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Published in:
MELUS

DOI:
[10.1093/melus/mlv055](https://doi.org/10.1093/melus/mlv055)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2016

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Visser, I. (2016). Fairy Tale and Trauma in Toni Morrison's Home. *MELUS*, 41(1), 148-164.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/melus/mlv055>

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Fairy Tale and Trauma in Toni Morrison's *Home*

Irene Visser

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The literary work of Toni Morrison is famous for its rich intertextuality, interweaving narrative, contemporary history, and tales and motifs from oral storytelling traditions. Her tenth novel, *Home* (2013), is no exception. It contains disturbing and dark narratives of childhood abuse, war trauma, and racial discrimination, which are offset by Morrison's use of motifs from the tale of "Hansel and Gretel," one of the best-known fairy tales collected by the Grimm brothers and called "a great and ferocious classic" by Philip Pullman (84). I explore the interplay between trauma and fairy-tale motifs in *Home*, a novel that engages with central themes of Morrison's previous work, such as gender, race, family, and empowerment. In this novel, Morrison envisages ways toward the resolution of trauma that contribute to developments in literary trauma theory and presents a new and stronger sense of positive closure to the thematics of trauma than has so far been the case in her fiction.

The Fairy-Tale Intertext

While Morrison's use of folkloric material has been a lively area in Morrison studies since the early 1990s, critical attention has focused on the political and post-colonial dimensions of her fiction.¹ Justine Tally regards Greek and African mythological references as integral to Morrison's oeuvre and suggests that the integration of myth and folklore in Morrison's work has been underexplored, even in the extensive criticism on *Beloved* (xiv, xv). Sharon Rose Wilson argues that in Morrison studies, as in literary criticism in general, fairy tales are "too often dismissed as simple decoration that is not an essential part of a text" (2). Wilson states that attention to these tales is essential to understanding Morrison's work because her "quest for full postcolonial identity" (86) is fully dependent on oral storytelling techniques. These views are endorsed by Morrison's own frequent statements about the importance of folklore and myth to her fictional project. In her early essay "Memory, Creation, and Writing" (1984), Morrison explains that she uses fairy-tale references to add meaning to characters' thoughts or actions. She illustrates this with the example of

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DOI: 10.1093/melus/mlv055

MELUS • Volume 41 • Number 1 • (Spring 2016)

Milkman Dead, whose “confusion, . . . his racial and cultural ignorance,” is flagged when his thoughts turn to the tale of “Hansel and Gretel,” “a story about parents who abandon their children to a forest” (387).

In *Home*, Morrison returns to “Hansel and Gretel,” a story that has fascinated her throughout her career, using it as the novel's intertextual framework to its central theme of trauma as an arduous process of coming to terms with past wounding. In a parallel to the fairy tale, *Home* is the story of the siblings Frank and Cee (Ycidra) Money, whose mutual love and support enable them to confront and eventually even integrate severely traumatic experiences. As Morrison has remarked in an interview, “A reason for *Home* is that I got very interested in the idea of when a man's relationship with a woman is pure—unsullied, not fraught. . . . It could be masculine and protective without the baggage of sexuality. So the sort of Hansel and Gretel aspect really fascinated me” (“Toni”). Woven into the novel's narrative fabric, the direct and indirect references to the tale of “Hansel and Gretel” in *Home* add meaning to the story of Frank and Cee and draw into play the genre expectations that belong to fairy tales and folktales.

The terms *fairy tale*, *folktale*, and *myth*, often used in Morrison criticism, are rarely defined precisely, and, indeed, the question of these genre definitions, even in folklore studies, is complex. I will discuss the matter briefly in order to present some characteristics of the fairy-tale genre on which folklorists agree and that inform my reading of the fairy-tale intertext in *Home*. There is no clear-cut definition that distinguishes the fairy tale from the folktale, and often folklore scholars use the terms interchangeably, sometimes even speaking of fairy folktale or preferring the term “magic tale” to either fairy tale or folktale (Ashliman 32). Attempts to define the fairy tale as featuring fairies or other magical beings in contrast to the more realistic folktale have been rejected.² The most useful distinction is perhaps not between folk and fairy tale but between these tales and other folkloric narratives, such as fables (very short, pointedly moralistic tales), legends (folk narratives featuring actual or assumed historical people, such as the legend of King Arthur), and myths (narratives concerned with profound questions, such as creation myths). These genre distinctions are generally accepted although, as folklore scholar Ruth B. Bottigheimer states, they “assume a supracultural theoretical purity in the genres that does not, in fact, exist” (9).

Folklorists agree on some features that all fairy tales have in common, and these are also of significance in Morrison's intertextual use of “Hansel and Gretel” in *Home*. Fairy tales are dark stories of violence, hardship, and strife. As Maria Tatar observes, “fairy-tale plots are fraught with merciless aggression, vicious brutality, and deadly hostility [and] *Villainy*: this was the name [Vladimir] Propp gave to the function that fuels the plots of fairy tales” (“Reading” xxix). However, the fairy tale also offers magic and wish fulfilment: “[S]udden riches, an advantageous marriage for an impoverished heroine or

hero, or unlimited food” (Bottigheimer 9). Most importantly, it always holds out the promise of victory over villainy and of the protagonists’ living “happily ever after.”

The fairy tale of “Hansel and Gretel,” which displays all of these features, has had a remarkable history. It was first published in 1812 in Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm’s first edition of their collection *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, a title that has been translated in various ways as *Children’s and Household Tales*, *Nursery and Household Tales*, and *Grimm’s Tales for Young and Old* and is today commonly referred to as *Grimm’s Fairy Tales*.³ Revised in multiple editions and made suitable for children, the book gained international scholarly recognition and widespread popularity that endure today. W. H. Auden stated in 1944 that the Grimm’s anthology was “next to the Bible in importance” and would rank “among the few indispensable, common-property books upon which Western culture can be founded.”⁴ As one of the Grimm brothers’ most well-known fairy tales, “Hansel and Gretel” has taken root in Western culture. It has been retold, reinvented, and adapted in many forms, from Engelbert Humperdinck’s opera *Hänsel und Gretel* (1893) to the recent action-horror film *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters* (2013).

What these adaptations share with the classic fairy tale is the recognition that the tale must be unsettling before it can be reassuring, and the characteristic happy ending can only be achieved by acts of courage and perseverance. The core idea of fairy tales, as G. K. Chesterton remarks, is the “idea that peace and happiness can only exist on some condition.” That specific central condition in “Hansel and Gretel” is the strong and reliable love between brother and sister, and this condition is similarly central in Morrison’s *Home*—sibling love as a powerful force against trauma, dispossession, and conflicted identity is its major theme. Regarded in the wider context of Morrison’s project of depicting the history of exclusion of African Americans from their democratic rights as US citizens, the Money siblings’ desire for personal belonging and security must be understood against the novel’s background of the 1950s, a time of growing awareness of the need for racial equality, preceding the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. However, while the novel poignantly dramatizes historical facts of racist practices against African Americans, it also explores avenues leading to resilience, resolution, and recovery. Major questions that *Home* seeks to answer are: How does healing from trauma come about? How may traumatized characters come “home” to a sense of self, to peace of mind, and to a renewed love of life?

The Trauma of Homelessness

The novel begins with a childhood memory charged with wonder and dread. At age nine, Frank and his sister Cee, aged five, are accidental witnesses to a

ferocious yet magnificent fight between two stallions and, immediately afterward, to the clandestine burial of a corpse. Frank recalls that he protected his frightened sister: “I hugged her shoulders tight and tried to pull her trembling into my own bones because, as a brother four years older, I thought I could handle it” (Morrison, *Home* 4). The fear of the two children, alone in a dangerous environment, and the brother’s concern for his sibling already anticipate the fairy-tale intertext. The dark, enchanted fairy-tale mood of this chapter sets the tone for the second chapter, which is told from a third-person perspective. A defining structural feature of the novel is the contrast between italicized chapters directly narrated by Frank and nonitalicized chapters in which Frank’s narrative continues as retold by a silent listener/scribe. It is evident from Frank’s occasional corrections to the work of the nameless scribe that Frank retains the authority of a supervisor and that the narratives unfold simultaneously. This dual structure is comparable to what Jean Wyatt terms the two-part structure in Morrison’s novel *Love* (2003), which, as she states, “enables the reader to see the textual past from a new perspective and find in it a new meaning” (214). In the context of Morrison’s oeuvre, the function of the sympathetic, nonjudgmental listener to Frank’s tale may be compared to that of the griot in African and African American folklore, who passes on cultural knowledge and values through narrative. This is a function that has long held a particular fascination for Morrison. As Pelagia Goulimari states, Morrison has said in various interviews that she regards herself as a modern griot (6-7). From the perspective of trauma theory, Morrison’s use of a silent listener in *Home* emphasizes the significance of listening as part of the healing process of trauma, which aligns with the ethics of trauma theory as formulated by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub in their foundational book *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992). In her analysis of the crucial function of Paul D as the empathetic listener to Sethe’s trauma narrative in *Beloved* (1987), Jill Matus also demonstrates that in Morrison’s work the process of healing from trauma depends not only on disclosure as such but also, and to an important degree, on the listener to the trauma narrative.

The trauma narrative in *Home* takes various forms. As a veteran of the Korean War, Frank displays many symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Cee, a victim of illegal medical experimentation, is scarred emotionally and physically for life.⁵ Both have experienced trauma as defined in trauma theory as “an overwhelming, unassimilable and violent wounding directly incurred as a first-hand experience” (Visser 275). Moreover, the siblings are also victims of what is known in trauma theory as the intergenerational transmission of trauma, which here (as in other works by Morrison) is racial persecution.⁶ At the age of four, Frank is imprinted with the traumatic wounding of witnessing what is surely unassimilable violence when his parents, together with fourteen other families, are told to vacate their homes in Bandera County, Texas, within twenty-four

hours, on threat of death. Morrison here draws on historical evidence of this “cleansing” by white supremacists and dramatizes it by adding the further atrocity of the blinding and lynching of an old man. On the long, arduous journey to Lotus, Georgia, Cee is born in a church basement. Memories of the eviction continue to plague Frank, and, similarly, Cee’s thoughts often return to being called a “gutter child” (Morrison, *Home* 45).

The siblings are both traumatized by childhood abuse, and due to this, their hometown is later remembered by Frank as “*the worst place in the world*” (83). Frank and Cee’s parents, numbed by work and exhaustion, leave their children in the care of their step-grandmother, Lenore, who starves and beats them. In this realistic narrative of childhood deprivation and abuse, the fairy-tale intertext is explicitly referenced: “Their parents were so beat by the time they came home from work, any affection they showed was like a razor—sharp, short and thin. Lenore was the wicked witch. Frank and Cee, like some forgotten Hansel and Gretel, locked hands as they navigated the silence and tried to imagine a future” (53). The motif of the forced and traumatic leaving of home in the tale of “Hansel and Gretel,” symbolic of the existential fears of being left alone in the world without aid or sustenance, flags the fact that Frank and Cee are emotionally pushed out of the family home and left without parental protection. Childhood deprivation is a major theme in Morrison’s work. Discussing trauma in seven of Morrison’s novels, J. Brooks Bouson states that Morrison is “intent on portraying the trauma of defective or abusive parenting” (3). It must be noted, however, that the neglect and cruelty of the parents in *Home* is due to the fact that they are worn down by poverty and hardship and not because they are cruel in themselves. This is in accordance with the subtext of fairy tales, which conveys, as Bruno Bettelheim explains, “an important, although unpleasant, truth: poverty and deprivation do not improve man’s character, but rather make him more selfish, less sensitive to the sufferings of others, and thus prone to embark on evil deeds” (159). In *Why Fairy Tales Stick: The Evolution and Relevance of a Genre* (2006), Jack Zipes argues that the general truth underlying the tale of “Hansel and Gretel” is that of the reality of rural poverty and the very real fear of starvation for families in those circumstances (219-21).

The trauma of children’s deprivation and helplessness due to the lack of a family home speaks strongly to Morrison’s imagination, and in *Song of Solomon* (1977), too, the “Hansel and Gretel” fairy tale is drawn into the story to foreground this theme. Milkman’s apprehension, but also his emotional immaturity, are accentuated by the fairy-tale parallel that opens Chapter Ten of *Song of Solomon*, in which Milkman, in his quest for gold, approaches the old, crumbling house “in which an old woman once lived”:

When Hansel and Gretel stood in the forest and saw the house in the clearing before them, the little hairs at the nape of their necks must have shivered. Their knees must have felt so weak that blinding hunger alone could have propelled them

forward. No one was there to warn or hold them; their parents chastened and grieving, were far away. (221)

In *Home*, the fairy-tale intertext accentuating this same despair of homelessness is a particularly strong factor in the characterization of Cee. Maltreated for years by Lenore, Cee is emotionally homeless and seeks escape and refuge in a common-law marriage to an impostor named Prince (Principal), later called Frog in a witty allusion to the Grimms' tale of "The Prince and the Frog." The "Hansel and Gretel" intertext adds meaning to Cee's near-fatal experiences during the episode at Dr. Scott's mansion. In this episode, Cee's initial joy at finding a job and a place to stay resembles the joy of Hansel and Gretel at finding the gingerbread house in the forest. Dr. Beauregard Scott, who uses young, homeless women like Cee for his illegal experiments, is a "heavy-weight Confederate" (62) with a substantial library of books on eugenics (65). Like the gingerbread house in the fairy tale, Dr. Scott's residence is a sham protection covering a malicious intent, and the doctor parallels the witch, determined to entrap homeless young women in order to cannibalize them. The house in fairy tales, according to Bettelheim's psychoanalytic interpretation, symbolizes the mother in her capacity as a source of protection and nourishment. From this perspective, the source of Cee's hunger on her arrival may be interpreted as the lack of nurturing by a mother, and the scene of her intense craving for food, which overwhelms her as soon as she enters Dr. Scott's house, may reveal not so much her fear of starvation as the fact of her abandonment and rejection as a child.

Cee is "fattened up" on arrival, eating huge meals of fried chicken and potato salad. This is a poignant image, similar to the image of Hansel and Gretel eating from the witch's house, which, as Bettelheim states, is "an image nobody forgets: how incredibly appealing and tempting a picture this is, and how terrible the risk one runs if one gives in to the temptation" (161). The risk that Cee runs is accentuated in *Home* by the servant's sharpening her carving knife and cutting a melon of the "girl" variety in two, "with intense anticipation of the pleasure to come" (Morrison, *Home* 66), reminiscent of the malevolent farmer's wife in the folksong "Three Blind Mice"; the act of carving symbolically foreshadows Dr. Scott's abusive experiments on Cee's reproductive organs. The folkloric allusions intensify the threatening mood of this episode. As Pullman writes, the threat symbolized by the witch's house in "Hansel and Gretel" speaks strongly to the imagination: "The wonderful invention of the edible house, together with the implacable cruelty of the witch and the wit and bravery of Gretel in dealing with her so neatly, make it unforgettable" (84-85).

Manhood and Nonviolence

In terms of the fairy-tale intertext, *Home* shows a gender reversal: it is Frank who performs the role of Gretel in defeating the witch and liberating his sibling. This

reversal may be understood as part of the novel's engagement with gender. Frank's conflicted sense of identity is predicated on his notions of manhood and violence, which are a strong undercurrent in Frank's trauma narrative, starting with his first memory of the ferociously fighting horses that "*stood like men*" (Morrison, *Home* 5). This formative scene of Frank's childhood has imprinted itself on his psyche. As he tells the scribe, it is the "*secret picture of myself—a strong good me tied to the memory of those horses and the burial of a stranger. Guarding [Cee], finding a way through tall grass and out of that place, not being afraid of anything*" (104). This childhood memory becomes entwined with Frank's later memories of his time in Korea, together constituting an entanglement of primal, disturbing, and obsessive memories that feed his fascination with manhood as connected to fighting, violence, and bloodshed but also underlie his self-image as protector of his sister.

Frank's notion of manhood at this stage—before he rescues his sister—reflects the culturally dominant notion described by Harvey C. Mansfield as that which "seeks and welcomes drama and prefers times of war, conflict, and risk" (ix). While Morrison's fiction presents many instances of the insidious effects of this notion, few of her novels present a protagonist who, like Frank, achieves a completely different notion of manhood. In rescuing Cee from Dr. Scott's mansion, Frank is able to concretize his self-image as Cee's protector while also realizing that violence and manhood are not necessarily synonymous. The psychoanalytic view of fairy tales suggests that the attainment of maturity requires a positive solution to the conflicts of childhood (Bettelheim 128). From this perspective, Frank's maturation requires an engagement with his memory of witnessing the fighting horses, symbolically representing his fascination with manhood as violence and aggression. After his traumatic experiences in Korea, having witnessed the deaths of his two closest friends, Frank begins to understand that his previous notion of masculinity as oriented to war, violence, and aggression is hollow and false. His crucial learning experience, which completely reverses this notion, follows when he rescues his severely injured sister from Dr. Scott's house. This central scene is remarkable for its nonviolence: a gun does no harm, the police are not called, Dr. Scott does not resist, and Frank gently carries Cee away in his arms (Morrison, *Home* 111-13). Having confronted the evil embodied by Dr. Scott courageously and honorably, Frank realizes that it is possible to "stand like a man" without engaging in conflict or violence. In a reversal of the fairy tale's gender roles, Frank assumes Gretel's role of the caretaker and nurturer, and this allows him to revise his notion of manhood; it is, he realizes, compatible with nonviolent, Other-directed caring. He ironically reflects that while his nickname is Smart Money, he only truly feels smart now: "[N]ot having to beat up the enemy to get what he wanted was somehow superior—sort of, well, smart" (114).

In a striking parallel to the fairy tale's erasure of evil through the death of a malevolent character, Morrison's novel presents that erasure through a

nonviolent intervention that transforms the evil characters, making them weak and inconsequential. Dr. Scott is last depicted in the narrative as a frightened and befuddled old man, and a similar transformation is portrayed in Lenore's character. Her venom and greed become inconsequential after she survives a stroke that leaves her a weak and dependent invalid, the recipient of the generosity of others. As the evil stepmother type, explicitly named "the wicked witch" (53) in a combined typecasting that is common in fairy tales, Lenore is removed from the narrative before the event of the siblings' homecoming, in a parallel to the absence of the evil stepmother in the fairy tale. This erasure of evil through transformation may be regarded as the novel's version of what is a core element of the fairy-tale genre: the violence and danger of the journey will end and the hero or heroine will achieve freedom, independence, and maturity. Frank achieves maturity by learning that manhood may involve meeting crucial challenges with courage and nonviolence.

The new concept of manhood that Frank achieves is remarkable in the context of Morrison's previous novels. As many critics demonstrate, Morrison's work consistently addresses gender and race, exposing cultural notions of masculinity as fraught with misunderstandings and contradictions.⁷ In her discussion of *Song of Solomon*, Linda Krumholz notes that Morrison's redefinition of African American heroism in this novel is made complex by the "obstinate and intractable values" (220) that inform gendered behavior in the United States. Comparing the novel to two African epics, Krumholz distills from the first, the Mwindo epic, the hero's conversion from a "proud, boastful fighter to a wise, generous, and benevolent ruler" (217), which she sees reflected in the character of Milkman in *Song of Solomon*. In the second, the Kambili epic, the hero needs to become a selfless provider for his tribe (218). In depicting Milkman as a nurturer (as a mother provides milk), Morrison feminizes him but only up to a point, Krumholz argues, because Morrison is careful to imply, but not impose, the idea that there is a nurturing aspect to authentic masculinity (220). In *Home*, Morrison is less cautious, repudiating Frank's fascination with aggression and violence (the stallions' sublime fight precedes their deaths in the slaughterhouse; soldiers "standing" in battle die horrible deaths) and explicitly stating that Frank's newfound capacity for Other-directed altruism leads him to the insight that manhood is not achieved by victory in battle but by courage without violence.

Shame and Guilt as Trauma

Frank's act of courage in undertaking Cee's rescue, told to the faceless scribe, aids the therapeutic process of coming to terms with trauma. Its successful outcome helps him confront what constitutes his most profoundly traumatic memory, that of his own shame and guilt. If villainy is the function that "fuels the plots of fairy tales" (Tatar, "Reading" xxix), the villainy in *Home* is both external and internal.

More insidious in effect than the external villainy of Lenore and Dr. Scott and the many racist injustices that Frank encounters on his journey southward—a molested couple on the train, a boy handicapped by police violence, and the casual brutality of the police during a street search—is Frank’s internalized villainy: his own horrendous crime of killing a young Korean girl that he had used for his sexual gratification. Villainy in fairy tales must be confronted and overcome; Frank’s internalized villainy, too, must be brought to light.

Frank first presents the murder of the child as the act of a fellow soldier on guard duty who shoots her in the face when she makes sexual advances (Morrison, *Home* 95). Frank’s misrepresentation appears to be deliberate dishonesty but may in fact be understood in terms of what Cathy Caruth describes as the paradox of traumatic experience, which is that “the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness” (91-92). Indeed it is only later, or belatedly, and aided by the therapeutic process of narrating his story, that Frank remembers the truth of the girl’s death.⁸ With that memory emerges the equally painful realization that the situation of the hungry Korean girl resembled that of Cee and himself as children, “*trying to steal peaches off the ground under Miss Robinson’s tree, sneaking, crawling, being as quiet as we could*” (Morrison, *Home* 94).

While Morrison’s depiction of Frank’s initial traumatized state, in particular his symptoms of PTSD, adheres closely to trauma theory, her focus on Frank’s survivor’s guilt and personal shame, his “free-floating rage, the self-loathing disguised as somebody else’s fault” (15), foregrounds aspects of trauma that are less prominent in literary trauma theory but which are central themes in Morrison’s work. As Bouson argues in *Quiet as It’s Kept: Shame, Trauma, and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2000), Morrison’s fictional project consistently engages with black-on-black violence, shame, and guilt, focusing “attention on the ubiquity and complexity of shame in the African-American experience” (4). In *Home*, Frank’s guilt and shame add a layer to the concept of the trauma victim as primarily a victim: Frank is also perpetrator, and when his crime surfaces in the course of his trauma process, truths are revealed that are hard to face and almost impossible to narrate. Thus, in presenting shame and guilt as intricately connected to traumatic experiences, Morrison presents a significant yet undertheorized theme in trauma literature.

Shame and guilt are not the same. Whereas guilt concerns concrete acts of misdemeanor or transgression, shame is a betrayal of an image of the self, and because shame threatens one’s sense of a secure self, as psychologists explain, it resists the exposure of the transgression (Maruna and Ramsden 131). The guilt of the transgression, the ensuing shame, and the deflection of shame can result in a vicious cycle; in Frank’s case, this cycle is eventually broken through narrative. His painful admission of guilt, elicited by the process of

narrating his experiences to the scribe, brings his feelings of shame into the open, where they can finally be confronted and integrated. As psychologists note, autobiographical narrative is crucial here, for only through telling the story of the self can an individual change and reconstruct that story into a “new and positive life script” (132).⁹

To achieve this stage, the shield of a false self-image must be removed, which in Frank's case means removing the false self-image of being a witness to atrocity to reveal the truth of being the perpetrator. The self-blame that this process entails is not necessarily detrimental to the recovery from trauma; on the contrary, it appears to make Frank stronger and more resilient. This is in accordance with findings in trauma research. Susan J. Brison observes that self-blame in trauma narrative “appears to lessen depression and facilitate recovery” (75). Brison furthermore refers to studies by psychologists that confirm that the alternative to self-blame is a continuing sense of helplessness (76).

In *Home*, Morrison posits that an act of will at the start of the healing process is crucial to the trauma process, and this is another important addition to current notions in trauma theory. Frank's decision to come to Cee's aid, which he makes with great difficulty, aligns him with what psychologists term his “authentic self” since Frank's care for his younger sister has been the driving motivation in his life and has shaped his sense of identity: “*Down deep inside her lived my secret picture of myself—a strong good me*” (104). The process of trauma narrativization, which discloses Frank's deepest feelings, allows him to gradually identify with this authentic self in an upward narrative movement that is intensified by the use of motifs from the fairy-tale intertext. As Zipes argues, fairy tales are “survival stories with hope” (*Why* 27), in particular because of “the possibility of transformation that gives hope to the teller and listener of a tale” (49). The effect, if not the purpose, of narrative of trauma in a therapeutic context can be justificatory even if it reveals guilt and reprehensible action, as does Frank's narrative of the murder of the Korean girl. While storytelling does not remove the memory nor the shame and guilt, it has a curative effect in making the memory accessible. Once occluded material has been recovered, memories are open to retrospection, and the blockage of trauma can be removed. Morrison emphasizes this healing function of narrative as Frank reveals, relives, and re-experiences his horrific deed and succeeds in integrating it psychically. Morrison thus suggests that narrative can reconvene the self with a profoundly traumatic experience, even one that defies comprehension. Morrison's engagement with issues of guilt and shame and her depiction of the possibility of healing and integration through acts of will and courage may be seen as valuable contributions to current theories of trauma in literary studies. This recovery from trauma, or, more precisely, the process of coming to terms with traumatic wounding, is accentuated by the fairy-tale intertext, particularly in the episode of the sibling's arrival in Lotus.

Community and Homecoming

The help extended by the community of women in *Lotus* is another major factor in the siblings' process of recovery from trauma. A feature of fairy tales is the presence of helpers along the way, such as the little bird in the forest and the duck on the lake in "Hansel and Gretel." In *Home*, this function is mirrored in the characters of Miss Ethel and her group of women. Embeddedness in a community is a strong factor in recovery from trauma, as psychologists have demonstrated (Maruna and Ramsden 144). The strongest and most vital communities in the world of Morrison's fiction are those created by women. As Gay Wilentz states, women are culture bearers in Morrison's novels, their orature encapsulating and safeguarding "the values of the African communities from whence they came" (143). In *Home*, Morrison's depiction of the women's community conforms to what Wilentz has defined as her tendency to use "African values, characteristics, and community as an alternative to mainstream assimilation or radical separatism" (138). The women in *Home* enact what Bouson terms the community's "reparative urge" in Morrison's work, "the potentially healing power of the sense of safety and connection offered by the African-American community" (8). Bouson's view coincides with Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber's, who, referring to all of Morrison's novels published before *Home*, states that "Morrison's work intricately depicts how home, family, and community can moderate trauma, and, as a result, self-esteem" (9).

The community of women in *Lotus* shares a down-to-earth realism, mixed with a strong faith in spiritual and magical forces, which, taken together, constitute a forceful alternative to the debilitating effects of the melancholia and passivity of trauma. The women save Cee's life, nursing her back to health through the use of folk remedies that draw on the mythic powers of the sun accompanied by good-natured scoldings and Christian admonitions. The cure that Cee is subjected to is no sinecure. In fairy tales, the female protagonists are typically faced with daunting tasks that constitute a form of initiation into a higher state of existence and often necessitate their isolation. As D. L. Ashliman explains, "for males, the initiation usually requires strength, valor, and fortitude" (41) whereas "the fairy-tale heroine, now an emergent woman, may spend her time of isolation passively isolated" (42). The sun cure, which may be seen as part of Cee's initiation ritual, invokes the symbolism of a benevolent deity; as Ashliman states, the sun, with its life-giving rays, "works well as a symbol for God" (6). This accords with Miss Ethel's acerbic criticism of Cee's docile submissiveness to Dr. Scott: "You ain't a mule to be pulling some evil doctor's wagon. . . . You good enough for Jesus. That's all you need to know" (Morrison, *Home* 122). The women in *Lotus* in fact affirm the notion that is intrinsic to the tale of "Hansel and Gretel": that in order to survive, "they must develop initiative and realize that their only recourse lies in intelligent planning and acting" (Bettelheim 162).

Expressing strength, faith, and compassion, the community of women provides a safe place, offering Cee a home in the hometown that she used to hate. Cynthia Dobbs observes that "Morrison insists that women, in particular, must be central to any vision of communal liberatory identity" (122). In *Paradise* (1997), Dobbs states, Morrison "moves the idea of home from one contained within the house to an explicitly gendered, open-borders communal space—its freedom and security defined by the degree to which black women feel simultaneously safe, free, and connected" (109-10). This notion of home is revisited in *Home* with a strong emphasis on the healing qualities of the women's community, which strengthens the function of *Home* as part of the continuum of Morrison's fictional project while constituting a further development. The celebratory presentation of community in *Home* differs from the ambivalent depiction of such communities in previous novels. For example, in *Beloved*, the community of women displays envy and malice towards Sethe, and *Paradise*, as Dobbs claims, "explodes the idea of (African) American home ownership as key to a sense of belonging" (115). By contrast, the final pages of *Home* speak unreservedly of healing, renewed self-esteem, and the will to move forward, qualities that are also foregrounded in the ending of the fairy-tale intertext. It is due to the physical and spiritual aid extended by the women's community that Cee surfaces slowly from melancholia and inertia to reach physical and psychic health, arriving "home" at last. In this process, Cee must achieve independence; as the women of Lotus tell her, she must become the "free person" (Morrison, *Home* 126) that is inside of her. The novel's final section leaves no doubt that Cee indeed becomes that autonomous person, standing her own ground, even in her relationship with Frank. Like Cee, Frank, too, attains independence and freedom in a final denouement that is very similar to the fairy tale's final episode, in which the children must overcome the last obstacle individually.

Crossing the Lake: Individual Growth

At the end of the fairy tale, Hansel and Gretel must cross an expanse of water, symbolic of their transition toward individuality. They cannot cross together but must go separately. Crossing the lake as individuals, they gain independence and maturity in thought and action: a new self-reliance. "The lake is an impassable barrier between the threatening forest and the safety of home," Pullman comments, "but it can be crossed with a combination of the benevolence of nature and human ingenuity" (85). In *Home* a similar transitional period is the period of separation when Cee slowly recovers from her injuries and Frank is kept away from her by the women of Lotus because "they believed that his maleness would worsen her condition" (Morrison, *Home* 119). Frank must adjust to living in Lotus by himself, symbolically traversing the lake of his memories and childhood fears and finding in crossing this lake that Lotus, the childhood town that he remembered as "worse

than any battlefield" (83), can now be a home to him, where a feeling of "safety and goodwill" and "[c]olor, silence, and music enveloped him" (118). This part of the novel is anticipated by its epigraph, "Whose house is this," words from a song cycle by Morrison, set to music by André Previn in 1992. The enchanted atmosphere of the fairy tale is reflected in the mood of the epigraph's lines: "I dreamed another, sweeter, brighter / With a view of lakes crossed in painted boats; / Of fields wide as arms open for me." Despite the strangeness and the shadows of the house, and the dream of another belonging, the speaker/singer finds that the house is a home, a place of belonging. Morrison's revisiting of these lyrics in this tenth novel indicates the continuity of her concern with home and belonging and, significantly, a sense of wonderment that such belonging is possible.

This unmistakably positive tone of the ending of *Home* is remarkable in comparison to Morrison's previous novels, whose endings are generally more ambiguous. The comparison with Morrison's major novel *Beloved* is invited several times in the last part of *Home*, for instance when Cee tells Frank that there is a baby girl "close by in the air, in this house" in search of a mother (131). This retrospectively adds meaning to Morrison's *Beloved*, where traumatic memories of shame and loss are also major elements and whose Mr. Garner and Sweet Home are echoed in the names of the Gardiner family in *Home* and in the novel's title. Whereas the eponymous *Beloved* is the ghost of a child, one of the "disremembered and unaccounted for" (Morrison, *Beloved* 275), the baby ghost in *Home* is fully acknowledged; Cee forcefully resists Frank's attempt to make her stop crying, asserting her right to mourn the loss of her fertility (Morrison, *Home* 131). Coming to terms with past injustice is a form of closure that *Home* dramatizes in its final chapters as a process that is essential to recovery from trauma; a recovery which, moreover, can be fully achieved. Color, a leitmotif in Morrison's work, functions as a symbolic marker of the siblings' return to health. In *Beloved*, too, color is a healing force, arousing aesthetic pleasure and functioning as a remedy for repressed or crippling emotions. Color is prominent in the final scenes of *Home*, where the siblings return (hand in hand, like Hansel and Gretel) to the scene of violence and bloodshed of Frank's childhood memory, find the remains of the murdered man, and re-bury his bones in a colorful quilt made by Cee, a "shroud of lilac, crimson, yellow, and dark navy blue" (143). Color washes the scene in which Frank nails a wooden sign to the bay tree bearing the words "Here Stands A Man" (145). This green bay tree near the grave symbolizes recovery despite traumatic wounding:

*It looked so strong
So beautiful.
Hurt right down the middle
But alive and well.* (147)

Although Cee and Frank will remain scarred for life, this last section of the novel expresses a strong sense that their traumatic experiences have been integrated,

and the road to personal growth and happiness is open to them. In the context of Morrison's fiction, this is a remarkably positive closure.

A Fairy-Tale Ending

Like the tale of "Hansel and Gretel," Morrison's *Home* is a dark but ultimately positive story of sibling love, resilience, and healing. As Zipes observes, "Hansel and Gretel" is about escape and returning home, in accordance with the primary or "utopian" function of fairy tales to provide hope (*Fairy* 159). Hope is a strong element of *Home*, inscribed in the curative and restorative forces of community and family. The ending of the novel provides a sense of closure that is not the complete erasure of past hurt but which poses the transformation of evil and affirms the healing potential of trauma through oral narrative and its reception. Comprising many themes from Morrison's previous novels, *Home* is perhaps the most optimistic of all her work. As Trudier Harris states in *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison* (1991), Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), ends in "an inversion of the folklore's ending." Pecola's quest for blue eyes, which Harris sees as similar to the folktale's hero quest, fails: "[T]he ugly duckling does not become the beautiful swan" (11). Bouson argues that Morrison's novels published prior to 2000 offer "potentially hopeful" conclusions to traumatic narratives, such as that of Sethe and Paul D in *Beloved* and of Joe and Violet Trace in *Jazz* (1992) (186). I would suggest that the interplay of trauma narrative and fairy tale in *Home* allows the novel to offer a stronger sense of optimism and hope. In re-creating the positive imprint of the fairy tale's happy ending, Morrison aligns herself with the fairy tale's basic purpose to inspire the confidence that real and imaginary dangers can be overcome. Cee and Frank are able to resolve the unfinished affairs of the past courageously and successfully. In terms of the fairy tale's ending, they achieve the state of kings and queens. "If we are told anything about the rule of those kings and queens," Bettelheim comments, "it is that they ruled wisely and peacefully, and that they lived happily. This is what maturity ought to consist of: that one rules oneself wisely, and as a consequence lives happily" (128). Maturity, happiness, and wisdom are implicit in the ending to the story of Cee and Frank Money, who have arrived home in the fullest sense of the word despite the ineradicable scars of their past traumatic experiences.

Notes

1. Influential critics in the 1990s publishing on folklore and orality in Morrison's fiction include Michael Awkward, Joyce Irene Middleton, Gay Wilentz, and Marilyn Sanders Mobley. An outstanding work on this subject is Trudier Harris's *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison* (1991).

2. The Grimm brothers' term *Märchen* simply translates as short tale, and they did not distinguish between folktale and fairy tale. The English term *fairy tale* is a translation of Madame D'Aulnoy's phrase *conte de fées* used for her collection of tales published in 1697. For a detailed discussion of the debate on genre distinctions, see Maria Tatar's *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales* (1987) (33-35).
3. The Grimm brothers' folkloristic project was to preserve the rich heritage of German folktales; it was, as Tatar writes, carried out "in the spirit of international collaboration and cooperation" ("Reading" xxxviii).
4. "Hansel and Gretel" belongs to the canon of tales collected in Europe by the Grimm brothers in Germany, Charles Perrault in France, Alexander Afanasev in Russia, and Joseph Jacobs in England. Jacobs complained that he could not match the impact of the Grimms' tales and correctly predicted that the English tale of "The Three Sillies" would have to give way to "Hansel and Gretel" (qtd. in Tatar, "Reading" xxxi).
5. In an interview, Morrison points out that Cee's fate bears a similarity to the notorious experiments performed on African American men in Tuskegee, who were given to understand that they were receiving medical care while serving only as test subjects to show the effects of dying from syphilis ("Toni").
6. Transmissibility, or the contagious impact of trauma, was first theorized by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub in relation to the therapeutic reception of trauma narratives in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992). Cathy Caruth presents a Freudian interpretation of generational transmissibility, using Sigmund Freud's theory of phylogenetics, in her influential book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996). For a discussion of the representation of generational transmission in *Beloved* (1987), see Jill Matus's *Toni Morrison* (1998). A more recent discussion of this form of trauma in Morrison's novels prior to *Home* is provided in Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber's *Race, Trauma and Home in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2010).
7. Notable critical publications on black masculinity in Morrison's fiction include works by Denise Heinze, J. Brooks Bouson, John N. Duvall, and Jan Furman.
8. It is the act of remembering the traumatic experience that constitutes trauma. This deferred, temporal aspect is a crucial element of trauma theory, which defines trauma as the aftermath of the event rather than the event itself. "Belatedness" is the translation of Freud's term *Nachträglichkeit*, or retrodetermination (Visser 273).
9. Evidence of the importance of life narratives in therapy and health care is provided by research results reported in publications by, for example, David Epston and Michael White, Yasmin Gunaratnam and David Oliviere, and Lynne E. Angus and Leslie S. Greenberg.

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