shown to have little lasting impact on Jane's own rebellious consciousness. She begins her story by revolting at the thought of being any man's servant, but in the end she slips into that very same role – at least in the way she uncritically adopts her male master's view of other dependent women about her.

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ELINA SYRI

Gender Roles and Trauma in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*

> Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act accordingly.
>
> (Hurston 1987: 9)

Toni Morrison has been described as a feminist as well as a womanist writer. Gender roles are indeed central in her fiction, also in *Paradise* (1998), which deals with the double burden of discrimination: both being black in the society dominated by whites, and being female in the male-dominated society. I apply Jessica Benjamin's (1988) particular notion of intersubjectivity in my examination of gender roles in the novel and in the study of recognition as a prerequisite for the healing of traumas. I claim that the way women and men act towards each other reflects not only their personal traumas but also the collective, cultural trauma of slavery.

Jessica Benjamin says in her work *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Dominaion:*

> What is extraordinary about the discussion of authority throughout Freudian thought is that it occurs exclusively in a *world of men*. The struggle for power takes place between father and son; *woman plays no part in it*, except as prize or temptation to regression, or as the third point of a triangle.
>
> (1988: 6, my italics)

However, my discussion of gender roles and trauma in Morrison's *Paradise* largely focuses on women. Slavery and racial discrimination is an obvious cause for trauma, but I argue the gender roles are also traumatizing. In the quest for recognition, people search for love and acceptance from others without realizing that they first need to accept themselves before the healing can start. Although Brooks Bouson (2000: 205, my italics) argues that in "telling the story of the Convent woman side by side with the story of how the Ruby men come to pathologize and scapegoat the woman, *Paradise* focuses attention on the blocked thinking of *racial* assumption and stereotypes", I claim that gender is an equally important issue.

My discussion of otherness is based on Jessica Benjamin's study of domination and gender roles, and on Simone de Beauvoir's idea of the woman functioning as man's primary other. According to Benjamin, the roles of masculinity and femininity are adopted in early childhood in the relationship to the mother, when "boys discover that they cannot grow up to *become* her; they can only *have* her" (Benjamin 1988: 75). Therefore, the issue of parenthood is also a crucial one in the novel.

Ron Eyerman (2001: 214) examines the history of the relationship between African American men and women and considers that, mainly as a result of slavery, "African American males and females are in constant battle", a factor which influences not only the way they relate to each other but also to their children. He quotes Orlando Pattersons's book *Rituals of Blood*: "Afro-Americans are the most unpartnered and isolated group of people in America and quite possibly the world", and agrees with Patterson that this is due to the institution of slavery that prohibited African American males from developing the role of husband and father. Eyerman, among many others, points out that slavery "encouraged the production of offspring but not the role of parent"; a fact that affected the way men and women related to each other. He argues that the attitudes this produced toward children and marriage continue to this day. Also in Morrison's fiction many male characters have problems relating to their children as well as to their wives.

Whereas many of Morrison's females in her earlier novels have been strong though vulnerable, and independent in spite of longing to belong, in *Paradise* the majority of the women are indeed lost in their search for recognition. They suffer from what Benjamin calls "the female difficulty in differentiation" that she describes as being nearly "the mirror image of the male's: not the denial of the other, but the denial of the self" (Benjamin 1988: 78). In particular, the women that inhabit the Convent have denied themselves in their search for recognition, love, and desire in men. Morrison has herself said in an interview that the way she sees it, woman have a special capacity of displacing "love of self for love of something else" and that this is one of their virtues but also a danger (Reynolds 2002: 18).

Morrison's *Beloved* introduced Sethe, who wasn't capable of loving herself, because she felt she had lost her best thing when losing her children. Also in *Paradise*, motherhood is a demanding gender role imposed on women, who cope with it in different ways. Although Ron Eyerman (2001: 214) claims that slavery, which rarely allowed African Americans the role of parent, affected men more than women, I argue that in *Paradise* the role of mother is far more central than the role of father in both creating traumas and the process of healing them. As Hortense J. Spillers (1989: 159) points out, in slavery "the African person was twice-fathered but *could not* be claimed by the one and *would not* be claimed by the other." This has probably greatly affected the fact that men, particularly fathers, are so often missing in Morrison's novels.

As Nancy Chodorow (1978: 32) argues, woman's mothering does not take place in a vacuum, but is influenced by the gender roles and is a "fundamental constituting feature of the sexual division of labor." In Morrison's *Paradise* mothering is highly respected in the community of Ruby. The Oven in Ruby is a powerful symbol of the purity of the town

women; a factor that is important to people whose pride lies in racial purity. Having a cooking place of their own in the town symbolizes that no woman in Ruby is forced to cook in a white man's kitchen and therefore be exposed to sexual victimization. Since women, as Bouson (2000: 204) says, "hold the key to the racial purity of the 8-rocks", it is crucial not only to protect them from sexual threats, but also to prevent adultery. It is important for the men of Ruby to keep their women under control and in their place.

Tradition and heritage are valued highly, which makes the cultural trauma of slavery even stronger and healing from it impossible. Trauma theorist Dominick LaCapra (2001: 22) calls this situation "fidelity to trauma". Especially in the case of historical trauma, such as slavery, loyalty to the dead and to the sufferings of the earlier generations can prevent the survivors from moving on with their lives. Trauma becomes a memorial, and healing would be a betrayal of those who have suffered, or a sign of wanting to forget them, instead of wanting to forget the traumatic event. Therefore the Ruby members are strict also about the rules of maintaining the gender roles they have adopted from the earlier generations. Everything new represents a threat of forgetting the source of their existence: the shame of having the darkest black skin, a factor that they have turned into a source of pride and consider it as a sign of being pure. They call the blacks of lighter skin color "mongrels" as a mechanism of self-defense.

While Ruby is a deeply patriarchal society, the Convent is inhabited by women only. In every way it represents the other, the counterpart of Ruby. While Morrison carefully describes the skin tone of Patricia Best, who is an outsider in Ruby due to her lighter skin, she does not indicate the skin color of the Convent women. While the Christian faith is the foundation of Ruby and the main streets are named after the gospels, the woman in the Convent practice mythical religion and communicate with spirits. Ron Eyerman (2001: 25) points out that, from the time of slavery, the church was a central source of community and formation of African American identity and continued to be strong until the great migration to the northern cities in the years following the Civil War somewhat weakened its position, at least in the north. However, the Convent women come from various backgrounds and behave unconventionally. Gigi, who is the most rebellious of the Convent women, shocks the conservative Ruby when she arrives "in pants so tight, heels so high, earrings so large they forgot to laugh at her hair" (*Paradise* 53). Morrison's continuing description of the "towering block heels not seen since 1949" refers to the moral corruption that forced the founding families to leave their original all-black town of Haven and start a new town of purity and high morality. This is the first sign of the destruction that will follow when the "evil" from outside enters the borders of safe and pure Ruby.

The Convent women are also a great temptation to the men in Ruby and the embodiment of sin. K.D., a descendant of the Morgan family, starts an affair with Gigi, even though he already has a girlfriend who is pregnant by him in Ruby. Gender roles and expectations play a role when the community blames Gigi for seducing K.D. instead of even realizing the need to question the appropriateness of his behavior. Similarly, Deacon Morgan, although married, has an affair with Connie. In both cases the relationship falls apart and the women are treated in an object-like way under the pressure of preserving the social code of Ruby. The threat that the women present has many layers, as Bouson (2000:204) points out:

> When Consolata [Connie] bit Deacon's lip and licked the blood from it, he became revolted and turned against her, seeing her as the sexually savage and primitive female Other. To the proud and respectable Deacon, Consolata stands as a visible reminder of his personal shame.

Connie is not black, but described as green-eyed and golden-skinned, and therefore represents everything that Deacon is supposed to despise. Close to the very end of the novel, Deacon follows the route that has been laid down for him by the heritage of the communal trauma. His ancestors were traumatized by the act of Disallowing, and as a legacy to the following generations they left the instruction to hate everything that was different from them.

Deacon's reaction to Connie's behavior can be seen not only as a consequence of their different race but also of the gender expectations for men and women. As Jessica Benjamin (1988: 85-87) points out, traditionally in patriarchal societies, man is expected to express desire and woman is supposed to be the object of it. Connie obviously breaks the rule of femininity identified with passivity by taking an active role in her relationship with Deacon. She does not fit into the role of the nurturing mother or the femme fatale, who "expresses not so much *her* desire as her pleasure in being desired" (Benjamin (1988: 89). Deacon, although in love with Connie, feels himself threatened and his domination questioned. He has been able to visit Connie in the Convent without endangering his position in the community of Ruby, but Connie's passionate behavior signals that she may expect too much of him. He realizes he has contradicted his own principles of moral and racial purity, or rather the expectations of the earlier generations and the present members of Ruby, and escapes the situation by leaving Connie.

Connie has been molested as a child and this has left her with fear and disgust of men, until she meets Deacon. They fall passionately in love and because of the intensity of her feelings the end of their affair nearly destroys her. For thirty years she had been content to serve God, but almost as if she had tasted the forbidden fruit, she now feels herself unworthy because of Deacon's rejection. As Reames (2001: 57) points out, the obsession she felt for Deacon can be due to the familiarity she felt in the town of Ruby on the day when she first met Deacon. The town people were celebrating with dance and music that reminded Connie of her home. Therefore, the intensity of the relationship can also be interpreted as Connie's attempt to be reunified with her roots. However, after the relationship ends, Connie finds consolation in Mary Magna, who now rescues her for the second time by returning the feeling of being loved and accepted. Connie's love for Mary Magna is also obsessive because of the hardship of her early childhood. She now clings to the mother figure because it is the only loving relationship that hasn't failed her, and when Mary Magna dies, Connie "was left orphaned in a way she was not as a street baby and was never as a servant" (*Paradise* 247).

Both the town of Ruby and the Convent are "gathering[s] of the wounded", a term Kai Erikson uses for a community of "otherwise unconnected persons who share a traumatic experience [and] seek one another out and develop a form of fellowship on the strength of that common tie" (Erikson 1995: 186-187). Although for the Convent women the "common tie" is not a singular event, or the same experience for each of them, they have all been traumatized. Most often the source of trauma is either sexual abuse or parental neglect. Unstable childhood that has not provided selfconfidence has led the Convent women in search of recognition and acceptance in relationships to the opposite sex. The origin of trauma is often in the problem of domination, as these women have been dominated by their fathers, foster brothers, husbands, or boyfriends.

As Erikson claims, "[t] raumatized people often come to feel that they have lost an important measure of control over the circumstances of their own lives and are thus very vulnerable" (1995:194). This losing of control has happened both to the people in Ruby and in the Convent. In Ruby especially, the men aim to regain this control through exclusion and strict rules of social behaviour, and in the Convent each of the women tries to regain control in a different way. One extreme is Gigi, who, through her defiantly sexual clothing and behavior, succeeds momentarily in gaining control over K.D., whereas the other extreme is Seneca, who tries to gain control over her own body by cutting scars on her skin. She has earlier been sexually abused by her foster brother, and when Seneca tells her foster mother about this, she refuses to believe her and tells her never to mention it again. As a result of this, she loses the little security she has, since "[a]fter a meal of her favorite things, she was place in another home". She has no control over her life or her body, and she soon comes to the conclusion that there was something "inside her that made boys snatch her and men flash her." (*Paradise 261*) She blames the recurring sexual abuse on herself, and by hurting herself gains control over the body that is to blame.

As already pointed out, *Paradise* is full of opposites, from thirty-year-abstinence to excessive sexuality, and from the extreme exclusivity of Ruby to the healing inclusion of the Convent. The building of the Convent is itself a paradox of opposites. The novel opens by giving a short description of the history of the building that used to be "an embezzler's folly" (*Paradise* 3), and its architecture of contradictory motives:

> The ornate bathroom fixtures, which sickened the nuns, were replaced with good plain spigots, but the princely tubs and sinks, which could not be inexpensively removed, remain coolly corrupt.
>
> (*Paradise* 4)

Throughout the novel one can find reminders of the history of the building, the nymphs that "the Sisters of the Sacred Cross chipped away" and, as "their marble hair still strangle grape leaves and tease the fruit" (*Paradise* 4), the sexuality still lives in the mansion in the form of the Convent women. There the women find a place where their traumas of domestic abuse, violence and neglect can be healed. Also, they are not forced into the gender roles created and maintained by men or male-dominated society. Morrison implies that it is also the Christian religion, here in the form of the nuns that used to inhabit the Convent, which enforces the gender roles that restrict specifically the female being and sexuality.

However, the women's refusal to no longer accept male domination results in a violent attack by the Ruby men, who "try to purge the sexuality in the house just as the nuns had earlier" (Reames 2001: 24). Although the men blame the women for promiscuity and bad influence, I argue that it is not only their sexuality or independence from men that is threatening, but also the fact that the Convent is inclusive rather than exclusive. The welcoming of everybody and helping the wounded forces the Ruby people to see how illusory their version of paradise is. In the Convent the women are not restricted by the dominant gender role expectations for females of their time that enforce submissiveness on them, but learn to express themselves through learning to understand their feelings and behavior as well as their pasts. Morrison seems to suggest that this eventually enables them to support and understand other people too.

The first of the Convent women introduced in *Paradise* is Mavis Albright. She is first constructed merely as a victim of an abusive, drinking husband and as a negligent mother. She is being interviewed by a journalist because she has left her twin babies in a hot car while running into the store for "some weenies" (*Paradise* 22) for her husband's dinner and the infants have suffocated. Instead of concentrating on the dead children, she tells the interviewer how important it is to get something decent for her husband to eat, thereby involuntarily indicating how surprising it was that he has in fact come home for dinner. She is the sterotype of a submissive, female victim, who cannot imagine what it would be like "to have a husband who came home every day." She is is afraid of her violent spouse and is used to "trying to feel, smell his mood in advance" in the darkness of their bedroom. He has all the control: she tries to interpret the signs of whether he wants to have sex or not. Just as she thinks she can hear him snoring, he attacks her by pulling up her nightgown and treating her like "a life-size Raggedy Ann." (*Paradise* 24-26)

Clearly Mavis has no control whatsoever in their relationship: her enormous insecurity has influenced all the other areas of her life as well. Her husband's abusive behavior has caused a paranoid delusion in her that her remaining three children want to kill her. Frank, her husband, has used his domination also in forbidding her to meet her friends. Frank's car is for her the symbol of freedom, and she surprises herself as much as anybody by stealing it one night. Not being able to think of any other place to go, she drives five hours to her mother, who is not happy about seeing her. She knows what Mavis has been through, but reminds her of the responsibility for her children. It can be argued that she has accepted the reality of domestic violence and thinks that Mavis should be content with that too. This is in line with the traditional notion of subordination that is expected of women (Benjamin 1988: 90).

In her earlier novels Morrison has made clear how important support from other females, and especially the mother, is to a woman. After Mavis tells her mother about her fear that the children want to kill her, even the little understanding that the mother had expressed disappears, and Mavis feels she has to leave if she wants to keep her freedom. As Nancy Chodorow (1978 :32) argues, "[m] othering...is most eminently a psychologically based role. It consists in psychological and personal experience of self in relationship to child or children". Although Mavis is twenty-seven years old, she is not psychologically ready for the role of mother, because of her shattered and traumatized self-image. It is suggested that Frank is not her first husband, so she probably has a long history of domestic violence. As soon as Mavis arrives in the Convent, Connie becomes a kind of a mother figure to her. Still her dreams of a lion cub eating her up indicate that she is traumatized and not healed, and the fact that in her dream "she willingly let her head fall back, clearing the way to her throat (*Paradise* 49), indicates that she is so used to abuse and violence that she thinks it is expected of her to succumb. In addition to her feelings for Connie, there is the fact that in the Convent Mavis can feel the presence of her dead baby twins, a sensation that makes her always return to the Convent.

The second Convent woman, Gigi, continues the novel's theme of women searching for something. She seems to be comfortable with her sexuality, which causes problems in the conservative Ruby but also annoys women in the Convent who are not all at ease with their own bodies, most of all Mavis. As Bouson (2000: 206) indicates, these two women represent

"culturally powerful and shaming images", stereotypes of gender roles: Mavis of "the battered wife and the neglectful, abandoning mother", and Gigi of a contrast, "a shameful woman, an [e] xhibitionist bitch" (*Paradise* 167) in the view of Mavis, and yet she is also suggestively called "Grace" by Consolata. By this renaming it is suggested that Gigi-Grace has a graceful attitude toward herself and especially her body, something that the other women should learn from her.

Since the differentition, the realization of the self, takes place in early childhood, the relationship between the child and the primary caregiver, usually the mother, is crucial. Because girls "sustain the primary identification with the mother while boys must switch to an identification with the father" (Benjamin 1988: 90), the relationship between mothers and daughters is often strong. Morrison has introduced several mother-daughter relationships in her earlier fiction: in *Beloved* both Sethe's remaining children, Beloved and Denver, are girls, and in *Jazz* Violet's baby hunger is specifically for a baby girl, and the relationships she forms with the memory of Dorcas and Felice are examples of mother-daughter relationships. Further, Violet recalls the importance of her own mother and grandmother, while she doesn't remember much about her mostly absent father. Equally, in *Paradise* the relationship between mother and daughter receives special attention.

Seneca has been abandoned at the age of five by her young mother, Jean, and since then she has been repeatedly sexually assulted. Before she ends up in the Convent, she wanders around feeling lost and lonely. She is deeply traumatized by the lack of love. The only reminder of her roots is her mother's note that she carries in her shoe. As Laurie Vickroy (2002: 25) notes, for trauma victims the most painful part of the situation is the feeling that they are completely powerless. Some sense of power, though illusory, can be regained through repetition, and for example self-mutilation. However, this mechanism of self-defense does not facilitate healing, which requires a sense of connection. Cutting herself helps Seneca to control not only the pain she feels, but also her feelings of sadness and despair: "this under garment life kept her own eyes dry, inducing a serenity rocked only by crying women, the sight of which touched off a pain so wildly triumphant she would do anything to kill it." (*Paradise* 261)

In connection with Seneca, another mother figure is introduced, namely her boyfriend's mother, who she goes to visit. Eddie is Seneca's apparently violent boyfriend, who sends her to his mother so that she will cash her saving bonds and send the money to him. The mother is described as a bitter woman who has little feeling for her son and no intention of helping him. However, after Seneca has left her house and just a moment later returns planning to ask whether she could use the phone, she hears the mother crying, "[a] flat-out helpless mothercry – a sound like no other in the world" (*Paradise* 134). Hearing this "mothercry" evokes strong

emotions in Seneca, who has never felt a mother's love because, even when Jean was with her, she thought she was her sister. Morrison's comparison of the mothercry with "the way a gull, a cow whale, a mother wolf might if her young had beed snatched away" (*Paradise Paradise* 134) symbolizes how instinctive and natural, free of human pretensions, a mother's love and care for her "young ones" are considered to be.

Pallas Truelove is another mother-abandoned girl who finds her way to the Convent. Her artist mother has left her with her with her lawyer father, who, although materially providing for her, seems to take little interest in her. This is the first indication of her mother not fitting "the ideal of motherhood", since as Benjamin (1988: 206-207) claims, it is usually the mother, not the father, who is likely to have sole responsibility for the child if the task is not shared. Since Pallas doesn't receive recognition from her father, she seeks it through a romantic relationship with an older man, her school's maintenance man. The two of them run off, and since Pallas desires her mother's approval and acceptance, they travel to New Mexico to live with her. Her mother, however, fails to meet her expectations by starting an affair with her daughter's boyfriend. By doing this she betrays her trust, and further strengthens the image the reader already has of her as an unfit mother. By becoming her daughter's rival for a man, she abandons her all over again, which I see as a more significant cause of trauma for Pallas than losing her lover.

Despite Pallas' unsuccessful mother-daughter history, Connie renames her Divine, after her mother's real name. Connie considers the connection between mothers and daughters to be as essential as the connection between body and spirit. This becomes clear in her healing ritual, where she talks about loving the flesh and forbids the women from breaking them in two: "Never put one over the other. Eve is Mary's mother. Mary is the daughter of Eve" (*Paradise* 263). It is suggested that the chain of the generations of women is essential for coming to terms with oneself.

An important part of the ritual Connie uses to heal the women is called "loud dreaming" (*Paradise* 264), in which the women collectively share their painful experiences. The image of Lorna Doones, Rose of Sharon petals, and the dark water become fused, and this collective sharing of trauma begins their healing processes. Kelly Reames (2001: 58) suggests that the important change was that, through this sharing, the loud dreaming, the women actually take control of their stories instead of passively seeking refuge. Earlier they thought they were safe enough when they were in the Convent physically away from dangers that the outside world represented. However, the mental threats continue, and spiritual mastery over them is required for healing to begin.

Mother-daughter relationships are not problematic only for the Convent women. Also within the town of Ruby the notion of parenthood, both motherhood and fatherhood, is often difficult. Arnette and K.D. are

representatives of the younger generation, and their potential marriage introduces the prospect of uniting two important families of the town. However, the fact that Arnette is already pregnant complicates the situation. Her question to K.D. "Well, what are going to do about it?" is glossed by Morrison as "I'm going to Langston in September and I don't want to be pregnant or to abort or ger married or feel bad by myself or face my family" (*Paradise* 54). This puts K.D. into a difficult position, which he escapes by leaving Arnette. Although the pregnancy is never mentioned, the Morgan family is interested in the K.D. offspring, which seems to be the only possibility of continuing the family line. However, since the conservative, religious community of Ruby rather pretends to be unaware of the pregnancy, Arnette ends up going to the Convent seeking for help, and there delivers a baby which soon dies as a result of her attempts to induce a miscarriage.

The complicate relationship between Arnette and K.D. represents the problems the younger generation is experiencing. Arnette is more aware of herself than the generation of women before her; she knows she wants to study and doesn't simply accept the role that her parents plan for her. K.D. too refuses to follow the traditional path of his father and the other older males, who saw it as their responsibility to protect women and keep the race pure. Although the two of them marry years later, the damage done can no longer be repaired and the attempt to unite the two families fails. On the other hand, although Arnette earlier seemed more aware than the women before her generation of what the world has to offer, she realizes on the day of her wedding that she lacks a sense of self:

> She believed she loved him absolutely because he was all she knew about her self – which was to say, everything she knew of her body was connected to him. Except for Billie Delia, no one had told her there was any other way to think of herself. Not her mother; not her sister-in-law.
>
> (*Paradise* 148)

It is suggested here that the other women should have told her how to love herself. It would have been the responsibility of the female community to create a stronger sense of self-worth, but the women who simply accepted the role of submissive wives had not known how to do it.

Finally, Patricia and Billie Delia represent a mother-daughter relationship that functions as a poignant example of the paradox women have to confront of having to "simultaneously separate from and identify with the mother" (Benjamin 1988: 121). Patricia thinks of her mother and the position in which she was as an outsider in Ruby and compares it to the position she finds herself in. Patricia tried to avoid exclusion by marrying a very dark-skinned man who died soon after their marriage, Their daughter, however, inherits the lighter skin of her mother, and years later, when Billie

Delia and Patricia have grown apart, Patricia wonders if she has in fact accepted the town's racist attitude toward lighter skin. Patricia realizes "that ever since Billie Delia was an infant, she thought of her as a liability somehow" (*Paradise* 203), and understands that she has in fact sacrificed her own daughter to the prejudices of the town.

Billie Delia has been stigmatized in the eyes of the community ever since she was a little girl and, unaccustomed to regularly wearing underwear, removes her underpants in front of the public before riding a horse. She is herself at the time completely unaware of the sexual implications of this, but later has to suffer for the fact that the community, including her own mother, thinks of her as sexually impure. For the majority of the adults in Ruby, sexuality is a taboo, and they want to deny or at least suppress it. When Billy Delia is a teenager her mother accuses her of having sex with the Poole brothers, and though she is in fact still a virgin, her mother doesn't believe her. Once again, the suspected promiscuity is blamed solely on the female, as if men are naturally entitled to more sexual freedom. Eventually, Billie Delia leaves Ruby, gets a job in Demby, buys a car, and starts a life separate not only from her mother but the whole community that had judged and excluded her. She frees herself from the gender role model but doing this also requires her to break the connection to her family and roots.

In *Paradise*, as well as in the earlier parts of the trilogy, fatherhood plays a minor role, and the issue of absent fatherhood is more dominant than the fathers themselves. The affectionate nicknames of Big Papa and Big Daddy signal the respect for the patriarchal figures of the community rather than the existence of loving fathers at the microstructure level of families. The males in Ruby are too heavily burdened by the cultural trauma of slavery to be able to function as loving husbands to their wives and fathers to their children. Just like women, they need to start the process of healing through acceptance and loving of themselves.

Already the epigraph of *Paradise*, as well as of *Beloved* and *Jazz* earlier, suggests healing and redemption. Especially the last three lines of the epigraph in *Paradise*: "And they will find me there,/ and they will live,/ and they will not die again" support the closure of the novel, which leaves it unclear whether the Convent women actually died or not. Bouson (2000: 213) suggests that there are two competing visions: the despairing one "of the intergenerational perpetuation of shame" and the hopeful one "of the healing power of the ancestral imagination to solve the issue of difference." I agree with Bouson that the magical final scene of the novel continues the narration of resurrection familiar from the earlier parts of the trilogy. It is suggested that there is healing from the traumatizing parent-child relationships as well as from the restricting gender roles.

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»Aber im Keller | die Leichen sind immer noch da«. Die Opfer-Debatte in der deutschen Literatur nach 1989

I

Eric Hobsbawm, der Chronist des »Kurzen 20. Jahrhunderts«, bezeichnet die »Zerstörung [...] jenes sozialen Mechanismus, der die Gegenwartserfahrung mit derjenigen früherer Generationen verknüpft« als »eines der charakteristischsten und unheimlichsten Phänomene des späten zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts. Die meisten jungen Menschen am Ende dieses Jahrhunderts« – so Hobsbawm – »wachsen in einer Art permanenter Gegenwart auf, der jegliche [...] Verbindung zur Vergangenheit der eigenen Lebensgeschichte fehlt«.[1]

Diese These einer zeitgenössischen Geschichtsvergessenheit könnte man zum Ausgangspunkt der Beschreibung jener literarischen und historischen Debatte nehmen, die sich in jüngster Zeit dem Thema des Bombenkrieges und seiner Verarbeitung im öffentlichen Bewusstsein der Deutschen zugewandt hat. In gewisser Weise lässt die anhaltende Diskussion einen Vergleich zum Historikerstreit zu, jener das Vergangenheitsbewusstsein der 80er Jahre polarisierenden Debatte, die im Ergebnis einer ›Normalisierung‹ des deutschen Selbstverständnisses in der Nachkriegszeit eine klare Absage erteilt hatte. Während damals Jürgen Habermas seinen Kontrahenten vorwarf, die »Hypotheken einer gründlich entmoralisierten Vergangenheit *abzuschütteln*« und zu einer »einhellig und vorreflexiv *geteilte*[*n*] Identität«[2] zurückkehren zu wollen, zielt jedoch die aktuelle Diskussion darauf, dass andere Hypotheken als die der deutschen Schuld bisher nur unzureichend zur Kenntnis genommen wurden und die mehr oder weniger einhellig geteilte Nachkriegsidentität somit reflexive Defizite aufweist. Es geht bei der Bombenkriegsdiskussion – wie auch im Fall der Debatte um die Vertreibung der Deutschen aus den Sudeten- und Ostgebieten des ehemaligen Deutschen Reiches – um nichts weniger als die Frage der Zulässigkeit einer Perspektive auf die Deutschen als Opfer des Krieges, den sie im Jahr 1939 selbst entfesselt hatten, bzw. das Problem der bisher unbefriedigenden Aufarbeitung dieses Geschehens durch Literatur und Geschichtsschreibung. Nach Auffassung Lothar Kettenackers, der kürzlich wichtige Beiträge in einem Sammelband zusammengefasst hat, wird diese Debatte, die gerade erst begonnen habe, »unser historisches Selbstverständnis verändern«.[3]

Um einen Überblick über die verschiedenen Stimmen und Standpunkte zu gewinnen, ist es zweckmäßig, die wichtigsten Thesen der Debatte noch einmal in Erinnerung zu rufen. Als Basis und immer wieder hergestellter