautiful, and if you are on this day 'worthy' you may have it.""[96] Unlike Pecola who internalizes these messages and idealizes the dolls -- she drinks three quarts of milk at one time because she wants to "gaze fondly at the silhouette of Shirley Temple's dimpled face" on the side of the cup[97] -- Claudia initially rejects them. She hates Shirley Temple, "not because she was cute, but because she danced with Bojangles, who was *my* friend, *my* uncle, *my* daddy, and who ought to have been soft-shoeing and chucking with me."[98]

As a young girl, Claudia is perceptive enough to feel betrayed not because she doesn't look a certain way -- white skin, blue eyes, etc. -- but because she is denied the attention of her own community, her parents and her heritage, represented by Bojangles. In giving her a white doll for Christmas, her parents are, in effect, rejecting her. Claudia destroys the

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96 Ibid., p. 20.
97 Ibid., p. 19.
98 Ibid.

doll; she "poked the glassy blue eyeballs," "broke off the tiny finger," so as to "examine it to see what it was that the world said was lovable."[99] Black skin and hair are normal in her view of the world. The "grown people" reprimand her, exposing an emotion which "threatened to erase the aloofness of their authority."[100] "Years of unfulfilled longing preened in their voices" when they scold Claudia: "I-never-had-a-baby-doll-in-my-whole-life-and-used-to-cry-my-eyes-out-for-one-of-them. Now-you-got-one-a-beautiful-one-and-you-tear-it-up-what-is-the-matter-with-you?""[101] Giving Claudia the doll, they embrace Shirley Temple and Jane as paragons of girlhood. Claudia's rejection of the doll is cruel, selfish and unappreciative in their eyes. But the adults, unable to affirm their own identity, do not see the positive self-assertion in Claudia's gesture. Her preferred Christmas gift is not a toy or an object but an "experience," an experience which celebrates black life and rises from within it. She wants to "sit on the low stool in Big Mama's kitchen with my lap full of lilacs and listen to Big Papa play his violin for me alone."[102] The beauty of this "gift" comes from having all of one's "senses engaged." The experience is not dependent upon what one can purchase, and is therefore a rejection of commodity culture, but upon the "security and warmth" of human relationships. Claudia is not exempt, however, from the influence of the messages that bombard her. During adolescence and the accompanying insecurity and self-doubt, Claudia's allegiance changes: "I reached the turning point in the development of my psyche which would allow me to

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99 Ibid., p. 20.
100 Ibid., p. 21.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.

love her [Shirley Temple]."[103] Claudia's perverse conversion is from "pristine sadism to fabricated hatred, to fraudulent love."[104] The permanent contortion of Claudia's self-image is as destructive as Pecola's psychic fragmentation. Claudia's experience with white dolls is another example of how ideologies of race and gender intersect in the formation of individual identity. Claudia can never attain the paragons of girlhood, and later womanhood, because she is black.

Pauline rejects her own heritage in favor of the cleanliness and material comfort of her white employer's kitchen. She "never felt home anywhere, or that she belonged anyplace."[105] This sense of isolation fosters an artistic sensibility. Cleaning the kitchen and organizing the shelves become opportunities to release this inclination so that "whatever portable plurality she found, she organized into neat lines, according to their size, shape and gradations of color."[106] Missing, "without knowing that she missed, paints and crayons," Pauline practices her art of housework not in her own home, but in the home of her white employers. Ironically, while the black community did not give her a nickname -- her children even call her Mrs. Breedlove -- her white employers do. They call her "Polly" and declare their total dependence upon her. According to Trudier Harris, nicknaming within black folk tradition reflects patterns of caring and incorporation into the community.[107] Here, however, the caring is dominated by a business relationship of employer to employee.

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103 Ibid., p. 19.
104 Ibid., p. 22.
105 Ibid., p. 88.
106 Ibid., p. 89.
107 Trudier Harris, "Reconstructing Fragments: Afro-American Folk Tradition in The Bluest Eye," Critical Essays on Toni Morrison, Nellie Y. McKay, ed. (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1988), p. 74.

The family's nickname is patronizing. Pauline rejects all connection with her own home and family and embraces the white home, which offers her what she could not have in her own home: "More and more she neglected her house, her children, her man -- they were like the afterthoughts one has just before sleep, the early-morning and late-evenings edges of her day, the dark edges that made the daily life with the Fishers lighter, more delicate, more lovely."[108] The effects of this rejection are realized in Pauline's daughter. Having nothing to pass along to her daughter, Pauline disinherits her. Pecola is denied any support that participation in cultural heritage might have offered her.

Pauline's rejection of the black community begins with her "education in the movies."[109] There she adopts the dreams of romantic love and physical beauty and was unable, after that, 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 the full from the silver screen. . . . .In equating physical beauty with virtue, she stripped her mind, bound it, and collected self-contempt by the heap."[110] Cholly's internalization of racist attitudes began when, engaged in his first experience with sex, he was discovered by a group of white hunters. They shine a flashlight on his nude buttocks and tell him to ""Get on wid it, nigger.""[111] Cholly focuses his rage and frustration from the emasculating experience onto the girl, Darlene.

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[108] Morrison, The Bluest Eye, p. 101.

[109] Ibid., p. 97.

[110] Ibid.

Women on Words & Images also notes that "girls are encouraged to dress up and play, to covet clothes and to preen, whereas clothing or physical attractiveness is virtually ignored in relation to boys." [Women on Words & Images, Dick and Jane as Victims: Sex Stereotyping in Childrens' Readers, (Princeton NJ: Women on Words & Images, 1972), p. 26.]

[111] Morrison, The Bluest Eye, p. 117.

> Sullen, irritable, he cultivated his hatred of Darlene. Never did he once consider directing his hatred toward the hunters. Such an emotion would have destroyed him. They were big, white, armed men. He was small, black, helpless. His subconscious knew what his conscious mind did not guess -- that hating them would have consumed him, burned him up like a piece of soft coal, leaving only flakes of ash and a question mark of smoke. He was, in time to discover that hatred of white men . . . . For now, he hated the one who had created the situation, the one who bore witness to his failure, his impotence.[112]

Later, as his hatred for white men and for himself flames within him, he again turns to the one who witnesses his failure: his daughter Pecola. His rape of her is a perverse combination of tender love for her and the mockery of that love in his inability to care and provide for her. "The clear statement of her misery was an accusation. . . . What could a burned-out black man say to the hunched back of his eleven-year-old daughter?"[113] These two emotionally powerful scenes illustrate Morrison's complication of human action based upon personal and collective past experience. The history of race relations frames the hunters' taunting of Cholly. The incident, in turn, molds Cholly's self-conception and influences others around him. Rape in the novel is clearly not a positive act. But Morrison reveals the love that underlies Cholly's act, and she locates the perversion of that love in Cholly's personal interaction with a history of white domination.

Through Claudia, her sister Frieda, and Pecola, Morrison explores the experience of children, a perspective which illuminates the mechanisms of adult control as the perspectives of black people expose systematic white domination. As Sandra Harding argues, the perspective of the less

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[112] Ibid., p. 119.
[113] Ibid., p. 127.

powerful -- here young black girls -- provides a more objective view of the more powerful -- here the adult world and the Dick and Jane ideology -- than the perspective of those who occupy more the powerful positions. Morrison focuses on experiences specifc to young girls: menstruation, romanticization of womanhood -- embodied in the blues songs Claudia's mother sings, and developing sexuality -- abused in the novel by older men. Pecola's first menstruation establishes her ability to get pregnant and foreshadows the inevitable conception after her father rapes her. Her emotional and psychological immaturity contrasts the advanced stage of her physical development. Of the three girls present when Pecola first begins to menstruate, only the eldest, Frieda, understands what is happening. Pecola thinks she is going to die. The event also lays the groundwork for the only love that Pecola does receive, albeit perverted into an incestuous relationship. Frieda tells Pecola, who is curious about how she will now be able to have a baby, that "somebody has to love you."[114] Having babies is associated with love, a connection by no means essential, Claudia later learns, for pregancy. But in Pecola's mind, getting someone to love her is by far a greater mystery. "'How do you do that? I mean, how do you get somebody to love you?'" Pecola asks Claudia who does not know.[115] Accustomed to fighting their ways in the world, the girls regard the concept of love as foreign, a mysterious line in one of their mother's blues songs. The difference between Claudia and Frieda's reaction to the lack of love in their lives and that of Pecola is the difference between life and death. Claudia remembers:

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[114] Ibid., p 29.
[115] Ibid.

> We had defended ourselves since memory against everything and everybody, considered all speech a code to be broken by us, and all gestures subject to careful analysis; we had become headstrong, devious and arrogant. Nobody paid us any attention, so we paid very good attention to ourselves.[116]

Their reaction, at least while they are still young, is to refuse that which they do not have. In this way, there is no lack. Pecola, on the other hand, turns inward and tries to change herself to "get somebody to love [her]."

Once young black girls reach the age where they embrace the Shirley Temple image as the embodiment of worth and value, many of them focus their lives on the imitation of this image. They accept the continuum wherein white and black are mutually dependent while at the same time mutually exclusive. There is only white because there is black and vice versa; white can never be black, and black never white. There are, however, those who try, both literally and ideologically, to become white. Although Morrison condemns the systems of value based on skin color, she also condemns those black people who accept and perpetuate this perverted system. Among them are the young women "from Mobile. Aiken. From Newport News. From Marietta. From Meridian." Places that are drenched in such beauty and purity that "the sounds of these places in their mouths make you think of love."[117] The romanticization of their home towns, of their lives and manners intitially disguises the perverted values of these women who imitate the image of Mother in Jane's happy home, an image which demands the "careful development of thrift, patience, high morals, and good manners."[118] Morrison's description connects their obsession with order and cleanliness to the availablity and promotion of

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116 Ibid., p. 149.
117 Ibid., p. 67.
118 Ibid., p. 68.

products designed specifically for the black woman trying to look white. These women "wash themselves with orange-colored Lifebuoy soap, dust themselves with Cashmere Bouquet talc, . . . soften their skin with Jergens Lotion. They smell like wood, newspapers, and vanilla. They straighten their hair with Dixie Peach, and part it on the side."[119] Morrison's disdain for these women is evinced in Pecola's encounter with Geraldine, "One such girl from Mobile, or Meridian, or Aiken who did not sweat in her armpits nor between her thighs,"[120] and whose life is devoid of any manifestation of "funkiness." Geraldine maintains the difference between colored and "niggers," "colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud,"[121] a difference she teaches her son, Junior. Desperate for a play companion, Junior lures Pecola into his house when his mother is not home. He mocks and torments her, and as she tries to escape from the house, Junior swings his cat by the hind legs. He lets go, and the cat hits the window and dies. When his mother returns, Junior blames the death of the cat on Pecola. The cat, a plot element from the primer paragraph, appears in Pecola's life only to betray her. Geraldine is unable to see Pecola as a terrified girl. Instead, she is blinded by Pecola's dark skin color and categorizes her as a "nigger." Here race is not an essence. One can mold one's experience of race, as does Geraldine. However, by further subdividing race, she perpetuates a hierarchized, racist system.

Morrison describes Geraldine as a type of woman easily identifiable and categorized because she so adamently and consciously adheres to and maintains such categories. In fact, Morrison details every aspect of such a

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119 Ibid., p. 63.
120 Ibid., p. 70.
121 Ibid., p. 71.

woman: her appearance, attitude, beliefs, concerns, family life, husband, sexuality which maintain this categorization. So focused on the subtle differences between being "colored" and a "nigger," Geraldine is unable to engage in honest human relationships. Her relationship with both her son and husband is stifling and artificial like Awkward's reading of the relationship between "Mother, Father, Dick and Jane." Geraldine can only relate to the cat who does not challenge the distinctions between categories of people. Loving the cat is unchallenging and safe. Geraldine, like Claudia and Pecola's respective mothers, internalizes the system of value based on appearance and skin color and evaluates her children according to it.

4.0 Validating Marginalized Perspectives and Knowledge

Standpoint theory bases knowledge in specific social and historical experiences. Morrison locates the perspective of the novel in the black home -- a perspective which offers a very different understanding of social relations than does the view from Dick and Jane's or Pratt's childhood home. Furthermore, children develop intricate means of deciphering the adult world that monitor and direct their movements. Words in and of themselves mean little. Actions, the tone of voice, gestures become touchstones for Claudia and her sister. Claudia remembers that as a child she and her sister did "not hear their words, but with grown-ups we listen[ed] to and watch[ed] out for their voices."[122] Claudia's mother speaks with her friends and, to Claudia,:

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[122] Ibid., p. 15.

> Their conversation is like a gently wicked dance: sound meets sound, curtsies, shimmies, and retires. Another sound enters but is upstaged by still another: the two circle each other and stop. Sometimes their words move in lofty spirals; other times they take strident leaps, and all of it is punctuated with warm-pulsed laughter -- like the throb of a heart made of jelly. The edge, the curl, the thrust of their emotions is always clear to Frieda and me. We do not, cannot, know the meanings of all their words, for we are nine and ten years old. So we watch their faces, their hands, their feet, and listen for truth in timbre.[123]

Although some of the words carry no meaning for Claudia, images do. The intensity of daily conversations, gestures and events in the young mind of Claudia blend with sensations, so that sounds become colorful and animated, touch becomes loud or quiet, and so on. Meaning is molded and shaped to fit a child's perspective. Denied information about sexuality, Claudia and her sister reason that to be fat is to be "ruined" and ruin, as they know from their mother's comments about the prostitute called The Maginot Line, is to be avoided at all costs. They overhear adults say that whiskey eats one up and makes one thin; so the two decide to drink whiskey to prevent them from becoming fat, thereby avoiding ruin. Claudia and Frieda's reasoning is another example of how knowledge is constructed by a specific social expereince.

Morrison counters the "Dick and Jane" ideology of the home with positive home environments that emerge directly from black experience. These constructions of home celebrate the "funkiness" that the white homes continually suppress. Positive constructions of the black home include Aunt Jimmy's home and Southern black culture, and the spirituality and sensuality of the three prostitutes who live in the apartment above Pecola's. They each involve strong spiritual beliefs, a tradition of music and

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[123] Ibid., p. 16.

metaphorical language which are grounded in the collective history of African American people. Human relationships are based in mutual support and a celebration of the sensuality of life. Focusing specifically on a black community, Morrison explores the positive elements of the black community that are erased under the category of "other." In the novel, the strongest elements of the black community are traced to the Southern black experience, an experience best captured in the strength of the community when faced with sickness and death. As a child, Cholly lives with his Aunt Jimmy. His father abandoned his mother before Cholly was born, and his mother, after a failed attempt to kill the child, left soon after his birth. The cruelty of Cholly's parents is countered by his aunt and her community. Folk medicine and Christianity mix with a spirituality that has African roots. Aunt Jimmy wears an asafetida bag around her neck. When she becomes ill in her old age, advice pours in. While one woman reads her the Bible, others suggest "Don't eat no whites of eggs," "Drink new milk," "Chew on this root."[124] Because the black community has been denied access to professional medical attention, black women become proficient in the development and application of their own home remedies -- remedies that are respected and successful. No one considers asking for a doctor when Aunt Jimmy is sick. They go for "M'Dear" the "competent midwife" and "decisive diagnostician" who "lived in a shack near the woods."[125] M'Dear's advice after careful inspection of the patient is to "bury the slop jar and everything in it . . . . Drink pot liquor and nothing else."[126] Aunt Jimmy improves significantly until someone disobeys

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[124] Ibid., p. 108.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.

M'Dear's advise and offers Aunt Jimmy peach cobbler. "The old lady ate a piece, and the next morning when Cholly went to empty the slop jar, she was dead."[127] The peach cobbler is regarded as the cause of her death, a foreign element interrupting the natural healing process delineated by M'Dear. Aunt Jimmy's funeral is followed by a banquet which unifies the black community and celebrates the "funkiness" of life. The banquet was the "exultation, the harmony, the acceptance of physical frailty, joy in the termination of misery. Laughter, relief, a steep hunger for food."[128] The burial and feast serve, as Trudier Harris notes, "to return order to a community disrupted by death. Like all rituals, it provides a functional release, a pattern into which grief can be shaped, for the entire community."[129] Harris studies these folk elements as connections between the life in Lorain, Ohio and African American culture. They emerge out of a pattern of survival and coping, "traditions that comfort in times of loss, and beliefs that point to an enduring creativity."[130] These examples of community, spirituality, support and caring are absent from Pauline and Cholly's adult home, resulting from a complex, slow process triggered by the internalization of the values of white culture and leading to isolation and self-hatred.

Of the four main family units in the novel, the three prostitutes who live above Pecola's storefront home are the only ones to completely reject the "Dick and Jane" ideology and re-construct the home to fit their experiences. The women break all stereotypes of prostitutes: they are not

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127 Ibid., p. 110.
128 Ibid., p. 113.
129 Harris, p. 74.
130 Ibid., p. 68.

those "with great and generous hearts, dedicated, because of the horror of circumstance, to ameliorating the luckless, barren life of men;" nor are they "the sloppy, inadequate whores who, unable to make a living at it alone, turn to drug consumption and traffic or pimps to help complete their scheme of self-destruction, avoiding suicide only to punish the memory of some absent father or to sustain the misery of some silent mother."[131] These women hate men, "all men, without shame, or apology, or discrimination."[132] They reject male domination as the determining principle in their lives. Susan Willis argues that Morrison offers the three-woman household as "an alternative and utopian possiblity for redefining the space and the relationships associated with social production."[133] The 3-woman household challenges bourgeois living arrangements, patriarchal relationships and interaction, and the economics of capitalism. While the prostitutes reject stereotypes of the "whore," they also reject the other categories of womanhood: virgin, wife and mother.

5.0 Choosing the Margins

The novel critiques social systems of valuation based on appearance -- both skin color and perceived beauty -- from the perspective of those rejected by such systems. Powerless against the pervasive effects of racism, Pecola and other black people of the novel denigrate themselves by internalizing the system of valuation based on superficial characteristics. A hierarchy is created so that everyone removes the hate and ugliness from

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131 Morrison, The Bluest Eye p. 47.

132 Ibid.

133 Susan Willis, "Black Women Writers: Taking a Critical Perspective," in Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism, Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn, eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 1985), p. 234.

themselves and places them onto the person below them. Pecola, as Claudia later understands, is the lowest on the hierarchy: "All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed. And all of our beauty, which was hers first and which she gave to us. All of us -- all who knew her -- felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her."[134] While the novel critiques the home as a stronghold of capitalism, racism and sexism, it also conceives of the home as a site of resistance against systematic discrimination. A strong presence of black culture and heritage in the home combined with the free expression and exploration of emotions and sensations -- Morrison's funkiness -- counter the psychological oppression of black women.

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134 Morrison, The Bluest Eye. p. 159.

Chapter 3:

Home "Sweet Home" Slavery in Beloved

1.0 Illuminating the Historical and Political Contexts of 124 and Sweet Home

2.0 The Home: Mediating between the Seen and the Unseen

3.0 Subverting the Ultimate Home: Motherhood

4.0 Reconstructing the Home from the Margins

As in The Bluest Eye, Morrison explores the effects of the dominant, racist white culture on the black home in Beloved. The "Dick and Jane" ideology appears in its most extreme form as the institution of slavery. The experience of Sethe, an ex-slave, provides the critical insight into slavery's far-reaching mechanisms of control and oppression. With her three young children and pregnant with a fourth, Sethe escapes to Ohio from the Kentucky plantation Sweet Home in 1855, eighteen years before the opening of the novel. She is soon tracked down by "schoolteacher," the Sweet Home slave driver, accompanied by an entourage of hounds. Rather than send her children back, Sethe tries to kill them with a quick slice of a handsaw across their throats before schoolteacher reaches them. She is successful in killing only one, the two-year-old girl, before she is stopped by her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs. Intimidated by an "animal-woman" who would kill her own child, schoolteacher returns to Kentucky without her. In the years following, Sethe's two eldest children run away, repelled by the power of their mother's love, a force, they know, that can kill. The youngest child, Denver, a new-born at the time of the murder, remains with her mother.

For years, Sethe's Southern Ohio house at 124 Bluestone Road is haunted by the ghost of the dead child. Soon after the novel opens, the baby appears embodied as a twenty-year-old, child-like woman called Beloved. Sethe understands Beloved is her child and, to "make up for the handsaw,"[135] offers Beloved the love she had previously denied her.

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[135] Toni Morrison, Beloved (New York: Penguin Inc., 1987), p. 251.

Beloved feasts off of Sethe's love; like a parasite, she "ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it."[136] The relationship between Sethe and Beloved provides the focal point of the novel and funnels larger questions about slavery and the home, and individual and collective histories. Slavery clearly subverts motherhood and destroys the black home for the benefit of the dominant slave owners. The question becomes: is death the only escape from enslavement or an oppressive system? Paul D, also an ex-slave from Sweet Home, does not understand Sethe's act, believing that "there could have been a way . . . some other way,"[137] and reminds her that, despite everything she has been through, she is a human being, not an animal: "You got two feet, Sethe, not four."[138] A vile and depraved system, slavery corrupts the oppressed as well as the oppressor. By grounding the narrative in the perspective of a slave woman, Morrison shows how Sethe's murder of her child is the only means of subverting this system. The novel explores Sethe's confrontation with the past and her struggle to re-create a sense of wholeness that slavery destroyed.

1.0 Illuminating the Historical and Political Context of 124 and Sweet Home

The novels' two homes, Sweet Home and "124," along with the historical and political contexts in which they are imbedded, frame the novel. Structurally, each of the novel's three sections begins with a description of Sethe's house: "124 was spiteful", "124 was loud", "124 was quiet."[139] The progression from spite, to loudness, to quietness mirrors

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136 Ibid., p. 250.
137 Ibid., p. 165.
138 Ibid.
139 Ibid., pp. 3, 169, 239.

the plot's development, climax in the exorcism of Beloved from 124, and resolution in Sethe's return to wholeness. 124 has a long history involving both the black and white communities of Southern Ohio. It is the birthplace of a prominent white man, Mr. Bodwin -- a complicated character although he appears once, briefly, toward the end of the novel. Sethe mistakes him for Sweet Home's schoolteacher coming to return her and her children to slavery. On a larger scale, the misrecognition attests to the suspicion black people in the novel feel toward white people. Slavery becomes synonomous with white people, the "men without skins" as Denver calls them. Later, the house falls into the hands of the newly-freed Baby Suggs and her daughter-in-law, Sethe. Initially, 124 is conceived of as a home. The house played an important, unifying role in the black community. It acted as a way station, "the place [the town's people] assembled to catch news, taste oxtail soup, leave their children, cut out a skirt."[140] 124 is the first structural manifestation of a home outside of slavery for many of the novel's characters. But when Sethe kills her baby, the community ostracizes 124, regarding Sethe as evil as the slavemaster.

The geographical location of Sethe's house accesses the larger political context of slavery in the United States. Located at 124 Bluestone Road, the house is situated not far from the Ohio River in a rural area now engulfed by Cincinnati. Ohio, as Morrison clarifies in the first paragraph, has been a state for only 70 years when the story begins.[141] The state plays a complex, paradoxical role in the history of race relations in the United States and, in turn, in the lives of the novel's characters. In an interview, Morrison explains the significance of Ohio:

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[140] Ibid., p. 249.

[141] Ibid., p. 3.

> The northern part of the state had underground railroad stations and a history of black people escaping into Canada, but the Southern part of the state is as much Kentucky as there is, complete with cross-burnings. Ohio is a curious juxtaposition of what was ideal in this country and what was base.[142]

Ohio is both asylum and prison. As Sethe crosses the Ohio River, escaping from Sweet Home, she looks to the Ohio side and thinks it "looked like home."[143] This ideal image of Ohio is shattered once schoolteacher penetrates the border of the supposedly free state. Although officially a free state during slavery, Ohio was a dangerous place for fugitive slaves after the Fugitive Slave Law, enacted in September 1850, facilitated the process whereby slaveowners reclaimed fugitive slaves as "lost" or "stolen" property.[144] Furthermore, even after slavery was outlawed, it nevertheless continued in the form of racism and terrorist groups such as

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142 Toni Morrison, as quoted in Claudia Tate, "Toni Morrison," in Black Women Writers at Work, Claudia Tate, ed. (New York: Continuum, 1983), p. 119

143 Morrison, Beloved, p. 83.

144 Ohio was a dangerous place for a black person, before and after the Civil War, because of the Ku Klux Klan and the Fugitive Slave Law. According to Walter Teller, "Enacted in September 1850, the Fugitive Slave Law made it easy to seize legally and enslave any black man or woman at large. A white man had only to appear before a specially appointed United States commissioner, swear ownership of the black person, and request a certificate for arresting him. The commissioner received more money (ten dollars) for issuing such a certificate and less (five dollars) for refusing it. The alleged fugitive was not permitted to testify, nor, if he claimed to be a freeman, did he have the right to trial by jury. Citizens, if called on, had to assist United States marshals in making arrests. Anyone harboring or rescuing a fugitive could be fined, imprisioned, and sued for damages. The Fugitive Slave Law brought on an era of slave hunting and kidnapping in the North that forced hundreds of slaves who had escaped before 1850 to flee to Canada. It polarized opinions and helped set the stage for the Civil War." [As noted by Walter Teller on p. 44 in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl by Harriot Jacobs (Linda Brent), (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973). Jacobs, born a slave in 1818 who was able to escape, educated herself and recorded her experiences as a slave which appeared in 1861 as Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. The text is annotated by Teller. The original editor, L. Maria Child, admits to an occasional "literary, moralizing, or didactic touch" which, she contends, is "distinguishable from the stark realities of Linda Brent's life and straightforward narration."(x)]

the Ku Klux Klan. Ohio, Paul D knows, is "infected by the Klan. Desperately thirsty for black blood, without which it could not live, the dragon swam the Ohio at will."[145]

Like 124 and Ohio, Sweet Home and the South play a paradoxical role, harboring a combination of terror and joy for the characters. Even after the brutality she lived through at Sweet Home, Sethe is often able to remember only the physical beauty of the plantation: ". . . although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled out before her in shameless beauty. It never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too."[146] Remembering the beauty, and not the terror, of Sweet Home is a survival mechanism and makes the present more bearable. This paradox shows the intensity of the desire for a home. Pratt also experiences the tension between rejecting oppressive and dominating aspects of home and searching for the ultimate, comfortable home. Sethe's memories of Sweet Home and Pratt's essay both suggest that appearances of beauty and comfort often conceal, or depend upon, a more profound system of discrimination and oppression.

The Kentucky plantation's name, Sweet Home, contrasts the reality of the plantation's existence. It survived, of course, only because of slave

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145 Morrison, Beloved, p. 66.

Also, Mary Wright, born in 1865 in Kentucky, recalls, ""I heard my Mammy talk of 'De Nigger Risin". De Ku Klux uster stick de niggers head on er stake alongside de Cadiz road en dar de buzzards would eat them till nuthin' was left but de bones. Dar war a sign on dis stake dat said "Look out Nigger You are next". Us chillluns would not go far way from dat cabin. I'se tells you dat is so I jes knowed dat dis Ku Klux would do dat to us sho if weuns had been catched.""(The American Slave, vol. 16, p. 62). For direct accounts of life under slavery from the point of view of ex-slaves, see The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography, George P. Rawick, general ed., (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1972.

146 Toni Morrison. Beloved., p. 6.

labor.[147] As Paul D admits, although they lived there for years, "it wasn't sweet and it sure wasn't home."[148] Before the arrival of schoolteacher, the plantation was owned and operated by the benevolent Mr. Garner. The relationship between Garner and the black men "was true metal: they were believed and trusted, but most of all they were listened to."[149] Permitting them to carry rifles and calling them men is as paradoxical as the name of the plantation. Garner instilled in them an illusion of personhood and manhood. The plantation enforced a "special kind of slavery;"[150] gentle human bondage is human bondage nonetheless:

> A truth that waved like a scarecrow in rye: they were only Sweet Home men at Sweet Home. One step off that ground and they were trespassers among the human race. Watchdogs without teeth; steer

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147 In Plantation Societies, Race Relations, and the South: The Regimentation of Populations, Edgar T. Thompson -- a white man who grew up on a South Carolina planation and questioned its means of existence only once he had left -- argues that the plantation is 1) a settlement institution, 2) an economic institution, an industrial dynamic exercised through agricultural rather than through manufacturing production, 3) a politicial institution, and 4) a cultural institution. He also identifies it as the physical basis of traditional race relations and as a race-making situation. See Edgar T. Thompson, Plantation Societies, Race Relations, and the South: The Regimentation of Populations (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1975).

Many studies on slavery and the plantation have focused exclusively on the economic concerns of white plantation owners, thereby effacing the very real atrocity of slavery with figures and calculations. Carl F. Hall does just this in his comment which prefaces an interview with an ex-slave. "It is probable that slave labor was more expensive to the white masters than free labor would have been. Beside having cost quite a sum a two-year old negro child brought about $1,500 in the slave market, an adult negro, sound and strong, cost from $5,000 up to as high as $25,000, or more. The master had to furnish the servant his living. The free employee is paid only while working; when sick, disabled or when too old to work, his employer is no longer responsible."(The American Slave, Vol. 16, Kentucky narratives, p. 32-33.) Although Hall's comment about the expense of keeping people as slaves may be true, the overall effect of his words is to present slavery as a much more appealing prospect for the worker than waged labor.

148 Morrison Beloved., p. 14.

149 Ibid., p. 125.

150 Ibid., p. 141.

> bulls without horns; gelded workhorses whose neigh and whinny could not be translated into a language responsible humans spoke.[151]

Sethe is seduced initially by Mr. Garner's treatment of his slaves. Garner permitted her husband, Halle, to rent himself out for years on Sundays to make enough money to buy her freedom from Garner. Sethe defends Garner to Halle. Halle responds, ""If he hadn't of, she would of dropped in his cooking stove.""[152] A dead slave carries no monetary value. Garner's so-called generosity benefits him anyway. Halle understands this, "If she worked another ten [years] you think she would've made it out? I pay him for her last years and in return he got you, me and three more coming up."[153] Once Garner dies and schoolteacher takes over, the "special kind of slavery" loses its distinctiveness and no longer disguises its purpose under a facade of humane treatment. The plantation's use of slave labour is a clear example of a dominant system's total dependence on the systematic and institutionalized oppression of a specific group of people.

As Sandra Harding and other standpoint theoriests have argued, it is from the perspectives of the slaves that slavery's mechanisms of control become clear. She uses the example of the relationship between slaveowner and slave to illustrate the bond between knowledge and experience. She contends that

> it is absurd to imagine that U.S. slaveowners' views of Africans' and African Americans' lives could outweigh in impartiality,

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151 Ibid., p. 125.

152 Ibid., p. 195.

153 Ibid., p. 196.

Harriot Jacobs remembers, "Slaveholders have a method, peculiar to their institution, of getting rid of *old* slaves, whose lives have been worn out in their service I knew an old woman, who for seventy years faithfully served her master. She had become almost helpless, from hard labor and disease. Her owners moved to Alabama, and the old black woman was left to be sold to anybody who would give twenty dollars for her" [Jacobs, Indicents in the Life of a Slave Girl, p. 14]

> disinterestedness, impersonality, and objectivity their slaves' views of their own and the slaveowners' lives. One doesn't have to assert that the slaves' views are impartial, disinterested, or impersonal in order to make this assessment, or to give the slaves -- any more than one gives their masters -- the last word about such matters as how the economics of slavery functioned on an international scale, in order to recognize the resource that the perspective from their lives' provides on the views typical of slaveowners. If human knowledge is not in some complex way grounded in human lives and human experiences, what is the source of its status as knowledge in modern Western societies?[154]

Garner and schoolteacher assume such a powerful position in Sethe's life that their perspective of slavery threatens to conquer Sethe's own knowledge of her experience. Halle relies upon his knowledge of slaveowners from the point of view of being their property and critiques them on the basis of that knowledge.

Slavery destroys any manifestation of home the slaves may create.[155] As a "white home," the plantation appropriates the black home for its own material and financial benefit. Human interaction between whites and blacks and between blacks themselves is subverted and stifled. Slaves learn not to love, not to establish intimate relationships. Any ties made will be severed by the slave market.[156] Paul D notices in Sethe a

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[154] Sandra Harding, Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 270.

[155] See Angela Y. Davis, Women, Race and Class (New York: Vintage, 1981), especially chapter one, "The Legacy of Slavery: Standards for a New Womanhood," for an analysis of black women and slavery. Davis contends that black women, brutally abused under slavery, resisted by creating positive domestic environments -- as well as engaging in overt acts of resistance such as revolts, escapes, and sabotage. Morrison would agree with Davis because Sethe escapes from Sweet Home and she works to create a positive home environment for her children both on the plantation and off. Morrison's understanding, however, is much more problematic and complex than Davis's, for loving ones' children while dominated by an oppressive, corrupt system may involve murdering them. Slavery is seen to subvert these positive domestic environments.

[156] Harriet Jacobs devotes a section of her book to "the lover." "Why does a slave ever love? Why allow the tendrils of the heart to twine around objects which may at any

love for her daughter, Denver, that he decides is too intimate and therefore dangerous:

> Risky, thought Paul D, very risky. For a used-to-be-slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love. The best thing, he knew, was to love just a little bit; everything, just a little bit, so when they broke its back, or shoved it in a croaker sack, well, maybe you'd have a little love left over for the next one.[157]

"They," of course, are white people who lurk outside 124, "out there" in Denver's mind. At a young age, Sethe learns of the danger of loving. She barely knew her mother who was relegated to the fields, unable to nurse

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moment be wrenched away by the hand of violence? When separations come by the hand of death, the pious soul can bow in resignation, and say, "Not my will, but thine be done, O Lord!" But when the ruthless hand of man strikes the blow, regardless of the misery he causes, it is hard to be submissve. I did not reason thus when I was a young girl. Youth will be youth. I loved, and I indulged the hope that the dark clouds around me would turn out a bright lining I forgot that in the land of my birth the shadows are too dense for light to penetrate" [Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, p 36]

Other ex-slave narratives recall marriage being forbidden on plantations or, if slaves were permitted to marry, the matches were arranged and controlled. In his interview with ex-slave John Cox, Carl F. Hall notes that "as a rule, negro men were not allowed to marry at all, any attempt to mate with the negro women brought swift, sure horrible punishment and the species (sic) were propagated by selected male negroes, who were kept for that purpose, the owners of this provileged (sic) negro, charged a fee of one out of every four of his offspring for his services" [The American Slave, vol 16, Kentucky narratives, p. 34.]

Susan Dale Saunders, an ex-slave from Kentucky, recalls ""Mammy was allowed to marry one of the Allen slaves, and my father's name was Will Allen. You see the slaves had the same name as the Master's, as he owned 'em. My Mammy had seven children and we all grow'd up on our Master Dales fa'm. My father had to stay at his master's, Col. Jack Allen's and wo'k in the fields all day, but at night he would come to my mammy's cabin and stay all night, and go back to his master's, Col. Allen's fields the next mon'in. Yes, I grow'd up in slavery times"" [The American Slave, vol. 16, Kentucky narratives, pp. 43-44].

Similaly, Annie B Boyd, born August 22, 1851, remembers, ""De white folks jes made niggers carry on like brutes. One white man uster say ter nuther white man, My nigger man Sam wanter marry yer nigger gal Lucy what does yer say en if he said it was all right why dat couple war supposed to be married. Den Sam would work foh his marster in de daytime en den would spend de night at Lucy's house on de next plantation"" [The American Slave, vol. 16, Kentucky narratives, p. 59].

157 Morrison, Beloved, p. 45.

her own child, then finally hanged. Sethe was cared for by Nan, a slave whose priority was to nurse the white infants and then, if there was milk to spare, to feed Sethe and the other black children. Upon looking at Denver, newly born and barely alive, Sethe's friend Ella advises her not to hope that she makes it. ""If anybody was to ask me,"" she tells Sethe, ""I'd say, 'Don't love nothing.'""[158] Baby Suggs saw all but the last of her children sold in the slave market.

> . . . it wasn't worth the trouble to try to learn features you would never see change into adulthood anyway. Seven times she had done that: held a little foot; examined the fat fingertips with her own -- fingers she never saw become the male or female hands a mother would recognize anywhere. She didn't know to this day what their permanent teeth looked like; or how they held their heads when they walked. Did Patty lose her lisp? What color did Famous' skin finally take?. . . .[159]

Since anybody that Baby Suggs "knew, let alone loved" had been "hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized," the fact that her daughter-in-law and all her children appear on the doorstep of 124 in Ohio terrifies her.[160] Considering her experience and her knowledge of social relations, it is ironically unnatural. In Baby Suggs' mind, allowing herself to rejoice in her daughter-in-law and grandchildren's presence led to the brutality that followed the celebration. Just as when she was a slave, the worst happened when things started to look good. Within this context, the implications of Paul D's desire to make a life with Sethe -- "We can make a life, girl. A life."[161] -- become clear.

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158 Ibid , p. 92.
159 Ibid., p. 139.
160 Ibid.
161 Ibid., p. 46.

Personified as a "screaming house,"[162] 124 initially assumes an independent, active role in the novel. It maintains an antagonistic relationship with Denver and Sethe. The baby ghost that repeatedly pounds the walls and floors is mistaken for the house itself. At one point, it is "full of strong feeling."[163] Denver thinks of 124 as a person not an architectural structure.[164] The extraordinary house, clearly different from the other homes on Bluestone Road, is known locally for its lively, but invisible, inhabitant. Compared to 124, thinks Paul D, "the rest of the world was bald."[165] Yet, the baby ghost that inhabits 124 and brings the structure to life is separate from the actual physical construction of the house. It is Sethe, rather, and her experience that call forth the ghost.[166] When Sethe tells Paul D that the community's ostracization of them is caused by the house, Denver retorts, ""It's not! It's not the house! It's us. And it's you.""[167] Once Beloved has finally disappeared, Stamp Paid remarks that "unloaded, 124 is just another weathered house needing repair."[168] The house is the physical and structural manifestation of the inhabitants' personal histories. 124's internal appearance is an extension of Sethe's psychological and emotional state. The absence of color inside the house is due to Sethe's inability to notice and remark on color in the world

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162 Ibid., p. 18.

163 Ibid., p. 39.

164 Ibid., p. 29.

165 Ibid., p. 41.

166 In many traditions, ghosts do not simply appear; they must be summoned and the passions of the living keep them alive. See Margaret Atwood. "Haunted by Their Nightmares, New York Times Book Review, 13 September 1987, pp 1, 54-55. Also, Luisah Teish, "Women's Spirituality: A Household Act," Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983), pp 331-351.

167 Morrison, Beloved p. 14.

168 Ibid., p. 264.

after she buried her daughter. The vibrant color of blood blinds her to the nuances of color; "it was as though one day she saw red baby blood, another day the pink gravestone chips, and that was the last of it."[169] The interior with its slate-covered walls, earth-brown floor, white curtains, the "wooden dresser the color of itself," and "the dominating feature, the quilt over an iron cot" reflects the stark reality of its inhabitants. Color represents individual expression, sensuality, and beauty -- "funkiness" -- which forced oppression suffocates.

2.0 The Home: Mediating Between the Seen and Unseen

124 records past experiences and re-plays them in the present. The intensity of this mediation between past and present makes the dead child's presence as a ghost, then as Beloved, believable. Memories occupy physical space within the house and Sethe finds room for little else.

> When she woke the house crowded in on her: there was the door where the soda crackers were lined up in a row; the white stairs her baby loved to climb; the corner where Baby Suggs mended shoes, a pile of which were still in the cold room; the exact place on the stove where Denver burned her fingers. And of course the spite of the house itself. There was no room for any other thing or body . . . .[170]

The physical presence of memories and spirits is an accepted part of Sethe's life. She calls memories "rememories," as if memory were something that is itself remembered or re-membered -- a re-connection of parts as limbs, members of the body, are re-connected to the body. The past is as much a part of the body as are the head and limbs. Homes are places which stubbornly remain, permanently embodying the realities that supported

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169 Ibid., p. 39
170 Ibid.

their four walls. Unlike some things which "pass on," "places are still there." After Denver sees the image of a white dress holding her mother's waist, Sethe explains to Denver the continual presence of the past.

> If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place -- the picture of it -- stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there in the world. What I remember is a picture floating out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened.[171]

Sethe understands that the white dress holding onto her was the daughter she killed. "Things that die bad don't stay in the ground," says Ella, Baby Suggs friend. Because most black people died "bad" -- hanged on the plantation like Sethe's mother was -- Baby Suggs asserts that there is "not a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead negro's grief."[172] And, as Amy Denver reminds Sethe, "anything coming back to life hurts,"[173] be it Sethe's almost dead body after she crosses the Ohio River, memories of Sweet Home, or the dead baby herself. Furthermore, the past embodied in Beloved and the "rememories" that exist "out there in the world" is both an individual past and a collective past. The history of black people in the United States lives on in the memories and lives of present and future generations of black people. Morrison suggests that choosing one's "position within a moving historical context," as Linda Alcoff proposes women do, involves for black people -- and people of other races -- a confrontation with the past as Sethe must confront Beloved.[174]

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171 Ibid., p. 36.
172 Ibid., p. 5.
173 Ibid., p. 35.
174 Linda Alcoff, p. 433. See footnote number 20.

Sethe's awareness and acceptance of the presence of the unseen is not an idiosyncratic extra sense, but is a faculty related to survival. Appearances, as the slaves at Sweet Home quickly learn, are deceiving. The effects of slavery and racism confront people in the "rememory that belongs to somebody else."[175] Sethe warns her daughter about Sweet Home:

> Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away. Even if the whole farm -- every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there -- you who was never there -- if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. So, Denver, you can never go there. Never. Because even though it's all over -- over and done with -- it's going to always be there waiting for you. That's how come I had to get all my children out. No matter what.[176]

Sethe tells Denver that nothing ever dies -- a belief which, on a structural level, foreshadows Beloved's appearance. Her warning, in addition to the fear that Denver hears in the unsaid of her mother's stories, prevent Denver from leaving her yard. Slavery is not an isolated experience, particular to a historical period or location. One is never totally safe from the past, as evinced by schoolteacher's search for Sethe once she has escaped. Although Sethe "got all [her] children out . . . no matter what,"[177] she learns that there is no safe place for a black person in a racist society.

Sethe actively represses the memories 124 foists upon her. But the questions of Denver and Paul D combined with Beloved's relentless fascination in Sethe -- she asks Sethe, referring to the earrings which she

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175 Ibid., p. 36.
176 Ibid.
177 Ibid.

played with as a child, "Tell me your diamonds"[178] -- force Sethe to come to terms with memories she hoped she had forgotten. Sethe's life is a daily struggle to beat back the past -- a struggle that Morrison compares to the repetition and calming concentration of beating bread dough -- "working dough. Working dough, working dough. Nothing better than to start the day's serious work of beating back the past."[179] Sethe uses the same motion on Paul D's knee: "Sethe rubbed and rubbed, pressing the work cloth and the stony curves that made up his knee. She hoped it calmed him as it did her."[180] Sethe's re-assuring rubbing distracts Paul D and prevents him, initially, from delving too deeply into the painful past. Remembering the past evokes cruel and brutal experiences for the ex-slaves. Although these experiences are in no way comparable to someone like Pratt's experiences, both Sethe and Pratt endure the pain of confronting honestly the realities of a racist culture.

3.0 Subverting the Ultimate Home: Motherhood

Pregnant with Denver while still a slave, Sethe is attacked by schoolteacher and his nephews who pin her down and steal her milk. Along with Sethe's murder of her child, the act symbolizes slavery's abuse and perversion of motherhood and personhood. Sethe is denied her role as mother to her own unborn child. The slave woman's womb is either adulterated by the sperm of white men raping black women -- Baby Suggs, Sethe's mother and other black women of the novel were raped by white men -- or commodified under the capitalist slave system. The slave

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178 Ibid., p. 58.
179 Ibid., p. 73.
180 Ibid.

woman's uterus becomes a production site which requires minimal maintenance and produces saleable goods. Schooteacher keeps a notebooks of the characteristics of his slaves. He tells his nephew, "I told you to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right."[181] He regards them as livestock, and therefore property, so that when Sethe flees Sweet Home with her children, schoolteacher is concerned about the return of his stolen property.[182] In a society wherein human bodies are

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181 Ibid., p. 193.

The importation of slaves to the United States was outlawed in 1820, thus the price of slaves increased greatly. Slaves were sold according to their age, abilities and weight. The Suppressed Book about Slavery (New York: Arno Press, 1985)-- written by George Washington Carleton in 1857 and published in 1864 after the Emancipation Proclamation, which"established slavery's crimes and gave proof of significant negro contributions to the United States," -- studies the "auction sales of slaves, horses, and other cattle." "That boys weighing only "50 pounds" should fetch $500 a piece, shows that Human flesh, when young and tender, is worth about $10 a pound, though it is not unusual to sell it so . . . . That those ordinary looking "Niggers" should fetch $1,000, who probably weigh, on the average, 150 pounds, proves that their flesh is hardly worth $7 a pound, the odds being the difference as to toughness. Young Women, weighing , say, 130 pounds, are fetching $1,750. "(p. 125) The Willmington Journal, a North Carolina Newspaper that Carleton cites, carried updates on the condition of the slave market: ""We know not to what cause to attribute it, but better prices have been offered by Traders for this description of property, than we have ever before known. Niggers, of ordinary appearance, are bringing $1,000 very readily. Women, from 16 to 20 years of age, are selling for very large prices, varying from $1,000 to $2,000. . . . It really seems that there is to be no stop to this upward tendency of things. Good breeders are at least 30 per cent. higher now (in the dull season of the year) than they were in January last. What our Servants will bring next year, no mortal man can tell.""(p.125)

The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography contains narratives of ex-slaves who attest to the prices that were placed on their bodies. See the Kentucky narratives, pp. 21, 32, 38-39, 51, 57, 66, 77, 78-9, for example.

182 The plot of the novel was taken by Morrison from an actual incident. Margaret Garner, a fugitive slave woman in Southern Ohio did kill one of her children to prevent his return to slavery. The woman was tried and convicted in a court of law, not for murder, but for possession and destruction of stolen property. Morrison recalls, "She became a *cause célèbre* for the abolitionists because they were attempting to get her tried for murder. That would have been a big coup because it would have assumed she haren. But the abolitionists were unsuccessful. She was tried for the 'real' crime, which was stolen property, and convicted and returned to [the slaveowner]." See Bill Moyers, "An Interview with Toni Morrison," A World of Ideas: Public Opinion from Private Citizens (New York: Doubleday, 1990), pp. 54-63.

bought and sold, the womb of the slave woman is a passageway into slavery and racist society. Baby Suggs knew her love for her children was irrelevent for she was producing them to be sold for her owner's benefit.

Morrison compares the slave woman's womb to the slave ship. Both the womb and the ship are passageways from a place idealized as an original pure state. Beloved describes to Denver the place she was before she appeared on the steps of 124, a place that is at once the womb and the slave ship. Both the hold of the slaveship and the womb are "dark," "hot," and "heavy." Beloved's sudden appearance -- "a fully dressed woman walked out of the water"[183] -- represents both a birth and the black person setting foot on North American soil as a slave. Morrison uses water as the metaphor of connection between the two worlds. When Beloved emerges from the water, she is exhausted. She leans against a tree for a night and a day to regain her strength. She is in pain; her lungs which hurt "most of all" adjust to the air.[184] She is "sopping wet" and she breaths "shallow." Her neck "no wider than a parlor-service saucer, kept bending" and she has trouble opening her eyelids.[185] As soon as Sethe sees Beloved for the first time on the steps of 124, her "bladder filled to capacity" and, unable to control it, she relieves herself in the backyard near the outhouse. Sethe thinks of giving birth: "there was no stopping water breaking from a breaking womb and there was no stopping now."[186] Invited into the house, Beloved "gulped water from a speckled tin cup . . . as though she had crossed the desert."[187] She drinks from the cup as a new-born baby

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183 Morrison, Beloved, p. 50.
184 Ibid.
185 Ibid.
186 Ibid., p. 51.
187 Ibid.

would suck from its mother's breast. Also, like a newborn, Beloved's skin "was flawless except for three vertical scratches on her forehead so fine and thin they seemed at first like hair."[188] Scratches from her mother's nails as she held her baby's head, preventing it from falling off, they are the only physical evidence of the murder.

Like the slave ship, the place where Beloved was before was dark. ""I'm small in that place,"" she tells Denver.[189] ""I'm like this here." She raised her head off the bed, lay down on her side and curled up."[190] Beloved wasn't cold but ""hot. Nothing to breathe down there and no room to move in,""[191] she says. There are "a lot of people" down there. "Some is dead," Beloved tells Denver. Near the end of Part Two, Beloved narrates a chapter. She describes the hold of a slave ship where a dead man lies near her, where she has no food except for the urine of the white men: "the men without skin bring us their morning water to drink."[192]

This image of water and passageway is developed further in Sethe's escape from Kentucky to Ohio across the Ohio River. As she crosses the river in a boat, she gives birth to Denver. Amy Denver -- the idiosyncratic, simple, but tremendously powerful and competent white girl who helps Sethe with the birth -- is astounded by the water that empties out of Sethe.[193] The passage from Kentucky to Ohio reverses the journey

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188 Ibid.

189 Ibid., p. 75.

190 Ibid.

191 Ibid.

192 Ibid., p. 210.

193 Amy Denver is the equivilent of "white trash," poor white Southerners who were unable to afford slaves. The relationship between slaves and "white trash" is paradoxical. Plantation owners liked to instill in their slaves a distain for "white trash," but to do so required that the slaves adopt the slaveowners' system of valuation. While poor whites were, like the slaves although by no means to the same degree, marginalized in Southern

of the slaveship. Sethe and Denver are supposedly escaping slavery and moving toward freedom -- supposedly because slavery, as noted, is inescapable, appearing either in the form of schoolteacher who tries to re-capture Sethe, or in the form of unbearable memories. During Denver's birth, Sethe's water joins the water of the Ohio River:

> Sethe was looking at one mile of dark water, which would have to be split with one oar in a useless boat against a current dedicated to the Mississippi hundreds of miles away. It looked like home to her, and the baby (not dead in the least) must have thought so too. As soon as Sethe got close to the river her own water broke loose to join it.[194]

Once the baby is born, Sethe drinks some of the Ohio River to quench her raging thirst. This emptying and re-filling oneself with water acts as a kind of purification and revitalizing process for Sethe. As the Atlantic was water of death and slavery, the Ohio, combined with her own water from the birth, is water of life. Yet, as noted, Ohio's proximity to the South -- merely a short boat ride across the Ohio River -- often blurred the distinction between freedom and slavery. Just as a slave could escape across the river, a slavemaster could cross it in less time and without obstacle of the wrong skin color.

In a system that perverts motherhood and denies any control over one's reproductive abilities and love for one's children, black women themselves are forced to subvert motherhood once again in order to survive and to keep the children from the slave market.[195] Sethe's mother

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society, they often regarded slaves as taking jobs from them and also attempted to set themselves above slaves. See The American Slave for personal accounts of ex-slaves' relationships with "white trash."

194 Morrison, Beloved., p. 83.

195 Again, see Angela Y. Davis, "The Legacy of Slavery: Standards for a New Womanhood," in Women, Race and Class, op. cit., for an analysis of the abuse of black women's bodies under slavery and their attempts at subverting and resistancing this abuse.

is repeatedly raped by whites. On the ship from Africa, Sethe's mother and her care-giver, Nan, "were taken up many times by the crew."[196] Sethe's mother killed the baby from a crewman, "the one from the crew she threw away on the island," Nan tells Sethe: "The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around. Never. Never. Telling you. I am telling you, small girl Sethe."[197] The only act of rebellion and control Sethe's mother could exercise was to instill meaning in a gesture insignificant in the eyes of the white men: whether or not she embraced them when they raped her; and to kill their bastard children.[198]

Sethe yearns to send her children someplace safe. The only safe place she sees, as schoolteacher approaches, is death. She wanted, in a perverse twist of logic, "to out hurt the hurter."[199] Sethe asserts that "nobody on this earth would list her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper."[200] She "collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. Over there. Outside this place, where they would be safe."[201] "Over there" is, of course, death. The possibility of freedom in death is the only home that the whites and the slave system

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196 Ibid., p. 62.

197 Ibid.

198 See The American Slave, op. cit., and The Suppressed Book About Slavery, op. cit., for direct accounts of how white slaveowners would rape slave women then sell the children, thereby keeping the slave market alive with their own offspring.

199 Morrison, Beloved., p. 251.

200 Ibid.

201 Ibid., p. 163.

cannot penetrate and corrupt. To Paul D who questions her action she explains, ""I stopped him [schoolteacher] . . . . I took and put my babies where they'd be safe.""[202] Paul D sees the paradox, which takes on cruel and brutal proportions in his mind, of Sethe's love. On the one hand, she "talked about love like any other woman," but "what she meant could cleave the bone. This here Sethe talked about safety with a handsaw."[203] In killing her own child, Sethe reappropriates from the whites and from the slave system the control over her own body and children, an example of slavery's perversion of moral systems.

Slavery also debases one's relationship to oneself. Repeatedly, the characters of the novel find themselves physically falling apart. When Sethe is being beaten by schoolteacher at Sweet Home, she bites her tongue: "Bit a piece of my tongue off when they opened my back. It was hanging by a shred. I didn't mean to. Clamped down on it, it come right off. I thought, Good God, I'm going to eat myself up."[204] Unable to fight outwardly, Sethe abuses herself. She considers whites' control over blacks far worse than "drag[ging] the teeth of that saw under the little chin; [feeling] the baby blood pump like oil in her hands . . . .

> . . . worse than that -- far worse [was the fact] that anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up.[205]

This self-hatred infects Paul D as well. Totally submissive to Beloved's sexual directives, he contemplates his lack of resolve:

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202 Ibid., p. 164.
203 Ibid.
204 Ibid., p. 202.
205 Ibid., p. 251.

> His strength had lain in knowing that schoolteacher was wrong. Now he wondered . . . . If schoolteacher was right it explained how he had come to be a rag doll -- picked up and put back down anywhere any time by a girl young enough to be his daughter. Fucking her when he was convinced he didn't want to.[206]

Paul D's sense of self wobbles on the abyss that schoolteacher tried to send him over -- years of being told one is an animal may finally be internalized and accepted.

Beloved's fear of fragmentation is real for she was literally and physically fragmented by the slice of the handsaw across her throat. In fact, Sethe is left holding onto her child's head so that it won't fall off after she killed her. When Beloved suddenly and unexpectedly loses a tooth, she believes that "pieces of her would drop maybe one at a time, maybe all at once . . . . Among the things she could not remember was when she first knew that she could wake up any day and find herself in pieces."[207] Beloved's desire is to make Sethe pay for the handsaw by feeding off of Sethe to make herself whole again. Sethe, eager "to make up for the handsaw,"[208] bends to Beloved's every whim. Denver realizes that "the players were altered."[209]

> Then it seemed to Denver the thing was done: Beloved bending over Sethe looked the mother, Sethe the teething child, for other than those times when Beloved needed her, Sethe confined herself to a corner chair. The bigger Beloved got, the smaller Sethe became; the brighter Beloved's eyes, the more those eyes that used never to look away became slits of sleeplessness. Sethe no longer combed her hair or splashed her face with water. She sat in the chair licking her lips like a chastised child while Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled

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206 Ibid., p. 126.
207 Ibid., p. 133.
208 Ibid., p. 251.
209 Ibid., p. 241.

> up with it, grew taller on it. And the older woman yielded it up without a murmur.[210]

Denver had originally protected Beloved from her mother, entertaining the fear as she had done before Beloved arrived that her mother will someday pick up a handsaw again. She finally understands that there are limits to a child's desire to be loved by its mother, that Sethe is now the one in danger. Although Denver does not fully understand what made her mother kill Beloved, she does correctly locate that something in society.

> I love my mother but I know she killed one of her own daughters, and tender as she is with me, I'm scared of her because of it . . . . All the time, I'm afraid the thing that happened that made it all right for my mother to kill my sister could happen again. I don't know what it is, I don't know who it is, but there is something else terrible enough to make her do it again. I need to know what that thing might be, but I don't want to. Whatever it is, it comes from outside this house, outside the yard, and it can come right on in the yard if it wants to. So I never leave this house and I watch over the yard so it can't happen again and my mother won't have to kill me too.[211]

That "something" is slavery which comes from "outside the yard" in the form of white people, be they schoolteacher or the supposedly benevolent Mr. Bodwin. It has already "come right on in the yard" as evinced by Sethe's murder of her child and the child's return as Beloved to take revenge.

4.0 Reconstructing the Home from the Margins

Denver is forced to leave her home and ask for help from the community, a community which collectively despises Sethe's murder but believes strongly in supporting one of its own. Morrison develops the

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210 Ibid., p.250.

211 Ibid., p. 205.

strong sense of black community and culture when the community of women pulls together to do the only thing they know how to exorcise Beloved from 124. As in The Bluest Eye when the community comes together for Aunt Jimmy's funeral, so too in Beloved do they assemble and summon their spiritual strength: "Some brought what they could and what they believed would work. Stuffed in apron pockets, strung around their necks, lying in the space between their breasts. Others brought Christian faith -- as shield and sword. Most brought a little of both."[212] The women are motivated by an understanding of motherhood, slavery and children.

> Ella had been beaten every way but down. She remembered the bottom teeth she had lost to the brake and the scars from the bell were thick as rope around her waist. She had delivered, but would not nurse, a hairy white thing, fathered by "the lowest yet." It lived five days never making a sound. The idea of the pup coming back to whip her too set her jaw working, and then Ella hollered.[213]

The experience of motherhood and slavery bonds Ella to Sethe. Ella begins the thought process that moves the novel to its end: motherhood is reclaimed by the mother.

Initially, Morrison creates an image of the mother as the ultimate home. Ideally, the mother nourishes both physically and spiritually her children. When Sethe breast feeds her child, the two are described as hitting home together. She picks up the child whom she would later kill, "enclosed her left nipple with two fingers of her right hand and the child opened her mouth. They hit home together."[214] Sethe, whose milk was taken from her at Sweet Home by the schoolteacher's nephews, is

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[212] Ibid., p. 257.
[213] Ibid., pp. 258-9.
[214] Ibid., p. 94.

concerned with caring for and having "milk enough for all." Outside of slavery she wants to make up for what she could not do as a slave. She positions her self as everyone's caretaker or nurse -- her childrens', Paul D's. As Sethe tries to make dinner for Paul D, he embraces her to entice her to have sex, Morrison writes "There was no question but that she had milk enough for all."[215] But having milk enough for all threatens to destroy Sethe.

Whether conceived in hate or love, children cannot claim their mothers in order to survive themselves. Sethe believes that her children are "her best thing." She is willing to endure anything to spare her children: "Whites might dirty *her* all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing -- the part of her that was clean."[216] Even once Beloved's presence threatens to suffocate and kill her, and even after Beloved disappears, Sethe believes that "she was my best thing."[217] It is only when Paul D takes her hand and tells her, ""You your best thing, Sethe. You are,"" that Sethe considers her own self. ""Me? Me?"" she responds unbelieving.[218] Sethe had originally blamed Paul D for standing in the way of her relationship with her daughter. She blames him for her not noticing immediately when Beloved first arrived on the steps of 124 and drank "cup after cup of water" that indeed she was her daughter. "I would have known right off," thinks Sethe, "but Paul D distracted me."[219] Paul D feels as if he and Beloved are fighting for Sethe's love and attention. Just when "the attention [Sethe] and Paul D were paying to

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215 Ibid., p. 100.
216 Ibid., p. 251.
217 Ibid., p. 273.
218 Ibid.
219 Ibid., p. 203.

themselves" was "so complete," Beloved enters the picture and pulls Sethe away from him.[220] What Morrison suggests by having Beloved finally disappear, Denver leave her yard and go out into the world to find a job, and Sethe restored to herself with the possibility of a future with Paul D -- ""Sethe,"" Paul D tells her, ""me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow.""[221] -- is that women must develop themselves beyond the mother-child bond. Women cannot absorb the cruelty of racism to prevent their children from experiencing it. Sethe does not, and should not, have "milk enough for all." Also, Sethe and Paul D are holding hands when Sethe realizes that her best part is, indeed, herself. This suggests that intimate, physical relationships are important and essential to self-realization.

Although Morrison's primary focus is black women and motherhood in relation to the collective history of black people in the United States, she does address the relationship between slavery and black men. Morrison recontextualizes the issue of the "absent black man," a condition particular to black families according to the reasoning of Moynihan and Moyers. Morrison approaches the issue from the specific perspective of one such "absent" black man, Paul D, and relates the lack of familial relationships in his life to systematic discrimination.[222] Paul D calls himself "a walking man."[223] Walking, leaving, moving when he wants are "the only way[s] he

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[220] Ibid., p. 130.

[221] Ibid., p. 273.

[222] For additional critiques of the stereotypified black matriarch and the absent but wild black man, see: bell hooks, "The Myth of Black Matriarchy" and Angela Davis, "Rape, Racism, and the Myth of the Black Rapist," both in Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations between Women and Men 2nd edition, Alison M. Jaggar & Paula S. Rothenberg, eds. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1984).

[223] Morrison, Beloved., p. 46.

could convince himself that he would no longer have to sleep, pee, eat or swing a sledge hammer in chains."[224] As a slave, he was always caught again after he tried to escape. "In five tries he had not had one permanent success."[225] Morrison develops the relationship of the fugitive slave to the earth which acts as his only protection. "Alone, undisguised, with visible skin, memorable hair and no whiteman to protect him, he never stayed uncaught."[226] The land is both home to him as he tries to escape slavery and the jail cell that confines him in the slave system.

> And in all those escapes he could not help being astonished by the beauty of the land that was not his. He hid in its breasts, fingered its earth for food, clung to its banks to lap water and tried not to love it. On nights when the sky was personal, weak with the weight of its own stars, he made himself not love it. Its graveyards and low-lying rivers. Or just a house -- solitary under a chinaberry tree; maybe a mule tethered and the light hitting its hide just so. Anything could stir him and he tried hard not to love it.[227]

The land is both home and mother to the slave, but like everything else in the black person's life, it will betray him in the end. To develop a loving relationship with something that one does not own and that will be taken away anyway, leads, as Paul D knows, to self-destruction.

Under slavery, blacks know no home. On the plantation, safety, familiarity, comfort carry an emotional and psychological pricetag that they cannot afford. With slavery outlawed, Morrison, like Smith and hooks, suggests that the home blacks create is often their only haven from the racism that lurks "out there," beyond their home as it did beyond Denver's front yard. "Referring to the destructive white culture "yonder,"

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224 Ibid., p. 40.
225 Ibid., p. 268.
226 Ibid.
227 Ibid.

[Baby Suggs] tells the blacks gathered at the Clearing that "the only grace" they can have is "the grace they [can] imagine."[228] This grace must eventually enter the home where a vision of the future is re-formulated and meets the present. The novel is clearly based in a belief that slavery is the "consummate evil of the world,"[229] an evil which, even after the Civil War, is inescapable both for black and white people. The novel argues for the necessity of people to confront the realities of a collective and individual past and to reformulate, within the home, a vision of black personhood and black family that slavery destroyed.

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228 Terry Otten, The Crime of Innocence in the Fiction of Toni Morrison. (Columbia, Missouri: Universty of Missouri Press, 1989), p. 344.

229 Ibid., pp. 344-5

Conclusion

1.0 Morrison's Constructions of Home and Standpoint Theory

2.0 African American Women's Writing and Standpoint Theory

3.0 The Novel as Home

1.0 Morrison's Construction of Home and Standpoint Theory

In The Bluest Eye and Beloved, Morrison frames the homes in precise historical, political and cultural contexts which greatly influence the outcome of the characters' various struggles. The characters' childhood experiences of home and their adult re-constructions of home are essential in the formation of identity and a sense of self. In opposition to a normalizing white culture, Morrison defines a particular black culture with strong roots in Southern black experiences, roots that are poisoned by slavery and the expression and internalization of racism as a means of functioning in the world. She addresses the wider political issues of black and white relations within the United States and shows how the internalization by blacks of the dominant and pervasive values of white culture leads to self-destruction. Only by nourishing and strengthening these roots do her characters survive and develop a strong sense of self. Morrison works from the belief that a strong home environment is vital for both the individual and culture and that home does not simply happen, but is a conscious and active choice.

The world views in The Bluest Eye and Beloved are based in an understanding of social relations also conceptualized by standpoint theorists. Social relations are multi-layered, hierarchized according to race, gender, and class. In both novels, black women are pitted against the effacing backdrop of white culture. Pecola and Sethe's perspectives illuminate the ideological underpinnings of the Dick and Jane scenario and slavery's far-reaching mechanisms of control. While Pecola and Sethe's views are not unbiased or disinterested, their specific experiences provide a more critical and objective view of systems of oppression than the

perspective of the oppressors such as Mr. Garner and Mr. Yacobowski. Standpoint theory also conceptualizes human experience as a dynamic intersection of forces that carry political implications in a social network. Alcoff's concept of "positionality" envisions race and gender, for example, not as essences but as fluid and active elements which partially articulate a specific social location. They are mutually-influential. In both The Bluest Eye and Beloved, female characters are molded by their experiences as both black people and women. Examples of this include when Pauline Breedlove goes to the movies and tries to adopt the appearance and attitude of white, female movie stars, and when Geraldine uses "beauty" products with the idea of making herself more feminine and less black. In both cases the ideal of womanhood is based in an image of a beautiful white woman. Despite the differences between Pauline and Geraldine that Geraldine would like to enforce -- she defines herself as "colored" and people like Pauline as "niggers" -- neither woman can attain the paragons of womanhood because of their race. Similarly, on the plantation in Beloved, white motherhood is sacred while black motherhood is perverted into a process of production.

Standpoint theory also contends that knowledge is socially and historically constructed. It is related to human experience. In the novels, Morrison illuminates and validates the marginalized experiences of her characters so that Pecola's desire for blue eyes and Sethe's murder and the dead child's reincarnation as Beloved correspond logically to their knowledge of the world. It is essential to note, however, that Morrison's textual incorporation of the standpoint is not an allegiance to standpoint theorists, nor an unproblematic articulation of the sociological forces in

black experience. The paradoxes inherent in her constructions of home negotiate a connection between the often volatile political and historical backdrop and the mental and emotional state of her black characters.

2.0 African American Women's Writing and Standpoint Theory

Literature by African American women has been received during the past 15 to 20 years by the literary establishment -- institutions of literary production, critique and scholarship such as publishing houses, literary and critical journals, universities, as well as the general reading public -- with increasing enthusiasm and critical acclaim. Although African American women have been publishing work in the United States since 1773 when Phillis Wheatley, a slave, published Poems on Various Subject, Religious, and Moral,[230] their presence had gone largely unnoticed until the mid- to late-twentieth century with writers such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Toni Cade Bambara, and the recently revived works of Zora Neale Hurston. Alice Walker won the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award for Fiction for her 1982 novel The Color Purple. The book captured the attention of a mass audience of movie-goers in the somewhat altered film version directed by Steven Speilberg.[231] In 1988 Toni Morrison won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the National Book Award for her fifth novel Beloved. With the publication of Beloved, Morrison was the first black American woman to have five novels to her credit.[232] Newsweek magazine devoted its cover story to Morrison in

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230 Nellie Y. McKay, "Interview with Toni Morrison," Contemporary Literature, vol. 24, no. 4 (1983), p. 413

231 Celie and Shugg's lesbian relationship is downplayed to such a degree as to disappear.

232 McKay, p. 2.

March 1981 -- the first time a picture of a black woman appeared on the cover of the magazine in its 48 years history.[233]

Accompanying this increased visibility of African American women's fiction have been efforts to recover work by earlier African American women writers. Many critics and scholars have focused their energies on critiquing the absence of work by African American women in the literary canon and exploring the development of an African American woman's literary tradition.[234] Revealing a history of African American women writing not only contextualizes contemporary work by black women, but also asserts their presence. Patricia Williams points out the necessity of identifying a historical presence, however fluid and changing.

> I, like so many blacks, have been trying to pin myself down in history, place myself in the stream of time as significant, evolved, present in the past, continuing into the future. To be without documentation is too unsustaining, too spontaneously ahistorical, too

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233 The first issue of Newsweek appeared in February 1933.

234 Among the most notable of these critical works are Mary Washington's 1975 book Black-Eyed Susans: Classic Stories By and About Black Women (New York: Anchor Press, 1975). A continuation of a study of African American women's literary tradition appeared as Washington's 1987 book Invented Lives: Narratives of Black Women, 1860-1960 (New York: Anchor Press, 1987). Other works include Barbara Christian's 1980 book Black Women Novelists: Development of a Tradition 1892-1976 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), and Marjorie Pryse and Hortense Spillers' book Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction and Literary Tradition (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1985). In addition there is Gloria T Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith's 1982 book All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, And Some of Us Are Brave (Old Westbury, NY Feminist Press, 1982).

Also, many African American women writers and critics have noted the positive matrilineal relationship that seems to exist between black women writers and their foremothers -- a contrast to the literary patricide that critics such as Bloom and even black writers such as Wright have noted that must occur before a male writer fully realizes and achieves his own literary voice. See Henry Louis Gates, Jr , ed Reading Feminist, Reading Black, op. cit., and Mary Helen Washington Invented Lives, op cit , for more on the maternal relationship between African American women writers.

> dangerously malleable in the hands of those who would rewrite not merely the past but my future as well.[235]

Locating a tradition of black women writing in the United States is not to establish an exclusive canon of works by African American women which would counter the present canon dominated by white men. It is a political act which answers the question, where were America's black women writers? Mary Washington calls her book Invented Lives: Narratives of Black Women 1860-1960 a "task of reconstruction" that is both informative and political.[236]

> As we continue the work of reconstructing a literary history that insists on black women as central to that history, as we reject the old male-dominated accounts of history, refusing to be cramped into the little space men have allotted women, we should be aware that this is an act of enlightenment, not simply repudiation.[237]

Washington's Invented Lives and the anthology she edited, Black-Eyed Susans, along with Toni Cade's anthology The Black Woman played pivatol roles in introducing black women's work not only to the general reading public, but also to university course lists.[238]

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235 Patricia J. Williams, "On Being the Object of Property," Signs, vol. 14, no.1, (1988), p. 1.

236 Mary Helen Washington, Invented Lives: Narratives of Black Women 1860-1960 (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1987), p. xxv.

237 Ibid., p.xxvii.

238 See Mary Helen Washington Black-Eyed Susans, op. cit. and Toni Cade, The Black Woman (New York: New American Library, 1970). Other important works on African American women writers and black feminist literary theory include: Hazel V. Carby, Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist (New York: Oxford U. P., 1987); Barbara Christian, Black Feminist Criticism (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985) and Black Women Writers: The Development of a Tradition op. cit. ; Roseann Bell, Bettye Parker, and Beverly Guy-Sheftall, eds. Sturdy Black Bridges: Visions of Black Women in Literature (New York: Anchor Press, 1979). Henry Louis Gates, Jr. ed., Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology (New York: Meridian/Penguin Books, 1990). Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981); Mari Evans, ed. Black Women Writers, 1950-1980: A Critical Evaluation (New York: Anchor Press, 1984); Gloria Hull,

The increased visibility of contemporary African American women writers combined with the history of black women writing in the United States raises the question of what, indeed, makes literature by black women unique. First, black women's literature has been primarily about black people, especially black women. And second, their work comes from the standpoint of being an African American woman. Hortense Spillers notes that

> black women writers are likely to agree on one point: whatever the portrayal of a female character yields, it will be rendered from the point of view of one whose eyes are not alien to the humanity in front of them. What we can safely assume, then, is that black women write as partisans to a particular historical order -- their own, the black and female one, with its hideous strictures against literarcy and its subtle activities of censorship even now against words and deeds that would deny or defy the black woman myth. What we can assume with less confidence is that their partisanship . . . will yield a synonymity of conclusions.[239]

Spillers connects the particular standpoint of a black American woman to her particular vision as a writer. She avoids making any sweeping generalizations about all black women writers. Claudia Tate locates the black women writer's standpoint as one which offers "an angle of vision . . . to see what white people, especially males, seldom see. With one penetrating glance they cut through layers of institutionalized racism and sexism and uncover a core of social contradictions and intimate dilemmas which plague all of us, regardless of our race or gender. Through their art

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Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds., But Some of Us Are Brave op. cit.; Barbara Smith, ed. Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology op. cit.; Cheryl A. Wall, ed. Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticsm, Theory and Writing by Black Women (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers U.P., 1989); Alice Walker, In Search of Our Mothers' Garderns (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1983).

[239] Hortense Spillers, "A Hateful Passion, A Lost Love," in Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship Shen Benstock, ed. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 185.

they share their vision of possible resolution with those who cannot see."[240] Tate suggests that African American women's fiction may be one space in which to "reinvent onself as other," or to "expand [one's] constricted eye" as did Pratt. It is one place to begin to comprehend the implications of racial and sexual difference in a racist and sexist society, and to envision ways to end oppression. In The Bluest Eye and Beloved, Morrison clearly offers a world view that sees what dominant perspectives fail to include. The homes in the novels emerge from marginalized experiences and must be understood within that specific context. This vision makes demands on the reader who does not share this understanding.

Cora Kaplan has argued for an increased responsibility of the reader. She contends that a literary text must be understood within the history, politics and culture in which it was produced. As an expatriate teaching in London, she confronts the specific problem of teaching texts by black American authors to students removed geographically, historically, culturally, from the historical context of race relations in the United States. She argues that

> We need to integrate these texts [texts by Black American authors] into current debates on race and culture but our appropriative reading must be a political one, connecting rather than blurring distinctions between cultures. In order for it to be more than another ideological bleaching of the text into an all-purpose human garment, it must come out of a specific understanding of the other cultural moment and histories in which it was written, published and read.[241]

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[240] Claudia Tate, "Introduction" to Black Women Writers at Work Claudia Tate, ed. (New York: Continuum, 1983), p. xvi.

[241] Cora Kaplan, "Keeping the Color in The Color Purple," in Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism (London: Verso, 1986), p. 178.

Kaplan illuminates the connection, emphasized by standpoint theorists, between the way we think and the "economic, political and ideological levels" which enforce that thinking. In order to emphasize the necessity of understanding the contexts out of which texts emerge, Kaplan cites the recent work by such black women American writers as Toni Morrison, Ntsozake Shange, Sonia Sanchez, Carolyn Rodgers, Toni Cade Bambara, Audre Lorde, Paule Marshall, Nikki Giovanni, Lucille Clifton and Alice Walker. The work of these women

> speaks into and out of contemporary debates with complex and contradictory histories. Moreover many, even most, of these novelists have not chosen updated versions of classical realist forms for their writing, so that even if one was lazy enough to rely on the fictional text to provide its own historical context, these new fictions refuse that project. These novelists dialogize the languages, Black and white, in which race, class and gender have been discussed in America, but they demand to be read intertextually with other discourses, other fictions as part of a wider debate.[242]

Kaplan calls for a "three dimensional, diachronic and dialectical manner" of reading[243] to avoid "teaching and thinking about these texts in an unintentionally imperialist lens, conflating their progressive politics with our own agendas, interpreting their versions of humanism through the historical evolution of our own."[244] Only by pulling apart the multi-layered network of social relations and struggling to see and learn from the numerous positionalities inherent within will reading become an active and political project.

Standpoint theorists such as Sandra Harding and Linda Alcoff, literary scholars such as Cora Kaplan, Hortense Spillers and Mary

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[242] Ibid., pp. 181-82.
[243] Ibid., p. 187.
[244] Ibid., p. 177.

Washington, and African American women writers such as Toni Morrison, each, from their particular area of focus (the social sciences, literary criticism and theory, and fiction), locate knowledge within human experiences and human lives. If fiction is understood, in many instances, to recreate a specific social and historical experience in relation to a fictional character, then perhaps ficiton may be understood to be a form of knowledge. It is here where fiction may play a particulary vital role in the projects of feminist standpoint theorists because, to access the knowledge within a fictional text or upon which a work of fiction is based, a reader must actively employ the imagination. In a study of differences among women and exclusion within feminist thought, Elizabeth Spellman isolates the powerful role of the imagination:

> Imagination isn't enough, but it is necessary. Indeed, it is a crucial starting point: because I have not experienced what the other has, so unless I can imagine her having pain or her having pleasure I can't be moved to try to help put an end to her pain or to understand just what her pleasures are. Against the odds I must try to think and feel my way into her world, a world that I do not know now, and surely cannot come to know overnight; and so, given what I do know, I try to imagine what her world is like. Imagination in this context thus marks at one and the same moment my similarity to another woman and my difference from her: it is because we both are human, maybe even because we both are women, that I dare to imagine, am required to image, that we share something in common - e.g., that it is horrible to be subject to physical and psychological violence. Precisely because as far as I know we are quite different from each other, I must use my imagination to try to enter her world, try to see the world the way she sees it.[245]

Spellman suggests that knowledge without imagination is insufficient. Trying to "think and feel [one's] way" into the world of another woman or

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245 Elizabeth Spellman, Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), p. 179.

into a work of fiction is a conscious choice which is activated initially by the use of the imagination. Envisioned as a space to "reinvent oneself as other," to use Sandra Harding's phrase, fiction carries tremendous political potential. Fiction by African American women writers exposes oppressive systems from the point of view of those harmed by such systems and explores the psychological complexity of a character in relation to a larger oppressive system. The fictional element and the theoretical underpinnings of a work emerge out of a specific history and experience.

3.0 The Novel as Home

Finally, it would be interesting to consider the fictional text as a possible home. I have used the home as a category of analysis within a text. How does the text itself, however, function as a home -- either rejecting differences as did Pratt's childhood home, or acting as a positive site of resistance to systems of oppression as did Smith and hooks' homes? Depending upon the reader, the text may play both these roles at different times. Is the process of reading a search for a comfortable environment or does it demand a radical re-evaluation of one's assumptions about social relations? Questions such as these may inform a process of reading based in the concept of the standpoint.

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