

## Cycles of Violence, Cycles of Trauma in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*

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### Abstract

*By excavating the psyches and violent behaviors of Joe and Violet in Jazz, this article aims at unveiling the danger of silencing past traumas- instead of healing them- which may entail a chain of connected traumas and even unexpected aberrations that can culminate in violence and murder. Besides, this study ascribes the violence of the African American community to the transgenerational trauma of slavery, which caused the pain of Blacks and the shame of Whites. This paper is therefore a psychoanalytic reading of the novel based on the trauma theories of Cathy Caruth, Sigmund Freud, Dominick LaCapra as well as on Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's theories of "the crypt" and "the phantom".*

**Keywords:** trauma, belatedness, incubation period, transference, crypt.

The temporal liaison between the present and past in Morrison's *Jazz* is dangerous because of the characters' traumatic memories and their inability to beat back the past, and free themselves from the haunting legacy of slavery as a national trauma, whether experienced by the characters themselves or transmitted to them unconsciously by previous generations. In fact and as Nancy Peterson states in her book *Against Amnesia*, "some things are unspoken because reigning ideologies do not consider them worthy of notice. Other things are unspeakable because they are too traumatic to be remembered" or articulated even (4). In light of this, I will examine in this paper the very reasons for these traumatic memories haunting the main characters in *Jazz*. Yet before that, I shall give an overview of the trauma theory in order to illuminate this study and give further insight into the dangerous impact of these intrusive memories on the individuals' psyches.

### Trauma Theory

In recent years, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and neurobiology have increasingly insisted on the direct effects of external violence on psychic disorders. This trend has culminated in the study of post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, which describes in Cathy Caruth's words "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often uncontrolled, repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth 57). Indeed in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, Caruth elucidates her theory of trauma which coincides in many aspects with Sigmund Freud's theory since both of them agree on the main symptoms of trauma as residing in the belatedness of the traumatic event and its haunting aspect as well as on the life-death oscillation of the trauma survivors.

For Caruth, trauma as it first occurs is incomprehensible. It is only later, after a period of latency, that it can be placed in a narrative. To elucidate her theory, Caruth quotes Freud's theory of trauma which converges with hers. Indeed, in Freud's book, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trauma is depicted as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind. Unlike the wound of the body, which is a simple and healable event, the wound of the mind is "experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it *imposes* itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (Caruth 4). Thus, a trauma in his credo resides in that very unmasterable traumatic past events which return to haunt the survivor later on. To exemplify his point, Freud invokes the story told by Tasso in his romantic epic *Gerusalemme Liberata*:

Its hero, Tancred, unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel while she is disguised in the armor of an enemy knight. After her burial he makes his way into a strange magic forest which strikes the Crusaders' army with terror. He slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again. (Caruth 2)

Thus, this story of Tancred, unwittingly wounding his beloved in a battle and then, unconsciously wounding her again by chance elucidates how the experience of trauma repeats itself through the intentional acts of the survivor and against his very will. Notably, what is striking in this story is the sorrowful voice that cries out, a voice that is paradoxically released through the

wound. For Tancred does not only repeat his act but, in repeating it, “he for the first time hears a voice that cries out to him to see what he has done. The voice of his beloved addresses him and, in this address, bears witness to the past he has unwittingly repeated” (Caruth 3). Hence, Tancred’s story “represents traumatic experience not only as the enigma of a human agent’s repeated and unknowing acts”, as Caruth puts it, “but also as the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound, a voice that witnesses a truth that Tancred himself cannot fully know” (Caruth 3).

It follows that trauma for both Freud and Caruth seems to be much more than pathology or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, a wound was given voice in order to reveal or unveil a reality or a truth that is not otherwise available. Indeed, this unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind is what Freud terms “traumatic neurosis” as he explains below:

It may happen that someone gets away, apparently unharmed, from the spot where he has suffered a shocking accident, for instance a train collision. In the course of the following weeks, however, he develops a series of grave psychical and motor symptoms, which can be ascribed only to his shock or whatever else happened at the time of the accident. He has developed a “traumatic neurosis.” This appears quite incomprehensible and is therefore a novel fact. The time that elapsed between the accident and the first appearance of the symptoms is called the “incubation period”. (Caruth 70)

Indeed this “incubation period” - during which the effects of the shocking experience are not apparent - is what Freud calls “latency” which is inherent in the very experience of trauma. Caruth’s synonym to Freud’s “latency” is “belatedness” as she emphasizes the essential belatedness of trauma, how it is by definition not experienced at the moment of the traumatic event as she explains in the quote below:

In its general definition, trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena. Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: 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. The repetitions of the traumatic event—which remain unavailable to consciousness but intrude repeatedly on sight— thus suggest a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known, and is inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing. (Caruth 91-92)

Elsewhere, Caruth asserts that the historical power of the trauma is “not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only *in* and *through* its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all” (Caruth 17).

Thus trauma for both Caruth and Freud is “the literal return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits”. That is “the outside has gone inside without any mediation”(Caruth 4). Unlike Freud and Caruth, Dominick LaCapra -as James Berger argues in his article “Trauma and Literary Theory” - focuses on three psychoanalytic topics: the return of the repressed; acting out

versus working through; and the dynamics of transference. A traumatic historical event, LaCapra argues, tends first to be repressed and then to return in forms of compulsive repetition. LaCapra is concerned primarily with the return of the repressed as discourse. He outlines two symptomatic possibilities for the return of historical trauma as discourse. There is, on the one hand, the "redemptive, fetishistic narrative that excludes or marginalizes trauma through a teleological story that projectively presents values and wishes as viably realized" as Berger writes, and on the other hand, LaCapra points to the "construction of all history ...as trauma and an insistence that there is no alternative to symptomatic acting-out and the repetition compulsion other than an imaginary ... hope for totalization, full closure, and redemptive meaning" (LaCapra qtd.in Berger 575).

Thus LaCapra wants to create a position that avoids both redemptive narrative and sublime acting out. He sets out to describe a way to work through trauma that does not "deny the irreducibility of loss or the role of paradox and aporia" but avoids becoming "compulsively fixated" (LaCapra qtd. in Berger 579). For LaCapra acknowledges a certain value in acting out. If there is no acting out at all, no repetition of the traumatic disruption, "the resulting account of the historical trauma will be that teleological, redemptive fetishizing that denies the trauma's reality: it happened, but it had no lasting effects; look, we're all better now, even better than before", to borrow Berger's words (576).

The third and most pervasive of LaCapra's concerns is transference. The failure to come to terms with the discursive returns of some traumatic event usually signals the failure to recognize one's own emotional and ideological investments in the event and its representation. Transference in psychoanalysis is itself a return of the repressed, or rather a more conscious summoning of the repressed. That is an attempt to repeat or act out a past traumatic event in a new therapeutic setting that allows for critical evaluation and change. Transference is the occasion for working through the traumatic symptom. Hence being conscious of one's trauma is the first condition to reach this stage.

Side by side with the abovementioned theories and approaches of trauma as an individual experience, I find it also crucial to invoke the trauma of slavery as a transgenerational legacy. Indeed and as Gabriele Schwab points out in her book *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*, it may be true that many African American people seem to be "disassociated" from the traumatic legacy of slavery, have no more connection with their distant history and no longer define their identities accordingly, yet this continual attempt of rewriting the history of slavery is nothing but an attempt to work through this collective trauma, which is transmitted from one generation to another despite and also because of this very attempt to mute it. In other words, "the collective or communal silencing of violent histories leads to a transgenerational transmission of trauma and the specter of an involuntary repetition of cycles of violence" (46) as Schwab puts it. So what Schwab calls "haunting legacies" are things and events which are hard to remember. The outcomes of a violence that holds "an unrelenting grip on memory yet is deemed unspeakable". "The psychic core of violent histories", she adds, "includes what has been repressed or buried in unreachable psychic recesses"(1). Thus the legacies of violence not only haunt the actual victims but are also passed on through the generations. It follows that these damages of violent histories, whether of slavery, genocide, wars or dehumanizing effects of atrocities, generate psychic deformations and "can hibernate in the unconscious, only to be transmitted to the next generation like an undetected disease" (3).

Moreover Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's theories of "the crypt" and "the phantom" serve also to back up this view and highlight the danger of stifling and silencing past traumas. For both of them in their book *The Shell and The Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis* develop "a theory of cryptonymy that traces different ways and forms of hiding in language. 'Cryptonymy' refers to operations in language that emerge as manifestations of a psychic crypt, often in form of fragmentations, distortions, gaps, or ellipses" (Schwab 45). This crypt is indeed similar to a psychic tomb in which people bury their unspeakable and unbearable pains, losses, guilts and traumas that is a harbor for a living corpse. The formation of the crypt, in Abraham's view, is due to a failed mourning and to the tendency of people to silence violent histories as Schwab describes it in the quote below:

People tend to bury violent or shameful histories. They create psychic crypts meant to stay sealed off from the self, interior tombs haunted by the ghosts of the past. Crypts engender silence. However, untold or unspeakable secrets, unfelt or denied pain, concealed shame, covered-up crimes, or violent histories continue to affect and disrupt the lives of those involved in them and often their descendants as well. Silencing these violent and shameful histories casts them outside the continuity of psychic life but, unintegrated and unassimilated, they eat away at this continuity from within. (49)

It follows, once silenced these traumatic memories or living corpses are likely to return as ghosts, phantoms or revenants in order to haunt the survivors or even their descendants. For cryptographic writing, in Abraham's credo, can bear the traces of the transgenerational memory of something never experienced firsthand by the one carrying the secret. "It is the children or descendants," as Abraham emphasizes, "who will be haunted by what is buried in this tomb even if they do not know of its existence or contents and even if the history that produced the ghost is shrouded in silence" (Schwab 4). It follows, not only the trauma is transmitted from one generation to another but violence itself is unconsciously transmitted and re-enacted.

### **Traumatic memories in Jazz**

*Traumatized people often come to feel that they have lost an important measure of control over the circumstances of their own lives and are thus very vulnerable. (Caruth, 99)*

Starting with Caruth's quote above, we can detect the vulnerability of the trauma survivors in *Jazz*. The main characters in *Jazz* are traumatized because of their abandonment by their parents or spouses or haunted by their own acts of violence. Joe is a trauma survivor because he is an orphan abandoned by his parents and also because he killed his eighteen-year-old mistress and is unable to pardon himself for this horrible act. Violet on the other hand is traumatized because of her parents' abandonment of her as a child as well as her husband's betrayal of her with a light-skinned young girl. Both characters are haunted by these memories against their own will. Thus being both motherless figures with psychic wounds, they are unable to maintain their romantic love. The cracks in their own selves were transmitted into cracks in their own liaison as a couple, which broke out for long years before being healed towards the end of the novel after confronting their own traumas, working through it by resorting to a collective memory in order to "keep the past at bay" and look for a better future.

As in Morrison's other historical novels, *Jazz* is also structured recursively; that is, the narration of present events is interrupted by the telling of "background" stories and by the unearthing of the unspoken events silenced by the mainstream history. For most of the characters are struggling with the intrusive memories of the past.

Indeed Joe and Violet in *Jazz* have no other choice but to dig deep into their past stories and memories in order to comprehend their present situation. The problem for them is that they have spent most of their lives forgetting and "beating back the past" instead of facing it. After leaving Vesper County, Virginia, in 1906 aboard a train heading North, Joe and Violet wished to leave behind their past wounds and disappointments and start a new page in their life. So they arrive in Harlem- the Promised Land - among "the wave of black people," like them, "running from want and violence" (33). By 1926, when the novel opens, Harlem seems to be the site of a new historical era. As the narrator describes it: "Here comes the new. Look out. There goes the sad stuff. The bad stuff. The things nobody -could- help- stuff. The way everybody was then and there. Forget that. History is over, you all, and everything's ahead at last" (7). In fact, "the bad stuff" alluded to in this passage refers to the unspeakable history and the repressed memories happening in the South; like slavery and all its inhuman crimes, which is a transgenerational trauma transmitted to them unwittingly by their ancestors. For this legacy is supposed to be forgotten and left behind literally in the Great Migration. Yet and "despite the promise of Harlem, to be post historical," as Nancy Peterson puts it, "Joe and Violet find that the past comes along to haunt them, that they have to reckon with 'the sad stuff', 'the bad stuff' in order to resuscitate themselves as individuals and as a couple" (Peterson 73). This idea indeed echoes Freud's view about trauma survivors who appear to get away, apparently unharmed, from the spot where they have suffered a shocking accident whereas they are unconsciously developing "a trauma neurosis". For the shocking "accident", Joe and Violet thought to have left behind and forgotten after migrating to the City is their childhood wounds as abandoned and orphaned children, which represent their silenced or repressed individual traumas.

Indeed both Joe and Violet yearn for some kind of connection with their previous selves in order to deal with their cycles of traumas. For Joe cannot find a confidant in Harlem similar to his childhood friend Victory to whom he used to unveil his unspeakable secrets. He admits, "I changed once too often. Made myself new one time too many. You could say, I've been a new Negro all my life" (129). This continual newness and self-renewal proves later to be problematic and painful. Having lost touch with Victory and all other friends in the South, Joe urgently needs someone to listen to his crying wounds and traumatic memories and mainly that of his mother who abandoned him.

For having a memory marked by a house "full of motherlessness" for months with no sign or sound of his mother (167), he traveled with "an inside nothing", which was the very proof of his trauma and one of the incentives of his later betrayal of his wife. Being told by Hunters Hunter that his mother is a crazy woman who "disappeared without a trace", he resolved to name himself Joe Trace, a name reminiscent of Derrida's trace, which conveys both the absence and presence of his mother. Being himself her son, that is a trace of her, he was convinced of her presence and decided to find her despite his feeling of shame:

From then on he wrestled with the notion of a wild woman for a mother. Sometimes it

shamed him to tears. Other times his anger messed up his aim and he shot wild or hit game in messy inefficient places. A lot of his time was spent denying it, convincing himself he misread Hunter's words and most of all his look. Nevertheless, Wild was always on his mind, and he wasn't going to leave for Palestine without trying to find her one more time. (176)

Thus his determination to find her and silence his crying wound of abandonment made him take three journeys to find her as the novel tells us:

All in all, he made three solitary journeys to find her. In Vienna he had lived first with the fear of her, then the joke of her, finally the obsession, followed by rejection of her. Nobody told Joe she was his mother. Not outright; but Hunters Hunter looked right in his eyes one evening and said, "She got reasons. Even if she crazy. Crazy people got reasons". (175)

Yet being disappointed to find a crazy and dirty mother "who orphaned her baby rather than nurse him or cuddle him or stay in the house with him. A woman who frightened children" (178), he decided to give up and started blaming and insulting her instead for abandoning her children and implicitly for refusing to be the anchor he is looking for to solve his identity crisis and to work through the trauma he has been suffering from for years:

But now they were full of her, a simple-minded woman too silly to beg for a living. Too brain-blasted to do what the meanest sow managed: nurse what she birthed. The small children believed she was a witch, but they were wrong. This creature hadn't the intelligence to be a witch. She was powerless, invisible, wastefully daft. Everywhere and nowhere.

There are boys who have whores for mothers and don't get over it. There are boys whose mothers stagger through town roads when the juke joint slams its door. Mothers who throw their children away or trade them for folding money. He would have chosen any one of them over this indecent speechless lurking insanity. The blast he aimed at the white-oak limbs disturbed nothing, for the shells were in his pocket. The trigger clicked harmlessly. Yelling, sliding, falling, he raced back down the incline and followed the riverbank out of there. (179)

Indeed, his hope was just to be given a sign of recognition as the narrative tells us: "All she had to do was give him a sign, her hand thrust through the leaves, the white flowers, would be enough to say that she knew him to be the one, the son she had fourteen years ago, and ran away from, but not too far" (37). Yet, after losing hope in his mother, hence failing to heal his first trauma, he decides to find someone to fill in "the inside nothing" he traveled with from then on, the "wound of the mind" lodging inside as Freud terms it. However, having a wife who suffers from her own psychic traumas and busy with her own wounds and "her private cracks" (22), Joe stumbles upon an eighteen-year-old young woman who happens to fill in his emptiness as the narrative tells us:

Maybe he missed the sign that would have been some combination of shame and pleasure, at least, and not the inside nothing he traveled with from then on, except for the fall of 1925 when he had somebody to tell it to. Somebody called Dorcas with hooves tracing her cheekbones and who knew better than people his own age what that inside nothing was like. And who filled it for him, just as he filled it for her, because she had it too. (37)

Thus finding in Dorcas the person to listen to his crying wounds and to whom he could unveil his repressed traumatic memories and unfold his pain, seems to be the main reason of his betrayal and the only way to heal his wounds of the mind as well as of the heart. “I couldn’t talk to anybody but Dorcas and I told her things I hadn’t told myself. With her I was fresh, new again” (123). Thus it is worthwhile to assert that his desire for Dorcas involves “not only sex or beauty or youth” as Peterson puts it, but also “the desire to articulate, to narrate memories and stories that might connect the past to the present in a meaningful way” (Peterson 77). In other words, Dorcas is the one who enabled him to overcome his first trauma of being orphaned and gave him a certain psychological balance.

Nevertheless, when Dorcas leaves him for Acton, a young man of her age, this was another shock for him and a new trauma reminding him of the previous ones. This cycle of traumas - being abandoned by his mother, then neglected by his wife who sleeps with a doll and in love with birds, then rejected again by the young lover who happened to listen to his “crying wounds”- made him resort to violence and to the power of the gun in order to put an end to the pain consuming both his mind and heart:

In this world, the only thing is to find the trail and stick to it. I tracked my mother in Virginia and it led me right to her, and I tracked Dorcas from Borough to Borough...something else takes over when the track begins to talk to you, give you its signs but if the trail speaks, no matter what’s the way, you can find yourself in a crowded room aiming a bullet at her heart, never mind, it’s the heart you can’t live without. (130)

Yet being shocked by his own violence to hurt the person he loves most “I had the gun but it was not the gun—it was my hand I wanted to touch you with” (130), is the beginning of another shock, hence another traumatic memory to haunt him later and make him lose direction and fall in despair and self-blame for killing the object of his love and burying the traits he cherished in her:

He remembers his memories of her; how thinking about her as he lay in bed next to Violet was the way he entered sleep. He minds her death, is so sorry about it, but minded more the possibility of his memory failing to conjure up the dearness. And he knows it will continue to fade because it was already beginning to the afternoon he hunted Dorcas down. After she said she wanted Coney Island and rent parties and more of Mexico. Even then he was clinging to the quality of her sugar-flawed skin, the high wild bush the bed pillows made of her hair, her bitten nails, the heart-breaking way she stood, toes pointed in. Even then, listening to her talk, to the terrible things she said, he felt he was losing the timbre of her voice and what happened to her eyelids when they made love. (28)

It follows, being haunted by traumatic memories of this murdered love made him “all broke up. Cried all day and all night. Left his job and wasn’t good for a thing” (204) as the text tells us. Thus returning to his wife’s lap to open together past wounds, to work through their traumas and heal each other has become a must for both Joe and Violet in order to escape from the grip of the past and repair what remains to be repairable.



As far as Violet is concerned, her traumatic memories pertain first to her being an orphan which made her reject motherhood and refuse to birth a baby at first then crave a baby when it has become too late for her to conceive. Her second shock is her husband's betrayal of her. Two traumatic shocks as such made Violet suffer "public craziness" and "private cracks" in Harlem (22) – fissures in her own self-concept that the novel highlights with names signifying her split self: "violent" and "that violet".

In fact, Violet's first shock is due to her mother's suicide. For after being deserted by her husband, Violet's mother Rose Dear committed suicide by jumping into a well leaving behind five daughters. Thus being raised by her grandmother True Belle and being unable to grasp this loss and lack of motherlove, which is incomprehensible to her as a child as Caruth contends, Violet decides not to have children on her own. "Her mother. She didn't want to be like that. Oh never like that" (97).

Indeed Violet's initial trauma of being deprived of her motherlove did not show up when she was a child. It is only when she got married and became entitled to be a mother that this trauma resurfaced. The time that elapsed between "the accident" and the first appearance of the symptoms is what Freud calls the "incubation period" (Caruth 70). A period during which Violet was not conscious of the wound implanted in her mind and the effects of the shocking experience are not apparent yet - is what Freud calls "latency" and Caruth calls "belatedness", which is inherent in the very experience of trauma. For as Caruth points out, the belatedness of trauma is by definition not experienced at the moment of the traumatic event or events "that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena". The repetitions of the traumatic event, she adds, - "which remain unavailable to consciousness but intrude repeatedly on sight - thus suggest a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known, and is inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing" (Caruth 91).

Hence the belatedness of trauma is embodied in Violet's decision not to have children of her own in order not to look like her mother or *be* like her mother. "The important thing, the biggest thing", to her mind, "was to never never have children. Whatever happened, no small dark foot would rest on another while a hungry mouth said, Mama?" (102). Thus her decision is due to her trauma and to her inability to grasp the traumatic event when it occurs- as a child- but returns later-as an adult- in a shape of a repetitive phenomenon. This belated trauma is the very reason behind her repeated miscarriages or rather her abortions induced by her "mammy-made poison" of "soap, salt and castor oil" (109).

Yet, when she reached the forties, "mother-hunger had hit her like a hammer. Knocked her down and out" (108) and she started craving for a baby when it has become too late for her to conceive. This craving is sublimated into a doll:

By and by longing became heavier than sex: a panting, unmanageable craving. She was limp in its thrall or rigid in an effort to dismiss it. That was when she bought herself a present; hid it under the bed to take out in secret when it couldn't be helped. She began to imagine how old that last miscarried child would be now. A girl, probably. Certainly a girl. Who would she favor? What would her speaking voice sound like? (108)

Still her trauma is aggravated later by her husband's betrayal with a girl young enough to be his daughter. Her 'exchange' of her with a young light-skinned girl made her realize that she prepared the ground for this betrayal by her refusal to bring him children, by distancing herself from him, by her interest in birds and the doll she chose to sleep with. That is when her trauma escalated into violence and she went to the funeral with a knife in order to cut the face of her rival's corpse.

Indeed her trauma resulting from the shock of being betrayed made her revise herself and become eager to know her enemy in order to figure out the woman her husband wants her to be: "But I wanted to see what kind of girl he'd rather me be" ( 82) as she told Alice. Hence, she started her investigations about Dorcas in order to compare herself to her and in a way to be Dorcas so as to gain her husband back:

She questioned everybody, starting with Malvonne, an upstairs neighbor—the one who told her about Joe's dirt in the first place and whose apartment he and the girl used as a love nest. From Malvonne she learned the girl's address and whose child she was. From the legally licensed beauticians she found out what kind of lip rouge the girl wore; the marcelling iron they used on her (though I suspect that girl didn't need to straighten her hair); the band the girl liked best (Slim Bates' Ebony Keys which is pretty good except for his vocalist who must be his woman since why else would he let her insult his band). And when she was shown how, Violet did the dance steps the dead girl used to do. (5)

In fact, one more detail that bears witness to her trauma is the picture of her rival she unexpectedly took from her aunt and placed on the mantel in her own house. For the picture of Dorcas "not smiling, but alive at least and very bold. Violet had the nerve to put it on the fireplace mantel in her own parlor and both she and Joe looked at it in bewilderment" (6). Indeed this picture is meant to keep haunting her memory as well as that of her husband, to keep deliberately torturing herself as well as her husband and reminding him of his guilts- betrayal and murder- which caused their insomnia as the text tells us: "The mantel over the fireplace used to have shells and pretty-colored stones, but all of that is gone now and only the picture of Dorcas Manfred sits there in a silver frame waking them up all night long (13).

Besides, the haunting memory of Dorcas is best illustrated in her omnipresence and absence as the text tells us, "the girl's memory is a sickness in the house—everywhere and nowhere" (28). For in Derridean terms, her trace is that of an absent presence, not there in the house but always-already there in their psyches. That is a buried trauma or a living corpse in Abraham's theory. Furthermore her trauma and painful shock of being betrayed escalated to the extent of being obsessed with her rival's physical traits and even falling in love with her. She is so hurt that she yearns to *be* the woman favored by her husband:

Violet agrees that it must be so; not only is she losing Joe to a dead girl, but she wonders if she isn't falling in love with her too. When she isn't trying to humiliate Joe, she is admiring the dead girl's hair; when she isn't cursing Joe with brand- new cuss words, she is having whispered conversations with the corpse in her head; when she isn't worrying about his loss of appetite, his insomnia, she wonders what color were Dorcas' eyes. Her aunt had said brown; the beauticians said black but Violet had never seen a light-skinned person with coal- black eyes. One thing, for sure, she needed her ends cut. In the photograph and from what Violet could remember from the coffin, the

girl needed her ends cut. Hair that long gets frugally easy. Just a quarter- inch trim would do wonders, Dorcas. Dorcas. (15)

To sum up, we can conclude that Violet was subject to a chain of traumas. The trauma of being deliberately orphaned by her mother entailed her deliberate trauma to be childless, which in turn entailed her unconsciously deliberate encouragement of her husband to couple elsewhere with a woman young enough to be his daughter. Likewise, Joe was subject to a chain of traumas. The trauma of being abandoned and rejected by his dirty and crazy mother Wild, which led him to search for a caring and attentive woman to perform both roles that of the wife and the mother, something Violet failed to do. Hence he found himself looking for a young woman to fill in the empty spaces left by his mother and his wife and overwhelm him with the love and attention he badly needs as a trauma victim. Yet being rejected again by his young mistress triggered in him the memory of his first rejection by his mother, something that made him act abruptly and gun down his mistress without any premeditation or maybe that was his way to claim her as his own and to prove how much he loves her and desires her for himself only. For his reply to Felice's question about the reason of shooting her - "Scared. Didn't know how to love anybody." "You know now?" "No. Do you, Felice?" (213)- bears witness to his trauma, that is to that incurable wound of the mind for not being loved hence not knowing how to love.

To conclude, both Joe's and Violet's common trauma as abandoned, orphaned, unmothered and unlovable children - which entailed their later traumas and their violent acts - are insidiously linked to the collective trauma of slavery, which is transmitted to them transgenerationally and continues to haunt them unwittingly. As Schwab points out, "the collective or communal silencing of violent histories leads to a transgenerational transmission of trauma and the specter of an involuntary repetition of cycles of violence" (46). In other words, the damages of violent histories -slavery in our case- are liable to generate psychic deformations and "can hibernate in the unconscious, only to be transmitted to the next generation like an undetected disease" (Schwab 3). Thus both Joe's and Violet's chains of traumas are due to the "crypt", as Abraham words it, that is the psychic tomb in which they -as well as their forefathers - buried their unspeakable and unbearable pains and traumas instead of healing them. The result of this silencing and of the trauma victims' failure to mourn their losses is "the phantom", according to Abraham, which is embodied in their violent behaviors and aberrations emerging in their lives later as adults. Thus, being subject to violence in the past, and being unable to work through their past traumas, Joe and Violet - and by extension the African American community as a whole - cannot act otherwise but in the same violent way as their white oppressors. Hence the Blacks' violence is nothing but the trace of the Whites' violence in the Derridean sense and their cycles of trauma are deeply rooted in the unforgivable and unforgettable trauma of slavery.

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