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Author(s): Kate Cummings

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Kate Cummings

Reclaiming the Mother('s) Tongue: *Beloved, Ceremony, Mothers and Shadows*

If interpretation is the violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules . . . in order to impose a direction . . . and to subject it to secondary rules, then the development of humanity is a series of interpretations. The role of genealogy is to record its history. . . . "effective" history [finding its subject in the event. By "event" is meant]. . . . the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it.

Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History"

I will tell you something about stories,
[he said]
They aren't just entertainment.
Don't be fooled.
they are all we have, you see,
all we have to fight off
illness and death. . . .
So they try to destroy the stories
let the stories be confused or forgotten.
They would like that
They would be happy
Because we would be defenseless then.
Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*

Three stories: Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, Marta Traba's *Mothers and Shadows*. None of them are "just entertainment." On the contrary, they are tales of resistance or "effective" histories that articulate different "minority" perspectives—all history being perspectival—and which compose a populist defense. My use of "minority" here and elsewhere is strictly political and meant to reflect the fact that the protagonists in all three

Katherine Cummings, assistant professor of English at the University of Washington, teaches courses in contemporary women writers, feminism, social theory, and post-colonialism. Her book, *Telling Tales: The Hysteric's Seduction in Fiction and Theory*, will be published this fall by Stanford University Press.

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novels are defined, commodified, and tortured by those whose access to power is materially greater than their own. As minorities, they resist domination while constructing alternative communities of their own. Only the dissidents in *Mothers and Shadows* are true minorities, that is, outnumbered; the Blacks in *Beloved* and Native Americans in *Ceremony* are numerical majorities in their texts. I use the term with full awareness of its questionable status and of the history of racism and error within which Westerners have entitled non-white minorities in their unwillingness to count beyond the West.

Unlike books whose stories are contained between covers, these three texts without borders are "events." Aiming to intervene in material practice, they posit subjects where subjectivity has been negated and minority histories where these have been suppressed. All three narratives are thus anchored in the lived experience of oppression, and all are fundamentally retrospective. Like other narratives of origin, they reconstruct, restore, and rename. In each book, remembering is labor, or what Traba calls a painstaking "excavation" (43); the past always lies in fragments, and the main characters perform like interested archeologists, constructing collaborative histories as the product of a dig. What they assemble as history is never immaterial, therefore, nor the offspring of a recollective gaze. Rather, in the minority narratives that I am reading, history is what subjects bump into. Out there as spectacle in bodies, it equally perdures in the world of things.

Sometimes we stumble across an affective history in objects. The teeth in Emo's pouch spill out in war stories/atrocities (*Ceremony* 60–62); the tin that Paul D carries with him contains the heart and history of a slave (*Beloved* 113, 117); and the photograph of the "four muses" in Irene's apartment recounts the subject's production as an isolated individual who's "trapped" within a bourgeois dream (*Mothers* 10–11). More often, though, the novels' histories reside in places. Indeed, "stories" are everywhere Tao looks in *Ceremony*; they're in Luisa's apartment and the Plaza de Mayo in *Mothers*, for example; and in *Beloved*, they are palpable presences at Sweet Home and house number 124. As Sethe insists of the Sweet Home plantation:

Places, places are still there. . . . [a]nd not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. . . . [E]ven if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened. . . . The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there—you who was never there—if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again. . . . (36)

In short, places are powerful histories, neither landscapes nor architectures merely, but moving pictures or living events. Still, the most compelling histories of domination and resistance lie elsewhere. We find them in the wounded bodies of Tao and Traba's Dolores, for instance, and the carved flesh of the ex-slave named Sethe. The first has been scarred by war, the second by torture, and the third by a white man's whip. Their bodies impinge upon our bodies in the act of reading so that history is registered viscerally, flesh calling out to flesh.

I have been calling these affective histories narratives of origin, because that is their common name in middle-class fictions of the West. The same texts have other ways of speaking (about) themselves, however; thus, Morrison will choose

to call her tales of origin “certificates of ownership” (95, 184–84) and/or “reclamations of alienated flesh” (88–89). For flesh is primary, as Hortense Spillers has also argued. It is there before the “captive body [is severed] from its motive will, its active desire” and thus prior to the moment when the body “become[s] a territory of cultural and political maneuver” without a proper identity and/or the means of signifying itself. The liberation of the body is accordingly dependent upon taking back the flesh, reading its surface as marks of resistance. On this “inside . . . turned outside,” Spillers concludes, we discover a narrative of origin: a black subject’s “cultural text” (67).

These two moments of captivity and liberation are fundamental to the telling of Morrison, Silko, and Traba; in fact, all three novels are equally dialogic or double-voiced. If one voice speaks painfully of oppression along with history experienced as something suffered, a second voice informs and disrupts the first speaking to represent recalcitrant subjects and the histories they have made. Within the first and dominant history, “minority” subjects are commonly represented as commodities, non-beings, or things. A few others are positioned as exceptions. Granted token membership in the dominant culture, these special cases are individuated and separated from their kind. In the second counter-histories, minority subjects are invariably constructed intersubjectively, the collectivity here speaking through the individual and the individual giving voice to the experiences of her *compadres* or race. Although history and counter-history overlap in the minority fictions I’ll be reading, they are often lived sequentially by their subjects. “Coerced into a negative, generic subject position [by the dominant white culture or, in Traba’s case, the military state], the oppressed individual [in time] responds by transforming that position into a positive, collective one” (JanMohamed 10).

Beginning with a reading of coercion—the uses of discipline as a regulatory mechanism for classifying, commodifying, and/or exterminating “minorities”—I end with a reading of transformation, enumerating three strategies of resistance and collective empowerment. In this writing of captivity and liberation, I will be trying to learn from the practice of Trinh Minh-ha, who has constructed her films and essays so that other(’s) histories have access to speech. Trinh views herself as speaking nearby other cultures, acknowledging real differences between and within subjects, while allowing for potential similarities or possible alliances. To speak near is to refuse speaking for others, she tells us, since the “for” address inevitably silences other peoples, while effacing differences between alternative histories and the speaker’s own. Speaking close also resists the dominant practice of speaking about and thus the appropriation of others’ experiences, which renders “the different” as one more instantiation of “the same” (“Difference” 33; see also Lecture).

Alike in their resistance to systematic domination and their representation of alternative communities, *Beloved*, *Ceremony*, and *Mothers and Shadows* nonetheless clearly compose distinct stories. I want to say a word about their differences at this point, outlining their specific subjects, settings, situations, and agendas so as to avoid reproducing some homogeneous counter-text. At the

same time I mean to indicate their specific points of comparison, since the interconnections among the three novels will be my subject.

Briefly, then, Traba's tale features two women. Irene is middle-aged, middle-class, and basically apolitical: Dolores is young, working-class, and politically engaged. *Mothers and Shadows* is constructed from their dialogue, some of which is exteriorized or voiced and some of which takes place as interior conversation. The scene is Argentina under military rule; the women's topics include popular resistance, "the disappeared," and the disciplinary powers of the Argentinian and Uruguayan states. Each speaker stirs up memories in the other by her presence and conversation. "[H]and in hand" (14) they piece together what has happened into an indictment of the juntas and a commemoration of the disappeared, "lest we forget" (i). In *Mothers and Shadows*, forgetting is a feature of isolation—of ignoring the bonds between peoples and suppressing/repressing the link up of events. Missing links make for a disjointed sort of history, whose incompleteness is reflected in the fragmentary character of Traba's book. On the whole, it's rather like a jigsaw puzzle—made of pieces which require (re)arranging for the picture to take shape. We might think of the novel's readers as players, then, who are at work on discovering a pattern or filling in an historical sequence.

The novel's dominant history is largely a matter of suppression and repression. On one hand, suppression "disappears" bodies and information; it is properly an operation of the state. On the other, repression is exercised by subjugated subjects, who may be thought of as acting out an obsessional defense. They keep their distance from what is happening, these subjects—the torturer's mutilation of the human body finding its counterpart in their refusal to recognize, touch, or be touched. An oppositional history is simultaneously kept alive by Dolores and Irene; its distinguishing characteristic is its emphasis on touch. Not only do the two women draw close to each other in conversation, but as active readers of events in Argentina and Uruguay they keep us in contact with events that the two regimes would suppress. As the first in a series of interpreters, they are in a position to (re)define reading, which they posit as a constitutive activity, a labor through which the world is reconstructed and "the disappeared" in a sense returned. "In a sense" represents a significant qualification in the women's history, however. It's significant because the bodies of "the disappeared" remain missing, their names and histories alone coming back to haunt. With missing bodies, we have reached the limits of idealism, then, for the body's materiality is precisely what stories cannot restore. Nor does Traba finally believe they can. Rather, her readers' idealism is sharply qualified by the final event of the novel: torturers break in upon the two women and military rule continues as before. With her ending, Traba suggests that if a different history is to happen in Argentina, words will not be enough; bodies will also be called upon to act.

Like *Mothers and Shadows*, *Ceremony* identifies state power with torture, notably in the characters of Pinkie and Emo, who are represented as military mimics and thus parodies of Western white men. The Native American history

also links the state apparatus to the production of obsessional and/or sadistic subjects. It too affirms the need for intersubjectivity and coalition politics in opposing technologies of individuation and ideologies of individualism. Furthermore, it pins its faith on the restorative power of maternal principles, or the practice of what I prefer to call the “mother-tongue.” There is, however, a salient difference between the two texts. Unlike *Mothers and Shadows*, *Ceremony* is finally a utopian narrative, whose end finds Tao cured, the land renewed, and the sun rising. The disparity of the two endings points to an ideological difference between the writers—a difference which pivots on the efficacy of the word. Silko, unlike Traba, is a thoroughgoing idealist who believes absolutely in the transformative power of tales. Thus, not only is Tao able to avert the destructive course of Western history by acting out the legends of the Laguna people, but by repeating the old tribal stories he gives birth to another creative history in the time present of the novel.

Ceremony itself is essentially a quest narrative set in New Mexico on and around a Laguna Pueblo reservation in the aftermath of World War II. To tell it, Silko relies upon two voices, one of which speaks as novels do with specificity, constructing characters whom we believe in as Native Americans occupying a well-defined time and space. The narrative proper describes Tao’s search for a ceremony capable of piecing together his identity, reintegrating him into the Pueblo community, revivifying indigenous traditions, and reempowering the Laguna tribe by returning them to the Mother from whom they came. “We came out of this land,” the narrator affirms in closing, “and we are hers” (255). “Tao’s narrative” may be something of a misnomer, however, since it is neither a monologic utterance nor seamless web. Instead, we find anecdotes, individual histories (such as Helen Jean’s), war-stories (swapped by Emo, Pinkie, and other vets), popular folklore (of which Josiah and Betonie are the repositories), and quasi-documentaries (like the footage on Gallup) all jumbled up together in the quester’s text. It appears that Silko has assembled “Tao’s” portion of *Ceremony* dialogically not only to represent the identity of the Lagunas and the differences within and among them but also, I think, to emphasize our need for communal structures. Certainly, her positive characters are alike in their commitment to collectivity and coalition. Some are “breeds”; others forge interracial alliances; all resist what “splits up community life, forces the individual back upon himself, and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way” (Foucault, “Subject” 420).

The interchangeability of story and ceremony here operate to much the same effect, for if stories are private entertainment, ceremonies are public works. By conflating them, Silko calls attention to the collective character and performative quality of tale-telling, thereby lending stories a more powerful name. Their power is most palpable in the book’s “other” sections. Its indigenous legends and serial narratives break up the more conventional life of Tao while adding an historical dimension to his quest. As stories of origin, they repeat the fiction’s present events within a mythic time frame and its personal experiences within a transpersonal context. Each section thus appears to call out to another which informs or touches it.

The points of comparison I have drawn between *Mothers and Shadows* and *Ceremony* might easily be extended to include *Beloved*. Morrison criticizes hegemony and state apparatuses with equal pointedness, focusing particularly on the institutional production of ideology and to that end including (as does Silko) both formal and informal pedagogical scenes in her history. She also shares both writers' commitments to collectivity, and she locates the origin of intersubjectivity in mothering, while similarly privileging the mother-tongue, a semiotic practice which contests dominant ideologies, imploding the symbolic dimension of language and breaking "the back of words" (*Beloved* 261). Overall, the perspective of *Beloved* lies somewhere between the unqualified affirmation of *Ceremony* and the final bleakness of *Mothers and Shadows*. Perhaps because it is the first installment of a trilogy in progress, the book raises many questions that go unanswered. Morrison leaves her ending open, for instance, and the histories of its major subjects irresolute. This is not to say that her narrative is somehow less satisfactory. On the contrary, of the three texts, *Beloved's* descriptions of domination and resistance are the most detailed, and its theory of subjectivity is the most complex; thus it will occupy a privileged position in my reading, hereafter directing the discussion of subordination and resistance in the two other texts.

In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison tells the life of ex-slaves in Cincinnati not long after the Civil War. Because her story focuses upon the destruction and reconstruction of the extended black family, its members occupy center stage. Here we find Baby Suggs, who is the mother of her community; through her, its people learn to "love [their] flesh" (88). Close to Baby is her daughter "in-law," Sethe, who has one girl child named Denver and another, slightly older, whose proper name has been forgotten. Years ago Sethe killed her elder daughter to prevent the child's capture by school-teacher and enslavement at Sweet Home once again. The murder of the "crawling already? girl" (94) marks the novel's main event. Roughly sixteen years later, in time present, she returns from "the other-side" as "Beloved," the inscription Sethe has paid for with her body to be carved into the tombstone above her daughter's head. Morrison solicits our attention to "Beloved" by reproducing the character(s) upon the cover of her book. A few pages later, we stumble against another gravestone. On it is an alternative spelling of "Beloved" in an inscription reading: "*Sixty million and more*" (iii). The million plus lie at the edge of the narrative on the dedication page of Morrison's tale. "Beloved" orients her writing/our reading of their diasporic plight, but also calls the "sixty . . ." into the text as flesh. One consequence of this calling is that Sethe's daughter will never simply be her child. Indeed, the familial law of "belonging to" is everywhere under erasure in Morrison's narrative with both positive and negative effects. That is why it's more fitting to speak of *Beloved* as "[e]verybody's [lost] child" (246)—more fitting, because the newborn (eighteen-year-old) articulates two interrelated histories: one properly "belonging to" Sethe's daughter, the other to the "[d]isremembered and unaccounted for" (274) among her race. More eloquently than the histories of those who have disappeared, "Beloved" expresses the feelings of those who remain. Hence, in the narrative, this endearing signifier originally names the group of mourners who are assembled at the child's funeral, "Be-

loved” being a part of the minister’s convocation and the mourners his immediate referent. Chief among them is the grieving Sethe. Were we to call her by other characters than the “seven letters” she’s been left with (5), then we might say that “Beloved” is an exteriorized affect: precisely, the intensity of a mother’s anguish made flesh. Here, though, I have need of Sethe: “[W]hat she got, settled for, was the one word that mattered. . . . rutting among the headstones with the engraver, his young son looking on. . . . That should certainly be enough. Enough to answer . . .” (5). And enough, even without the preacher’s additional “Dearly,” to recall.

Beloved’s mother also has a temporary lover, Paul D. Entering Sethe’s home near the beginning of the book, he leaves around its midpoint, when “bumped” by the mother’s killing event. Sethe’s “love is too thick” (164); “what [she] did was wrong” (165); it may be “worse” than the enslaver’s action. “‘You got two feet, Sethe, not four,’” Paul says. Because his judgment is inextricably related to the lessons of his master, I have chosen to enlist Paul as a prompter in discussing processes of subjection as they are represented in *Beloved* and the other two texts. I begin, then, as he does while still at Sethe’s home, with a rememory of what Sylvia Wynter has called “the discourse of enchantment.”

Paul’s “enchanting” scene stars his master, Mr. Garner, in conversation with other white “men.”

“Y’all got boys,” he told them. “Young boys, old boys . . . Now at Sweet Home, my niggers is men. . . . [I]f you a man yourself, you’ll want your niggers to be men too.”

“I wouldn’t have no nigger men around me wife.”

It was the reaction Garner loved and waited for. “Neither would I,” he said. “Neither would I,” and there was always a pause before the neighbor . . . got the meaning. Then a fierce argument, sometimes a fight, and Garner came home bruised and pleased, having demonstrated . . . [he] was tough enough and smart enough to make and call his own niggers men. (10–11)

Garner’s joke has two targets, I’m assuming: the immediate one is the teller’s audience of farmers and the more fundamental one the absent black “men.” For if the jokster’s logic proves his fellow slave owners “niggers,” its founding premise is that “niggers” are “niggers”; these sexual animals/potential rapists are the antitypes of “men.”

The joke’s contrastive grammars demand explanation. On one hand, we have “niggers is men”—a statement which depends upon “young boys, old boys” for its sense, since the point of Garner’s exercise is not black manhood but the efficacy of his own denomination process. Once Garner’s grammar is given its referents, the following ontology takes shape: under the right conditions, which include the mastery and nominative power of Garner, “niggers” can become (flawed) copies of their masters; that is, they can “be” (like) men. On the other hand, we have something akin to an oxymoron in the impossible construction “nigger men.” The joker’s construction is not precisely oxymoronic, however, since its two terms are simply contradictory; they are not equal nor reciprocal in the least. Instead, the adjective modifies its subject or otherwise acts upon it to

erase or contaminate. In effect, "nigger" transforms a positivity into a negativity; all at once, it "disappears" men by (re)turning them to beasts.

The "nigger's" disappearing act is not an isolated episode, however, but the skewed repetition of an earlier scene which has been structured as the prologue to the white man's racist joke. Its actors include one generic black female and five generic black males; the implied script-writer and director is Garner himself. The stage is Sweet Home; the subjects are sexuality and subjectivity; the six leads are all without names. The female appears as "she" and "new girl"; the males make up a unit called "the five Sweet Home men" (10). When the girl arrives the five are "so sick with the absence of women, they [have] taken to calves" (10). The girl promises all of them "the solitary gift of rape" (10). Nonetheless, the males allow her to "choose," passing on the kind of subjectivity that Garner has granted them and—above all—exercising "restraint." In Paul's words, their restraint was, in fact, possible "only because they were Sweet Home men" (10; my emphasis). "His" implication could not be clearer: black males—"niggers"—always rape. If the Sweet Home slaves behave otherwise, that is because their "niggerhood" has been weeded out under Garner's cultivation. Almost white but not quite, the five find themselves cast as imitation men; but "only on Sweet Home." Paul later reminds us, and only "by [Garner's] leave" (220).

While the restrictions upon manhood and the so-called exceptionality of the Sweet Homers directly affect Paul's history, neither tells the full story of domination. Both are rather supplemented by a second discourse, which represents Garner's exceptional "niggers" as common or generic—unexceptional in either case. Because "the mark of the plural" (Memmi 85) is primary, already at work within and behind the special case, and because it is also more inclusive, I want to delay discussing the "exceptions" and the conditions of their exceptionality by reading the plural first.

The patronym, Garner, marks Paul D, Paul F, and Paul A as property of Garner himself, their stamps of purchase standing in contrast to Cincinnati's self-named "free" black, Stamp Paid. But the Pauls' personal names tell another story which directly engages the generic; in their case, the given name, which ought to personalize, undoes personality along with difference and specificity. In fact, were it not for the men's separate initials, the three would (appear to) be one in the same. Although they approach namelessness, the slaves' sameness stops short at a critical juncture. In effect, the three Pauls plus initials are the making(s) of a brand name. They are slightly different packagings, in other words, for a product that is essentially the same. Certainly, the consumers benefit from the marketing strategy and not the commodity/slave. For the black male is left with nothing that's his own: not a self, a personal history, a real name. At best, he makes visible the conditions of his production in an appellation miming the law of exchange. By contrast, the white male has a bill of sale specifying his merchandise; and if the need arises, instead of "you boy," he is handy with a discriminating name.

Black females are in much the same position, as Sethe's memory of her own mother indicates. There is no personal address by which the child can call her,

but only a perverse refiguration in the shape of a circle and cross which must do what it can for a name. While still a child, Sethe is shown the woman's scar and instructed to remember it as the emblem of a mother who, in exploiting the master's signifiers to signify a self, comes to stake her identity upon a brand. In the brand name, two histories are accordingly represented. An oppressive one makes visible the visage of slavery or the slave owner's sovereignty over and against the objectitude of his slaves; an oppositional history signifies upon the first to make apparent the slave's subjectivity, her resistance to domination, and her pain. The black woman says to Sethe, "'This is your ma'am. This,' and she pointed. 'I am the only one got this mark now. . . . If something happens to me and you can't tell me by my face, you can know me by this mark'" (61).

Sethe's mother appears under another appellation which is considerably less distinctive than her identifying scar. In the child's "world of cooing women," that is, she "belongs to" the body of maternal functionaries "each of whom was called Ma'am" (30). The Ma'ams are another commodity. Like the Pauls, whose brand name Sethe's mother embodies, the black mammies are in all ways dispossessed, more viscerally, if possible, than the males. Unlike them, black females are forced to feed the slave system, not simply as field hands, cooks, or domestic workers—that is, with labor that is non-gender specific and might equally have been performed by black males—but also as the (re)producers of two raw materials, which depend upon the women's sexuality or reproductive systems. First, the children ma'ams bear are made to nourish slavery; at bottom, they are the replacements for the "machinery" that their owners by abuse and over-production have worn down. Second, the milk mothers produce goes first to feed white mouths immediately and then, if any is left, to keep alive slave children, potential laborers and commodities. Sethe says, "The little white-babies got it first and I got what was left. Or none. There was no nursing milk to call my own" (200). Nor was there a biological mother to feed her, except perhaps for a short while at first. Sethe's predominant experience is, rather, the common one. As she says, "'I sucked from another woman whose job it was'" (60).

The commodification and pluralization found in *Beloved* are central operations in *Ceremony* and *Mothers and Shadows* as well. The official language with which different Native American peoples are referred to in Silko's *Ceremony* is "these dumb Indians" (41), or—when there's a need to summon the Other as a commodity—"Anyone can fight for America . . . even you boys'" (64). In Traba's *Mothers and Shadows* the plural is applied to dissidents in contexts which represent them as negative beings or non-people as well. For instance, when the state refers to Dolores and her *compadres*, their proper names inevitably disappear; Enrique, Victoria, Tomás, and countless others are all effaced by broadcasts denouncing them as "enemies of the people." The state's strategy proves singularly effective: not only do its "enemies" lose their separate identities, they also lose the look of "human beings" (41) when reproduced in photographs for public consumption. Many, like Dolores, lose their families as well, or—what is more fundamental to the subjectivity of the child—the familial look recognition. Hence, when Dolores' photo is "flashed up on the screen [her]

parents" (41) cannot recognize her. Neither then nor later, when their daughter returns to them, are they able (in Beloved's terms) to say Dolores her name. But hers is not, like Beloved's, a family drama, nor does her mother's distance break Dolores into pieces. On the contrary, that job is reserved for the state and its disciplinarians. Their refusal "to recogni[ze] what is happening" as torture constitutes a "negation . . . that will in turn allow" the negation of the subject and her world to continue (Scarry 51). The negation of Dolores is essentially two-fold. On one hand, torture destroys her motherhood, and on the other it denies or derealizes her pain. Not only do the state police crush her unborn baby and rupture her spleen, they also produce a nearly insentient being, who speaks of tortures, when prompted, without affectivity—in the official language of disassociation and classification, "as if [she has become a detached observer] reeling off a list of plant species" (Traba 42). Irene's mothering, however, repairs much of the torturers' damage and enables Dolores to claim her scars as "radiant objects" (143). Thus remembered, they effectively embody her history. And like the brand that is reclaimed by Sethe's mother, Dolores' flesh will compose another cultural text—one that differs somewhat from the black woman's in that while the Latina's resistance and resilience are similarly made visible, so also, in marked contrast, is Dolores, her name.

The history of Dolores intersects with that of Sethe's mother, just as Irene's history partially coincides with Paul D's. Though race, class, gender, and historical circumstance separate Paul and Irene, who occupy nearly opposite social positions as a result of these factors, they have one thing in common. They, like Tao's brother Rocky, have been trained to view themselves as distinct exceptions or special cases.

All three cases are products of a pedagogy which discriminates, reforms, and regulates. At one end of the pedagogical process stands the master teacher/disciplinarian to whom belongs the power of defining; he reproduces the relations of domination and subordination particular to the ruling order. At the other end lies the student/subject who, in internalizing the master's lessons, finds herself/himself a captive of the dominant ideology specific to his or her (e)state. Education is, therefore, always about learning "to speak (again)," about acquiring the power, as Irigaray says, "to distinguish, to index, to name" (274). She goes on to argue that the master's foreign language is designed to dis(re)member the mother-tongue and suppress the speaker's history both by reproducing the pupil's past as "primitive" and her or his presently lived experience as "strange." Not only will the learner be "cut off from any remaining empirical relation with the womb," the home, or the community of those who resemble her, but the student will also be separated "[f]rom everything that might remind him" of where he came from, that might "turn him in the direction of . . . an origin that is still inscribed within and also inscribes a *proper* . . . history of one's own" (293). Still more significant than the missing record of the learner is the lost visage of the pupil's people or race. Without them, s/he is essentially placeless: neither a member of the ruling class s/he's encouraged to mimic nor one with the collectivity whose cultural differences imperil the existence of the

same. In short, s/he has no home left to speak of but makes her way as an orphan or special case till events compel a change of course.

In the three minority histories, only Irene and Paul experience such compulsion. Because Rocky is killed before events catch up with him, what he might have become—besides the “A” student who undergoes the pedagogical process I’ve just described—remains an open question in the text.

At an early age, Irene’s family teaches her to disown her Jewishness. And as long as she identifies with “Argentina *über alles*” (Traba 61), she passes as a (near) member of the “master-race.” Irene lives untouched by the events around her until her arrest with Dolores and other dissidents forces a re-education. Irene then realizes that “I’d got things completely wrong. Something had changed radically and I was starting to notice. No matter who I might be I simply didn’t exist for them. Or rather: they decreed who could exist and who could not” (44). Her conclusion testifies to the power of naming in its capacity to make or unmake those named, but it also bears witness to the intersubjectivity of the subject. For if before capture Irene imagined she was an (autonomous) individual and thus free to create her self, in jail she recognizes the state’s power to define and her consequent need of the other in order to speak herself. In the novel’s time present, Irene’s significant other is Dolores, with whom she gradually works through the trauma of the station. Thus, from a position of initial aversion that roughly duplicates the authorities’ cool negation of dissidents, the elder woman moves towards identification. She stops looking at Dolores distastefully from a distance and begins seeing her empathetically, her look finally accompanied by a maternal touch.

Paul D is also the product of individuation, although the kind of individuality he has been educated to assume differs fundamentally from Irene’s. Under Garner’s tutelage, Paul actually grows up “thinking that of all the Blacks in Kentucky, only the five of them [the Sweet Homers] were men” (Morrison 125). This “wonderful lie” (221), as Paul later calls it, chains him to Garner’s pseudo-family, “isolates” him from the larger black community, and produces self-hatred in Paul largely because the flesh, which ought to be the origin of narcissistic pleasure and the basis of a self one can love, has been subjected to a monstrous anti-narcissism instead. Securely positioned inside his nominal father’s definitions, Paul can neither name himself nor recognize his own face.

However, once events dislodge him from Sweet Home, the black male begins to interrogate: “Is that where manhood lay? In the naming done by a whiteman who was supposed to know?” (125). And later: “Was he naming what he saw or creating what he did not? . . . Suppose Garner woke up one morning and changed his mind. Took the word away” (220). Would the five of them still be men? Of Sixo and Halle, Paul is sure. His certainty is tied to the fact that both men remember their origins, Halle in tending his mother and Sixo in speaking his native tongue. These proper histories work against the grain of Paul D’s Garner-driven narrative, articulating black identities in relation to black communities and enabling Halle and Sixo each to name and be himself. Unlike them, Paul is homeless and altogether unsure of his masculinity.

Paul D's re-education begins when a flash flood provides a chance for him and forty-five other members of a chain-gang to turn their enforced seriality into a collective escape, here making use of the "chain that held them captive" to signify a path of flight. Paul's freedom is not the same as his manhood, however. He claims the latter only when he stops viewing himself "through Garner's eyes" (267) and adopts Sixo's viewpoint instead. The two perspectives could hardly be more antithetical; for where the first convinces Paul that his judgement of Sethe is "righteous," the second "makes him feel ashamed" (267). As a man, Paul then reverses his steps. Back again at 124, he takes on the job of mothering. "'I'm a here to take care of you, you hear?'" (272) he says to Sethe and begins to bathe her as if she were his child. The affectivity of Paul's mothering will join their separate histories, so that "his story [comes to lie] next to hers" (273). From here (on) there will be no more speaking for or about Sethe but only conversing nearby, "[h]is holding fingers . . . holding hers" (273). Together they review the lessons of Garner's pedagogic replacement as a preliminary to forgetting a history that must not be passed on.

The man whom we know only as "schoolteacher" is ultimately responsible for the bit in Paul D's mouth, the brutal murder of Sixo, the unmaning and maddening of Halle, the sexual abuse of Sethe for his students' edification, and the killing of her child. Schoolteacher's actions are undeniably repellent, but none have the impact of his obsessional studies which underwrite and thus legitimize the slave economy with the pseudo-science of race. Hence, every "night he . . . write[s] in his book" (37); during the day he asks questions and measures body parts, intent on codifying the alterity of Blackness. Later Sethe remembers how "[s]choolteacher'd wrap that string all over my head, 'cross my nose, around my behind, number my teeth" (191). She also represents the master's classroom as a laboratory for creating "race": a "trope of ultimate, irreducible difference" (Gates 4-5) here produced as a natural/biological fact. In the classroom, schoolteacher's white pupils are instructed; in the art of observation and classification; their objects are black subjects whom the students' discourse (re)produces as "slaves." It's a tidy operation, as Sethe explains it, in which "her human characteristics" are listed "on the left" side and her animal traits lined up beside them, teleologically, "on the right" (193), where they chart the "beast" that blacks are in danger of becoming if removed from the influence of the human(izing) white. Clearly, there's a perfect marriage here between the pedagogue's discourse of knowledge and the material requirements of slavery. By "raising" the black body into metaphor, that is, schoolteacher has made it signify, strategically, according to the needs of the slave regime.

A like deployment of metaphoricity is at work in the Argentinian and Uruguayan juntas, where torture functions to obliterate bodies by systematically translating the real suffering of its victims into what Scarry has termed "the wholly illusory but . . . wholly convincing spectacle of [state] power" (27). Traba gives us three such translations in the aborted child of Dolores, the broken spine of Tomás, and the dismemberment of Enrique. Although *Mothers and Shadows* purports to reclaim the same bodies—or to construct a different

history in their name(s)—it begins, necessarily, by repeating (or at least implying) a few particulars that are proper to the states' official script. In the dominant narrative, the three dissidents appear to be metonyms for revolution; the story they are made to tell re-presents the superior force of the juntas and the consequent annihilation of popular resistance. According to the official legend, revolutionists have been cut off from each other—dispersed and isolated as in the Enrique trope; the back of the revolution has been broken as signified by the (dis)figuration of Tomás and its life extinguished within the metaphor displacing Dolores and her aborted infant. Where the junta's story exemplifies a discourse of "enchantment," which, in Sylvia Wynter's words, functions to "determine and orient . . . system-maintaining behaviors" consonant with the subject's subjection, *Mothers and Shadows* exemplifies a "disenchanting discourse" which gives another meaning to the metaphors of the state (230). With Irene's help Dolores then gives birth to a counter-narrative. In it, the "morale" of Tomás remains "unshakeable" (30) and popular resistance unbroken. Decentered but not depeopled or dismembered, opposition continues in other countries and erupts again in the land where it began, but perhaps in a different place.

Three oppositional strategies of resistance, whose importance vary from one minority history to the next, have played a part in my description of dominant discourse, since *Mothers and Shadows*, *Beloved*, and *Ceremony* never reproduce a colonial scene (of writing) that is untouched from within by dissent. Still, the emphasis has fallen heavily upon subjection, whereas the three fictions always bear witness to their subjects' empowerment. This empowerment grows out of the following practices: menacing, renaming, and mothering. Briefly, "menace" operates within colonizing situations to delegitimize colonial authority by unmasking the Other (who's supposed to require ruling over) so that s/he is seen for what s/he is—precisely, the fantasmatic replication of the colonialist himself. Renaming makes use of two language systems—a master discourse, which minority subjects appropriate to signify themselves, and a mother-tongue, whose utterances exceed signification and whose articulations are (consequently) irreducible to the binarism of other and same. Mothering provides the final and most fundamental opposition, for through it the subject is reconstituted and the body reborn in the flesh.

In *Beloved*, Sethe murders her already crawling baby so that "nothing [will be] there to claim" when the "slave-catcher[s]" arrive; on the contrary, she and her children will have crossed over together, now living as a family on the "other side." None of the white men recognize Sethe's murder as a maternal gesture, however. Instead, they see an unnatural mother severing her child's head. Although the onlookers would prefer to view everything as Sethe's doing, they are menaced by being made to see their own actions spectacularly repeated in hers. Self-recognition here coincides with the return of the Other's gaze. "Little nigger-boy eyes open . . . nigger-girl eyes staring . . . nigger-baby eyes crinkling up to cry. . . . [and] the nigger woman who looked like she didn't have any" (150)—in all of these "nigger eyes," Morrison locates "the displacing gaze of the disciplined [under which] the observer becomes the observed" (Bhabha 129). Horrified, the white men recoil from their reflection; they "back out" of

the barn and away from the Other's gaze, but not before recognizing their implication in the action or realizing that slavery constitutes the original violence, having always already operated systematically to denature black motherhood and dismember black families. While both operations, denaturing and dismembering, are overlooked by the slave owners in *Beloved*, here—for a moment—they are made visible by Sethe. Because her spectacular crime menaces the men's conceptions of themselves as civilized or enlightened, it thereby challenges the ideological foundations upon which slavery rests.

Silko's Emo is another reflector. In essence, he reproduces the white world as if he belonged on the "inside"—from a position of assimilation, then, that is virtually the opposite of the resistant Sethe's. Unlike her, he (initially) does what he has been authorized to do, but he does it with a vengeance that goes beyond mimicry, carrying officially sanctioned speech and behavior to excess. In fact, so perfectly does the Native American copy his white originals that he takes on the dimensions of a menace. His function, then, is similar to Sethe's, although the audience menaced by Emo is external to *Ceremony*, its members being the potential white readers of the text. We are the ones that Silko is addressing in rememories of "how Emo grew from each" slaughtered soldier, feeding "off each man he killed" (61) in battle, until he became "the [military's] best . . . ; some men didn't like to feel the quiver of the man they were killing; some men got sick when they smelled the blood." But not Emo, we're told; "he was one of them. The best. United States Army" (62). A killing machine, he re-presents (while further magnifying) the sterility and destructive direction of the white race.

Renaming provides the second practice of resistance in these novels, where it appears to be a more pervasive and self-conscious strategy than menace. Unlike the parodic mimic, whose implied audience is the ruling class or dominant race, the signifying trickster or resourceful troper addresses his or her own community immediately. Furthermore, as unintentional parodists such as Emo do not, s/he talks the talk of her constituents or race—at times by employing a "major" language for "minor" purposes, thus lending the formations of dominant discourse a new sense/different significance, and at other times by returning to an older, more archaic signifying through the mother tongue.

The "radiant objects" of Dolores, the alternative metaphors of revolution that are constructed by Dolores herself and Irene, the identifying "scar" of Sethe's mother, and the "Morse" code of Paul's chain gang are all such minor makings of a major language, which, in Deleuze and Guattari's words, operates intensively "to direct . . . lines of flight" (21). To them I would add the naming of Stamp Paid. But *Beloved* contains other notable respeakings. The black men on the chain-gang continually signify against "the bosses and the masters" (108), re-call the physical pleasures of their home-lives, and generally bond together through a talk that's talked only among themselves: singing "it out and beat[ing] it up, garbling the words so that they could not be understood [by the guards]; tricking the words so that their syllables yielded up other meanings" (108): getting through, resisting, and returning home. Morrison's Sixo engages in a similar brand of "signifyin'" under a torture that is punctuated by his death. Although

the white men's punishment is intended to set an example for would-be runaways, Sixo will wrest another meaning from the masters' text, jamming the circuits of their disciplinary apparatus by withholding the pain that would become the other's "power" were it voiced (Scary 36, 45). Sixo never screams nor cries out while burning; instead, he chooses silence and thereafter laughter, until he interrupts the laughter itself with the cryptic cry of "Seven-O! Seven-O!" which heralds his death. Nearby, Paul discovers his friend's laughter to be contagious; in it he hears the voice of resistance and the self-proclaimed manhood of his race. "And it was Sixo's laughter that was on his mind, not the bit in his mouth, when they hitched him to the buckboard" (229) and hauled him off to the chain gang the following day. The trickster's "Seven-O" encodes yet another story, telling of the Thirty-Mile Woman, who is not taken with the others and in whom Sixo's seed escapes. He laughs at his torturers and their metaphors accordingly. Although they think to kill rebellion in killing Sixo, he knows that resistance lives on materially in the body of his son in another place.

Still, neither "Seven-O" nor laughter are renamings in the strict sense. For their register is not the (Father's) symbolic but the (Mother's) semiotic; that is, they engage a more ordinary discourse which I have been calling the maternal tongue. So also does the naming of Baby Suggs. Hers is not a suitable name according to Mr. Garner, who rather encourages his ex-slave to mark her freedom by taking on the "real" identity of Jenny Whitlow, a so-called proper name written on the slave woman's order of purchase and natural, no doubt, to a master who might be expected to hear in Jenny the replication of a common name for mules and she-asses. But to Baby the bill-of-sale identity represents her servitude and perpetuates her estrangement from the husband who loved her and whose life line she preserves in the patronym Suggs. It was the same Suggs who fondly called her "Baby." And just as Sethe retains Beloved as the name of her slaughtered child, Baby holds on to her name as an exteriorized affect and the foundation of a self one can love. In Morrison's history, Baby also speaks eloquently of mothering; not only does she give birth to her "Self," but she also mothers the community of Cincinnatians she loves. The city's black women learn an alternative way of speaking, which is irreducible to signifying, from her. Their alternative language practice will drive the ghost from Sethe's house, thereby dissolving the guilt that has originated in "meaningful" discourse and that Beloved, as a symbolic signifier of her mother's shameful action, represents. I quote from the scene of Beloved's exorcism with the women assembled outside 124:

They stopped praying and took a step back to the beginning. In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like . . . [as the] 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. . . . It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized [newly born] in its wash. (259, 261)

The women—like the men on the chain-gang who spoke "not with words" but whose "eyes had to tell what there was to tell" (107)—have access to the semiotic or to a language rooted in the body and altogether more ordinary than for-

mal speech. The utterances of both female and male communities tell of endurance but also of sickness and the need for caretaking; and what they have to tell, they tell well.

Similar speakings inform *Mothers and Shadows*, one of the most powerful issuing from the Plaza de Mayo where survivors gather in memory of those whom the state has disappeared. In coming together, Latina mothers collectively make history from sounds which implode the sense of words. Their language practice is no more referential than Sethe's calling of "Beloved." For "speaking about" presupposes distance or separation, while the mothers speak "nearby" their absent children, families, and lovers. Their cry of loss and longing moves the listener to stand close alongside of them. Although personally untouched by the same tragedy at the time of the demonstration, Irene momentarily shares the mothers' memory, takes part in their outrage, feels something of their pain. Her voice is instinctively added to the others, therefore—instinctively, since she has "no idea" of what she is voicing, nor can she "understand" the other women's speech. In fact, "it was as if the words were severed from each other by the sobbing and the howling." Later "the crowd of women surged forward like a tide," galvanized by the "demand" for their children's whereabouts. Ultimately, "[t]he chaos was indescribable" (89); neither it, nor the mother's affectivity, we must assume, are properly representable by name.

Of the three narratives, *Ceremony* is the most adamantly committed to the mother tongue. The novel's point of origin is "Thought-Woman, the spider," and Silko is her vocal representative, the one "telling . . . the story she is thinking" (1). In giving voice to the silent speaking of Thought Woman, Silko confounds our commonsensical view of boundaries as they are standardly represented in the West, beginning instead with the proposition that borders are always permeable, that the one doesn't speak without the other, that the subject is fundamentally intersubjective, and that storytelling is thus a collaborative event. Together, the two women take us back to the origins of the Laguna tribe and a time when its people lived close to the Mother: in touch with the land, the ceremonies, and the stories.

Many of these ceremonies are partially written in the language of the Lagunas. Unlike the languages of *Beloved* and *Mothers*, which fall back upon representation while critiquing the uses of referential discourse, thereby speaking about what their semioticians cannot or choose not to represent, the Laguna dialect is finally non-representational or wholly intensive. Neither translated, nor properly translatable, the lexical units of Silko's chants are irreducible to meaning, inconvertible to metaphors or English substitutes. "It is sound now which," as Deleuze and Guattari say, "is going to deterritorialize itself absolutely, without return" (21):

en-e-e-ya-a-a-a-a!

en-e-e-ya-a-a-a-a!

eh-hey-yah-ah-na!

eh-hey-yah-ah-na! (Silko 142–44)

“This language wrested from meaning has no direction except in the accent of a word, an inflection. . . . vibrat[ing] upon itself” (Deleuze 21), while setting off vibrations in proximate words. As Betonie, the medicine man, continues the ceremony, his chanting catches Tao in its rhythm. And the orphan returns home. But the ceremony has only just begun; “all kinds of evil [are] still on him” (Silko 144).

To unlearn the lessons of the dominant culture and complete the healing ritual, Tao will need the Mother’s emissary, a woman whose nickname is Ts’eh. She will talk to him about the history of places in words that recall Sethe’s. Ts’eh’s history, however, is a positivity and thus (as Sethe’s is not) a record of survival “to pass on”: “‘The clay is washing away,’ she said. ‘Nobody has come to paint it since the war. But as long as you remember what you have seen, then nothing is gone. As long as you remember, it is part of this story we have together’” (231). Of course, Tao does remember, and in rememory he comes to see “the pattern, the way all the stories fit together—the old stories, the war stories, their [contemporary] stories [of torture and nuclear holocaust] to become the story that was being told” (246). The vision tells him that he is not, as others have labeled him, “crazy,” but that he has only been “see[ing] and hear[ing] the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time” (246). Seeing thus, Tao completes the ceremony. Refusing to participate in the “deadly ritual” (253) of Pinkie and Emo, he rather takes up the task that Ts’eh has started, gathering the seeds and planting them “near the sandy hills” so that vegetation will in time come to “grow there like the story, strong and translucent as the stars” (254).

Mothers and Shadows and *Beloved* stage similar scenes of healing and reclamation in which mothering is fundamental to the process and mothers central members of the set. Once again I quote directly from the two minority histories, shifting registers from a proximate speaking to close with the others’ words. Traba says:

[Irene] squatted on the floor in front of Dolores and put a firm hand on her knee. “Why don’t you tell me all . . . that’s happened?” The girl [wondered how to] . . . explain it all in an orderly fashion. . . . But before she’d found the answer her voice started to tell the whole story. . . . [A]s she went on speaking, she was astonished to discover that she was getting closer to that twisted knot and starting to unravel it. She was afraid the ends of the skeins would be stiff with dry blood but she no longer cared; all that mattered was to go on explaining. . . .

Dolores went on talking. . . . “Now it’s going to be my turn,” Irene thought, but she spoke the words aloud. . . . “I have to confess. . . .” (170–71)

What Irene confesses is the need for an empathetic other, the absence of whom has encouraged her isolation and enforced her silence on the disappearance of Victoria, for instance, and “the whole horrible business of the Plaza de Mayo” (172). The final words are Morrison’s, most of them spoken by Baby Suggs, who abandons referential discourse for the affective language of music and dance:

“Here,” she said, “in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don’t love your eyes. . . . No more do they love the skin on your back. . . . And O my people they do not love your hands. . . . Love them. . . . Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face

'cause they don't love that either. *You* got to love it, *you!* . . . More than your life-giving 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. (88–89)

Speaking about the body to begin with, Baby speaks through the body and in it by the end.

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