ROSANA RUAS MACHADO GOMES

“WHAT I KNOW AND LONG TO TELL YOU”: UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA AND AFFECT AS A PEDAGOGY OF HEALING IN TONI MORRISON’S *A MERCY* AND *HOME*

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AUTORA: ROSANA RUAS MACHADO GOMES

ORIENTADORA: PROFA. DRA. RITA TEREZINHA SCHMIDT

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BANCA EXAMINADORA:

_____

Prof. Dr. Claudio Vescia Zanini
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS)

_____

Profa. Dra. Danielle de Luna e Silva
Universidade Federal da Paraíba (UFPB)

_____

Profa. Dra. Liane Schneider
Universidade Federal da Paraíba (UFPB)

Profa. Dra. Rita Terezinha Schmidt (Presidente)
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS)

Where is your fire?

You got to find it and pass it on.
You got to find it and pass it on
from you to me from me to her from her
to him from the son to the father from the
brother to the sister from the daughter to
the mother from the mother to the child.

[…]

Where is your fire, the torch of life
full of Nzingha and Nat Turner and Garvey
and DuBois and Fannie Lou Hamer and
Martin
and Malcolm and Mandela.

[…]

Catch the fire and burn with eyes that see our souls:
WALKING.
SINGING.
BUILDING.
LAUGHING.
LEARNING.
LOVING.
TEACHING.
BEING.
Hey. Brother / Brotha. Sister / Sistah.
Here is my hand.
Catch the fire…and live.
live.
livelivelivelive.
livelivelivelive.
live.
live.

— Sonia Sanchez

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RESUMO

Compaixão, publicado em 2008, traz a história de Florens, uma garota negra que se sente rejeitada após a mãe ter implorado a um anglo-holandês que a levasse para ser criada em sua fazenda. Focando em diversas personagens, a obra examina os primórdios do estabelecimento dos Estados Unidos da América enquanto país, abordando as complexidades e problemáticas das diferentes relações marcadas pelo período colonial. *Voltar para casa*, publicado em 2012, traz a história de Frank Money, um veterano de guerra que precisa retornar à cidade onde cresceu para resgatar sua irmã, que está em perigo. Durante a jornada, Frank passa a se confrontar com fantasmas do passado que o assombram ainda no presente. De volta a Lotus, os dois irmãos estabelecem novas conexões com a comunidade local, encontrando algumas respostas que podem ajudá-los a lidar com experiências do passado enquanto constroem um novo futuro. Em ambas as obras, Morrison apresenta situações traumáticas e afetos causados por pessoas e por eventos que impactam profundamente as suas personagens. Diante disso, analiso as representações de trauma e os afetos que circulam nos dois livros, estudando os efeitos que algumas dessas personagens e as situações por elas vividas exercem umas sobre as outras. Proponho ainda que o afeto pode acontecer também entre a obra literária e o leitor, criando assim uma pedagogia da cura para aqueles que encaram o encontro abertos para uma leitura reparadora. Como suporte teórico, utilizo principalmente autores que escrevem sobre algum aspecto dos estudos do trauma e do afeto, como Jeffrey Alexander, Stephen Ahern, Stef Craps, Alex Houen, Irene Visser, Jamie Ann Rogers e a própria Toni Morrison. Na conclusão, argumento que a memória e o cuidado podem promovem a rememoração, articulando assim o afeto do passado que permanece no presente. Portanto, quando lemos a partir de uma posição reparadora, pode acontecer uma nova avaliação do passado, que acarreta a ocorrência de afetos que podem mover o leitor à reflexão e à ação.

Palavras-chave: Toni Morrison; literatura afro-americana; trauma; afeto.

ABSTRACT

A Mercy, published in 2008, tells the story of Florens, a black girl who feels rejected after her mother begged an Anglo-Dutch man to take her to be raised on his farm. Focusing on several characters, the novel examines the beginnings of the establishment of the United States of America as a country, addressing the complexities and problems of the different relationships marked by the colonial period. *Home*, published in 2012, tells the story of Frank Money, a war veteran who needs to return to the city where he grew up to rescue his sister, who is in grave danger. During the journey, Frank faces some ghosts from the past that still haunt him in the present. Back in Lotus, the two siblings make new connections with the local community, finding some answers that can help them deal with past experiences while building a new future. In both novels, Toni Morrison presents traumatic situations and affects caused by people and events that deeply impact her characters. Therefore, I analyze the representations of trauma and the affects that circulate in both books, studying the effects that some of these characters and the situations that they experience have on themselves and on others. I also propose that affect occurs between the literary work and the reader, thus creating a pedagogy of healing for those who approach the encounter open to a reparative mode of reading. As theoretical support, I discuss the texts of scholars who write about some aspects of trauma and affect studies, such as Jeffrey Alexander, Stephen Ahern, Stef Craps, Alex Houen, Irene Visser, Jamie Ann Rogers and Toni Morrison herself. In the conclusion, I argue that remembering and caring promote rememory, thus articulating the affect of the past which remains. Therefore, when we read from a reparative position, there is a reexamination of the past and the occurrence of affects that move readers to reflection and action.

Keywords: Toni Morrison; African American literature; trauma; affect.

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Introduction

Toni Morrison is a novelist studied around the world. In Brazil, we can highlight the works of some scholars who discuss her oeuvre, such as Danielle de Luna e Silva, who establishes connections between contemporary narratives of slavery written by Morrison and by Brazilian writer Ana Maria Gonçalves. Mônica de Lourdes Neves Santana and Ana Thais Barreto Apoliano discuss how Morrison's post-colonial literature focuses on the representation of the colonized subject, raising awareness to the trauma of the colonial period and helping (re)establish individual and collective identities. There are also scholars such as Luciana de Mesquita Silva and Prila Lelíza Calado who analyze the translated versions of Morrison's novels and the impact that they have on Brazilian literary culture. Therefore, I intend to dialogue and contribute with the discussions around Toni Morrison's oeuvre in our country. I have worked with Morrison for over six years now. My curiosity started with a sentence which intrigued me from the beginning. It has served as inspiration and motivation for many of my works, and I finally feel ready to try and propose an answer to it now.

In the foreword section to *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Morrison comments on the challenges of centering the main inquiry of the novel on the vulnerable character of Pecola Breedlove—a poor, black, lonely little girl. Morrison explains that she wanted to avoid giving the readers the comfort of simply pitying the child instead of reflecting and questioning their participation in her downfall. The novelist then comments on some strategies and techniques that she used in an attempt to overcome such obstacles, but confesses that the result neither satisfied her nor worked, for "many readers remain touched but not moved" (*The Bluest Eye* VIII).

From the moment I read this sentence, I was intrigued. What does it mean to be touched, but not moved? What was Morrison trying to do? How could this effect she was seeking be achieved? Would she continue to pursue it throughout her oeuvre? How can we become readers

who are touched *and* moved? What are the processes through which literature makes it possible? It took me a lot of reading and research on Morrison, but I believe that I have now come across a theory which can help me answer these questions: affect. After all, as Meera Atkinson and Michael Richardson observe in *Traumatic Affect*, "affect is always about moving or being moved" (7). And as Tobias Skiveren explains, the study of affect encompasses sociological enquiries of the numerous encounters between bodies and the world that continually move, touch and affect us (222).

In my master thesis, I discussed the representations of trauma in *The Bluest Eye* and in *Home.* I also compared the fates of the characters in both novels, suggesting that the presence of a nurturing community and a connection to such community was what determined the difference in outcome for both tales. Now, I intend to take my research one step further. I aim at examining how healing is processed in *A Mercy* and *Home* and how it moves the reader as well: that is, I propose to examine how plots and characters affect each other, and how the novels affect the reader. The two books were chosen for addressing the issue of trauma, for the effects and affects that their characters have on one another, and for the healing paths that they seem to suggest for readers too. I aim at demonstrating that Morrison is promoting some type of healing for the African American community through her oeuvre by means of affect—which I shall call pedagogy of healing.

In her analysis of Morrison's novels (from *The Bluest* Eye to *A Mercy*), Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber highlights the author's impressive ability to portray a "range of trauma associated with the black experience" in the American society, where "whiteness is the norm" and "black identity is marginalized" (2). Schreiber writes that Morrison's novels show how Black Americans suffer from "specific historical, contextual, and inherited trauma", with her focus ranging from the traumatic connected to different periods—from the horrors of the Middle

Passage and slavery, through relocation and segregation, to a contemporary racist and urban violence (3).

In fact, when asked about her motivations for writing *The Bluest Eye* during an interview, Morrison declared that she was a little worried that something was going to be skipped amidst the enthusiastic and racially uplifting tone of most of the works that were being published at the time—mainly related to the Black Arts Movement ("Motivation" Web). Although the novelist found the Movement's message stimulating, she also felt concerned about the possibility of people overlooking the fact that black had not always been considered beautiful, and that it might be harmful if no one remembered "how hurtful a certain kind of internecine racism is" ("Motivation" Web).

In similar fashion, when inquired about what inspired her to write *Home*, Morrison told her interviewer that she wanted to instigate Americans to rethink their view of the 1950s (Morrison "Google" Web). The novelist stated that the decade was remembered by some as a prosperous, fortunate time, while she remembered events often silenced or ignored, such as the Korean War and the dangerous medical experiments that were performed on the poor and helpless. Therefore, she considered it important to remind or inform people of such terrifying occurrences, so that they would reconsider romanticizing such a complicated decade ("Google" Web).

In the declarations above, we can see how Morrison pays attention to traumatic events, the consequences and effects that they have on people, on both individual and collective levels. In her novels, the author seems intent on exploring the origins of trauma and working through their ramifications, instead of just allowing them to be ignored or overlooked.

Since Morrison is undoubtedly concerned with revisiting African American History, questioning master-narratives and exploring traumas that were silenced for too long, her novels are relevant to Trauma Studies. Besides, since I believe that her works hint to healing paths,

they can be considered of high importance—and not only to African Americans, but to other minority groups, to people on an individual level, and to society as a whole.

Toni Morrison's novels can help readers rethink history, recognize and reconstruct trauma. Through affect, her works also indicate possible healing paths[1], contributing to responsible reconsiderations of official discourses, and helping readers who are trying to make sense of their life experiences. Morrison hints at possibilities for healing experiences in the appreciation of African American knowledge, the discovery and construction of community, and in the formation of interpersonal relationships. These elements are present both in plot and imagery and in the language and aesthetic choices employed in her narratives. We can also highlight the author's careful consideration and choice of words and tone, as well as her intentions of involving the reader—thus creating an interconnection that generates affect.

A Mercy revisits the seventeenth-century United States of America as different lives get entangled in Jacob Vaark's farm. Through many perspectives and different narrative techniques, *A Mercy* explores the early roots of slavery in America. The novel also addresses the bitterness and pain felt by sixteen-year-old Florens. At an early age, the black little girl was sold to Jacob Vaark by a Portuguese trader named D'Ortega as payment for a debt. Floren's memories of the occasion involve her mother holding her younger brother while begging Vaark to take Florens with him. To the girl, these actions meant that her mother did not want her and did not choose her. Haunted by such memories, Florens would always seek for love and affection. It is only by the end of the novel, after facing rejection and having to become her own person, that Florens starts growing independent. Her only regret is never knowing what her mother told her as she was taken away, but in the very last pages of the novel, the reader gets to learn what the message was. It is revealed to us that Florens's mother asked Jacob Vaark to

[1]The notions of recovery from trauma and healing are here considered a reintegration of traumatic memories into a survivor's narrative story, allowing them to make sense of their experience and move on with their lives, even if never fully recovered from the trauma. See Caruth and Brison.

take the girl so she could escape the advances and abuse of D'Ortega. Therefore, it was not an act of abandonment, but an act of love.

In *Home,* we follow the journey of Frank Money and his younger sister Cee—two siblings who ran away from their home in Lotus, Georgia, as soon as they had the chance. However, years later, they are forced to return. Frank, now a war veteran who fought in Korea, has to leave the woman he is living with in order to rescue his sister, who is getting weaker every day because of medical experiments conducted on her by her boss. Alternating with the third-person narration, we have little sections in which Frank talks directly to the narrator of the story (and perhaps also to the reader). In those sections, Money tells us about traumatic events of his life—from white supremacists forcing his family to leave their town in Texas when he was a kid, passing through his and his sister's witness of a man being buried by members of the Ku Klux Klan, to the grief of losing his two best friends in the Korean War. Eventually, the siblings return to Lotus, where the women in the community help Ycidra regain her health. By the end of the novel, Frank and Cee stand side by side, apparently healed enough to move on with their lives. Irene Visser observes that in *Home,* there is a sense of homecoming which is absent from Morrison's previous novels, which may indicate some form of closure to Morrison's engagement with the trauma of slavery and colonization ("Entanglements 5"). As I have suggested in my master thesis, it seems that only once Morrison had revisited and addressed African American history by writing about several places and several moments in time, she felt that it was time to give one of her novels a "happier ending" (Gomes 105).

My thesis consists of examining more closely the healing which is hinted at in *A Mercy* and which finally seems to be achieved in *Home*. In the first chapter, I review key concepts related to affect and trauma theories and propose the idea of a pedagogy of healing. This notion is guided by Sedgwick's questioning of paranoid modes of reading, and her suggesting of reparative ones instead. As it will be discussed in the end of the first chapter, this involves

approaching texts with an openness to the promise of the affective connection-making generated by them.

In chapters two and three, I analyze and demonstrate how those notions are reflected in *A Mercy* and *Home,* respectively. By the end of this research, I intend to show how the characters affect one another and how the novel affects the reader, indicating that Morrison has indeed managed to *move* us.

1 On Affect and Trauma

1.1 Affect Studies

One of the first and most comprehensive books published on the possible relations between affect studies and literary criticism is *The Palgrave Handbook of Affect Studies and Textual Criticism* (2017), edited by Donald R. Wehrs and Thomas Blake. In the preface to the publication, Wehrs and Blake write that their handbook "brings together, and puts in dialogue, strands of affect deriving from both post-structuralist philosophy and neurocognitive-evolutionary research" (viii). The scholars use the term "affect studies" when referring to research, analysis, and criticism from diverse intellectual traditions and perspectives—all related and focused on affect. Meanwhile, "affect theory" and the capitalized Affect Studies are used when referring to theoretical and critical discourse affiliated with work by Gilles Deleuze, Brian Massumi, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Wehrs and Blake viii).

Similar division can be found in Patrick Colm Hogan's "Affect Sudies" (2016). Hogan synthesizes the works involving affect into two broad orientations: affect theory and affect science. The first is connected primarily to fields such as psychoanalysis and philosophy, often contributing to political analysis, offering critique of discourses, institutions, and other social structures and practices. Affective science derives from cognitive science and social psychology, and includes detailed analysis of affective and cognitive processes (Hogan 6).

In the chapter entitled "Introduction: Affect and Texts: Contemporary Inquiry in Historical Context" (2017), Wehrs explains that during the twentieth century, "affect" was typically connected to bodily causality and natural science, whereas "emotion" was often linked to ideas, social science and the humanities. As Wehrs observes, this division had its roots in religious and philosophical interpretations of the body and mind as separate orders of being (1).

Throughout the Modern Era, philosophers and scholars would understand their disciplines as concerned with the mind, the body, or the effect that one held upon the other. Wehrs notes that modern Western sciences tended to focus on the isolated individual as their primary unit of analysis, thus interpreting sociality as a secondary phenomenon. Such tendencies produced a second dualism to the mind/body dichotomy: the nature/nurture division. Structural linguistics and developmental cognitive psychology researchers argued that human minds were a product of nature, while environmental-cause social analysis and developmental cognitive psychology scholars believed that it was nurture that played an essential role in the development of our brains (Wehrs 2).

Nevertheless, theories emerging during the latter half of the twentieth century started questioning the mind/body dualism. After all, the mind is composed by neurons, synapses and chemical compounds; in other words, matter. Around 1970, new theories, which were informed by the empirical research of diverse fields, started suggesting that "cognitive patterns reflect human embodiment, that without emotion's influence, reasoning is impaired, and that affective susceptibilities and attunements bound up with sociality give judgments, direction, significance, and urgency" (Wehrs 2-3). Thus, natural and social sciences began to conceive the relations between nature and nurture in terms of interactive reciprocity, instead of mutual opposition.

However, Wehrs believes that the mind/body dualism has not been completely overcome in the fields of the liberal, performing, and fine arts. He writes that humanities scholarship from the 1970s through the 1990s conceived as its disciplinary and political goal the contesting of binary-hierarchical concepts and representations. The objectives of the scholarly works from the period consisted of unmasking "illegitimate, oppressive linguistic and cultural signifying practices and forms" and recovering or championing the "literature, art, and popular culture that challenged or subverted" claims and representations connected to the mind/body hierarchy (Wehrs 3). Nonetheless, he argues that the genealogy of affect studies

which emerged in the 1990s and is commonly referred to as "affect theory" fails to achieve these goals by prioritizing the body: "affect is treated as the prime site or engine of liberating subversion, or as the place where oppressive 'nurturing' does its work." (Wehrs 3, emphasis in the original). He believes that, in contrast, "neurocognitive and evolutionary criticism situates affect within contexts of 'nature/nurture' mutual modifications" (Wehrs 3, emphasis in the original). Even so, he recognizes the importance of the two affiliations, mentioning that to both, "affect denotes sensations, intensities, valences, attunements, dissonances, and interior movements shaped by pressures, energies, and affiliations embedded within or made part of diverse forms of embodied human life." (Wehrs 3).

The importance of both affiliations is also highlighted by Hogan, as he observes that many theorists and critics tend to draw on both traditions. The scholar believes that this choice is highly beneficial; since affective science presents enough rigor to properly support literary analysis and affect theory presents greater opportunity for political engagement: "One might even hope for a greater integration of the genuine insights of the two major tendencies in affect study, particularly the ideological skepticism of affect theory and the empirical and analytic rigor of affective science" (Hogan 23).

One of the scholars who best exemplify this greater integration suggested by Hogan is Alex Houen. In the Introduction to *Affect and Literature* (2020), he reiterates an assessment commonly made in the literature regarding affect studies: two 1995 publications are considered as particular influential in fostering an affective turn—Brian Massumi's "The Autonomy of Affect" and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank's "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold". Massumi's text is a meditation on the autonomy of affect as prepersonal intensity, influenced by the works of Baruch Spinoza and Gilles Deleuze. Meanwhile, Sedgwick and Frank's writing focuses on social scripts which are driven by biologically hardwired affect-pairs, and is influenced by the theories of Silvan Tomkins. Houen observes that in spite of their different

sources of inspiration, both 1995 publications have been understood by some theorists as "advancing a concept of affect as a form of *bodily* feeling that is distinct from emotion, cognition, and language" (3, emphasis in the original).

Therefore, we can summarize, for genealogical purposes, that in the mid-1990s, Masumi, Sedgwick and Frank dedicated their attention to life sciences and biological studies. They did so in order to question the emphasis on linguistic signification at a moment when it was the dominant trend in both social and cultural theory: "instead of rejecting discursive and constructivist forms of analysis, they sought to highlight the limitations associated with assuming that these were the *only* (or always the most suitable) frameworks for exploring social and political life" (Pedwell 6, emphasis in the original).

In terms of differences between the two texts, we can highlight that Sedgwick and Frank were primarily concerned with affect as part of intersubjective relations. Therefore, they use the term "affects" in the plural, noting the qualitative differences among affects, such as the differences between being amused, disgusted, ashamed, or enraged. Meanwhile, in Massumi's text, affect tends to be used in the singular, as it refers to that which escapes confinement in human bodies, subjectivities, and relations (Pedwell 6).

Meanwhile, a number of philosophers and literary theorists have worked on developing a cognitivist approach to affect in literature, interested in "exploring the richness of mental life – including memory, consciousness, and imagination – as well as its relation to language and representation" (Houen 4). As Houen observes, cognitivists tend to comprehend affect as "emerging through distinct cognitive 'attitudes'; subjective outlooks, that develop like narratives" (4, emphasis in the original). Therefore, cognitivist approaches to literature tend to focus on fiction as "a means of reflecting on emotion in terms of character and personality" (Houen 4). Furthermore, cognitivists argue that the emotional content of literature can elicit empathy or sympathy in readers, thus fostering good ethical capacities.

Such cognitivist approach is identified in Donald Wehrs and Thomas Blake's *The Palgrave Handbook of Affect Studies and Textual Criticism*, which "raises some important questions about the limitations of regarding affect studies as essentially corporeal" (Houen 5). However, Houen notes that cognitive approaches have their own limitations, as the focus on mental attitudes frequently subordinates the role played by bodily sensations in affective life. Additionally, some cognitive approaches have analyzed emotional content exclusively, thus ignoring the role and impact that form, genre, or style might have in presenting emotion in a way that is distinctly literary.

An argument for an approach to affects in theory and in literature that is "neither strictly cognitivist nor noncognitivist", and which is therefore open to the consideration of literary affect in terms of both form and content, is presented by Houen (5). This proposition is based partly on his reading of Spinoza, Deleuze, Tomkins, Sedgwick and Frank. Houen believes that these scholars do not, in fact, support an opposition of emotion and cognition versus bodily affect. He also comments on the works of other literary theorists which support an approach that is not reducible to either cognitivism or noncognitivism, and offers examples of his own to what this approach can look like in practice (5). Such examples will be examined and discussed in the following subsection.

1.1.1 Affect and Literature

As I have previously mentioned, Houen argues for an approach to literary texts that is neither reducible to cognitivism nor to noncognitivism. In his understanding, Spinoza, Deleuze, Tomkins, Segdwick and Frank do not support an opposition of emotion and cognition versus bodily affect (Houen 5). When addressing Spinoza's philosophy, Houen highlights its monism: there is no split or dualism between body and mind, for they are attributes of the same substance,

always correlated with one another (5). To Spinoza, affections (*affection*) represent external bodies as present to us; as images. Thus, when the mind regards bodies as such, the philosopher argues that it imagines them[2] (Spinoza 100). Deleuze interprets the bodily image of an affection as a form of idea. He also highlights Spinoza's formulation of affections forming another kind of affect (*affectus*): "the *affectio* refers to a state of the affected body and implies the presence of the affecting body, whereas the *affectus* refers to the passage from one state to another"[3] (Deleuze 49, emphasis in the original). Thus, Houen argues that Spinoza does not support understanding ideas connected to affections and affects as secondary cognitive abstractions. Instead, the scholar favors Deleuze's understanding of feelings being themselves ideas (5-6).

The scholar also highlights Tomkins's formulation that the cognitive and the affective are conjoined through a set of relations of partial dependence, partial independence, and partial interdependence, which are conditional to specific states at specific times[4]. As Houen summarizes, "the dynamic conjunction of affects and cognition is fluid, contingent upon the 'state' one happens to be in" (6, emphasis in the original). He then links this notion to Spinoza's conception of affect (*affectus*) as a felt idea of the passage from one affective state to another. Thus, in both Tomkins's and Spizona's theories, "affects and cognition need to be seen as thoroughly fused with each other" (Houen 6). The critic also believes, as do Sedgwick and Frank, that such fusion may develop through affect theories and scripts that people develop individually, through the course of multiple experiences of a particular affect. The development of a theory or script also involves strategies for dealing with the affect in question, allowing the person to diminish, amplify, or combine it with other affects (Houen 6-7).

Thus, we can understand that Tomkins's account does not urge for separation between emotion and affect. It does not view affective life as opposed to language, as the scripts which

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[2] See Benedict de Spinoza's "The Ethics".

[3] See Giles Deleuze's *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy.*

[4] See Silvan Tomkins's "What are Affects?" and *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness: The Complete Edition*.

people develop for and with affects can be linked to the work of textual criticism. Houen notes how, since the affective turn initiated around 1990s, critics and theorists have analyzed and formulated new insights not only into how affect can be interpreted through language, but also into comprehending how language itself is affective (Houen 7). The scholar turns to poet and philosopher Denise Riley's formulations that language does not exactly express feelings as much as it does and produces feelings; its architecture at the heart of the affects we form[5]. As Houen explains,

> Punctuation, vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and ideological discourse can all be informative and formative for a person's affective life. Punctuation can do affect by exclamation marks, for example, just as a statement can be modified affectively by tone or volume of voice. Vocabulary alone affords a variety of tones: when relating the fact of a person's death, for example, I can say he "died", or "passed away", or "kicked the bucket", each of these carrying a different affective charge, the force of which will also depend on my tone of voice no less than the affective state of the person hearing it. In using any of those words for death I could also retain quotation marks around them (if speaking, I can signal that with finger movements) in order to ironise the meaning, affective charge, and my identification with them. (Houen 7)

The scholar also highlights, in consonance with Riley and Judith Butler, that each of us comes into being as a social individual through identifying ourselves by using structures and terms of language: "We are interpellated into society through language, by taking up a position in it, and it's because the terms of language are consequently very much at the core of one's selfhood that hate speech, for example, can be so affecting and injurious" (Houen 7-8). It is also

[5] See Denise Riley's *The Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony*.

important to note that the self-identifications we create with language can result in an array of affects. Someone is likely to feel pride when a term they identify with is celebrated in a certain space. We are also likely to feel solidarity with people who identify with the same terms as we do. If we take an action that ostracizes or is conflicting to one of the identity-related terms in which we take pride, we might feel shame (Houen 8).

In addition to categories related to nouns, other grammatical modes and syntax may present affective linguistic dynamics. The following example given by Houen is very interesting in order to consider this:

> In saying 'I love you', for example, the very act of identifying my feeling with that statement can augment the feeling itself while formalising its existence for me and my beloved. In other words, the statement isn't simply expressive but also performative in so far as the feeling emerges through its verbal formalisation. As with any statement, though, one can have varying affective identifications with "I love you". It might make me feel happy in thinking that my love resonates with other love scenes that I have taken to heart from literature and films and life. I can even take the statement's syntax gladly to heart and feel that, yes, I as subject am doing the emotion and am giving it to my beloved. Alternatively, I might think that the statement is a cliché and that its syntax doesn't fit with feeling how I am subject to a love that has arisen not solely in me but between me and my beloved – in which case I'm better off declaring "Love You-It-I makes me". (Houen 8, emphasis in the original)

This example seems to corroborate the benefits of thinking of affect, cognition and language as thoroughly conjoined yet open to different modes of co-assembly, interaction, and fusion.

As we think of language as affective, it is important to highlight that literary forms and genres have indeed explored particular affects, such as the sonnet and love, the Gothic and horror, comedy and mirth (Houen 10). Raymond Williams believes that these literary explorations of affect can register wider social structures of feelings and then convey them to readers. To the scholar, a person's experience as a social being is present and moving, as it involves fluid, sometimes ephemeral, structures of feelings that circulate and achieve shape as they circulate among people (Williams 128-132). As Houen explains, this comprehension explores "how the transmission of meanings and beliefs is partly contingent upon people's experience of them and how they interact with them" (11). Such interactions enclose a person's restraint, impulse and tone—affective elements of consciousness and relationships—"not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and inter-relating community" (Houen 11). Thus, there is an argument in William's writings for not only a flexible fusion between emotion and cognition, but also between individuality and community.

In "Affective operations of art and literature" (2015), Ernst Van Alphen writes that affect is social. He notes that current artistic strategies consist increasingly of the use of a more personal voice, and that such strategies can be understood as affective modes of communication which present the capacity to generate and transmit affect and to engage a reader or viewer in particular, transformative ways. Alphen also notes that "affect" comes from the Latin word *affectus,* which means emotion or passion, and can be connected to intensities (23). As the scholar explains,

> The transmission of such intensities has a physiological impact. Affects can arise within a person but they also come from without. They can be transmitted by the presence of another person, but also by an artwork or a (literary) text. They come from an interaction

> with objects, an environment, or other people. Because of its origin in interaction, one can say that the transmission of affect is social in origin, but biological and physical in effect. The experience of affect is usually seen as a kind of judgment. The person who receives the affect has to do something with it. It will be projected outwards or it will be introjected. The projection or introjection of a judgment is the moment when the transmission takes place. (Alphen 23)

Thus, we can conclude that cultural objects can be understood as active agents in the social and cultural world—that is, they can be affective. Houen also sustains that affect presents a "betweenness that is reducible neither to subject nor object and that can take on singular forms, including aesthetic ones" (18). In Alphen's understanding, a reading for meaning invested by affects can invite an ethical response. This call for an ethical response proves to be another reason to consider affect as social, since we observe not only how they originate, but also how they work and what they do (Alphen 30).

Recent theorization calls attention to how bodies are affected and, in return, affect others through interactions, in addition to affecting the environments which they inhabit. This has created a challenge for critics: developing a critical practice which "accounts for the importance of affective phenomena in the psychological models and rhetorical strategies developed by poets, dramatists, and novelists to depict the forces that move characters to feel, to think, to act" (Ahern 1). The scholar also highlights the importance of noting the occasions when "affect breaks free of the text or script to circulate through readers or audience members in ways that are hard to predict yet palpable nonetheless" (Ahern 1). Thus, the role of a literary critic who analyzes affect involves studying how particular affects and modulated intensities can determine narrative form, character development, and influence or cause impact on those who approach texts open to living and feeling them. Ahern assesses that one of the main challenges

faced by critics who approach literary texts from an affective perspective is the attempt to "account in critical discourse for phenomena that writers themselves portray as difficult to apprehend fully, let alone capture in words—and that materially affect bodies that are fictional in the first place" (7). Ahern argues that one of Massumi's insights is particularly important to the analysis of affect in literature: if phenomena always encompass the real and the virtual, then they are about "potentially in the process of becoming, even when actualized in a singular instance of body or art, flesh or fiction" (Ahern 8).

Literary writers sometimes strive to represent moments of heightened affective charge, moments of "the *extra*-ordinary, of a surfeit or surplus of affect, in which forces of encounter overwhelm a character's sense of self-possession as the transmission of affective intensities threatens to wipe out psychic integrity" (Ahern 8). At the same time, this transmission presents a sense of potential and promise, "of something profound in play beyond the narrow confines of the self, something that baffles bare cognition, let alone full comprehension" (Ahern 8). Therefore, the heightening of affective intensity or the affect-triggers (such as joy, distress and terror) of social scripts can be found at the threshold between cognition and intuition, both of the character and of the reader (Ahern 9).

Readers that immerse themselves in literature can experience self-estrangement from their usual affective environment precisely because literature can experiment linguistically and imaginatively to offer an alternative world of possibility. Therefore, the affective mapping is "largely something that readers can perform on themselves *with* the text" (Houen 12, emphasis in the original). Houen argues for an ontological existence of the world of the text, a suspended world that takes on existence "in the event of reading by exerting real affective force and thereby making the reader feel other with it" (13). The existence of such a suspension is important to Houen's formulations of affective critical readings of literary texts, as the scholar believes that "the suspended status of literary writing presents a reader with distinctly aesthetic

forms of feeling that can be experienced as exerting their own affective force despite the suspension" (16). This understanding of literary affect considers the transformation and fusion of affect with cognition, bodily language, imagination, and language. Furthermore, Houen notes that "the aesthetic nature of literary emotion is always open to affective interactions with readers." (17).

The becoming of fictional characters can be seen in the process through which the affects of characters develop by being composed with and of other things—both animate and inanimate. Thus, writers can convey affect through the use of language, and through aesthetic form. Houen also sustains that literary tone emerges as an affective relay between the reader and the text, presenting more of the betweenness that the scholar links to affect. As he explains, "aspects of a text's genre, form, and style combine to present its affective bearing to the reader with its own mode of aesthetic suspension. That suspension is part of the text's affective bearing, its tonal feeling" (Houen 19). The reader can then be inspired by that tonal feeling and project it, or they can bring their affective critical sense in their analysis of the book. As Houen highlights, the suspension presented by fiction is intrinsic to aesthetic feeling (19).

The influence of emotion on literature, both as a subject (in the plot and felt by the characters of the story) and as part of reader response is also stressed by Houen. To the scholar, the key in fiction is simulation, an important operation of the human mind that involves "the imagination of particulars beyond direct perception and memory" (Houen 3). When we imagine how different outcomes may play out during several sorts of activity, we engage precisely in simulation. In our brains, a similar set of regions are triggered by both representations of emotionally loaded events and by the corresponding events themselves—although the former presents less intensity. Simulation also allows us to evaluate scenarios off-line and without risk, but only because the usual emotions associated with the simulated events are still experienced (Hogan 3).

To Hogan, the emotions inspired by fiction and the enjoyment of tragic stories may by understood through the comprehension of literature as a form of simulation, whose functionality is inseparable from emotion. Thus, we can understand that emotion has a very significant place in literature and in literary experience. We can also connect Hogan's simulation to Houen's suspension. This connection is not saying that the two notions are the same, but that both scholars understand that emotions and affects can circulate between fictional works and actual people, attesting to the betweenness that is so characteristic of affect studies.

1.2 Trauma theory, affect and a pedagogy of healing

Another field that has expanded considerably and rapidly in the 1990s is that of trauma theory. As Irene Visser remarks, studies on trauma have become quite diversified, with analysis produced by scholars of disciplines such as cultural and literary studies, law, psychology, cognitive science and history—among others. Trauma is indeed regarded as "one of today's signal cultural paradigms" (Visser's "Trauma" 270). Publications such as Cathy Caruth's *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) are examples of this, as these editions organize works of professionals and researchers from distinct fields, such as sociology, psychology, education, creative writing, and more. Caruth believes that there is no single approach to analyzing or listening to traumatic stories and experiences. Thus, different disciplines can present a variety of responses of acknowledging and acting in helpful ways, contributing to the ongoing work on trauma. Caruth believes that through such variety, we can learn not only to ease suffering, but to open new possibilities for change, acknowledging the unthinkable realities to which traumatic experiences bears witness (*Trauma* iv).

The premise that the contributions of a variety of disciplines are useful and desirable for trauma studies is also endorsed by Visser. When writing about trauma in postcolonial studies,

the scholar observes that there is a growing consensus to "conceptualize trauma not by theorizing hierarchical structures which would privilege some conceptual approaches and delegitimize others, but by envisaging trauma as a complicated network of concepts and approaches, all centered around trauma" ("Entanglements" 3). For the present dissertation, notions linked to cultural and postcolonial trauma will be particularly relevant—nevertheless, in some instances, other perspectives will be discussed as well.

The most acknowledged definition of trauma is that of "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucination and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth's *Unclaimed* 11). As Visser remarks, the subject of study in trauma theory is intrinsically linked to the traumatic aftermath, which is marked by the repetition or recurrence of the stressor even through dreams, flashbacks, memory, and/or other symptoms known under the definition of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) ("Trauma" 272).

During the first half of the twentieth century, the idea of trauma was most associated with soldiers that had witnessed massive and sudden death while in a state of numbness. Later, they would relieve such witnessing in recurring nightmares. However, an increasing number of overwhelming war experiences and other types of catastrophic responses led psychiatrists and physicians of the latter half of the twentieth century to start reshaping their understanding of mental and physical experience. Thus, events such as child abuse, work accidents and rape were included as catalysts for PTSD (Caruth's "*Unclaimed*" 11).

The idea that the pathology of trauma cannot be defined by the event itself or in terms of a distortion of it is also explored by Caruth. In her understanding, the pathology actually consists in "the *structure of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who

experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (Caruth's *Trauma* 4-5).

There is a link between Caruth's formulations on trauma and Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), in which the psychiatrist reflects on compulsive repetitions which cannot be connected to the pleasure principle, for they involve past experiences which do not include any possibility of pleasure, as they are linked to painful or catastrophic events, and have never produced any pleasure. According to Freud, such events do not take the shape of dreams or memories; instead, they haunt the survivor in the form of fresh experiences, which are repeated under pressure of a compulsion (Freud 3725). Thus, the traumatized person is subjected to a series of repeated painful events, with no control or desire for their reoccurrence[6].

In her analysis of Freud's formulations in relation to Tasso's epic, Caruth identifies a representation of the way a traumatic experience repeats itself, exact and literal, against any will of the survivor. She also draws attention to the voice that cries out from the wounded tree. The scholar argues that, through the repetition of his act, Tancred is urged by the pained lament to acknowledge what he has done for the very first time. The voice that addresses him bears witness to the past that the knight has unknowingly repeated, witnessing a truth that Tancred cannot fully know. Thus, Caruth reflects on trauma as a wound that "is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (*Unclaimed* 4). Tancred does not hear the voice of Clorinda until he hurts her for a second time, which can be interpreted as a parallel to trauma: it is not locatable in the original event, but "in

[6] Freud illustrates these reflections with a literary example: Tasso's romantic epic *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1581). In the story, the knight Tancred unknowingly murders his beloved Clorinda, disguised in the armor or an enemy warrior. Following her funeral, Tancred goes into a mythical forest that inspires fear in the soldiers. He then strikes with a sword at a tall tree; blood comes out of it as the voice of Clorinda reveals that her soul is now in that truck, and complains about Tancred hurting her again. The fact that the knight wounds his beloved a second time is used by Freud to illustrate his hypothesis that "there really does exist in the mind a compulsion to repeat which overrides the pleasure principle" (3726).

the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth's *Unclaimed* 4, emphasis in the original). The scholar's analysis of Tasso's epic reinforces the comprehension of the pathology of trauma with a focus on the structure of its experience, as the event cannot be entirely assimilated as it occurs. To Caruth, trauma can be thought of as an overwhelming event which cannot be fully witnessed as it takes place, and which may later return in an unassimilated and literal form to possess and haunt the survivor.

In recent decades, a number of scholars have argued about the necessity of broadening the scope of our comprehension of trauma, directing attention to those traumas which cannot be linked to a single event. One such scholar is Stef Craps, who believes that connecting trauma exclusively to singular events can marginalize or ignore traumatic experiences of non-Western or minority cultures, taking for granted the universal validity of definitions of trauma and recovery developed in and by Western modern thinking (2). Therefore, the scholar argues that trauma theory "can and should be reshaped, resituated, and redirected so as to foster attunement to previously unheard suffering" (Craps 37). Craps sees the event-based model of trauma as insufficient to accurately and appropriately address and portray the experiences of certain groups. In his understanding, the concepts that were originally presented by trauma theory scholars are not adequate to explain or convey the traumatic impact of racism and other forms of ongoing oppression: while racism is historically specific, it is unlike historical trauma, as it cannot be related to a particular event with a before and an after. Instead, it continues to cause damage in the present (Craps 37-38). Joanne Chasshot also comments on the limits of theories that connect trauma exclusively to events. In her understanding, they "fail to account for experiences like slavery or ordinary racism, forms of trauma that are neither event-based nor exceptional but continuous and part of the usual, everyday life of the victims" (Chasshot 25).

According to Craps, racism can be thought of as one of the sources of insidious trauma: "traumatogenic effects left by oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit" (Brown 107). Considering this concept, Craps notes that overt racism has often been replaced with more subtle, covert and complex racist incidents that operate at cultural and institutional levels in most Western countries. As examples of daily micro-aggressions that take place nowadays, Craps mentions being the target of a security guard, being stopped in traffic, being denied home mortgages, business loans or promotions, and seeing one's group portrayed in a stereotypical manner in media. The scholar also explains that while one of those incidents alone may not be traumatizing, the reoccurrence of cumulative micro-aggressions may insidiously result in traumatization; that is, even if one of those experiences may seem too small to be a traumatic stressor, together they are capable of amounting to intense traumatic impact. Craps also argues that considering trauma as an exclusively individual phenomenon may distract focus and attention from the wider social situation:

> In collectivist societies individualistic approaches may be at odds with the local culture. Moreover, by narrowly focusing on the level of the individual psyche, one tends to leave unquestioned the conditions that enabled the traumatic abuse, such as political oppression, racism, or economic domination. Problems that are essentially political, social, or economic are medicalized, and the people affected by them are pathologized as victims without agency, sufferers from an illness that can be cured through psychological counseling. The failure to situate these problems in their larger historical context can thus lead to psychological recovery being privileged over the transformation of a wounding political, social, or economic system. Insofar as it negates the need for

> taking collective action towards systemic change, the hegemonic trauma discourse can be seen to serve as a political palliative to the socially disempowered. (Craps 28)

Another particular type of trauma that becomes relevant for an analysis of Morrison's novels is cultural trauma, explained by Ron Eyerman as referring to "a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion" (Eyerman 61). Thus, the trauma in question is not necessarily experienced directly by everyone in a community. As Eyerman explains, slavery was not a part of the contemporary reality of many African American artists and writers who speak about it, but it became central to the forging of a collective identity which was strongly marked and affected by it. The scholar also notes that the articulation of discourse around cultural trauma is a process of mediation that involves alternative voices and alternative strategies. This process seeks to reconfigure or reconstitute a collective identity, as a traumatic tear in the social fabric requires the narration of new foundations. Such narration includes the reinterpretation of the past as a means toward reconciling present and/or future needs. As Eyerman notes, "there may be several or many possible responses to cultural trauma that emerge in a specific historical context, but all of them in some way or another involve identity and memory" (63).

An also interesting concept is that of the trauma process, explored by Jeffrey Alexander. According to the scholar, the trauma process gives narrative shape and meaning to overwhelming phenomena that have deeply harmed collective identity. As he explains, cultural trauma occurs when the members of a certain collectivity feel that they have been subjected to horrendous events that leave profound marks upon their group consciousness, "marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (Alexander 1). The scholar also argues that through the narrative embedded in cultural traumas, social groups and national societies cognitively recognize the existence and source of human

suffering, feeling compelled to take responsibility for it. When reflecting on the social process of cultural trauma, Alexander writes that social crises must become cultural crises in order for traumas to emerge at the level of the collectivity. Therefore, the focus is on the narration and representation of events. The scholar believes that trauma is not the result of a group of people experiencing pain, but the result of this pain and discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity's sense of its own identity. As he explains,

> "Experiencing trauma" can be understood as a sociological process that defines a painful injury to the collectivity, establishes the victim, attributes responsibility, and distributes the ideal and material consequences. Insofar as traumas are so experienced, and thus imagined and represented, the collective identity will become significantly revised. This identity revision means that there will be a searching re-remembering of the collective past, for memory is not only social and fluid but deeply connected to the contemporary sense of the self. Identities are continuously constructed and secured not only by facing the present and future but also by reconstructing the collectivity's earlier life. (Alexander 10, emphasis in the original)

Therefore, identity revision involves exploring a collective past. This notion is also stressed by Visser, who believes that the trauma process involves "the construction and interrogation of the history of colonialism and decolonization through narratives" ("Decolonizing" 15). The scholar also highlights how important it is to respond to trauma with respectful recognition of historical, national, ethic and spiritual diversification. When summarizing the perspectives and understanding of this field of study today, she writes that trauma is acknowledged as a very complex phenomenon: "it is not only understood as acute, individual, and event-based, but also as collective and chronic; trauma can weaken individuals

and communities, but it can also lead to a stronger sense of identity and a renewed social cohesion" (Visser's "Decolonizing" 20). The critic stresses the importance of reflecting and reconstructing the complexity of trauma in its specific historical, political, and cultural contexts. She observes that many trauma narratives do not negate the profound, lasting impact of trauma, but also focus and portray resilience and growth as possibilities in the aftermath of traumatic wounding. According to the scholar, narrativization is capable of empowering individuals and communities, which might be crucial to their cultural survival (Visser's "Decolonizing" 20-22).

One of the works which establish a link between trauma and affect is *Traumatic Affect*, organized by Meera Atkinson and Michael Richardson. The scholars stress that trauma occurs on a relational spectrum, linked to context—which can be personal or collective (2). They also believe it to be unlikely that people can escape the affect that either generates trauma or is generated by it. Furthermore, they write that "being open to one's own trauma is necessary in order to be open to that of another, and conversely opening to the trauma of others facilitates opening to one's own" (Atkinson ad Richardson 3). The scholars believe this to be especially important because unacknowledged trauma can produce damaging effects—on one's self and on others: "in this way, a dangerous cycle is perpetrated, a cycle in which everyone is affected and implicated" (Atkinson and Richardson 3).

The scholars also note the emergence of a need to consider the "experience of the body, the singularity within the multiplicity that is moved by an encounter—with a text, with an other, with art or culture, politics or experience" (Atkinson and Richardson 7). As they remark, this is provided by the affective turn, as affect can be understood precisely as a force or forces of encounter: "affect is always about moving or being moved" (Atkinson and Richardson 7). The duo notes that some scholars, such as critical race theorists and feminists have championed "focus on the body, on specific bodies, and in particular on those bodies most ignored, maligned and exploited, whether in social, political or theoretical realms" (Atkinson and Richardson 7).

Through the study of everyday life, art, literature and film, affect theory can work to refuse to establish homogeneity. To the two critics, the fact that affect is concerned with what happens in the currents and exchanges between bodies (and not just within them) gives it potential to widen and deepen comprehensions of trauma. They suggest that traumatic affect can be understood as "the mode, substance and dynamics of relation through which trauma is experienced, transmitted, conveyed, and represented. Traumatic affect crosses boundaries, between personal and political, text and body, screen and audience, philosophy and culture" (Atkinson and Richardson 12). Thus, traumatic affect brings its constitutive terms into relation.

One of the scholars who focus on the characteristics and themes of trauma fiction is Anne Whitehead. She observes that such narratives tend to present some techniques and forms that call attention to the complexity of memory, criticizing the notion of history as grand narrative: "in testing formal boundaries, trauma fiction seeks to foreground the nature and limitations of narrative and to convey the damaging and distorting impact of the traumatic event" (82). The scholar also highlights that trauma fiction brings silenced or marginalized voices and stories to public consciousness, rescuing previously overlooked histories, presenting "concern with the recovery of memory and the acknowledgment of the denied, the repressed and the forgotten" (Whitehead 82). Thus, fiction centered on trauma can contribute to the rethinking of the ethics of historical representation by allowing politically and psychologically repressed stories and events to surface to consciousness (Whitehead 82-83).

There is also a tendency in trauma fiction to register the unassimilable and overwhelming nature of its subject matter in formal and structural terms (Whitehead 83). Among the most common key stylistic features are intertextuality, repetition, and a dispersed or fragmented narrative voice. The scholar explains intertextuality as the comprehension of a text as "a tissue of quotations, absorbing and transforming material from other texts" (Whitehead 89). It can be related to images, characters, plots or conventions that certain texts

might bring to mind for the readers. The technique can be used to suggest the surfacing to consciousness of memories that have been forgotten or repressed, or to allow previously silenced voices to tell their own stories as authors revise canonical texts, offering different perspectives on well-known tales. The technique of repetition "mimics the effects of trauma, for it suggests the insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology or progression" (Whitehead 86). In a literary work, repetition can take the form of imagery, plot, language, etc. Inherently ambivalent, it exists between trauma and catharsis. When connected to trauma, it can replay the traumatic past as if it were present, leaving the survivor under its paralyzing influence. Nonetheless, repetition can also be linked to memory and catharsis, facilitating the reformulation of the past. Meanwhile, the dispersive or fragmented narrative voice is related to the attempt of not oversimplifying a traumatic experience. It can also help in retaining its impact. To Whitehead, literary fiction has the freedom and flexibility that might prove necessary in order to articulate the impact and resistance of trauma (Whitehead 87).

When commenting on the trauma endured by Indigenous people in Australia and the stories created by them, Atkinson and Richardson stress that those tales are not only for Indigenous people: they "demand the attention of those who would not readily give it, commanding witness, engagement, ethical response" (4). They also note that studying trauma in cultural or literary terms is focusing on the tension between what is known and what is not known, as well as on the machinations of trauma—its physical instantiation and all its reverberation (Atkinson and Richardson 5). Cathy Caruth has indeed noted that literature is "interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing" (*Unclaimed* 3). In her understanding, art and literature present possibilities of speaking about overwhelming and complex experiences because they do so in a language that is always somehow literary, "a language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding" (*Unclaimed* 5). As Atkinson and Richardson observe, literature, cinema and art produce texts that do not only describe the

experience of trauma thematically or directly, but can also be read as structurally and linguistically traumatized (6).

On their formulations on the connection between affect and literature, both Houen and Ahern mention Eve Sedgwick's "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You". In this text, Sedgwick argues that critical theory has often adopted a particular affective outlook that can be characterized as a "hermeneutics of suspicion" or "paranoid reading". She explains that paranoia is anticipatory, as its first imperative is that "*There must be no bad surprises*, and indeed, the aversion to surprise seems to be what cements the intimacy between paranoia and knowledge per se, including both epistemophilia and skepticism" (Sedgwick's *Paranoid* 130, emphasis in the original). As the scholar indicates, the future-oriented vigilance of paranoia creates a complex relation to temporality: since there can be no bad surprises, and learning of the possibility of a bad surprise would be, in itself, a bad surprise, "paranoia requires that bad news be always already known" (Sedgwick's *Paranoid* 130). Besides, she believes that there is a great loss when "paranoid inquiry comes to seem entirely coextensive with critical theoretical inquiry rather than being viewed as one kind of cognitive/affective theoretical practice among other, alternative kinds" (Sedgwick's *Paranoid* 126). The issue with paranoia is that the strategy of anticipating negative affect can completely block the potentially operative goal of seeking positive affect. As an alternative, Sedgwick argues for reparative modes of reading and explains that

> To read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader *as new*; to a reparative positioned reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise. Because there can be terrible surprises, however, there can also be

> good ones. Hope, often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparative positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates. Because the reader has room to realize that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from the way it actually did. (Sedgwick's *Paranoid* 146)

Thus, a feature of reparative modes of reading is that generational relations do not have to continue the same: today can differ from yesterday and tomorrow can differ from today. Sedgwick also stresses that practicing forms of knowing other than paranoid does not entail a denial of the reality or gravity of enmity or oppression; what it does is open possibilities for different, maybe healing outcomes, not having pain as an only option (*Paranoid* 126-127; 147). This feature of reparative reading can be linked to Visser's considerations of certain trauma narratives, as the critic argues that they do not negate the lasting and profound impacts of trauma. Instead, they also turn their focus to the portrayal of resilience and growth as possibilities in the aftermath of traumatic wounding (Visser's "Entanglements" 20).

I have mentioned that both Ahern and Houen discuss Sedgwick's "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You" in the introductions to the volumes on affect and literature that they organize. Ahern calls for critics to accept Sedgwick's proposition of a reparative mode of reading and criticizing, with an openness to the promise of the affective connection-making created by some texts (14). The scholar argues that rather than being guided by a stance of suspicion that can narrow our horizons, as we look for signs of repression and complicity, always knowing what we will find, we could approach texts in their own terms. Ahern believes that critical attention to the

circulations of affect in and outside the text also requires attunements to the possibility of bodies affecting and being affected by others, to the potentiality present in the process of becoming, and to an ontology that comprehends all as interconnected and implies an "ethics of relation that opens space for acknowledgment of multiplicity and respect for difference" (Ahern 18). The scholar believes that being open to the joy, the pain, and the fear of texts, without disbelieving the transformative potential of such engagements is indeed an ethical imperative that should guide our critical practice (Ahern 17).

In his proposition for reparative modes of reading, in contrast to paranoid approaches, Houen argues that the first is connected to "developing one's critical and theoretical perspective in the process of negotiating the singular features of a text" (22). As the scholar explains, it requires attention to the local and close readings while retaining a sense of contingency. Sedgwick writes that, from a paranoid theory perspective, reparative modes of reading can seem superfluous, for they value pleasure (which can be seen as merely aesthetic) and because they are ameliorative (and can be seen as merely reformist) (*Paranoid* 144). To Houen, this is rather interesting, as the critical concept of literary affect which he has developed includes attention to how texts present singular forms of aesthetic feeling (23). Thus, these aesthetic feelings can actually be understood as a positive feature—of texts and for readers.

In "Invisible Memories: Black Feminist Literature and Its Affective Flights", Jamie Ann Rogers comments on how, for decades, Black feminist writings have questioned and opposed the subject-object dualism that served as philosophical basis for Western modernity, insisting on the political significance of communal and self-love. To her, it becomes essential to consider antecedents to affect theory in Black feminist thought, such as Audre Lorde, June Jordan and Toni Morrison, whose works are "powerfully affective, producing 'affective flights' that move within and among readers, and become part of the affective circuits or 'structures of feeling' that condition the different realities in which we live." (Rogers 202, emphasis in the original).

The scholar argues that the intellectual critique of affective responses has a great political relevance, as it involves the serious examination of moods, temperaments, and emotions which are produced through exterior stimuli such as encounters with environment, brushes with the historical, and intersubjective relations. In her analysis of Morrison's *Beloved*, Rogers shows that the intellectual critique of affect can unveil relationships between historical trauma and contemporary psychic damage (203). She also draws attention to the fact that the formulation of memories for the African diasporic subjects and the articulation of histories is both crucial and psychically threatening; and therefore, it must be undertaken with communal support and great care. The active relationality between text and reader generates emotional charge, and the story then moves within affect circuits of memory-formation and history-making, becoming "part of the cultural commentary and critique that shape subjective and intersubjective (thus political) positions and experiences" (Rogers 211). The scholar concludes that

> Narrative, in other words, can't ever speak the unspeakable or recover histories forever lost. It can, however, articulate the affect of the past that remains, and draw from the information it provides. Such stories, entering into the affective circuits of the present, have the potential to disrupt dominant structures of feeling, including those related to cultures of white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity. An intellectual history of affect theory that tells the story of Black feminist thought within it, in its own small way, has the potential to do just that. (Rogers 214).

Writing in the postcolonial and post-civil rights era, Morrison and other black authors tended to emphasize the persistent legacy of the systems of oppression questioned by movements such as The Civil Rights and postcolonialism. According to Chasshot, the "tension between a compulsive return to and return of historical traumas and a productive engagement

with the past is what Morrison captures in her concept of rememory, in which the prefix suggests both repetition and revision" (27). In her analysis of *Beloved*, the critic notes that the numerous questions posed by the character Beloved enable Sethe to revisit her past and engage with it in a (re)constructive way. This allows the woman to remember events which had been occluded and to get new perspectives on others. As Chasshot observes, the haunting is painful, but "more than a source of suffering that binds negatively to the past, it can also be a way of poetically and politically re-visioning a traumatic history and reflecting on how it impacts diasporic identity" (27).

In an essay called "Rememory", Morrison argues that writing is not simply reminiscing or recollecting, but doing. In her case, that involves creating narratives that are infused with authentic and legitimate characteristics of the culture. To the author, rememory is related to recollecting and remembering, as in "reassembling the members of the body, the family, the population of the past" (324). To Morrison, rememory involves the stress and the inevitability of remembering, but also the chances of liberation that exist within the process. To her, the essence of rememory is "memory turned to nostalgia and regret and moving forward finally toward a very thin, but not so frail, possibility of hope for the present" (325). Thus, it becomes possible to argue that rememory is an important component for reparative modes of reading. One of the main benefits of such modes is the possibility of learning of "the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture—even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them" (Sedgwick's *Paranoid* 150-151). Thus, I propose that in the next chapters, we allow ourselves the experience of a reparative reading, of being affected and moved, of learning from a pedagogy of healing.

2 A Mercy

In *Playing in the Dark,* Morrison notes that "cultural identities are formed and informed by a nation's literature" (39). Thus, from the beginning of the colonial era, there was a conscious effort for the construction of the American as a new white man in the literature of the United States (Morrison "Playing" 39). As literary critic Charles Tedder notes in his text "Post Racialism and its Discontents: the Pre-National Scene in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*", the author contrasts this imagined and constructed figure of the new white man (Jacob Vaark) with many other presences and identities. Also present in the story—and thus, present in the formation of the United States of America—are African Americans, Native Americans, women, gay men and poor people. Therefore, *A Mercy* "reimagines nascent America through a *dramatis personae* that illustrates identity as a matrix of different affiliations" (Tedder 153, emphasis in the original). This leads to a representation of the colonial period as "composed of many different individuals in a complex network of power relations negotiating a life together" (Tedder 155). *A Mercy* then remembers America as a territory where many different people came together through various ways, for a variety of reasons and with different objectives, and not as a nation formed with a single and unifying purpose. In doing so, the novel refuses the creation of the American nation as a historical inevitability and displaces a historiography that was entirely male and white. As Tedder notes, "this alternative history of the community also has consequences for the individuals—all the novel's characters must create their own selves out of the crosshatching of their memories and their surroundings" (155).

A Mercy depicts the lives of a handful of characters in the United States of America during the 1690s—a time when, as Tedder highlights, the government of the country had not

yet been created and the expansion of the slavery system in the South had yet to reach its peak (145). The community space of the novel is a farmstead that belongs to Jacob Vaark, an "'American Adam' who is both central and peripheral to the novel" (Tedder 153, emphasis in the original). Jacob can be considered a central character because he is the one who establishes the farmstead and the one who initially connects the other characters in the novel. Rebekka is his wife, who made the Atlantic crossing because of the financial necessity of an arranged marriage. Lina is a Native American whose village was decimated by smallpox, and who Jacob purchases as a servant while she is still a young woman. Sorrow is also purchased as a servant, and she is the lonely survivor of a shipwreck, whose teeth have rotten. Florens is a black enslaved girl who Jacob accepts as trade from a Maryland Portuguese squire, and who is then separated from her mother and little brother. Finally, the Blacksmith is the African American free man who Jacob hires to help him build the mansion of his dreams.

However, Jacob can also be considered as peripheral to the novel because he is dead for most of the narrative. Furthermore, even though he is a white man, he is not the envisioned "new white man" who would ideally become a model for an American citizen. Instead, he decides to try to become a prosperous plantation owner out of vanity and jealousy after visiting D'Ortega and acquiring Florens. Nevertheless, he fails spectacularly, becoming sick and dying without heirs and without ever seeing his new house completed. Then, the community of women is left to tend to the farm, the grief and their survival on their own.

The formal structure of *A Mercy* is not linear, and the novel demands that the reader piece information together to interpret it. There is a variety of voices in the novel: the first-person speeches of Florens and her mother, and the third-person narrator who relates the thoughts and some life experiences of Jacob, Rebekka, Lina, Sorrow and the henchmen Willard and Scully. Frequently, recollections from the past and present thoughts intertwine. As mentioned in chapter one, a novel that employs a fragmented or dispersive narrative voice

reflects in its own structure the traces of traumatic disruption and discontinuity. Furthermore, this voice aids in articulating the impact and resistance of trauma (Whitehead 84; 87; 142). Therefore, the reader feels affected by the book not only cognitively through its plot and themes, but also through the formal aspects that recreate the complexity of trauma. In the following sessions, the myriad of voices and the affect that they provoke on the reader and on the other characters in the novel will be analyzed.

2.1 "They once thought they were a kind of family": Jacob Vaark, the American Adam, and the ruin of Eden

The illegitimate son of a Dutchman and an "English girl of no consequence who died in childbirth", Jacob lived his childhood years in poorhouses, stealing food and running errands for people who would compensate him (*A Mercy* 30). Eventually, due to being literate, he became a runner for a law firm, until inheriting a patroonship in New Netherlands from an uncle he had never met.

As suggested by scholar Maria Rice Bellamy, the "American Adam" Jacob Vaark that we initially see in the novel encompasses the spirit of adventure and self-reliance associated with a nascent American spirit (18). This adventurous and daring demeanor is what encourages Vaark to journey to America, and it can also be seen as Jacob travels to a plantation called Jublio, where he intends to collect money owed him by a Portuguese man known as Senhor D'Ortega: "In fact it was hardship, adventure, that attracted him. His whole life had been a mix of confrontation, risk and placating […] A quick thinker, he flushed with pleasure when a crisis, large or small, needed invention and fast action" (*A Mercy* 10).

In addition to these adventurous and daring traits, Jacob is also well-liked and admired by his disposition to work hard and act justly and amicably. Even though Rebekka becomes his wife through an arranged marriage, the pairing works well as the woman discovers that Jacob

is kind and the man discovers that Rebekka is willing to work on the farmstead. Together, they find ways to establish their new house and life: "They settled into the long learning of one another: preferences, habits altered, others acquired; disagreement without bile; trust and that wordless conversation" (*A Mercy* 85). As Jacob began travelling in order to trade and profit, Rebekka felt apprehensive, but was always eager for his return:

> His returns, however, were joyful times, full of news and amazing sights: the anger, loud and lethal, of townspeople when a pastor was shot dead off his horse by warriors of a local tribe; a shop's shelves stacked with bolts of silk in colors he saw only in nature […] Tales of his journeys excited her, but also intensified her view of a disorderly, threatening world out there, protection from which he alone could provide. If on occasion he brought her young, untrained help, he also brought home gifts. A better chopping knife, a hobbyhorse for Patrician. (*A Mercy* 85-86)

The passage above further gives us insight of Vaark's farmstead as some sort of Eden in the new land. While Jacob is the American Adam, Rebekka is afraid of the world outside of their peaceful and quite place.

The trust and respect that people have for Jacob can also be seen in some other occasions. One of them is when Vaark is asked to take a young, orphan girl as help for his farm (one of the untrained and unwanted gifs, in Rebekka's understanding). The sawyer's wife asks her husband to give Sorrow away, as their young sons are demonstrating sexual interest in her, and the man "obliged and offered her to the care of a customer he trusted to do her no harm" (*A Mercy* 49). That customer was Jacob Vaark.

Similar trust can be seen in Lina's assessment, as she recalls the prophecies of her tribe's sachem in regards to the Europeans, which said that "It was their destiny to chew up the world

and spit out a horribleness that would destroy all primary peoples" (*A Mercy* 52). It is precisely because of her impressions and her belief in Jacob and Rebekka that "Lina was not so sure. Based on the way Sir and Mistress tried to run their farm, she knew there were exceptions to the sachem's revised prophecy" (*A Mercy* 52). Instead of Europeans with a complete disregard for nature and animals, Lina recognized in the English couple willingness to act "mindful of a distinction between earth and property", as they "fenced their cattle though their neighbors did not, and although legal to do so, they were hesitant to kill foraging swine" (*A Mercy* 52). As Lina understood it, Jacob and Rebekka cared more about sustaining themselves than flaunting wealth: "They hoped to live by tillage rather than eat up the land with herds, measures that kept their profit low" (*A Mercy* 53).

Another character who demonstrates to recognize in Vaark a disposition to decency and kindness is Floren's mother, who decides to ask Jacob to take her daughter as the payment that he is owed by Senhor D'Ortega precisely because she does not judge him to be as cruel as the Portuguese:

> One chance, I thought. There is no protection but there is difference. You stood there in those shoes and the tall man laughed and said he would take me to close the debt. I knew Senhor would not allow it. I said you. Take you, my daughter. Because I saw the tall man see you as a human child, not pieces of eight. I knelt before him. Hoping for a miracle. He said yes. (*A Mercy* 164)

When writing about affective testimony, Tobias Skiveren argues that when we encounter a text through a literary affective approach, it is highly important to note the rhythms and textures of the affective experiences produced by material and discursive powers within and around the bodies of the characters in that literary work. After all, affects are corporeal

transformations, distributed across body and environment, which materialize through the forces of the encounters that the characters experience (Skiveren 223). Therefore, when we think of Jacob Vaark, we can conclude that he tends to positively affect those around him, inspiring respect and trust that lead to life-altering decisions.

Nevertheless, Jacob himself is affected and permanently altered by his encounter with Senhor D'Ortega and his Jublio plantation: "He had heard how grand it was, but could not have been prepared for what lay before him" (*A Mercy* 12). The many wide windows, the grand pillars and the grandiosity of the house impress Jacob, who had never seen one quite like it before. Even though he is owed payment, he is a trader, while the Portuguese is a gentleman, who decides to organize an ostensive feast. Such flaunting of wealth and difference in status affects Vaark: "Seeded resentment now bloomed. Why such a show on a sleepy afternoon for a single guest well below their station? Intentional, he decided; a stage performance to humiliate him into a groveling acceptance of D'Ortega's wishes" (*A Mercy* 15).

Jacob's dispositions and feelings of shame and envy are also connected to D'Ortega's family of six children, which reminds him of the tragedies that have befallen his own farmstead: "His bitterness, Jacob understood, was unworthy, the result of having himself no survivors—male or otherwise. Now that his daughter Patrician had followed her dead brothers, there was no one yet to reap the modest but respectable inheritance he hoped to accumulate" (*A Mercy* 17). Seeing numerous heirs who would be able to inherit such a big house affects Jacob's mood and disposition even further, leading him to despise the Portuguese couple: "Thus, tamping envy as taught in the poorhouse, Jacob entertained himself by conjuring up flaws in the couple's marriage" (*A Mercy* 17).

It is also during the visit to Jublio that we learn of Jacob's original opinion on slavery. When D'Ortega asks Vaark if he knows how much the slaves are worth, "Jacob winced. Flesh was not his commodity" (*A Mercy* 20). Nevertheless, the Portuguese is able to convince Vaark

to accompany him to the little sheds where he organized his captives in lines to be assessed. It is very interesting to note Jacob's corporeal reactions to seeing the enslaved people's silent gazes and scars: "Suddenly Jacob felt his stomach seize. The tobacco odor, so welcoming when he arrived, now nauseated him […] He couldn't stay there surrounded by a passel of slaves whose silence made him imagine an avalanche seen from a great distance" (*A Mercy* 20).

In *Horror Film and Affect: Towards a Corporeal Model of Viewership*, Xavier Aldana Reyes argues that the epitome of the moment of affect takes place when the bodies of an audience are moved by the bodies on the screen (3). The scholar believes that the observation of torture or pain elicits horror through a "basic representational level with images that encourage a sense of threat connected to our corporeal vulnerability and capacity to read certain images as conductive to pain, harm or imminent death" (Reyes 70). Even though Reyes is discussing audiovisual media, we can use these notions here, as we remember Houen's literary suspension and the relevance of analyzing how characters can affect each other in an affective critical reading. After all, in the enslaved people aligned before him, Jacob notices scars, facial brands burnt upon the flesh of those who assaulted white people and "wounds like misplaced veins tracing their skin" (*A Mercy* 20). These details are reminiscent of pain, and they are partly responsible for affecting Vaark, making him feel nauseated and leave him with his "stomach turning, nostrils assailed" (*A Mercy* 21). Additionally, a sense of shame and guilt seems to affect Jacob as he notices that "when they thought they were not being evaluated, Jacob could see their quick glances, sideways, wary, but most of all, judging the men who judged them" (*A Mercy* 20).

Fictional bodies can be used to generate affect because they can elicit sensations of physical discomfort, and because humans have the capacity to understand pain and its neurophysiological consequences (Reyes 72; 134). Furthermore, Houen's formulations on affective readings and literary suspension remind us that literature exerts its own affective force

(16). Thus, when the narrator describes the mutilated bodies and Vaark's visceral responses to them, the reader also pictures and reacts to that violence and its consequences. As discussed in chapter one, the relationality between reader and text creates emotional charge, with the story moving within affect circuits of history-making and memory-formation, becoming part of the cultural critique and commentary around a subject (Rogers 211).

Nevertheless, as previously indicated, the close presence of enslaved people is not the only aspect of the visit to Jublio that affects Jacob, his ideas and projects. The fact that Vaark can convince D'Ortega to part with the black child (Florens)—a trade he was not looking forward to engage in—leaves the Englishman with the sensation that he had "gone head to head with rich gentry" (*A Mercy* 25). This perception leads to the conclusion that "only things, not bloodlines or character, separated them" (*A Mercy* 25). This belief that proof of value is related to the ownership of material possessions is what leads Vaark to wonder: "So mighten it be nice to have such a fence to enclose the headstones in his own meadow? And one day, not too far away, to build a house that size on his own property?" (*A Mercy* 25). Nonetheless, Jacob still believes that his house would be different—and better—because it would not rely on slavery: "And pure, noble even, because it would not be compromised as Jublio was. […] He was determined to prove that his own industry could amass the fortune, the station D'Ortega claimed without trading his conscience for coin" (*A Mercy* 26). Ideas of wealth and material possessions are further disseminated in Vaark's mind during an encounter in a tavern, as Jacob returns from his visit to Jublio. There, a man is talking about the advantages and profits of investing on sugar plantations in Barbados. The timing of this conversation is important, so an analysis of Jacob's disposition at the moment can be helpful.

The word affect—and the corresponding adjective affective—is often used to refer to a class or category of mental states that includes moods, emotions, attitudes, affect dispositions and interpersonal stances. Each of these categories differs in origin, intensity, function, bodily

reaction, duration, behavioral effects and rapidity of change (Frijda and Scherer 36). Moods are explained by Patrick Hogan as "medium-term inclinations to respond to situations or events with a congruent sort of emotion" (7). Thus, when someone is in an irritable mood, it becomes more likely that they will respond with irritation to their environment. Affect dispositions, which may also be called trait affectivity or trait emotionality are "enduring personality characteristics (or traits) that dispose one toward a particular sort of emotion" (Hogan 7). As an illustration of this, Hogan gives the example of someone who presents an anxious disposition: that person is likely to respond to mildly threatening possibilities with anxiety. The scholar also explains that emotions are not simply mental structures or types of causal process, but events and activation of systems by causes. Therefore, emotion episodes can be analyzed in terms of components: eliciting conditions, expressive or communicative outcomes, action readiness, alteration of cognitive processing and phenomenological tone (Hogan 12-15). Since eliciting conditions, expressive or communicative outcomes and phenomenological tone can help us understand the changes in Jacob's personality and objectives, they will be explained here.

Eliciting conditions are "the circumstances that give rise to the emotion episode" (Hogan 12). Such circumstances include events which take place in the external world, the moods and the affective dispositions of the person who is feeling the emotion. Expressive or communicative outcomes are "results of the emotion that do not serve directly to alter or maintain the situation as such. Rather, they serve to convey the emotion to those present" (Hogan 12). Communicative outcomes provide information and, additionally, may serve to inspire empathy (the allocentric experience of the feelings of another person) or emotion contagion (the egocentric experience of the emotion felt by another person) (Hogan 12-13). Finally, phenomenological tone is "the one component of an emotion episode that is essentially private; it is a subjective experience that cannot be observed by anyone else or even phrased in a third-person idiom" (Hogan 14). Thus, phenomenological tone is both deeply subjective and

deeply felt, for it encompasses dimensions such as the pleasure or pain of an emotion. Even though phenomenological tone cannot be shared, Hogan highlights how literature can help us understand and even feel the emotions of fictional characters: "the detailed elaboration of emotional particularity in a literary work may give us intimations of more fully sharing emotions with characters or authors or may enable a sense of elaborate emotion sharing with other readers" (Hogan 14-15). Therefore, phenomenological tone is often understood as the subjective experience of bodily changes (physiological outcomes) that happen during emotion episodes. Thus, feeling an emotion is not spiritual or ethereal, but "thoroughly embodied" (Hogan 15). Decision making processes are impacted by this connection, as they are not just rational and abstract, but also linked to emotions and embodiment: "decisions bearing on action are a matter not merely of information processing (thus logic and evidence) but of motivation (thus emotion, including phenomenological tone) as well" (Hogan 15). One can simulate outcomes connected to a particular decision and experience negative or positive emotions in response to those simulations. Therefore, emotional responses have motivational consequences, influencing on decision making.

The Jacob Vaark who hears about the sugar plantations in Barbados is one who has been deeply affected by his visit to Jublio. While it is true that the Englishman felt repulsion towards the practice of slavery, he also experienced shame of his status, envy of D'Ortega's house and heirs and a sense of self-righteousness: as a better man, he should be living better than the Portuguese. This particular mood and disposition provoke an emotional response in Jacob that influences directly on his decision making process:

> Besides, a plan was taking shape. Knowing full well his shortcomings as a farmer—in fact his boredom with its confinement and routine—he had found commerce more to his taste. Now he fondled the idea of an even more satisfying enterprise. And the plan

> was as sweet as the sugar on which it was based. And there was a profound difference between the intimacy of slave bodies at Jublio and a remote labor force in Barbados. Right? Right, he thought, looking at a sky vulgar with stars. Clear and right. The silver that glittered there was not at all unreachable. And that wide swath of cream pouring through the stars was his for the tasting.
>
> The heat was still pressing, his bed partner overactive, yet he slept well enough. Probably because his dreams were of a grand house of many rooms rising on a hill above the fog. (*A Mercy* 32-33)

The desire for a house as grand and luxurious as the one in Jublio affects Jacob to the point of him dreaming about it in his sleep. In fact, this is an indication of what will happen to the man and will be noticed by everyone around him: dreams of the new house will consume his thoughts and his efforts. With the passage above, we can speculate that the new obsession has consumed his character and values as well, as we see Vaark negotiating with his conscience, trying to convince himself that paying for enslaved labor in another continent is not the same as owning slaves in one's farmstead. He has also convinced himself that the cases of Lina, Sorrow and Florens are different from the slaves kept in Jublio. Even though they are his possessions, they are not abused by him or Rebekka.

This corruption of the man through the corruption of his beliefs and morals is exactly what happens in *A Mercy* and what is summarized at the end of the novel, as Floren's mother reflects that "to be given dominion over another is a hard thing; to wrest dominion over another is a wrong thing" (*A Mercy* 165). Before his visitation to Jublio, Jacob had, in a sense, been given dominion over others: Rebekka, Sorrow, Lina. These women—by custom and law of the period—belonged to Vaark, but were treated with decency and seen as an essential part of the collaboration that kept the farmstead working. The moment that Jacob starts investing money

on enslaved labor in Barbados is the moment when he truly starts wresting dominion over others, and the moment that the corruption which will eventually lead to his death starts.

One of the first indications that Jacob has changed as a person comes through his choices of gifts for his wife. Before his visit to Jublio, he would bring home useful purchases and would share various tales of his journeys with Rebekka. After Vaark starts investing on plantations in Barbados, the souvenirs change:

> It was some time before she noticed how the tales were fewer and the gifts increasing, gifts that were becoming less practical, even whimsical. A silver tea service which was put away immediately; a porcelain chamber pot quickly chipped by indiscriminate use; a heavily worked hairbrush for hair he only saw in bed. A hat here, a lace collar there. Four yards of silk. Rebekka swallowed her questions and smiled. When finally she did ask him where this money was coming from, he said, "New arrangements," and handed her a mirror framed in silver. Having seen come and go a glint in his eye as he unpacked these treasures so useless on a farm, she should have anticipated the day he hired men to help clear trees from a wide swath of land at the foot of a rise. A new house he was building. Something befitting not a farmer, not even a trader, but a squire. (*A Mercy* 86)

In the passage above, we can see that Jacob's ambitions and greed alter him from the husband that Rebekka used to know. While previously the man used to be practical, now he would spend a lot of money on items that did not have much use on a farm. The fact that he is vague when asked about the origin of the money indicates shame or some degree of awareness that slavery is condemnable (a stance that the man used to sustain). Nevertheless, as the last line of Rebekka's thoughts indicate, his new motivation, which is born out of jealousy and envy, is stronger than any remorse: Jacob now desires to live as a squire, as a gentleman, like

D'Ortega. To his wife, this wish is foreign and unfamiliar, as she still guides herself on the values and character that they used to believe in together:

> We are good, common people, she thought, in a place where that claim was not merely enough, but prized, even a boast.
>
> "We don't need another house," she told him. "Certainly not one of such size." She was shaving him and spoke as she finished.
>
> "Need is not the reason, wife."
>
> "What is, pray?" Rebekka cleared off the last dollop of lather from the blade.
>
> "What a man leaves behind is what a man is."
>
> "Jacob, a man is only his reputation."
>
> "Understand me." He took the cloth from her hands and wiped his chin. "I will have it." (*A Mercy* 86-87)

The visit to Jublio has affected Vaark, and the changes in the man affect the relationship of the couple. Jacob and Rebekka had exhibited proud behavior before, but the reason for this pride now differs for each of them. Before, the duo felt satisfaction in being "decent" and "good" people (*A Mercy* 86). As the excerpt above suggests, the couple seemed to think of themselves as better than their neighbors, as they thought that they did not need anyone outside their sufficiency. These reasons for finding themselves superior varied from despising slavery to not leaning heavily on religion, and they were mostly connected to character and morale. Nevertheless, the Jacob that has visited Jublio is altered in his very essence: now, he sees material possession and display of wealth as the real reasons for pride.

As previously mentioned, Jacob can be seen as some sort of American Adam. In its isolation and self-sufficiency, the Vaark farmstead also functions as a type of Eden. Therefore,

it is interesting to note that the downfall here is not connected to the temptation of a woman, but to the ambition and envy of a man. As Jacob becomes obsessed with displaying a manor as grand as that of D'Ortega's, he starts investing money in slavery, thus wrestling dominion over others—something that Floren's mother declares as a "wrong thing" (*A Mercy* 165). The connection to Eden is also reinforced in the image that Lina presents as Jacob asks to be taken to the new house to spend his last moments there: "No one to stand in awe at its size or to admire the sinister gate […]. Two copper snakes met at the top. When they parted it for Sir's last wishes, Lina felt as though she was entering the world of the damned" (*A Mercy* 49). The imagery here affects the reader, who is probably aware of the connection between temptation, Eve and the serpent in Bible stories. Thus, when the architecture of the new manor exhibits snakes, the link between Jacob's ambition and the downfall of his "Eden" becomes even more explicit.

When the narrator focuses on Lina's thoughts, we learn that this big manor that Jacob is building is the third house on the farmstead. The first one had been weak, but the second one was strong and comfortable, and "there was no need for a third" (*A Mercy* 41). Furthermore, the new house was corrupted not only because it was built with money that came from plantations, but also because it wounded the nature around it: "That third and presumably final house that Sir insisted on building distorted sunlight and required the death of fifty trees" (*A Mercy* 41). In Lina's perception, the new construction was Jacob's monument for himself, and his ambition and sudden disregard for nature cost its price: "Killing trees in that number, without asking their permission, of course his efforts would stir up malfortune. Sure enough, when the house was close to completion he fell sick with nothing else on his mind" (*A Mercy* 42). Therefore, the affection and corruption of character also affects and corrupts the body:

> When he returns this time he is different, slow and hard to please. He is short with Mistress. He sweats and wants cider all the time and no one believes the blisters are going to be Sorrow's old sickness. He vomits at night and curses in the day. Then he is too weak to do either. He reminds us that he has chosen help, including me, who are survivors of measles, so how is this happening to him? He cannot help envying our health and feeling the cheat of his new house. (*A Mercy* 34)

Before the visit to Jublio, Vaark judged slavery as immoral and was mindful of the land and animals around him. However, after seeing D'Ortega's house, Jacob was willing to invest on plantations and to cut down trees without real necessity, and it is precisely this Jacob that becomes sick during the construction of the new residence. In his last days, Vaark is curt with his wife and the people who cared for him. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that one of Jacob's last feelings is that of envy (he is jealous of the women's health) and that his last request is not connected to his wife or his deceased children, but to the house that he had become obsessed with building, as he desires to be taken inside the incomplete manor for his last breath. Despite him not considering them in his last thoughts, the women of the farmstead are deeply affected by Jacob's demise—which shall be discussed in the next section.

2.2 "Mother hunger—to be one or have one": the women of the farmstead

In the article "'Mother Hunger': Trauma, Intra-feminine Identification, and Women's Communities in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, *Paradise* and *A Mercy*", scholar Sandra Cox argues that "the polyphonic narration in *A Mercy* is a means to investigate how women, Native Americans, and people of Afro-Caribbean descent are subjugated and destroyed by colonial power" (Cox 106). The portrait of the voices and experiences of the characters—mostly women—, who belong to different categorical identities, creates a "polyphonic protest against

collective trauma" (Cox 106). Therefore, we can conclude that the use of different voices—which belong to different social identities—in *A Mercy* works as a strategy to discuss the hauntings felt not only by African Americans and Native Americans separately, but by these groups and Anglo Americans "collectively, albeit differentially" (Tedder 147). This creates an active memory, a rememory, a rethinking and recognition of the past as the shared history of the dominating and the dominated (Tedder 147).

To Cox, testimonial prose can characterize identity-based communities (gendered or racial) as sites of trauma or as sites of healing. She recognizes in Vaark's farmstead the potential for becoming the latter, thus presenting the possibility of healing for its inhabitants. The scholar also argues that, in such case, the function of fiction "becomes performative—a text that *does* as it *is*, and *is* as it *does*. In fact, transformative reading is only plausible if one accepts the radical claim that narrative can have some subjectivity—that texts sometimes act upon their readers" (Cox 99, emphasis in the original). This transformative reading mentioned by Cox can be linked to Sedgwick's reparative reading, which argues for literary approaches that allow the reader to imagine different possibilities and even different pasts, hoping for healing outcomes in the present (Sedgwick's *Paranoid* 126-127; 146-147).

Transformative or reparative readings bring closer groups and individuals, and characters and readers, with the specific becoming the general, the singular becoming the plural, and the personal becoming the political. Like affect, this transformative moment is fleeting, but powerful in its effect, as it allows for communication across identity-based differences in a way that may generate understanding and acceptance (Cox 99). Therefore, we can conclude that

> when the form (a testimonial novel that speaks about history as an object of narrative transformation) undertakes a particular sort of content (the possibilities of using community to create spaces for dealing with cultural trauma) the ways in which

> characters (as testifying voices that speak for those communities) convey their experiences posit a metafictive statement on the viability of women's communities and racial communities to serve that transformative function for communities and individuals in crisis. (Cox 99)

In *A Mercy*—for at least a period of time—, we have a community, composed mostly of women, with the potential of offering healing for its members, as they work through their experiences together and form new bonds. Thus, the members of this community, their relationships with each other and the affect that their stories and interactions have on one another and may have on the reader will be discussed.

As mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, *A Mercy* presents an alternative history of a community with characters that must create their own selves by combining their memories and their surroundings. One such character is Lina, as her identity construction process shows that "unbroken continuity with the past is not a necessary condition for present action" (Tedder 155). In the chapter dedicated to Lina's focalization, we learn that when she was still a child, her village was decimated by smallpox. The only survivors were herself and two other boys, who climbed up trees to escape the wolves that came for the bodies of the dead. The next day, men in uniforms arrived at the village, but their actions produced doubt in the little girl: "Lina's joy at being rescued collapsed when the soldiers, having taken one look at the crows and vultures feeding on the corpses strewn about, shot the wolves then circled the whole village with fire" (*A Mercy* 44-45). While it is comprehensible that one would feel distraught over witnessing fire reduce one's home to ashes, I believe that there is an additional layer here. Lina is the character who, in her adult life, reckons that Jacob has attracted misfortune by putting down fifty trees without real need. That Lina—as will soon be analyzed—is someone who has put together teachings that she remembers from her childhood with others that she has learned

or even guessed throughout her life. Therefore, it makes sense that Lina remembers this specific lesson from childhood: the senseless killing of animals who are just following their natural instinct of feeding and the unceremonious burning of land—even if infested—are ill omens, and that obfuscates the relief of the rescue.

As previously discussed, moods and dispositions impact on decision making processes. The Lina who is taken to live with a Presbyterian family is deeply affected by the death of her community and the destruction of her village, and feels "afraid of once more losing shelter, terrified of being alone in the world without family" (*A Mercy* 45). The girl was named Messalina to indicate that the Presbyterians viewed her as devious and libertine but given the nickname "Lina" to "signal a sliver of hope" (*A Mercy* 45). Afraid of solitude, desperate to be accepted and knowing that her survival might depend on it, the girl accepts the new teachings and ways of life which are imposed on her:

> Lina acknowledged her status as heathen and let herself be purified by these worthies. She learned that bathing naked in the river was a sin; that plucking cherries from a tree burdened with them was theft; that to eat corn mush with one's fingers was perverse. That God hated idleness most of all, so staring off into space to weep for a mother or a playmate was to court damnation. Covering oneself in the skin of beasts offended God, so they burned her deerskin dress and gave her a good duffel cloth one. They clipped the beads from her arms and scissored inches from her hair. Although they would not permit her to accompany them to either of the Sunday services they attended, she was included in the daily prayers before breakfast, midmorning and evening. But none of the surrender, begging, imploring or praising on her knees took hold because, hard as she fought, the Messalina part erupted anyway and the Presbyterians abandoned her without so much as a murmur of fare well. (*A Mercy* 45-46)

Even though Lina follows the rules and adopts the customs that the Presbyterians teach her, she is still not seen as one of them, and that knowledge is precisely what stops the girl from trying to tell them that the marks on her body were caused by sexual assault: "The Presbyterians, recalling perhaps their own foresight in the name they had given her, never asked what had happened to her and there was no point in telling them. She had no standing in law, no surname and no one would take her word against a Europe" (*A Mercy* 50). Lina is blamed for the sexual offenses of others and is then announced for purchase as a "'Hardy female, Christianized and capable in all matters domestic available for exchange of goods or specie'" (*A Mercy* 50, emphasis in the original). Jacob Vaark, then a bachelor expecting the arrival of his soon-to-be wife, was looking for exactly the sort of help that the announcement described in Lina's figure.

Nevertheless, it is at the Vaark farmstead—the place with the potential for becoming a site of healing—that Lina finds a way to resist the ideologies which had been previously forced on her:

> It was some time afterward while branch-sweeping Sir's dirt floor, being careful to avoid the hen nesting in the corner, lonely, angry and hurting, that she decided to fortify herself by piecing together scraps of what her mother had taught her before dying in agony. Relying on memory and her own resources, she cobbled together neglected rites, merged Europe medicine with native, scripture with lore, and recalled or invented the hidden meaning of things. Found, in other words, a way to be in the world. There was no comfort or place for her in the village; Sir was there and not there. Solitude would have crushed her had she not fallen into hermit skills and become one more thing that moved in the natural world. She cawed with birds, chatted with plants, spoke to squirrels, sang to the cow and opened her mouth to rain. The shame of having survived

> the destruction of her families shrank with her vow never to betray or abandon anyone she cherished. (*A Mercy* 46-47)

The decolonization of trauma theories calls for a recognition of culturally specific spiritual and religious perspectives (Visser "Decolonizing" 16-18). Therefore, we can understand that, for Lina, inventing and remembering rituals and lessons from her deceased families is a both a healing and a surviving process, as Lina "sorted and stored what she dared to recall and eliminated the rest, an activity which shaped her inside and out" (*A Mercy* 48). Through the connection to her mother and elders, the woman can reconstruct a sense of self, feeling once again like part of the world. As Tedder argues, "this is rememory performed on the levels of personal history, culture and, finally, ecology" (156). Ostracized from human societies after the death of her kin, the woman redefines her place in the natural world, connecting to other living beings and things. Furthermore, the affect and feeling of shame is substituted by determination through the new moods and dispositions that Lina is able to conjure for herself. Now, instead of grieving, she wishes to protect. This change in confidence and in how she perceives herself allows Lina to see a "place from which to enunciate", and she "becomes the reliable housekeeper of the farm, nursing the other women though sickness and childbirth" (Tedder 156).

In addition to rediscovering a sense of self, Lina also establishes healing bonds of genuine connection with some members of the Vaark farmstead. One of them is Rebekka, even though their initial reaction to one another is one of instant hostility. To Rebekka, Lina represented a figure who was already in charge of a house that was hers to keep. To Lina, the European was a figure of authority, and she despised her for it. Nevertheless, competition and animosity between them proved to be useless, as they had plenty of work to do together around the farmstead. In fact, it was through working in unison that the women discovered that

> They were company for each other and by and by discovered something much more interesting than status. Rebekka laughed out loud at her own mistakes; was unembarrassed to ask for help. Lina slapped her own forehead when she forgot the berries rotting in the straw. They became friends. Not only because somebody had to pull the wasp sting from the other's arm. Not only because it took two to push the cow away from the fence […] Mostly because neither knew precisely what they were doing or how. Together, by trial and error they learned: what kept the foxes away; how and when to handle and spread manure […]. For her Mistress, farmwork was more adventure than drudgery. (*A Mercy* 51).

Initially, the eliciting conditions in the farmstead—still the safe Eden—allow for genuine friendship between Lina and Rebekka. With few people around (and especially with few men), the women are able to work around their difference in status and discover together how to keep the farmstead functional. This companionship establishes a bond that affects Lina's disposition. While before she felt lonely and hurt, now she had once again a connection to the human world in the form a friend—a fact that even lead her to believe that there were exceptions to the sachem's revised prophecy that said that Europeans would chew up the world.

The other bond of genuine connection that offers Lina love and healing is the one that she establishes with Florens: "Lina had fallen in love with her right away, as soon as she saw her shivering in the snow […] Some how, some way, the child assuaged the tiny yet eternal yearning for the home Lina once knew where everyone had anything and no one had everything" (*A Mercy* 58). The presence of Florens affects Lina, as the girl reminds her of the child that she once was, due to their similar age when they were separated from their families and their homes: "Florens had been a quiet, timid version of herself at the time of her own

displacement. Before destruction. Before sin. Before men" (*A Mercy* 59). As Lina has vowed to defend those she cares for and has now a disposition to protect, she decides to love and nurture Florens, transmitting to her the teachings that she remembers and that she has recreated. In the girl, she sees a chance that innocence can be preserved—that differently from her, Florens might be protected from harm and violence. The child was reminiscent of home because in her there was still chance for companionship, love and safety. Furthermore, the woman sees in Florens her chance to be a mother: "Lina had hovered over Patrician, competing with Mistress for the little girl's affection, but this one, coming on the heels of Patrician's death, could be, would be, her own" (*A Mercy* 59).

Lina is completely aware that she and Florens feel "mother hunger—to be one or have one—", and that "both of them were reeling from that longing which, Lina knew, remained alive, traveling the bone" (*A Mercy* 61). It is interesting to note the literary description of the bodily sensation of affect—the longing for a mother or daughter is so strong that the characters feel it physically, traveling through their bones. Not only a well-timed opportunity, Florens is also a very good choice of pupil to raise for Lina. The fact that she has not been sexually touched by a man reminds the older woman of her young self and separates Florens from Sorrow. Additionally, Florens can read, write and correctly perform domestic chores. Lina also recognizes an opportunity for a motherly bond because "Not only was she [Florens] consistently trustworthy, she was deeply grateful for every shed of affection, any pat on the head, any smile of approval" (*A Mercy* 59). Florens also loves to listen to the stories that Lina has to tell. Therefore, she is a young girl who yearns for and accepts Lina's affection and her teachings. It is interesting to note that "especially called for were stories of mothers fighting to save their children from wolves and natural disasters" (*A Mercy* 59). To Florens, these tales are endearing because they contradict her own experience, showing a mother that would put her daughter above all else. To Lina, such stories are meaningful because she has vowed not to disappoint or

abandon the people that she loves ever again. One of the most precious tales to the duo is related to an eagle that had laid her eggs very securely and very high. She was very protective,

> But one thing she cannot defend against: the evil thoughts of man. One day a traveler climbs a mountain nearby. He stands at its summit admiring all he sees below him. The turquoise lake, the eternal hemlocks, the starlings sailing into clouds cut by rainbow. The traveler laughs at the beauty saying, "This is perfect. This is mine." And the word swells, booming like thunder into valleys, over acres of primrose and mallow. Creatures come out of caves wondering what it means. Mine. Mine. Mine. The shells of the eagle's eggs quiver and one even cracks. The eagle swivels her head to find the source of the strange, meaningless thunder, the incomprehensible sound. Spotting the traveler, she swoops down to claw away his laugh and his unnatural sound. But the traveler, under attack, raises his stick and strikes her wing with all his strength. Screaming she falls and falls. Over the turquoise lake, beyond the eternal hemlocks, down through the clouds cut by rainbow. Screaming, screaming she is carried away by wind instead of wing.
>
> Then Florens would whisper, "Where is she now?"
>
> "Still falling," Lina would answer, "she is falling forever."
>
> Florens barely breathes. "And the eggs?" she asks.
>
> "They hatch alone," says Lina.
>
> "Do they live?" Florens' whispering is urgent.
>
> "We have," says Lina. (*A Mercy* 60-61)

This story is particularly interesting for a few reasons. First, it is directly related to the inhabitants of the farmstead, as "they were orphans, each and all" (*A Mercy* 57). Jacob, Lina and Sorrow are characters who are literal orphans, as their parent figures were either deceased

as they were still kids or unknown to them. Rebekka was sold by her father to a man who lived in another continent and, to Floren's understanding, her mother had given her away because she preferred her young son. Therefore, all of the farmstead inhabitants were indeed like the eagle's eggs, hatching alone. The tale is also connected to Lina's background and the prophecies of her sachem. In this case, the man that wanted to take the world for himself would be the Europeans that were chewing up the world. Lina's families would be the mother eagle, with the woman as the egg that had to hatch on her own, learning for herself how to survive.

The story of the eagle and the man can also be linked to the words of Floren's mother, which warned that wrestling dominion over others was a wrong thing. The man that climbs the mountain is dominated by thoughts of greed and ambition—just like Jacob—and just like Jacob, he gets the urge to *possess*, and the words "mine, mine, mine" intrigue the animals around him. It is also interesting to observe that the man from the tale and Vaark receive a visual affect that deeply impacts their lives and the ones of those around them. It is *seeing* the grand manor and the beautiful landscape that makes the men desire to possess them. It is acting on this desire that can be understood as wrestling dominion over others—people, nature and animals—and it is those pursuits that lead to the doom of the mother eagle, the farmstead and of Jacob himself. Finally, storytelling can transmit teachings and knowledge, and that can strengthen peoples and communities. By telling Florens that they are the hatchlings and that they have survived, Lina is teaching the girl about resilience and connection. They are survivors, and together, they can establish a place for themselves in the world.

Another character who finds healing and human connection in the Vaark farmstead is Rebekka, Jacob's wife. Before traveling to marry the husband that her father had arranged for her, the woman was seen in her house as "the stubborn one, the one with too many questions and a rebellious mouth" (*A Mercy* 72). The eldest child at sixteen, Rebekka was considered old, and her father was eager to trade her for a favorable offer. The girl's mother was not more

affectionate, as she objected to the proposal "not for love or need of her daughter, but because the husband-to-be was a heathen living among savages" (*A Mercy* 72). In fact, Rebekka's considerable disdain for the religious communities close to the Vaark farmstead comes partially from her childhood: "religion, as Rebekka experienced it from her mother, was a flame fueled by a wondrous hatred. Her parents treated each other and their children with glazed indifference and saved their fire for religious matters" (*A Mercy* 72). Affected by the jealousy of not being as important to her parents as religion, the girl could not become truly devoted. This lack of devotion ashamed her, but she assuaged that shame by reasoning that God would not be better or grander than the imagination of the believer.

To Rebekka, her hometown was not a place of comfort or love. Instead, the city of her birth—London—was full of violence, such as brawls and kidnaps. Her own house was not better, as both her parents and siblings were indifferent to her, and her parents displayed such prejudice related to religion that it negatively affected Rebekka: "her discomfort in a garret full of constant argument, bursts of enraged envy and sullen disapproval of anyone not like them made her impatient for some kind of escape. Any kind" (*A Mercy* 75). Therefore, the prospect of marrying a man who lived in America presented some advantages, such as separation from her emotionally distant mother and "from male siblings who worked days and nights with her father and learned from him their dismissive attitude toward the sister who had helped rear them; but especially escape from the leers and rude hands of any man, drunken or sober, she might walk by" (*A Mercy* 76).

Rebekka did not have illusions of a blissful marriage, but she was aware that without money or the possibility of working in upper class nunneries, "her prospects were servant, prostitute, wife, and although horrible stories were told about each of those careers, the last one seemed safest. The one where she might have children and therefore be guaranteed some affection" (*A Mercy* 75-76). It is interesting to note that, like Lina, Rebekka seeks for human

connection in motherhood. Therefore, just as Florens and Lina, she is also affected by mother hunger. While Lina has lost her mother to disease and Florens was separated from a mother who did not want her (in the girl's perspective), Rebekka even longed to be away from her mother, as the woman had never shown her love. However, this does not mean that Rebekka did not long for a mother-daughter bond. On the contrary, she believed that such relationship would be her best—if not her only—chance of experiencing love.

The Vaark farmstead became an Eden to Rebekka because it freed her from the indifference of her family, from religious obligations to which she did not feel fully committed and from a city that oppressed and terrified her. This perception of a haven comes partially from a landscape that Rebekka perceives as more welcoming than that of London:

> Rain itself became a brand-new thing: clean, sootless water falling from the sky. She clasped her hands under her chin gazing at trees taller than a cathedral, wood for warmth so plentiful it made her laugh, then weep, for her brothers and the children freezing in the city she had left behind. She had never seen birds like these, or tasted fresh water that ran over visible white stones. There was adventure in learning to cook game she'd never heard of and acquiring a taste for roast swan. (*A Mercy* 74)

In the passage above, we can see that the environment affects Rebekka, changing her moods and even her disposition towards some elements. While before the cold was scary, as it brought promises of freezing, now it was not a threat, as the wood of the near trees would guarantee warmth. Rain was not dirty water anymore, but clean and delightful. These elements make her laugh and make her feel adventurous—the only lingering pain being related to knowing that her relatives were probably facing harsh conditions in London. In fact, "the thought of what her life would have been had she stayed crushed into those reeking streets, spat on by lords and

prostitutes, curtseying, curtseying, curtseying, still repelled her" (*A Mercy* 74-75). We can see that Rebekka's reactions to her hometown are visceral. The memories affect her so much that they make her feel repulsion. Her relationship with the Vaark farmstead is quite different: "here she answered to her husband alone and paid polite attendance (time and weather permitting) to the only meetinghouse in the area" (*A Mercy* 75). Therefore, we can conclude that not feeling restricted to so many societal and religious norms improves Rebekka's mood.

Additionally, when the woman arrived at her new house, the predictions of her mother proved to be wrong. One such prediction was that "savages or nonconformists would slaughter her as soon as she landed" (*A Mercy* 72). This warning scared Rebekka, so when she "found Lina already there, waiting outside the one-room cottage her new husband had built for them, she bolted the door at night and would not let the raven-haired girl with impossible skin sleep anywhere near" (*A Mercy* 72-73). The European was terrified because she had been taught that Native Americans were violent and would hurt her. Nevertheless, the sharing of tasks around the farm made them become companions.

Such bond deepened when Patrician, Rebekka and Jacob's first infant, was born, as "Lina handled it so tenderly, with such knowing" that "Rebekka was ashamed of her early fears and pretended she'd never had them" (*A Mercy* 73). Thus, witnessing Lina act tenderly and nurturing towards a baby affects Rebekka. One of the affects, as explicitly narrated, is shame, because the woman had believed in the stereotypes that were told her. This shame is so intense that it leads Rebekka to change her attitude towards Lina, promoting her from a chores companion to a real friend. Another affect in play here is also related to the way that Lina treats the baby. For Rebekka, having children was her original hope for genuine affection. Not knowing soft love and tenderness from her own mother, the woman is moved to see Lina demonstrate this maternal care for Patrician. Lina is, then, something that Rebekka admires and longs to be, and that changes her disposition towards the other woman to a more favorable one.

With time, Rebekka's admiration and trust in Lina grow. The other woman becomes a companion and a reliable source of advice and protection, such as during the time when a blizzard gets Lina, Rebekka and Patrician close to starvation (Jacob was away on his travels). In the face of such a threat,

> It was Lina who dressed herself in hides, carried a basket and an axe, braved the thigh-high drifts, the mind-numbing wind, to get to the river. There she pulled from below the ice enough broken salmon to bring back and feed them. She filled her basket with all she could snare; tied the basket handle to her braid to keep her hands from freezing on the trek back. (*A Mercy* 98)

Such acts of bravery, loyalty and love lead Rebekka to value Lina immensely. When Jacob passes away and Rebekka gets sick, Lina becomes "the only one left whose understanding she trusted and whose judgment she valued" (*A Mercy* 70). In her feverish hallucinations, the European sees many faces that she has encountered throughout her life, and knows when one of them is actually in her physical presence: "no. This face was real. She recognized the dark anxious eyes, the tawny skin. How could she not know the single friend she had?" (*A Mercy* 71). Therefore, we can conclude that Rebekka did find companionship and affection in the Vaark farmstead, and one of the sources of this affection was her relationship with Lina.

Another relationship that made Rebekka feel safe and happy was the one that she built with her husband Jacob. If in her hometown the woman had been considered stubborn and rebellious, in her new husband she found the respect and disdain for unnecessary courtesy that she sought. This was made clear during their first meeting, when Rebekka tripped and tore the hem of her dress. Jacob did not turn around, so the woman grabbed her own skirt, walked to the wagon and did not accept her soon-to-be husband's hand to mount the vehicle. Right then, "it

was seal and deal. He would offer her no pampering. She would not accept it if he did. A perfect equation for the work that lay ahead" (*A Mercy* 84).

Jacob was also a counterpart on the importance of religion when contrasted with Rebekka's family in her hometown. He was indifferent and had not joined the village congregation, but let Rebekka decide for herself what she wanted to do. Nevertheless, "after some initial visits and Rebekka choosing not to continue, his satisfaction was plain. They leaned on each other root and crown. Needing no one outside their sufficiency. Or so they believed" (*A Mercy* 85). Even though there was some isolation in not attending the congregation, the woman felt that "with him [Jacob], the cost of a solitary, unchurched life was not high" (*A Mercy* 91). Therefore, Rebekka also found in Jacob the companionship and affection that she craved.

Even though Rebekka longed to free herself from religious norms, she still maintained a troubled relationship with faith and the faithful during her time on the farmstead. First, there was another contradiction to the teachings of her mother, as the "anabaptists […] were not the Satanists her parents called them, as they did all Separatists, but sweet, generous people for all their confounding views" (A Mercy 75). As previously mentioned, Rebekka visited the local church for some time. There, she met some villagers who "had removed themselves from a larger sect in order to practice a purer form of their Separatist religion, one truer and more acceptable to God" (*A Mercy* 76). Initially, the woman attempted to belong in that congregation: "among them she was deliberately softspoken. In their meetinghouse she was accommodating and when they explained their beliefs she did not roll her eyes. It was when they refused to baptize her firstborn, her exquisite daughter, that Rebekka turned away" (*A Mercy* 76). Rebekka's reasonings for attempting to baptize Patrician were that "weak as her faith was, there was no excuse for not protecting the soul of an infant from eternal perdition" (*A Mercy* 76). It is interesting to note that it is not grand faith or devotion that makes Rebekka subdue her

stubborn personality, act softspoken and disguise how the beliefs of the group do not resonate with her, either because she is not very religious or because her parents have taught her that those particular beliefs are ludicrous. In fact, it is her love for her daughter and her devotion to building a model of motherhood that she deems exemplary that take Rebekka to the church. The moment that the religious group refuses Patrician, the woman stops attending the congregation.

When her children die, Rebekka cannot accept the condolences from the Pastor, "since he and his flock had been the ones whose beliefs stripped her children of redemption. She growled when they touched her; threw the blanket from her shoulders" (*A Mercy* 77-78). In this passage, we can notice how Rebekka is affected by the death of her kids and the presence of those who she partially blames for their doom, as her reaction to their touch is a visceral growl. More comforting to her is the presence and the words of the friend who had been by her side throughout the raising of Patrician:

> At dawn in a light snowfall Lina came and arranged jewelry and food on the grave, along with scented leaves, telling her that the boys and Patrician were stars now, or something equally lovely: yellow and green birds, playful foxes or the rose-tinted clouds collecting at the edge of the sky. Pagan stuff, true, but more satisfying than the I-accept-and-will-see-you-at-Judgment-Day prayers Rebekka had been taught and heard repeated by the Baptist congregation. (*A Mercy* 78)

It is quite possible that the comfort comes not only from the more soothing images, but also from the affect of who pronounces each prediction. The Baptists are the ones who refused to baptize Patrcian—therefore, their prayer offers little comfort. Rebekka does not necessarily

believe more in what Lina says, but she believes more in the person reciting the words. Therefore, those images become more comforting to her.

In addition to not fully believing in the ideas of the Baptists, Rebekka resented the fact that the villagers had kids who were alive: "each time one of hers died, she told herself it was anti-baptism that enraged her. But the truth was she could not bear to be around their undead, healthy children. More than envy she felt that each laughing red-cheeked child of theirs was an accusation of failure, a mockery of her own" (A Mercy 90-91). Thus, the sight and hearing of healthy children deeply affects Rebekka, as it reminds her that her own offspring have met their demise early.

As mentioned in the first section, Jacob's death marks a sort of fall of Eden. This represents the end for the possibility of a healing site. Before, the Vaark farmstead had been a place where at least three women had found genuine affection and connection. Nonetheless, following Jacob's demise, safety and support are threatened on the farm. For Rebekka, this is also represented by her doubts concerning religious, as she starts questioning her life and ideas: "Were the Anabaptists right? Was happiness Satan's allure, his tantalizing deceit? Was her devotion so frail it was merely bait? Her stubborn self-sufficiency outright blasphemy? Is that why at the height of her contentedness, once again death turned to look her way? And smile?" (*A Mercy* 95). In face of those questions, Rebekka starts remembering and pondering some of the Anabaptists teachings, such as that "Natives and Africans […] had access to grace but not to heaven […]" (*A Mercy* 96-97). Other beliefs were related precisely to his haven in afterlife, which would be "thrill-soaked" and a place where "dreams come true" (*A Mercy* 97). Furthermore, Rebekka was entertaining hope that "perhaps if one was truly committed, consistently devout, God would take pity and allow her children, though too young for a baptism of full immersion, entrance to His sphere" (*A Mercy* 97). Without Jacob and, therefore, without perspective of a happy life on the farmstead, Rebekka mused on those ideas, concluding

that “she had only to stop thinking and believe” (*A Mercy* 97). This leap to religion makes Rebekka consider that maybe it was not Lina who had fished salmon during the blizzard, but God. Therefore, the change in circumstances (Jacob’s death and the impossibility of the women owning land on their own) changes Rebekka’s dispositions and moods. While originally, she believed in the strength and devotion of her friend, now God was the true explanation for their survival. In fact, Rebekka starts wondering if all this time she had been on a road to revelation and whether it is too late for salvation.

The Vaark farmstead had also been a healing site for Willard and Scully, two white male servants indentured to a nearby landowner and lent regularly to Jacob as day labor in exchange for livestock grazing rights. To the duo, “the neighboring farm population made up the closest either man would know of family. A goodhearted couple (parents), and three female servants (sisters, say) and them helpful sons. Each member dependent on them, none cruel, all kind” (*A Mercy* 141-142). Unlike their owner, Jacob never threatened or cursed them. Thus, the men harbored respect and admiration for Vaark, and were saddened by his death. Out of affection for him and for the women on the farm, Willard and Scully decided to help Rebekka tend to the property. In doing so, they noticed that “there was much to be done because, hardy as the women had always been, they seemed distracted, slower, now” (*A Mercy* 142-143). After years of knowing them, Willard and Scully could observe changes in every woman of the farmstead. With now stern features, Rebekka “avoided as too tiring tasks she used to undertake with gusto. She laundered nothing, planted nothing, weeded never. She cooked and mended. Otherwise her time was spent reading a Bible or entertaining one or two people from the village” (*A Mercy* 143). Thus, we learn that after healing from the pox, Rebekka did indeed turn to religion, seeking salvation on Earth and in the afterlife. In fact, Scully’s analysis of the changes in the woman are very interesting:

> She was a penitent, pure and simple. Which to him meant that underneath her piety was something cold if not cruel. Refusing to enter the grand house, the one in whose construction she had delighted, seemed to him a punishment not only of herself but of everyone, her dead husband in particular. What both husband and wife had enjoyed, even celebrated, she now despised as signs of both the third and seventh sins. However well she loved the man in life, his leaving her behind blasted her. How could she not look for some way to wreak a bit of vengeance, show him how bad she felt and how angry? (*A Mercy* 151)

Through Scully's observations, we can further understand how Jacob's demise has affected Rebekka. While the woman had been happy to have her husband more present on the farmstead for the construction of the manor, she now despised its sight because, in her newfound religious devotion, the house represented greed and pride. Furthermore, not allowing anyone into the manor seems to be a way to punish Jason for abandoning her. The man was consumed by his desire for the grand house, which would now be useless and empty.

The changes in Rebekka also change her relationships with the women on the farmstead, as she beats Sorrow, takes Lina's hammock down because sleeping in one is now considered heresy by her, and advertises the sale of Florens. With sadness, Scully muses on how "they once thought they were a kind of family because together they had carved companionship out of isolation. But the family they imagined they had become was false. Whatever each one loved, sought or escaped, their futures were separate and anyone's guess" (*A Mercy* 153-154). Therefore, the Vaark farmstead seems to have ultimately failed to achieve its potential as a healing site. In Cox's understanding, this happens because colonialism disrupts identification (106). While Rebekka is sick, Lina is aware that "three unmastered women […] became wild game for anyone. None of them could inherit; none was attached to a church or recorded in its

books. Female and illegal, they would be interlopers, squatters, if they stayed on after Mistress died, subject to purchase, hire, assault, abduction, exile" (*A Mercy* 56). Therefore, as Cox concludes, "gender, alongside race and class, becomes important for considering how colonialism and slavery function to generate oppressive institutions that are internalized" (110).

As soon as Jacob dies and Rebekka recovers, the sense of community within the farmstead is dismantled because the women who live there have different places in its hierarchy. On top, there is Rebekka, called "Mistress" due to her racial and marital status. Next, there is Lina, who is older, who has lived freely with her tribe and learned from them, and who has known Jacob the longest. Sorrow occupies the third place because her ethnic heritage is unknown, because she is now a mother and because she is older than Florens. Florens is last, being the youngest and having been born with an enslaved status. After Jacob's death, Rebekka takes up white privilege and adopts the prejudicial ways of the Anabaptist community, restraining Lina's traditional practices and preparing to sell Florens (Cox 115-116). Thus, we can see how the first in the hierarchy organizes the apparently most sinister fate for the one who stands last in such hierarchy. As scholar María Lugones explains in "Colonialidad y género: hacia um feminism descolonial", the coloniality of power introduces the classification of people in terms of race, establishing relationships of superiority and inferiority through domination. Therefore, European, Native and African are racialized identities that portray colonial relationships (Lugones 19-20).

As I have discussed, these colonial relationships and their hierarchy can be clearly seen during the dismantle of the Vaark farmstead community. However, the tensions have always existed, as we learn during Floren's narration of an episode when she, Rebekka and Sorrow went into town to attempt to sell calves. As Mrs. Vaark left the cart in order to conduct the negotiations, Sorrow decided to relieve herself in the yard, provoking the ire of a village woman who hit her. Once Rebekka becomes aware of the occurrence, she drives the two girls away and

> After a while she pulls the horse to a stop. She turns to Sorrow and slaps her face more, saying Fool. I am shock. Mistress never strikes us. Sorrow does not cry or answer. I think Mistress says other words to her, softer ones, but I am only seeing how her eyes go. Their look is close to the way of the women who stare at Lina and me as we wait for the Ney brothers. Neither look scares, but it is a hurting thing. But I know Mistress has a sweeter heart. (*A Mercy* 66-67)

The women referenced by Florens are European. Even though they are not free, they consider themselves above Lina and Florens on the hierarchy of colonial relationships, as they are white and hail from Europe. Even though Florens feels shocked and rationalizes in her head that Rebekka is not truly like those women, but a sweeter person who does not typically abuse her servants, we can see that the hierarchy has always existed in the farmstead; it was only possible to ignore the most blatantly violent aspects of it for some time.

Nevertheless, even though the community of women is shattered, there seems to still be some hope or mercy, as there is one improvement in a relationship: that of Sorrow with her newborn. The sole survivor of an ambushed ship, the red-haired girl was named "Sorrow" by the wife of the sawyer who found her, and that title was used by almost everyone around her. The only one who used her real name—the one by which the captain of the ship, her father, used to call her—was Twin, the identical self that only Sorrow could see. In fact, Twin was the one who advised the girl not to reveal her true name to anyone else. While the sawyer's wife screamed at her for chores poorly executed and his sons sexually abused her, Twin was "her safety, her entertainment, her guide" (*A Mercy* 117).

The hierarchy that made itself clear at the end of the novel was known to Twin previously, from the moment that Lina first kept Patrician away from Sorrow: "from then on it

was clear to Twin, if not to Sorrow, that Lina ruled and decided everything Sir and Mistress did not" (*A Mercy* 120). Lina was suspicious of the new girl—suspicious that she could be a thief and convinced that she would bring only bad luck. Possibly intent on keeping this misfortune from spreading, Lina drowned the baby that Sorrow had been carrying when she first arrived at the Vaark farmstead. As it became clear that neither Lina nor Rebekka would give her affection, Sorrow turned to Twin completely: "with no one to talk to, she relied on Twin more and more. With her, Sorrow never wanted for friendship or conversation" (*A Mercy* 121). Floren's arrival did not provide new companionship for the girl, as Lina claimed Florens as her own. Furthermore, the older woman kept bent on isolating Sorrow from everyone else: "whenever Sorrow came near, Lina said 'Scat,' or sent her on some task that needed doing immediately, all the while making certain everyone else shared the distrust that sparkled in her own eyes" (*A Mercy* 122, emphasis in the original). Therefore, we can see that Lina's impressions and attitudes towards Sorrow affected the other inhabitants of the farmstead, making them reject and resent her as well.

The resentment that Lina feels seems to intensify when Sorrow gets sick with smallpox. As the blacksmith is able to nurse her back to health, it deepens the feelings that Florens has for the man. In Lina and Twin's understanding, Lina gets frustrated because she had been trying to separate her protegee from the blacksmith: "Lina, however, became truly ugly in her efforts to keep Florens away from the patient and the healer, muttering that she had seen this sickness before when she was a child, and that it would spread like mold to them all" (*A Mercy* 125). While Lina's disapproval of the blacksmith and her wish to keep Florens to herself, untouched by any man, certainly play a part in the woman's behavior, the reader knows that there is one more layer to her reactions. The fact that, as a young girl, Lina had seen her families decimated by the disease affect her, bringing her memories of death. Thus, Lina's reactions are also informed by her experiences and wariness of smallpox. Once, she lost her human connections

and her land to such illness. Now, she is afraid that it might all happen again. As we know, it does: Jacob dies from smallpox and, while Rebekka does not die, she changes and the home of the Vaark farmstead as they all knew it is indeed lost.

As previously mentioned, Sorrow is able to withstand Lina's disdain with Twin's company. However, when she becomes pregnant of the deacon, Twin seems to disapprove, and that is clear to Sorrow when her water breaks: "Twin was absent, strangely silent or hostile when Sorrow tried to discuss what to do, where to go" (*A Mercy* 130). Knowing that they would help, Sorrow goes to the riverbank close to the place where Willard and Scully would normally fish. There, the trio is able to proceed with the labor, and Sorrow becomes the mother of a baby girl. This experience changes the girl and the way that she perceives herself:

> Although all her life she had been saved by men— Captain, the sawyers' sons, Sir and now Will and Scully—she was convinced that this time she had done something, something important, by herself. Twin's absence was hardly noticed as she concentrated on her daughter. Instantly, she knew what to name her. Knew also what to name herself. (*A Mercy* 131)

It is interesting to note that Sorrow seems to be the female character in the novel who was the least affected by mother hunger—at least consciously. While Rebekka and Lina were aware that they wanted to become maternal figures and Florens was traumatized by the rejection from her mother, Sorrow did not express many thoughts connected to motherhood. She was resentful of Lina for drowning her baby boy but found sufficient companionship in Twin. Furthermore, her life had been more positively affected by men than women (even though some men had also been abusive towards her). Nevertheless, the birth—and the chance to hold the child in her arms, as she did not have that with the boy—of her daughter seems to awake this

mother hunger in Sorrow. Unlike the other characters in the novel, at the moment when her labor happens, she has the chance to transform that hunger in a real relationship.

As previously mentioned, by that moment in the narrative, the community of women on the farmstead has crumbled. As Sorrow muses, "there had always been tangled strings among them. Now they were cut. Each woman embargoed herself; spun her own web of thoughts unavailable to anyone else. It was as though, with or without Florens, they were falling away from one another" (*A Mercy* 131-132). This disconnection is not only between Rebekka and Lina, but also between Sorrow and Twin, who is now gone. However, unlike the other broken relationships, the disappearance of Twin is a positive sign. Sorrow does not wander at night anymore. Now, she has a routine organized around her infant, and is indifferent to anyone else's complaints. The changes in her are perceptive to Willard and Scully, and unlike the changes in Lina, Rebekka and Florens, are perceived by the men as positive—at least, for Sorrow herself:

> Sorrow's change alone seemed to them an improvement; she was less addle-headed, more capable of handling chores. But her baby came first and she would postpone egg-gathering, delay milking, interrupt any field chore if she heard a whimper from the infant always somewhere nearby. Having helped with her delivery, they assumed godfather status, even offering to mind the baby if Sorrow needed them to. She declined, not because she did not trust them; she did, but out of a need to trust herself. (*A Mercy* 144)

While many relationships have fallen apart, the most important one in Sorrow's life had just started: "she had looked into her daughter's eyes; saw in them the gray glisten of a winter sea while a ship sailed by-the-lee. 'I am your mother,' she said. 'My name is Complete'" (*A Mercy* 132). Before losing her father and their crew, Complete had only been aboard a ship, and land was foreign to her. Therefore, it was the ocean and its memories that truly felt like

home. Therefore, when the eyes of her daughter remind Complete of a winter sea, we can see the affect created by this new connection. Now, her daughter means home. Now, Twin does not need to exist anymore, because Sorrow is no longer a person torn in two halves: she is complete, and she is capable of taking care of herself and her daughter. Therefore, we can see at least one relationship that still configures a site of healing. There is still hope and there is still mercy on for some of the characters.

2.3 "Hear a tua mãe": Florens *e a sua mãe*

As previously mentioned, the narrative in *A Mercy* is fragmented. Between each chapter that presents the stories and perspectives of the characters in the Vaark farmstead (Jacob, Rebekka, Lina, Sorrow, Willard and Scully), we have Floren's sections, written in first-person speech and directed at the blacksmith—the man that she has fallen in love with—through the use of the second person "you". Scholar Anna Iatsenko observes that two major narrators can be identified in *A Mercy*: Florens and a third person narrator who uses the technique of focalization to tell the personal backgrounds and perspectives of Jacob, Rebekka, Lina, Sorrow, Willard and Scully. As a result, "they tell their stories in parallel and they intertwine and overlap, supplementing each other, but remaining quite individual with respect to the voice and points of view" (Iatsenko 82). The omniscient third person narrator presents chronological histories and backgrounds of most characters, while Florens writes a more fragmented story line that must be pieced together through several sections. Furthermore, while the other characters' narrations seem static, we get the sensation that Florens is moving—which she is indeed during a considerable part of the tales that she describes, as Rebekka has given her the quest of fetching the blacksmith so that the widow can be cured. This happens because the temporality and mode of narration affect us, and we can feel Floren's urgency (Alphen 27).

It is also interesting to highlight the opening lines of the novel: “Don’t be afraid. My telling can’t hurt you in spite of what I have done […]” (*A Mercy* 1). While it eventually becomes known that these words are directed at the blacksmith, they are also directed at the reader as we first read them. Here, this character begins her story by telling us that we do not have to be afraid and that her telling cannot hurt us, but if we engage in affective and reparative readings, that is not true. Floren’s tale and its narration have indeed the potential to hurt. They also have—in commune with the mother’s words—the potential to heal, and that will also be explored in this section.

The fragmented composition also hints at a trauma narrative. An intrusive image that keeps coming to Florens, connected to a traumatic moment in the girl’s life, is the following: “I see a minha mãe standing hand in hand with her little boy, my shoes jamming the pocket of her apron” (*A Mercy* 1). As we will soon examine, this particular trauma is triggered by moments when Florens feels abandoned or rejected, as that was indeed one of the emotions that she felt as the scene first unfolded.

As the reader eventually discovers, Floren’s tale is written by her with a nail, using the walls of the grand manor that Jacob had built. In fact, Willard and Scully presume that Jacob Vaark’s ghost has left the grave in order to visit his beautiful house: “Night after night they watched, until they convinced themselves that no one other than Jacob Vaark would spend haunting time there: it had no previous tenants, and the Mistress forbade anyone to enter. Both men respected, if they did not understand, her reasoning” (*A Mercy* 141). This excerpt further establishes the broken relationships between the women on the farmstead. Unlike Willard and Scully, Florens does not respect Rebekka’s reasonings and instructions anymore. The empty house—which people will not enter because it is forbidden—presents the ideal conditions for Florens to write her story, as she will not be disturbed in such space. Furthermore, the mistaking of Florens for a ghost adds a layer to the narrative: since ghosts can have an affective presence

that sustains the past in the present, we can conclude that this ghost has tales—her own and of people who have gone through similar situations—to tell, both at the time when the events of the novel transpire and at the time a 21st century audience reads it.

After Florens writes that her story cannot hurt the reader, she tries to organize her tale, stressing that from an early age, she could not tolerate being barefoot and would beg for anybody's shoes. Even though her mother let Florens wear the throwaway shoes from Senhora D'Ortega, both the mother and Lina disapproved of the habit and of its consequences: "As a result, Lina says, my feet are useless, will always be too tender for life and never have the strong soles, tougher than leather, that life requires. Lina is correct" (*A Mercy* 2). In this passage, we learn that Florens sees herself—at least in her childhood and Vaark farmstead years—as someone who would always depend on some level of comfort, from other people or from accessories. It is also interesting to note that Florens, unlike most characters at the Farmstead, can read and write. This is because the girl, her mother and her brother had clandestine lessons with the Reverend Father at Jublio. Furthermore, it is important to highlight how subversive it is that an enslaved woman is writing her own tale on the walls of the big manor built by the farmstead owner.

Through Floren's writings, we learn that the Reverend Father was the one to take her to the Vaark farmstead once she had been bought by Jacob. It is during this trip and new interactions that Florens discovers that not everyone appreciates priests and that different languages are used in the two places where she has lived. In her new residency, it is Lina who cares for her, sheltering and explaining things to the girl. One of Lina's ponderations is related precisely to what Florens has experienced for herself:

> Lina says Sir has a clever way of getting without giving. I know it is true because I see it forever and ever. Me watching, my mother listening, her baby boy on her hip. Senhor

> is not paying the whole amount he owes to Sir. Sir saying he will take instead the woman and the girl, not the baby boy and the debt is gone. A minha mãe begs no. Her baby boy is still at her breast. Take the girl, she says, my daughter, she says. Me. Me. (*A Mercy* 5)

It is relevant to note that Florens affirms that she repeatedly sees the scene where her mother "rejected" her. According to van der Kolk, people who have been greatly affected by trauma are constantly re-exposed to the horror of the event through emotional states, nightmares, and visual images, thus experiencing the timelessness of trauma. This can also be seen as one more reason why Florens's narrative is in present tense—with the traumatic experiences not thoroughly processed, the past continuously interferes with the present, negatively affecting how the girl responds to the world around her. This affected present can also be recognized when Florens learns that Sorrow is pregnant and becomes worried "because mothers nursing greedy babies scare me. I know how their eyes go when they choose. How they raise them to look at me hard, saying something I cannot hear. Saying something important to me, but holding the little boy's hand" (*A Mercy* 6).

In the quote above, we learn that Florens is aware that her mother had a final message to her—and that it was important—but she cannot remember what was said, probably due to her shocked and upset state when the "rejection" happened. It is also possible that the young woman is forgetting some words in Portuguese, as she has not spoken it in years. In fact, "*a minha mãe*" are some of the only Portuguese words which we encounter in the novel (the others being "*senhor*" and "*senhor*a"). They may represent a unique affection for her mother, as they are uttered in the first language that Florens has ever learned, but they can also show distance as the definite article before the pronoun seems to suggest a noun or a title (Cox 110). Furthermore, it is possible to speculate that, even though a part of Florens wants to remember

her mother's words, she also blocks them out due to the pain of the rejection. This possibility is raised, for instance, in a passage where Florens describes a dream of cherry trees walking towards her and affirms that "that is a better dream than a minha mãe standing near with her little boy. In those dreams she is always wanting to tell me something. Is stretching her eyes. Is working her mouth. I look away from her" (*A Mercy* 99). By looking away from her mother, Florens seems to be avoiding her words, either choosing not to listen to her or frustrated for never being able to remember them.

It is also interesting to note that not remembering her mother's important message may have developed in Florens a necessity of clinging to the words and teachings of others. This can be seen in a few passages, such as in the following reminiscence directed at the blacksmith: "I like talk. Lina talk, stone talk, even Sorrow talk. Best of all is your talk" (*A Mercy* 4). The importance that Florens gives to the instructions of others (as she cannot remember her mother's) can also be recognized as she looks for a way to stay safe from predators in the woods: "my plan for this night is not good. I need Lina to say how to shelter in wilderness" (*A Mercy* 40). In this excerpt, Floren's dependent disposition can also be recognized, further establishing her as someone with soles that are too tender to face the hardships of life. This need for affection that the girl presents is even recognized by other characters, such as Mrs. Vaark:

> In time, Rebekka thawed, relaxed, was even amused by Florens' eagerness for approval. "Well done." "It's fine." However slight, any kindness shown her she munched like a rabbit. Jacob said the mother had no use for her which, Rebekka decided, explained her need to please. Explained also her attachment to the blacksmith, trotting up to him for any reason, panicked to get his food to him on time. (*A Mercy* 94-95, emphasis in the original)

The fondness and passion that Florens holds for the blacksmith is what motivates her to follow Rebekka's instructions and fetch him. If the Vaark farmstead worked as some sort of Eden while Jacob was still alive, Florens experiences leaving such haven as she embarks on her quest. The girl is aware of the danger that leaving the Vaark farmstead entails. Nevertheless, the thrill of reuniting with her lover makes her willing to risk her perceived safety and comfort:

> My head is light with the confusion of two things, hunger for you and scare if I am lost. Nothing frights me more than this errand and nothing is more temptation. From the day you disappear I dream and plot. To learn where you are and how to be there […] Now at last there is a way. I have orders. It is arranged. I will see your mouth and trail my fingers down. You will rest your chin in my hair again while I breathe into your shoulder in and out, in and out. I am happy the world is breaking open for us, yet its newness trembles me. To get to you I must leave the only home, the only people I know. (*A Mercy* 2-3)

The excerpt above shows the mix of sensations experienced by Florens. It is worth noting the words used to describe her perceptions and feelings: hunger, scare and trembling. These are affects that produce both a physical and psychological impression. Thus, Florens feels deeply affected, both by the exciting prospect of seeing the blacksmith again and by the fear of leaving all that has been familiar to her in the last eight years.

It is also worth noting that the word hunger is associated other times when referring to the sensations that the blacksmith provokes in Florens. When describing the first time that she saw his back, the girl recalls that "the shine of water runs down your spine and I have shock at myself for wanting to lick there. I run away into the cowshed to stop this thing from happening inside me. Nothing stops it" (*A Mercy* 35). This description of desire shows that the presence

of the blacksmith affects Florens in ways that are new to her and that awake sensations that she cannot contain. As she says, "there is only you. Nothing outside of you. My eyes not my stomach are the hungry parts of me. There will never be enough time to look how you move. Before you know I am in the world I am already kill by you. My mouth is open, my legs go softly and the heart is stretching to break" (*A Mercy* 35-36). Once again, the physicality of the sensations is evoked and described, as Florens feels hungry, with weak legs and a heart that hurts. She is consumed with lust and love for the blacksmith, and the quest of finding him to save Rebekka offers her a chance of seeing him again and, therefore, satisfying that hunger once more.

Each and every woman in the Vaark farmstead is aware that the journey that Florens must take can prove to be a dangerous one, and they try to adopt measures that might aid in her safety (and consequently, in the success of saving Rebekka): "They stuff them [Jacob's shoes] with hay and oily corn husks and tell me to hide the letter inside my stocking—no matter the itch of the sealing wax. I am lettered but I do not read what Mistress writes and Lina and Sorrow cannot. But I know what it means to say to any who stop me" (*A Mercy* 2). While the letter offers an additional layer of safety by establishing Florens as "legitimate property", the wearing of shoes offer psychological comfort, as the girl has always disliked being barefoot.

Leaving the considerable safety of the Vaark farmstead (which, as we know, was ending) brings Florens closer to experiencing the hierarchy of colonial relationship more intensely once again. One of the first memories that she has of such disparity is precisely of a time when she did not live at the farmstead yet, as the Reverend Father was taking her to her new home after the deal made between Jacob and D'Ortega:

> As soon as tobacco leaf is hanging to dry Reverend Father takes me on a ferry, then a ketch, then a boat and bundles me between his boxes of books and food. The second

> day it becomes hurting cold and I am happy I have a cloak however thin. Reverend Father excuses himself to go elsewhere on the boat and tells me to stay exact where I am. A woman comes to me and says stand up. I do and she takes my cloak from my shoulders. Then my wooden shoes. She walks away. Reverend Father turns a pale red color when he returns and learns what happens. He rushes all about asking where and who but can find no answer. Finally he takes rags, strips of sailcloth lying about and wraps my feet. (*A Mercy* 5)

In this passage, we can see that a woman (presumably, a European one) considered herself more deserving of the warmth provided by the cloak and the shoes than Florens, who was both black and a young child. This is an example of how the society of the time offered a risk to the girl, who was seen as the lowest position in the colonial hierarchy.

Leaving the Vaark farmstead also further exposes Florens as someone who does not truly know about many of the hardships and cruelty that take place in the country at the time. When the girl is aboard the Ney brothers' wagon, heading towards the place where the blacksmith leaves, she is accompanied by Europeans that have ropes tied around their ankles. While they are certain that their years of debt should be over, their master sustains that that is not the case and send them to a tannery, which has them extremely upset. This reaction surprises Florens: "I don't understand why they are sad. Everyone has to work. I ask are you leaving someone dear behind? All heads turn toward me and the wind dies. Daft, a man says. A woman across from me says, young. The man says, same" (*A Mercy* 38). One of the women then explains to Florens that "there are no coffins in a tannery, only fast death in acid" (*A Mercy* 38). This dialogue shows that, in addition to not knowing about the terrible conditions of work at tanneries, Florens seems to also be unaware of how masters were exploring their servants beyond the debts of their passages. Furthermore, in the same occasion, the girl reckons that the

occupants of the wagon are scratching their ankles for a long time and scraping their feet against the floor while others cough because they are trying to defy the driver's orders to stay quiet. In reality, they are planning their escape, which Florens cannot guess in her naivety. This lack of knowledge is also exhibited as the girl separates from the fugitives and goes into the woods. Eventually, she encounters two hares that freeze before bounding away and admits that "I don't know how to read that" (*A Mercy* 39). It is on that same night that Florens wishes that Lina could tell her how to shelter in wilderness.

Florens is also confronted with violence and prejudice against black people when she finds a village and asks for shelter at a house while most of the town seems to be at evening prayer. The woman who lets her in (Widow Ealing) has a daughter called Jane, who has a problem in her eye: "one of her eyes looks away, the other is as straight and unwavering as a she-wolf's" (*A Mercy* 105). This leads the villagers to suspect that Daughter Jane may be a demon who possesses the evil eye. As they come to inspect her in the morning, the situation is changed due to Floren's presence:

> I step into the room. Standing there are a man, three women and a little girl who reminds me of myself when my mother sends me away. I am thinking how sweet she seems when she screams and hides behind the skirts of one of the women. Then each visitor turns to look at me. The women gasp. The man's walking stick clatters to the floor causing the remaining hen to squawk and flutter. He retrieves his stick, points it at me saying who be this? One of the women covers her eyes saying God help us. The little girl wails and rocks back and forth […] One woman speaks saying I have never seen any human this black. I have says another, this one is as black as others I have seen. She is Afric. Afric and much more, says another. Just look at this child says the first woman. She points to the little girl shaking and moaning by her side. Hear her. Hear her. It is

> true then says another. The Black Man is among us. This is his minion. (*A Mercy* 108-109)

When confronted with Floren's blackness, the villagers automatically shift their suspicions of evilness towards her—purely due to the color of her skin. Their prejudice is so intense that the affect is once again visceral: the characters gasp, scream, wail and drop objects. It is also relevant to highlight that, prior to their reactions, Florens did not expect such violence. In fact, she was even seeing herself in the little girl, who was probably close to her in age when she left Jublio. Now suddenly aware of the danger that she is in, Florens shouts for the villagers to wait: "I think they have shock that I can talk" (*A Mercy* 109). The girl then retrieves the letter from Rebekka and is instructed to place it on the table. Once the widow breaks the seal, the man (the only other person in the room who is lettered) reads the note. Then, he and his companions decide to take Florens to the storeroom and order her to strip:

> Without touching they tell me what to do. To show them my teeth, my tongue. They frown at the candle burn on my palm, the one you kissed to cool. They look under my arms, between my legs. They circle me, lean down to inspect my feet. Naked under their examination I watch for what is in their eyes. No hate is there or scare or disgust but they are looking at me my body across distances without recognition. Swine look at me with more connection when they raise their heads from the trough. The women look away from my eyes the way you say I am to do with the bears so they will not come close to love and play. (*A Mercy* 110-111)

The violence in the paragraph above is clear. It is also written in a way that is likely to affect the reader, causing sickness and pain. Even though we know that black people have been

dehumanized through centuries, the literary description of the lack of recognition of humanity is deeply affective. Florens is seen by the villagers as a dangerous beast, one that they cannot connect with on any level. The only reason for them not restraining her at that exact moment is the letter from Rebekka Vaark, as it makes clear that her survival depends on Florens fulfilling her quest: "A woman's voice asks would Satan write a letter. Lucifer is all deceit and trickery says another. But a woman's life is at stake says the Widow, who will the Lord punish then?" (*A Mercy* 111). As they decide that the proper course of action is to study, consult and pray before returning to relay their decision regarding Floren's fate, they leave with Rebekka's letter. Widow Ealing has hope that the note may help the girl, but Daughter Jane laughs at the notion. As the first leaves to talk to the sheriff, the latter helps Florens escape.

Nevertheless, her journey is now haunted by new dangers and traumas: "I walk alone except for the eyes that join me on my journey. Eyes that do not recognize me, eyes that examine me for a tail, an extra teat, a man's whip between my legs" (*A Mercy* 112-113). The violence of the encounter with the villagers is so damaging that it changes Florens: "Inside I am shrinking […] and know I am not the same. I am losing something with every step I take. I can feel the drain. Something precious is leaving me. I am a thing apart. With the letter I belong and am lawful. Without it I am a weak calf abandon by the herd" (*A Mercy* 113). The lack of recognition of her humanity deeply affects Florens. She feels drained and feels that she is changing and losing something—something that was taken from her. In fact, just as the woman on the boat took her cloak and warmth, the villagers have also taken Rebekka's letter and her chance at safety. Therefore, Florens is loose and lost.

The dehumanization makes Florens fear herself, believing that she might be "a minion with no telltale signs but a darkness I am born with, outside, yes, but inside as well and the inside dark is small, feathered and toothy" (*A Mercy* 113). The girl also fears that the "clawing feathery thing" might be the only life in her and wonders if her mother could sense it and chose

to live without her because of it (*A Mercy* 113). She does remember that her mother would tell her that she was dangerous and wild before relenting and finding shoes for her to wear. The comfort that Florens finds is in hoping that the blacksmith can help her find answers, as he has the "outside dark as well" and makes her feel alive: "the sun's going leaves darkness behind and the dark is me. Is we. Is my home" (*A Mercy* 113). Thus, we can conclude that the man is also a source of comfort and love because in him Florens can recognize herself and find community.

Nevertheless, before focusing on their reunion, it is interesting to highlight the roles of Rebekka's letter, Widow Ealing, Daughter Jane and a few Native American boys in Floren's journey. All of these items and people offer some level of comfort or aid in the girl's mission. As we have seen in previous passages, Mrs. Vaark's letter protected Florens of immediate persecution and made the young woman feel like she belonged somewhere while she had the note in her possession. Widow Ealing is someone who offers Florens shelter and food. The moment that she becomes convinced to help the girl is the moment when she learns that she has no mother or father: "Christian or heathen, she asks. Never heathen I say. I say although I hear my father may be. And where doth he abide, she asks. The rain is getting bigger. Hunger wobbles me. I say I do not know him and my mother is dead. Her face softens and she nods saying, orphan, step in" (*A Mercy* 105). It is interesting to note that, just like Jacob Vaark, Widow Ealing seems to have special compassion for orphans. Therefore, just like Jacob, she offers Florens some mercy—in her case, in the form of shelter and meals.

Widow Ealing can also be linked to another character in the novel: Floren's mother. Just like the latter, the first has to make difficult decisions that hurt her child in order to save her. When Florens first sees Jane get up, she notices that the girl limps and has bleeding wounds all over her legs: "This is my daughter Jane, the Widow says. Those lashes may save her life" (*A Mercy* 106). The full context for those words is overheard by Flores at night, as she lies down

to sleep and Jane and Ealing talk to each other: “He will not abandon me, nor will I, yet you bloodied my flesh, how many times do you have to hear it demons do not bleed” (*A Mercy* 107). The next morning, Florens witnesses Ealing freshening Jane’s wounds while the girl whimpers. Then, when the villagers arrive and before they see Florens, the widow tries to convince them that there is no evil in her daughter: “Widow interrupts him saying her daughter’s eye is askew as God made it and it has no special powers. And look, she says, look at her wounds. God’s son bleeds. We bleed. Demons never” (*A Mercy* 108). Therefore, we can see that even though it seems cruel and it is certainly hurtful, Ealing wounds her daughter in order to try and save her life. It is a very difficult decision, as we know that the choice made by Floren’s mother was as well.

Aid that saves her life is also offered to Florens by Jane herself. Once the villagers and Ealing have left, Jane boils eggs and wraps them in a cloth. She also fetches a blanket and hands the items to Florens, beckoning the girl to follow her through the pasture and into the woods until they reach a stream. There, she instructs Florens on the directions to follow to get to the hamlet where she believes that the blacksmith lives and they part: “I say thank you and lift her hand to kiss it. She says no, I thank you. They look at you and forget about me. She kisses my forehead then watches as I step down into the stream’s dry bed” (*A Mercy* 112). Just like Rebekka’s letter is not only intended to keep Florens safe, but mainly to guarantee that Mrs. Vaark is healed and saved, Jane is not only acting with spontaneous kindness, but retributing the favor that Florens unintentionally did her in changing the focus of the villagers’ persecution. Nevertheless, both of those aids result in the main character’s survival.

Another offering of help that Florens receives comes from a few Native American boys as she wanders through a sunny field, feeling thirsty and about to faint. When the young men approach from among some apple trees, Florens marvels at how magnificent they look riding their horses without saddles. However, she is also afraid of them, as they laugh and talk in

words that she cannot understand: “He grins while removing a pouch hanging from a cord across his chest. He holds it out to me but I am too trembling to reach so he drinks from it and offers it again. I want it am dying for it but I cannot move. What I am able to do is make my mouth wide. He steps closer and pours the water as I gulp it” (*A Mercy* 100-101). Additionally, the boys also offer Florens dried meat. Even though she is scared of the way that they laugh and shout, the fact that they share food and water with the girl help her survive.

Persevering through the hardships and receiving some aid along the journey, Florens is able to find the blacksmith. Initially, the sensations of the reunion fill the girl with joy: “the smell of fire and ash trembles me but it is the glee in your eyes that kicks my heart over” (*A Mercy* 133). Through this description, we can see how the presence of her lover affects Florens through her senses, as scent and sight provoke bodily and emotional reactions. Nevertheless, the happiness is short-lived. When the young woman explains the reason why she is there, the blacksmith tells her that she must wait while he travels alone, because it will be faster that way and because of something else. As Florens follows his eyes, she is triggered by an image that has haunted her throughout her life:

> This happens twice before. The first time it is me peering around my mother’s dress hoping for her hand that is only for her little boy. The second time it is a pointing screaming little girl hiding behind her mother and clinging to her skirts. Both times are full of danger and I am expel. Now I am seeing a little boy come in holding a corn-husk doll. He is younger than everybody I know. You reach out your forefinger toward him and he takes hold of it. (*A Mercy* 134)

As we know, small children around parental figures make Florens uncomfortable, as the image triggers the traumatic moment when she felt rejected and abandoned by her mother. The

danger of the situation has been renewed by the episode in Widow Ealing's house, as the scream of a child marked Florens as evil. Therefore, when Malaik—a foundling who the blacksmith is now raising—approaches the man, Florens feels threatened: "I worry as the boy steps closer to you. How you offer and he owns your forefinger. As if he is your future. Not me" (*A Mercy* 134). Thus, the fear of rejection and feeling of peril that the image brings is reignited by what Florens sees happening with Malaik and the blacksmith. Nonetheless, as the boy is sent to the yard to play and the man bathes and feeds Florens, the girl relaxes and decides that, due to the comfort and safety that she can find in the blacksmith's presence, she will not return to the Vaark farmstead, but will stay with her lover:

> Here I am not the one to throw out. No one steals my warmth and shoes because I am small. No one handles my backside. No one whinnies like sheep or goat because I drop in fear and weakness. No one screams at the sight of me. No one watches my body for how it is unseemly. With you my body is pleasure is safe is belonging. I can never not have you have me. (*A Mercy* 134-135)

Through Floren's words, we can infer that what the blacksmith offers her is genuine connection, recognition and humanization. The man represents companionship, safety and affection. Therefore, Florens needs him in order to feel wanted and in order to feel like she belongs. However, once he leaves in order to aid Rebekka, Florens is left alone with Malaik and their interactions are full of tension. In fact, the presence of the boy is so triggering that it once again evokes the traumatic image of Floren's mother with the girl's shoes in her pocket, holding the little boy's hand and trying to tell her something. Florens tells her mother to go, refusing to listen to her message. Then, she sees Malaik: "What Malaik, what. He is silent but the hate in his eyes is loud. He wants my leaving. This cannot happen. I feel the clutch inside.

This expel can never happen again" (*A Mercy* 135). The boy's presence is a threat to Florens because it may, once again, represent rejection and the loss of home, and the young woman cannot fathom that possibility. Nevertheless, as she tries to fight the risk, her mind only seems to obsess with it more: "When I wake a minha mãe is standing by your cot and this time her baby boy is Malaik. He is holding her hand. She is moving her lips at me but she is holding Malaik's hand in her own. I hide my head in your blanket" (*A Mercy* 136).

The situation between Florens and Malaik become even more tense as the young woman realizes that Jacob's boots are gone. Walking around barefoot hurts her and she is sure that the little boy is the culprit. Believing that his power is associated to the doll that he is always clinging to, Florens takes it away and places it on a high shelf. This makes Malaik cry and scream, but Florens just runs outside with her feet bleeding. Once he stops, the young woman returns. However, as he begins to wail again, Florens grabs his arm to make him stop and ends up breaking it. As the kid faints from pain, he hits his mouth on the table, and it bleeds. It is then that Florens knows that her safety and the feeling of belonging are ruined: "I don't hear your horse only your shout and know I am lost because your shout is not my name. Not me. Him. Malaik you shout. Malaik" (*A Mercy* 138).

The ire that the blacksmith feels makes him slap Florens, screaming that she has no ruth. As he tends to the child, Florens feels hurt because "You see the boy down and believe bad about me without question. You are correct but why no question of it? I am first to get the knocking away […] No question. You choose the boy. You call his name first […] I am lost" (*A Mercy* 138). The young woman had been scared of rejection and that is exactly what she feels as the blacksmith aids the injured Malaik. In Floren's eyes, that is a demonstration that once again a little child is another's first choice, and not her. When the blacksmith tells Florens that he will arrange for someone to take her back to the Vaark farmstead, the duo has a very interesting dialogue:

Why? Why?

Because you are a slave.

What?

You heard me.

Sir makes me that.

I don't mean him.

Then who?

You.

What is your meaning? I am a slave because Sir trades for me.

No. You have become one.

How?

Your head is empty and your body is wild.

I am adoring you.

And a slave to that too.

You alone own me.

Own yourself, woman, and leave us be. You could have killed this child.

No. Wait. You put me in misery.

You are nothing but wilderness. No constraint. No mind.

You shout the word—mind, mind, mind—over and over and then you laugh, saying as I live and breathe, a slave by choice. (*A Mercy* 139)

As mentioned before, the message from her mother that Florens cannot remember involves the warning that being dominion over another is hard, while wresting dominion over another is wrong. It also adds that "to give dominion of yourself to another is a wicked thing"

(*A Mercy* 165). We know that Florens does not recall her mother's words, and that sometimes she looks away from her apparition, either frustrated that she cannot remember the message or unconsciously trying to avoid it. We also know that the image of her mother holding the little boy's hand has been especially recurrent in the blacksmith's house. It can be established that the presence of Malaik represents to Florens the threat of preference of him in detriment of herself. Nevertheless, it is also possible to argue that the "ghost" of Floren's mother feels more urgency than usual, showing up a few times during the girl's short stay at the blacksmith's residence. Perhaps this figure is aware that Florens is now believing that the feathery thing is the only life in her, and she also recognizes that the girl is placing her entire humanity and survival on the recognition from the blacksmith. The emotional dependence is made explicit by Florens throughout her journey, as she realizes that she has some freedom to make a few choices along the path: "I am a little scare of this looseness. Is that how free feels? I don't like it. I don't want to be free of you because I am live only with you" (*A Mercy* 68). Therefore, when the blacksmith says that Florens is a slave to adoring him, he might be echoing the message that it is wicked to offer dominion of yourself to someone else.

The fact that Florens does not remember her mother's words makes her unaware of the danger of offering dominion of herself to another—even to a beloved partner. Furthermore, the perception that the blacksmith is choosing a little boy over her is reminiscent of the traumatic rejection that the girl experienced during her childhood. As we know by the intrusive images and nightmares, the trauma has not been fully processed by Florens. Atkinson ad Richardson explain that unacknowledged trauma can produce damaging effects on one's self and on others, producing a dangerous cycle in which multiple people are affected and implicated (3). The reexperiencing of rejection that Florens lives does indeed produce hurtful effects—physical ones included: "Now I am living the dying inside. No. Not again. Not ever. Feathers lifting, I unfold. The claws scratch and scratch until the hammer is in my hand" (*A Mercy* 140). As we

learn from her narration on the walls of Jacob's manor, the girl attempts to assault her former lover, incorporating his judgment of her: "You say I am wilderness. I am. Is that a tremble on your mouth, in your eye? Are you afraid? You should be" (*A Mercy* 155). The blacksmith's words affect Florens, so she decides to act exactly like his perceived image of her. As they wrestle, she strikes the man's face with tongs, making him stagger and bleed. Thus, her unacknowledged trauma has indeed wounded someone else.

The rejection from the blacksmith is also a loss of the source of safety and community that Florens thought that she had found: "But my way is clear after losing you who I am thinking always as my life and my security from harm, from any who look closely at me only to throw me away. From all those who believe they have claim and rule over me. I am nothing to you" (*A Mercy* 155). The realization that she is not as important as she thought that she would be to her lover and the discovery that he could not be her savior change Florens. First, she has to learn how to walk barefoot, traversing stony riverbeds and forests to return to the Vaark farmstead. Secondly, the affect of the rejection alter how Florens perceives herself, other people and the world around her. A person who receives an affect has to do something with it, projecting it outwards or introjecting it (Alphen 23). In Floren's case, it seems that she does both. The introjected affect changes her as a person. The outwards projection is the narration that she writes with a nail on the walls of Jacob's abandoned new house: "In the beginning when I come to this room I am certain the telling will give me the tears I never have. I am wrong. Eyes dry, I stop telling when the lamp burns down. Then I sleep among my words" (*A Mercy* 156). We can see that even though the narration does not produce the tears expected, it still represents an absolute necessity for Florens: she cannot stop writing her tale until she has finished it.

As we know, Florens is not the only one who has changed. The death of Jacob and the explicit solidification of the colonial hierarchy have affected the other inhabitants of the Vaark farmstead, and the girl can recognize those changes:

> "Mistress has cure but she is not well. Her heart is infidel. All smiles are gone. Each time she returns from the meetinghouse her eyes are nowhere and have no inside. Like the eyes of the women who examine me behind the closet door, Mistress' eyes only look out and what she is seeing is not to her liking." (*A Mercy* 157)

If before there was compassion and even affection in the relationship between Rebekka and Florens, now the widow seems to no longer recognize humanity in the younger girl. In fact, she has become so indifferent that Willard and Scully tell Florens that Rebekka intends to sell her. Nevertheless, the young woman reckons that "worse is how Mistress is to Lina […] I am never hearing how they once talk and laugh together while tending garden" (*A Mercy* 157-158). While once they had considered each other a friend, now Rebekka acts in ways that hurt Lina, prohibiting her from bathing in the river and sleep in hammocks, making her cultivate alone and forcing her to sit by the road in all weather as she cannot enter the church of the village.

Changes in Sorrow are also perceived by Florens. The other girl has now chosen a new name (Complete) and plans to escape in order to offer better life conditions for her child: "I like her devotion to her baby girl" (*A Mercy* 157). It is interesting to note the apparently different stance that Florens presents to the subject. Before, mothers nursing greedy babies scared her. Now, she admires Complete's devotion to her daughter. This change might be due to gender, as it may be satisfactory for Florens to see a baby girl, and not a baby boy, receive love and affection. It might also be that articulating the tale of her life in words is producing a healing effect in the young woman. This possibility is reinforced by how Florens reminisces on "what

will I do with my nights when the telling stops? Dreaming will not come again" (*A Mercy* 158). If dreaming will no longer happen, then the traumatic nightmares of her mother's rejection will not torment Florens anymore. This might be due to the healing offered by the act of narrating her story and due to learning important lessons for her survival—albeit not through her mother's mouth. One of these lessons is the following:

> I am remembering what you tell me from long ago when Sir is not dead. You say you see slaves freer than free men. One is a lion in the skin of an ass. The other is an ass in the skin of a lion. That it is the withering inside that enslaves and opens the door for what is wild. I know my withering is born in the Widow's closet. I know the claws of the feathered thing did break out on you because I cannot stop them wanting to tear you open the way you tear me. Still, there is another thing. A lion who thinks his mane is all. A she-lion who does not. I learn this from Daughter Jane. Her bloody legs do not stop her. She risks. Risks all to save the slave you throw out. (*A Mercy* 158)

This excerpt is very interesting because it shows some of the changes that Florens has experienced during her journey and her encounter with the blacksmith. She relays once more how the villagers who did not recognize her as a fellow human negatively affected her, altering something inside of her, making her feel broken. She also recognizes her assault on the blacksmith as a reaction to his rejection. Since he wounded her soul, she lashed out, hurting his body. However, the most interesting description is that of her former lover as a lion who is proud of himself and reckons that he knows all the truths. If before Florens had absolutely worshipped the blacksmith, believing in everything that he said and making him the priority in her life, now she has become a she-lion who no longer thinks that he is everything or that he knows everything. It is also relevant to note that Florens now considers herself a lion, which is

here the metaphor that the blacksmith uses for someone who is free—either in body or in mind and soul. Therefore, we can infer that Florens no longer gives dominion of herself to another—in spirit, she belongs to herself. Additionally, it is interesting to observe the positive affect that Daughter Jane has had on Florens. By helping her escape and survive, Jane has shown the other girl that she is worth of affection and of being alive.

Eventually, the words that tell Floren's tale cover the entire room, from the floor to the door. It is then, as she is nearly finished, that the girl realizes that the blacksmith does not know how to read. From this realization, comes a very interesting passage:

> If you never read this, no one will. These careful words, closed up and wide open, will talk to themselves. Round and round, side to side, bottom to top, top to bottom all across the room. Or. Or perhaps no. Perhaps these words need the air that is out in the world. Need to fly up then fall, fall like ash over acres of primrose and mallow. Over a turquoise lake, beyond the eternal hemlocks, through clouds cut by rainbow and flavor the soil of the earth. Lina will help. She finds horror in this house and much as she needs to be Mistress' need I know she loves fire more. (*A Mercy* 159)

This excerpt conveys how the words that tell Floren's story get to the 21st century reader. Even if the blacksmith—the original intended audience—never reads the woman's tale, her words will fly across fields, lakes and sky. Such is the power of storytelling. In the article "'These Careful Words . . . Will Talk to Themselves': Textual Remains and Reader Responsibility in Toni Morrison's A Mercy", Bellamy notes precisely that the words of Florens and her mother remain. Thus, we have to wonder who the intended audience for these words truly is and what we—the readers—are supposed to do with these haunting presences: "Morrison leaves them to haunt her contemporary readers and beckons us to receive them within ourselves to restore the

personal and familial losses of American slavery" (Bellamy 15). Therefore, we are affected by these tales—which are Floren's, but are also the stories of so many others—and they work as rememory, reconstructing much that has been erased about the past; especially the past of African Americans and Native Americans in the beginning of the colonization of the United States of America. It is also interesting to note the insinuation that Florens will ask Lina to burn the manor down. The house is the material manifestation of the greed and corruption of Jacob Vaark, of the moment when he crosses the line of a hard thing (being given dominion of another) to a wrong thing (wresting dominion over another). By incinerating the house, the two women are also burning the symbol of the corruption that has ended their community—the symbol of slavery, greedy, cruelty and oppression.

By the end of her narrative, Florens is conscious of her transformation and finally confident in herself: "See? You are correct. A minha mãe too. I am become wilderness but I am also Florens. In full. Unforgiven. Unforgiving. No ruth, my love. None. Hear me? Slave. Free. I last" (*A Mercy* 159). While the young woman knows that she is a slave due to the oppressive system of the time, she is also free—a she-lion. Additionally, she is resilient, and she knows how to survive. She does indeed last, as we know from her words that fly with the wind and that reach us. This notion that Florens has become more resistant through her experiences is also present in the following excerpt: "I will keep one sadness. That all this time I cannot know what my mother is telling me. Nor can she know what I am wanting to tell her. Mãe, you can have pleasure now because the soles of my feet are hard as cypress" (*A Mercy* 159). No longer naive and no longer depending on the aid and affection of others, Florens has become hardened. It is also interesting that this is the first and only time that "mãe" is used as a vocative—which indicates more intimacy than the "title" with an article. This may be because the resentment is not as intense anymore now that Florens has been able to write her story and process some of her trauma. It can also be because she considers that now her mother would be proud of her and

would choose her as a daughter, since she now has hardened feet. Additionally, it may be the first time that Florens feels ready to address her mother directly.

The final section of the novel presents the account of Floren's mother, directed at her daughter. As it seems unlikely that they will ever meet again, we can assume that just as the words written by Florens on the walls of Jacob's manor, her mother's words are also directed at the reader. Through her account, we learn that the life of Floren's mother had been full of violence, abuse and trauma. As the king of her families and the kings of other families fought, there were battles, destruction, and kidnapping. She is one of the prisoners taken by other African tribes and sold to white Europeans. The imprisonment and travelling conditions are so horrible and dehumanizing that Floren's mother confesses the following: "I welcomed the circling sharks but they avoided me as if knowing I preferred their teeth to the chains around my neck my waist my ankles" (*A Mercy* 162). Several times, the woman tried to kill herself or pretended to be dead so that she would be thrown overboard. From these confessions, we can recognize a similar negative affect to what Florens felt when the villagers did not recognize her as a human being. Such dehumanization produces haunting effects that are so damaging that they make death preferable to inhuman life conditions.

When Floren's mother is taken to Barbados, she faces the prejudice of colonialism: "It was there I learned how I was not a person from my country, nor from my families. I was negrita. Everything. Language, dress, gods, dance, habits, decoration, song—all of it cooked together in the color of my skin. So it was as a black that I was purchased by Senhor […]" (*A Mercy* 163). This excerpt also highlights the dehumanization caused by colonialism, slavery and racism. The lack of recognition of humanity also implicates in the lack of recognition of culture.

The violence faced by Floren's mother continues in Jublio. She is raped by other slaves who are told to break her spirit and that of her companions. Later, she is abused again by the

overseer. Even so, her devotion cannot be destroyed, as the woman loves her children fiercely: "And it would have been all right. It would have been good both times, because the results were you and your brother" (*A Mercy* 164). It is interesting to observe that throughout her adolescence, Florens thought that her mother did not care or want her. However, in the older woman's telling, we see that she loved her daughter so much that she was willing to see her as a blessing, even though the circumstances of her conception were brutal and violent.

What makes the situation even more dangerous for the woman and her family is that she is also abused by the D'Ortega couple. Desperate to find a way to spare her daughter the same fate of sexual violence, Floren's mother asks the Reverend Father to teach them how to read, hoping that "if we could learn letters somehow someday you could make your way" (*A Mercy* 161). Worried that her daughter loved shoes and that her breasts were starting to grow, Floren's mother desperately wished to spare her daughter the same fate that she had undergone: "there is no protection. To be female in this place is to be an open wound that cannot heal. Even if scars form, the festering is ever below" (*A Mercy* 161). Thus, we learn that the problem was never that the shoes would make Florens too naive or unprepared for labor and hardship, but that they would possible cause her to be prematurely seen as a woman and, as consequence, as a sexual object.

Therefore, we learn of the real motivations that led the older woman to ask Jacob to take Florens: "there was no animal in his heart. He never looked at me the way Senhor does. He did not want" (*A Mercy* 161). Observing Vaark's behavior at dinner, Floren's mother noticed that he did not trust the D'Ortegas and concluded that "his way, I thought, is another way" (*A Mercy* 161). She knew that there was no real protection, but she also knew that there was difference in treatment. As Tedder observes, "He [Jacob] does not, against all possibility, set Florens free. There is nothing so romantic or transcendent at work here […] Such may be the mercy we can expect in a world where no one stands outside the systems of political and social

power" (157). Therefore, Jacob is not a savior and Floren's mother knows that. However, she also believes that he can offer her daughter a better life than the one she would have at Jublio, where she would very likely be physically and sexually abused on a regular basis.

Right before the moment when Floren's mother gathered her children to stand near Jacob and D'Ortega, she was singing "a song about the green bird fighting then dying when the monkey steals her eggs" (*A Mercy* 164). The tune can be connected to the situation that is about to happen. The mother is the green bird and she has decided to fight. Otherwise, her egg—her daughter—will be stolen and abused by D'Ortega, and that would destroy both mother and child. As Floren's mother notices that Jacob sees her daughter as a human child, she asks him to take her. When he accepts the proposal, she reminisces that "it was not a miracle. Bestowed by God. It was a mercy. Offered by a human" (*A Mercy* 164-165). By focusing on how the acts of mercy and community come from other human beings, Tedder observes that

> This suggests that while larger systems themselves are not quickly subject to reform, and revolutions may fail, something that persists in spite of those systems might mitigate the suffering they inflict. Lina pieces together a hybrid counter-culture, and Florens' mother chooses a less inhuman future for her daughter. These choices are by no means ideal, but they do break with the status quo, the situation at hand which has not been freely consented to. (Tedder 157)

It is interesting to contrast the perception of Floren's mother of a mercy offered by a human to that of Rebekka once she has turned to religion and started mistreating the other inhabitants of the Vaark farmstead. She once thought that Lina had saved her and Patrician. However, after changing and becoming more distant and cold, she attributed that intervention to God. Nevertheless, as we analyze *A Mercy*, we observe several instances of mercy offered

by humans that positively affect the lives of other characters. Some examples are Jacob welcoming the orphan Sorrow and accepting Florens on her mother's request, Lina loving and protecting children such as Patrician and Florens, Will and Scully assisting on Complete's labor, widow Ealing feeding and offering Florens a place to sleep, Daughter Jane helping Florens escape and the blacksmith raising the orphan Malaik. As Tedder argues, "the acts of community that one individual might extend to others, generously, is precisely what Morrison points us toward in A Mercy, foremost in the title itself" (152). The novel closes with Floren's mother saying that

> I stayed on my knees. In the dust where my heart will remain each night and every day until you understand what I know and long to tell you: to be given dominion over another is a hard thing; to wrest dominion over another is a wrong thing; to give dominion of yourself to another is a wicked thing.
>
> Oh Florens. My love. Hear a tua mãe. (*A Mercy* 164-165)

It is relevant to note that Floren's mother addresses her daughter as "my love", with the term of endearment reinforcing what the readers know: that the young woman is very precious and very dear to her. Furthermore, referring to herself as "a tua mãe" adds a level of intimacy to the sentence. It is also interesting to highlight that both Florens and her mother close their narrations addressing each other. While the younger woman wants her mother to know that she is now resilient and ready to face challenges in life, the older one desperately wishes that her daughter learns from her teachings and wisdom. Even though they probably do not have the chance to ever have that conversation face to face, it seems that Florens has eventually learned the lesson that her mother intended for her. She knows not to give dominion of herself to anyone now, she is free and she is Florens. She is also open to connection, as she recognizes that

Daughter Jane, the blacksmith, Lina and Complete have all been very important in her journey. In fact, the potential for healing in the narrative comes from the acts of community and mercy. Even if the Vaark farmstead is dismantled, there are still some bonds, as that of Complete and her daughter and Complete and Florens, as the former wants the latter to escape with them. Additionally, even if some bonds are broken, the lessons and positive impacts that they have brought remain.

A Mercy is not a tale of founding fathers. Nevertheless, the characters leave their marks in their own way, such as Florens with her story on the walls and then in the wind. Tedder argues precisely that the novel complicates a normative vision of "the land of the free", as

> This early America is not even "America" in a national sense—there is no representation of unified, inevitable progression toward the Declaration of Independence, or any such "historical" event. There were, this novel remembers, only many different people interacting in many different ways, and the systems in place meant that most people suffered one way or another. Many such systems are still in place today. But also, and most importantly, there were acts of mercy. We can extend this to say that it is an ethos of human kindness, rather than faith in American goodness per se (its principles, its laws, its historical meaning), that the novel offers as a context for living in the present. (Tedder 157)

The novel also alters one of the prevailing stories of the early establishment of the United States of America, possibly instigating readers to rethink what it means to be Americans, "in particular how they are united to other Americans by a past that is shared but not common to all" (Tedder 158). It is interesting to recall the story that Lina told Florens of the eagle that falls perpetually, leaving her eggs to hatch alone. As the younger girl asks if the chicks survived, Lina replies

that "we have" (*A Mercy* 63). Therefore, Americans can be seen as the orphaned children who are "still haunted by the colonial proclamation" (Tedder 158).

It is also important to highlight that even though Florens and her mother do not listen to each other's words, the readers do. We learn their stories and they affect us and our perception. Tedder argues precisely that the past that is unrecorded in personal memory or the historical record needs to be imaginatively reconstructed (152). As he explains, "insofar as the individual has the power to actively interpret the past, 'rememory' offers a way of thinking about history that does not generate a sense of inevitability or destiny" (Tedder 151, emphasis in the original). If we recall Sedgwick's proposal for a reparative reading, it includes precisely the entertaining of painful and relieving ethical possibilities that the past could have happened differently. Tedder wonders what sort of ethics we can form if we read *A Mercy* as a statement of the impact that "the kindness that we may show to those with whom we live" might have on the lives of others and our own (Tedder 158). Therefore, if we approach the novel through a pedagogy of healing lenses, we might understand that it "offers individual mercy as a way to ameliorate human suffering […] If it [the world] becomes a better place at all (and it may not) it will be through smaller, unremarkable, sometimes illegible actions" (Tedder 158). Thus, we can look at both the past and literary creations and allow them to affect us and the present, allowing ourselves to be moved by these stories, also allowing them to change how we act in the world around us.

3 Home

In the novel *Home*, we follow the journey of Frank Money and his younger sister Ycidra (Cee)—two siblings who ran away from their home in Lotus, Georgia, as soon as they had the chance. However, years later, they are forced to return. Frank, now a war veteran who has fought in Korea, has to leave the woman he is living with in order to rescue his sister, who is getting weaker every day because of the medical experiments conducted on her by her white boss. The narrative opens with an epigraph that consists of the lyrics to a song named "Whose House Is This?". Such lyrics were written by Toni Morrison herself, and the song premiered in 1992, as part of an art-song cycle called *Honey and Rue*. The motif of "Whose House Is This?" is connected to the "depiction of alienation inspired by the African American experience in American History" (Gillepsie 256).

Following the epigraph, we are met with seventeen chapters, which present distinct structures and focalization. Most of them are narrated by an omniscient third-person narrator who seems to accompany Frank in his journey and recollections about the past. Additionally, there are a few chapters focused on the stories of Ycidra, Lily (Frank's girlfriend in Seattle) and Lenore (the siblings' step-grandmother in Lotus). There are also some italicized chapters that present the first-person speech of Frank Money as he speaks to what seems to be some sort of scribe, interested in writing his story.

As Frank embarks on his journey to save his sister and return her to their hometown, a process of healing begins—for the two of them. Frank progressively confronts his past, acknowledging terrible occurrences, taking responsibility for his actions and recovering agency. Meanwhile, Cee is assisted in her recovery by the female community of Lotus—determined and nurturing women who teach her about strength and self-love.

3.1 "*Describe that if you know how*": notes on literature, trauma and affect

It is possible to argue that the scribe who accompanies Frank throughout his journey is actually the one responsible for organizing the entire story—fulfilling the role of the third-person narrator who is recounting the tale of the Money siblings. This hypothesis seems to be corroborated by two passages, in chapters two and five of *Home*, which address an incident involving a couple on a train. Chapter two is narrated by the omniscient third-person narrator and depicts a conversation between Frank and a waiter. Frank notices a woman crying, displaying a bleeding nose, sat next to a man who looks angry, but remains silent. The waiter then explains to Money that the man was assaulted and kicked out of a restaurant during a stop at Elko. His wife tried to help him, but had a rock thrown at her face. Then, the third-person narrator tells us that

> The abused couple whispered to each other, she softly, pleadingly, he with urgency. He will beat her when they get home, thought Frank. And who wouldn't? It's one thing to be publicly humiliated. A man could move on from that. What was intolerable was the witness of a woman, a wife, who not only saw it, but had dared to try to rescue—rescue!—him. He couldn't protect himself and he couldn't protect her either, as the rock in her face proved. She would have to pay for that broken nose. Over and over again. (*Home* 26)

However, three chapters later, the thought process narrated in the passage above is contested by Frank Money in his first-person speech. While describing and reminiscing on his reasons for sharing a house with Lily, Frank accuses his scribe of misunderstanding and incorrectly registering his impressions and feelings:

> *You are dead wrong if you think I was just scouting for a home with a bowl of sex in it. I wasn't. Something about her floored me, made me want to be good enough for her. Is that too hard for you to understand? Earlier you wrote about how sure I was that the beat-up man on the train to Chicago would turn around when they got home and whip the wife who tried to help him. Not true. I didn't think any such thing. What I thought was that he was proud of her but didn't want to show how proud he was to the other men on the train. I don't think you know much about love*.
>
> *Or me*. (*Home* 69, emphasis in the original)

The link between these two passages can be interpreted as confirmation that the scribe is the single narrator organizing the entire tale. Nevertheless, it is a complicated matter to establish whether this scribe is modifying and embellishing Frank's story or if Frank is indeed contradicting himself amidst his recollections. The first hypothesis is a concrete possibility, since the process of telling a story is subjective, allowing room for interpretation and adaptation. The second hypothesis also becomes quite relevant when we consider that the passages in chapters two and five are not the only moments in the narrative when Frank contradicts previously offered accounts.

In her reading of *Home*, Visser concludes that the representation of trauma in the novel works as an argument that the process of retrieving memories is recursive, permeated by mistakes and rectifications. This is exemplified by how Frank's initial remembering of events is corrected throughout the course of his ongoing narrative. These corrections portray the narration of memories linked to trauma as possible, albeit through a process that might be long and imprecise, requiring reviewing with each retelling (Visser's "Entanglements" 11).

Nevertheless, it is an essential process that allows traumatic memories[7] to be transformed into narrative memories that can be integrated into a person's life.

The presence and narration of the scribe can also be linked to the process of working through trauma, as this scribe can also be seen as a witness to Frank's tale. In the text "Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self", Brison highlights the importance of an empathic listener in the remaking of one's self after traumatic events: "In order to construct self-narratives we need not only the words with which to tell our stories, but also an audience able and willing to hear us and to understand our words as we intend them" (46). Thus, the presence of someone who will listen and participate in the process of bearing witness can be decisive for survival. This is due to the fact that the retelling of traumatic experiences might help achieve a sense of agency. While traumatic memories are intrusive and passively endured, narrative memories are a result of certain choices, such as what to tell first, how much to tell, and whom to tell.

In his essay "The challenges of recovering from individual and cultural trauma in Toni Morrison's *Home*", Aitor Ibarrola writes that the novel *Home* can be comprehended as a joint enterprise, in which a trauma survivor who offers their testimony and a scribe collaborate, thus assigning meaning and shape to stories that had previously remained unknown. To the scholar, the enterprise is successful precisely because the survivor and the scribe/witness "constantly check on each other's referential frameworks and their possible limitations, thus encouraging the reader to make the effort to integrate these complementary stories" (117-118). Professor Eden Freedman expands this notion to include the reader as part of the joint effort of witnessing and acknowledging Frank's tale and, consequently, the individual and collective histories of marginalized Americans (1). To her, the reader becomes a witness as well, accompanying Frank on the facing of his trauma and on his journey home. Therefore, narrative witnessing is seen as

[7] The term "traumatic memory" is understood by psychiatrist and psychotraumatologist van der Kolk and van der Hart as a merely convenient one, since a memory can only be considered as such when it can be narrated, integrated with other experiences, accessed and described anywhere, at any given moment (160-163).

an interpersonal interaction, in which "a narrator bears witness to an addressee who absorbs the teller's story and testifies to its veracity" (Freedman 2). The scholar calls this process in which a survivor gives their testimony and a listener (or reader) engages empathically with it "dual-witnessing" (18). She recognizes it as demanding and acknowledges that it needs constant practice but believes that it can offer the readers the same benefit that *Home* offers to its characters: "the healing that proceeds from reciprocal engagement" (Freedman 18). The critic assesses that Morrison testifies to some of the most painful and violent realities in the history of the United States of America, thus provoking her readers to reflect not only on her novels—but on the occurrences and events that take place in the country too.

One of the texts in which Morrison talks about her creation process is her Nobel Lecture in Literature, a parable in which a few young people visit an old blind woman, famous for her wisdom. Initially, the intention of the guests is to discredit the woman, and their strategy relies on posing a question that they believe that she cannot answer: whether the bird in the hands of one of them is dead or alive. After a few moments of silence and snickering on the part of the teenagers, the old woman finally replies with "'I don't know whether the bird you are holding is dead or alive, but what I do know is that it is in your hands. It is in your hands'" (Morrison's "The Nobel" 103, emphasis in the original). The author than explains that in this story, present in the lore of several cultures, the answer of the elderly is taken to mean that if the bird is dead, the one holding it has either found it that way or has killed it. If it is alive, it can still be killed. Thus, the responsibility for its fate lies on the person holding it.

Morrison explains that, in her adult life, she came to connect the bird to language and the woman to a practiced writer: "Being a writer she thinks of language partly as a system, partly as a living thing over which one has control, but mostly as agency—as an act with consequences" (Morrison's "The Nobel" 103). Thus, the elderly comprehends language as susceptible to erasure or death. Its vitality lies in its ability to speak of the imagined, possible,

and actual lives of its writers, readers and speakers: “We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives” (Morrison’s “The Nobel” 106).

However, Morrison does not finish her story by focusing solely on the old wise woman. The author expands the known ending of the parable, turning her attention to the young people. She then wonders on who they are, on their reasons for going to the house of the elderly lady, on the possibility of their anxiety and struggles being completely genuine. Morrison poses the inquiries of the teenagers, their requests that the old woman take them seriously and assist them. They explore language, looking for meaning. Their doubts are both anxious and poetical, composed by questions that many of us humans ask ourselves throughout our lives. It is then, after they have also made their usage of language, looking for meaning, that the wise woman finally says: “’I trust you now. I trust you with the bird that is not in your hands because you have truly caught it. Look. How lovely it is, this thing we have done – together’” (Morrison’s “The Nobel” 109, emphasis in the original).

Here, I would like to stress particularly the emphasis on *together*. As I have mentioned, Freedman believes that the reader, alongside the scriber, is also witnessing Frank Money’s journey. As previously stated in chapter one, Alphen highlights the possibilities of affect working through literature, as he believes that some forms of art hold the capacity of generating and transmitting affect by engaging viewers, listeners, or readers in transformative ways. As the scholar explains, comprehending affects as energetic intensities implies understanding them as relational, and thus the result of an interaction between a worker and its beholder, listener or reader. As he summarizes it, “it is within this relationship that this intensity comes about” (Alphen 26).

The critic believes that there are benefits to what he calls “affective reading”, in which the interpretation of the text is based on the experience of reading as an event (Alphen 26-27). In an affective reading, textual elements such as narrative, temporality and succession become

highly important for interpreting the text with a consideration of narrative experience: "[…] It is especially the mode and temporality of narration that are responsible for how the reader will relate to the narrated events. The events as such do not necessarily affect us. The mode and temporality of narration produce the intensity that constitute affect" (Alphen 27). When we think about *Home*, this is noticeable: the narration is fast paced, which simulates Frank's rush to rescue his sister. That is to say that the textual composition of *Home* affects the reader, creating in us a sense of urgency. Furthermore, if we accept Freedman's proposition that the reader is dual-witnessing Frank's tale alongside the scribe, then we accept that we are also being interpolated by sentences such as "*I don't think you know much about love. Or me*" (*Home* 69, emphasis in the original). Thus, the affect created by the narration might compel us to dual witness for Frank Money so that we can, eventually, learn more about him.

The importance of the reader in creating meaning together with the novel and the author is also discussed in Morrison's essay "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation". In the text, the writer highlights some characteristics of black art that she tries to incorporate in her novels, including "the ability to be both print and oral literature" (Morrison's "Rootednes" 341). The author then comments on how a black preacher asks his congregation to participate in his sermons, thus expanding on them. She also mentions that, with a response from the audience, a musician's music is enhanced. Therefore, with books, there is also an attempt for connection. Using the letters of the alphabet and punctuation, the novelist tries to "provide the places and spaces so that the reader can participate. Because it is the affective and participatory relationship between the artist or the speaker and the audience that is of primary importance" (Morrison's "Rootednes" 341). As Jamie Ann Rogers notes, such active relationality creates emotional charge, allowing the story to move within affective circuits of memory-formation and history-making. This way, stories may become part of "the cultural commentary and critique that shape subjective and intersubjective (thus political) positions and experiences" (Rogers 211). To

Morrison, having the reader work with the author in the construction of the book is very important. Therefore, we can believe in the importance of accompanying Frank alongside his scribe, witnessing his story.

There are also other possible links between Frank's distinct accounts to his scribe and affect. Under psychological perspectives, affect and its corresponding adjective—affective—tend to be used to refer to a mental state which is characterized more by emotional feeling than by rational thinking. Psychologists and philosophers usually identify an evaluative feeling (sometimes understood as a judgment) of a person, object or event in terms of negative-unpleasant versus positive-pleasant as one of the defining characteristics of affect. Generally, a certain degree of arousal (bodily reaction) is also required to differentiate affect from purely cognitive judgments. Furthermore, as explained in chapter two, the term is frequently used to refer to a class or category of mental states that includes moods, emotions, attitudes, affect dispositions and interpersonal stances (Frijda and Scherer 36).

As discussed in chapter two, moods are inclinations to respond to events with a congruent emotion, while affect dispositions are related to more enduring personality traits that dispose one toward a particular type of emotion (Hogan 7). Emotion episodes can be analyzed in terms of eliciting conditions, expressive or communicative outcomes, action readiness, alteration of cognitive processing and phenomenological tone (Hogan 12-15). The focus here will be on the components that may be relevant to analyze Frank's accounts in chapters two and five of the novel, in which his accounts on the train couple vary, as mentioned in the beginning of this subsection.

As previously explained, eliciting conditions are responsible for giving rise to the emotion episode, and they include the moods and the affective dispositions of the person feeling the emotion, as well as events that take place in the external world. Expressive or communicative outcomes convey the emotion to those present, providing information, inspiring

empathy or emotion contagion (Hogan 12-13). When explaining how emotions tend to alter cognitive processing, Hogan writes that negative emotional states typically stress particulars over generalities. In contrast, positive emotional states stress generalities over particulars. Other processing changes are connected to interpreting and responding to ambiguous situations with one's predominant emotion at the time (Hogan 14).

When Frank first sees and thinks about the abused couple on the train, he is at the beginning of his journey home. The man had just escaped from a psychic ward to which he had been institutionalized after being arrested for a breakdown. At this point in the narrative, Frank shows multiple signs of PTSD, such as irritability, hyper-vigilance and exaggerated startle responses, memory and concentration problems, sleep disturbances, such as nightmares, and the experiencing of intrusive flashbacks (van der Kolk "Posttraumatic"). Thus, at the beginning of Frank's trip, we can identify in him affect dispositions connected to anxiety and pessimism. Furthermore, he is in a sour mood, because he knows that his relationship with Lily is most likely over: "Yet it was hard to ignore what living with her had become: a tired cruelty laced her voice and the buzz of her disappointment defined the silence" (*Home* 20). Therefore, when Frank learns about the situation involving the couple in the train, his interpretation is coated with the pessimism, cynicism and anger that he himself feels at that moment in his life. It is also important to note that what Frank empirically knows about the humiliation and violence of being the target of racism also informs his judgment of the episode.

In chapter five, the Frank who reminisces on love is already a different character in comparison to the one from the very beginning of the narrative. His journey is not yet complete—neither geographically nor psychologically— but he has been welcomed in people's homes, has received help and has told his scribe more about his story. After all, as Brison explains, speech acts of memory can be understood as action on the part of the narrator, "a speech act that defuses traumatic memory, giving shape and a temporal order to the events

recalled, establishing more control over their recalling, and helping the survivor to remake a self" (39-40). In Chapter five Frank has less nightmares and intrusive flashbacks and is not so prone to outbursts. He has also had a little more time to process the breakup, which allows him to think of his relationship with Lily with more clarity, recognizing and cherishing what they once had. This change in mood and affect disposition makes it possible for Frank to reinterpret the situation of the couple in the train, identifying pride and care in it.

It is possible to link Frank's changes of perspective and reinterpreting of situations throughout the narrative to some of the central themes in *Home*: trauma, community, affect and healing. As the story progresses, both Frank and Cee change considerably. The male sibling progressively confronts the past and acknowledges truths which he had repressed or hid from himself. This allows him to understand what kind of man he wants to become. Meanwhile, Cee finds nurturing in the community of women who live in Lotus and who inspire her to become strong and take charge of her own life. In the next subsections, these processes will be more thoroughly examined.

3.2 "*What type of man is that?*": Frank Money's Journey

As previously mentioned, affects in literary texts can be understood as corporeal transformations that materialize through the forces of the encounters that the characters experience (Skiveren 223). Therefore, when we think of Frank Money, we have to consider the conditions of his specifically situated corporeality, and how he is moved through the encounters of his body with the forces of the world.

A good example of how particular Frank's situation is can be perceived in the very opening of chapter two:

> Breathing. How to do it so no one would know he was awake. Fake a deep rhythmic snore, drop the bottom lip. Most important, the eyelids should not move and there must be a regular heartbeat and limp hands. At 2:00 a.m. when they checked to determine if he needed another immobilizing shot they would see the patient on the second floor in Room 17, sunk in a morphine sleep. If convinced, they might skip the shot and loosen his cuffs, so his hands could enjoy some blood. The trick of imitating semi-coma, like playing dead facedown in a muddy battlefield, was to concentrate on a single neutral object. (*Home* 7)

In the passage above, we have our first hint that Frank Money is a veteran of war. In one of the internship classes I taught about *Home*, as we discussed chapter two, I called attention to the fast-paced and urgent rhythm of the narrative. The group then said that they *felt* as if they were in a battlefield. This was caused by Frank's strategical approach to his surroundings during the first half of the chapter. The mode of the narration recreates a war background, in which it becomes necessary to plan each step, while keeping track of everything in the environment. The temporality of narration creates a sense of urgency, highlighted by the note "Come fast. She be dead if you tarry" (*Home* 8). It is also relevant to observe that we only learn Frank's name by page twelve. Up to that point, he is a nameless soldier, moving through the battlefield in an attempt to escape and survive. Before page twelve, Money is referred to as "he" and even "the patient" (*Home* 10). This choice of words and narration helps recreate the sense of neglect which many veteran soldiers—especially black ones—face. Furthermore, as we consider that my students *felt* as if they were also in a battlefield, we can conclude that our group engaged in affective reading, and our interpretation of the text was based on the experience of reading as an event—and it was that intensity that affected us.

The first half of chapter one brings us more interesting hints into Frank's tale. As he looks for an object to focus on and considers ice cubes, he is faced by some complication, as there is "too much emotion attached to frozen hills" (*Home* 7). Finding an ideal focus point is hard for Money, as "he would need something that stirred no feelings, encouraged no memory—sweet or shameful. Just searching for such an item was agitating. Everything reminded him of something loaded with pain" (*Home* 7-8). In these sections, we can highlight how affected Frank can get by his surroundings. In the beginning of the narrative, the man has not yet worked through his trauma, so he is more subjective to triggers, which are a variety of real and symbolic stimuli that can cause flashbacks and intrusive memories. In order to escape triggers, people who have developed PTSD commonly choose to avoid any possible reminders of the trauma.

Throughout the novel, we learn that Frank has indeed been exposed to a number of traumatic experiences, which vary from war occurrences that include violence and death to the trauma insidious events that can be related to the structural racism that Money faces daily in the twentieth-century America. Therefore, we will examine Frank's life in more detail, analyzing some of the episodes which he has gone through.

Frank Money was born in Bandera County, Texas. At the young age of four, he, his family and neighbors were forced to abandon their houses and crops, due to the threats and persecution of Ku-Klux-Klan men. However, an elderly man, named Crawford, refused to leave. He remained seated on his porch steps, and when the twenty-four-hour notice expired, he was beaten to death and tied to the oldest magnolia tree in the country, in his own yard: "Maybe it was loving that tree which, he used to brag, his great-grandmother had planted, that made him so stubborn" (*Home* 10). Risking themselves, some of the fleeing neighbors returned that night to untie and bury Crawford beneath his beloved magnolia.

As Frank fled with his father and his pregnant mother, his younger sister Ycidra was born on the road. Eventually, their family arrived in Georgia, where they moved in with Frank and Cee's grandfather Salem and his wife, Miss Lenore, who was cold and cruel to the children. Frank's childhood was marked by hardships. His father Luther and his mother Ida worked two jobs each: Luther was a field worker for two different planters, while Ida worked crops during the day and swept lumber jacks in the evening. Thus, the couple had very little time for their children. Their exhaustion and absence meant that they were unaware of Lenore's abusive behavior towards the kids. Luther's brother Frank also lived in the same house before enlisting in the army. As a result, the sleeping arrangements were quite improvised, with young Frank sleeping on a wooden swing on the back porch, Cee sleeping on a thin pallet on the floor, and Uncle Frank sleeping on two chairs put together in the semblance of a bed.

The very first event which Frank narrates to us in the beginning of the novel occurred precisely during his childhood in Lotus—and left a lifelong impression on the man. Once, he and Cee had snuck past a fence into a farmland near Lotus. While hidden in tall grass, the siblings watched in awe as two horses battled each other in an improvised ring that the farmers had put together. When the fight was over, the children tried to sneak back to town, but ended up getting lost. The sound of hushed voices frightened them both, and peeping through the grass, the kids saw some men pull a body from a wheelbarrow and throw it in a hole: "one foot stuck up over the edge and quivered, as though it could get out, as though with a little effort it could break through the dirt being shoveled in" (*Home* 4). At the sight of the burial, Ycidra started to tremble as Frank held her. When the children finally dared to move, they were sure that they would be reprehended for getting home so late. However, the adults in town did not even notice the moment that they got back, for their focus was on some other occurrence. By the end of the first chapter, Franks says to his scribe: "Since you're set on telling my story, whatever you think and whatever you write down, know this: I really forgot about the burial. I

only remembered the horses. They were so beautiful. So brutal. And they stood like men" (*Home* 5).

It is interesting to note that, only ten pages into the novel, we learn about two incidents in Frank's childhood that present corpses: his old neighbor Crawford and the man who he and Cee witnessed being thrown in a ditch. Stephen Morton notes that "subaltern histories are registered affectively through the transmission of human remains" (319). To the scholar, the histories of people whose lives are deemed without value and who are not allowed to tell their tales in hegemonic forms of speech can still be transmitted through the embodied experiences of subalternity (Morton 319). In the case of *Home*, when we think of the two corpses mentioned in the beginning of the novel, we may consider that their embodied knowledge and historical experience of racism, violence and poverty can be transmitted—both to the reader and to the characters in the novel. One of the instances in which we can see the knowledge that has been transmitted to Frank occurs during his attempt to flee the psych ward in order to rescue his sister. While planning his escape, Money stresses the necessity of acquiring shoes:

> Walking anywhere in winter without shoes would guarantee his being arrested and back in the ward until he could be sentenced for vagrancy. Interesting law, vagrancy, meaning standing outside or walking without clear purpose anywhere. Carrying a book would help, but being barefoot would contradict "purposefulness" and standing still could prompt a complaint of "loitering." Better than most, he knew that being outside wasn't necessary for legal or illegal disruption. You could be inside, living in your own house for years, and still, men with or without badges but always with guns could force you, your family, your neighbors to pack up and move—with or without shoes. Twenty years ago, as a four-year-old, he had a pair, though the sole of one flapped with every step. Residents of fifteen houses had been ordered to leave their little neighborhood on the

> edge of town. Twenty-four hours, they were told, or else. "Else" meaning "die". It was early morning when the warnings came, so the balance of the day was confusion, anger, and packing. (*Home* 9, emphasis in the original)

In the passage above, we can see that the loss of his childhood home and the murder of old Crawford has taught Frank about the threat of racism. Crawford's body cannot speak, but it has transmitted knowledge—both about love and pride (as he felt towards the magnolia tree which his great-grandmother had planted) and about violence and prejudice (the mere existence of a black body—even in their own home—can be a cause of discomfort to the project to exterminate anything other than white). Thus, we can sense in the narration that Frank knows about the necessity of acquiring shoes in order to have better chances to avoid being targeted for vagrancy or loitering. Nevertheless, he also knows that it grants no guarantees, for he lives in a society which is not just in the slightest.

Returning to the chronological order for the events of Frank's life, we learn that, eventually, the Money family managed to move to their own house, still in Lotus. Nevertheless, Frank grew more and more restless, feeling suffocated by the small town. Alongside his childhood best friends, Mike and Stuff, the young man then enlisted in the army. The three boys were sent to fight in the Korean War, an experience which further traumatized Frank. In the tenth chapter of the novel, on a train to Atlanta, Frank experiences one of the flashbacks which frequently haunts him: "Mike in his arms again thrashing, jerking, while Frank yelled at him. 'Stay here, man. Come on. Stay with me.' Then whispering, 'Please, please.'" (*Home* 97, emphasis in the original). Having his childhood friend die in his arms "changed him" (*Home* 98). Frank went from merely fulfilling his duties to acting recklessly, looking forward to kill in a desperate attempt for vengeance. However, weeks later, Stuff was the next to die, lying on a

stretcher holding the severed arm that Frank had helped him to find. These two deaths had a profound impact on Money:

> Afterward, for months on end, Frank kept thinking, "But I know them. I know them and they know me." If he heard a joke Mike would love, he would turn his head to tell it to him—then a nanosecond of embarrassment before realizing he wasn't there. And never again would he hear that loud laugh, or watch him entertain whole barracks with raunchy jokes and imitations of movie stars. Sometimes, long after he'd been discharged, he would see Stuff's profile in a car stopped in traffic until the heart jump of sorrow announced his mistake. Abrupt, unregulated memories put a watery shine in his eyes. For months only alcohol dispersed his best friends, the hovering dead he could no longer hear, talk to, or laugh with. (*Home* 99, emphasis in the original)

The passage above reflects how deeply affected Frank is by the death of his friends. Mike's demise changes his personality, shattering his instincts of looking for safety and leaving him completely reckless. The vocabulary used in the sentence "the heart jump of sorrow" also speaks of affect, of that bodily feeling which escapes language and which writers describe through literary creation. The deaths of Mike and Stuff are forces of encounter that overwhelm Frank's sense of self-possession, threatening to wipe out his psychic integrity. In fact, they seem to do exactly that when we consider the intrusive memories and flashbacks which haunt the main character.

According to van der Kolk, the three major elements in the diagnosis of PTSD are the repeated reliving of memories of the traumatic experience, avoidance of reminders of the trauma, and a pattern of increased arousal. The first is related to vivid visual and sensory memories of the event, which are commonly accompanied by great psychological and

physiological distress. Furthermore, van der Kolk explains that people who have developed PTSD are continuously re-exposed to the horror of the traumatic experience through visual images, emotional states and nightmares. This constant re-exposure creates a timelessness to the trauma. They bring forth the unresolved past while also making it difficult to focus on and live the present. Therefore, a range of maneuvers is frequently sought out, which may include the abuse of alcohol and other drugs. As we learn that, during a period in his life, only alcohol would keep the intrusive memories of his friends at bay, we can conclude that Frank had been using it as an avoidance maneuver.

Another intrusive memory that haunts Frank is related to the death of a Korean child: a little girl who had started sneaking up to the edge of the American army camp in order to steal food from the trash. When he first mentions the tragic situation, Frank tells his scribe that one day, as the child reached for a rotten orange, the following event occurred:

> *My relief guard comes over, sees her hand and shakes his head smiling. As he approaches her she raises up and in what looks like a hurried, even automatic, gesture she says something in Korean. Sounds like 'Yum-yum'.*
>
> *She smiles, reaches for the soldier's crotch, touches it. It surprises him. Yum-yum? As soon as I look away from her hand to her face, see the two missing teeth, the fall of black hair above eager eyes, he blows her away. Only the hand remains in the trash, clutching its treasure, a spotted, rotting orange. […]*
>
> *Thinking back on it now, I think the guard felt more than disgust. I think he felt tempted and that is what he had to kill.*
>
> *Yum-yum.* (*Home* 95-96, emphasis in the original)

Once again, we have a passage permeated with affect. First, as readers, we are likely to feel something visceral as we read about a child who has to prostitute herself for rotten food. She is described so we can picture her childish face (with two missing teeth) right before we learn of her violent death. There is also a strong impact at the last image we get of her: a hand clutching a spoiled fruit as if it were a treasure. Furthermore, we learn of Money's interpretation of how his fellow soldier was affected by the encounter. In "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold", Sedgwick and Frank explain that affects produce body knowledge. Disgust, for instance, can make someone spit out bad-tasting food, demonstrating the difference between inside and outside the body and a recognition that some things should not be let in. Shame can also exemplify some hyper reflexivity of the surface on the body, as something that is felt internally can be shown externally—or vice-versa (520). From how fast everything seems to have happened, we can speculate that the initial affect generated arousal—and that arousal created shame. Then, the reaction was to eliminate that which caused shame, and that extreme reaction of killing the child was what was shown and done externally. We can also speculate that the source of the shame had to be eliminated because it would turn the soldier into a pedophile—a man he did not want to be.

As Frank returns from Korea, he is understandably torn and shattered, haunted by repeated intrusive memories and flashbacks:

> So, as was often the case when he was alone and sober, whatever the surroundings, he saw a boy pushing his entrails back in, holding them in his palms like a fortune-teller's globe shattering with bad news; or he heard a boy with only the bottom half of his face intact, the lips calling mama. And he was stepping over them, around them, to stay alive, to keep his own face from dissolving, his own colorful guts under that oh-so-thin sheet

> of flesh. Against the black and white of that winter landscape, blood red took center stage. They never went away, these pictures. Except with Lily. (*Home* 20)

As we can see, Frank returned from Korea experiencing vivid images that interfered with his present life. His considerations of moving back to Lotus were quickly refuted, as he could not bear to face Mike and Stuff's parents. Once again, shame and guilt were the predominant affect dispositions experienced by Money at the time. Furthermore, Lotus was not really an option for him, as he "hated Lotus. Its unforgiving population, its isolation, and especially its indifference to the future were tolerable only if his buddies were there with him" (*Home* 16). To Frank, Lotus was tedious, with no prospects of change or advancement. When we remember that Frank's childhood in Lotus had been filled with Lenore's abuse of him and his sister, with a cramped house with no adequate sleeping spaces and with the absence of his parents, it is not difficult to understand why Money remembers his hometown with resentment.

It was in this state of anxiety, intrusive flashbacks and avoidance of reminders through the abuse of alcohol, that Frank met Lily. After spending a few nights sleeping on benches in the park, Money caught his reflection in a store window. The reflection seemed to him the "*dirty, pitiful-looking guy*" who "*looked like the me in a dream I kept having where I'm on a battlefield alone*" (*Home* 69, emphasis in the original). That was when Frank decided to become sober, yearning to "*make my homeboys proud. Be something other than a haunted, half-crazy drunk*" (*Home* 69, emphasis in the original). It was amidst this resolution that Money walked into the cleaner's where he met Lily: "*Sober as sunlight, I handed her my army issue and couldn't take my eyes away from hers. I must have looked the fool, but I didn't feel like one. I felt like I'd come home. Finally*" (*Home* 69, emphasis in the original).

It is interesting to observe that one of Frank's motivations to get sober is the idea of the man who he wants to become—a question that inhabits his mind throughout the novel. It is also

relevant to highlight the drive generated by visual affects. The first is when Money sees his reflection on the window store and recognizes that he is becoming someone who he does not wish to be. The repulse and shame is so intense that it makes him decide to become sober right then. The second happens when he first sees Lily. Something about the encounter is so moving that Frank *feels* like he is finally home—a concept which we can guess he had been wondering about throughout his life. There is still a third moment related to a strong affect which originates with sight. During his first date with Lily, Frank was hit by raw and strong emotion: "He could not take his eyes away from the backs of her knees. As she stretched, her dress […] rose up, exposing that seldom noticed, ooo-so-vulnerable flesh. And for a reason he still did not understand, he began to cry. Love plain, simple, and so fast it shattered him" (*Home* 22). Once again, the literary description accounts for affect—a bodily impact which originates from sight and which is so intense that it makes Frank *feel* as if he were shattered.

It is also insightful to reflect on how visual affect can be associated to negative memories. When Franks reflects on the impact that Lily had on him and on his life, he muses on how "When he lay with the girl-weight of her arm on his chest, the nightmares folded away and he could sleep. […] Only with Lily did the pictures fade, move behind a screen in his brain, pale but waiting, waiting and accusing" (*Home* 22). The accusations which the images professed were connected to Frank not being able to protect Stuff, to going on a killing rampage after the death of his two best friends or to his failed thirst for vengeance and to "the girl. What did she ever do to deserve what happened to her? All unasked questions multiplying like mold in the shadows of the photographs he saw" (*Home* 22). Here, the visual affect is caused by the intrusive images that trauma keeps repositioning into Frank's brain. They are referred to as pictures and photographs—visual stimuli— and they haunted Frank with actions which he had taken and that likely got him further away from the man who he wished to become.

While the romantic relationship with Lily helped Frank for a while, it also had its complications. One of the major elements in the diagnosis of PTSD is related to vivid sensory and visual memories of the event, which are commonly accompanied by great physiological and psychological distress. At times, there is also a feeling of emotional numbing, for the duration of which there is no physiological arousal, according to van der Kolk ("Posttraumatic" [n/p]). Episodes which indicated emotional numbing on Frank's part happened during his relationship with Lily when he would sit for hours, numb and unwilling to talk. These instances start exasperating the woman: "She had begun to feel annoyance rather than alarm when she came home from work and saw him sitting on the sofa staring at the floor. One sock on, the other in his hand. Neither calling his name nor leaning toward his face moved him" (*Home* 75). We are also informed that these occasions in which Frank would go into an almost catatonic state were not rare: "The multiple times when she came home to find him idle again, just sitting on the sofa staring at the rug, were unnerving" (*Home* 78).

Frank's numbness was also demonstrated by his refusal to engage with housework—which also frustrated Lily. Whenever she tried to complain about how he would not help her, he would only apologize, turning every argument into a one-sided complaint. All of this contributed to make Lily extremely dissatisfied with their partnership: "Her resentment was justified by his clear indifference, along with his combination of need and irresponsibility" (*Home* 79). In addition to his general numbness, some particular episodes also contributed to Lily's frustration. One of them occurred during a church convention that the couple had attended together:

> They were in high spirits all afternoon—chatting with people and helping children load their plates. Then, smack in the middle of all that cold sunlight and warm gaiety, Frank bolted. They had been standing at a table, piling seconds of fried chicken on their plates,

> when a little girl with slanty eyes reached up over the opposite edge of the table to grab a cupcake. Frank leaned over to push the platter closer to her. When she gave him a broad smile of thanks, he dropped his food and ran through the crowd. People, those he bumped into and others, parted before him—some with frowns, others simply agape. (Home 76-77)

In a chronological reading, at this point of the narrative, the reader could feel just as confused as Lily. Nevertheless, *Home* is a fragmented novel that presents pieces that the reader must put together as they progress in order to better grasp them. Thus, we can eventually connect Frank's reaction to the trigger of a little girl smiling up to him to the kid he saw being shot at the head by his fellow soldier.

Another troubling incident for Lily happened after the couple watched a noir crime drama. The experience made Frank clenching his fist in silence for hours at night and, as consequence, they did not watch movies together anymore. Following these episodes, the couple would stay home more and more, with Frank's numbness irritating Lily and instigating her to pursue her goals alone. Therefore, when Money announced that he had some family issues to take care of, the woman felt relieved.

The passages where Frank relates his leaving reveal more reluctance but acknowledge that their relationship had become strained: "He chose not to think of this as a breaukup. A pause, he hoped. Yet it was hard to ignore what living with her had become: a tired cruelty laced her voice and the buzz of her disappointment defined the silence" (*Home* 20). Money also muses that, at some point, he did not know if he could live without the woman—precisely because her company brought some relieve from the painful memories that haunted him. However, Cee had always been one of the most important people for him, and her letter made him decide to embark on a journey to Georgia: "*If it wasn't for that letter, I'd still be hanging*

from her [Lily's] apron strings. She had no competition in my mind except for the horses, a man's foot, and Ycidra trembling under my arm" (*Home* 69, emphasis in the original).

The passage above might once again seem to contradict Frank's previous statement, in which he said that he "really forgot about the burial. I only remembered the horses." (*Home* 5). In page sixty-nine, we are informed that a man's foot and Ycidra trembling under his arm were also images that would frequently inhabit Frank's thoughts. It is possible that this change happens due to the progress of the narrative and to its characteristics. Visser observes that one of the major themes in *Home* is "the nature of the therapeutic engagement with trauma" ("Entanglements" 8). This engagement is part of the structure of the novel, as Frank talks about his life with the scribe that registers it. Throughout the novel, memories and episodes are revisited and Frank seems to remember or admit occurrences that he had either repressed or forgotten.

The question of what kind of man Frank wishes to become is also present in his witnessing of the horse fighting ring and on his role in Ycidra's life. The first sentence of the novel, written in the italicized font which indicates Frank's direct speech reads "*They rose up like men. Like men they stood*" (*Home* 3, emphasis in the original). Frank's childhood memories seem to consider the strong and imponent image of horses on their rear hooves as a demonstration of what it means to be a man. Therefore, we might assume that, as a kid, Frank valued power and strength.

When Frank receives the note containing the warning that Ycidra might die soon, he considers himself to be the only one who could help her. This is due to the fact that their parents had passed away and that Lenore and Salem were not fit to travel—which Frank doubts that they would be willing to do even if they could. Being the only one who could possibly help Ycidra makes Frank wonder:

> Maybe that was the reason no Russian-made bullet had blown his head off while everybody else he was close to died over there. Maybe his life had been preserved for Cee, which was only fair since she had been his original caring-for, a selflessness without gain or emotional profit. Even before she could walk he'd taken care of her. The first word she spoke was "Fwank" […] Cee suffered no bruise or cut he had not tended. (*Home* 34-35)

In this passage, we can register the love that Frank feels for his sister. Additionally, we can see one more hypothesis to the question of what kind of man he wishes to become: a protector. We know that Frank experiences PTSD and survivor's guilt, which makes him

ashamed of returning home and seeing Stuff and Mike's parents. However, the letter about Cee gives him the hope for a purpose in life.

Once Frank leaves Lily, he is overwhelmed by the quest that awaits him and ends up being taken to the psychic ward of a medical institution. As he manages to escape, he decides to ask for shelter and assistance in a building identified as associated with the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. As he knocks on the door in the middle of the night, it is a Reverend that greeted him, welcomes him into his house and urges his wife to help their new guest. It is also interesting to note that it is through their dialogue that we first learn Frank's name: "'My name is Locke, Reverend John Locke. Yours?' 'Frank, sir. Frank Money'" (*Home* 12, emphasis in the original). Until this point in the narrative, we only knew the main character as "he" or "the patient". As I have previously mentioned, he was a nameless soldier and a nameless veteran. Thus, it is highly significant that the first character to care to learn Frank's name is also a black character. Furthermore, Reverend Locke asserts that the hospital where Frank was committed sells bodies to medical schools, as "'doctors need to work on the dead poor so they

can help the live rich'" (*Home* 12, emphasis in the original). This line corroborates the sense that, to a parcel of a white American society, Frank was just a nameless black veteran.

We can also identify affect and its origin in bodily sensations—this time, through hearing—when Reverend Locke asks Frank what had warranted his visit to the hospital. Money cannot really recall, as he only remembers "'the noise. Loud. Real loud'" (*Home* 13, emphasis in the original). As he muses on what could have called the police's attention to him, Frank considers throwing himself on the ground at the sudden sound of backfire as a possibility. It is the noise that possibly affects Frank and causes him to throw himself on the ground. The sound of a car backfire can be easily confused with that of a gunshot, so it also makes sense that such noise would be a trigger and provoke an instinctual reaction on Frank.

Van der Kolk stresses that in addition to concentration and memory problems, a pattern of increased arousal in people diagnosed with PTSD can also be expressed by irritability, hyper-vigilance, sleep deprivation and exaggerated startle responses. Some of these responses can be observed in Frank's behavior as he further reflects on what might have caused his arrest and conduction to the psychic ward:

> He truly could not remember. Had he thrown himself on the ground at the sudden sound of backfire? Perhaps he started a fight with a stranger or started weeping before trees—apologizing to them for acts he had never committed. What he did remember was that as soon as Lily shut the door behind him, in spite of the seriousness of his mission his anxiety became unmanageable. He bought a few shots to steady himself for the long trip. When he left the bar, anxiety did leave but so did sanity. Back was the free-floating rage, the self-loathing disguised as somebody else's fault. And the memories that had ripened at Fort Lawton, from where, no sooner than discharged, he had begun to wander. (*Home* 14-15)

As Frank muses on what could have happened, he considers a few different possibilities. From that, we can infer that his hypothesis is based on events that have previously occurred. Therefore, the passage above allows the identification of concentration and memory problems, as Frank cannot remember what exactly led to his arrest; irritability, as he is aware that he might have yelled at people or even gotten into a fight; and hyper-vigilance, which leads Frank to throw himself on the ground at the sound of a backfire. Additionally, Frank manages his anxiety through the ingestion of alcohol—which can be interpreted as an avoidance maneuver against flashbacks and nightmares.

At Reverend Locke's home, Frank is treated with respect and kindness. The Locke family offers him food, sleep and a chance to shave and clean himself. Additionally, the Reverend gives Frank seventeen dollars to help him buy a bus ticket to Portland and the address of a name called Reverend Jessie Maynard—the pastor of a Baptist church who could help Frank. Once Locke hints that they have helped veterans before and Money gets curious, the former explains: "Well, you´re not the first one by a long shot. An integrated army is integrated misery. You all go fight, come back, they treat you like dogs. Change that. They treat dogs better" (*Home* 18). Frank—who has not yet been through the process of working through his trauma, understanding the wan who he wishes to become and finding a home where he can feel he belongs—internally disagrees with the statement, thinking that the army and their doctors were not at fault for his situation.

It is relevant to observe that Reverend Locke's home is one of the first stops of Frank's journey to Georgia, and one where he is treated with kindness. Furthermore, it is the beginning of a sense of community, as the Locke family welcomes him into their house, takes care of him and suggests the next safe place for him to rest. As the family does not have any shoes to spare, they improvise a pair with some socks and ripped galoshes. Additionally, they give Frank

sandwiches, cheese, bologna and fruits for the road, offering him advice in which the sense of community is present:

> "You'll be grateful for every bite since you won't be able to sit down at any bus stop counter. Listen here, you from Georgia and you been in a desegregated army and maybe you think up North is way different from down South. Don't believe it and don't count on it. Custom is just as real as law and can be just as dangerous." (*Home* 18-19)

As Frank continues his journey, alone and sober, he is haunted by flashbacks associated to the war. Nevertheless, the man is able to arrive safely in Portland, where he finds Reverend Maynard. The pastor is a lot colder than the Locke family, but still assists Frank with money and addresses of hotels copied from Green's travelers' book[8], once again highlighting the sense of community that would assist Frank throughout his quest.

It is on the train to Chicago that Frank first sees a figure that will make a few appearances throughout the novel: the zoot-suited man. Money finds it curious that the man decided to sit right next to him when there were several empty seats in the car. The gentleman was a "small man wearing a wide-brimmed hat. His pale blue suit sported a long jacket and balloon trousers. His shoes were white with unnaturally pointed toes" (*Home* 27). He just stared ahead, so Frank decided to resume his nap. Then, the man got up and continued his walk down the aisle, leaving no indentation in the leather seat.

As the readers of *Beloved* are well-aware, Morrison has used the presence of ghosts in some of her novels. Jamie Ann Rogers highlights Sethe's articulations of "rememory" which are related to the affect of absence. In *Beloved*, "rememory is shaped by histories of collective

[8] *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, a guide that provided a rundown of guest houses, hotels, service stations, barber shops, restaurants and drug stores that were considered safe for African American travelers during the Jim Crow era.

trauma that leave the former slaves who populate the novel haunted, scarred psychologically and physically" (Rogers 212). The scholar explains that rememory hovers in the landscape as a physical presence, interfering in the relationship between characters and between characters and the environment, producing affective sensory experiences. There is a passage where Seathe tells Denver about how sometimes one can hear or see something that is "so clear. And you think it's you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else" (*Beloved* 36). As Rogers suggests, the details of these personal and collective memories exist "only in fragments and circuits of feelings, only in stories, rumors and hints that are passed on between community members" (Rogers 212). Therefore, we can link the zoot-suited figure that sat next to Frank (if we accept him as a ghost) to a collective memory that inhabits circuits of feelings that are transmitted between community members[9].

The sense of community is reinforced in Chicago, where Frank follows the recommendations of Reverend Maynard and Taylor, the train waiter, and eats at a place called Booker's. In there, Frank finds good food and good company: "Laborers and the idle, mothers and street women, all ate and drank with the ease of family in their own kitchens. It was that quick, down-home friendliness that led Frank to talk freely to the man on the stool next to his […]" (*Home* 27-28). A place marked on *The Negro Motorist Green Book* and recommended by two black men proves to be a safe, welcoming place—one that gives the sensation of home, of families inhabiting their own kitchens. In fact, there is a sense of ease and trust that leads Frank to talk without inhibitions to a man named Billy Watson. Therefore, we can conclude that the environment and the atmosphere of the place have affected Frank in a positive manner; that is

[9] The figure of a zoot-suit man can be linked to the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943. The zoot suits, which were loose-fitting, became popular among young men in African American, Mexican American and other minority communities. They were also increasingly viewed with suspicion by affluent white people, who considered the zoot suit wearers juvenile delinquents. In 1943, tensions exploded and people wearing zoot-suit clothing were attacked. See Evan Andrews's "What Were the Zoot Suit Riots?".

to say, the eliciting conditions of a welcoming place have affected Frank's mood, making him cheerful and relaxed.

During the conversation, as Frank reveals that he is headed to Georgia, the Booker's waitress confides that she and her family had hidden in an abandoned house for half a year when they lived in Macon. The declaration prompts the following dialogue: "'Hid from what? White sheets?' 'Naw. The rent man.' 'Same thing.' 'Why him?' 'Oh, please. It was 1938'" (*Home* 28). As Craps explains, one possible micro-aggression of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is connected to black people being denied home mortgages (28). Thus, the comparison of a rent man to a Klu Klux Klan member indicates the prejudice and violence of white institutions and structures of power. Furthermore, periods of social and economic challenges are especially hard for the low and middle classes. The testimony of the waitress causes some commotion in the bar: "Up and down the counter there was laughter, loud and knowing. Some began to compete with stories of their own deprived life in the thirties" (*Home* 28). Some of the tales involved people sleeping in a freight car, in a chickens' coop or in an ice house, eating dandelions, hog guts, and ice. Even though the subject revolved around painful and difficult experiences, the conversation about it involved shouting, laughter and a sense of camaraderie. The waitress herself now had a job in Chicago—that is, she had managed to persevere after her time hiding in an abandoned house in Macon.

Visser observes that many trauma narratives focus on portraying resilience and growth as possibilities in the aftermath of traumatic wounding, since narrativization can empower individual and communities, assisting in their cultural survival (Visser's "Decolonizing" 20-22). In the text "Affective Form", Ankhi Mukherjee also identifies an empowering potential in trauma, which can be foreclosed by the designation of victimhood to the trauma sufferer. The scholar argues that in narratives focused on groups considered as minorities, suffering may lead to change and the development of resilience (Mukherjee 308). Analyzing the capacity for

laughing that people displayed at the Booker's while talking about hardships and the fact that they now seemed to live in different conditions, we can recognize the resilience and the community in shared experiences.

This sense of community is also what leads Billy Watson to invite Frank to stay at his house. At the Watson residence, Frank meets Billy's wife, Arlene, and son, Thomas. The latter is not able to move his right arm, which prompts Money to ask what had happened to him. Billy explains that when Thomas was eight years old, he had a cap pistol and was playing with it outside. A young drive-by cop saw the kid and shot him. When Watson comments on how at least it had kept Thomas off the streets and in the classroom, where he exceeded at Math, Money asks if he is saying that the young cop did them a favor. To that, Billy replies: "No. No, no, no. Jesus stepped in and did that. He said, 'Hold on there, Mr. Police Guy. Don't hurt the least of mine. He who harms the least of mine disturbs the tranquility of my mind'" (*Hom*e 31, emphasis in the original).

Once more, we can see the portrayal of resilience in the face of trauma. Billy is proud of his son and mentions that his dedication is granting him offers of scholarships. Therefore, despite the terrible attack that Thomas suffered, he is still thriving. The novel is also careful to emphasize that trauma and racism are not good: it was never the young cop who did Thomas a favor. Instead, the boy's academic success happens despite the shooting and injury; it is all due to the perseverance, strength and resilience of him and his family.

Another interesting conversation happens between Frank and Thomas, as the first goes to the boy's bedroom in order to thank him for lending Money his bed. Frank mentions that Billy has told him that Thomas is good at Math, and the eleven-year-old replies that he is good at every school subject. Judging the kid as a little arrogant and in need of some humility, Money asks if he plays any sports, but ends up feeling ashamed by the cold look that Thomas gives

him. After examining Frank carefully, the eleven-year-old tells the older man that he should not drink. Before leaving the bedroom, Thomas decides to discuss one last topic:

> "Were you in the war?"
>
> "I was."
>
> "Did you kill anybody?"
>
> "Had to."
>
> "How did it feel?"
>
> "Bad. Real bad."
>
> "That's good. That it made you feel bad. I'm glad."
>
> "How come?"
>
> "It means you're not a liar."
>
> "You are deep, Thomas." Frank smiled. "What you want to be when you grow up?" Thomas turned the knob with his left hand and opened the door. "A man," he said and left. (*Home* 32-33, emphasis in the original)

Like Frank, Thomas is also a trauma survivor. Their conversation, especially the answer about what he wants to be when he grows up, gives Frank much to consider. As we have seen, as a kid, Money linked manhood to power and strength. In the beginning of his journey to Lotus, he hopes to find his purpose as a protector to his sister. Now, in the dialogue with Thomas, one more option is presented: a man can be someone who is wise, honest, resilient and able to thrive. Thus, we can conclude that their conversation has affected Frank, bringing him new knowledge and new considerations.

The second appearance of the zoot-suit ghost happens while Frank sleeps in Thomas's bed. Awoken by the sound of a click that seems to him like the trigger of a gun without

ammunition, Money sits up and sees the same small man in the zoot suit from the train. It is relevant to consider the circumstances of the two appearances of the ghost until this point of the narrative. The zoot-suited man first shows up on the train to Chicago, minutes after Frank had seen the abused couple and heard about how the husband had been kicked out of the store and beaten, while the wife had had a rock thrown at her face. The second appearance of the figure takes place at the night after Frank learned Thomas's tale, how the little kid had been shot by a cop and lost movement in his right arm. The fact that the ghost appears right after Money hears stories of racism and violence seem to corroborate his presence as an affective one; as a collective memory in the circuits of feelings which is transmitted between the members of a community.

As Frank thinks about the ghost, he focuses on his appearance: "He had heard about those suits, but never saw anybody wearing one. If they were the signals of manhood, he would have preferred a loincloth and some white paint artfully smeared on forehead and cheeks. Holding a spear, of course" (*Home* 34). As Money reflects on the actual appearance of the zoot-suiters, with their watch chains, wide-brimmed hats, wide shoulders and ballooned pants, he thinks about how they had been targeted by riot cops in different parts of the country. Rogers indicates that rememory can emerge to descendants from slavery's survivors in an encounter with "sycamore trees, from the landscape of a ruined Harlem, from the love between women who share no history but oppression" (214). The fact that Frank never saw someone wearing a zoot suit, but knows about them and their stories reinforces the notion that the main character experiences rememory when he sees the ghost. The experiences that the figure in the hat has gone through were not lived by Frank, but he has heard about them and acknowledges them as part of his identity through the legacy of affect between a people.

Furthermore, we can see that Money continues to think about the man he wishes to be. As Katrina Harack highlights in "Shifting Masculinities and Evolving Feminine Power:

Progressive Gender Roles in Toni Morrison's *Home*", Frank is conjuring up the image of an African male warrior, longing for "male ancestors to emulate" (379). Therefore, we can see that Money values connection and culture in the answer he is trying to formulate throughout the novel; that is, to the question of what type of man he wishes to become.

Examples of micro-aggressions that may result in insidious trauma are presented again as Billy helps Frank buy new clothes and shoes. On the way back from the store, they are intercepted by police officers. Random searches of black men are one more indicator of racist micro-aggressions that might add up into processes of traumatization. After the policemen see Frank's veteran medal and allow them to leave unharmed, we encounter the following line: "The police incident was not worth comment so Billy and Frank walked off in silence" (*Home* 37). I purposely chose the word "encounter" to address this sentence because I believe that it might feel visceral when you read it. It seems like a very simple phrase, but it indicates how common and routine the violence of being randomly stopped by police is for black men such as Frank and Billy. There is also another interesting interpretation: perhaps the incident is not worth mentioning not only because it is such commonplace, but because the two men have grown in their resilience against such aggressions.

As I got to this part of the novel—where Frank and Billy say their goodbyes and promise to visit one another—with my internship class, a few people related that they were very surprised. As soon as Billy offered to take Frank home with him, they believed that something sinister would happen to Money. We can attribute that to paranoia reading—in wanting no bad surprises, we expect the worst. I think that what might have escaped the students' observations, reading *Home* for the first time, is the centrality of community in the novel. Frank and Ycidra are able to return to Lotus because of the help that they receive from black people along the way. Thus, when we approach the encounter between African American characters in the novel,

we could consider reparative modes of reading. Being open to the joy, pain and fear in the texts, we might encounter healing outcomes.

By the moment that Frank embarks to Georgia, he has shared with his scribe (and the reader) his memories regarding Lotus, his experiences in the war, and his impressions of his relationship with Lily. Money has had a chance to talk and revisit his memories—even very painful ones. Therefore, as he is sitting on the train to Atlanta and thinking about the deaths of Mike and Stuff, "Frank suddenly realized that those memories, powerful as they were, did not crush him anymore or throw him into paralyzing despair. He could recall every detail, every sorrow, without needing alcohol to steady him" (*Home* 100). This is a product of the therapeutic engagement promoted by the novel: the talking and facing of traumatic memories allows Frank to slowly heal, growing in his resilience.

On his path to Georgia, Frank also reflects on his relationship with Ycidra, Mike and Stuff. Thinking about the latter two strengthens Frank's resolve to rescue his sister: "*No more people I didn't save. No more watching people close to me die. No more. And not my sister. No way*" (*Home* 103, emphasis in the original). In this last line, we can identify the survivor's guilt that Money feels, but also his determination—that is, the development of a sense of agency. The critic Van der Kolk highlights how important it is for the survivors to have experiences that directly contradict the physical paralysis and emotional helplessness that tend to accompany traumatic experiences. As Money reflects on his bond with his younger sister, he informs his scribe that

> *She was the first person I ever took responsibility for. Down deep inside her lived my secret picture of myself—a strong good me tied to the memory of those horses and the burial of a stranger. Guarding her, finding a way through tall grass and out of that place, not being afraid of anything—snakes or wild old men. I wonder if succeeding at*

> *that was the buried seed of all the rest. In my little-boy heart I felt heroic and I knew that if they found us or touched her I would kill.* (*Home* 104, emphasis in the original)

In this passage, we can gather confirmation that, at this point of the narrative, Frank seems to believe that the answer to the type of man that he wishes to be is linked to the role of a protector. The inspiration for that is in his childhood memories—a time in his life when he felt strong and capable. He was responsible for protecting Cee and leading her back safely. Therefore, we can understand that Frank believes that, if he can guide Ycidra home again, he can match the image that he has of himself as a kid and would like to have of himself in the present: that of a strong protector. Thus, we can conclude that the memories Frank has are affective, serving as an inspiration.

We can also see that Frank's healing process is succeeding through narrativization, communal support and agency as, in Atlanta, the man realizes that "He'd had lots of sad memories, but no ghosts or nightmares for two days […]" (*Home* 106). In the evening, as he is feeling relaxed and gets distracted, Money is assaulted by a gang of teenagers who beat him with a pipe and steal his money. The person who assists him is a black man, who helps him get up and stuffs a couple of dollar bills in his jacket pocket. The police had previously been discussed with disbelief and as a symbol of unfairness in conversations with Reverend Locke and Billy Murray, and continues to be discussed in the same manner as Frank answers with a "hell, no" when inquired by the man if he would like him to call the police or not (*Home* 107). Furthermore, the sense of community brought on by shared experiences and pain is exhibited when the helper replies to Frank's statement that he does not have anything to offer him in exchange for the dollar bills by saying "Forget it, brother. Stay in the light" (*Home* 107).

One more sign of healing can be recognized in Frank's approach to his romance with Lily: "As he poked the eggs his thought turned to what Lily must be doing, thinking. She had

seemed relieved at his departure. And, truth be told, so was he. He was now convinced his attachment to her was medicinal, like swallowing aspirin" (*Home* 107). Frank reflects on how his relationship with Lily had been a temporary distraction for the rage and shame that he felt. It helped him pretend that he was okay—which he could now recognize that he had not been. When he was with her, she was the inspiration that kept him sober. He believed that without her, he would not survive. As Money left Seattle, he had hopes that they would get back together. Now, having almost finished his journey, the man is able to recognize that the relationship helped him avoid his pain and traumatic memories. As he is finally healing, he now knows that he can, in fact, survive without Lily.

Sarah, the woman who had sent Frank the note about Ycidra, is the one who opens the back door at the Scott residence. As Money heads downstairs to find his sister, he sees a white-haired man in an office. The man—Beauregard Scott—starts yelling at Frank to get out, threatening to call the police. As he tries to do so, Money knocks the telephone out of his hand. Scott then pulls a revolver from his desk: "The doctor raised the gun and pointed it at what in his fear ought to have been flaring nostrils, foaming lips, and the red-rimmed eyes of a savage. Instead he saw the quiet, even serene, face of a man not to be fooled with" (*Home* 111). Scott, an eugenic physician, is ready to recognize in Frank his own expectations of a black man as a "black savage". However, the image that he actually sees is that of a serene and determined man. As Rosana Gomes and Gabriela Pereira have observed, "Morrison is both subverting notions related to the black rapist/aggressor/savage and showing that the absence of monstrosity is destabilizing to Scott. If this Other, this 'not-me' is not the monster it is supposed to be, then on what differentiation can I base my 'pure' identity?" (12, emphasis in the original).

The potent negative affective charge of stereotypes is also highlighted by Morton, who explains that these charges sustain the psychic life of colonial power (322). Skiveren observes that these kinds of expectations and stereotypes do indeed affect black people, as there is a

captivating force of the corporeal pushes and pulls involved as the discourses, norms and power structures of society orient one's racialized body toward a particular role or life. One can feel the effects of an affective transformation that diminish the capacity of the body to act: "The feeling of enslavement is accordingly the feeling of encounters with a world that restricts the agentic force of the body, shackling it by the gravity of history and lineage" (Skiveren 225). Frank has felt restricted in other moments of his life, as when he was forced by Ku Klux Klan to abandon his house, as when he witnessed the unceremonious burial of a black man and could only protect his sister, as when he was stopped and searched by the police simply for being a black man. Nevertheless, in the scene with Scott, Frank refuses to play the stereotypical image in the doctor's mind. Because of the healing obtained by talking about his traumatic memories and the receiving of communal support, Frank now has agency, so the one who feels restricted and runs is Scott.

The sense of community is once again highlighted as Sarah prevents Scott from calling the police, allowing Frank to escape with his barely breathing, cold to the touch sister in his arms. Therefore, the maid risks her job in order to try to save Cee's life. As soon as Frank manages to find a cab for him and Ycidra, he allows his anxiety and worries to be accompanied by the relief of having successfully completed his mission:

> Mixed in with his fear was the deep satisfaction that the rescue brought, not only because it was successful but also how markedly nonviolent it had been. It could have been simply, "May I take my sister home?" But the doctor had felt threatened as soon as he walked in the door. Yet not having to beat up the enemy to get what he wanted was somehow superior—sort of, well, smart. (*Home* 114)

In the passage above, we can see that the encounter has produced positive affects in Frank: he feels smart, wise and powerful. Without using violence, he was able to intimidate Beauregard Scott and rescue his sister. It is also relevant to note that Frank's childhood nickname had been Smart Money. As we consider that he remembers his younger self as brave and strong, and now believes that he can actually think of himself as clever, we can conclude that the episode has taken Frank closer to the man that he wishes to become.

When Frank gets to Lotus, he goes to the residence of Miss Ethel—one of the elder women who plays a role of leadership in town. Miss Ethel tells Frank to leave her and the other ladies to their work, so Money has no choice but to spend the following days getting reacquainted with Lotus and fixing his old father's house. As the days go by, we can notice changes in Frank's perception: "Had these trees always been this deep, deep green?" (*Home* 117). Where before Money had described Lotus as tedious and suffocating, he now notices the shining of the sun, the laughter of the kids, the blossoming of flowers and vegetables. Frank recognizes that there is a feeling of safety and goodwill in the town and observes that "The sun […] did her best to ruin the pleasure of being among those who do not want to degrade or destroy you. Try as she might, she could not […]" (*Home* 118). This sentence is related to the feeling of safety that Frank now experiences in Lotus. He now has been to other parts of the world, and many of them have been hostile to him: segregated restaurants and trains, police violence and racism. Thus, Frank's shift of perspective is related to a change in his affect disposition: where before Lotus had been a tedious town, it has now become a safe place, inspiring much more positive emotions and impressions.

Another change is registered when Money is finally allowed to visit Ycidra and notices that "Cee was different. Two months surrounded by country women who loved mean had changed her" (*Home* 121). As they move back to the house where they had once lived with their parents, Frank continues to observe the transformations in his sister. She had been a shy kid

who hid behind him. She had also been afraid and naive. Frank did not know what Miss Ethel and her friends' treatment had entailed. All he knew was that "They delivered unto him a Cee who would never again need his hand over her eyes or his arms to stop her murmuring bones" (*Home* 138).

Eventually, Ycidra confides in Frank that, due to the experiments conducted on her body by Scott, she cannot have children. Then, he tries to console her and they have the following conversation:

> "I'm sorry, Cee. Really sorry." Frank moved toward her.
>
> "Don't," she said, pushing his hand away. "I didn't feel anything at first when Miss Ethel told me, but now I think about it all the time. It's like there's a baby girl down here waiting to be born. She's somewhere close by in the air, in this house, and she picked me to be born to. And now she has to find some other mother." Cee began to sob.
>
> "Come on, girl. Don't cry," whispered Frank.
>
> "Why not? I can be miserable if I want to. You don't need to try and make it go away. It shouldn't go away. It's just as sad as it ought to be and I'm not going to hide from what's true just because it hurts" (*Home* 131).

Cee also complements her description of the baby girl by saying "You know that toothless smile babies have? […] I keep seeing it" (*Home* 132). The fact that there is a kid that Ycidra can sense in the house suggests the presence of one more ghost in the novel. Once again, this figure possesses an affective force, since it makes Cee believe that it is the child who was destined to be hers.

It is also interesting to note that the shifts in Ycidra reject the answer that Frank was formulating to the question of what type of man he would become. Based on childhood memories and on his successful rescue of his sister, Money seemed to be interested in taking on the role of a protector, once again shielding Cee from the dangers of the world—just as he did when they were kids. However, the Ycidra who has been assisted and educated by the women in Lotus rejects such role, pushing Frank's hand away and telling him that he does not have to make her sadness go away.

Furthermore, Cee's words about not hiding from something just because it hurts also affects Frank: "His sister was gutted, infertile, but not beaten. She could know the truth, accept it, and keep on quilting. Frank tried to sort out what else was troubling him and what to do about it" (*Home* 132). In fact, her words, her attitude and her reporting of the ghost of the young girl move Frank in such a manner that it forces him to acknowledge his past: "*I have to say something to you right now. I have to tell the whole truth. I lied to you and I lied to me. I hid it from you because I hid it from me*" (*Home* 133). The man then continues his confession:

> *Then Cee told me about seeing a baby girl smile all through the house, in the air, the clouds. It hit me. Maybe that little girl wasn't waiting around to be born to her. Maybe it was already dead, waiting for me to step up and say how.*
>
> *I shot the Korean girl in her face.*
>
> *I am the one she touched.*
>
> *I am the one who saw her smile.*
>
> *I am the one she said "Yum-yum" to.*
>
> *I am the one she aroused. […]*
>
> *How could I let her live after she took me down to a place I didn't know was in me?*
>
> *How could I like myself, even be myself if I surrendered to thar place […]*

What type of man is that? […] (*Home* 133-134, emphasis in the original)

Cathy Caruth argues that not only the violent event itself, but the way its violence has not yet been fully known or understood are responsible for overwhelming the survivors of trauma (*Traumatic* 6). Van der Kolk and van der Hart also explain that "lack of proper integration of intensely emotionally arousing experiences into the memory system results in dissociation and the formation of traumatic memories" (163). Many trauma survivors report their experiences as if they were removed from the scene, observing it from a distance. When Frank first tells the tale of the Korean girl to his scribe, he does precisely that, describing himself as an observer who witnessed his fellow soldier shoot the kid. However, after his healing process, in which he could talk about his experiences, receive communal support and be affected by Ycidra's words, he could finally acknowledge the truth.

The question of what type of man considers accepting sexual favors from a child is also present because it breaks everything that Frank wants to believe about himself. In fact, projections of the person who he wants to be help him avoid the truth: "*I felt so proud grieving over my dead friends. How I loved them. How much I cared about them, missed them. My mourning was so thick it completely covered my shame*" (*Home* 133). In seeing himself as a loyal friend who missed his companions, Frank was able to repress the guilt for what he had felt and done. Nevertheless, his healing process and the ghost that Ycidra sees, with a toothless smile—much like the kid who Frank killed and the girl who smiled at him while he was dating Lily—, affect him into facing his past and admitting his role as a perpetrator of violence.

Now that Frank has admitted his actions to himself and to his scribe, he has to believe that time will help the wound heal. Meanwhile, he seeks attunement in other ways. As we know, the other memory that kept flashing into Frank's mind throughout his journey was that of the black foot being buried and the horses fighting each other. Money decides to interrogate Salem

and the other men in Lotus about the place where farmers used to conduct horse and dog fights. The question is received with laughter and scorn, as the men reveal that those rings actually did more than dog fights. They then tell Frank the tale of a black man who was forced to fight his father. The white men mocking them made it clear that only one of them would leave the battle alive.

After being forced to murder his father, the son—Jerome—fled to Lotus and told people there about what had happened while sobbing in desperation. The women in town collected some money to assist him while the men found him clean clothes and a mule that he could ride, as they all knew that "'if the sheriff had seen him dripping in blood, he'd be in prison this very day'" (*Home* 139). Upon hearing that this terrible event had taken place around ten to fifteen years in the past, we can assume that Frank concludes that the black foot he and Ycidra saw belonged to Jerome's father. The commotion around helping the man and being shocked by the brutality of the situation was also likely what caused the adults not to tell the kids off for returning so late.

Frank then returns home and tells Ycidra that he needs that quilt that she had been stitching and herself to accompany him to a place that he did not wish to reveal yet. At first, Cee is reluctant to part with the first quilt she had ever stitched, but she can recognize how important it is to Frank that she accepts his requests. Together, they walk to the old farmland that they had visited as children, years before. After finding the spot that he was looking for, Frank digs a hole in the ground, recovering small bones and a human skull, which the siblings envelop in Ycidra's quilt. The duo then carries the bone-filled quilt to the base of a sweet bay tree, "split down the middle, beheaded, undead" (*Home* 144). There, Frank buries the human remains and nails to the tree a wooden marker that reads "Here Stands A Man" (*Home* 145). Then, marking the last chapter of the novel, we have access to Frank's thoughts:

I stood there a long while, staring at that tree.

It looked so strong

So beautiful.

Hurt right down the middle

But alive and well.

Cee touched my shoulder

Lightly.

Frank?

Yes?

Come on, brother. Let's go home. (*Home* 147, emphasis in the original)

Here, it becomes important for us to remember another episode in Frank's childhood: the murder and burial of old Crawford, in Texas. Just as Money's neighbors had buried the old man beneath the magnolia tree that he loved, Frank decides to give Jeremy's father an honorable burial, also beneath a tree. As subaltern histories can be registered affectively through the transmission of human remains, we can conclude that Frank is applying the knowledge which he has gained from Crawford's death and the approach of his community to it.

There is also a sense of agency surrounding Frank's act of burying Jerome's father. Mukherjee believes that in a traumatic reaction, there is a symbolic repetition of the primal event that can lead to an active understanding of it, and that being affected by such understanding can alter, change someone (307). As a child, Frank could not do anything about the body being unceremoniously thrown into a ditch. Now, however, he has the chance to regain agency over the situation that has generated intrusive thoughts by offering Jerome's father a dignified burial.

Ann Rogers highlights that narrative can help "articulate the affect of the past that remains, and draw from the information it provides" (214). As she explains, when stories that talk about slavery and its ramifications enter into the affective circuits of the present, they "have the potential to disrupt dominant structures of feeling, including those related to cultures of white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity" (Rogers 214). Therefore, as Frank pays homage to Jerome's father, he is also paying homage and transmitting affects of resilience and healing to the readers of the novel.

I should also note that Frank regards Jerome's father as a man. Perhaps because he chose the life of his son over his own, perhaps because of the lessons that his remains have taught Frank. As Money stares contently at the tree that is hurt, but is still beautiful, we can also speculate that he has probably found more answers to the inquiry of what kind of person he wants to become. Perhaps he now believes that a man looks after his community, offering dignity and respect to those who surround him. Perhaps Frank will strive to become exactly that kind of man.

The use of repetition in trauma fiction mimics the insistent return of the event and the disruption of time and chronology that haunt survivors. As Whitehead explains, repetition exists between trauma and catharsis (83; 86). The beginning of Frank's journey shows repetition as trauma, as he has nightmares, intrusive flashbacks and feels paralyzed. However, as he progressively tells his tale to his scribe and assumes agency over situations that had previously left him paralyzed, repetition becomes catharsis: Frank is able to reformulate his memories and place them within his past, which allows him to move on with his life.

Frank's observation about the sweet bay tree being hurt right down the middle, but still beautiful, alive and well also applies to himself and Ycidra. The siblings have been hurt and traumatized by racism, violence and some particular events. In Frank's case, he has also been the perpetrator of violence. The duo has experienced pain, guilt and shame, but they are

survivors. They are learning, they are attempting to become stronger and kinder, and they have finally found a sense of home. They are healing, and Visser notes precisely that many trauma narratives present resilience and growth as possibilities in the aftermath of traumatic wounding. To the scholar, the image of the tree at the end of the novel indicates that a sense of closure is not denial or erasure of the past, but an affirmation of "growth and health to emphasize that recovery, despite traumatic wounding, is possible, and that trauma, although it stands outside precise representation, can be integrated" (Visser "Decolonizing" 12).

As Visser observes, Frank's tale engages the history of enslavement, disenfranchisement, and continuing oppression and discrimination faced by African Americans. Frank's story is not only a tale of personal trauma, but also the story of other black soldiers that have faced war catastrophes and racist incidents throughout their lives (Visser "Entanglements" 6;8). Therefore, as these stories enter into the affective circuits of the readers, they can inspire and teach about community, resilience and growth.

3.3 "What in this world did Cee love?": Ycidra's healing

Home presents several parallels with fairy tales, especially with the story of Hansel and Gretel. In fact, such connection is established explicitly in the novel: "Lenore was the wicked witch. Frank and Cee, like some forgotten Hansel and Gretel, locked hands as they navigated the silence and tried to imagine a future" (*Home* 53). As Visser observes, fairy tales tend to depict narratives of hardship, violence and strife. However, they also portray magic and wish fulfillment, often presenting the triumph of the main characters over villainy. Then, the first can live "happily ever after" (Visser's "Fairy Tale" 149; 150).

Here, my emphasis is not to discuss the formal structures of a fairy tale, but its links (especially the links established in *Home*) to affect. It is relevant to observe that many fairy

tales present certain virtues as key to the triumph of the main characters. Therefore, when Morrison presents parallels between *Home* and the genre, she is also affecting our experience of reading the novel. As we recognize the fairy tale structure in the book, our affect circuit may prepare us to learn from the tale of the Money siblings—which helps in the healing message and the pedagogy of cure presented in the novel.

One of the first links between the novel and the fairy tale genre that can be established right in the beginning of chapter four—the chapter dedicated to Ycidra Money's story—is the presence of an "evil step-mother". However, that role is played by Cee's step-grandmother, Lenore, who has married Cee's grandfather, Salem.

Lenore mistreated Frank and Cee when they were kids, giving them water instead of milk for their cereal, beating them with wooden branches, and not feeding them properly. As Ycidra had been born in a church basement as the Money family travelled from Texas to Georgia, Lenore would call her "gutter child", stating that "Being born in the street—or the gutter, as she usually put it—was prelude to a sinful, worthless life" (*Home* 44).

Lenore's resentment originated from how her nice house, completely owned by her after the death of her first husband, was suddenly filled with Salem's sons, daughter-in-law and grandchildren. Unable to throw all of them out, Lenore

> Chose to focus her resentment on the little girl born "in the street". A frown creased her every glance when the girl entered, her lips turned down at every drop of a spoon, trip on the door saddle, a loosening braid. Most of all was the murmur of 'gutter child' as she walked away from a failing that was always on display from her step-granddaughter. (*Home* 45, emphasis in the original)

As we can observe, Cee's childhood was filled with displays of disgust, distaste, and cruelty toward her. As her parents worked two jobs and were barely ever home, Lenore was her prime caretaker. Thus, it is not surprising that Ycidra became a shy girl who would hide behind her older brother. The negative comments and mistreatment directed at her affected the girl, impacting her self-esteem and constituting in her affect dispositions inclined to fear and insecurity.

Ycidra remembers the pride and relief that her whole family felt when Ida and Luther were finally able to save enough money to rent a place separately from Lenore and Salem. Those sensations were associated with having their own garden, their own chickens, and being treated with friendship instead of pity by their neighbors. Therefore, we can see the affect of housing, material conditions and familial love on the Moneys: no longer being dependent on Lenore, the family could feel pride. Free from the older woman's constant abuse, the children could feel happier. Sensing that the family was finally disconnected from Lenore (a person who they did not like), the community of Lotus could act friendlier and get closer to them: "Everybody in the neighborhood, except Lenore, was stern but quickly open-handed. If someone had an abundance of peppers or collards, they insisted Ida take them […] One woman sent her husband over to shore up their slanted porch steps" (*Home* 40).

Nevertheless, much like her brother, Ycidra nurtured some resentment towards Lotus. She blamed some of her bad decisions on her lack of formal schooling: "If she hadn't been so ignorant living in a no-count, not-even-a-town place with only chores, church-school, and nothing else to do, she would have known better" (*Home* 47). Cee felt constantly watched and ordered around by every adult in Lotus: someone would always tell her to get down from a tree, to adjust her clothes or wipe her mouth after eating berries. Furthermore, the presence of Frank, Mike and Stuff prevented the other boys in town from flirting with Ycidra—which the girl pinpointed as the reason which led her to fall in love with the first young man who courted her.

Another reference to fairy tales is connected precisely to the man who charmed Ycidra: he was from Atlanta and his name was Principal, but he called himself Prince. His good looks, his clothes and his accent impressed the girls in Lotus. Furthermore, "Prince loved himself so deeply, so completely, it was impossible to doubt his conviction" (*Home* 48). Thus, he was able to convince Ycidra that he loved her and that, at fourteen, she was old enough for them to get married. It is interesting to note that Cee is led by Prince's tone and his own conviction of his own worth to believe him and adore him. That is, Ycidra, who has affect dispositions inclined to insecurity and low self-esteem, is affected by Prince's self-confidence and high opinions of himself.

In little time, the couple got married and moved into Frank's old bedroom, as the older Money sibling had enlisted and left with the army. Eventually, Prince got tired of Lotus and took Cee to Atlanta in the old Ford that Lenore had given Luther and Ida (on the condition that they returned it in case her new station wagon broke). It was in the capital of Georgia that Cee "learned that Principal had married her for an automobile" (*Home* 49). After taking the old Ford, her husband abandoned her in an apartment room in Atlanta. Therefore, what Cee discovered was that Principal was not, in fact, a prince charming. The point is further stressed by Cee's friend Thelma as the two talk about Ycidra's ex-husband: "'Prince.' Thelma snorted. 'You mean Frog'" (*Home* 56). Therefore, we can conclude that *Home* presents us an inversion of a classic fairy tale trope. While some stories portray a frog who becomes a prince, in Morrison's novel we discover a "Prince" who is actually a frog: uninspiring and disappointing.

When Ycidra realized that Prince was not coming back, she rented a cheaper room on a quiet street. There, she met Thelma, her upstairs neighbor who helped her get a job dishwashing at Bobby's Rib Bouse. It was one of her coworkers who drove Bobby's car and took Cee back to Lotus when Ida died, and "nothing was more hurtful than Lenore's name-calling accusations. Thief, fool, hussy; she ought to call the sheriff. When Cee got back to the city, she swore never

to go back there. A promise kept, even when Pap died of a stroke a month later" (*Home* 50). In this passage, we can recognize the affect generated by Lenore's words and threats. The choice of vocabulary and her mad tone make Ycidra feel shame, humiliation, and fear. The negative affect created by the name-calling is so intense that it stops Cee from attending the funeral of her own father.

As the world around her shattered, Cee desperately wished that she could talk to Frank. She knew that he would not fight, judge or laugh at her, but "would, as always, protect her from a bad situation" (*Home* 51). As Frank's cautions were clear and his instructions were specific, Cee would always follow his advice. In her loneliness and despair, the young woman wishes that her big brother were around to "once more touch the top of her head with four fingers, or stroke her nape with his thumb" and whisper to her "Don't cry, don't cry girl; I'm right here" (*Home* 53).

In this passage, we can see how Cee changes throughout the narrative. During her childhood and young adult years, the girl welcomed Frank's role as a protector, accepting and enjoying the way that he would assume responsibility for her and console her. Nevertheless, Ycidra recognizes that her dependence on Frank bears some negative consequences. When she finally understands that Prince had deceived her, Cee thinks that the down side "of having a smart, tough brother close at hand to take care of and protect you—you are slow to develop your own brain muscle" (*Home* 48). Always relying on Frank's advice, Cee finds herself unprepared to make smart decisions on her own. It is also possible to identify some resentment, as Cee feels that she had been abandoned by her protector.

As we know, later in the narrative, Cee's expectations of her relationship with Frank and of her own capabilities will change. After the physical and emotional healing offered by the women in the community of Lotus, Cee no longer wishes to be rescued or protected by

Frank. She no longer wants his hand around her head or for him to tell her not to cry—she has become able of taking care of herself.

Nevertheless, before returning to Lotus, Ycidra lamented her situation, loneliness and absence of her brother, feeling that "She was broken. Not broken up but broken down, down into her separate parts" (*Home* 54). Knowing the imagery of the sweet bay tree, split down the middle, we can connect Ycidra to it. However, the connection to the resilience, to the tree being hurt, but alive and well, will come later, after the healing offered by the Lotus community.

As Ycidra realizes that she can barely survive with the money she earns at Bobby's, she decides to look for a better-paying job. It is Thelma who informs her that there is a couple in Buckhead who is looking for a maid who can assist the husband, a doctor, in his work. As the worker would sleep in the couple's house, not paying rent would help saving money. Therefore, Ycidra decides to apply for the job.

It is Sarah Williams—the woman that will later send Frank the note warning about Cee's health—who welcomes Ycidra through the back door. She is friendly and warm—a contrast to Mrs. Scott, who is distant and formal. As she interviews Cee, some strange questions are asked: "'Born here? Atlanta?' 'No, ma'am. I'm from a little place west of here, called Lotus.' 'Any children?' 'No, ma'am.' 'Married?' 'No, ma'am.' 'What church affiliation? Any?' 'There's God's Congregation in Lotus but, I don't…' 'They jump around?' 'Ma'am?' 'Never mind […]'" (*Home* 59). The reader might be affected by this dialogue, finding it suspicious that the Scott family is so intent on finding someone who is seemingly isolated: single, with no children, born in another city, and with no connections who usually travel to other places. Such weary feeling is intensified by the sequence of the dialogue:

> "[…] I don't really understand my husband's work—or care to. He is more than a doctor; he is a scientist and conducts very important experiments. His inventions help people. He's no Dr. Frankenstein."
>
> "Dr. who?"
>
> "Never mind. Just do what he says and you'll be fine. Now go. Sarah will show you to your room." (*Home* 60)

In the passage above, there seems to be an intention to affect the reader, creating feelings of anxiety and weariness. Ycidra does not know who Dr. Frankenstein is, but the reader probably does. Thus, we expect some medicinal experimentation, alteration of bodies and even gothic dread.

The suspicions over Beauregard Scott and Cee's job at his house only grow as we learn that the man is a Confederate and that he keeps in his library titles such as "Out of the Night". "The Passing of the Great Race" and "Heredity, Race and Society" (*Home* 65). The first—which Ycidra guesses to be a mystery novel—is actually the autobiography of a spy who infiltrated the Gestapo. The second one presents a theory of Nordic superiority, and the last title is connected to eugenics—the idea that it is possible to improve humanity by allowing only some people to produce offspring. Just as it had happened with Dr. Frankenstein, Cee is unfamiliar with the word eugenics: "How small, how useless was her schooling, she thought, and promised herself she would find time to read about and understand 'eugenics'" (*Home* 65, emphasis in the original).

The scholar Maisha Wester writes that the "African American body [...] exists as the threatening object within the national body but like the disdained bodily fluids disassociated from dominant society" (24). This threat to white identity is the place where minority bodies are rendered abject. As Gomes and Pereira have observed, even though Scott studies Ycidra's

body, he harbors disgust towards it. The doctor is interested in eugenics, in "purifying" the United States of America, and that entails disposing of unwanted bodies, such as Native and African American ones. Scott's repulse is also mixed with fear: as long as Ycidra is fertile, she represents the possibility of miscegenation, one of the greatest sources of anxiety for white supremacists (Gomes and Pereira 11).

In Ycidra's section, there seems to be an intention to cause a sense of dread in the reader. As previously mentioned, there is the reference to *Frankenstein*, one of the most famous gothic works of literature. There is also reference to novels connected to Nazism and eugenics, and the mention that Scott identifies as a Confederate. The threat here is also connected to racial horror, with white institutions (such as white western medicine) representing the danger that inflicts dread on the reader. This affect on the reader is sustained to the end of Cee's chapter, as Ycidra and Sarah choose honeydews to eat:

> Cee lifted the third one, then stroked its lime-yellow peel, tucking her forefinger into the tiny indentation at the stem break. "Female," she laughed. "This one's a female."
>
> "Well, hallelujah." Sarah joined Cee's laughter with a low chuckle. "Always the sweetest."
>
> "Always the juiciest," echoed Cee.
>
> "Can't beat the girl for flavor."
>
> "Can't beat her for sugar."
>
> Sarah slid a long, sharp knife from a drawer and, with intense anticipation of the pleasure to come, cut the girl in two. (*Home* 66)

Following the mentions to *Frankestein* and white supremacy, the chapter closes with the suggestion that a female (very likely Ycidra) will be cut in two. This can cause a sense of

weariness in the reader, who knows by this point that Frank has received a warning that Cee is in danger. We do eventually discover that our suspicions and fear were correct: Beauregard Scott did indeed conduct medical experiments on Cee, making her infertile and almost costing the young woman her life.

It is also interesting to contrast the chapter involving Ycidra and Scott with the chapter involving Frank, Reverend Locke and Billy Watson. Locke's passages also present elements of foreshadowing of hardships and prejudice to come during Frank's journey, but they come in the form of advice, from a place of worry and willingness to help. Billy Watson is part of an African American community that has developed a sense of camaraderie through shared experiences of racism and hardships during the Depression. The malice and danger come from Beauregard Scott, a doctor who believes in white supremacy. In a fairy tale, his figure would be linked to an ambitious powerful being who absolutely despises the lives of the main characters.

When Frank arrives to help Ycidra, she is very thin and unconscious. However, with Sarah's assist, the man is able to remove his sister from Scott's house and take her back to Lotus, where she is placed under the care of Miss Ethel Fordham and the other women in the community. The women faced illness as if it were an affront, battling it insistently and with determination. They used different recipes for infusions, soups and potions. They also exhibited contempt and dismissal for Western medicine:

> Later, when the fever died and whatever it was they packed into her vagina was douched out, Cee described to them the little she knew about what had happened to her. None of them had asked. Once they knew she had been working for a doctor, the eye rolling and tooth sucking was enough to make clear their scorn. And nothing Cee remembered—how pleasant she felt upon awakening after Dr. Beau had stuck her with a needle to put

> her to sleep; how passionate he was about the value of the examinations; how she believed the blood and pain that followed was a menstrual problem—nothing made them change their minds about the medical industry. (*Home* 121-122)

It is interesting to notice that, initially, both Frank and Ycidra are hesitant to recognize that they have been exploited and abused by people (Frank by the army and Cee by doctor Scott and his medicine practice). At first, Frank thinks that the army physicians had been nice to him by telling him to stay away from alcohol, and that it was his fault that he had not and, as consequence, felt so bothered by his trauma. Meanwhile, Cee was resistant to see Dr. Beau as someone who had been irresponsible with her body and health, believing that he was just passionate about medicine. Nevertheless, the exposure and comprehension of the violence of the army and the medical industry and the chance to receive communal love and support affect the siblings, changing their opinions and helping them understand their position as survivors. Much of the change in Ycidra's perspective happens while she is under the care of the women in Lotus, who bring their crocheting and embroidery to Cee once she is feeling a little better, thus transforming Miss Ethel's house into a quilting center:

> They practiced what they had been taught by their mothers during the period that rich people called the Depression and they called life. Surrounded by their comings and goings, listening to their talk, their songs, following their instructions, Cee had nothing to do but pay them the attention she had never given them before. They were nothing like Lenore, who'd driven Salem hard, and now, suffering a minor stroke, did nothing at all. Although each of her nurses was markedly different from the others in looks, dress, manner of speech, food and medical preferences, their similarities were glaring. There was no excess in their gardens because they shared everything. There was no trash

> or garbage in their homes because they had a use for everything. They took responsibility for their lives and for whatever, whoever else needed them. […] Mourning was helpful but God was better and they did not want to meet their Maker and have to explain a wasteful life. They knew He would ask each of them one question: "What have you done?" (*Home* 122-123)

In the passage above, we can see how the transmission of values, knowledge and culture affect Ycidra. Through the tales, songs and teachings of the women around her, Cee discovers a Lotus that feels different to her that the one she knew under Lenore's tutelage. The interaction with the women introduces Cee to the generosity, resilience, and responsibility present in her hometown, which she had not yet truly experienced. With their determination, the women in Lotus are able to heal Cee—physically and psychologically: "two months surrounded by country women who loved mean had changed her" (*Home* 121). The emotional, physical, and psychological support that Ycidra receives from the women in the community affect her, transform her. In a moment filled with "the demanding love of Ethel Fordham, which soothed and strengthened her [Ycidra] the most" (*Home* 125), Fordham tells the girl:

> "I knew you before you could walk. You had those big, pretty eyes. They was full of sadness, though. I seen how you tagged along with your brother. When he left you ran off with that waste of the Lord's air and time. Now you back home. Mended finally, but you might just run off again. Don't tell me you going to let Lenore decide again who you are? If you thinking about it, let me tell you something first. Remember that story about the goose and the golden eggs? How the farmer took the eggs and how greed made him stupid enough to kill the goose? I always thought a dead goose could make at least one good meal. But gold? Shoot. That was always the only thing on Lenore's mind. She

had it, loved it, and thought it put her above everybody else. Just like the farmer. Why didn't he plow his land, seed it, and grow something to eat?" (*Home* 125, emphasis in the original)

Once again, there is a reference to a fairy tale in the narrative. However, the better-known version is questioned and challenged by Ethel, who chooses to focus on resilience and determination. As previously mentioned, Mukherjee observes that some misconceptions around trauma can be readily attached to raced bodies that have been historically subjugated by symbolic overdeterminations, and that the designation of victimhood to a trauma survivor can obstruct and deny the potential for trauma to be transformed into resilience (308). Miss Fordham seems to argue precisely for that transformation. Just as she saw a different possible outcome for the farmer, she sees distinct possibilities for Cee:

Cee laughed and spread jam on another biscuit.

"See what I mean? Look to yourself. You free. Nothing and nobody is obliged to save you but you. Seed your own land. You young and a woman and there's serious limitation in both, but you a person too. Don't let Lenore or some trifling boyfriend and certainly no devil doctor decide who you are. That's slavery. Somewhere inside you is that free person I'm talking about. Locate her and let her do some good in the world." (*Home* 126, emphasis in the original)

Ethel recognizes the hardships that women and black people face in the American society, but also stresses the possibilities that Cee can grow, thrive, live and be happy. As Fordham mentions slavery, she addresses a rememory that affects both Ycidra and her as descendants of slavery survivors. The woman is also advocating for doing something with the

rememory and the affect that they encounter, choosing and fighting for freedom, and doing something that impacts the world around them. It is also important to note that Ethel's words are presented in the form of direct speech during a dialogue, addressing Ycidra as "you". This use of "you" can also affect the reader, interpolating them to assume a position of agency, choosing freedom and taking the responsibility of doing something with the affect generated by the suggestion of doing some good in the world. Here, the formal aspects of the text present its affective bearing and tonal feeling. As Alphen explains, the person who receives the affect has to do something with it, projecting it outwards or introjecting it. Whether the reader introjects the affect generated by the encounter with the novel as development of a sense of ethics or projects it outwards in the form of action, the transmission has taken place.

The time spent with her caretakers allows Cee to learn from their storytelling, their medicinal practice and their custom and habits. This exchange alters her perspective. If she was originally inclined to defend Beauregard Scott, believing in his passion for medicine and even blaming herself for not being a strong enough helper, the time and teaching of the women in Lotus change her opinion. As Ycidra understand that her caretakers are wise, that they lack formal education but know a lot about the world, and accepts their lessons of loving and appreciating one's self, she is able to see Scott and her choice to originally trust him under a more critic perspective:

> As usual she blamed being dumb on her lack of schooling, but that excuse fell apart the second she thought about the skilled women who had cared for her, healed her. Some of them had to have Bible verses read to them because they could not decipher print themselves, so they had sharpened the skills of the illiterate: perfect memory, photographic minds, keen senses of smell and hearing. And they knew how to repair what an educated bandit doctor had plundered. If not schooling, then what? (*Home* 128)

The care of the Lotus women have offered Ycidra the opportunity to regain her physical strength and to develop emotional resilience and self-love. After the weeks spent with her caretakers, Cee recognizes that she had internalized the label of "gutter child" and believed that she was worthless. Ida had not taken her into her arms and verbally contradicted the accusation. Cee believes that "Frank alone valued her", but has now come to the conclusion that "while his devotion shielded her, it did not strengthen her" (*Home* 129). Therefore, she does not want her brother to play the role of her protector anymore.

Instead, Ycidra's inspiration now comes from the women that she has met throughout her life: Thelma, Sarah, Ida, Ethel, and the others who had helped heal her. They were strong, focused and determined, and now Cee wishes to develop that kind of strength and determination for herself: "In this world with these people she wanted to be the person who would never again need rescue. Not from Lenore through the lies of the Rat, not from Dr. Beau through the courage of Sarah and her brother […] She wanted to be the one who rescued her own self" (*Home* 129). The woman decides that the first step is to believe that she can save herself and respect herself. The second would be to find a way to make a living. The third came from observing Miss Ethel and noticing the devotion and love that she held for her garden: "What in this world did Cee love? She would have to think about that" (*Home* 130). Once again, the encounter with the women in Lotus urges Cee to do something with the affect generated, and she now looks for a purpose, for something to do and love in her life.

Near the end of narrative, as Frank observes Ycidra, he recognizes in her a "newly steady self, confident, cheerful and occupied" (*Home* 135). She had started working on her own quilt, as the women who had cared for her stitched together while they sang, discussed medications and prayers that would aid Cee in her recovery. As we know, Frank asks Ycidra to allow him to take the quilt, which she agrees to once she sees how important it is to her brother.

As the siblings find the place where they had seen the horses fighting and Frank digs the human remains from underneath the earth, Cee refuses to look away, steading herself in order not to cringe and not to close her eyes. When they take the bones and skull to the sweet bay tree and Frank once again starts to dig, the following event takes place: "'Who's that?' Cee pointed across the water. 'Where?' Frank turned to see. 'I don't see anybody.' 'He's gone now, I guess.' But she was not sure. It looked to her like a small man in a funny suit swinging a watch chain. And grinning" (*Home* 144).

As we know, the figure that Ycidra sees is the zoot-suited ghost that had previously appeared to Frank on a few occasions. The fact that the same apparition is seen by the two Money siblings on distinct moments reinforces the notion of the ghost as a rememory, hovering in the landscape as a physical presence able to produce affective sensory experiences. Rogers believes that narrative can articulate the affect of the past that remains, drawing from the information that it provides. In her understanding, when these tales enter the affective circuits of the present, they have the potential to disrupt dominant structures of feelings, including those connected to cultures of patriarchy, heteronormativity, and white supremacy. When Frank and Cee offer Jerome's father a dignified burial, reclaiming and resisting the erasure of black history and identity, and the zoot-suited ghost smiles in approval, I believe that the affect circuits of both characters and readers are altered. The black characters who had been disrespected at death are now honored. Frank is now able to face his trauma and rebuild his life. Cee has changed and now has a purpose to find. Like the sweet bay tree, the siblings are resilient and strong, "*Hurt down the middle/But alive and well*" (Home 147, emphasis in the original). And the reader has come to the end of a fairy tale, with the task of unraveling which lessons were transmitted by the narrative. Possibly (and hopefully) moved, the reader now has the decision of what to make with the affect created by the encounter with the novel.

Conclusion

In chapter one, ideas related to how language itself is affective are presented. Therefore, when we encounter a literary work, we must consider the punctuation, style and vocabulary used and the effects that they might produce on the readers. It is clear then that the title of a novel is also carefully considered and chosen in order to provoke certain sensations and thoughts. Thus, we need to think of the titles *A Mercy* and *Home* and the affects that they generate once we reach the ending of the books.

A Mercy is a novel full of pain, hardships and intentions which are incorrectly interpreted. The colonial hierarchy in the relationships lead characters to suffer in social positions which are subjugated and abused. This abuse can be related to cultures that are disavowed and disrespected and to bodies that are tortured and sexually assaulted. Attempts to protect others are controversial, as they inevitably involve some sort of pain in their proposition of a less horrible choice. Examples of this are the case of Floren's mother asking Jacob Vaark to take the girl with him and Widow Ealing wounding her daughter in order to prove that she is not a demon. As Floren's mother summarizes, there can be no real protection—only difference in the form of less inhumane life conditions.

Nevertheless, amidst all the pain and horror of a social and economic system that is ruthless and full of prejudice, there is still hope and chance for genuine connections. For a while, the Vaark farmstead presents the potential to constitute a site of healing. This is partially due to the isolated status that resembles some kind of Eden, with the inhabitants (with the exception of Jacob) having very little contact with the world outside of the farmstead. In a space that is only their own, Lina and Rebekka can act as friends as they work together tending to the animals and the crops. Florens can accept nurturing from Lina and Sorrow is relatively free to roam with Twin as her companion. There is genuine affection between the women, and they lead lives which are relatively safe and content.

However, the greed and ambition that affect Jacob Vaark once he sees the wealth of D'Ortega disrupts the healing potential of the farmstead. Once the man is corrupted by investing in slavery, the Eden also falls apart, with physical disease spreading through the property and implicating on the death of Jacob and on the dismantling of the relationships between the women. With the demise of Jacob, the changes in Rebekka's actions and the announcement of Floren's sale, we can conclude that the ending of the novel is not a "happy" one. However, we are still left with the title *A Mercy* to examine.

Although there is much pain and suffering in the book, the positive affect that the characters have on one another is still central to the novel. Even amidst a colonial system that differentiates and separates people, there is still compassion offered to people of different ethnicities, races, social positions, and nationalities. Mercy is presented in many different forms: when Jacob Vaark accepts a variety of orphans under his care, when a Native American woman decides to become a maternal figure for a young black child, when a teenager accused of witchcraft saves the life of another wrongly accused girl, when a blacksmith decides to raise an orphaned little boy. All of these characters are flawed, and they often commit acts that we can judge as reprehensible, but at other times they show mercy and they help and save their fellow humans.

Individualist approaches to improvement in health and life are never sufficient to change whole societies or political systems, of course. Nonetheless, as we have this encounter with a novel where people's actions, their teachings and, most importantly, their acts of mercy have such profound impact on the lives of others, there is a sense of empowerment. Perhaps we cannot change an entire society all at once, but we can improve the lives of the people around us. I think of my position as a teacher for teenagers. Many times, they come talk to me—and these conversations are often not about English grammar or vocabulary. A lot of times, these kids want to feel heard, want advice, want affection, want to feel *seen*. There can be mercy and

there can be positive affect in listening to their stories, giving suggestions, offering hugs. There is definitely mercy and positive affect when they notice that I am having a difficult day and offer me little notes or candy. As we encounter the actions of compassion and the profound affect that they have on the characters in the novel, we can ask ourselves: what are the mercies that we can perform in our daily lives? What do we learn from the specific corporalities in the book that can improve the way we understand and act in regard to history and racial relations?

Home examines the damaging effects of trauma and the disruption that they cause on the life of a person. Frank Money experiences traumatic events in their most classic definition: war violence that leads to deaths, nightmares and flashbacks. However, Frank is also the survivor of insidious trauma, being subjugated to racism and to the violence derived from segregation and neglect. The novel also focuses on the therapeutic engagement with trauma, as Frank is given the opportunity to narrate his story, acknowledging and working through the shattering events that he has experienced throughout his life.

Much like the characters in *A Mercy*, Frank and Ycidra encounter acts of compassion that are vital to their survival and to the development of resilience and wisdom. Throughout his journey back to Lotus, Frank is aided by several different characters who offer him food, shelter, clothes, and advice. The people that he meets also help him reflect on the kind of man that he wishes to become, teaching and making him reflect on bravery, compassion, patience, and resilience. As Money assumes more and more agency, he becomes less haunted by past traumas.

Ycidra is nurtured back to health by the community of women in Lotus, who refuse to pity themselves and work hard, believing in their own strength and resilience. In fact, it is quite interesting to observe how similar the knowledge presented by Floren's mother and eventually developed by the girl herself is to the knowledge taught Ycidra by the women in Lotus. Floren's mother proclaims that giving dominion of oneself to another is a wicked thing, thus believing that a person should be responsible for themselves. By the end of her tale, Florens sees herself

as someone with hard soles, someone who is free, despite an enslaved status. Miss Ethel remarks that no one is obliged to save your but yourself, highlighting to Ycidra that she is free and that she cannot let others decide who she is. The women are centuries apart, but these similarities in their speeches can make us believe that the words that the Florens (and presumably, her mother) offered to the wind were indeed transmitted to other generations as valuable lessons and wisdom.

By the end of the novel, both Frank and Ycidra are like the bay tree, hurt right down the middle, but alive and well. The siblings have acknowledged their pain and have learned about resilience. They have paid homage to a man who was killed as a joke to white supremacists and have received the approval of the ghost in the zoot suit, thus altering their affect circuits. The two characters are now ready to rebuild their lives as survivors who are healing. Therefore, we can conclude that the title *Home* refers to this community that actually constitutes a healing site through the genuine connections offered by its inhabitants.

The consolidation of a community seems to indeed be the key to the healing that is hinted at in *A Mercy* and that consolidates itself in *Home*. In addition to the individual acts of mercy that help people and alter their lives, we have a whole town that is ready to aid anyone who needs protection from possibly corrupted and prejudiced institutions such as the police. Through caring and offering things such as dignified burials, the characters and community in *Home* seem to promote rememory, articulating the affect of the past that remains and disrupting dominant structures of feelings connected to cultures of patriarchy and white supremacy. As we finish the novel, we have the sensation that the siblings and the small town of Lotus are triumphant. It is a bittersweet ending, of course, but it feels incredibly hopeful. As mentioned in chapter one, hope is seen by Sedgwick as possibly fracturing and traumatic. Nevertheless, it is among the energies by which a reader organizes that which they encounter from a reparative reading position. Reading with hope allows us to deny inevitability, comprehending that the

past could have happened differently and that the future may differ from the present (Sedgwick's *Paranoid* 146).

Just as Frank Money first has to revisit the events and places that have shaped his life before he can find a certain sense of serenity and happiness, Morrison also revisits distinct geographical spaces and moments in time before presenting to her readers endings that can be considered more bittersweet or even hopeful. Thus, there is a careful reexamination of the past and the creation of affective flights that move readers to reflection and action.

I have chosen the word hope to think of the endings of *A Mercy* and *Home*. As I have quoted before, Sedgwick believes that hope can be present in reparative modes of reading, and I have an anecdote on that. As previously mentioned, I read both *The Bluest Eye* and *Home* with fellow students in classes I taught for my internship. As we were finishing the latter, a lot of the students commented on how they kept waiting for something horrible to happen every time someone offered Frank any kind of help on his journey to rescue Ycidra. It caught my attention because that can both be connected to the terrible events that take place in *The Bluest Eye* and to our paranoid mode of reading. We expect despair; thus, we do not know what to do when presented with hope.

As I have argued in this thesis, I believe that when Morrison wrote *A Mercy* and *Home*, she was putting in practice a pedagogy of healing. In those two novels, we witness the suffering of characters, but also their resilience, their growth and their survival. We see how connection, culture and community save them. As discussed in chapter one, Ahern believes that our critical practice should follow the ethical imperative of being open to the pain, the fear and the joy of literary texts, believing in the transformative potential of the engagement between reader and novel (17). Thus, if we approach Morrison's writing through a reparative reading, engaging with the pedagogy of healing that we can find in her ouevre, we are indeed *moved*, not only by the pain, but also by the affective flights of love, hope, and community.

As previously mentioned, someone who receives an affect has to do something with it, projecting it outwards and/or introjecting it. If we approach Morrison's texts through reparative lenses, open to their connection-making promise, I believe that we are indeed affected and that we will project that affect into the world. In relation to the introjection, I would like to believe that reading *A Mercy*, *Home* and other titles by Morrison has made me more aware to the importance of communities, more able to acknowledge multiplicities and more capable of respecting difference. As to the outward projection of the immense affect that my encounter with Toni Morrison created, I present this dissertation, the product of the reflections of someone who has felt deeply moved by Morrison's writings.

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