

ABSTRACT

Considering the importance of the reconstruction of past experiences for the creation of Toni Morrison's art, this paper aims to establish parallels between her critical works on memory, particularly "The Site of Memory" and "Memory, Creation, and Writing", and specific examples in her fiction. The use of autobiographical strategies, inspired by slave narratives, is shown to stem from similar concerns. Support material on memory and autobiography includes Beckett's *Proust*, Halbwachs's *On Collective Memory*, and Paul Eakin's *How Our Lives Become Stories*.

KEY WORDS: Toni Morrison, critical works, memory and autobiography, slave narratives, process of creation.

TONI MORRISON'S "SITE OF MEMORY": WHERE MEMOIR AND FICTION EMBRACE

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RESUMO

Considerando a importância da reconstrução da experiência passada na criação da obra de Toni Morrison, este trabalho estabelece paralelos entre a sua obra crítica sobre memória, particularmente "The Site of Memory" e "Memory, Creation, and Writing", e exemplos de sua ficção. O uso de estratégias autobiográficas, inspiradas nas narrativas de escravos, tem origem em preocupações semelhantes. O material de apoio inclui o ensaio de Beckett sobre *Proust*, *Memória e Sociedade*, de Halbwachs, e *How Our Lives Become Stories*, de Paul Eakin.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Toni Morrison, obra crítica, memória e autobiografia, narrativas de escravos, processo de criação.

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Toni Morrison argues that her inclusion in a series of talks on autobiography and memoir – later edited by William Zinsser and published as *Inventing the Truth. The Art and Craft of Memoir* – has much to do with the general characteristics of her work, although she is a fiction writer who has never written her memoirs, or joined in the vogue of life writing.

“The Site of Memory”,¹ her resulting contribution to the series, dates from 1987, at the time that she was writing *Beloved*. In it she points out her close association with both genres: 1) autobiography is at the root of her own literary heritage, in the slave narratives that inspired subsequent black American literature; 2) by “ripping” the veil drawn over “proceedings too terrible to relate” – that is, by breaking the silence of those narratives about the cruelest aspects of black lives – her fiction fills the gap between present and past with imagination and fantasy, and helps build the collective *memoirs* of her people.

Starting from Toni Morrison’s critical works on memory, specifically “The Site of Memory”, and “Memory, Creation, and Writing”, this paper develops two main objectives:

(1) Discussing the mechanism of memory for the reconstruction of past experiences, or in Morrison’s own words “the re-appropriation of the past”, which underpins her process of artistic creation. I then establish parallels with the concepts of memory in other works, basically Samuel Beckett’s essay on *Proust*, and Maurice Halbwachs’s *On Collective Memory*.

(2) Showing that the autobiographical characteristics of her work go beyond the use of slave narratives as a matrix, when examined within the frame of reference of current studies about life writing.

Morrison’s nonfiction and the series of interviews, from 1981 onwards, in which she evaluates her work and comments on her process of creation, confirm her main concern as an artist. It is her duty to use her art to empower her people to survive difficult circumstances in the present: “I know I can’t change the future, but I can change the past. It is the past, not the future, which is infinite. Our past was appropriated. I am one of the people who has to reappropriate it” (TAYLOR-GUTHRIE, 1994, p. 14-15).

THE PROCESS OF RE-MEMORY

In order to draw aside the metaphorical veil and reappropriate the past of her people in her writing, Morrison claims it is necessary to trust not

1 MORRISON, Toni. The Site of Memory. In: ZINSSER, William. *Inventing the Truth. The Art and Craft of Memoir*. Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1998. p. 185-200.

only her own recollections but also the recollections of others – in other words, to resort to *individual* and *collective* memory.

Although, strictly speaking, memory is individual, as it involves individual consciousness, anthropologists and sociologists, notably Maurice Halbwachs, insist that all memory is social. Individuals remember as members of groups, and belonging to a group gives a sense of validity to their memories.

Morrison refers her process of creation to both categories of memory: she moves from the recollection of an image – not a symbol, but simply a picture – and of the feelings accompanying that picture, to the creation of her text, in order to reconstruct the world in which her ancestors lived. This reconstruction is based on collective memory when she tries to imagine their world and the private or interior life of the people in it.

On the issue of individual memory, parallels can be established with the Proustian concepts of voluntary and involuntary memory in the process of transcending time and recollecting past experiences, - described in detail in *Le Temps Retrouvé*, the last volume of *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* – which Samuel Beckett discusses in his essay entitled *Proust*.

Voluntary memory is the uniform memory of intelligence, and it can be relied on to reproduce those impressions of the past that have been consciously and intelligently formed. Remembering, in this case, can be compared to the action of turning the leaves of an album of photographs that contain nothing of the past, merely a blurred and uniform projection.

However, the action of involuntary memory, stimulated by a sound, an odor or any other sensory stimulus, is liable to unleash a train of associations in the mind which bring the past flooding back and fuse it with the present. Involuntary memory attains the very essence of ourselves, which is stored in an inaccessible part of our being, in safe keeping from the destructive action of daily habit, that enforces only the immediate and the superficial:

But here, in that 'gouffre interdit à nos sondes,' is stored the essence of ourselves, the best of our many selves and their concretions that simplists call the world, the best because accumulated slyly and painfully and patiently under the nose of our vulgarity, the fine essence of a smothered divinity whose whispered 'disfazione' is drowned in the healthy bawling of an all-embracing appetite, the pearl that may give the lie to our carapace of paste and pewter. (BECKETT, 1970, p. 31)

An example of involuntary memory is the famous episode of the *madeleine* steeped in tea, which brings rushing back to Proust the feelings that surrounded his recollections of youth and of those he loved.

Morrison describes similar processes of remembering, both in her personal experiences and in experiences she ascribes to her characters. As stated above, her process of creation goes from remembered image (picture), to meaning, to text. In the creation of a scene, for instance, she says she “sees” corn on the cob. The picture of the cob keeps coming back and with it the “nimbus” of emotion that surrounds it: the pleasure of eating hot sweet corn, in the company of friendly neighbors and relatives.

Similarly innocuous daily events can start a chain of cruel memories that bring back her protagonist Sethe’s carefully disguised past suffering, in *Beloved*. This is an instance of involuntary memory:

Then something. The splash of water, the sight of her stockings and shoes awry on the path where she had flung them; or Here Boy lapping in the puddle near her feet and suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes, and although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty. (MORRISON, 1987, p. 6)

As Beckett says, involuntary memory is an “unruly magician that chooses its own time and place for the performance of its miracle” (1970, p. 33-34).

On the other hand, for Morrison, memory, or the deliberate act of remembering, is a form of willed creation, which she describes in “Memory, Creation and Writing”. The point, she says, is to dwell on the way an image from the past appeared and why it appeared in that particular way, to dwell on the feelings that surround the recollected event. No matter how small the pieces remembered, they set the mechanism of creation in motion; and the process by which Morrison develops these pieces into parts – that she prefers to leave unconnected – is creation. Thus memory furnishes both the germ of a theme and the non-linear structure of her novels, which corresponds to the characteristic fragmentation of recollections.

In the creation of her title character in *Sula*, published in 1986, Morrison claims she started from her fragmented recollections of a visitor who came to their house when she was a young child: her perfume, her color, her aloofness, but mostly the indefinable aura that surrounded her, as a result of the other women’s attitude when they uttered her name, “Hannah Peace”, with a mixture of respectful awe and something that sounded to the child like forgiveness.

Thus, individual memory – both voluntary and involuntary – and collective memory are inextricably entwined in Morrison’s process of writing the *memoirs* of her people. This would entail a redefinition of memoir as “a history or narrative stressing personal experience and acquaintance with the

events, scenes or times known to the writer”, to “events, scenes or times known to the writer and to his/her community.”²

The communal character of black narrative is, in fact, a tradition of African peoples: stories with shared authorship, transmitted orally, which aim at a larger truth. As a modern griot or storyteller, Morrison builds her stories around both personal and communal memories and recollections of events. “These people”, she says of her ancestors, “are my access to me; they are my entrance into my own interior life. Which is why the images that float around them – the remains, so to speak, at the archaeological site – surface first [...]” (1998, p. 195).

The importance of the sites of memory is also foremost for Halbwachs, who argues that the mental spaces of recollections always refer back to the material spaces that groups occupy: “Our images of social spaces, because of their relative stability, give us the illusion of not changing and of rediscovering the past in the present. We conserve our recollections by referring them to the material milieu that surrounds us” (1982, p. 23). Both individual and collective memory depend upon the individual as a member of a cohesed, solidary, social group, and they involve the re-membering of the group.

Similarly, the re-appropriation of the past experiences of black slaves in the United States, in *Beloved*, is a process that Toni Morrison denominates re-memory and that involves “dis-(re)membering” and “re-membering”. The antithetic connotations of re-membering and dis(re)membering put into relief the tension between remembering and forgetting that provides the novel’s central meaning. The spatial framework is the site of memory in Sethe’s conversation with her daughter Denver, in *Beloved*:

Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it’s not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it’s gone, but the place – the picture of it – stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around 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 say is still out there. Right in the place where it happened. (p. 35-36)

Thus the process of rememory in Morrison’s novels also emphasizes the importance of material spaces, although very few remains (images) might be found at “the archaeological site”.

Morrison’s declared objective, however, is to gain access to the unwritten interior life of her people, which has been left out even from

² Webster’s Third New International Dictionary. v. II, p. 1408. London: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc.

autobiographical slave narratives. Thus, her art aims at the reconstruction of the racial memory of her people – which she values over individual fulfillment. For this she must rely on the act of imagination. Consequently, and Morrison is not too happy about this, her work falls, in the minds of most people, into that realm of fiction called fantastic, or mythic, or magical, or unbelievable. This is inevitable, however, if her work is to transmit a different reality from that of authoritative historical narratives.

If my work is to confront a reality unlike that received reality of the West, it must centralize and animate information discredited by the West – discredited not because it is not true or useful or even of some racial value, but because it is information described as “lore” or “gossip” or “magic” or “sentiment”. (MORRISON, 1984, p. 388)

It is irrelevant whether her narrative assumes mythical or fantastic characteristics, for the crucial distinction is not between fact and fiction, but between fact and truth. Morrison reconstructs her ancestors’ world, she explores their interior life, by following the path of the compellingly vivid images that surface from shared recollections that were not written, but that lead to the revelation of a kind of truth.

How I gain access to that interior life is what drives me and is the part of this talk which both distinguishes my fiction from autobiographical strategies and which also embraces certain autobiographical strategies. (1998, p. 192)

In this respect, Morrison distrusts dominant narratives to help her know the truth of her own cultural sources, whereas she trusts the “ruse” of memory to trigger some process of invention. Her narrative transcends even the boundaries of history and myth, by going into the terrain of *counter-memory*, which, in the words of George Lipsitz, “is a way of remembering and forgetting that starts with the local, the immediate, and the personal [...] and then builds outward toward a total story.” Counter-memory is common in narratives of minorities, and focuses on “localized experiences with oppression, using them to reframe and refocus dominant narratives purporting to represent universal experience”. If by themselves these narratives do not hold an answer to the crisis in contemporary historical thought, they surely indicate other means of searching for answers (1990, p. 213).

In *Song of Solomon*, the myth of the slave that flies back to an Africa chanted in folk songs leads the protagonist, Macon Dead, into a quest to find out the truth about his family history and about Afro-American history prior

to slavery. Only then can he live effectively in the present. It is not a rejection of history, but a reconstitution of history, based on oral traditions and on local experiences, used to fashion the time of counter-memory.

In this way, the crafts of memoir (self-recollection) and fiction mingle in Morrison's novels, for the re-appropriation of her people's past. The same principles are valid in her use of autobiographical strategies.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STRATEGIES

Although Toni Morrison never actually wrote the history of her life, I have proposed as a second issue in this paper the possibility of detecting autobiographical characteristics in her work. As stated above, Toni Morrison argues that the authenticity of her presence in the series of talks about life writing is the connection of her own literary heritage with slave narratives – the autobiographical narratives of black slaves or ex-slaves – of which a considerable number, estimated at over six thousand, were written between 1703 and 1944. Of these, over a hundred book-length narratives were published, which constitutes an absolutely unique experience in the history of slave groups in the Americas.

Whatever the style and circumstances of these narratives, Morrison affirms, they were written to say principally two things. One: "This is my historical life – my singular, special example that is personal, but that also represents the race." Two: "I write this text to persuade other people – you, the reader, who is probably not black – that we are human beings worthy of God's grace and the immediate abandonment of slavery." With these two missions in mind, the narratives were clearly focused (1998, p. 186).

Both objectives can be said to inspire Morrison's work. Her worldwide readership is evidence that she has successfully used her writing to empower her people and to show the worth of Black American literary artistry. I now wish to discuss how "a singular special example of historical life" might also "represent the race".

Theorists of autobiography agree that discourse that aims to describe the history of an "I" has an evident fictional character. In matters of genre, autobiography uses the techniques of the novel in the selection of events and experiences from the writer's life. On the other hand, modern novels often transform autobiography into fiction.

The problem is how to define the boundaries between fiction and autobiography as the "retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality", proposed by Philippe Lejeune, in his celebrated essay "The autobiographical pact."

According to Lejeune, the textual sign of the real person is the author's proper name on the title page. Furthermore, the identity of author, narrator, and protagonist ensures the authenticity of the report, regardless of what might be true in the world of reference. This is the autobiographical pact that is drawn up between author and reader. In schematic terms, once we accept the author as a being in the world of fact, we accept the truth of what he says. On the other hand, the writer has a commitment to his reader to tell the truth. For Lejeune, then, autobiography is a mode of reading as much as it is a type of writing; it is a historically variable contractual effect.

In the light of Lejeune's definition, it is not possible to say that any of Toni Morrison's works is actually an autobiography. It is evident, however, that her work is permeated by an autobiographical urge, which results in the telling of the story not of an individual "I" but of a collective "we". For her, the integration of the "we" in the "I" of black literature, as for example in Langston Hughes's poem "I, too, am America," is "an urgent connection with and celebration of racial past" (1981, p. 38).

Issues of the fluid sense of the self, and of the complex forces that shape identity are the basis of Paul John Eakin's study of autobiography, *How Our Lives Become Stories* (1999), which mainly emphasizes the relational nature of the "I", the subject of autobiography, as a member of a culture that must cross the changing boundaries between the self and the other, in other words, between private and public life.

With regard to Lejeune's theorization of autobiography, Eakin concludes that although it provides a clear approach to the matter, mapping autobiography as a distinct genre, anchored in the referential world, it leaves the nature of the "real person" of his definition unspecified.

By contrast, Eakin quotes Michael Sprinkler for whom autobiography is fundamentally unstable and hence unclassifiable, a shifting, borderless locale, where "concepts of subject, self, and author collapse into the act of producing a text". As a corollary, in spite of referential evidence (the historically verifiable name shared by the protagonist, the narrator and the author of the text) the "I" of autobiography remains a fictional creature. Without an "I" to perform actions, to have feelings and qualities, the possibility of just "having" some history to tell about one's own existence simply evaporates (1999, p. 2-3).

Faced with the conceptual impasse between the referentiality of the autobiographical text and the fictional character of its subject, Eakin argues that an answer might be found by approaching autobiography in the spirit of a cultural anthropologist, *asking what such texts can teach us about the way in which individuals in a particular culture experience their sense of being "I"*. Thus his answer to the nature and sources of identity that make up the core

of autobiographical studies is based on experience. Although there may be “a legitimate sense in which autobiographies testify to the individual’s experience of selfhood, that testimony is necessarily mediated by available cultural models of identity and the discourses in which they are expressed” (1999, p. 4).

Cultural models of identity and the specificity of black discourses are of primary relevance for an understanding of Morrison’s autobiographical strategies.

Coherently with his “anthropological” stance, Eakin argues that the first person of autobiography is truly plural in its origins, although autobiography criticism has not fully considered the extent to which the self is defined by its relation to others. “At the very moment of realizing our own independence, we are dependent upon another to recognize it” (1999, p. 52). Identity in autobiography, therefore, is necessarily relational, and, as a corollary, the definition of the genre must be stretched to reflect the kinds of self-writing in which relational identity is characteristically displayed. This is the case with the individual “I” expanding into a collective “we”, which, according to a number of theorists, marks women’s autobiography.

Toni Morrison affirms that it is in order to establish connections with the interior life of her ancestors that her own fiction embraces certain autobiographical strategies. This is what I propose to examine in her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*.

The germ of the narrative is a personal recollection: what Morrison felt and saw when she heard a schoolmate, a child of her own age, say that she wished she had blue eyes, and that she prayed for them. This is the basis for the characterization of Pecola Breedlove, whose story is told by nine-year-old Claudia MacTeer, who assumes the simultaneous roles of autobiographer and storyteller. The locale is Lorain, Ohio, in 1941.

The setting and the atmosphere correspond to what Morrison says about her own childhood in Lorain, especially her parents’ garden, on the other side of some railroad tracks, “some distance away from our house,” where “they didn’t welcome me and my sister when we were young” (1998, p. 197).

The MacTeers also live beside some railroad tracks where the two sisters, Claudia and Frida, help to gather tiny pieces of coal lying about, to warm their house. Their house is poor, the living is harsh, and the parents are severe in their relentless struggle to feed and clothe their family through winter. We are told Mr MacTeer will not “unrazor his lips until spring”. “My daddy’s face is a study”, says Claudia. “His eyes become a cliff of snow threatening to avalanche; his eyebrows bend like black limbs of leafless trees”. Painful recollections will later be seen in their proper proportions: “Love,

thick and dark as Alaga syrup, eased up into that cracked window [...] – everywhere in that house” (MORRISON, 1972, p. 14).

Thus, in her role as autobiographer, Claudia’s childish voice tells of her own and Frida’s exploits in the neighborhood, and of their family life. Looking back on the past, as a spokesperson for Morrison, the storyteller, she develops a similar mechanism of retrieval of recollections, in order to structure her story. As Morrison says, the form as well as the content of *The Bluest Eye* correspond to “the visual image of a splintered mirror, or the corridor of split mirrors in blue eyes” (1984, p. 388).

The galaxy of images that accompany the recollections forge the technical complexity of Morrison’s novel. The narrative is divided into six sections: two introductory pieces are followed by four chapters, “Autumn”, “Winter”, “Spring”, and “Summer”. The cycle-of-seasons chapters are subdivided into a total of seven subsections. With the exception of flashbacks to the previous two decades, which reconstruct background episodes set in the South, the narrative orders the events set in Ohio chronologically. As Morrison points out,

There may be play and arbitrariness in the way memory surfaces, but none in the way the composition is organized, especially when I hope to recreate play and arbitrariness in the way narrative events unfold. The form becomes the exact interpretation of the idea the story is meant to express. (1984, p. 388)

The autobiographical strategy that permeates Claudia’s narrative is part of the novel’s process of composition. As the narrator of Pecola’s story, she must make sense of the shocking news that has caused a communal crisis: Pecola is having her father’s baby. Reporting the voices of the chorus of older women’s vaguely overheard conversations, she becomes an instrument of their indictment of Pecola: “They say the way her mama beat her she lucky to be alive”. “How come she didn’t fight him?” (1972, p. 148).

In this example, the child narrator is obviously mimicking conversations of adult black women, one of the several communities of women included in the narrative, and which have diverse functions in Pecola’s plight. They either comment on the events or represent a parameter against which Pecola’s rejection of blackness – symbolized by her desire for blue eyes – must be measured. Although these groups of women also live outside mainstream society, their presence defines the contours of the black community.

It is again the choric voice that subsumes Claudia’s tale of how “that Old Dog Breedlove had burned up his house, gone upside his wife’s head”, and everybody, as a result, was outdoors. That this is “the real terror of life”

reveals the prevailing economic uncertainty among blacks. Anyone who like Old Dog Breedlove puts himself or his family “outdoors” commits a crime that places him “beyond the reaches of human consideration”.

The chorus is unanimous in its verdict on the Breedloves, parents who do not care to ask whether their own child was “live or dead”, when staying with the McTeers: “None of them Breedloves seem right anyhow”. “Don’t nobody know nothing about them anyway. Where they come from or nothing. Don’t seem to have no people” (1972, p. 147).

After the rape episode, the condemnation is extended to Pecola, who, in the women’s opinion, must be taken out of school as “she carry some of the blame”. The chorus also cruelly decides that the baby ought not to live:

“Well, it probably won’t live. They say the way her mama beat her she lucky to be alive herself”.

“She be lucky if it don’t live. Bound to be the ugliest thing walking”.

“Can’t help but be. Ought to be a law: two ugly people doubling up like that to make more ugly. Be better off in the ground”.

“Well, I wouldn’t worry none. It be a miracle if it live”. (1972, p.147-148)

The cruel verdict is not in keeping with the “benevolent, instructive and protective” relationships with characters that Morrison claims for ancestors in her fiction. I argue it highlights the total severance of Pecola from communal springs of nurture and her status as a communal scapegoat: she is the odd one out in the group, who is rejected for being different, very dark, ugly and humble.

Communal cohesion as represented by the chorus is a positive aspect of Afro-American groups who care for their aged and sick and homeless; rejoice with their members’ good fortune and share their worries; chastise the guilty and take pity on the weak. Their attitude towards the Breedloves, however, is understandable when we consider that the main objective of a social group, particularly of an ethnic minority, is its survival. Any member who threatening this survival must be eliminated. Thus, the same energy and dedication fire the group’s struggle to neutralize possible aggressions against communal institutions that endanger its survival.

The fact that Lorain is a new Northern community, in the transition from rural to urban surroundings, makes it ambivalent about black and white values. Influenced by their contact with the dominant culture, the black women of Lorain straighten their hair, paint their lips, and wear high-heeled shoes. The submission to white standards is one way to handle the gaze of the Other, that is, the way in which they are seen by the white majority. As part of a minority discriminated by skin color they have internalized the dominant myth of white beauty.

However, Morrison claims that urbanization does not necessarily mean the absence of beauty or diminished individual freedom for the black American writer, provided the “advising, benevolent, protective, wise Black ancestor is imagined as surviving” in the city. “The city is wholesome, loved when such an ancestor is on the scene, when neighborhood links are secure” (1981, p. 39).

To narrate the outcome of Pecola’s plight, Claudia’s voice openly fuses the “I” and the “we”, hitherto subordinated. As the butt of recurrent cruel humiliation from peers and elders – her mother is the first to disown her – Pecola goes quietly insane, believing she has finally been given the coveted “bluest eye”. Claudia becomes the voice of the chorus, a community that includes the reader, a position that allows her to act as a moral agent capable of making judgments:

All of us – all who knew her – felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. (1972, p. 159)

Claudia, the griot, portrays the social context, after the scapegoat has been sacrificed for the welfare of the group. The mature, older narrator realizes that their group’s supposed strength, beauty, generosity, and eloquence, which they assumed they had been favored with, when compared to the scapegoat’s disintegration and negativity, are mere fantasy. Claudia is able to see that a rise in the social scale – her own, or that of any member of the black community – is meaningless when achieved at the expense of other Pecolas who step over into madness. “Being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about anyway in the hem of life, struggling to consolidate our weaknesses and hang on, or to creep singly up into the major folds of the garment” (1972, p. 18).

The reversal of the protective and benevolent role of the female ancestor in black communities, so dear to Morrison’s cosmology, is understandable from the perspective of mechanisms of survival in social groups. The action of turning against a scapegoat, the ex-centric individual who is incapable of establishing or sharing the social bonds that link the rest of the inhabitants, polarizes communal dissent and restores harmony to the group. By retelling Pecola’s story, Claudia is able to understand her own sources and her own community.

In this aspect the parallels with slave narratives again come to the fore. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* is a paradigmatic black autobiographical narrative. In it Harriet Jacobs (“Linda Brent”) records her

plight as a victim of sexual abuse and her cry of outrage against the brutality of slavery and the sexual oppression of slave women. In 1941 Lorain, Pecola is equally a victim who, however, lacks the capacity to give voice to her suffering. Thus, Claudia MacTeer's childhood memories represent both her movement toward physical and emotional growth and a commentary on the life story of Pecola, as the communal scapegoat. Linda Brent's narrative has a positive aspect: the celebration of the bonds that link the female communities in their struggle against a common oppressor. Morrison's novel may serve as a warning against a situation when these bonds are forfeited.

Thus *The Bluest Eye* is not only the story of Pecola's longing for blue eyes, but also the story of another little black girl, Claudia, who equally suffers discrimination and injustice, and who might herself have become a victim had it not been for her stable family environment.

Looking back on the past, as an autobiographer, Claudia writes both the story of her life, and the biography and the autobiography of the other – Pecola and the community. She tells the story of the story, in Eakin's words. The focus of Claudia's autobiographical narrative is on someone else's story, and as such, her primary activity becomes the telling of this story. The relational structure of the autobiographer's identity becomes evident. Instead of the individual "I" and his/her inner subjectivity, Morrison's narrative highlights the social interrelationships between people. In her search for her identity and for her roots, Claudia becomes involved in another's life and story. According to Eakin's principle of relational lives, the tension between self and other shows where narrative lines and life-lines are inextricably intermingled (1999, p. 58).

Thus Morrison makes use of an autobiographical context in order to place the individual in relation to the other (others) within a group that shares cultural, psychological, and emotional affinities. The intertwining of individual and collective representation casts into relief the relational quality of the subject, in a context in which one may stand for many.

As a conclusion, it is possible to assert that the matrix of slave narratives is effectively expanded in Morrison's work by using the individual self to express community values and to affirm a collective experience. Paul Eakin's theories about the nature of self and self-experience, which effectively enlarge our understanding of identity in autobiography, have provided a suitable basis for my argument: Morrison's use of the autobiographical form, which is classic in African-American literature, because it allows the writer to be representative of his/her people.

Morrison sums up her autobiographical strategies at the conclusion of her talk:

Along with personal recollection, the matrix of the work I do is the wish to extend, fill in and complement slave autobiographical narratives. But only the matrix. What comes of all that is dictated by other concerns, not least among them the novel's own integrity. (1987, p. 199)

The novel's integrity is entirely compatible with the author's use of autobiographical genres – memoir and autobiography – since she sees her novel as an instrument for the preservation of African-American tradition centered on the tribe, and, within the tribe on the ancestor, whose presence secures the links with cultural roots. Individual and collective recollections, therefore, constitute Morrison's site of memory, in a symbiotic relation with her art.

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