

GOTHIC TROPES IN TONI MORRISON'S *HOME*: THE SCIENTIST-VILLAIN FIGURE AND THE MAIDEN IN DISTRESS

Manuela López Ramírez
IES Alto Palancia, Segorbe, Castellón

RESUMEN

Toni Morrison recurre a tropos góticos para tratar la relación de la víctima y el victimizador entre las figuras góticas del científico villano y la doncella inocente y vulnerable, que simboliza la opresión racial del sistema público de sanidad americano, así como el desprecio y la baja autoestima que la sociedad racista inculca en los individuos negros. Morrison desvela los procedimientos eugenésicos de doctores blancos en mujeres negras, que fueron objeto de experimentación sin su consentimiento. A la perspectiva inhumana eugenésica hacia los “indeseables” afro-americanos, ella contrapone su lucha por mantener su humanidad y conseguir una identidad plena en un mundo occidental patriarcal, dominado por blancos, lleno de violencia y de horrores góticos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Morrison, género gótico, negro, científico-villano, doncella.

ABSTRACT

Toni Morrison resorts to Gothic tropes to depict the victim-victimizer relationship between the Gothic scientist-villain figure and the vulnerable innocent maiden, who epitomizes the racial oppression of the U.S. Public Health System, as well as the self-loathing and low self-esteem the racist society instills in black individuals. Morrison unveils the eugenic procedures of white doctors on black women, who were experimented on without their consent. To the eugenicists' inhumane approach to “undesirable” African Americans, she opposes their struggle to keep their humanity and achieve wholeness in a white-dominated patriarchal Western world full of violence and Gothic horrors.

KEY WORDS: Morrison, Gothic genre, black, scientist-villain, maiden.

[...] the mad scientist [of the Gothic] is our dark double who reveals our current deep suspicion that all motives, including our own and especially any that lay claim to aesthetic detachment, disinterest, or scientific objectivity, are dark and sinister, weighted with power, Oedipal strife, propelled by self-interest [...] the dream of using art or even theory to deconstruct the world and remake it in a better form too often turns into a Frankensteinian nightmare. MAGGIE KILGOUR, “Dr. Frankenstein Meets Dr. Freud”.



In her novel *Home*, Toni Morrison uses Gothic tropes to expose, deconstruct and contest the master-narrative of racial oppression in which African Americans are defined as sub-humans, because the Gothic, as Teresa Goddu argues, “has served as a useful mode in which to resurrect and resist America’s racial history” (1997: 152). Morrison deploys Gothic images to explore the unspeakable experiences of black individuals in the Western patriarchal order, as well as to question and reverse the rationalist discourse that enforces and legitimizes racism and discrimination against blacks. As Kim Hyejin contends,

Gothic strategies allow writers from the repressed class, race, or gender to transgress against the main discourse [...]. In this sense, the Gothic opens a space not only to articulate the broken voice of suffering and pain, but also to produce a counter-hegemonic discourse. (2007: 3)

Morrison’s narrative shows horrors that have their source in the repressed factual and historical past. In Gothic overtones, she unmasks the rationalized world of eugenics that defines blacks as inferior. Morrison deploys Gothic conventions to describe the atrocious practices of the U.S. Public Health System, which has allowed appalling regular medical experimentation on vulnerable individuals, such as African Americans. *Home* tackles the harrowing truth about these experiments, and “like all gothic, it haltingly brings forward the underside, the Otherness, of the narratives of national self-construction” (Savoy 1998: 18).

In her most recent novel, Morrison revisits two central characters of the Gothic genre, the scientist-villain and the maiden in distress. The Gothic villain, who lies often at the center of the plot, has been depicted as “the persecuting principle of damnation”, while the innocent damsel is regarded as “the persecuted principle of salvation” (Fiedler 1966: 128). Both of them, victimizer and victim, are the two sides of a binary complex personality. Morrison’s books are full of young women oppressed in a white racialized society, who struggle to attain self-definition, albeit there are not many scientists. In *Beloved*, Morrison had already dealt with a true villain, schoolteacher, showing her concern with the ethical purpose of science and unraveling questionable facets of the scientist’s quest for truth. Through the Gothic, Morrison reveals the assumptions on which the scientific discourse is predicated and the abhorrent aftermath of Western rationalism and science. By means of her scientist figures, Morrison explores the brutal ordeals science has put black individuals through in American history. The scientist-villain character derives from a romantic and Gothic symbol, the seeker after forbidden knowledge, associated with the legend of Prometheus and Goethe’s Faust, who makes a pact with the Devil, exchanging his soul for unlimited knowledge: “Faust challenges the limitations set upon experience not in the name of pleasure but of knowledge; he seeks not to taste life without restraint but to control it fully; and his essential crime [...] is [...] the Satanic bargain: to sell one’s soul to the Devil” (Fiedler 1966: 133). In his Faustian sense of divine power, the scientist-villain cares more for science than for mankind, subordinating human beings to his scientific pursuits, thus transgressing all



moral boundaries: “When the scientist works against rather than for mankind he becomes a demon” (McPherson 1987: 221-222).

In *Beloved*, Morrison discloses how science provided the objective grounds to justify racism and the lucrative slave trade. The slaveholder, school-teacher, as the representative of the scientific project, systematically documents measurements of the Sweet Home slaves with the purpose of substantiating “scientifically” their inferiority and animal-like condition. Hence, Morrison unveils the most controversial aspects of Western science, the use of reason and empirical observation to validate the institution of slavery. Nevertheless, in *Home*, the scientist-villain figure is approached from a different perspective. Morrison writes about the 50s, a period of racial violence in American history, the “time of the McCarthy hearings and a lot of medical apartheid, the license of [eugenic practitioners] preying on black women, the syphilis trials on black men” (Shea 2012: online). Through Dr. Beau, Morrison delves into eugenics medical experimentation on Afro-Americans, which was a common practice in American science history until and throughout the 20th century. Clinical research was conducted consistently on vulnerable groups, such as children, the poor, the institutionalized, etc. Blacks were involved in especially dangerous inhumane medical trials since, among other reasons, they were considered inferior to whites and their cheap workhorses; whites had to be shielded from perilous experimental procedures; blacks did not have rights as research subjects: their consent was not required or were easily experimented on without it.

Eugenics endorses the improvement of the genetic quality of society’s gene pool by promoting the reproduction of people with desired traits (positive eugenics) and reducing that of those individuals with undesired traits (negative eugenics). Eugenacists believed that social inequality was the result of evolution and the expression of the natural order¹. Eugenics, as the science of “race improvement” (called “racial hygiene” in Germany), was originally developed by Francis Galton, who applied Darwin’s theory of evolution to humans. He postulated that not only human physical features are heritable, but also intellectual ones. Medical experimentation on black people has been the outcome of scientists’ racist cre-
dence and ambition. Some of the clinical treatments eugenacists implemented had therapeutic purposes, but others were performed for the advancement of science itself, as in the Tuskegee syphilis experiment.²The predominantly negative American eugenics program, disguised as “respectable” science, intended to eliminate “genetically unfit” citizens, fostering laws to promote compulsory sterilization and

¹ Biologists like Charles White stated that blacks and whites were different species because of their different genetic and inherited skull sizes and sex organs. George Cuvier sustained that the black race was the most degraded of all human races.

² This clinical study was conducted between 1932 and 1972 to investigate the natural progression of untreated syphilis. Rural black men were deceived into believing that they were receiving free health care from the US government.



support anti-miscegenation.³In the first half of the 20th century, forced sterilization programs, which aimed at debarring the reproduction of those “carriers of genetic defects”, were conducted in 31 American states (Joseph 2005: 178)⁴:

America has always viewed unregulated Black reproduction as dangerous. For three centuries, Black mothers have been thought to pass down to their offspring the traits that marked them as inferior to any white person. Along with this biological impairment, it is believed that Black mothers transfer a deviant lifestyle to their children that dooms each succeeding generation to a life of poverty, delinquency, and despair. A persistent objective of American social policy has been to monitor and restrain this corrupting tendency of Black motherhood. (Roberts 1997: 8)

On account of those programs, thousands of Americans were sterilized. From 1958-1974, the North Carolina eugenics program targeted black women. Coercive sterilization was systematically used to control welfare spending on African American females on the grounds of racial stereotypes, which portrayed them as having unleashed sexual drives, ergo, an unusually prolific breeding⁵: “During the 1960s and 1970s [...] state legislators considered a rash of punitive sterilization bills aimed at the growing number of blacks receiving public assistance” (Roberts 2000: online). Paradoxically enough, black women’s procreative potential was, under slavery, their most precious attribute. Eugenics’ success is predicated on the fact that people believed it to be based on real science, and not on racism, prejudice or white supremacy.

Dr. Beauregard Scott, who everybody calls Dr. Beau, “is more than a doctor; he is a scientist and conducts very important experiments” (60)⁶. As Robert Walton says about Victor Frankenstein, he has the capacity for “penetration into the causes of things” (Shelley 1990: 28). Dr. Beau is a practitioner of eugenics⁷. When one day Cee entered his office, she had a look at the medical books on the crowded shelves and saw several paramount eugenic titles: *Out of the Night*, written by Hermann Muller, a famous American geneticist and proponent of eugenics; *The Passing of the Great Race*, American eugenicist Madison Grant’s book of scientific racism, where he expounds a theory of “Nordic superiority” and advocates for a strong eugenics program; and *Heredity, Race and Society*, written by a prominent

³ It is estimated that around 70,000 people were sterilized against their will between 1900-1970, even though it is impossible to know the exact quantity because many records were incomplete or not kept (Black 2003: 398).

⁴ As Jay Joseph points out, “eugenic sterilization was legally sanctioned in the USA long before the Nazi sterilization law of 1933” (2005: 178).

⁵ Simone Caron writes that there is evidence that black females on welfare struggled to find doctors who would deliver their babies without consenting to sterilization, and 94 per cent of them supported the compulsory sterilization of mothers on welfare with three illegitimate children (2008: 213, 211).

⁶ Toni Morrison (2012). *Home*. London: Chatto & Windus (all subsequent quotations will be identified by the page number included in parentheses in the text).

⁷ According to Bob Minzeshelmer, Dr. Beau’s unethical surgical operations are inspired by Harriet Washington’s book, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans From Colonial Times to the Present* (2012: online).



geneticist and evolutionary biologist Theodosius Dobzhansky, who was among the signatories of a eugenics manifesto in 1939. Cee can only wonder about the physician's knowledge and feels small. Ironically, she promises herself that "she would find time to read more and understand "eugenics" (65). Dr. Beau's eugenic beliefs are linked to the forced sterilizations many black women have undergone since the onset of slavery, practices which have persisted in recent years. His character may be drawn from Dr. William Beaumont, (with similar surnames), the father of American physiology, who asserted the importance of experimental treatments and is known for his 10-year insensitive research on a man with gastric fistula and Dr. Marion Sims, touted as the American founding father of gynecology by reason of the major scientific breakthroughs he achieved conducting surgical procedures on powerless female slaves (who could not give voluntarily consent) without anesthesia in order to find a cure for a terrible disease, vesicovaginal fistula. Slave owners sent black slaves to Dr. Sims so that he might restore their full reproductive capability. As Marie Schwartz claims, "Surgeons worked with slaveholders to maintain the economic definition and worth of black women in the South, a strategy that made southern medicine distinctive" (2006: 229). Dr. Sims won fame and fortune through his polemical experimentation because his perfected techniques were later used to cure wealthy white females with the help of anesthesia. Dr. Sims shares with Dr. Beau the racialized context of his research. They systematically used "violent" control over black women's sexual or reproductive activity in the medical field. Both doctors "acquired" black females, who became silent medical subjects on whom to experiment at will. Dr. Sims upheld the foundations of the southern slave system and Dr. Beau vindicates Afro-American females' inferior condition. Through his clinical trials, Morrison discloses how "In both moments of reproductive technologies, Dr. Sims' experiments and eugenic sterilization respectively, black women have not been afforded the privilege to negotiate rights' (Sampson 2012: 96).

Like schoolteacher in *Beloved*, Dr. Beau is an evil character, as his racial research proves. He has struck an alliance with the devil when he trespasses the ethical boundaries of science, venturing into the maternal body and its related secrets of birth and sexuality. In fact, both scientists personify the disembodied perspective of the scientific discourse, linked to the Law-of-the-Father, as "it is set against the maternal body" (Goldner 1999: online). In *Home*, Morrison also "limits the scope of the scientized world view to the minor white characters" (1999: online). Hence, to the "distanced and 'objective' view of science", she opposes a more "personal, morally-committed, and even passionate testimony that derives from [...] lived experience" (1999: online)⁸. Like the slaveholder, Dr. Beau, as the true impersonation of Gothic evil, "is very gentlemanly". When he first interviews Cee, she finds him welcoming, "a small man with lots of silver hair". Dr. Beau is extremely careful with his patients, respecting their privacy and donating money for funeral expenses. Schoolteacher's and Dr. Beau's soft descriptions alike clash with their cruel scientific

⁸ Ellen Goldner's words refer to *Beloved*.





approach to blacks. Hypocrisy is one of the most important features of the Gothic villain. Under his cordial appearance, Dr. Beau conceals his inherently evil nature, materialized in his ghastly eugenic experimentation.

While *Frankenstein* is “a horror story of maternity” (qtd. in Fleenor 1983: 83)⁹, *Home* is a horror story of “sterilization”. Dr. Beau is an ironic Frankensteinian figure, despite his wife’s denial, whose experiments go beyond moral and ethical boundaries. He does not create new life by bestowing “animation upon lifeless matter” and does not want to master the mysteries of forging new life. Conversely, whether voluntarily or accidentally, the monstrous actions of the Gothic scientist-villain end up stealing women’s capacity of creation. Dr. Sims and Dr. Beau alike are Frankensteinian scientists whose investigation, apparently, has the objective of improving the world by learning more about women’s physiology and how to cure sexually-related illnesses. However, the noble ends they may have cannot justify their heartless scientific research on the female black body, the suffering they cause, not even considering that, at the time, blacks were regarded as sub-humans. Dr. Beau’s laboratory, the Gothic secret room, symbolizes the Western patriarchal menace towards the black woman’s body, which is abhorrently performed on, and towards her sexuality. In Gothic fiction, as Cynthia Wolff notes, this recurrent situation, a young damsel threatened in a secret room by a villain, has overtly sexual implications, hinting at the innocent maiden’s metaphorical “rape”, key element in the early Gothic romance, which parallels the medical procedures the evil scientist carries out on her (1983: 209). As M.H. Miller says, Dr. Beau is “a eugenicist who likes to hire childless young black women in order to perform sexual experiments on them” (2012: online). The doctor actually operates on the young girl with his scalpel, the phallic symbol of penetration into the female body. Danger for the damsel is equated with “a specialized form of ‘inner space’” (1983: 209).

Home is a narrative of women victimization in a patriarchal society, reproducing its gender dynamics, the domination-subversion in the male-female relationship that singularizes Gothic narratives. As a tyrannical villain, Dr. Beau exerts his power over the helpless maiden, Cee, who falls victim to his experimentation, which leads to the violation of her physical integrity and complete dissolution of her self¹⁰. Morrison depicts the debasement and torture of the innocent woman by the heartless scientist-hero. As James Twitchell writes in *Dreadful Pleasures*, “The early gothic usually tells the story of a single and specific family romance run amok: ‘father’ has become monstrous to ‘daughter’ (qtd. in Gross 1989: 42). *Home* reflects the Oedipal dynamics of the “family romance”, as Freud calls it. Dr. Beau plays the father role and his bond with the vulnerable damsel, whose sexual identity is dislocated in the confrontation, is always of paternal dominance. Cee’s entrapment

⁹ Ellen Moers’ words.

¹⁰ Dr. Beau plays a vampiric role: he “feeds” on Cee, sucking her life. In *Home*, the Gothic vampire trope links to the social violence through which “undesirable” females are objectified and their subjectivity denied.

in the Gothic house, Dr. Beau's, expresses the Oedipal conflict that enmeshes the overbearing father-like figure and the female body itself. In the maiden-villain encounter, the Faustian physician manages to castrate the powerless woman. Like Radcliffean heroines, the damsel in distress is confined within the Gothic home, which is not only her prison, but it might become her tomb.

Morrison's version of the Gothic maiden epitomizes African Americans as victims of a dominant white Western patriarchal order. Her self-contempt and low self-worth stem from a fractured identity, sequel of the racial oppression she experiences in her harsh life. The black female is the most powerful "other", the alienated self, of the American Western culture and society. Cee emerges as the perfect victim, defenseless against the white doctor's statutory "rape". Morrison truly addresses "the terrors lurking for women within patriarchal social arrangements" (Williams 1995: 7)¹¹. As Juliann Fleenor argues, "At the center of the Gothic is the conflict over female identity" (1983: 25). Cee is portrayed as a young girl at odds with herself, her community and the society as a result of her self-disgust. She has troubled and confused insights into her own self. Questioning identity, and especially "the concept of self as monster—is associated with narratives of female experience" (Stein 1983: 123). As Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*, she "becomes the abject of the abject" (Hyejin 2007: 20). Cee, as the ultimate victim, shows some of the most distinctive traits of the early Gothic heroine who, as Syndy Conger writes, is "emotionally passive and intellectually ill-trained" (1983: 94). Due to her damaged personality, Cee displays a submissive behavior for most part of the story and, withal, she is ill-prepared for blacks' trials and tribulations. Unaware of the threatening forces that menace her life, Dr. Beau's fiendish intentions, Cee is deceived into believing that she is only going to be his assistant. The damsel in distress does not have control over her own fate.

The dysfunctional family is at the core of the Gothic novel and it is central to the maiden's shattered self. Cee shares other typical features with the Gothic damsel that are connected to her "abnormal" family: she is "young, orphaned, unloved, and lonely. She is shy and inexperienced [...] [who] sometimes she has (or has had) a wicked stepmother, a bad aunt, a demanding and selfish mother" (Nichols 1983: 32). In the postcolonial times, African Americans led really rough lives. Luther and Ida Money, Cee and her brother Frank's parents, are no exception. Like other black households, they are expelled from their home in Bandera County, Texas. They have to flee and move in with some relatives in Lotus, Georgia¹². Frank has always been haunted by recollections of their family's expulsion: "You could be inside, living in our 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" (9). The Moneys cannot look properly

¹¹ Ann Williams is talking about the successful 1960s Gothic formula.

¹² As Morrison claims about black citizens' exile: "It was a regular thing. I have an interesting book that looked at the counties that were "cleansed." A lot were in Texas. It was like the Palestinians. They'd just say, "Go", and if you didn't, you'd get killed. There was a migration—a forced migration" (Bollen 2013: online).



after their children because they work all day long. Their affection after toiling for long hours is “like a razor—sharp, short, and thin” (53). The Moneys have to leave their children, Frank and Cee, under the care of their grandparents, who neglect or even abuse them. Hence, Cee is well nigh raised like an orphan, bereft of female models. Her step-grandmother, Lenore, a wicked witch, exemplifies the loss of traditional moral values in the black community, which she manifests in the hateful treatment of her step-grandchildren, especially the little girl. Lenore envisages her granddaughter’s birth on the street as an omen, “a prelude to a sinful, worthless life” (44) and, repeatedly, undervalues and berates her, calling the black infant “gutter child”. Cee’s suffering under the care of her step-grandmother, her surrogate “mother”, parallels the Radcliffean orphans’ plight at the hands of their female protectors. Lenore instills self-hatred in the little black girl.

Home explores the Gothic theme of the brother-sister “incest”, whose specter hangs over the entire narrative, and its role in the annihilation of the heroine’s self. Cee experiences extreme devotion to the hero-“lover”, her own brother Frank. Despite Morrison’s choice of siblings, as an asexual relationship, the brother-sister bond is a reflection of their incapacity to find love and build a mature caring heterosexual relation inasmuch as their selves are extremely damaged¹³. As a child, Frank has to act out the adult role, assuming responsibility for his forlorn sister. He is an utterly idealized paternal figure, a surrogate father who provides the love and care she has not received from her parents. Being just a boy, Frank even protects her from a molester and, afterwards, consoles her with his healing hands, which are “like balm” (51). However, his sheltering suppresses Cee’s sensual energies, since he would keep all possible suitors away from her: “When Cee and a few other girls reached fourteen and started talking about boys, she was prevented from any real flirtation because of her big brother, Frank. The boys knew she was off-limits because of him” (47). When Frank leaves their hometown, Cee cannot live without him. It is as if she were “broken. Not broken up but broken down, down into her separate parts” (54). Cee’s overreliance on her brother is stressed in the capital letters of a note she writes to him: “Yours truly Your sister” (53). Notwithstanding his efforts, Frank does not truly succeed in taking care of Cee. Actually, his overzealous attention and tutelage shatter her already low self-confidence. The patriarchal family of the Gothic romance is at the root of the maiden’s woeful drama: Frank’s mollycoddling, her grandmother’s contempt, her grandfather’s passivity and the scientific pursuits of her Faustian “father” lead Cee to self-destruction. Thus, the patriarchal paradigm can only engender a dependent and forsaken female with a really poor self-esteem, who cannot cope with the trials of African Americans’ severe life.

¹³ In an interview with Christopher Bollen, Morrison says that “Another reason for *Home* is that I got very interested in the idea of when a man’s relationship with a woman is pure—unselfed, not fraught. If it’s his relationship with his mother or his girlfriend or his wife or his daughter, there’s always another layer there. The only relationship I thought that would be minus that would be a brother and a sister. It could be masculine and protective without the baggage of sexuality. So the sort of Hansel and Gretel aspect really fascinated me” (2013: online).



Because of her difficult upbringing, Cee is impressed by Dr. Beau's respectable neighborhood, his large two-story house with a church-neat lawn, a living room more beautiful than a movie theater, velvet furniture, a wife with soft musical voice who looked like "the queen of something who belonged in the movies" (60), etc. Along with "the beautiful house" and "the kind doctor", Cee loves her work and the wages, "never skipped or short as they sometimes were at Bobby's" (65). Sarah tells her that the doctor has two daughters with "cephalitis" (encephalitis) in a home (63). Ironically, Dr. Beau, who is interested in eugenics, has two daughters that are disabled. Cee believes that is why the physician is trying to help other people. She starts to feel admiration for him when she sees the poor people, especially women and girls, he treats, many more than the well-to-do ones. Dr. Beau, like Dr. Sims, seems to use destitute females for his medical procedures.

As an autocratic Gothic villain, Dr. Beau uses his position to encroach upon the rights of his servant, Cee. As slaveholders did before him, he rules her body and life, taking advantage of her benightedness and lack of self-regard. The Faustian physician apparently experiments on Cee without her informed consent, she may not even be aware of being performed on. Moreover, unlike Dr. Sims, who operated to cure vesicovaginal fistula patients, the medical procedures Dr. Beau conducts on the young black woman do not have any therapeutic intent. Its sole purpose is the advancement of gynecological research. Like Dr. Sims, who created the "Sims speculum"¹⁴, Dr. Beau makes improvements on the instruments he uses in his clinical trials. Sarah, his housekeeper, informs Cee that he invents things and tries to get patents for them. As his eugenic inclinations intimate, Cee's infertility may be the purpose and not just the outcome of the doctor's operations.¹⁵ In any case, she is his "guinea pig", an expendable "undesirable" female. Sarah's cutting of melons is a premonition of what the young female is going to experience at the hands of the Frankensteinian scientist, the dismemberment and amputation of her body, which mirrors the fragmented Black Self and the disruption of motherhood by the patriarchal system. The evil physician epitomizes the objectifying and dissection of the ethnic woman, whose body is colonized by patriarchy.

As in Gothic romances, the heroine is caught between the "demonic" lover, represented by Prince, whom she marries, and the chaste lover, her own brother and protector. Prince, whose true name is Principal, is a good-looking man from Atlanta. Nevertheless, he is just the opposite of prince charming in fairy tales. He only weds Cee to get her grandfather's car, and then he abandons her. On the other hand, she needs love and to flee from the horrors of her household. When Frank is in Lotus, Cee is off-limits and when he joins the army, she feels "adrift in the space where her brother had been, she had no defense" (48). She falls for the first man who

¹⁴ The Sims speculum, still commonly used in gynecology, is inserted into the vagina to dilate it for examination.

¹⁵ Dr. Beau's experimentation may have as an objective to prevent "unfit" females to become mothers. In a world where the social construct of womanhood is grounded in her reproductive abilities, white eugenicists assume the God-like power of controlling and deciding about female reproduction.





comes to town and does not look like a peasant. As Thelma, Cee's friend, comments, Prince is more like a "Frog", or as Cee calls him, a "rat". He is not the hero-lover she is looking for. The damsel in distress is finally freed from the evil villain by the rescuer-"lover", Frank, who defies the Gothic scientist to save her. He receives a letter with the words "She be dead" from the good-willed Sarah, who can see how Cee is dying at the hands of the Faustian doctor¹⁶. Frank has to return to rescue his sister once more. The brawl between the Gothic villain and the hero highlights Dr. Beau's cowardly condition and the Western cultural fear of the black male, questioning civility and white supremacy. The physician feels jeopardized when he sees Cee's brother, whom he immediately mistakes for a thief, exclaiming: "There's nothing to steal here!" (110). Thus, Dr. Beau believes in the Western stereotypical image of the black individual as a barbaric beast. Frank does not resort to violence when he faces the Faustian doctor. He stands calm and manly, contradicting the black stereotype. And yet, Dr. Beau threatens him with a gun. Frank feels proud because he finally manages to salvage Cee without the use of physical force. His heroic acts "overthrow" the patriarchal tyrant, freeing the wretched maiden.

Morrison does not reproduce entirely the early Gothic narrative pattern of escaping and getting caught by the villain. Nonetheless, she describes the damsel's flight from the menacing patriarchal figure. Through her brother's agency, Cee runs away from the Frankensteinian physician and, finally, starts a new life. Then Morrison recreates the classic Cinderella motif: the heroine, who has internalized self-loathing at the hands of her step-grandmother, awakens to ferret out her new identity with the help of the community. Cee has undergone a horrifying initiation rite, brimming with physical and sexual violence. The maiden in distress begins the transition from a subservient young female to a self-sufficient one. Her passage to a fuller womanhood is now unstoppable. Cee is reborn when Ethel and the black women of her community cure her deep physical wounds, as well as the psychological and emotional scars inflicted by the patriarchal system. Thereupon, she truly is on her quest for self-affirmation. In *Home*, Morrison refuses again "to accept isolationism and instead upholding community" (Britton 1995: 8).

By means of Dr. Beau, Morrison criticizes Western science, which she sets against her black ancestors' healing powers. She contrasts the wicked scientist's hideous patriarchal medical procedures without therapeutic objectives to the soothing and curing of the self and body the black females of the community engage in. These "seen-it-all eyes" women take "responsibility for their [Cee and Frank's] lives, and for whatever, whoever else needed them" (123). They have ancestral remedial properties that nurse Cee to life with root medicine. In their sense of community and ancient wisdom, these nurturing matriarchal figures know that the unfledged female suffers not only from bodily injuries, but also

¹⁶ Sisterhood is a classic Gothic theme. Like Amy in *Beloved*, Thelma and Sarah help Cee. Sarah treats Cee with kindness and saves her when she calls Cee's brother. She does not know the real danger she is exposed to as a result of the scientist's research on the woman's womb (113).

from emotional and psychological trauma. They try to give a boost to Cee's low self-esteem, encouraging her to struggle for self-definition:

Look to yourself. You free. Nothing and nobody is obliged to save you but you. See 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. (126)

They aid Cee in becoming a self-reliant woman who "would never again need his [her brother's] hand over her eyes or his arms to stop her murmuring bones" (128). These healing agents symbolize women's revolt against the dominant patriarchal order. Theirs is a counter-narrative of female empowerment and communal solidarity.

Gothic stories depict the triumph of goodness and innocence over evil. The hero-rescuer defeats the wicked Faustian villain and the maiden circumvents the witch-step-grandmother. Cee is no longer the innocent and defenseless damsel in distress she used to be. During her curative process, she gains self-assertion and self-respect. Cee understands that it is not her school deprivation or her dumbness, as she believed, which makes her powerless. The matriarchs of her community are completely illiterate, and yet, they possess fortitude and acumen. Cee finally sees how her rugged upbringing has impeded her identity formation. She was categorized as a "gutter child", and "she had agreed with the label and believed herself worthless" (129). She has "to be the one who rescued her own self" (129). After Cee confesses her barrenness, Frank tries to assuage and comfort her, but she pushes his hand away and embraces her suffering. She is already cured from her physical scars and now she has to start healing her profound psychological wounds. Cee commences a quilt, which signifies her determination to stitch the dismembered parts of herself. Hence, patchwork, as a metaphorical image, connects with Dr. Frankenstein¹⁷. The young woman can now resist the patriarchal system that has ruled her life until then. Cee's *Bildungsroman* leads her out of the reach of wicked predacious villains, such as Dr. Beau.

As Louis Gross aptly contends, "Gothic narrative has always looked backward; the past is its beginning and end" (1989: 23). Gothic novels often disclose unspeakable crimes inherent in the structure of the Western patriarchal culture and society. In *Home*, in a cyclic return to the outset of the story, Morrison suggests the need to lay the haunting ghosts of the past to rest. She correlates blacks' healing with unmasking the disremembered history of racial oppression and the necessity to pay homage to ancestors, who suffered the appalling consequences of slavery and its aftermath. To mend their split selves, the buried past must be unearthed, as repressed memories are at the core of personal and national trauma.

¹⁷ Ann Sonser claims, referring to *Beloved*, that both Morrison's and Shelley's texts are "reworked through culturally traditional feminine tropes of sewing and stitching, a form of 'self-fashioning'" (2001: 34).



When Frank and Cee were just little children, they witnessed a lurid situation, which has troubled them ever since. They saw white men interring a dead black male. At that time whites organized “men-treated-like-dog fights” (138) to the death between blacks. The inhumed man had been killed by his son so that he could save his own life. Brother and sister celebrate a ritual to entomb his bones in order to bestow him dignity and humanity, arranging them inside Cee’s quilt, their shroud, which is the emblem of her new identity reconstruction. The burial ceremony epitomizes the need to come to terms with the dreadful past. The siblings’ reconciliation with their traumatic memories exemplifies how African Americans’ subconscious has to be purged of the demons of the past.

Home unfolds sundry ways out of victimization: awareness and active constructive coping with real life; fellowship and sense of community, as the victims need support to overcome the victimized position; pacifist confrontation with threatening patriarchal forces, which delegitimizes them, bolstering the victims’ humanity; opposition of ancestral values to those of the dominant Western system; questioning and challenging of traditional gender and cultural roles; retrieval of the haunting past to grow up and achieve self-actualization. Conversely to the early Gothic romance, in *Home*, the heroine’s story of development and self-transformation surpasses the traditional socially-sanctioned female gender identity, the prevailing norms of femininity. The maiden’s rite of passage does not lead to conventional marriage and offspring. Cee and Frank can form a non-typical family and be part of a community, their true home. They can live their lives on their own terms. Those individuals eugenics brands as “unfit” can successfully conclude their journeys from trauma to empowerment. They can complete their metamorphosis from alienation and identity annihilation to wholeness.

In conclusion, in *Home*, Morrison deploys Gothic conventions, with their remarkable power to bring the unspeakable –“the overriding theme of every Gothic novel” (Booher 2001:125)– to light, to create an alternative narrative to that of the racist American history and culture, with a special focus on African Americans’ victimization by the U.S. Public Health System, thus reclaiming their past. Through the Gothic, Morrison allows “for the voice of the culturally repressed” to be heard “and hence act out a resistance to the dominant culture” (Martin 1998:130). She resurrects suppressed elements of national experience, eugenics medical experimentation. Morrison depicts harrowing images of Gothic villainry, the heartless scientist figure, and the threat he imposes on the integrity of the self and body of the easily assailable black woman, his true victim.

Morrison juxtaposes Dr. Beau’s barbaric cold scientific discourse haunted by the ghost of racism against Cee’s moving and humane story, which unveils the profoundly fragmented black female self. In the postcolonial era, when Afro-Americans underwent acutely harsh material conditions, the innocent vulnerable maiden –a representative of African Americans–, who has internalized self-hatred due to deprivation of parental love and care, is easily preyed on. Morrison unravels how “social damaged” identities’ are the “result of their continuous exposure to and internalization of the insidiously colonizing, denigrating rhetoric of the hegemonic group” (Hwangbo 2004: 12). In the Western white-dominated society, the damsel’s



alienation is that of the common black female, whose identity boundaries are about to get disintegrated. In her individuation process, the young woman is leaving behind her childhood and venturing into adulthood. The black community guides Cee to self-consciousness, which will allow her to cope with and subvert the oppressive white-dominant patriarchal paradigm. As Sonser claims about Hester in *The Scarlet Letter*, Cee is “a subject in process whose own meanings and self-definitions emerge through disruptions to the symbolic or paternal order” (2001: 23). Thus, to the patriarchal master narrative, Morrison opposes the female “counter story” that can unsettle the cumulative history of subjugation and help them to extricate themselves from the trap of victimization” (Hwangbo 2004: 12). Morrison shocks her readers into an awareness of blacks’ victimization and, withal, she provides us with a radical redefinition of the African Americans’ identity and experience.

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