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Manifesting individuality as a Heideggerian approach to Toni Morrison's "Trilogy".

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MANIFESTING INDIVIDUALITY AS A HEIDEGGERIAN APPROACH TO TONI MORRISON'S TRILOGY

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by

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For Anh Hai,

who gathers me.

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MANIFESTING INDIVIDUALITY AS A HEIDEGGERIAN APPROACH TO TONI MORRISON'S TRILOGY

"One thing is alone wise, to know the thought through which all things are steered through all things."

--Heraclitus

CHAPTER 1: BEYOND THE LOOKING GLASS

Within our self-defining quest to create and uncreate ourselves and our place in the world is a discourse that encompasses both our life and our literature. In a 1992 interview with Dana Micucci, Toni Morrison claims that "the search for love and identity runs through everything I write" and that through writing, she explores "the possibilities of self and being human in the world."[1] For Morrison, this exploration for identity is not realized independently, but as Jill Matus contends, is "constructed temporally, relationally, and socially."[2] In all of Morrison's novels, both history and communal experience play an intricate part in the understanding of self. Taking possession of one's past, according to Morrison, is a responsibility we must take seriously. Speaking specifically on her intentions for *Beloved*, Morrison urges that the "gap between the past and the present"[3] be bridged,

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[1] Dana Micucci, "An Inspired Life: Toni Morrison Writes and a Generation Listens," *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danielle Taylor-Guthrie (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1974) 278.
[2] Jill Matus, *Contemporary Women Writers: Toni Morrison* (Manchester, Manchester UP, 1998) 3.
[3] Marsha Darling, "In the Realm of Responsibility: A Conversation with Toni Morrison" *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danielle Taylor-Guthrie (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1974) 247-248.

and that only by doing so will the individual and the collective heal and grow. Furthermore, as the characters in Morrison's fiction eventually learn, selfhood is possible through interaction with the group and not transcendent over the group. Such is the case when Pilate tells Milkman in *Song of Solomon* that "you can't just fly off and leave a body."[4] Accordingly, the characters in Morrison's trilogy, which comprises of *Beloved*,[5] *Jazz*,[6] and *Paradise*,[7] also experience the same realization.

Morrison began writing the trilogy to recount the African American experience as it passed from the days of slavery to the present. The three novels do not follow the conventional pattern of a trilogy in the extension of characters and setting. Each subsequent novel, instead, follows the other in a rough chronology with *Beloved* concentrating on slavery and the Reconstruction Period, *Jazz* on Reconstruction to the early 1920s, and *Paradise* on the 1890s to mid-1970. Thematically, *Beloved* is a story

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[4] Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977) 208.
[5] Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Plume, 1987).
[6] Toni Morrison, *Jazz* (New York: Plume, 1992).
[7] Toni Morrison, *Paradise* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998). Hereafter, all quotes and references to the novels in the trilogy are from the editions noted in this or the above two footnotes and will be cited parenthetically.

about "'the tension between being yourself, one's own Beloved and being a mother.'"[8] Matus follows this paradigm to suggest that the next story, *Jazz*, "has to do with the tension between being one's own Beloved and the lover, . . . [and] *Paradise* is about being one's own Beloved and a believer, the seeker and receiver of spiritual love."[9] Evidently, Morrison recognizes the bond and the possible tension between actualizing one's privatized self and fulfilling the communal expectations.

Much academic work, particularly after the publication of *Song of Solomon*, has focused on Morrison's fiction. As for the trilogy, *Beloved* has received the most analysis and *Paradise* the least due to its recent publication, but as to date, only a few monographs have focused on the three novels as a trilogy.[10] Much scholarship on the three novels has also focused on the importance of the community in personal development which is quite understandable given

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[8] Matus quotes from Morrison's unnoted discussion of *Beloved*, 155.
[9] Matus, 155.
[10] I have come across only three scholastic works dealing with the trilogy, the first being Karen Carmean's *Toni Morrison's World of Fiction* published by Whitston Publishing in 1993, one year after the publication of *Jazz*. Consequently, Carmean is able to give only a brief analysis of how *Beloved* and *Jazz* fulfill Morrison's intentions for the trilogy. The next two monographs are published shortly the publication of *Paradise* in 1998 and addresses all three novels in full. The first monagraph is Missy Dehn Kubitschek's *Toni Morrison: A Critical Companion* published by Greenwood in 1998 and the second is by Jill Matus, as cited in footnote 4.

that Morrison has spoken openly about her approach to the characters and the community in which they belong.

This search for identity and place within the community, not exclusive to literature and modernity, constitutes one of the fundamental undertakings in philosophy. It is with this primordial question which focuses on the meaning of being that German philosopher Martin Heidegger published in 1927 what is arguably his magnus opus, *Being and Time*. Heidegger claims that we have falsely assumed an understanding of being by maintaining the meanings we have as self-evident or indisputably correct. What we do have, Heidegger contends, is simply a "vague average understanding of Being" which we regard as "Fact."[11] Consequently, in *Being and Time* Heidegger reformulates the question of being by employing the method of phenomenology. He posits in the Part II of the "Introduction" that "*Only as phenomenology, is ontology possible*" (60) and justifies this method by first giving

[11] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) 25. All subsequent quotations and references are from this translation and will be cited parenthetically by page only.

the etymology of phenomenology[12] with the end result demonstrating that this method offers in-depth descriptions beyond any obstructions or hindrances or the creditable understanding we have fossilized.

While a few of the scholarships do analyze Morrison's work with a philosophical approach (most of them concentrating solely on *Beloved*), none has employed phenomenology to understand Morrison's characters. Cynthia Davis' analysis, "Self, Society and Myth in Toni Morrison's Fiction"[13] does examine Morrison's first three novels through Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism but while an existential analysis of the trilogy is plausible, adopting the "existentialism of Sartre [which] is, explicitly, a version and critique of the idiom and the propositions"[14] of Heidegger's *Being and Time* seems meager. Heidegger's analytic of Being also seems more appropriate because his treatise emphasizes an interpretation of time as "the

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[12] Heidegger explains that "phenomenology" is derived from two Greek words: "phenomenon" (appearance) or that which shows itself and "logos" is discourse, or that which shows itself through talking 51-63. Phenomenology, as a critical synthesis of phenomenon and logos, is making manifest that which shows itself. Heidegger contends that which shows itself is the Being of beings.

[13] Cynthia A. Davis, "Self, Society, and Myth in Toni Morrison's Fiction" *Toni Morrison*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1990) 7-25.

[14] George Steiner, *Heidegger* (Sussex:Harvester Press, 1978) 12.

possible horizon" (1) to work out an understanding of Being. In other words, the inquiry into Being necessitates an inquiry into our history because the presentness of the past determines our "ownmost possibilities" and this corresponds thoroughly with Morrison's emphasis on coming to terms with the past.

Accordingly, the current undertaking approaches Morrison's trilogy from a Heideggerian perspective by suggesting that once Morrison's characters learn to scrutinize and identify the imposed pre-conceptions on their identity, once they have acquired their own vocabulary necessary for self-interpretation, they will begin to understand their selfhood. This success in self-interpretation, ultimately, returns them to their authentic and free self.

Heidegger precedes his analysis of Being in general with the concept of Dasein, a particular or unique being. A being that questions its own Being is Da-Sein. Literally translated, Dasein means "being there;" hence, "*The 'essence' of Dasein lies in is its own existence*" (67). Stated differently, to be human means "being-there," and "there" refers to the world. Dasein, as Being-in-the-world

encounters other Beings, and as Heidegger posits in the opening of section 26, individuality is determined by the way Dasein understands and conducts its relations to Others. Our sense of who we are is motivated either by a will to conformity in which the aim is not to distinguish ourselves from Others, or conversely, to demarcate ourselves and to negate any opportunity for Others to determine the way we live. Either way, Heidegger's point that "Dasein, as everyday Being-with-one-another, stands in *subjection* to Others" (164) is established, and consequently, the self is actually the "they-self," an inauthentic self closed to its existential possibilities. This dispossession of self, the loss of authenticity, can be reclaimed if Dasein acknowledges that its existence is its own. Heidegger contends that through the method of descriptive phenomenology, interpretation of "the authentic meaning of Being, and also those basic structures of Being which Dasein itself possesses, are *made known* to Dasein's understanding of Being" (61-62). Thus, this "hermeneutic" constitutes an interpretation of Dasein's Being, allowing a capacity for self-definition and authenticity.

Chapter 2 focuses on Heidegger's concept of Dasein and the temporality of Being. Chapter 3 discusses the

perception of certain characters as slaves, thus, as usable property and how this corresponds to Heidegger's Structure of Equipment. Chapter 4 analyzes the characters' sense of being based on their relations to the "they" in the community. Lastly, chapter 5 details the characters' dispossession of identity due to their absorption of the world and how selfhood and authenticity are still possible through self-interpretation. Accordingly, the ultimate intention is to illustrate that a Heideggerian approach can, indeed, shed light on the paradoxical but inextricable connection between the community and the individual.

CHAPTER 2: THE QUESTION OF DASEIN

Early in Part I of the "Introduction" of *Being and Time*, Heidegger breaks down the fundamental structure of an inquiry and notes that perhaps the most significant element of the structure is that an inquiry reveals the Being of the inquirer. He says that "Inquiry itself is the behavior of a questioner, and therefore of an entity, and as such has its own character of Being" (24). An inquiry suggests that a preliminary understanding is already available to the inquirer, indefinite and dim as this understanding may be. Heidegger explains this point further:

> We do not *know* what 'Being' means. But even if we ask, 'What *is* "Being"?', we keep within an understanding of the 'is', though we are unable to fix conceptually what that 'is' signifies. We do not even know the horizon in terms of which that meaning is to be grasped and fixed. (25)

The answer we seek when we inquire into Being is not completely foreign to us. We do not begin an inquiry void of any presuppositions but have a vague idea of what the answer will be which guides us to know when we have found what we are seeking for. Likewise, when Dasein seeks to

know "What is being?" it already has a "vague average understanding of Being" (25) in order to be capable of understanding the question and also to grasp the answer when Dasein has attained it.

By engaging into an inquiry about its being, Dasein distinguishes itself among other entities in that its very "Being is an *issue* for it" (32). Only Dasein is concerned with the continuation of its existence, the continuation of "being-there." And not only that, Dasein is also concerned with the *how* of its existence. Dasein understands itself "in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not itself" (33). Where animals and objects are also "there" in the world, what or how they are to be is not an issue for them. Dasein, on the other hand, will pose the question "What am I?" and is determined to create its own way of being in the world--its own existential possibilities. Recognizing this, Heidegger says that "*Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein's Being*" (32) and further marks Dasein from other entities in claiming that Dasein alone "exists" or has "existence." Hence, Heidegger refers to the structures of Dasein as "existentialia" and uses "categories" to refer to

other entities whose character is not of Dasein but pertains to animals and objects (70).

This very distinction between Dasein and the possibility for "existence," the possibility for self-determination as opposed to simply being an object is a haunting issue for the characters of *Beloved*. Sethe may not have slaughtered her "crawling already?" baby in the shed had there not been the humiliation of being categorized by Schoolteacher's pupils. As she tries to justify her actions to the ghost-child Beloved, she says,

> [Schoolteacher] was talking to his pupils and I heard him say, "Which one are you doing?" And one of the boys said, "Sethe." That's when I stopped because I heard my name, and then I took a few steps to where I could see what they was doing. Schoolteacher was standing over one of them with one hand behind his back. He licked a forefinger a couple of times and turned a few pages. Slow. I was about to turn around and keep on my way to where the muslin was, when I heard him say, "No, no. That's not the way. I told you to put her human characteristics on the

> left; her animal ones on the right. And don't forget to line them up. (193)

Unable to prevent Schoolteacher and his pupils from objectifying her, Sethe rejects any possibility that her children should experience such degradation. She further explains to Beloved that "no one, nobody on this earth, would list her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper. No. Oh no" (251). Sethe is committed to protecting her children from the objectifying gaze of the Schoolteacher. She believes that by preventing her children from being categorized, they can remain "beautiful [and] magical" (251). And since "the best thing she was, was her children," through her children, Sethe can still recover "the part of her that was clean" (251)--and human.

In deciding to live in her own way, Sethe is attempting to claim her existential possibility. This claim of ownership of one's possibilities is Heidegger's point when he says, "Dasein has in each case mineness" (68). In other words, Dasein has the potential to be what it chooses to be because it is its own. He further explains that Dasein, as its own possibility can "'choose' itself and win itself [or] it can . . . lose itself and never win itself" (68). Simply put, Dasein can assert its

"mineness" and manifest its individuality, thus choosing itself, or Dasein can allow itself to be informed by others, and thus lose itself.

To further understand the Being of Dasein, Heidegger returns to the importance of temporality. As he mentioned in the first page of *Being and Time*, temporality is the standpoint from which an interpretation of Being is possible. Dasein, as an entity "in time," lives in its past--is its past. Dasein cannot simply discard its past and exist oblivious of the affects of the past on the present. Indeed, it is the presentness of the past that helps establish Dasein's present and future. Heidegger, therefore, insists that

> In working out the question of Being, we must heed this assignment [of a historical inquiry], so that by positively making the past our own, we may bring ourselves into full possession of the ownmost possibilities of such inquiry. (42)

This historical inquiry will establish the historical moments or the traditions that have been passed onto and have developed Dasein's present Being.

In *Beloved*, not only Sethe, but all her ex-slave neighbors live with the traumatic memories of slavery.

Brian Finney, in his article, "Temporal Defamiliarization in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," claims that while Sethe and the other former slaves are physically free, the past continues tormented their conscience.[1] For Sethe who wants to "keep the past at bay," (42) the emergence of Beloved as the past brought to the present is a reminder of what the "the institution of slavery forced on her."[2] Beloved, moreover, serves two purposes. Morrison claims that Beloved not only is the personification of Sethe's murdered baby but also a survivor of the Middle Passage.[3] Consequently, Morrison dedicates *Beloved* to "Sixty Million and more," the estimated number of Africans who died awaiting transportation on the slave ships or died during the Middle Passage. She empathizes with African Americans who refuse to dwell on slavery but rushed away as a way of "rushing out of bondage into freedom."[4] However, Morrison also believes that not remembering these sixty million people is an abandonment of responsibility. And according to Deborah Horvitz, Morrison also suggests that pursuing a

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[1] Brian Finney, "Temporal Defamiliarization in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison's "Beloved,"* ed. Barbara H. Solomon (New York: G.K. Hall, 1998) 108.
[2] Finney, 113.
[3] Darling, 247.
[4] Darling, 247.

future without remembering the past "has its own and even deeper despair for it denies the reality and sacrifice of those who died."[5]

Remembering the past needs not be destructive but can, in fact, heal the individual and the collective. Suppressing the past, on the other hand, says Karen Carmean, is "another form of enslavement" because it holds "the inner life captive to recurring fears and possibly neurotic obsessions."[6] Such is the case with Sethe and Paul D. The former is tormented with guilt and fear and the latter exists mechanically with a "tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be" (72-73) and operates only with the portion of the brain that enables him to walk, eat, sleep and sing (41). Healing comes about when individuals take control of their past and willingly share their memories with others. Hence, the collective has the power to renew its members as well as itself.

Jazz also shows how the desired future depended on how the past is maintained. Where Sethe's mind is always

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[5] Deborah Horvitz, "Nameless Ghosts: Possession and Dispossession in *Beloved*," *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison's "Beloved,"* ed. Barbara H. Solomon (New York: G.K. Hall, 1998) 102.
[6] Karen Carmean, *Toni Morrison's World of Fiction* (New York: Whitston, 1993) 87.

"loaded with the past and hungry for more" (70), Joe Trace is unable to remember. He lies in bed trying to sear the memories of Dorcas and their moments together into his mind in order to

> . . . brand her there against future wear. So that neither she nor the alive love of her will fade or scab over the way it had with Violet. For when Joe tries to remember the way it was when he and Violet were young, when they got married, decided to leave Vesper County and move up North to the City almost nothing comes to mind. He recalls dates, of course, events, purchases, activity, even scenes. But he has a tough time trying to catch what it felt like. (29)

As little as Joe can remember of the moments and the emotions he shared with Violet, he is "Convinced that he alone remembers those days, and wants them back, aware of what it looked like but not at all of what it felt like" (36). This emptiness, according to the narrator, is what spurs Joe to find love somewhere else. Forgetting the rugged life in Virginia is not for Joe an unburdening. Instead, he wants to remember his history and tries to

recollect his boyhood and his seven life changes because through his history Joe feels connected to his roots. It is when he is unable to recovery his past that Joe tries to create new memories, and it is this urgency which incites him to displace rather than to re-establish his memories that jeopardizes his present life with Violet. Here, Morrison implies that with the optimism of new life and the excitement of the City, the lack of collective history, of shared memories, do not free the characters from the horrors of the past but leaves them in a state of desolation.

With the third novel of the trilogy, *Paradise*, Morrison explores the limitations of history through the collective memories of the townspeople. In Ruby, power belongs to the descendents of the 8-Rock families, the original forefathers of Haven, not necessarily based on their leadership abilities, but on how much history they remember. The twins, Steward and Deek Morgan, "haven't forgotten a thing since 1755" (278) even remembering "the details of everything that ever happened--things they witnessed and things they have not" (13). As a result, they are the authoritative figures of Ruby because their ability to remember Haven's past is their link to the

forefathers, enabling them to claim the forefather's experience as their own. Consequently, the forefather's authority is now theirs, evidence in the town's argument over the Oven's inscription. The argument ends abruptly, "As could have been predicted [when] Steward [has] the last word[s]" and when he threatens anyone who "ignore, change, take away, or add to the words in the mouth of that Oven" (87). With that admonition, the meeting is disjoined.

The dispute, however, is more than a power struggle between the two generations of Ruby. It shows how the town, in Heidegger's words, has fallen "prey to the traditions of which it has more or less explicitly taken hold" (42). The young people's eagerness to create new traditions interferes with the older generation's adherence to traditions. The latter's collective history, which helped them live through the shame of the Disavowal, the refusal of "the world in 1890 on their journey to Oklahoma" (109), is the same force they use to exclude and reject new ideas and newcomers. Ruby's traditions, based on the forefather's history, is so dominant and "self-evidence" that what Heidegger calls the "primordial 'sources'" or the origins of these traditions are no longer questioned and as a result, misinterpreted. Dasein, moreover, has the

potential to be enslaved by its very traditions because it does not "go back to make the past in a *positive* manner and make it *productively* its own" [emphasis added] (43). As Reverend Misner, a newcomer to Ruby, reflects on the town's fixation on memorialization and traditions, he notes that

> Over and over and with the least provocation, they pulled from their stock of stories tales about the old folks, their grands and greatgrands; their fathers and mothers. Dangerous confrontations, clever maneuvers. Testimonies to endurance, wit, skill and strength. Tales of luck and outrage. But why were there no stories to tell of themselves? About their own lives they shut up. Had nothing to say, pass on. As though past heroism was enough of a future to live by. As though, rather than children, they wanted duplicates. (161)

We can infer from the dispute over the Oven's motto and the above passage that the problem does not lie in the town's inability to realize the value of collective memory, but in their unwillingness to "continually adapt and respond to

the present."[7] Matus continues to say that "It is not a question of revising and rewriting history, but of seeing new significance in traditional accounts and artifacts."[8] Furthermore, in their adherence to maintaining the traditions, the older generations of Ruby have, indeed, not made the past positively and productively their own, but have unknowingly suspended their progression.

In Division Two of *Being and Time*, Heidegger refers to "On the Use and Abuse of History for Life" of Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations* where Nietzsche distinguishes the three ways history can be used and abused in life. In the "Foreword," Nietzsche insists that "We want to serve history only to the extent that history serves life: for it is possible to value the study of history to such a degree that life becomes stunted and degenerate."[9] We cannot deny that Dasein exists in time, consequently, is defined by time. But complete surrender of the present and sacrifice of the future to the historical moments in our life is not authentic Dasein existence for Dasein's Being is an issue for it. Dasein cares about the quantity and the quality of

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[7] Matus, 161.
[8] Matus, 161.
[9] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997) 59.

its existence. Perhaps that is why Heidegger refers to the *Untimely Meditations* for both philosophers concur that Dasein must chose to live for its present. As Nietzsche says, "*the unhistorical and the historical are necessary in equal measure for the health of an individual, of a people and of a culture.*"[10] Dasein's authenticity as well as Morrison's characters require this historical instinct to discern what to remember and how to remember.

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[10] Nietzsche, 63.

CHAPTER 3: "DE MULE UH DE WORLD"

Janie's grandmother in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* calls the black woman "de mule uh de world."[1] Her admittance highlights the black woman's oppressive relationship with the black man for whom she has to labor, mother, and satiate. But grandmother's comment also sheds light on the deprave condition of the female slaves. The defilement of the female slaves, among other horrors, includes sexual molestation by the colonizer as well as economic exploitation where they are forced to neglect their own starving children to serve as maid and wet nurse.[2] These abuses are particularly evident in Morrison's *Beloved* where slavery is still at the forefront. Sethe's own mother is forced to leave her after two or three weeks of nursing so that she can return to the rice fields. Left with Nan, Sethe learns that on the slave ships, both Nan and her mother "were taken up many times by the crew" (62) and that her mother threw away all her children of white

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[1] Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990) 14.
[2] Patrick Bryce Bjork, *The Novels of Toni Morrison: The Search for Self and Place Within the Community*, Series XXIV American Literature 31 (New York: Peter Lang, 1994) 17.

fathers and saved only her because she was fathered by a black man. Similarly, Baby Suggs gives birth to eight children fathered by six different men. As she tells Denver, "Slaves not supposed to have pleasurable feelings on their own; their bodies not supposed to be like that, but they have to have as many children as they can to please whoever owned them" (209). The female slaves, while used to sate their owner's sexual desires are also valuable in that they are "property that produced itself without cost" (228). In other words, they are breeding machines.

The characters' usability as such confirms Heidegger's observation that our primary involvement with entities in the world is one of use. His discussion of the structure of equipment, however, is with the understanding that Dasein, or human beings, are the users encountering things or objects to be used as equipage. Nonetheless, in the political system of slavery, male and female slaves are deemed as usable property and equipment. As Baby Suggs expresses, all the men and women she "knew, let alone loved, who hadn't run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen, or seized" (23). In this sense, slaves are considered subhuman, chattel, and beasts of burden--

property to exchange, bargain, or move whenever deemed profitable. In Baby Suggs' words, slaves are no more than game pieces on a checkers game where the players are the white slave owners.

To better grasp Morrison's portrayal of the treatment of slaves as equipment, an understanding of Dasein's relationship with other entities and Heidegger's structure of equipment is needed. Early in *Being and Time*, Heidegger notes that for a veritable analytic of Dasein's essential nature, Dasein needs to be interpreted in its "average everydayness" to avoid the contextualization of Dasein in some atypical situation that may uncover aspects not definitive of Dasein's behavior. Furthermore, Dasein as defined to mean "being there," suggests that "there" is the world--the everyday world. Heidegger is quick to note that Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, does not mean one entity is "in" another entity, as water is in a glass, but rather denotes the "relationship of Being which two entities extended 'in' space have to each other with regard to their location in that space" (79). Simply stated, the "in" suggests the sense of actively "dwelling alongside" or "being alongside" the world. Being-in, as an existential

structure of Dasein, therefore, denotes a concernful "tarrying along."

To actively reside with others assumes that Dasein has mindful interactions with other entities. Therefore, the primary mode of Being-in-the-world is knowing-the-world in which Dasein steps back from its everyday dealings or involvements into theoretical contemplation towards the world. In knowing-the-world, Dasein disengages itself from the entity it is manipulating and begins to contemplate and discuss it. Heidegger calls the moment of manipulation or usage "readiness-to-hand" and the moment of contemplation as "presence-at-hand." Hence, knowing-the-world is a shift of attitude, from seeing an entity as ready-to-hand (using the chalk) into something that is present-at-hand (contemplating the chalk).

Having clarified the meaning of "Being-in" and its derivative mode of knowing, Heidegger next explains the "worldhood of the world," or the basic structures of the world. Simply put, Dasein's world comprises of "Things" which we encounter as equipment or tools. Consequently, Dasein's primary relationship with entities within the world is one of use. Our everyday comportment with other

entities, then, is in terms of pragmatics where the entities appear ready-to-hand rather than present-at-hand.

The structure of equipment dictates that a single piece of equipment cannot exist for any equipment belongs in a "totality of equipment." Secondly, equipment is "essentially 'something in-order-to . . .'" (97) such as an axe used to chop wood is, in turn, used to make a fire--in order to cook food, and so forth. In this sense, the "in-order-to" structure suggests that equipment does not lie in isolation but is involved in assignments or references with other equipment. Heidegger cites the examples of a pen where the pen exists only in the contexts of ink-stands, paper, table, lamp and the like, thus constituting an equipmental totality.

But even though our comportment with other entities is one of readiness-to-hand--a pen can be used in order to write a thesis for the purpose of receiving a degree--we do not necessarily notice the "in order to" structure underlying this work. In our everyday work environment, our attention is not on the equipmental totality (the pens, paper, desk, etc.) but more on the task that needs to be accomplished (completing the thesis). Heidegger instructs that the ontological structure of the readiness-to-hand is

grasped, ironically, when equipment is unhandy and we discover its unusability. He cites three possibilities where property can come across as unreadiness-to-hand. When we encounter a damaged tool, my pen running out of ink for example, then the tool is conspicuous and is noticed as present-at-hand; when a tool is missing or misplaced, the tool is deemed obtrusive; and when we encounter hindrances or distractions that draw us away from the work, the tool is called obstinate.

In *Beloved*, these modes of unreadiness-to-hand are poignantly demonstrated in the scene where schoolteacher arrives at the shed shortly after Sethe slaughtered her baby. Schoolteacher had originally planned to bring Sethe and her children back to work at Sweet Home. But once at the shed,

> Right off it was clear, to schoolteacher especially, that there was nothing there to claim. The three (now four--because she'd had the one coming when she cut) pickaninnies they had hoped were alive and well enough to take back to Kentucky, take back and raise properly to do the work Sweet Home desperately needed, were not. Two were lying open-eyed in sawdust; a third

> pumped blood down the dress of the main one--the woman schoolteacher bragged about, the one he said made fine ink, damn good soup, pressed his collars the way he liked besides having at least ten breeding years left. (149)

In that moment, Sethe's usability--her readiness-to-hand seizes--she is, according to schoolteacher, damaged equipment. With further contemplation, however, schoolteacher realizes he could still find use for her--not as a working animal or breeder, but as a continual reminder to the nephew of the effects of "overbeat[ing] creatures." Hence, Sethe shifts back into the readiness-to-hand.

Using Heidegger's language, then, slaves would be measured for their "serviceability, conduciveness, usability, [and] manipulability"--essentially, their readiness-to-hand (97). Always deemed as such, it is not surprising that former slaves would continue to conceptualize and characterize themselves according to these same external perceptions and definitions. Thus, the next chapter will address how this conformity to outside definitions illustrates a definite way of Being-with-others in the world and is, indeed, the self of everyday Dasein but one which leads to inauthentic existence.

CHAPTER 4: A MUTUALITY OF INFLUENCE

As noted earlier, Morrison believes that self-definition is possible only through interrelation with members of the community. As Denise Heinze asserts in *The Dilemma of "Double Consciousness,"* a description of African life can provide a context to better understand Morrison's societal structure.[1] This being the case, Heinze quotes Wilfrid Samuels who writes that in traditional African communities, the community's survival supersedes the individual who exists only as a representative of the community.[2] Therefore, when the individual oversteps his boundaries and the group feels threatened, the individual is either punished, expelled, or both. Such is the perceived offense when Sethe tries to slay her children to prevent them from becoming slaves. As the sheriff leads Sethe away, the crowd that gathered around scrupulously studies her demeanor.

> Sethe walked past them in their silence and hers. She climbed into the cart, her profile knife-

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[1] Denise Heinze, *The Dilemma of "Double Consciousness"* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1993) 106.
[2] Heinze, 106.

> clean against a cherry blue sky. A profile that shocked them with its clarity. Was her head a bit too high? Her back a little too straight? Probably. Otherwise the singing would have begun at once, the moment she appeared in the doorway of the house on Bluestone Road. Some cape of sound would have quickly been wrapped around her, like arms to hold and steady her on the way. As it was, they waited till the cart turned about, headed west to town. And then no words. Humming. No words at all. (152)

Sethe's assumed pride, first noted by the friends and neighbors the day before at the family's extravagant party, had already sparked their resentment for it seemed like Baby Suggs and Sethe "had overstepped, given too much, offended them by excess" (138). The community's envy and the conviction that Sethe and her family were trying to transcend the community prevented the neighbors from warning Sethe of the four horsemen as they came toward the house and it also stopped them from singing for Sethe as she was taken away.

For Baby Suggs, whose freed life was devoted to harmony and spreading the message of love, the community's lack of empathy and overt indifference is straining:

> To belong to a community of other free Negroes--to love and be loved by them, to counsel and be counseled, protect and be protected, feed and be fed--and then to have that community step back and hold itself at a distance--well, it could wear out even a Baby Suggs, holy. (177)

Disheartened, she retreats into her bedroom until her death, and the rest of the inhabitants of 124 are forsaken. Not surprisingly, when Beloved first sets foot at 124, "Nobody [sees] her emerge or [come] accidentally by" (50); when Sethe, Denver and Beloved go skating, "Nobody [sees] them falling"; when the three women merrily walk back to the house on Bluestone Road, "Nobody [sees] them" either (174-175). Community disapproval has spurred community indifference.

Although Sethe and her family are the recipients of the community's disdain, they are still inextricably linked to that small community in Cincinnati. As Patrick Bjork asserts, regardless of the circumstances, the individual will return to the community where both individual and

collective will be "shaped and/or misshaped" in mutual influence.[3] For Heidegger, banishment from the community does not relinquish Dasein's connection to the larger community--Dasein is still in-the-world. He posits that through the work environment, we discover the "public world," a larger social world comprised of Dasein, users of the ready-to-hand. As co-recipient of the products from the workplace, Dasein is also a co-habitant of the world with entities like its own. This being the case, "Being-in is Being-with Others" (155). The Others, explains Heidegger, are more of "Being-there-too" suggesting that Dasein is not alienated from Others but is also an Other.

Moreover, Dasein's relationship with Others is of solicitude.[4] Heidegger maintains that this orientation of solicitude towards Others comes mostly in the form of "deficient modes" which parallel the characteristics of inconspiciousness and obviousness associated with the ready-to-hand entities found in the equipmental environment. The deficient modes of solicitude include "Being for, against, or without one another, passing one

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[3] Bjork, x.

[4] Heidegger notes that in Dasein's dealings with entities ready-to-hand, its orientation is one of concern, with Others, it is solicitude.

another by, [and] not 'mattering' to one another" (158). These indifferent modes are demonstrated in all of Morrison's novels as a result of individuals asserting their identity apart from the community or act in such a way that the community deems harmful to the group. Such is the case when the small community of Cincinnati withheld their support of Sethe and her family after the slaying. Likewise, in *Jazz*, the community's indifference ensued after Dorcas' funeral when Violet, in trying to deal with her husband's infidelity, cuts the dead girl's face. Violet is thrown out of church, voted out of community assistance by the Salem Women's Club, and void of customers since her regulars decided to have their hair done somewhere else.

Morrison's *Paradise* also demonstrates deficient modes of solicitude, and even in a more pernicious manner. Nine of the Ruby townsmen, convinced that the women's amusement in the convent is inimical to their black community, set out to eliminate the problem. These men are convinced that the proofs they have, dysfunctional families, birth defects, disappearing brides, sibling disputes, upshot of venereal diseases and other various "catastrophes," are all connected to the women at the Convent. In blind rage, the

men drive to the convent in the middle of the night to slaughter the women they consider as "detritus: throwaway people that sometimes blow back into the room after being swept out the door"(4). The men believe that by killing the women, "the venom" will be managed from further infestation of their town.

Solicitude, however, is not simply indifference and opposition but has two positive possibilities. The first possibility is when Dasein "leaps in" and disburdens the Other of his concern by placing the burden on itself. In such solicitude, cautions Heidegger, the Other becomes "dominated and dependent" upon Dasein. In *Beloved*, 124's separation from the rest of the community is so severe that when Denver takes the initiative to go for help, she feels she is "step[ping] off the edge of the world" and entering another one (139). As she comes to Lady Jones for assistance, the latter recognizes Denver immediately: "[Denver] was older, of course, and dressed like a chippy, But . . . [e]verybody's child was in that face" (247). Perhaps it is Denver's vulnerability or her universal appeals, or

> Maybe they were sorry for the years of their own disdain. Maybe they were simply nice people who

> could hold meanness toward each other for just so long and when trouble rode bareback among them, quickly, easily they did what they could to trip him up. (249)

The mobilization to come to Sethe's rescue suggests the atonement of Sethe's murderous act as well as the acknowledgment of the community's "error" in their jealousy and abandonment. As described by Wendy Harding and Jacky Martin, the neighborhood, led by Ella, assemble like Sunday mass in front of the house on Bluestone Road to exorcise the spirit.[5] The community has gone full circle in their rejection and now atonement of Sethe. In helping Sethe, the community has affirmed its solidarity. But this solidarity implies that individuals, ultimately, depend on the community for development and renewal.

In *Paradise,* when Consolata teaches the women to know "what [they] are hungry for" (262), she is helping them see their authentic selves. This leaping ahead, as Heidegger calls it, is the second possibility of positive solicitude. Dasein leaps ahead of the Other not to take up the Other's

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[5] Wendy Harding and Jacky Martin, *A World of Difference: An Inter-Cultural Study of Toni Morrison's Novels*, Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies Number 171 (Westport: Greenwood, 1994) 91.

burden, but in order for the Other to concernfully deal with the burden in his own "potentiality-for-Being," thus enabling him to be his authentic self.

For eight years, Consolata offers refuge for five women who are fleeing either from destructive relationships or their tumultuous past. As Consolata waits for her death in the cellar, the women

> One by one would float down the stairs, carrying a kerosene lamp or a candle, like maidens entering a temple or a crypt, to sit on the floor and talk of love as if they knew anything at all about it. (222)

What the women confide with Consolata is not of love but the same tale of "disorder, deception . . . [and] drift" (222). With her death slow in coming, Consolata decides to rise from the cellar and is determined to teach the women how to "become transparent" to themselves. She directs them to undress and lie on the cellar floor so that she can trace their silhouettes. Once the outlines are complete, the women lay naked in the mold of their body as Consolata instructs them of the spirit and the body and that the two should never be divided but remain one. With Consolata's guidance, the women's healing, or the "loud dreaming"

begins. Through painting on their body templates lying on the cellar floor, they are able to share their pasts and reveal their dreams. The group's bonding frees the Convent women so that they are "no longer haunted" but rather "sociable and connect[ed]" (266).

The possibility for selfhood through group interaction is not an idea original with Morrison. In his analytic of Dasein, Heidegger also realizes that Dasein, as Being-with and Being-there-too has a reciprocal relationship with Others. Just as Dasein is bound to be shaped by Others with whom it shares the world, Dasein will also contribute to the identity of the Other. This reciprocity, is best explained in the passage of *Beloved* when Stamp Paid tinkers between knocking on Sethe's door and seeing how she and Denver are doing or just walking away. As he walks around the house and remembers Baby Sugg's death, he reflects on the plight of the colored people:

> Whitepeople believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle. Swift unnavigable waters, swinging screaming baboons, sleeping snakes, red gums ready for their sweet white blood. In a way, he thought, they were

> right. The more coloredpeople spent their strength trying to convince them how gentle they were, how clever and loving, how human, the more they used themselves up to persuade whites of something Negroes believed could not be questioned, the deeper and more tangled the jungle grew inside. But it wasn't the jungle blacks brought with them to this place from the other (livable) place. It was the jungle whitefolks planted in them. And it grew. It spread. In, through, and after life, it spread, until it invaded the whites who had made it. Touched them every one. Changed and altered them. Made them bloody, silly, worse than even they wanted to be, so scared were they of the jungle they had made. The screaming baboon lived under their own white skin; the red gums were their own. (198-199)

Morrison implies in this powerful passage that dominance belongs to no single entity due to an unavoidable mutuality of influence. While Stamp Paid at first may view the Others, the white slave owners, as having dominion, he immediately realizes that the Others are affected by him in

return. In other words, both the self and the Other eventually exist simultaneously as subject and as object thus nullifying the political imbalance of power because, as Heidegger contends, eventually--essentially--one also belongs to the Others.

Heidegger's concurrence with this mutuality is evidenced in his explanation of the "who" of the indefinite Others. This ambiguous "Other" Heidegger signifies with the neuter, das Man, "the they". He posits that this "they" is everyone but not anyone or any group in particular and that one inherently belongs to the "they." This is the case because Dasein, as Being-with-Others, is established and maintained by its relationship with Others and vice versa. But as such, Dasein's everyday self has the capacity to lose itself in the "they"--that is, lose its mineness and authenticity--no longer being the 'I myself'" (150), but the they-self. As a result, Heidegger insists that there are two modes of existence--authenticity and inauthenticity. The former maintains its own way, determining its own life; the latter follows a prescribed way of life, allowing the "they" to determine its being.

In Morrison's trilogy, certain characters live such inauthentic lives because they fail to look inside

themselves. Instead, they place all their value outside of themselves and then allow the outside, the "they," to determine how they should exist. Such is the case with the Sethe and Denver in *Beloved*. Sethe, who "didn't know where the world stopped and she began" (164) defines herself by motherhood.[6] Sethe's relationship with her own mother is something she doesn't remember much of and perhaps this lack of connection is what incites her to focus all her being to mothering her own children. Her urgency in getting milk to her baby, Sethe later explains to Paul D, is a primary reason for her to flee Sweet Home:

> All I knew was I had to get milk to my baby girl. Nobody was going to nurse her like me. Nobody was going to get it to her fast enough, or take it away when she had enough and didn't know it . . . . I told that to the women in the wagon. Told them to put sugar water in cloth to suck from so when I got there in a few days she wouldn't have forgotten me. (16)

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[6] The world for Sethe is where her children are. As she watches Denver and Beloved sleep, Sethe is convinced there is no outside world and if there is, she could not live in it. "Her world is in this room. This here's all there is and all there needs to be" (183).

Being a mother is Sethe's "kind of selfishness" and how she identifies herself. Not surprisingly, Sethe's most proud moment is when she manages to free her children and herself from Sweet Home: "I birthed them and I got em out and it wasn't no accident . . . it was me doing it, me saying, *Go on* and *Now*" (162). As Sethe says above, she does not want her children to forget her just as she has forgotten her own mother. Therefore, being able to free her children and to have that opportunity to love them with her "thick" love (162) solidified, for Sethe, her connection to the children. Her willingness to prevent any white slave owners to separate her family, to maintain that bond, that claim on her children and consequent claim on her self is what induces her to gather her children into the shed to do the "unspeakable" as the four horsemen approach the house. She is convinced that since she has freed her children once, she can free them again. Her "success," however, is superseded by the guilt of the "crawling already?" baby's death. With Beloved's presence, Sethe's guilt may have subsided, but in her readiness to submit to Beloved's consuming and unsatiable wants, Sethe remains enslaved to her maternal love.

Denver's sense of existence transpires through the gaze of another. Denver, unable to understand her mother's murderous act, is at once fearful and dependent upon Sethe. With Baby Sugg's death, Denver suffers twelve years of solitude with Sethe, the dog, Here Boy, and the spirit of the house as her only companions. Their companionship serves as the community with whom she understands herself and the world. In this very limited group, Denver lacks a framework that a community provides and from which she can either conform to the group's values or assert her individuality. It is no wonder then that with Beloved's arrival, Denver embraces and claims her as her own. For Denver, Beloved's gaze is acknowledgement. Having her

> hair examined as a part of her self, not as material or a style[,] [h]aving her lips, nose, chin caressed as they might be if she were a moss rose a gardener paused to admire[,] Denver's skin dissolved under that gaze and became soft and bright like the lisle dress that had its arm around her mother's waist. (118)

Denver's selfhood, not surprisingly, is dependent on another's acknowledgement. As a result, she becomes a

"strategist" in order to keep Beloved by her side and validate her existence.

In *Jazz*, the "they" is represented by the City. Morrison personifies the City as a character with the ability to grow, dance, speak, persuade, harm, and empower. In Heinze's discussion of *Jazz*, she contends that the City provides the indifference necessary for black people to regain their sense of autonomy because they have escaped the glare of racism that defines and shapes their identity. However, this newfound independence slackens their values and connection within the group that they resort to hedonistic acts for self-affirmation.[7] Joe Trace falls prey to the "out of control" fascination of the City so that instead of becoming the "stronger, riskier" self he always believed himself to be, he becomes a victim to the whims of the City:

> That's the way the City spins you. Makes you do what it wants, go where the laid-out roads say to. All the while letting you think you're free; that you can jump into thickets because you feel like it. (120)

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[7] Heinze, 117-118.

Joe's sense of self, based on a false sense of freedom, beckons destruction. He fails to realize that the City, like "laughing gas" (34), has taken hold of him, seducing him to forget his history and his connections so that whatever the City urges, "there is no contradiction" (117) --as the narrator says, "You can't get off the track a City lays for you" (120).

The City, prompting Joe to find "young loving," leads him to Dorcas whose existence is more inauthentic than his. Where Joe's lack of memory and subsequent disconnection lead to his inauthenticity, Dorcas has never established her sense of self. For Dorcas, the man she is involved with fosters her self-worth. As the narrator informs the reader, if Dorcas is not "lying down somewhere in a dimly lit place enclosed in arms, and supported by the core of the world," then nothing mattered to her (63). Those embracing arms not only support her but mold her and the world she occupies. It is because Joe fails to discern this dependence but instead credits Dorcas with a self-determining self that she leaves him. She misinterprets his love and acceptance for indifference:

> "[Joe] didn't even care what I looked like. I could be anything, do anything--and it pleased

> him. Something about that made me mad. I don't know. Acton, now, he tells me when he doesn't like the way I fix may hair . . . Then I do it like he likes it . . . . He worries about me that way. Joe never did. Joe didn't care what kind of woman I was. He should have. I cared. I have to have a personality and with Acton I'm getting one. (190)

For Dorcas, love is not love until it is all-consuming, and the lover is not a lover unless he claims and defines her. It never occurs to Dorcas that she can have a personality, a self, independent of a man's love.

In *Paradise*, aside from the five women who found sanctuary in the Convent from their tumultuous relationships which undermined their self-worth, one other principle character wrestling for her identity and place within the community is Patricia Best. As the daughter of Roger Best, one of the New Fathers of Ruby and the first to violate the unspoken but existing blood rule by marrying a "cracker," a light-skinned woman, Pat is very aware of her outsider status. She also understands that in Ruby, when one is an outsider, one is an enemy (212). Albeit that she is critical of the Ruby community, blaming their apathy for

her mother's death, Pat desperately wants to belong--suggested by her scrupulous study of the original fifteen family and their genealogies. Pat's desire to have a valid place in the community jeopardizes her relationship with her daughter, Billie Delia, because "Pat realized that ever since Billie Delia was an infant, she thought of her as a liability somehow" (203). Despite her carefulness in marrying into one of the 8-Rock families to avoid the "visible glitch," both Pat and her daughter are hated "because [they] looked like a cracker and was bound to have cracker-looking children" (196). Consequently, rather than defending her daughter from the town's gossip, Pat "sacrifice[s] her" (203).

All these characters, by internalizing the external interpretation of themselves, forfeit the opportunity to define who they are and how they are to live. Heidegger stresses, however, that authenticity does not necessitate isolation from the "they". Indeed, "isolation kills generations. It has no future" (210) is what Reverend Misner tells Pat Best in *Paradise*. What Heidegger emphasizes, instead, is a different and uniquely individual relationship with the "they." Moreover, inauthenticity is not a lesser form of existence but is a definite kind of

Being. Only by losing oneself can one find oneself. And the key to finding oneself and to living an authentic life is through interpretation, which is explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: TRANSCENDING THE "THEYSELF"

Dasein's everydayness suits well to the humdrum everydayness in Morrison's novels where the emphasis is on daily life and ordinary people and the characters are seen splitting peas or styling hair. In these typical situations, Dasein--Morrison's characters in particular--often becomes engrossed in their everydayness, in things in the world, that they tend to overlook their own nature, their own Being-in-the-world. Violet Trace, for example, wakes up each morning and "sees with perfect clarity a string of small, well-lit scenes" (22) detailing the tasks for the day as well as the people she will encounter. So ordinary and monotonous is her routine that sometimes Violet "does not see her self doing these things" (22). This absorption into the world is what Heidegger calls Verfallen, "falling" away from oneself. Dasein immerses itself in the "they" and conforms to the "they's" life, thus alienating its authentic self.

Morrison admits the *in medias res* opening of *Beloved* is intended to have both readers and characters in a shared

experience where both are thrown into an environment.[1] Similarly, Dasein is thrown into a situation or in broader sense, into the world that is already there, reminiscent of one's birth. As a result of this thrownness, Dasein finds itself in a situation in which its encounter with other entities discloses the things that matter to it. This throwing constitutes a structural moment Heidegger calls Befindlichkeit, which means "how one finds itself," and in this regard, Dasein's existential nature is disclosed. Furthermore, to speak of Verfallen as a falling away from oneself does not suggest that Dasein was once in a state of unfallenness. Instead, Dasein thrown into a pre-existing world and whose Being is Being-in and Being-with-Others is always attuned to the existential structure of Verfallen.

How one finds oneself is usually manifested through the phenomenon of moods, such as depression, joy, fear, anxiety, or other inflections of Dasein's temperament. Moods disclose Dasein's relation to other entities in the world and particularly that which affects or matters to Dasein. Moreover, moods zoom right in on that which

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[1] Toni Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28.1 (Winter 1989): 32.

becomes the basis, often the grounding for Morrison characters. Understanding Heidegger's conceptualization of moods, then, will illuminate certain characters' selfhood in Morrison's trilogy. Sethe's fear of losing her children to the dehumanizing, bestial world of slavery is traumatically made evident in her decision to slay her children. Further, with the possibility that Beloved may leave them, both Sethe and Denver anxiously succumb to Beloved's whims. Beloved comes to represent Sethe's maternal instinct as well as her desperate horror of slavery and Denver's need for companionship and acknowledgment.

Steward, in *Paradise*, kills Consolata without hesitation because of the shame he feels knowing the tie between her and his family that threatens both the Morgan name and his view of his brother. Similarly, Deacon Morgan's shame is of his relationship with Consolata but also his brother's violence towards the Convent women. Deacon's shame, which mimics the shame of his grandfather Zechariah with his brother Coffee, undermines the two things he holds sacred: his relationship with his twin and the Morgan legacy. Both the brotherly relationship and the legacy, for Steward and Deacon alike, are the basis of

their selfhood; therefore when either one or both are questioned, the brothers' selfhood is in jeopardy.

Interestingly, shame is prevalent in all three novels of the trilogy that eventually, most of the primary characters experience this particular mood. For instance, in *Beloved*, Paul D's shame is a result of wearing the iron bit and of Beloved's manipulation and Baby Sugg's for having eight children with six different men. In *Jazz*, Joe is ashamed of knowing his mother is the "Wild" woman; Alice Manfred's shame is that Joe is able to seduce Dorcas while under her care. Other than the twins, in *Paradise*, Pat cannot live off her shame when Billie Delia pulls her underpants off in public. Ultimately, the shame of these characters and those unlisted is based on the exposure of that which makes them vulnerable to rejection by the Other.

As Dasein's existential structure, Befindlichkeit is passive in the sense that it is thrown into the world in which it tries to comport with, whereas Verstehen, the equiprimordial structure with Befindlichkiet, is the more active manifestation of Dasein's possibilities. Verstehen, or understanding, is Dasein actively comprehending the readiness-to-hand structure of the equipmental totality as well as its relations to Beings like its own. This

comprehension necessitates a vocabulary Dasein inherits from its society or culture and from which it characterizes its understanding of the world and of itself.

Morrison's characters, however, tend to lack this necessary vocabulary, or if they do possess one, it is that which the white slave owners have used to define them. Moreover, the capacity to name and to define for Morrison is a representation of power that the act of renaming oneself comes to symbolize the characters' claim on their own being. Stamp Paid, for example, gives up the name Joshua given to him by his white master for a name that symbolizes the debt for his life and his fellow slaves which he has paid in full.

In Sethe's case, she forgets the language of her mother and of Nan's, and as a result, is disconnected with them. Sethe no longer possessing the "code" with which to connect her to her African ancestors and as culturally orphaned, she pressed to adopt the white man's language. With Paul D, his humanity and masculinity are at stake. While at Sweet Home, under the ownership of Mr. Garner, Paul D (whose name, along with the three other Pauls, is indicative of his lack of individuality) is defined for him

so that with Garner's death, he is uncertain of his own being:

> What would he have been anyway--before Sweet Home--without Garner? . . . Did a whiteman saying it make it so? Suppose Garner woke up one morning and changed his mind? Took the word away. (220)

Paul D relies on Garner for his own humanity and manhood so with Garner's unexpected death, his life "fell to pieces" (220), and his existence is reduced to that "less than a chicken" (72). Then, with his reunion with Sethe and "just when doubt, regret, and every single unasked question was packed away, long after he believed he had willed himself into being" (221), he encounters Beloved who moves him from room to room "Like a rag doll" (221). So while he has regained a being, his manhood is once again threatened. Thus, when Sethe and Paul D lack the vocabulary, the tools to define themselves, they recourse to outside definitions or categorizations.

The significance of the vocabulary is that it expresses Dasein's understanding of the world, and just as important, its own "potentiality-for-Being" (184). With this possibility for understanding itself, Dasein has the

capacity for self-interpretation. By interpretation, Heidegger means seeing something as something, therefore in self-interpretation, Dasein is transparent to itself--it sees itself as itself. Heidegger also stresses that while any interpretation is not free of pre-conceptions, Dasein's task is also to determine these pre-conceptions and evaluate their legitimacy.

This being the case, for Morrison's characters to be initiated into authentic existence, they first must scrutinize their inherited vocabulary and deconstruct the pre-conceptions of them as equipment or as subhuman. In other words, to survive free, they must develop other definitions of selfhood and forge a life that connects them to the community but not imprison them. Such a life first starts with self-love, as Baby Suggs preaches in the Clearing. Sethe, Paul D, and Denver need to follow Baby Suggs' advice to visualize their grace because "if they could not see, they would not have it" (88). By seeing this grace, by recognizing that they are their "best thing," these characters slowly free themselves from slavery's dehumanizing gaze.

Violet Trace, in *Jazz*, despite the community's scorn, is perhaps the one character in the novel who comes closest

to authentic existence. She alone determines her life, as evident in her "claim" of Joe and in her remarkable act of learning to love Dorcas. Violet, however, does experience renewal by the novel's end. She admits to Felice that she "Forgot it was mine. My life. I just ran up and down the streets wishing I was somebody else" (208). But rather than dwelling in this wish to be another, Violet has recognized the necessary step to an authentic life is to "Kill her," that is to kill that "somebody else" in her mind, the person who was glamorized by the "they" as someone worthy of being. Violet has realized that the only person worth being is the "me".

In *Paradise*, Ruby's frail attempts to banish sin and death, according to Matus, is an imitation of the traditional Paradise,[2] which is suggestive of the citizen's conviction of the Forefather's faultlessness and invincibility. But with Save-Marie's death, the construction of a cemetery and the small funeral ceremony, indicate the community's willingness to admit mortality and a slow release of the Forefather's dominance. The Ruby citizens are eventually learning that "Roots that ignore

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[2] Matus, 160.

the branches turn into termite dust" (209). It is one thing to understand the past, it is another to be lost in it.

As demonstrated, then, the primary characters in *Beloved*, *Jazz*, and *Paradise* fail to establish their being, their authenticity, because they do not project their being apart from their classification or instrumentality to the Other. Their sense of being is embedded in the popular, pre-conceived understanding established by this Other. Consequently, interpretation is necessary in order for the characters to understand and project their selfhood as *they* understand their being and not as defined externally for them. Lastly, as George Steiner comments, "it is not 'understanding' that Heidegger's discourse solicits primarily. It is an 'experiencing', an acceptance of felt strangeness."[3] Both Morrison and Heidegger concur that individuals--characters and readers alike--need not religiously adhere to their themes and conclusions because that would be succumbing to the Other, but that individuals open themselves to themselves and their possibilities.

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[3] Steiner, 18.

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