

ANCILLARY TRAUMA IN THE NOVELS OF TONI MORRISON

TRAUMA AUXILIAR EN LAS NOVELAS DE TONI MORRISON

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Abstract

This article explores the concept of «ancillary trauma», through which a woman character who has not been subjected to racial violence becomes traumatized through the actions of a male character who has been either psychically or emotionally damaged as a result of racist actions. While Morrison sympathizes with what the male characters endure, the texts suggest that, in many cases, these male characters lash out against the women in their lives in an attempt to emulate white masculinity. These men know that they cannot act out against the white men who oppress them; they repress their feelings of shame and humiliation, choosing rather to assert their perceived dominance over those they feel they can control—the women and children in their homes. Some of the victims of ancillary trauma go on to wreak havoc in the lives of others, while the only defence against ancillary trauma appears to be the instilling of self-worth by parents who value their children as complete human beings.

Keywords: Ancillary trauma; violence; women characters; masculinity; Morrison.

Resumen

Este artículo explora el concepto de «trauma auxiliar», por medio del cual un personaje femenino que no ha sufrido violencia racial se traumatiza a partir de las acciones de un personaje masculino que ha sido dañado, psicológica o emocionalmente, como resultado de acciones racistas. Mientras que Morrison parece simpatizar con lo que soportan los personajes masculinos, los textos sugieren que, en muchos casos, esos personajes masculinos arremeten contra las mujeres de sus vidas en un intento de emular la masculinidad blanca. Estos hombres saben que no pueden actuar en contra de los hombres blancos que los oprimen; reprimen sus sentimientos de vergüenza y humillación, prefiriendo afirmar su dominación percibida sobre quienes sienten que pueden controlar a las mujeres y niños/as de sus casas. Algunas de las víctimas de trauma auxiliar continúan causando estragos en la vida de otras personas, mientras que la única defensa contra ese trauma parece ser que los padres inculquen autoestima a sus hijos/as, valorándolos/las como seres humanos completos.

Palabras clave: trauma auxiliar; violencia; personajes femeninos; masculinidad; Morrison.

In June of 2020, when Mar Gallego asked me to contribute a chapter to a collection of essays she was editing on Toni Morrison, the US, where I live, was reeling from the impact of the murder of George Floyd. Protests and counter-protests erupted everywhere, even in the small (20,000 people) town where I live. After I watched the recording of the calloused police officer kneeling on Floyd's neck, ignoring the dying man's pleas, acting actually gleeful, I couldn't function, or work, or sleep. I am not naïve. I have read of the horrors of slavery and the violence that followed Reconstruction. I know about Emmet Till and the four girls blown up in the 14th Avenue Baptist Church. I saw the beating of Rodney King and the rage that followed the exoneration of the police officers who committed that act. But I felt I had reached a breaking point and my initial response to Mar's request was a sense of futility. How could life simply continue in the light of what was happening so routinely in my country? Would I ever be able to write academically again? And, if I accepted Mar's offer, how could I incorporate what I was experiencing to an analysis of Toni Morrison's fiction?

However, as I watched Floyd's funeral and listened to his brother, and, later watched John Lewis' funeral, I was struck by the pain and trauma

experienced not by the main victims of racial violence, but rather by how that violence goes on to traumatize those left behind, those, who sometimes, by virtue of gender, are spared the beatings, the gun shots, the castrations, the hangings. In *Jazz*, the narrator speculates over which particular horror drove Rose Dear to choose to end her life: «What was the thing, I wonder, the one and final thing she had not been able to endure or repeat? [...] Perhaps word had reached her about the four-day hangings in Rocky Mount [...] Or had it been the news of the young tenor in the choir mutilated and tied to a log» (Morrison, 1992, p. 101). Karen Cope questions: «what happens to a woman who witnesses these things—as numerous African American women in last century and others certainly have» (Cope, 2011, p. 60). I am well aware that African American women are also violated, abused, beaten, and murdered. But proportionally, more Black men are victimized than women, even as it is the women who worry about their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons, and are often left to mourn them. Carlyle Van Thompson states: «Like sturdy bridges, Black women continually support Black males, especially their sons, in the journey to self-respect and empowerment despite America's white supremacist cultural design to emasculate, symbolically castrate, and neutralize all Black males» (Van Thompson, 2010, p. 59). However, I would argue, sometimes the trauma suffered by those sons—and husbands and fathers—is so severe that those men lash out at the women who are attempting to sustain them. Van Thompson coins the phrase «vicarious traumatization» to indicate the «process whereby one person's traumatic experience can revive another person's traumatic experience» (Van Thompson, 2010, p. 59). That is not, however, what I am endeavoring to address. No person can arrive at adulthood without experiencing pain and loss; however, many have been spared actual trauma and have been gently raised by loving parents in welcoming communities and have been educated by concerned and caring teachers.

J. Brooks Bouson argues that «African Americans have been forced to deal not only with individual and/or family shame and trauma but also with cultural shame and racial trauma as they are designated as the racially inferior and stigmatized Other and thus become the targets of white discrimination and violence» (Bouson, 2000, p. 6). While I doubt any African American person of any gender has not experienced racism in some form

growing up, some have been spared the extremes that others routinely face. I am reminded of one of my former students, an upper-middle class African American woman, the daughter of a judge, who was horrified, when she left for college, at «the talk», as she called it, when her parents instructed her how to act if she ever encountered white police officers. She had assumed the time had passed when that was necessary. Many of my African American students come from similar backgrounds—small towns where their families are respected and where they themselves are seen as outstanding students, musicians, athletes, etc., or cities where they attended highly rated private schools where their friends included both international and American students of many races and ethnicities. Perhaps the term I need is «ancillary traumatizing», when events and incidents that occur to someone else precipitate trauma in one who has not been directly subjected to it before. As Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber points out, «[P]eople experience trauma not just from specific events but also from their physical environment and support systems» (Schreiber, 2010, p. 9). Alisa A. Balestra writes: «Tenets of African theology, outlined most notably by theologians such as James Cone, John Mbiti and Gwinyai H. Muzorewa, detail a system where acts committed against one have a profound effect on others, and thus no one is exempt from persecution» (Balestra, 2005). In Morrison's texts, ancillary traumatizing at times occurs when a male victim of racism, unable to directly confront his oppressors, turns his rage onto the African American woman.

As many have pointed out, Black men face multiple challenges in their quest for manhood. As Aaron Ngozi Oforlea explains, «Morrison picks up on the resistance that black men confront as they struggle to live in a country that celebrates masculinity but devalues black manhood» (Oforlea, 2007, p. 11). Maurice Wallace states that «black masculinity emerges as the contender identity in a bitter interracial conflict over sex and stereotype that reveals itself performatively in a dramatic improvisation on the black male body under white objectification» (Wallace, 2002, p. 149). Understandably, some Black men embrace hegemonic (i.e. white) masculinity, «accepting the dominant definition of masculinity with the belief that they will benefit from it or because they accept black male inferiority as commonsense» (Oforlea, 2007, p. 8). However, As David Ikard claims, «what becomes clear on one level is that the attraction/repulsion that black men have toward

white hegemonic masculinity wreaks emotional havoc on black men's relationships with *each other* and black women» (Ikard, 2012, p. 204, italics in original). It is those women, sometimes minor characters in the Morrison oeuvre, that I examine here.

In considering the women characters who are harmed by their relationships with traumatized men, I find that Morrison frequently uses images of fire, ash, and burning either metaphorically or literally to articulate the situations of these women. Anissa Wardi's insightful work, *Toni Morrison and the Natural World: An Ecology of Color*, interrogates fire in nature, understanding it is «generative and necessary in maintaining a healthy ecosystem. Fire clears dead trees, leaves, and competing vegetation from the forest floor so that new plants can generate, and thins tree stands to let more sunlight in so that trees stay healthier. It improves wildlife habitats and returns nutrients to the soil» (Wardi, 2021, p. 112). However, as she also points out, fire in Morrison's novels «unmistakably draws attention to the lynching and burning rituals executed in the decades after Emancipation and continuing throughout the twentieth century» (Wardi, 2021, p. 120). She concludes by maintaining that «Morrison evokes and explores our human relationship to fire and the ecological benefits of fire, insisting that rejuvenation will occur in the burnt area, but for now, only ash is left behind» (Wardi, 2021, p. 123). It is through this seemingly contradictory understanding of fire that I wish to consider the ancillary trauma of the women characters I treat.

I want to begin with Alice Mansfield, from *Jazz*. Her situation is different in that her trauma is not the result of an African American man in her own life, but rather ensues from losing family members to racial violence. Although Alice's upbringing was hardly ideal, it was not atypical either for girls raised when she was young. Her parents were strict and obsessed with patrolling their daughters' sexuality, anxious about a possible pregnancy until Alice was married, at which point they became consumed by the desire for grandchildren. She is further wounded when her husband abandons her for another woman, again a scenario that has been and still is repeated regardless of race. What shatters her, however, is the racially-motivated violence that results in the death of her sister and brother-in-law, the East St. Louis race riots of 1917, in which over 200 people were killed and over 6,000 left homeless. Although the incident is typically discussed either in terms

of labor relations in factories or returning veterans who were treated poorly in spite of their service to the country, Alice understands that the source of the rage is simply racism, since her brother-in-law was neither a veteran nor a factory worker taking a job white men presumed they were entitled to. Rather he owned a pool hall and was not rioting; nevertheless, he was «pulled off a streetcar and stomped to death» (Morrison, 1992, p. 57), and his house, with his wife in it, was set afire.

In this instance, Morrison uses fire quite literally as an instrument of racial violence. From the ashes of that fire, Alice's terror of becoming a victim of racial hatred begins. As a woman of comfortable means, Alice has the luxury of rarely leaving her home, intermingling only with a few women of her social class. Only after her frank conversations with Violet does she begin to overcome her ancillary trauma. Christine Maksimowicz suggests that, in Morrison's novels, «transformative reparative work transpires relationally where imagination and intimacy with an other intersect» (Maksimowicz, 2019). Violet's trauma is not ancillary, but began with her mother's suicide and her childhood poverty. Believing she has escaped her past after her marriage to Joe, she is again victimized by the Klan, who burn the land that the couple had bought believing they could make a living farming it. The ashes of that fire drive the couple to the City, where, for several decades, they thrive, seemingly reborn from those flames. However, the return of the repressed unhinges Violet. Never having allowed herself to mourn all that she'd lost, she withdraws inward. Joe's affair with a young, light-skinned girl sends her over the edge and leads her to seek out Alice, the aunt of the girl, to attempt to understand Joe's actions. The two women, through sharing their stories, are both able to overcome their hauntings. Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber speaks of the «ability of trauma survivors to rebuild identity through testimony» (Schreiber, 2020, p. 32). At the end of the novel, Alice can look ahead at potential new avenues to explore while reimaging her powerful girlhood self without regret and enjoying her «public love» (Morrison, 1992, p. 229), as well as her home life with Joe.

However, before Alice's healing occurs, her ancillary trauma causes her to raise her niece, orphaned by the night of terror which she escaped, having spent the night at a girlfriend's home, in accord with the repressive actions she herself experienced as a girl, hoping thereby to keep the child safe.

Dorcas suffers from her own ancillary trauma. Raised in a middle-class home, her childhood was filled with dolls and friends, until the night she loses both parents to racial violence. Repressing her grief, refusing to consciously remember the two closed coffins, Dorcas chooses a different path from that of her aunt. Rather than living in fear, Dorcas embraces fatalism and defiance. She believes that an ember from the house fire has entered her, that «it would be waiting for and with her whenever she wanted to be touched by it. And whenever she wanted to let it loose to leap into the fire again, whatever happened would be quick» (Morrison, 1992, p. 61). While many teen-agers take extreme risks and engage in dangerous behavior, Dorcas is different in that, rather than believing she is indestructible, she assumes she will die, at a time she chooses. Critics have speculated that she refuses to let anyone know she has been shot to allow Joe time to escape, but I would argue that, because of the ancillary trauma she has experienced, she finds no reason to continue living. Understandably having rejected Joe because of his age, in spite of how loving he was to her, and intuitively grasping that Acton, who is sexually attractive and with whom she gains social credibility, will never care about her the way Joe does, she lets loose the ember and chooses death. The racism that destroyed her parents but that she has never personally experienced has traumatized her to the point that not even her friendship with Felice matters enough for her to desire to continue to live. In this instance, the fire Dorcas conjures, while it destroys her, enables Joe and Violet to reunite and Felice, Dorcas's friend, to find supportive and loving other-parents. Hence, rejuvenation occurs for some, but only ash remains for others.

Not all of Morrison's characters pass through the flame to be rejuvenated. One such example is Pauline from *The Bluest Eye*. As a girl growing up in the South, she and her family no doubt were subjected to slurs and unequal treatment, but the text does not indicate that either her parents or Pauline herself suffered violence, either psychic or physical. While I would not go as far as Denise Heinze, who calls Pauline's childhood «idyllic» (Heinze, 1993, p. 71), the girl's family appears to be loving as well as sympathetic after an injury leaves her with a limp. Pauline finds satisfaction and purpose in maintaining an orderly home for her parents and caring for her younger siblings. Additionally, as Heinze points out, Pauline «once possessed such joy that it

welled up in her in a fountain of colors and bubbled into laughter» (Heinze, 1993, p. 71). Once the family arrive in Kentucky, the text suggests they are financially secure, although they are obviously not wealthy. However, her husband Cholly's past was far more toxic. Not merely abandoned by his mother shortly after birth, but actually thrown away, he is raised by his Aunt Jimmy who provides for his material needs. He is buttressed by his connection to a local man who acts as a surrogate father to him. However, even at a young age, he decides that Blue, his powerful, joyful father figure, must be the devil because «God was a nice old white man, with long white hair, flowing white beard, and little blue eyes» (Morrison, 1970, p. 106). As a result, Cholly «never felt anything thinking about God, but just the idea of the devil excited him» (Morrison, 1970, p. 107), clear evidence of how the white imaginary has already warped the boy, making him incapable of identifying Blackness with goodness. Cholly's placid childhood ends abruptly the night of his aunt's funeral. Out for a walk with a pretty girl named Darlene, who initiates a sexual encounter, Cholly is both humiliated and panic-stricken when, mid-coitus, two white hunters shine a flashlight on the couple, laugh, and demand the terrified boy continue to complete the act, which he obviously cannot do. The teenagers are saved from worse violence when the bray of their hunting dogs recalls the men to their purpose, but, understandably, Cholly's trauma is such that he never recovers from this event, given that neither art nor therapy is available to him.

Because Cholly dares not unleash his rage at the white men, he turns it upon someone who is weaker than he perceives himself to be—Darlene. Morrison writes: «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» (Morrison, 1970, p. 129). Although Cholly's emotional response is psychologically completely understandable, the text never goes on to explore the impact of his anger on Darlene, who presumably becomes yet another victim of ancillary trauma. She is also humiliated and afraid of the white hunters, but Cholly is incapable of showing her any sympathy or tenderness after the fact. Emy Koopman maintains that Cholly is «'being raped' by the white men with their flashlight [...] and gun, their demeaning words and looks. At the moment when Cholly was supposed to 'become a man', the white men

emasculate him, once and for all. The result for Cholly is a complete confusion concerning his own desire, which he is no longer in charge of. Since their desire has been appropriated by the white men, Cholly's sexuality will be forever tainted with violence and disgust» (Koopman, 2013, p. 306). As Leester Thomas states: «The anger and shame [Cholly] felt because of the white man's control over him now is manifested in his relationships with all women, consequently his adaptation of a cavalier philosophy about life» (Thomas, 1997, p. 56).

However, Cholly's trauma is intensified when, after seeking out his birth father, he is soundly rejected, told to «get the fuck outta my face» (Morrison, 1970, p. 123). At that point, Cholly regresses to an infantile state, soiling his trousers and curling in a fetal position. After bathing in a river, a form of rebirth, he becomes detached from humanity and considers himself free. Upon meeting Pauline, however, he does fall in love and the two marry. But they move north, where Pauline feels confined in a two-room apartment, lacking «a sense of purpose and identity» (Heinze, 1993, p. 72), unable to find friends among the Northern Black women who consider her too countrified for them. Cholly, accustomed to the freedom to roam and having had multiple sexual partners, finds monogamy debilitating and Pauline's increasing reliance on him chafes. The downward trajectory of their relationship is inevitable, and two children later, Cholly has become an alcoholic while Pauline has achieved the respect she requires as a maid to a kindly white family.

The trope of fire flickers through the narrative treating the couple. During one of their many brutal fights, Pauline knocks her husband up against the red-hot coal stove. Cholly's burns are never described, although they were likely severe. The first physical fight within the diegesis of the novel occurs when Pauline is forced to get the coal for the stove and here, Pauline's weapon of choice is the now-cold cast iron stove lid, with which she renders Cholly unconscious. The fire contained within the coal stove could have provided the family with warmth and comfort, but, given that it is weaponized against him, Cholly releases the flames to destroy their pitiable residence and leaves the members of the Breedlove family homeless. From these ashes, no new growth occurs. Morrison focalizes Cholly's rape of Pecola through his consciousness; as Bouson points out, «the utterly helpless

and vulnerable daughter and the embodiment of her father's self-contempt and loathing, the shamed Pecola becomes the target of her father's humiliated fury. He does what has been done to him and thus [...] inflicts on her his own feelings of exposure, powerlessness, narcissistic injury, and humiliation» (Bouson, 2000, p. 43).

Pauline is no better a parent to Pecola than Cholly is. While readers are quick to condemn her for her attachment to her employers, I would maintain that Pauline has lost all of her optimism about having any kind of a decent life with Cholly. Her lifelong love of organizing and maintaining a home is channeled into the work she enjoys doing for the upper-middle class white family who employ her. Pecola is literally scalded (by a boiling hot cobbler) when she encounters the little blond girl her mother cares for. Pauline knocks her daughter into the hot juice and continues to slap her until the little white girl begins to cry, at which point Pauline ignores her daughter to comfort the sobbing child. I am not justifying her treatment of Pecola, but given the ancillary trauma she is experiencing, she is repeating the pattern Cholly experienced with Darlene. Her hatred of her husband takes the form of her violence to him, as well as her turning to the Church; she will not divorce him, since he becomes the cross she bears to become virtuous in the sight of the Lord, or at least the community. However, although she may not consciously realize it, since Pecola is as much as part of Cholly as she is of Pauline, the girl is a constant reminder of the loss of all Pauline's dreams. In retaliation, she burns her daughter just as she had earlier pushed her husband onto a red-hot stove.

Much of the critical commentary on the novel *Sula* centers around the titular character, but I am more interested in Sula's best friend Nel, another victim of a husband who is deformed by the racism he encounters. Nel's childhood, in an all-Black community, is, for the most part, spent in a cocoon where she has a best friend and a secure home, and all her material needs are met. While one might not perceive Helene Wright as an ideal mother—and let me insist that I grow impatient with all the expectations that motherhood is laden with—she cares for her daughter and Nel grows up with that blissful combination of security and safety that now appears utopian. Lucille P. Fultz argues that both Sula and Nel, in spite of their «quite different upbringings [...] are denied a necessary aspect of childhood—affection» (Fultz, 1996,

p. 231), and Denise Heinze claims that although the girls «are products of two distinctly different family structures, both fail to sustain and nurture their members into adulthood» (Heinze, 1993, p. 79). I would counter these points by maintaining that, while Heinze's claim is true for Sula, it certainly is not for Nel, since she was raised with the expectation that marriage and motherhood would be her lot, as was the case for most girl children in her time. As for affection, it was also not unusual in the past for parents to remain stern and somewhat distant from their children—we are reminded of Claudia's coming to understand, in *The Bluest Eye*, that although she and Frieda were not shown affection, nevertheless their mother loved them and did not want them to die.

I would argue Nel's problems begin, as do those of many women, when she enters a marriage because she feels needed and, in the process, loses herself. Morrison writes: «She didn't even know she had a neck until Jude remarked on it, or that her smile was anything but the spreading of her lips until he saw it as a small miracle» (Morrison, 1993, p. 84). However, if Jude felt for Nel what she feels for him, the situation would have been different. Jude's reasons for marrying have little to do with love or romance, but stem from his inability to get hired on a road crew in spite of his strength and his ability—in other words his decision is driven by «the social and economic anxiety of racism» (Quashie, 2018, p. 76). Continually seeing weaker white boys, not men, chosen for the work he desires drives Jude to fury, and his «determination to take on a man's role anyhow» leads him to propose to Nel, believing that «[t]he two of them together would make one Jude» (Morrison, 1973, p. 83). Quashie points out how «[t]he narrative here identifies, through Jude's black male longing, the hunger to be successful in the patriarchal language of American masculinity» (Quashie, 2018, p. 76). Hence, «Nel figures not as a partner but as a complement or substitution» (Quashie, 2018, p. 77). To give Jude his due, while he expects her to continually «shore him up», he believes that he is obligated to «shelter her, love her, grow old with her» (Morrison, 1973, p. 83), and the couple appear to be happy with their home and children until Jude chooses to have sex with Sula—and Nel discovers them in the act. Jude's reaction—leaving Nel with no words and eventually leaving town—shatters Nel emotionally, another victim of ancillary racism. Fultz speaks of «the toll exacted upon mothers and children when fathers

desert their families and mothers are burdened by poverty» (Fultz, 1996, p. 235). Nel's recollections of her life after Jude leaves do not suggest her economic situation was dire (he sends money and she finds work), but she is traumatized nevertheless.

To be fair, Nel comes to realize later in life that her true despair was losing her friendship with Sula. Nel, however, blames Sula for Jude's betrayal, overlooking the fact that simply because Sula offered sex did not oblige him to accept it. Sula, without boundaries as a result of her upbringing, cannot grasp why Nel has become so conventional that she cannot perceive a casual sexual encounter as simply that. Given that Hannah's sexual proclivities with the men of the town were regarded as mere nuisance, no one would have judged Nel harshly had she taken Jude back, which, I argue, she would have done had he made the attempt. Nel wonders, «So how could you [Jude] leave me when you knew me?» (Morrison, 1993, p. 105). But did he? Or did the shame he felt initially when he was rejected by the road crew resurface, making him feel as if, once again, he failed in his obligations as a man? At any rate, Nel and her children suffer ancillary trauma in spite of the secure years they had experienced.

Fire enters the novels repeatedly, most specifically linked to the character of Eva, seen by many as a wise crone who lives her life on her terms. Obviously, Eva had experienced racism as well as poverty driven by racism, but the text makes clear that it is her husband's abandoning her that becomes the impetus for her life's decisions. Although we are not given a backstory to the marriage of Eva and Boy-Boy, we learn, as she does, that he is an abusive husband who is also a womanizer and that Eva left «her people» when a «white carpenter and toolsmith [...] insisted on Boy Boy's accompanying him when he went West and set up in a squinchy little town called Medallion» (Morrison, 1993, p. 33). After five years, Boy-Boy runs off, leaving Eva and their children helpless. Faced with starving and ailing children, Eva leaves them with a neighbor and returns 18 months later minus one leg but with adequate funds to begin building the bizarre, sprawling, never-finished house in which she lives with two of her children, and later, her granddaughter Sula. When her husband returns for a visit, accompanied by a laughing city woman, and never even asks to see his children, Eva experiences a «liquid trail of hate [that] flooded her chest» (36) and that will never

leave her; she understands that «hating him [...] kept her alive and happy» (37). Bouson claims that Boy-Boy's visit results in Eva's becoming «an arrogant contemptuous woman who rids herself of her own shame by shaming others» (Bouson, 2000, p. 58). As Susan Neal Mayberry argues, «Boy Boy projects his frustrations onto his wife, who then converts her anger at him into fuel for a meanness that will give her life meaning but will damage her children» (Mayberry, 2003, p. 524).

The scene in which Eva immolates her son Plum is narratively vexing. Because Plum has returned from World War I addicted to heroin, Eva burns him to death, claiming she wanted him to die like a man and not like the baby he was turning into. I would suggest that Eva's murder of Plum is triggered by her memory of Boy Boy, who was equally purposeless and who depended on women to provide for him. Bouson points out that while «Morrison partially protects her readers by describing Eva's burning of Plum in an aestheticized and detached way», she argues that the young man's being burned alive recalls «the shameful, horrific experiences of African Americans at the hands of white lynchers» (Bouson, 2000, p. 59). Wardi, on the other hand, sees the immolation as sacrificial: «Given Eva's love for Plum, it is a deep personal loss as she takes his life to heal him» (Wardi, 2021, p. 116). Wardi also sees the fire as healing, claiming that «Eva's use of fire to repair and renew her son's vitality is in keeping with the role of fire in the natural world [...] since] Eva believes she is restoring his identity» (Wardi, 2021, p. 117). Nevertheless, Wardi states that «fire becomes a place marker for death» (Wardi, 2021, p. 120) in the novel and that the various fires in the novel «signify in multiple directions» (Wardi, 2021, p. 116). Hannah's accidental death by fire serves no healing or sacrificial purpose, but rather «unmistakably draws attention to the lynching and burning rituals executed in the decades after Emancipation and continuing throughout the twentieth century» (Wardi, 2021, p. 120).

Sula, already a victim of ancillary trauma, dissociates from the horror of her mother's agony and simply watches what she calls her mother «dancing»; however, observing the death of any person in such a horrifying manner, especially if that person is one's mother, will scar a person, whether that person recognizes the damage or not. Sula's aimless life, which she sees as a form of authenticity, can be said to begin with Eva's ancillary trauma. Fultz points out how «Hannah's inability to like her daughter may be linked to

her own mother's inability or failure to give Hannah the feeling of being liked» (Fultz, 1996, p. 9). When Sula returns to Medallion after years away, she finds Eva once again setting fire, this time «to the hair she had combed out of her head» (91), presumably to prevent anyone using it to conjure with. Fire triggers Sula's memories, and, as the two argue, Sula shouts, «any more fires in this house, I'm lighting them», adding, «whatever's burning in me is mine» (Morrison, 1973, p. 93). Her words are prophetic, as her death, Sula's own «death by fire»—as she is dying from, presumably, some form of cancer, leaves her «overwhelmed with the smell of smoke» before she feels «a kind of burning» (Morrison, 1973, p. 148). Sula's arguably leaves behind only ash rather than rejuvenation. Once the town's scapegoat is gone, the center no longer holds and many go to their watery deaths before the entire town is razed. While Nel, in 1965, realizes racial progress has occurred, she also understands much has been lost. Nostalgic for what Medallion had been, she reflects: «now there weren't any places left, just separate houses with separate televisions and separate telephones and less and less dropping by» (166).

While *Song of Solomon* is the one Morrison novel that focuses more on the male characters than the female ones, I am considering the impact those men have on the various women in the work. Ruth, raised in upper-middle class comfort with a doting father, experiences early years that are secure and sheltered, if lonely. When Macon Dead comes courting, Ruth's father despises him but sees him as a way to rid himself of a clinging daughter. However, his scorn at his son-in-law poisons Macon against him, and Ruth is torn between loyalty to a man she has loved for years and one that was effectively foisted upon her. As a result, she is, as Jane S. Bakerman points out, «helpless, abandoned and immobilized by the death of her father and the scorn of her husband» (Bakerman, 1981 p. 560).

Macon carries into adulthood the trauma of having seen his father murdered by racists who wanted his remarkably productive farm, where father and son, along with Pilate, lived a good life filled with abundance. As a result of the murder, Macon is deprived of his inheritance and is forced to hide out to save himself, having observed the faces of the murderers. And because everything his father had labored for was stolen from him, Macon understandably becomes acquisitive, needing more and more property to attempt to alleviate the anxiety that he will lose his life's work as well.

Seeing his much-loved father murdered and feeling betrayed by the sister he helped to raise, Macon no longer truly trusts people. He needs a wife, but he regards her as a possession, and he totally ignores his daughters, except when he can flaunt them as an indication of his wealth and status. Unable to confront his respected father-in-law directly, Macon turns his scorn onto his wife, completely disregarding her, except to mock, belittle, and occasionally, batter her. Ruth tells Milkman, «I'm small because I'm pressed small» (Morrison, 1977, pp. 123-4); having had such a privileged girlhood has left Ruth ill-equipped to demand respect in her own home and has caused her to overlook her daughters as well as to breast-feed her son for years simply to experience human contact. Scalded by her husband's early animosity toward her, Ruth shuts down, focusing on her garden, and living a cheerless existence. While readers typically judge Macon harshly for his materialism and his lack of compassion, and, admittedly, the adult Macon is a callous, unsympathetic character, his childhood experiences have created the man that he is. And while Ruth's misery is blatant, one must assume Macon's life is equally empty, since he has no friends, no hobbies, and no life outside of his work—in essence, no real life, because that potential was stolen from him.

Macon and Ruth's two daughters are equally impacted by Macon's traumatic past and Ruth's inability to act as a result of Macon's treatment of her, hence both are victims of ancillary trauma. Lena recalls their father taking her and her sister, in their Sunday finery—white stockings, ribbons, and gloves—to the icehouse where black men were working and children—[b]arefoot, naked to the waist, dirty—were subjected to the spectacle of what they could never have. She adds, «and when [Macon] talked to the men, he kept glancing at us, us and the car. The car and us. You see, he took us there so they could see us, envy us, envy him» (Morrison, 1977, p. 217). When Corinthians offers one of the raggedy little boys her piece of ice, Macon knocks the ice away and shoves the girls into the car. Lena says: «first he displayed us, then he splayed us. All our lives were like that: he would parade us like virgins through Babylon, then humiliate us like whores in Babylon» (Morrison, 1977, p. 218). Macon and Ruth send Corinthians to college, to Bryn Mawr, intending that she marry well, but in spite of her physical attractiveness and her father's money, men are put off because «she lacked drive» (Morrison, 1977, p. 189). They attribute this to her education

and her economic privilege, but it is equally possible that her spirit has been suppressed by the years she lived in her parents' home, uncherished and ignored.

Lena states: «our girlhood was spent like a found nickel on you. When you slept, we were quiet; when you were hungry, we cooked; when you wanted to play, we entertained you; and when you got grown enough to know the difference between a woman and a two-toned Ford, everything in this house stopped for you» (Morrison, 1977, p. 217). Speaking of the sisters, Soophia Ahmad notes: «their lack of initiative and drive can [...] be traced back to their childhood spent under the shadow of a tyrannical father like Macon Dead and an insipid mother like Ruth Dead» (Ahmad, 2008, p. 61). Morrison writes: «the disappointment [Macon] felt in his daughters sifted down on them like ash, dulling their buttery complexions and choking the lilt out of what should have been girlish voices. Under the frozen heat of his glance they tripped over doorsills and dropped the salt cellar into the yokes of their poached eggs» (Morrison, 1977, p. 10). The image of ash is important here, indicating their spirits have been burned away, possibly allowing for new growth, possibly not. Ahmad believes Corinthians «shed[s] the enormous burden of hypocrisy, and free[s] herself of the shackles of social superiority her parents had wrapped around her» (Ahmad, 2008, p. 63) when she moves in with Henry Porter. However, one wonders how that relationship will play out long-term. Corinthians has repeated her mother's action in choosing a partner of a significantly lower social class, a man who was the butt of humor in the community when he had an emotional break as a result of his involvement in the Seven Days. As she grows older, will Corinthians find life in semi-poverty to be unacceptable when the choice to return to her upper middle-class home remains a possibility? Additionally, Bouson claims that the narrative about Porter is troubling and contradictory, presenting him both «as a gentle lover and rescuer of Corinthians but also as a killer» (Bouson, 2000, p. 90). Given Porter's earlier irrational behavior, one wonders what will happen if he melts down again.

As for Lena, even though Ahmad attributes «the lack of initiative» of both sisters to their upbringing, what I am calling ancillary trauma, the critic appears to blame Lena for her inability to act, stating «Lena falls a total victim to this concept of women as the less privileged sex. She represents

the women who continue to be repressed and dominated by the male species [sic], but do not give enough importance to their own selves to retaliate against the existing system and go in quest of their own identities» (Ahmad, 2008, p. 63). Lena chose to forego college in order to protect her mother from Macon's rages, so she has never had the temporary escape from the site of her trauma her sister had. In trauma, a person remains fixed at the moment the trauma occurred. Given that Lena was a victim of ancillary trauma every day of her life, her inability to act in her own best interest and achieve a life apart from her parents is predictable.

Hagar is also gently raised, although certainly not in any degree of material privilege. She is loved by her mother and grandmother but also embarrassed by them, although she hides that information from them. Schreiber points out that «people experience trauma not just from specific traumatic events but also from their physical environment and support systems» (Schreiber, 2010, p. 9). While many critics laud Pilate's life as some form of Black authenticity and a rejection of presumably white middle class privilege, I completely concur with Gary Storhoff when he maintains that «Morrison [...] does not privilege Pilate's unconventional, matriarchal, marginalized family unit over Macon and Ruth's conventional, patriarchal bourgeois nuclear family [...] Neither Pilate's nor Macon's family is functional» (Storhoff, 1997). Pilate and Reba think Hagar is «prissy» for wanting what many would consider simple necessities—sheets for a bed, for example. Pilate's household «routine», if it can even be called that, is hardly conducive to providing a stable environment for a child, nor is it a healthy one. The text points out that the three

ate like children. Whatever they had a taste for. No meal was ever planned or balanced or served [...] Pilate might bake hot bread and each one of them would eat it with butter whenever she felt like it. Or there might be grapes [...] or peaches for days on end. If one of them bought a gallon of milk, they drank it until it was gone. If another got a half bushel of tomatoes or a dozen ears of corn, they ate them until they were gone too. (Morrison, 1977, p. 29)

Guitar recognizes that Pilate had harmed the girl: «What had Pilate done to her? Hadn't anybody told her the things she ought to know» (Morrison, 1977, p. 310):

Neither Pilate nor Reba knew that Hagar was not like them. Not strong enough, like Pilate, nor simple enough, like Reba, to make up her life as they had. She needed what most colored girls needed: a chorus of mamas, grandmamas, aunts, cousins, sisters, neighbors, Sunday school teachers, best girlfriends, and what all to give her the strength life demanded of her—and the humor with which to live it. (Morrison, 1997, p. 311)

Hagar has none of those. She has never known discipline or routine, has never been socialized into a community, because neither Pilate nor Reba cares about discipline, routine, or socialization.

Ahmad claims that Pilate «identi[fies] herself as part of a larger African community» (Ahmad, 2008, p. 67), a claim I challenge. Pilate sells wine to the community, but does not allow her clients to drink in her home, and although Reba finds lovers fairly regularly, no indication exists that the three have any kind of social life outside of their immediate family, and we have no indication that Hagar has friends. As a result of these conditions, Hagar suffers from ancillary trauma, which is only exacerbated when she gets entangled with Milkman, who is as lost as she is. Milkman's toxic home environment, the pull he experiences between his Southside friendship with Guitar and the Honore Island friends he has made, and his utter lack of purpose in life have made him lethal. As Hagar grows older and wants more of a commitment than Milkman is capable of giving, he savages her when he ends their relationship in a cavalier manner and again when he confronts her for the last time, viciously suggesting she kill herself. From then on, she spirals downward until she does indeed die. Storhoff argues that «[a]lthough most criticism blames Milkman for Hagar's madness and death, Pilate and Reba are also partly responsible» (Storhoff, 1997). Never having experienced trauma first hand, Hagar is nevertheless a victim of what other people have suffered.

Christine Cosey, from *Love*, is another example of a privileged girl who is a victim of ancillary trauma. Born to the much-loved son of the wealthiest man in a small coastal town, the owner of a resort catering to wealthy Black clients during Jim Crow years, one might assume Christine would grow into adulthood fairly unscathed by racial trauma. However, Christine suffers as a result of her grandfather's pedophilic tendencies and racially-driven guilt and her mother's past as an impoverished girl who married well but who could

never overcome her anxieties about losing the wealth and security she came by through her marriage. Christine's mother, May, is a workhorse who from the day Billy Boy married her devotes herself heart and soul to the hotel, not trusting the economic security that is now hers. When Christine is born, May weans her «at three months» (Morrison, 1997, p. 137), and leaves the child to be cared for primarily by L., the cook at the resort. Christine's first loss comes in the form of the death of her father. She is virtually ignored in the grieving of her mother and her grandfather, who apparently are oblivious to the fact that, although they lost a husband and a son, she lost a father, a devastating experience for a child.

However, L. cares for her through the period of mourning, and Christine is young enough to once again find joy in life, especially after she finds a friend in Heed, in spite of May's disdain for the impoverished girl from a seemingly universally despised family. The girls share a carefree existence, living in the grand hotel, playing on the beach, and being doted upon by L., who nurtures the girls physically and emotionally. Christine recalls that she and Heed «shared stomachache laughter, a secret language, and knew as they slept together that one's dreaming was the same as the other one's» (Morrison, 2003, p. 133). All this ends abruptly when Grandfather Cosey decides to marry Heed, even though she is eleven years old, is never asked if she wants to marry, and is completely bewildered by the entire process. As she is driven off on her honeymoon, her «face is a blend of wild eyes, grin, and confusion [...] Will her fingers crack the glass, cutting the skin and spilling blood down the side of the door [...] Does she want to go? Is she afraid to go? Neither one understands. Why can't [Christine] go too? Why is he taking one to a honeymoon and leaving the other?» (Morrison, 2003, p. 170). May seizes upon the event to drive a wedge between the girls, which leaves Christine bereft. Eventually, she is sent away to boarding school while Heed battles May and the others who work in the hotel, all of whom view her as a conniving seductress who orchestrated the marriage rather than seeing her as the victim of an entitled man.

While Cosey himself is seen as a benevolent figure in the community, an example of racial uplift that even the poor take pride in, he is also a victim of trauma. His father, called Dark, was a police informant who betrayed many in the African American community and, although he accumulated

great wealth through his despicable acts, he «withheld decent shoes from his son and passable dresses from his wife and daughters» (Morrison, 2003, p. 68). One particular childhood memory disconcerts Cosey—he reports to his father the location of a man the police had been seeking and, as the culprit is taken away, a little girl runs crying after him. She trips and falls into some manure, which results in the entire town laughing at her. The event haunts Cosey and, when he inherits the wealth, he chooses to compensate for his childhood deprivation. Hence his creation of the resort hotel, which is, admittedly, off-limits to the poor in the community, even as he provides for them in their times of need: «If a family couldn't pay for a burial, he had a quiet talk with the undertaker. His friendship with the sheriff got many a son out of handcuffs. For years and without a word, he took care of a stroke victim's doctor bills and her granddaughter's college fees» (Morrison, 2003, p. 103). One might argue that he is desperate to be disassociated from his father, that he is attempting to atone for the father's actions, which in and of itself would not be harmful. However, we might consider that his obsession with girl children indicates that he is moored in the trauma that resulted from the little girl falling into the manure. Unable to save that child, he sees Heed as a surrogate that he can indeed rescue. However, Christine suffers the loss of her best friend as well as her home because of Cosey's actions. May initially sends her daughter to boarding school to separate her from Heed; later, Cosey demands that Christine leave because he claims she is a threat to Heed, who, humiliated by Cosey's publicly spanking her for throwing a glass at him, sets fire to Heed's bed. L. throws sugar on the bed, «carmelizing evil» (134), essentially sugar coating the disaster, refusing speech, as she always does¹. As a result of this fire, Christine, at a young age, is effectively on her own. Her upbringing has not even remotely prepared her for such a life, so her continual poor choices should come as no surprise.

One could argue that Christine's journey through men (Eddie, the soldier she marries; Fruit, the Civil Rights activist; Dr. Rio, the wealthy man

1. See my chapter, «In a Mirror Dimly: The Limitations of Love in Toni Morrison's *Love*» in *Reading Texts, Reading Lives: Essays in the Tradition of Humanistic Cultural Criticism in Honor of Daniel R. Schwarz* (2012) for a more thorough discussion of the political implications of L.'s silence.

whose mistress she is for three years) are attempts to find a home, a sanctuary from the world. After Christine's marriage ends, May subtly indicates that her daughter is not to return home, so, once again, the young woman is homeless, without financial resources. As Schreiber points out, «mental and physical re-creations of home perform a protective function by supplying a sense of adequate loving and self-esteem in the midst of material deprivation» (Schreiber, 2010, p. 9). However, Christine's concept of home—of love, and security—are tied to Heed rather than to May, who never mothered her daughter in any loving, significant way. Christine Maksimowicz employs Winnicott's discussion of how a child can be traumatized by such (un)mothering: «the experience of repeated ruptures in an infant's maternal holding environment [becomes] a structuring trauma that occurs before the child possesses the mental capacity to process the injury» (Maksimowicz, 2019). Christine's ancillary trauma stems from two sources, both of which can be traced back to racism: May's extreme poverty as a child, which has led to her obsession with financial security at all costs, and Cosey's need to atone for his father's betrayal of the Black community, which, as I have argued, may account for his pedophilia—or not. Only as one of the two former friends is dying², do the two finally recognize how their lives have been destroyed by May and Cosey. Christine says: «She wanted me gone because he did, and she wanted whatever he wanted» (Morrison, 2003, p. 184). They agree about Cosey: «Only a devil could think him up» (Morrison, 2003, p. 190). Given the novel's diegesis, readers can choose to believe, as I do, that Heed and Christine's dialogue will continue after their death and that they will never be divided again. But the ancillary trauma that Christine suffered made her living life unlivable.

The hatred that stoked the fires of the lynched resonates through Morrison's novels, sometimes subtly, sometimes blatantly. The knowledge of such a horrific past would be enough to derail anyone, but the fact that racial violence continues and that, certainly in the U.S., black men are not

2. Although most readers assume it is Heed who dies, the narrative suggests Christine may be having a heart attack. Just as Morrison never reveals who the «white girl» is in *Paradise*, so she leaves the matter of which woman dies ambiguous. I would argue by this time, the two have once again become as close as they were as children and in death, they will not be divided.

safe, takes its toll on the women in the lives of those men even as it often erodes the men's capacity for kindness and compassion. Ancillary trauma is perpetuated by the violence directed at some, but continues the cycle of suffering throughout the generations.

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