

THE THEME OF THE SHATTERED SELF IN TONI MORRISON'S *THE BLUEST EYE* AND *A MERCY*

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The splitting of the self is a familiar theme in Morrison's fiction. All of her novels explore, to some extent, the shattered identity. Under traumatic circumstances, the individual may suffer a severe psychic disintegration. Morrison has shown interest in different states of dementia caused by trauma which, as Clifton Spargo asserts, "has come to function for many critics as a trope of access to more difficult histories, providing us with entry into a world inhabited by the victims of extraordinary social violence, those perspectives so often left out of rational, progressive narratives of history" (2002).

In Morrison's narratives, dissociated subjectivity, like Pecola's in *The Bluest Eye*, is usually connected to slavery and its sequels and, as Linda Koolish observes, is frequently the consequence of the confrontation between the Blacks' own definition of themselves and slavery's misrepresentation of African Americans as subhumans (2001: 174). However, Morrison has also dealt with insanity caused by other emotionally scarring situations, such as war in *Sula's* character, Shadrack, or as a result of the loss of your loved ones, sudden orphanhood, as in *A Mercy's* Sorrow.

In this paper I focus on Morrison's especially dramatic depiction of the destruction of the female teenager's self and her struggle for psychic wholeness in a hostile world. The adolescent's fragile identity embodies, better than any other, the terrible ordeal that the marginal self has to cope with to become a true human being outside the Western discourse. There are two main aspects that make the

disintegration of the female teenager's subjectivity more significant than that of others. First, owing to their gender and age, the adolescent is extremely vulnerable and, consequently, more prone to become a victim in adverse circumstances. Secondly, psychic disorders in one's teens are particularly tragic and appalling, since they map out the future.

Morrison has delved in many of her novels into the impact of psychological trauma on the female teenager's selfhood. Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* and Sorrow in *A Mercy*, two traumatized girls, poignantly exemplify this impact. In *The Bluest Eye* the dissociation of the female adolescent identity stems from the colonization of Blacks by mainstream culture and the internalization of its standards of beauty, which engender self-hatred. On the other hand, in *A Mercy*, madness is a coping strategy, which helps Sorrow survive in a hostile environment after sudden bereavement. Despite their strong differences, both characters share some obvious similarities, such as their psychotic mental state, ostracism and social victimization.

Trauma, as the root cause of psychological disorders, can be described, in Freudian terms, as a wound inflicted upon the mind (Caruth 1996: 3). Psychic distress can be the consequence of a devastating event or can be the result of long exposure to humiliation and abuse, as in tyrannized minority groups. Traumatic experiences might irreparably fracture the subject's symbolic universe. The loss of a loved one produces an irreversible psychic rupture, which may cause a drastic change in personality as well as mental disorders. Bereavement entails the disintegration of the subject's protective and nurturing psychological environment, leaving him/her desolate and helpless. The individual who has suffered a traumatic death in the family might appear to be 'damaged', occupying a devalued and marginal position in the midst of the community.

On the other hand, social oppression and power dynamics are two determinant factors in the impact of psychological trauma on selfhood. In these two narratives Morrison highlights the invisible psychic wounds of people who belong to social minorities, using Maria Root's concept of 'insidious trauma', on the "traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit" (in Brown 1995: 107). Social and racial minorities experience insidious trauma as a result of the cruelty inflicted by the dominant group, usually the whites. Hence, they internalize feelings of inferiority and self-contempt, which are projected onto them by the patriarchal Western discourse. Systemic racism, like other types of marginalization and social exclusion, determine the forms which the transgenerational transmission of trauma takes within the family and community. Colonized members of minority groups become oppressors themselves, reproducing the values of the hegemonic group, of which they are victims.

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Trauma brings about ostracism and, finally, may lead to the destruction of the sense of self. Judith Herman writes, “the core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others”; consequently, “traumatic events have primary effects not only on the psychological structures of the self but also on the systems of attachment and meaning that link individual and community” (1992: 133, 51). Morrison depicts these two psychologically traumatized girls as discriminated and marginalized, occupying a denigrated status in the eyes of the other members of their own community, or suffering exclusion from that community. Their trauma and ensuing isolation are associated with the fact that, in Root’s words, “a characteristic intrinsic to their identity is different from what is valued by those in power”, which encompasses a “distinct threat to psychological safety, security, or survival” (in Brown 1995: 10).

In the process of marginalization, minority individuals are reified into rejected and debased objects, which results in damaging effects for their psyches. In Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection, the marginal subject is the Other in relationship to the self. In the act of ‘abjection’, the individual projects onto the Other everything that he/she finds objectionable, thus disturbing “identity, system, order” (1982: 4). This process is especially dramatic when the victims are teenagers, who are particularly vulnerable, since their subjectivity is not yet fully developed. Pecola and Sorrow also symbolize the difficulties that being a woman and racially marked (black and mixed-race, respectively) entail: “Womanhood, like blackness, is Other in this society, and the dilemma of woman in a patriarchal society is parallel to that of blacks in a racist society” (Davis 1990: 12). Abjection erodes their self-esteem and provokes self-loathing, destabilizing them emotionally. Trauma, self-contempt and ostracism, at a critical stage of the identity formation, might make their victims cross the border from sanity into insanity.

This article delves into Morrison’s psychotic characters, Pecola and Sorrow, from a psychosocial or emotional perspective. I intend to explore the female teenager’s shattered self, underscoring the connection between trauma and its impact on subjectivity development, with a focus on key notions such as the intergenerational transfer of racial self-loathing, the collapse of the teenage orphan’s ‘conceptual system’, marginalization or exclusion and social victimization. Pecola and Sorrow’s split self cannot be understood without a patriarchal Western society that makes the minority subject the victim of social oppression, disempowerment and disfranchisement. Yet, Morrison’s novels evince significant hopeful signs. She juxtaposes the master narrative about the victimized teenage female self and a counter-narrative — Claudia’s in *The Bluest Eye* and Sorrow’s, as a mother, in *A Mercy*— which reconstitutes women’s humanity and encourages female empowerment, thus challenging oppressive social structures.

1. Fragmentation of the self and western standards of beauty

In *The Bluest Eye*, the dissociation of identity is closely related to the racial prejudice that the mainstream white culture spreads among Blacks and how it affects their self-definition. The dominant cultural system has succeeded in the process of African Americans' mental colonization. The minority subject has internalized the ideals of the hegemonic group, the whites. This interiorization "fragments both individual psyches and the community as a whole" (Pérez-Torres 1997: 21-22) and it is life-denying inasmuch as Blacks can never live up to the standards they are being measured by. Thus, African Americans' acceptance by others and their self-worth can only be the consequence of the disavowal of their own race.

78 Through the Breedlove family Morrison draws attention to the negative impact that the dominant Western cultural system has on Blacks. Their tragedy is the result of the conflict between the ideal standard of life set by the prevailing culture and their real one. According to Michael Awkward, the Breedloves are "the very antithesis of the standardized, ideal (white) American family"; consequently, they can only be seen by the others, both whites and blacks, and themselves as utterly failing "to conform to the standards by which the beauty and happiness of the primer family (and, by extension, American families in general) are measured" (1988: 58). The Breedlove family does not only fail because they are not able to conform to the Western cultural system and, therefore, to the white paradigm of ideal family, but also because, when they eventually acquiesce to it, they start to forget their own black communal values, such as solidarity. Trudier Harris points out how "[t]he breakdown of the bonds of human caring in the novel reflects the general absence of ethics and morality" (1991: 38). Hence, the violence that the black community experiences when it is colonized by the controlling Western culture brings about its members' sense of unworthiness, as well as the loss of their value system.

According to Gurleen Grewal, "*The Bluest Eye* is an antibildungsroman" (1997: 125). Pecola Breedlove is the ultimate example of the pervasive negative effects that internalized racial prejudice has on Blacks, especially since she is only a child, and how it may lead to madness. For her, as for other members of her community, color is at the core of her sense of self: her feeling of inferiority and self-disgust. She believes that beauty and self-worth are associated with whiteness and its attributes and, consequently, she cannot construct a positive self-image. Like the rest of her family, Pecola thinks that she is ugly, an ugliness that does not belong to her, "it came from conviction, their conviction [...] they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it" (Bluest: 28).¹

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In the adolescence, Laing writes, one's sense of self heightens "both as an object of one's own awareness and of the awareness of others" (1990: 106). Teenagers are especially vulnerable to the family and society's gaze. Pecola can only view herself in the mirror of other people's Look. Thus the center of this novel is her ontological 'unbeing'. The fact that, as Morrison says, "She is not *seen* by herself until she hallucinates a self" (1990: 220). Pecola remains invisible to herself until she can envision the alter ego that fits 'her' ideal of beauty. She must, as Laing claims, acquire a false self to adapt to false realities (1990: 12).²

Pecola embodies the black individual's history of oppression and exclusion. She suffers prolonged exposure to domestic and communal violence, which produces what Kai Erikson calls 'psychic erosion'. For the black girl, psychic instability results from "a constellation of life experiences" (1995: 185). In her short existence, Pecola has experienced only rejection and suffering from both her family and community, institutions which are at the root of subjectivity formation and individuation. The self-hatred that colonized Blacks have internalized destroys the social fabric of these identity strongholds. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison deals with trauma as a communal problem, which derives from systematic oppression and discrimination. Dysfunctional families are its outcome: parents who do not respect one another and neglect or even abuse their own children. The Breedloves' self-loathing is reflected in their relationships with each other. Pecola's family has an ironic name, as no love is bred within it. In *The Bluest Eye*, as Awkward states, Morrison deconstructs "the bourgeois myths of ideal family life", while she shows "her refusal to allow white standards to arbitrate the success or failure of the black experience" (1988: 59).

Pecola is the victim of an intergenerational transfer of racial self-loathing. Her mother, Pauline Breedlove rejects her as a consequence of her own self-contempt, which she counteracts in her role as an 'ideal servant'. Her children do not deserve her attention or love. In fact, she only teaches them to have fear, "fear of life" (Bluest: 100). Pauline has always despised her daughter. When she sees Pecola just after her birth, she remarks: "Head full of pretty hair but Lord she was ugly" (Bluest: 98). The black woman is all caring and sweet with the Fishers' infant, the family she works for. The white girl calls her Polly, while her own daughter addresses her as Mrs. Breedlove. Pauline feels ashamed of her child and abuses her, as when she attacks Pecola furiously when the girl accidentally spills a blueberry pie at the Fishers'. Many psychologists state how important the mother's Look is for the child's subjectivity development, since the "*failure of responsiveness* on the mother's part to one or other aspect of the infant's being will have important consequences" (Laing 1990: 116). The mother's Look is at the core of the child's evolving self-concept and Pecola is exposed, from her birth, to a shaming and

condemning gaze. Pauline fails utterly as a mother when she distrusts Pecola's account of the first time her father rapes her. Her disbelief prevents her from protecting her daughter, who will be sexually assaulted again.

Similarly, Pecola's father, Cholly, who has endured devastating experiences in his life, is incapable of fatherly behavior. He is neglectful and abusive with his children. As a disempowered oppressed individual, he victimizes his own daughter. In a patriarchal society, the black woman is the ultimate victim: the black man displaces his frustration and self-disgust onto her. According to Cynthia Davis, "Pecola is so far 'outside' the center of the system —excluded from 'reality' by race, gender, class, age, and personal history" (1990: 14). Pecola's rape by her own father at the age of eleven is the culmination of a series of shaming and denigrating events in her life, which will lead to the complete dissociation of her self. Both Pauline and Cholly are examples of colonized fractured psyches. They have internalized negative self-images and help transmit and perpetuate the system that has tyrannized them.

Not only the Breedloves, but also the community are responsible for Pecola's ordeal. Like Pauline and Cholly, other Blacks, who have also internalized the outside Western patriarchal system of values, victimize each other, collaborating in their own oppression. Selfhood and worthiness are defined according to the dominant cultural paradigms, on which individual identity rests. Color is one of them: light-skinned females, such as Maureen, can feel superior to black ones; married women are better than whores, etc. Those values define you as a better person in relation to other members of the community. Claudia surmises: "All of us —all who knew her [Pecola]— felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness [...]. We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength" (Bluest: 163). In a colonized community, marginal subjects are condemned to despairing ostracism, which drives those acutely sensitive to the brink of madness.

Pecola, due to her 'ugliness', suffers first hand constant psychic violence from other blacks who ignore and disdain her. She becomes the community scapegoat: "Pecola will never be an insider in the black community and cannot possibly hope for acceptance beyond that community" (Harris 1991: 21). Being a child, whose position is extremely assailable, Pecola becomes an easy victim. The victimization of women, or even young girls, in a patriarchal system is seen in how people accuse them of the sexual abuse they receive, while they fail to condemn the true victimizers. In the story one woman incriminates Pecola for her father's statutory rape: "She carry some of the blame" (Bluest: 149), implying that the black girl did not fight him, despite the fact that she was only eleven. The black community's

contempt towards the black girl is dramatically transferred to her baby, whom they think will “be the ugliest thing walking” (Bluest: 149) and they want it dead. However, some members of the community, Claudia and Frieda, break this intergenerational transmission of self-contempt. They feel responsible for Pecola and experience the need for someone “to want the black baby to live —just to counteract the universal love of white baby dolls, Shirley Temples, and Maureen Peals” (Bluest: 149). Thus, the two sisters decide to change the course of events and ask for a miracle, so that the baby can live. They try to perform some magic, burying their money and planting marigold seeds.

Unlike other blacks such as Pecola, Claudia refuses to conform to the dominant culture's paradigm of beauty. Indeed, in a ritualistic act, she even destroys a white doll she has received as a present for Christmas. Unlike the Breedloves, Claudia's family, the McTeers, still keeps the communal values. They take Pecola in when she is raped, even though their economic situation is difficult. In the McTeer family, “Morrison illustrates that the values that can sustain and provide the guidelines for growth are not alien to the community” (Harris 1991: 42). Claudia herself exhibits her family principles when she defends Pecola from some boys who are bullying her or when she despises Maureen's sense of superiority at being light-skinned. Claudia and her family exemplify the ability of blacks to confront and rebel against an oppressive system.

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Pecola uses invisibility as a defense mechanism against other people's disdain. The schizoid individual may have phantasies of being invisible, as being a “seable object” means to be “constantly exposed to danger” (Laing 1990: 113, 109).³ As a reaction to the frequent family quarrels, the black girl tries to conceal herself, covering her head with a quilt and, little by little, she seems to vanish (Bluest: 33). Pecola's self-hatred is the consequence of other people's rejection, but also the result of the awareness of her invisibility in the community, of her existential nonbeing: a metaphor that has been deployed recurrently to depict the black identity in the mainstream society. When Pecola goes to the candy store of Mr. Yacobowki, a white immigrant, he denies Pecola's self: “He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see” (Bluest: 36). According to Grewal, “Pecola's story demonstrates, the socially mandated charade of being something one is not (white) and of not being something one is (black) makes one invisible” (1997: 122). Pecola can perceive the erasure of her subjectivity, her unbeing, in other people's Look: “She would see only what there was to see: the eyes of other people” (Bluest: 35).

Pecola has fully internalized racial self-contempt and the white concept of ideal beauty, which Hollywood has spread.⁴ As Davis remarks, the black woman “is ‘the antithesis of American beauty’ [...]. Defined as the Other [...] [she] can never

satisfy the gaze of society” (1990: 12). At Claudia’s house, Pecola is very fond of the Shirley Temple cup and asks for candies with the picture of little Mary Jane. For the black girl, eating them “is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane” (Bluest: 38). She starts believing that if her eyes were the blue eyes of a Shirley Temple doll, people might love her and things would be different. Maybe then, her parents would say: “Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn’t do bad things in front of those pretty eyes” (Bluest: 34).

Like the ugly-duckling character of the fairy tale, Pecola seeks acceptance and approval in a community that has internalized dominant white values. That is why she wants, more than anything, to be beautiful and fantasizes with having blue eyes. Pecola’s wish for blue eyes epitomizes internalized racial self-contempt. Throughout the story, the black girl goes deeper and deeper into a world of phantasy, rejecting the real world as a result of the threatening circumstances of her life. Pecola takes a definite step towards insanity when she decides to make her dreams come true and, so, she visits Soaphead Church, a sort of pedophile magician, with a unique request: blue eyes, which Pecola truly believes would change her world. As Morrison writes, even the self-appointed psychic is “wholly convinced that if black people were more like white people they would be better off” (Stepo 1994: 22). Soaphead Church, in a god-like manner, ‘grants’ Pecola her wish for blue eyes, which only she will see.

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Sexual abuse triggers Pecola’s complete identity fragmentation. Her father, who should protect her and should be an identity development model for her, becomes her sexual attacker. As Doris Brothers contends, “psychic trauma can only be fully understood as the betrayal of trust in the self-object relationships on which selfhood depends” (in Hwangbo 2004: 66).⁵ When Cholly rapes Pecola the second time, she succumbs to a mental breakdown and fully withdraws into a fantasy world, a safe universe, absolutely convinced that she has acquired blue eyes: “this eleven-year-old girl steps across commonly accepted borders of reason and speech to enter her own personal world of silence and madness. Pecola’s ‘self’ becomes so crazed, so fragmented, that it conducts conversation with itself—and with no one else” (Miner 1990: 89). Her identity dissociation is complete and irreversible. Yet, despite the ‘bestowed’ blue eyes, Pecola does not get the reward of flight. She remains imprisoned in a schizophrenic state, in a “devastating inertia [which] prevents her from achieving the flight she thought would come with the blue eyes” (Dixon 1990: 121):

The damage done was total. She spent her days, her tendrils, sap-green days, walking up and down, up and down, her head jerking to the beat of a drummer so distant only she could hear. Elbows bent, hands on shoulder, she flailed her arms like a bird in an eternal, grotesquely futile effort to fly. Beating the air, a winged but grounded

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bird, intent on the blue void it could not reach —could not even see— but which filled the valleys of the mind. (Bluest: 162)

Pecola cannot fly and will never fly, since only through self-acceptance could her soul soar.

Pecola, as Claudia states, steps “over into madness, a madness which protected her from us” (Bluest: 163). Incapable of struggling any more through her painful and frustrating life, she retreats into schizophrenia. Pecola tries to find shelter in a fantasy world, a way to carry on. Her imaginary friend is a survival strategy. That is why when she asks her alter ego why she did not come before, it answers her “You didn’t need me before” (Bluest: 154). In her dream universe Pecola can deny her excruciating experiences, especially those of sexual and physical abuse. When her split self questions Pecola about her incestuous rape, she denies that it happened: “He just tried, see? He didn’t do anything. You hear me?” (Bluest: 157). Yet, even in her schizophrenic state, Pecola is deeply concerned about achieving the beauty she needs in order to be loved. She keeps interrogating her image self about her eyes: are they blue enough? Are they the bluest ones in the whole world? (Bluest: 161). As Harris highlights, “Pecola’s society has taught her not merely to want to be beautiful but to be the most beautiful of all, for only in such supremacy can she erase the lack of affection, the constant lack of approval” (1991: 42).

Pecola’s tragedy is the dramatic consequence of the internalization of the system of values of the dominant group, the whites, which leads to the marginalization and self-contempt of the black individual. These values are perpetuated through the scapegoating of the weakest and most vulnerable members of community. At the end of the novel, Claudia realizes how both the community and themselves have failed the black girl and have been participants in her victimization: “All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed” (Bluest: 162-163). There is advancement in her recognition of their part in Pecola’s ordeal. Morrison shows Claudia’s passage to adulthood as a contrast to the unfortunate black girl’s entrapment in trauma. She is one of the true survivors of this story and, in her awareness and honesty, we can expect some hope for the future.

2. The split self and motherhood

Sorrow, the ‘mongrelized’ girl rescued by a family of sawyers from the riverbank and then acquired by Jacob Vaark, an Anglo-Dutch farmer, is reminiscent of Pecola, the schizophrenic protagonist of *The Bluest Eye*. She also creates an alter ego, Twin, to cope with trauma. However, while Pecola’s story is an anti-bildungsroman, in which she ends up in a psychotic state, Sorrow, on the other

hand, reverses that situation. Sorrow is a mentally disabled girl, whose shattered self is the consequence of her agonizing experience on the foundered ship that was her home. Hers is an identity journey that takes her from insanity to psychic wholeness through maternity.

Unlike Pecola's, Sorrow's psychosis is the result of a terrible event in her life. She epitomizes the trauma and madness of a tragedy survivor, a young girl who has suffered a sudden and devastating bereavement, which leaves her orphan and alone in a chaotic and hostile world, primeval America. To develop their subjectivity and reach individuation, children need a safe environment and someone who loves and takes care of them. Early parental loss destroys the progenitor-infant bond, which is his/her foremost source of security at that time. Hence, children's bereavement, even more if it is unexpected and calamitous, leads to mental disorders, such as schizophrenia, by reason of the infant's high vulnerability. The unexpected loss of your parents is an extremely harrowing ordeal as described by Ronnie Janoff-Bulman,

84 a liminal experience of radical deracination and calamity that brings about a violent rupture of the order on both the personal and the social level. It annihilates the sense of continuity in our lives and our self-narratives, bringing to the fore the contingency of our lives. It destroys the "fundamental assumptions" or "the bedrock of our conceptual system", which helps us to conveniently manage and confidently transform a myriad of random experiences into a certain view of our reality.⁶ (In Hwangbo 2004: 1)

A dramatic circumstance like the death of a loved one triggers psychological disintegration, which makes the victim's life meaningless and incoherent.

Unlike Pecola, who goes through a progressive deterioration of her mental faculties and does not cross the borderline into psychotic condition until the end of the story, Sorrow's is a fractured self from the very start of the novel. The onset of the orphan's dementia is dramatic and abrupt, the terrible outcome of the death of her father and of all the others she was familiar with. Hers is a complicated bereavement, as there is a tragic parental loss and a clear grieving process including PTSD, which, as J. W. Worden argues, heightens the risk of a later development of psychopathology (in Benedict 2008).⁷ As a survivor of a devastating event, Sorrow feels that the basic assumptions and expectations of her life have been destroyed and, with them, the continuing sense of self and the possibility of nurturing human relationships. Her agonizing ordeal annihilates the indispensable psychological strategy for coping with paramount experiences.

As a result, Sorrow creates an identical self that she calls Twin, her doppelganger. In her schizophrenic identity, the mongrelized girl, like Pecola, "fears a real live dialectical relationship with real live people", she can relate herself "only to depersonalized persons, to phantoms of [her] own phantasies (imagos) [...]" (Laing 1990: 77). Twin

'materializes' when Sorrow wakes up under the surgeon's hammock in the deserted and looted shipwrecked vessel, and eventually becomes her "safety, her entertainment, her guide" (Mercy: 119).⁸ Sorrow brings to life an image self to struggle with bereavement and orphanhood. According to Laing and other psychologists, schizophrenia and other mental illnesses can be understood as coping strategies used by people in order to bear an unlivable situation (in Koolish 2001: 173). Identity splitting or dissociation is a common defense mechanism in the face of trauma.

As a survival strategy of psychotic personalities, Sorrow displaces her powers of assertion into her imaginary friend: "adaptation and adjustment to changing experiences have to be conducted by the false self" (Laing 1990: 143). Thus Twin, her strong double, helps Sorrow carry on. With its company the waif overcomes her fears. Twin encourages her to search the ghost boat and, finally, to abandon it. Being only a child, Sorrow has to contend with a wholly new situation: she has never set foot on land before and she is terrified of leaving the ship. Her father, the captain, had reared her as a sort of crewman-to-be. Sorrow's rescue from the waters represents a new and uncertain beginning. On the first day in the sawyers' house, everything is totally unfamiliar for her. Sorrow has to fight with the distressing gravity, while the sawyer's wife tries to teach her simple cleaning tasks she is incapable of performing. As Susan Vega-González rightly argues, "Around the orphan coalesce [...] the chance to create something anew; the possibility of inventing oneself and ultimately undergoing an empowering rebirth" (2011: 120).

Sorrow never speaks of her past. In fact, she can hardly recall anything, except being dragged ashore by whales: "Now the memories of the ship, the only home she knew, seemed as stolen as its cargo [...]. Even the trace of Captain was dim" (Mercy: 117). The psychotic subject has no memory or knowledge of that dissociation. Recollections are pushed aside, repressed, placed in a box (Koolish 2001: 173). Consequently, traumatized individuals are usually incapable of remembering important aspects of their trauma, or like Pecola, try to beat back the haunting remembrances of their past. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud observes that "patients suffering from traumatic neurosis" are not "much occupied in their waking lives with memories [...]. Perhaps they are more concerned with *not* thinking of it [the traumatic event]" (in Barnett 1998: 75). Therefore, as a defense mechanism in a hostile environment, Sorrow does not answer the questions of the people who find her. She does not remember some of the things she is asked and, some others, she pretends not to recall.

Unlike Pecola, Sorrow is a true orphan. Nevertheless, from the very beginning of their stories, both of them are rejected by the majority of the people with whom they come into contact. While Pecola is ostracized owing to her 'ugliness', Sorrow is marginalized as a 'damaged' girl. Besides, as Anissa Wardi indicates, Sorrow

could have Black blood, as her skin color and hair imply (2011: 27). So, her mixed-race condition may also be linked to her marginal status in the community.⁹

Thus, nobody truly accepts Sorrow. The family gets rid of her once they know she is pregnant. Then the waif joins Vaark's household. By the time she gets to the plantation, "the resident women are a united front in dismay" (Mercy: 53). Sorrow is never welcomed. Rebekka, Jacob's wife, receives her with annoyance, in spite of the fact that they need help on the farm. The Native American servant, Lina, on the other hand, does not like Sorrow, whose look "raised Lina's nape hair" (Mercy: 54). She thinks that sir and mistress would never have kept the girl who is "bad luck in the flesh" (Mercy: 53), a curse: people like her "can't help the evil they make" (Mercy: 56). Lina's rejection is motivated by superstition. First, she holds Sorrow responsible for minor domestic mischief but, later, she is certain that the early deaths of Rebekka's children "could be placed at the feet of the natural curse that was Sorrow" (Mercy: 55). When Florens, the Angolan slave, comes to the house and Sorrow makes an attempt to approach her, Lina keeps the little black girl away from her. Sorrow cannot be part of the household women, themselves victims, who go on to victimize the mongrelized orphan. Therefore, Sorrow decides to continue as before, indifferent to everyone, except Twin.

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Both Pecola and Sorrow become scapegoats of their communities. Their sundered psychological world is the result of a defense mechanism, scapegoating, of communities that live in a situation of violence. Both girls are extremely vulnerable because of their age and the fact that neither of them receives the necessary nurturing, Pecola, as a consequence of her dysfunctional family, and Sorrow, as an orphan. Nobody provides for their true needs. As Magdalena Vallejo writes, quoting Erich Neumann, it is socially underprivileged and marginalized groups that are more likely to become scapegoats (1998: 158).¹⁰ Their communities, which have already been victimized, emerge as their victimizers. Scapegoating, Vallejo further claims, is the outcome of the individual's and/or the community's need to get free of their feelings of guilt, or their failure to achieve recognition of their values (1998: 157). In a process of displacement, the community projects their own fears, frustrations, hostility, hopelessness, insecurity, etc. onto their most weakest and helpless members. Sorrow's only social relationship is with her self-image. Nobody truly accepts her for herself. Laing writes that the psychotic individual,

in order to develop and sustain its identity and autonomy, and in order to be safe from the persistent threat and danger from the world, has cut itself off from direct relatedness with others, and has endeavoured to become its own object: to become, in fact, related directly only to itself. (1990: 137)

As long as Sorrow lives within her trauma, she can only be a pariah. She has no identity in the community. That is why Twin is the only one who knows her real

name, the name her father used. Likewise, only Pecola's imaginary friend can see her blue eyes, the feature that defines her new being. Sorrow devotes most of the time to her doppelgänger. At her call, she "[quits] any chore and [follows] her identical self" (Mercy: 116). Sorrow only talks to Twin, who tells her stories. Her favorite tale is about a school of fish girls riding the backs of a fleet of whales, perhaps, a fictionalized and beautified version of her flight from the foundered ship. Being a marginal self somehow frees Sorrow from social constraints. As Laing claims, "the imagined advantages" of the schizoid person "are safety for the true self, isolation and hence freedom from others, self-sufficiency, and control" (1990: 75). Sorrow does not follow any social convention, as when she relieves herself in the yard without any concern for other people. She is "uncultivated, uncontrollable and unrestrained" (Wardi 2011: 27).¹¹

Both men and women victimize Sorrow and Pecola. The two young girls endure rape and sexual abuse, which are the most terrible and gruesome part of a woman's victimization. Due to her emotional disability, Sorrow, who has never been coached by other women, becomes fair game for men. For them she is 'an easy harvest'. She has just had her period when both the Sawyers brothers rape her. As a result of her traumatic and shattering sexual experiences, Sorrow cannot imagine any connection between sex and love or tenderness. She is amazed when she sees Florens and the blacksmith make love. Unlike the Angolan slave, Sorrow has always had quick and submissive sex in hidden places while the black couple seems to be dancing and Florens is actively participating. However, what surprises Sorrow the most is that, once sex is over, the blacksmith kisses Florens' mouth and nobody has ever kissed hers. She realizes that none of her 'lovers' has ever loved her. Notwithstanding her extensive sexual experience for a girl her age, Sorrow has never experienced such affection.

Maternity is, for both Pecola and Sorrow, the aftermath of abuse and rape. And yet, it has a different effect on them. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison suggests that the baby's death is at the root of Pecola's withdrawal from reality. On the contrary, in *A Mercy*, the author focuses on motherhood as a holistic healing agent. Like Pecola, Sorrow lives an excruciatingly traumatic experience with her first baby, which Lina takes from her, just after it is born, and lets it drown in the river. Its death worsens her schizophrenic state, relying on Twin more than ever. Nevertheless, when Sorrow gets pregnant again, she is very happy at the thought of a person growing inside her. The desire to become a mother gives her strength and determination to save her baby. She knows Mistress is not well enough to help her with the delivery and she does not trust Lina, who thinks that, unfortunately, "this one would not die" (Mercy: 56). Therefore, Sorrow goes to the riverbank where Will and Scully, the indentured servants, assist her during labor.

Sorrow's maternity has a therapeutic effect on her.¹² Until that moment she is believed to be mad because of her strange and erratic behavior. However, the indentured servants observe that "[t]o dismiss Sorrow as 'the odd one' ignored her quick and knowing sense of her position [...]. When pregnant, she glowed and when her time came she sought help in exactly the right place from the right people" (Mercy: 152). Maternity sets in motion a process that puts an end to her hallucinated self. The first sign of this process is that, when Sorrow is making preparations for childbirth, Twin seems absent and strangely silent or hostile. At that moment Sorrow is capable of deciding by herself, without her false self's help, how to deliver her baby. Sorrow believes that, by doing this, she has accomplished something important on her own, which shows clearly that she does not need her imaginary friend any more. So, after her baby's birth, Twin vanishes and Sorrow stops wandering. Her new responsibilities as a mother make her embrace all parts of her self and she finally bids goodbye to her split self.

The sawyer's wife gives Sorrow her name, which depicts her as an emotionally crippled orphan.¹³ Yet, after her delivery, she is ready to rename herself: "She had looked into her daughter's eyes [...]. 'I am your mother,' she said. 'My name is Complete'" (Mercy: 134). As her new name prefigures, Sorrow has finally found fulfillment in her role as a mother, which "enables her to confirm her sense of self, to settle down, to achieve wholeness" (Gallego-Durán 2011: 109). From then on she devotes herself to her baby girl: "She is a mother. Nothing more nothing less" (Mercy: 159). As part of her process of self-invention, Sorrow develops a need to trust herself. That is why she does not let anyone take care of her baby, not even Willard or Scully, her godfathers.

At the end of the story, Sorrow's identity development contrasts with that of the other women, Rebekka and Lina, who have always looked down on her. When Mistress wants to give her away, Sorrow realizes that servants, despite their care and devotion, do not matter (Mercy: 129). She demonstrates her improvement by deciding to flee and take Florens with her. Through motherhood Sorrow reconstructs her fractured self. Unlike Pecola, she seems to have a future: her "unblinking eyes" "were not blank, but waiting" with a "lying-in-wait look" (Mercy: 152), showing her conviction and hope.¹⁴

In conclusion, both Pecola and Sorrow retreat into a schizoid state but for different reasons. Pecola has suffered from a prolonged exposure to rejection and abuse, while Sorrow is the lone survivor of a shipwreck. Yet, in both situations, the formation of their subjectivity is compromised by repudiation and ill-treatment at the hands of others. Their dissociated personalities unveil the fissures of a patriarchal order that tolerates the existence of denigrated subjects, disempowered victims of social oppression. Victimized communities victimize some of their members, especially

when they are helpless female adolescents who have suffered sexual abuse. As rape victims, the two girls are stigmatized and seen as 'damaged' by society.

Both Pecola and Sorrow create an alter ego as a strategy "to defend [themselves] against the dangers to [their] being that are the consequences of [their] failure to achieve a secure sense of [their] own identity" (Laing 1990: 108). There cannot be a healing process for Pecola if she does not learn to accept and love herself. Like the marigolds Claudia and Frieda plant, she cannot grow. Throughout the novel Pecola does not gain awareness of the psychological origins of her split-off self. Morrison clearly states that an individual or community identity cannot be acquired as long as those individuals and communities acquiesce in and conform to the oppressive definitions of the mainstream culture. Pecola is one of Morrison's irreversible lunatics, such as Halle in *Beloved* or Shadrack in *Sula*, who cannot take any more. They go crazy because the inhumane situations they have to live finally break them. On the other hand, Sorrow, who reverses Pecola's process of psychological dissolution, is finally able to reconstruct her splintered self through motherhood, undergoing a substantial improvement. Through Sorrow, Morrison reveals that mental instability, besides an outward expression of inner pain, may also be part of a healing process, which tells us of the human beings' power and courage to carry on. Thus, in the Morrisonian fictional world, 'madness' is not a sign of weakness or failure but, as Laing and other psychologists contend, an act of resistance and survival: a brave attempt to face an unfair and terrible ordeal (in Koolish 2001: 173).

Morrison's novels *The Bluest Eye* and *A Mercy* restore humanity to trauma victims by showing that their 'insane' behavior is the result of the dramatic and appalling circumstances of their existence, while providing counterpoints in Claudia who, unlike Pecola, rejects the values of the dominant culture and Sorrow, who becomes complete in her new role as a mother. Through her traumatized characters, Pecola and Sorrow, Morrison engages in a counterdiscourse, rendering an alternative vision of society from the marginal self's point of view, that of a female teenager.

Notes

¹. Toni Morrison. 1970. *The Bluest Eye*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston (all subsequent quotations from this edition will be identified by the abbreviated title of the book 'Bluest' and the page number included in parentheses in the text).

². Preface to *The Divided Self*.

³. Laing uses, in a phenomenological and existential sense, the term schizoid for the sane individual, while schizophrenic is used for the insane one.

⁴. Earle says that "Hollywood had inundated (and continues to inundate) people's lives with artificial and entirely white images of feminine beauty" (1997: 30).

⁵. See Brothers 1995: 55.

⁶. See Janoff-Bulman 1992: 5. According to Charles Robins, who treated many survivors of the tragedy of September 11, 2001, not feeling like oneself due to a sudden, violent change is the “hallmark of being traumatized” (in Hwangbo 2004: 1). See Robins 2003: 14.

⁷. See J. W. Worden 1996.

⁸. Toni Morrison. 2008. *A Mercy*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf (all subsequent quotations from this edition will be identified by the abbreviated title of the book ‘Mercy’ and the page number included in parentheses in the text).

⁹. In her reading of *A Mercy*, Wardi interprets “Sorrow’s ambiguous identity construct [...] As an embodiment of the trans-Atlantic journey” (2011: 27).

¹⁰. See Neumann 1969.

¹¹. Wardi points out Sorrow’s elision with the sea, “as the sea has historically been characterized as a ‘lawless’, antithetical ‘other’ lying outside the rational organization of the world, an external space to be feared,

used, crossed or conquered but not a space of society” (2011: 27). Wardi further contends that Sorrow is “not merely of the water”, but “cast as a water body” (2011: 27), highlighting her strong connection to water all throughout the story.

¹². Despite the fact that pregnancy has frequently been depicted as an experience of identity dissociation, it enables Sorrow to work her trauma through: “Pregnancy serves as an almost perfect metaphor for the psychic metaphor of multiple personality, for a pregnant woman carries not self and other, but self and an other which is in fact experienced as an aspect of self within her own body” (Koolish 2001: 181-182).

¹³. As Mar Gallego-Durán argues, at this point of the novel, Sorrow cannot even claim her own name.

¹⁴. Justine Tally suggests that Sorrow, in her ‘mongrelized’ condition, represents hopeful future, which “lies in the ‘mixture of races’” (2011: 77). She comments that ‘racial mongrel’ was the word used to discredit Barak Obama during the presidential campaign (2011: 77).

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