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Memory

In our psychology-centered culture with its stress on the individual, self-definition is the beginning and the end of the work of our lives, and our identity is the culmination of a lifetime of learning about and remembering from whence we came in relationship with experience. Discussions of identification and heritage often neglect the importance of the many factors that contribute to identity, focusing instead on genetics and environment. I would argue, like many others, that we grow to understand ourselves in a multitude of contexts, of which our genetic history and environment are a part, but which also include inherited realities and memories that are life-defining truths. Zora Neale Hurston writes that "like the dead-seeming cold rocks, I have memories within that came out of the material that went to make me" (Site of Memory, 111). Like ages of geological history traced in single rocks, within each of us is a multitude of physical, emotional and social memories that shaped the lives of those that preceded us, and will continue to shape our own lives and those of our descendants.

These memories are important, even crucial, to any discussion of identity. They must be considered in understanding our own individual realities as well as in examining our social interactions within our communities. This two-fold consideration is embodied in the term *collective memory*; they are collected generationally throughout history and are also collectively shared by the many members of society who have accumulated similar memories. I want to work through what these memories mean to us by focusing on the way that we communicate them and come

into relationship with them throughout our lives, and then to examine the way that they are dealt with in three of Toni Morrison's novels.

Memories are important to our concepts of ourselves, so to continue this discussion it is necessary to define the ways that memories define and accent our perceptions of reality. As I see it, there are three types of memories: sense memories, cultural memories, and individually experienced memories. The last of these is the easiest understood, memories of events that we actually lived through, which we can recall and locate in our past. These contribute to our definitions of self because they are part of our life work and experience. Sense memories provoke us to respond to things as whole persons. For example, they can be music and songs that evoke emotional response to a memory of a past experience or environment. Moreover, these memories express or recall something that is lacking in language. Sense memories can be the sounds of a frequented location from your childhood, or the smell of the food that grandma always cooked—memories that cause all of your person to respond. The third, and perhaps most complex type of memories are cultural memories. These are memories which dominate our personal memories, but of which we have no direct recollection. An example of a cultural memory is slavery. For many black Americans, memories of slavery define their individual reality, and the experiences of their foremothers and fathers become their own. In these instances, there is no sense of the individual without the cultural collective memory.

Unlike the textbook and hands-on learning that we accomplish throughout our schooling, we acquire historical truths and memorable experiences from the beginnings of our lives. These multi-layered memories are created, shared and

communicated by forms of oral culture: songs, nursery rhymes, music, stories, fables, and myths. They are passed down from parent to child, shared and understood by children as they grow, and perpetuated by them to the next generation. When we recognize the reality of collective memories as more than merely perceived, but instead as social truths that are communicated by language, we realize that they are crucial to our individual identities and ideas about the world around us. In an article in the New York Times, James Baldwin points out that “language is the most vivid and crucial to identity: it reveals the private identity and connects one with, or divorces one from, the larger, public, or communal identity.”

An understanding of the breadth and importance of oral culture is necessary to this discussion not only because it perpetuates collective memories, but also because it is the root for all communication in our societies. Walter Ong, an authority on orality and literacy, has observed that, “Human beings in primary oral cultures, those untouched by writing in any form, learn a great deal and possess and practice great wisdom—but they do not ‘study’”(Ong, 9). This is a key point here because it reveals the fact that wisdom and knowing are possible outside the confines of written language. Thus, collective memories, which we understand and accept as part of our identity, carry a reality in our lives that is as important as any scientific, pragmatic knowledge.

The introduction of written language changes many aspects of our modern world, especially ways of knowing. While these memories are perpetuated within the dynamic richness of oral communication, written texts threaten to isolate the raw messages from their multi-dimensional meanings. In order to preserve the meanings

that oral language is capable of conveying, written language attempts to represent spoken language in sentence structure, attempts at dialect, and recreations of thought patterns.

The cultural presence within literature acknowledges spoken language as its source. The potential to reformulate story, not into constituent patterns but into frames that reconstruct more ancient patterns of memory and telling—mythologies—is of interpretive significance. Texts by black women writers privilege an older understanding of literature. (Holloway, 89)

Also of significance are the ways in which written language attempts to convey the tones accessible in the transmissions by oral culture. Spoken words have the ability to carry with them different meanings and significance when encased by different rhythms, voices, and tones. These musical qualities of oral language distinguish not only different cultures and ethnicities, but also attitudes and demeanor. Ong further asserts that “written texts all have to be related somehow directly or indirectly to the world of sound, the natural habitat of language, to yield their meaning. ‘Reading a text means converting it to sound, aloud or in the imagination’”(Ong, 8). This is of utmost importance for writers concerned with relating not only oral language, but also the messages that oral language has a tendency to convey, especially memories. Morrison prioritizes these messages in her writing, and strives for her works “to be both print and oral literature, to combine the two aspects so that the stories can be read in silence, of course, but one should be able to hear them as well. It should try deliberately to make you stand up and feel

something profoundly.” So, “to make the story appear oral, meandering, effortless, spoken –to have the reader feel the narrator without identifying the narrator, or hearing her knock about, and to have the reader work with the author in the construction of the book—is what’s important” (Rootedness, 341).

As Karla Holloway notes in Moorings and Metaphors, “Black women writers nurture the spoken word within their texts.” She goes on to say that “black women carry the voice of the mother—they are the progenitors . . . women as carriers of the voice, carry wisdom—mother wit.” For many black women authors concerned with identity, fiction is a medium of knowing and conveying that knowledge that is inherited and shared among generations. It follows then, that they must find a way to communicate memories that are perpetuated by oral culture within the confines of written language.

Toni Morrison addresses the balance between oral and written cultures in this way:

You know they straightened out the Mississippi River in some places . . . Occasionally the river floods these places. ‘Floods’ is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding, it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be . . . writers are like that: remembering where we were, what valley we ran through, what the banks were like, the light that was there and the route back to our original place. It is emotional memory . . . and a rush of imagination is our flooding. (Site of Memory, 119)

Memories are important for Morrison, and within this comment she touches on many aspects of memory which she employs in her writing. Using the analogy of the Mississippi River, she emphasizes that certain memories are more important to the meaning of our lives. These are the places to which the river returns and floods. These flood sites are the places where we find our identity, but too often in our lives circumstances have also straightened us out, and cut us off from those memories. Thus, our periodic moments of flooding must be seized and appreciated, we must look at the emerging memories not as a burden but as quenching of thirst, and use our imaginations to return to those places to discover their importance in our lives.

For Toni Morrison, writing is a process of imaginatively enhancing the memories that contribute to define her life. "First of all, I must trust my own recollections. I must also depend on the recollections of others. Thus memory weighs heavily on what I write, in how I begin and in what I find to be significant." She goes on to refer to Zora Neale Hurston's "memories within" from the passage quoted earlier: "These 'memories within' are the subsoil of my work. But memories and recollections won't give me total access to the unwritten interior life of these people. Only the act of imagination can help me" (Site of Memory, 111). So, memories are not enough. While they are indispensable and necessary, imagination is the tool which can open the memories to the possibilities of faith, grace, and love.

Morrison relies on memories not only as a medium through which to relate, but also as a starting point and source of inspiration.

It's a kind of literary archeology: on the basis of some information and a little bit of guesswork you journey to a site to see what

remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply. What makes it fiction is the nature of the imaginative act, my reliance on the image—on the remains—in addition to recollection, to yield up a kind of truth. By image, of course, I don't mean symbol; I simply mean picture and the feelings that accompany that picture (Site of Memory, 112).

Here, Morrison communicates what she attempts to accomplish with memories. In a way, she is compiling the three types of memories I distinguished earlier into one complete experience. The cultural memory is the beginning, which translates into a personal recollection—or picture—which evokes the response of the whole person as sense memories do. Ultimately the memories, in addition to the imaginative act, are the beginning and the truth from which Morrison works to build the novel. Most importantly, they belong to people. Toni Morrison's work relies on all of these things, but the characters in her novels must relate to the people who read about them, and vice versa. The interaction between these two is crucial to the success of the novel and the ideas expressed within it.

Music

Music is an ideal mode of communication for Toni Morrison because it is both an aspect of oral culture as well as a part of our collective memory. While Morrison does not always employ music in its traditional understanding, she recognizes that, like the memories which she works with in her fiction, musical melodies and refrains are passed down generationally throughout history and they are culturally shared in

ways that language is not. "One of the freedoms Toni Morrison claims in her novels is to move beyond language, even while working through it, to incorporate significance beyond the denotation of words, to render experience and emotion, for example, as musicians do" (Voices, 7). Morrison finds a balance between the melodic qualities of sounds, the rhythms of words and the repetition of refrains to evoke recognition and participation from her readers.

Recursive structures [like refrains] accomplish a blend between the figurative processes that are reflective (mirror-like) and symbolic processes whose depth and resonance make them reflexive. The combined symbolic-figurative process results in texts that are at once emblematic of the culture that describe as well as interpretive of this culture. (Holloway, 55)

Morrison utilizes music in her writing to give her readers access to communities who do not write. "My sense of the novel is that it has always functioned for the class or group that wrote it" (Rootedness, 340). She recognizes that the novel must appeal to a truth for a group of people, and in her novels these are African Americans. This is not to suggest that Morrison's novels are not applicable for all of us, just that her works are about blacks, and "music plays a fundamental role in the history of black people" (hooks and West, 38). Music is the medium that Morrison uses to create a common ground for her fictional characters and her readers (both black and white), for the classes of characters within her novels, and herself with her own recollections. The nature of music, as a component of our memories but also as something which is accessible to everyone, no matter what their language, makes it

an appropriate and useful tool in fiction. Music becomes the medium through which traditionally orally communicated memories and experiences are translated into written language.

“Morrison also sings in her novels . . . Images of music pervade her work, but also does a musical quality of language, sound, and rhythm that penetrate and radiate in every novel” (Voices, 8). Music functions as an important and necessary factor in each of the novels that I have chosen to discuss. However, I think that Morrison uses music in different ways to emphasize and accentuate the memories which serve as vehicles within each story. Song of Solomon is primarily about Milkman’s quest for identity through heritage, and Morrison repeats familiar refrains to allude to the connectedness of family history. The song is the key to Milkman’s discoveries, but it is also present at each of the defining moments of his life—making music integral to both his families’ memory and his own memory when all is learned and done. As Song of Solomon is musically individualistic, Beloved’s music is shared both within the family and by the community. Songs communicate Sethe’s “rememories”, and the words and sentences shared by her and her daughters are lyrical. Music is an initiation into the community, it is a common bond amongst the members of the community, and the absence of music is a sign that something is terribly wrong. The difference between Song of Solomon and Beloved, and Jazz is that in Jazz Morrison uses music as a mold or framework by which she models the text. Morrison has commented extensively on the influence of music, especially jazz music, on her writing, so it follows that a novel named Jazz would draw upon that genre of music most heavily. And so it does. Morrison provides a framework of a

story from which each character improvises their own section, remembering the melodies of their pasts, integrating it into their present lives, and weaving them together to contribute to the song.

In her literature, it is important to recognize that Morrison considers her reader as much a part of her work as are the characters which she creates, "What I really want is the intimacy in which the reader is under the impression that he isn't really reading this; that he is participating in it as he goes along. It's unfolding, and he's always two beats ahead of the characters and always right on target" (Site of Memory). This is important in all of the novels. For Song of Solomon, Milkman's discoveries of lineage, fatherhood and self follow along with the reader's, and Morrison's statements on the necessity of identity in relationship with family become as important to her reader as they are for her characters. Beloved's music is about the communal identity, the shared experiences of slavery and their implications on the people who experienced the horror and even those who did not. Music functions to instigate a memory (resulting in rememory) for the characters, as well as inspiring a memory for the reader of something which they never experienced. This brings the reader into such close relationship with not just the characters in the story, but even more so the story itself, or the experience which the memory recalls. Morrison is boldest in Jazz, where the narrator of the novel is the book itself. Because the book is written as jazz music, the reader of the novel participates as a musician, contributing his own improvisational strain to the original song which is the text. As each character has an opportunity to play and replay the story according to their own

memory and experience, the reader must put the pieces together to complete the story and the song.

Above all, it is my goal to show how Morrison uses music in her writing to illustrate and provide memories for the characters in her novels. I think that this is important because it is the usage of music and memory that give the reader an entrance into her fiction. They are key elements of the novels that I have chosen, as is the reader's participation in the work as it goes along.

The Novels

"[Hélène] Cixous writes in *The Laugh of the Medusa*, 'In women's speech, and in their writing, that element which never stops resonating, which, once we've been permeated by it, profoundly and imperceptibly touched by it, retains the power of moving us—that element is song,' first music from the first voice of love which is alive in every woman" (Voices, 9).

There is no argument that Toni Morrison's fiction retains the power of moving her readers, nor is there doubt that the musical qualities of her novels aid their effectiveness. What I want to examine are the places where Toni Morrison uses music and song to enhance Song of Solomon, Beloved, and Jazz, and the ways that the music brings meaning to the literature. Music plays a different role in each of these novels, but in each it reveals and works with aspects of collective memory—both the memories of the characters, but also the memories that we share as members of the same community.

Song of Solomon

Morrison experiments with the idea of collective memory in Song of Solomon, and in the novel clearly establishes the relationship between memory and music. She is not shy about making the connections evident to her reader: the title with its reference to song, the names of characters like Guitar and Sing Byrd, the melodies of Pilate and Reba, and the recurring refrain about “flying home.”

Pilate, for example, “sings” throughout all of Song of Solomon, in which both the motif of music and the musicality of language are so crucial. The solution to Milkman’s quest is found in the words and rhythms of a song, the same song his aunt Pilate sings on the first page of the novel, and his rediscovered grandmother is significantly named ‘Sing Byrd’. The duet sung by Pilate and Reba at Hagar’s funeral is spontaneous, yet staged, theatrical, and operatic performance, typical of the way these particular women have always communicated among themselves. All Pilate’s words are musical, rhythmic, as the young Milkman realizes: ‘Her voice made Milkman think of pebbles. Little round pebbles that bumped up against each other. Maybe she was hoarse, or maybe it was the way she said her words, with both a drawl and a clip.’ (40) (Voices, 8)

The mentions of music are important, and they clearly indicate Morrison’s emphasis, but it is her utilization of the music to incite memory that is crucial to the success of her novel. While Song of Solomon is often preoccupied with the

discoveries of the individual characters and malfunctions of human relationships, the novel is ultimately about Milkman's search for identity through social and historical memories. The words of the title, Song OD Solomon, immediately associate music with name, or identity, and if the novel is about Milkman's identity, musical references throughout the novel are reflections for or on Milkman himself. Milkman finds comfort in music: Pilate's song outside Mercy Hospital announces his entrance to the world; Pilate, Reba and Hagar's singing leaves him breathless "I need some music" (83), he says after he confronts his father, and the children's singing leaves Milkman mesmerized. There is not doubt that the song of Milkman's family will be his salvation, but Morrison might be presenting that Milkman's affinity for music might lead him first to Guitar—whose name implies melody. Thus, Milkman looks first to Guitar and the world that he offers. When he does not relate to him, he follows the only other melody in his life: the song of Solomon. Morrison clearly links music and identity here, and the rest of Milkman's quest will incorporate the musical memories that can fulfil him.

Pilate is an integral player in Milkman's search, and it is not surprising that she is often associated with song. Morrison writes Pilate's words musically, the audible harmony of her words make her magical and unique. Milkman says in frustration, "I know I'm the youngest one in the family, but I ain't no baby. You keep saying you don't have to explain nothing to me. How do you think that makes me feel?" (50). Because Milkman's biological parents do not sufficiently provide him with identity, he looks to Pilate for answers about who he is and where he came from. This is only

natural, as Pilate's presence at his birth ushered him into the world with her "powerful contralto":

*O Sugarman done fly away
Sugarman done gone
Sugarman cut across the sky
Sugarman gone home . . .*

*O Sugarman done fly
O Sugarman done gone . . .*

Pilate guides Milkman's search for himself and nourishes him, like the women around her, with song. As the women pluck berries and contemplate Hagar's complaint of hunger, Pilate nourishes her family (including Milkman), "[she] took the lead:

*O Sugarman don't leave me here
Cotton balls to choke me
O Sugarman don't leave me here
Buckra's arms to yoke me . . .*

When [they] got to the chorus, Hagar raised her head and sang too.

*O Sugarman done fly away
Sugarman done gone
Sugarman cut across the sky
Sugarman gone home.*

Milkman could hardly breathe." (49). He is fed by the melody, and it is this visit with Pilate and his extended family that begins to unlock the mysteries surrounding his identity, as both Pilate and his father begin the narration of their family history. The pieces that Pilate and Macon senior give Milkman allow him to start his search for the puzzle that defines him.

Pilate's melodies continue on throughout the novel, but it is the poignant moments of delivery that Morrison manipulates to connect the memories with song. As Hagar is memorialized at her funeral, Reba and Pilate stage a spontaneous performance of song and mourning:

Mercy? It was not enough. The word needed a bottom, a frame.

She straightened up, held her head high, and transformed the plea into a note. In an clear bluebell voice she sang out—the one word held so long it became a sentence—and before the last syllable had died down in the corners of the room, she was answered in a sweet soprano: 'I hear you.' The daughter standing at the back of the chapel, the mother up front, they sang.

In the nighttime.

Mercy.

In the darkness.

Mercy.

In the morning.

Mercy.

At my bedside.

Mercy.

On my knees now.

Mercy. Mercy. Mercy. Mercy.

They stopped at the same time in a high silence. (317-18).

Pilate sings to Hagar “the very same reassurance she had promised her when she was a little girl.” (318). After a moving dedication to her dead granddaughter, Pilate proceeds to identify Hagar to each of the people there to remember her, “selecting her from everybody else in the world who had died. Suddenly . . . Pilate trumpeted for the sky itself to hear, ‘And she was *loved!*’” (318-19). This display of sadness and frustration and memorial connects music, identity, and memory. With every “My baby girl,” Pilate identifies the lost youth in the coffin and forces the participants to identify and to remember her as well; she remembers the song she sang to Hagar as a baby and shares that memory with the congregation; and the harmony of Pilate and Reba memorializes Hagar for themselves and to the community. Morrison uses this scene not so much as a commentary on the tragedy of the loss of Hagar, but more as a statement of the nature of memory, as key to identity and often bound with music.

We turn now back to Pilate’s primary function in the novel, her role as pilot for Milkman. Pilate gives Milkman the information and inspiration that he needs to journey through time and place to find his roots and himself. On a trip not so much to find gold but the truths about his family, Milkman is confronted with his family’s past, which become his own. The key is a familiar, overheard verse:

Jay the only son of Solomon

Come booba yalle, come . . .

. . . and now the children were singing ‘*Solomon* don’t leave me’ instead of ‘*Sugarman*.’ Milkman’s scalp began to tingle. Jay the only son of Solomon? Was that Jake the only son of Solomon?

Jake. He strained to hear the children. That was one of the people he was looking for . . . Milkman took out his wallet and pulled from it his airplane ticket stub, but he had no pencil to write with, and his pen was in his suit. He would just have to listen and memorize it. He closed his eyes and concentrated while the children, inexhaustible in their willingness to repeat a rhythmic, rhyming action game, performed the round over and over again. And Milkman memorized all of what they sang.

*Jake the only son of Solomon
Come booba yalle, come booba tambee
Whirled about and touched the sun
Come konka yalle, come konka tambee*

*Left the baby in a white man's house
Come booba yalle, come booba tambee
Heddy took him to a red man's house
Come konka yalle, come konka tambee*

*Black lady fell down on the ground
Come booba yalle, come booba tambee
Threw her body all around
Come konka yalle, come konka tambee*

*Solomon and Ryna Belali Shalut
Yaruba Medina Muhammet too.
Nestor Kalina Saraka cake.
Twenty-one children, the last one Jake!*

*O Solomon don't leave me here
Cotton balls to choke me
O Solomon don't leave me here
Buckra's arms to yoke me*

*Solomon done fly, Solomon done gone
Solomon cut across the sky, Solomon gone home.*

He couldn't be mistaken. These children were singing about his own people! He hummed and chuckled as he did his best to put it all together . . . His eyes were shining. He was as eager and happy as he had ever been in his life. (302-04)

Morrison connects all threads in these passages. It is the music that bears the clues of Milkman's heritage, and gives him the groundwork to piece together his families' memories to form the story. The memories function collectively here in both ways: the song reveals the memories of the family, and Milkman has inherited them throughout his life, they have become part of who he is; and they are collectively shared by the children and people of the town, thus they are communal. Morrison is very careful to make her point in this scene—note that the children play this game from memory, and that Milkman could not write down the words. The collective memory is perpetuated by an oral culture of a rhyming game and familiar song, and it defines who he sees himself to be as much, if not more, than any gene in his body.

Milkman returns home, after going home, and shares their story with Pilate. As a form of closure, the two return to bury the remains of her father, and so begins the end of the novel. After the burial is complete, "[Pilate] stood up then, and it

seemed to Milkman that he heard the shot after she fell.” Pilate’s last request is to Milkman.

“Sing,” she said. “Sing a little somethin for me.” Milkman knew no songs, and had no singing voice that anybody would want to hear, but he couldn’t ignore the urgency in her voice. Speaking the words without the least bit of a tune, he sang for the lady.

‘Sugargirl don’t leave me here/ Cotton balls to choke me/

Sugargirl don’t leave me here/ Buckra’s arms to yoke me.’ (336)

Milkman ushers out Pilate’s life with a version of the same song that ushered in his own. This is important in the context of the novel because she piloted him to his identity through those very words. With his rendition he adds a verse not just to the song, but the memory that has defined him into the man he has become.

Beloved

There are many similarities between Song of Solomon and Beloved, not so much in the content of the novels or in their narrative devices, but in the ways that Morrison uses music and aspects of music to bring the reader into relationship with her characters and their stories. Like the song that weaves the threads of Milkman’s past, there are songs in Beloved which connect one generation to the next. However, music in this novel functions with memory in a collectively cultural way. Instead of the memories and melodies having significance solely to the characters which they recall, the music in Beloved connects the individuals to the larger community.

Paul D tells Sethe that “I never have talked about it. Not to a soul. Sang it sometimes, but I never told a soul.” (71). Paul D’s words are important, and Morrison explicitly chooses them to focus our attention on the importance of music and song. He is referring to the pains of slavery, and slavery becomes the primary pain of the novel. While experiences of slavery are difficult, and often remain memories, when Morrison chooses to recall them through her characters, she has them remember through melodies.

Sethe often recounts her ‘rememories’ in the form of songs, made-up ballads for her children, which constitute a transmission of history and of culture, but it is also her conversation, even her thoughts, which are musical. Beloved’s own voice is “gravelly” with “a song that seemed to lie in it. Just outside music it lay, with a cadence not like theirs.” (60). All women’s songs, Morrison indicates, are “just outside music”; often they are codes, ways to break an enforced silence; they constitute a protest. (Voices, 9)

This points to the fact that the music in Beloved refers to a memory that is cultural, one that is shared by the entire former-slave community. While they may be Sethe’s or Beloved’s own recollections, the memories are larger than themselves, they belong to the experience and trials of slavery.

Sethe attempts to explain these memories—rememories—to Denver.

Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. 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. Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away. Even if the whole farm—every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what's more, if you go by there—you who never was there—if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. So, Denver, you can never go there. Never. Because even though it's all over—over and done with—it's going to always be there waiting for you. That's how come I had to get all my children out. No matter what. (36)

While Sethe doesn't put these words to a tune, she defines what her memory—and the whole memory of slavery—is, and what it always has the potential to be. While their time of enslavement is over, and they are free, they are constantly susceptible to the bondages of slavery through recollection.

Paul D arrives at 124 Blue Stone Road to free Sethe, not explicitly from the pains of slavery, but more so from the child that is the living (although dead) memory of it. "Emotions sped to the surface in his company. Things became what they really were: drabness looked drab; heat was hot. Windows suddenly had a view. And wouldn't you know he'd be a singing man" (39). Paul D's presence is a permanent reminder of what slavery actually was. "He couldn't go back to 'Storm upon the Waters' that they sang under the trees of Sweet Home." Instead, he sang "some old pieces of a song he'd learned on the prison farm or in the War afterward" (40).

With a sledge hammer in his hands and a Hi Man's lead, the men got through. They sang it out and beat it up, garbling the words so they could not be understood; tricking the words so their syllable yielded up other meanings. They sang the women they knew; the children they had been; the animals they had tamed themselves or seen others tame. They sang of bosses and masters and misses; of mules and dogs and the shamelessness of life. They sang lovingly of graveyards and sisters long gone. Of pork in the woods; meal in the pan; fish on the line; cane, rain and rocking chairs. (108)

Paul D is important because he connects music and memory in a very public way. The songs he recalls are slave ballads and working tunes, music that is shared within a community for communication and survival. His inability to return to the sweet music of Sweet Home is indicative of the lasting emotional pain that slavery has left in him.

Paul D's attempts to free Sethe are futile because her slavery is the bond between a mother and child and a woman and a community, which goes far beyond the bond of a master over his property. In her madness to save her children from madness, Sethe kills her daughter who, like Sethe's memories of slavery, comes back to haunt her. Throughout the novel, Sethe and Beloved struggle to find a common ground on which to relate, a place where each can accept the other for what she has done, and where both can remember and reconcile that memory into the present. While Beloved presents herself as a threat to the family, I would argue that

she is necessary for the family to continue. Sethe is stuck in the present because she chooses not to integrate her past into herself for her future. Beloved is a reminder and embodiment of that past, of the memories and the pains of slavery, which must be accepted and internalized in order to move forward. There are clues that the three (including Denver) belong to each other (as memories and experiences belong to the people who have them), and many are understood on the basis of music.

Upstairs Beloved was dancing. A little two-step, two-step, make-a-new-step, slide, slide and strut on down.

Denver sat on the bed smiling and providing the music.

"Where'd you learn to dance?" Denver asked her.

"Nowhere. Look at me do this." Beloved put her fists on her hips and commenced to skip on bare feet. Denver laughed.

Beloved took Denver's hand and placed another on Denver's shoulder. They danced then. (74)

This is the moment Denver recognizes Beloved for who and why she is. And it becomes their secret. Denver beseeches Beloved to keep it a secret, "Don't tell her. Don't let Ma'am know who you are. Please, you hear?" (76).

Beloved and Sethe truly recognize one another later in the novel, and again the vehicle for the recognition is music. After a day ice skating, the three sat around the fire drinking hot sweet milk.

When the click came Sethe didn't know what it was. Afterward it was clear as daylight that the click came at the very beginning—a beat, almost, before it started; before she heard three notes;

before the melody was even clear. Leaning forward a little,
Beloved was humming softly.

It was then, when Beloved finished humming, that Sethe recalled
the click—the settling of pieces into places designed especially
for them . . . She simply turned her head and looked at
Beloved's profile: the chin, mouth, nose, forehead, copied and
exaggerated in the huge shadow the fire threw on the wall
behind her.

"I made that song up," said Sethe. "I made it up an sang it to my
children. Nobody knows that song but me and my children."

Beloved turned to look at Sethe. "I know it," she said. (175-76)

The few notes that Beloved hums as the women are warming before the fire are the final pieces of recognition for a mother of her dead, yet so alive, daughter. In this case, the music is the memory. Morrison is very deliberate in these two scenes: she uses music to provoke contact and relationship between Denver and Beloved; and the notes hummed by Beloved are both a sense memory and personal memory for Sethe.

Sethe and Beloved and Denver form a trio, not only in their cohabitation and relationships with one another, but also in the ways that they play off of each other once they experience complete recognition. In a semi-stream-of consciousness/ song about self, Morrison devotes a chapter to a thought exchange. It is not always clear who the speaker is, and this is deliberate, as it could be one of the three women, or an outside voice. It is clear however, that the thoughts/statements are

both memories and observations—the two intertwined into the same declaration. I would argue that this chapter is the beginnings of the song that Morrison composes in the next. Sethe begins, as the mother is the beginning for her daughters, and the women respond to one another in a musical way. I think that this is the pinnacle moment of the music-memory connection in the novel, the place where memory meets recognition which meets music to convey to the reader that the divided women have found one another and are a unit.

(To delineate who speaks where, I have marked the lines with S, B, or D)

First comes a dialogue with alternating lines by Sethe and Beloved:

(S) Tell me the truth. Didn't you come from the other side?

(B) Yes. I was on the other side.

(S) You came back because of me?

(B) Yes.

(S) You rememory me?

(B) Yes. I remember you.

(S) You never forgot me?

(B) Your face is mine.

(S) Do you forgive me? Will you stay? You safe here now.

...

(B) If they put an iron circle around your neck I will bite it away.

(S) Beloved.

(B) I will make you a round basket.

(S) You're back. You're back.

(B) Will we smile at me?

(S) Can't you see I'm smiling?

(B) I love your face.

Next, the dialogue changes into a duet between Denver and Beloved:

(D) We played by the creek.
 (B) I was there in the water.
 (D) In the quiet time, we played.
 (B) The clouds were noisy and in the way.
 (D) When I needed you, you came to be with me.
 (B) I needed her face to smile.
 (D) I could only hear breathing.
 (B) The breathing is gone; only the teeth are left.

 (B) She is the laugh; I am the laughter.
 (D) I watch the house; I watch the yard.
 (B) She has left me.
 (D) Daddy is coming for us.
 (B) A hot thing.

This is followed after a spaced line by a strong, synthesizing trio:

(S) Beloved
 (D) You are my sister
 (S) You are my daughter
 (B) You are my face; you are me
 (S) I have found you again; you have come back to me
 (S) You are my Beloved
 You are mine
 You are mine
 You are mine
 (S) I have your milk
 (B) I have your smile
 (S:D) I will take care of you

 (B) You are my face; I am you. Why did you leave me who am you?
 (S) I will never leave you again

(B) Don't ever leave me again
(S) You will never leave me again
(B) You went in the water
(D) I drank your blood
(S) I brought your milk

(B) You forgot to smile
(S) I loved you
(B) You hurt me
(S) You came back to me
(B) You left me

And the last four lines, marking the complete recognition, are claimed by Sethe:

(S) I waited for you
 You are mine
 You are mine
 You are mine (115-17)

This is the culmination of the musically memorable events of the novel. The exchange of dialogue between the trio resembles a song, a question and answer, the melody and a refrain. The women answer one another and accept one another, reconciling the seemingly irreconcilable, and attempting to ameliorate the pain in order to move forward. Morrison sets this moment apart from the rest of the narrative by introducing it with a chapter of thoughts, this vocal chapter being its answer.

As poignant and moving as this shared recognition is, Sethe, Denver and Beloved can not move forward to exist as a trio. Beloved is dead, she functions in the novel to provide memory, and giving her life would upset the natural balance. Here, Morrison picks up with imagination where recollection must stop. The characters must return Beloved to the dead, while allowing the memory that she embodies to become a part of their own. Sethe especially must reconcile Beloved into herself so that she can move forward. It is the women of the community who are

finally able to free Sethe. As *Beloved* consumes all that she is, physically, emotionally and spiritually, the women unite to exorcise Sethe's demon from 124.

When the women assembled outside 124, Sethe was breaking a lump of ice into chunks. She dropped the ice pick into her apron pocket to scoop the pieces into a basin of water. When the music entered the window, she was wringing a cool cloth to put on Beloved's forehead. . . As the voices grew louder, Beloved sat up, licked the salt and went into the bigger room. Sethe and she exchanged glances and started towards the window. . . For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did It was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash. (261)

There are also moments in *Beloved* which are not explicitly musical, but which possess musical qualities that work to convey emphasis. "And if *Beloved* is not, as Morrison writes, 'a story to pass on' (274), then it is certainly one to be sung. Morrison describes 'the sound of the novel, sometimes cacophonous, sometimes harmonious [which] must be an inner ear sound or sound just beyond hearing, infusing the text with a musical emphasis that words can do sometimes even better than music can'" (Voices, 9). One such moment in *Beloved* is Baby Suggs' preaching in the clearing. Baby's speech to the people gathered around her is about love—love of self and love of one another against oppression. "'More than your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize.' Saying no more, she stood up then and danced with her twisted hip the rest of what her heart had to say while the others opened their mouths and gave her the music. Long notes held until the four-part harmony was perfect enough for their deeply loved flesh" (89). This is clearly a moment of triumph in the novel, and

for Morrison. Here, I believe, she achieves her goal of providing the “places and spaces so that the reader can participate.” Baby Suggs sings throughout her delivery, though not literally singing, and when she is done the reader wants, as does Baby’s audience, to give her the music to dance the rest of her message.

Jazz

In Jazz, Toni Morrison retells the story of Beloved, which Morrison regards as the essential story of the black experience in America. The novel is concerned with the theme of arming: of moving from the violence that wounds the self to a reconstructed identity that heals, that allows one to negotiate life in a full and vital way and to love. The metaphor for the process of attaining this fullness, this love is jazz. (Jones, 481)

The story of Jazz is that of the fractured souls of Joe and Violet, and their search for wholeness. Their search is clearly bound up with identity, and ultimately the story leads us through their family pasts which the two have in common but choose not to reveal to one another. I am interested in how Joe and Violet’s search is connected to memory, and the way that Morrison chooses to reveal that memory to us. I would also argue that all of this is linked to music--as it is the beginning, the end and the entirety of the novel.

The title Jazz implies the music of improvisation, “containing a melodic line that the narrator returns to time after time, ‘seeing it afresh each time, playing it back and forth.’”(110)” (Jones, 492). Morrison drives her point home on the last page of the novel. The narrator of the book is the book itself, and because the book is Jazz and it is also jazz, the novel’s primary connection to its reader is through music. However, the novel only works if the reader participates with it. Morrison describes her work as containing “places and spaces so that the reader can participate . . . in

the same way that a musician's music is enhanced when there is a response from the audience." (Rootedness, 341).

These places and spaces for participation are important for many reasons and are made evident by the information that Morrison chooses to leave out. Active participation undoubtedly encourages reading until the end of the work, but it also allows for the meaning of the novel to change with each new reader. Thus, Jazz allows for slightly varied meanings based on personal readings, with the refrains and melodies as a guide and framework for improvisation. While I think that the idea that Morrison leaves spaces for interpretation and participation is important and necessary to appreciating the artistic wholeness of Jazz, I also believe that the novel stands alone on its own structure. Morrison's talent is her ability to create both of these within the same text.

Jones most eloquently testifies to Morrison's artistic triumph in Jazz:

Identity, narrative, and voice, and their relationship, are all redefined in Toni Morrison's writing jazz/Jazz. Identity is not just a stable unity, but also an improvisation. Writing the novel as jazz text, Morrison creates a form that demonstrates a concept of identity. In doing so, she moves back to where she begins as a writer—writing texts like Duke Ellington wrote music—posing the question of whether art is relationship, performance, or artifact. Jazz, as a site of multiple voices and of identity and community formation, is all three. (494)

As I discussed earlier, the story is constructed and written as jazz music, weaving in and out of different melodies, while grounded by a common strain. There are some musical references sprinkled throughout, but I am not convinced that Morrison uses them in this novel to directly recall memories. Instead, I think that she uses the construction of the text as jazz music to allow the characters to contribute to the total melodic line. Toni Morrison says in "Memory, Creation, and Writing" that,

I fret the pieces and fragments of memory because too often we want the whole thing. When we wake up from a dream we want to

remember all of it, although the fragment we are remembering may be, and very probably is, the most important piece in the dream.
(388)

In Jazz, the characters are all fragmented, largely because their understandings of their personal pasts are also fragmented. Joe was abandoned by his parents, who “disappear[ed] without a trace” (124), leaving his only identity as “Joseph Trace, because he is ‘Trace, what they went off without’ (Jazz, 124)” (Jones, 483). Wild’s (Joe’s mother) failure is that she did not claim her son, a fault that is inherited by Joe until Dorcas.

It seems that Joe abandons his search when he marries Violet, but he must live up to his name: construct from the traces a “rememoried” past, and become whole. That is, he must put into narrative what has happened to him and give it meaning.
(Jones, 484)

Joe finds completion not as much when he claims Dorcas as a lover and rises in her love, but more so when he kills her. This is his ultimate act of claiming resulting of his need to be claimed which was left unfulfilled by his mother. This is odd, to think that Joe must lose Dorcas to gain an understanding of his identity, but it is true. Jones agrees, “Dorcas, for Joe, is the end of change [uncertainty] and the beginning of insight” (484).

Violet’s fragmentation is also a result of her inability to put all of her pieces together. Her parents, like Joe’s, were often absent, and she has difficulty finding continuity within her life to move her from moment to moment. Jones describes this a like a slide projector where Violet can observe the scenes of her life but fails to recognize herself acting within those pictures. Jones further asserts that there are two Violets which must be reconciled; “the silent woman who fears her cracks and who never names and cannot answer back the ‘I love you’ of even a bird, much less a husband” and the Violet who “claimed Joe Trace, the one who knows where the knife is” (Jones, 485), Violet must accept and integrate these two perceptions of herself, implying that she must find the connection from her childhood past to her

violent present to make her whole. Violet's completion occurs through laughter. "The sight of herself trying to do something bluesy, something hep, fumbling the knife, too late anyway. . . She laughed until she coughed" (114).

This laughter indicates a potentially positive aspect of the double-consciousness: the insight that allows one to see the self as an 'other' and to love the 'other self.' This perspective allows Violet to claim her name, unites the two Violets and heals the crack. . .

Jazz, we know, is this taking of another perspective. (Jones, 487)

Jones makes this connection between memory and identity and music beautifully, asserting that Morrison intentionally brings recognition through the framework of improvisation and identification.

Morrison reiterates the function of jazz music by her construction of the chapters at the end of the novel. If we think of jazz as a musical genre which takes a song and flips it, turns it around, picks it apart, and then puts it all back together to form a new song, Morrison's Jazz is in many ways as much music as it is literature. After she establishes the song that is the present-tense plot, she allows the characters to interpret. Violet, Joe, the narrator, the memory, Dorcas, Felice, then the narrator play their stories. In doing so, they recall their personal memories, their pasts, and the parts of the people who went before them that contributed to their understandings of themselves. Each character has an opportunity, through the narrator which is the book, which is jazz music, to pick up a musical instrument to recall, improvise and play their memory and their story. The stories that they sing take pieces of the plot and turn it over, add to it, interpret it, and form the new, more complete, song which is Jazz.

While Jazz's musical emphasis is the jazzy nature of the construction of the text, there are also some musical references throughout. Joe and Violet's search for connection and identity lead them to the city, where there is pulse and music.

The train shivered with them at the thought but went on and sure enough there was ground up ahead and the trembling became the dancing under their feet. Joe stood up, his fingers clutching

the baggage rack above his head. He felt the dancing better that way, and told Violet to do the same. (30)

The pulse of the train as it travels to the city is a precursor to the pulse of the city itself, which has broader implications for Joe and Violet.

Her hip bones rubbed his thigh as they stood in the aisle unable to stop smiling. They weren't even there yet and already the City was speaking to them. They were dancing. And like a million others, chests pounding, tracks controlling their feet, they stared out the windows for first sight of the City that danced with them, proving already how much it loved them. Like a million more they could hardly wait to get there and love it back. (33)

Here, the music of the city translates into love, love for the new places which is reciprocated from the City to the couple, and also love between Violet and Joe. What is interesting here is that Morrison labels it love, but it is lust that she describes. The lust of the newness and sexuality that the City promises infuses the couple. It is not surprising that Morrison calls the lust love because Joe and Violet are not complete enough in their acceptance of themselves to experience love.

Morrison reiterates this lustfulness a few pages later with Alice Manfred's (Dorcas' adoptive mother), perceptions and fears of the City,

They did not know for sure, but they suspected that the dances were beyond nasty because the music was getting worse and worse with each passing season the Lord waited to make Himself known. Songs that used to start in the head and fill the heart dropped on down, down to places below sashes and buckled belts. Lower and lower, until the music was so lowdown you had to shut your windows and just suffer the summer sweat when the men in shirtsleeves propped themselves in window frames, or clustered on rooftops, in alleyways, on stoops and in

the apartments of relatives playing the lowdown stuff that signaled Imminent Demise. (56)

The music is movement, a movement of rhythm and beats, as well as a political and social movement through the city. What is interesting, is that these words are on the verge of violence. The music is lustful and sexual, but it is also painful and hints at violence. It points to both the downward spiral that the urban center faces as it modernizes, integrates and segregates and the violence which Dorcas will experience at the hands of Joe and Violet.

Morrison's mastery of the art of jazz within the construction of Jazz is impressive. By using music and improvisation as a basis for a text, she is able to provide and withhold information according to her imaginative generosity, give her characters greater voice in the presentation of the story, and allow the reader a broader place of access into the novel. She uses the music to accentuate and accent her text as a whole, as she does in Song of Solomon and Beloved, but in Jazz the text *is* music, suggesting that the two are inseparable.

Conclusion

The discussion of the ways that Toni Morrison incorporates music into her novels, especially Song of Solomon, Beloved, and Jazz, to incite or recall memories is dynamic. Although Morrison has not commented on this intention directly, she has often stressed the importance of memory in her writing process, and in the construction of the characters in her works. Further, she repeatedly asserts her aspiration to create literature that can move her reader as a musician's music moves her listener. While there is no distinct progression in narrative from Song of Solomon to Jazz (while it has been indicated by Toni Morrison that Beloved and Jazz are the first two novels of the trilogy ending in Paradise), there is some semblance of a progression in the sophistication of the memory-music connection.

The Song of Solomon is Milkman's quest and the answer to his search for self-definition through family identity. Morrison's combines the music of African mythology and slave songs to construct a family history that is mythologized in the

community. These songs are personal, they retell one family's story of enslavement (*Buckra* is a slave owner/white man, [*his*] *arms to yoke me*) and freedom, which gives Milkman the license to accept freedom from the confines of ignorance.

While Beloved is also consumed with freedom from slavery, it is mostly about the memory of slavery and Sethe's need to integrate it into her life for her future. Sethe can not live or love anymore without reconciling her past and remembering Beloved. Morrison uses music with and within the words; Sethe and Beloved relate lyrically to one another and words also often give way to music (Baby Suggs, the community women, dancing). Thus, music moves from a personal form--folk lyric and myth--to a chorus. While the music is in many ways recalling slavery and searching for freedom, it is almost always presented in chorus, indicating that there is a collective recognition of the memory.

The progression moves from the characters to the novel itself in Jazz. As in the other two books, the music is shared by the characters which Morrison creates, however it is shared in a different way. Violet, Joe, and Dorcas are all searching for something that was left unfulfilled in their pasts (like the other two novels), and they discover what they are missing through each other. Morrison presents this search and discovery through the construction of jazz music, giving the characters opportunity to find completion through improvisation.

Morrison moves from personal recollection and discovery to personal contribution and discovery of music and memory through these three novels. While the music is often what moves us, Morrison's emphasis is on the memory. In "The Site of Memory", she discusses the importance of memories as her "route to a reconstruction of the world, to an explanation of an interior life that was not written and to the revelation of a kind of truth" (115). In her writing and in her life, Morrison uses memory as a tool to journey back through and to a place to discover its relevance and importance. This is the truth that she seeks both for herself and her reader, a truth that can guide our lives to a more meaningful place.

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