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FINDING LOVE AMONG EXTREME OPPOSITION IN TONI MORRISON'S *JAZZ* AND EUDORA WELTY'S *THE OPTIMIST'S DAUGHTER*

by

JOHN D. CLARK

Under the Direction of Audrey Goodman

ABSTRACT

In Toni Morrison's Jazz and Eudora Welty's The Optimist's Daughter, extreme opposition is prevalent as the authors describe the makeup of each character, as well as the setting and plot in these novels. What are they accomplishing by portraying such opposition? By using Jacque Derrida's deconstructive theory and Julia Kristeva's definition of abjection as theoretical guides to navigate these novels, examples of how both authors use extreme opposition in each element of their works are cited and explored. Through this process, the realization that opposing extremes can harmoniously lie side by side and have as many similarities as differences is discovered. By the conclusion, the unifying quality that love plays in both novels, as well as the authors' intents to change their readers traditional concept of love, is evident.

INDEX WORDS: Abjection, confluence, deconstruction, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, love, Toni Morrison, opposition, post-modernism, Eudora Welty

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JOHN D. CLARK

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

In the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2006

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December 2006

To Christopher and Alice, for their love, in all its forms.

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"*The wedding day of light and dark was here…*"

- "From High Mountains; Aftersong," Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*.

Introduction

Toni Morrison's Jazz and Eudora Welty's The Optimist's Daughter tell extraordinary love stories of common people dealing with tragedy and coping with oppression. Both novels address individual identity in clearly defined communities, the remembering of the past in order to remake the future, and the attempt to destroy what is perceived as evil, to create good. Though all of these themes are central and worthy of discussion, my thesis focuses on how the texts broaden the definition of love through layers of opposition.

Though there are many differences between the two novels, Jazz and The Optimist's Daughter have much in common as well, including a non-linear structure (though The Optimist's Daughter is more chronological than Jazz), shared symbolism, and a persistent fluctuation between fantasy and reality through the narration of their stories. The plots of the two novels consist of protagonists dealing with a significant loss and, through confrontation with their pasts, finding closure out of which a nontraditional love is revealed.

Jazz tells the story of Joe and Violet Trace, a couple who migrate from Vesper County, Virginia, to Harlem in the 1920s. The novel depicts the couple's healing process following Joe's murder and Violet's defacing of Dorcas with whom Joe had a love affair. As the narrator carefully choreographs their respective histories (both grew up motherless) with the story of several friends in their Harlem community, Joe and Violet find love in their relationship – an uninhibited love free of oppression and yet fully informed of the violent and, at times, lonely makeup of their love.

Set in New Orleans, Louisiana, and Mt. Salus, Mississippi, in what readers can assume is the 1950s, The Optimist's Daughter depicts a healing process as well, this one of Laurel McKelva who has lost her father after losing both her mother and her husband – to whom she

was only briefly married – several years earlier. Laurel's healing process is assisted by her step mother, Fay, who is Laurel's age, whom her father married only a year and half earlier and with whom Laurel carries out a careful dance in order to control her strong emotions. Though the reader becomes aware of Fay's assistance to Laurel as she remakes her past, Laurel perceives Fay as her nemesis, never realizing the similarities these two outsiders possess in their determination to create a future of their own, never admitting to the love that they shared towards Judge McKelva.

In both novels, ambiguity results from the constant opposition portrayed in the texts. Through Morrison's and Welty's descriptions of settings, characters, and communities, multiple and often conflicting dualities appear that challenge readers to reevaluate the various emotions, including love, evoked. By applying a deconstructive analysis to each text, the reader becomes aware that characters are equally as present in the story when they are absent, that what may appear as fact is only fictional perception, and that what may be seen as spiteful, ends up being full of love. Ultimately, readers are forced to question traditional dichotomies, including that of bad and good as well as wrong and right.

Before each novel is addressed independently, I will discuss the many ways that the authors illustrate opposition by comparing and contrasting the plots, character developments, and settings. The first chapter will alternate between key characteristics of Jazz and The Optimist's Daughter in order to establish a common conclusion that can be drawn from both authors' use of extreme opposition in their writing: mainly instability of language, identity, and reality –central concepts in deconstruction. I will also demonstrate how Julia Kristeva's definition of abjection applies, mainly to Jazz, in creating ambiguity and in showing the duality of love. In her work Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection (1982), Kristeva defines abjection as that by which we

are simultaneously repulsed and seduced (1). As Morrison creates ambiguity from abjection, she draws on W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness in establishing an "other" in certain characters. The presence of the "other" allows characters to remove themselves from their established identities, see the opposing side of the abject situations they are in, and create new identities for themselves. "The separation of the external and the internal is part of the experience of seeing oneself in a mirror for it allows us to see ourselves both as self and as other" (Peach 120). Double-consciousness is yet another duality in the text of Jazz.

Morrison also pulls from Gnosticism, as evident from the epigraph of *Jazz* that comes from the Gnostic text *The Nag Hammadi*. Gnosticism is a religious practice that centers around the human struggle to gain knowledge of a supreme truth which is found in the unity of the divine and the mundane, two forces that are often thought of as very different, but which Gnosticism places closely together, just as it does good and evil.

Abjection is not as easily identified in The Optimist's Daughter, but the similarities of separate forces are evident through the constant confluence Welty depicts. By its very definition, confluence, "the merger or meeting of two or more objects (or subjects) that seem to inseparably bind their respective forces or attributes into a point of junction" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confluence), addresses duality and the resulting unity of two forces. Though not synonymous, abjection and confluence resemble each other in that they both merge two or more elements. Abjection unites extreme opposing emotions such as attraction and disgust, while confluence unites elements that can be similar and/or different.

Individual analysis of each novel (Jazz in Chapter 2, The Optimist's Daughter in Chapter 3), illustrates a resolution of the conflicts as assisted by the narrators' depiction of disparities in their most extreme form – to the point of defining polar opposition. This continuous opposition

illustrates how closely polar opposites lie to one another, forcing readers to make new connections of opposite details that define the same scene, character, or action. This opposition ultimately challenges readers to find new and extraordinary meanings in common stories of everyday people.

In both novels, extreme opposition is created through the use of polarized language, highly contrasted settings, and prominent character conflicts. In addition, both novels address how individuals, as well as communities, perceive and fuse opposing forces. My analysis moves from one novel to the other, reflecting a mating dance of two lovebirds, or a pas de deux between dancers in a ballet, to show the interrelatedness of not only the two novels, but also of conflict and resolution, opposition and unity, memory and reality, hate and love.

To continue the comparison of these opposing concepts in Jazz and The Optimist's Daughter to dance, the work of choreographer Petier D. Scholten has been described similarly. In critiquing a dance piece performed by Emio Greco|PC in the New York Times, Scholten, also the director of the Netherlands Dance Theatre, comments on the intention of the work, stating that "Conjunto de NERO," the collaborative work created in 2001 by Greco, is characterized by a "duality" that is made up of "contradiction, which gives a chance and possibility of reflection and creativity. It means in 'Conjunto de NERO': to enlighten the darkness and to darken the light; again also to experience what is beyond darkness and what is beyond the light" (qtd. in La Rocco). Duality, including the opposing emotions in abjection as defined by Julia Kristeva, pervades Scholten's world. Scholten's ballet "Double Points: Two" was described by another critic, Stephan Laurent, in 2003 as consisting of "partners coming together or separating like magnets successively attracted and repelled by each other" (www.danceinsider.com).

Opposition, abjection, and confluence are themes explored by many art forms in today's postmodern world.

The dichotomies, dualities, oppositions, and deconstructions that exist in Morrison's and Welty's work have been addressed by many scholars. In addition, the wholeness that these binary elements form is equally addressed. After an exploration of how these two novels depict opposition, I theorize about what this extreme opposition creates for the reader. Ambiguity and liberation have been cited as results of such opposition. This extreme opposition also brings out the dual nature of love: a love that transcends the typical affiliations of affection, fate, and connectedness; a nontraditional concept of love that includes emotions of disgust, isolation, and conflict.

Following the analysis of how Jazz, viewed through a deconstructive lens, inverts our connotations of identity, race, and politics, the deconstructive elements of The Optimist's Daughter, as well as how Welty uses confluence to illustrate the duality of love, will be highlighted. In the concluding chapter, I explore how these oppositions change our perception of love. Using Erich Fromm's concept of love, I emphasize the new light that abjection, confluence, double-consciousness, and metaphor shine on this complex and often over-simplified emotion, revealing love in all its violence, separation, and unpredictability.

Chapter 1: Extreme Opposition in Jazz and The Optimist's Daughter

Through the stories they tell in The Optimist's Daughter and Jazz, Eudora Welty (1909 – 2001) and Toni Morrison (1931 -) challenge readers by focusing on dualities and by portraying the settings, characters, and plots with extreme opposition in their language. This portrayal of opposition makes the reader aware that Morrison and Welty were keenly aware of and interested in the conflicts of their time: racial, gender, geographic, and class. Whether intentional or not, Morrison's and Welty's works are infused with deconstructive concepts introduced by Jacques Derrida. A deconstructive analysis of Jazz and The Optimist's Daughter makes clear how opposition defines communities and individuals as well as the result of this opposition. From a postmodernist perspective, both texts also draw from the concept of "the other" – an outside, fragmented identity *other* than the "I" in which we traditionally define ourselves – to further draw the reader's attention to the duality of identity and character, as well as to the relationship of love to hate. The inequalities/equalities of different/similar people are magnified when "the other" is addressed. In Jazz, Morrison specifically addresses inequalities that blacks confronted, inequalities that were created by oppression from whites (the "other" in this circumstance) prior to the Civil Rights Movement. The inequalities Welty illustrates in The Optimist's Daughter also concern race, but the oppression she addresses is created by an "other" of the same race; one that represents a different level of education and class represented by the "I" or the protagonist in her novel.

Both Welty and Morrison lived through the Civil Rights Movement, witnessing the degrading treatment of blacks; both wrote about the roles black people play in American communities; and both gained tremendous success and fame for their literary talents, personally experiencing acclamation and reward. Welty's fictional conflicts are often between family

members and therefore are insular, drawing our attention to the individual rather than the community. Morrison's conflicts, on the contrary, often involve entire communities and focus on white oppression. Because Morrison's fiction has a more visible political agenda than does Welty's, and because she inverts traditional hierarchies that originate as far back as the Bible, Morrison depicts conflicts that are extreme expressions of the double-consciousness possessed by women and African-Americans. Morrison's conflicts therefore are more blatant than the conflicts narrated in Welty's fiction. Morrison's fiction turns conflicts inside out, inverts stereotypes, and doubles these inversions, evoking extreme emotions for her readers. This extensive doubling is most likely a result of Morrison's double minority status as a woman and an African-American. "Historically, black women have constituted the *other* other, the doubly marginalized, oppressed by both racial and gender prejudice" (Page, Dangerous 18-19).

Welty also discusses doubling upon doubling and occasionally utilizes it in her work. She has depicted the lives of southern blacks not only in her fiction, but also in her photography, while Morrison, in interviews, has discussed the racially charged household she was brought up in, saying that her father thought "all black people were superior to whites" (Taylor-Guthrie 283). The economic, racial, and educational disparities that Morrison and Welty experienced and observed in their lives play a critical role in how they approach and create fiction. Taking a close look at the opposition created in Morrison's and Welty's fiction sheds light on the disparity in which both authors were immersed. I will discuss how the portrayal of opposition links Jazz and The Optimist's Daughter, and how the illustration of extreme opposition evokes indifference, ambiguity, doubt, and change in their readers. Ultimately, this infusion of opposition in their work highlights the duality of love.

The exploration of opposition and how it applies to human behavior was begun long ago by scholars in texts such as Sigmund Freud's Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Friedrich Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil, and more recently in Susan Sontag's AIDS and Its Metaphors. In Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, Kristeva pushes the exploration of opposition to an extreme through her definition of abjection, and Amy Leigh White's dissertation entitled Reframing the Subject: Abjection in Twentieth-Century American Literature applies abjection to several twentieth century authors, including Morrison. Kristeva's definition of abjection expands upon the theory of deconstruction and helps readers understand how closely opposition and confluence are related. Philip Page, the author of Dangerous Freedom: Fusion and Fragmentation in Toni Morrison's Novels, connects Derrida's concepts with the double-consciousness evident in Morrison's work and is particularly helpful in an analysis of opposition in Jazz. Discussions of Welty's fiction rarely cite the deconstructive elements present. Scholars focus, rather, on the confluence that evolves out of conflict. Mae Miller, Axel Nissen and Betina Entzminger provide insight on the role of opposition in Welty's work.

Both Welty and Morrison have been credited for their contributions to American politics – mainly surrounding the often invisible African American presence in literature – and both have been praised for their unique use of language to create a distinct and often poetic aesthetic in their work.[1] Morrison has commented on the political and aesthetic aspect of writing, as have her critics. "[L]ike Ellison, [Morrison] is committed to an art that is both aesthetically powerful and politically effective" (Conner x). Morrison states that for her "a novel has to be socially responsible as well as very beautiful" (Jones 183). On the contrary, Welty has never discussed the political aspects of her writing. This does not mean, however, that Welty's work is not political. "Welty's personal predisposition to steer away from the politics of literature might

serve as a paradoxical indicator that, on the level of imagination, she knows full well that literature is political and that the novel is the most political form of all" (Gretlund 7). Welty's political motivations are discussed in detail in Pollack and Marrs' Eudora Welty and Politics: Did the Writer Crusade? Reflecting on the strong connection both authors have to the Civil Rights Movement, Morrison and Welty have good reason for creating an aesthetic that falls on the ambiguous side of politics, and for requiring their readers to question what composes opposition and contradiction, as well as what resolves it.

"The Optimist's Daughter" was first published as a short story in The New Yorker in 1969. Welty later revised and expanded the story resulting in the novel, published in 1972. The novel is known as Welty's most autobiographical, since much of what she describes in her memoir, One Writer's Beginnings (1983), echoes parts of The Optimist's Daughter. Despite, or perhaps due to, its autobiographical nature, The Optimist's Daughter addresses the conflicting emotions Laurel McKelva has in response to her father's wife, Fay – a character that represents drastically opposing values. This conflict may reflect Welty's own conflicting emotions towards her parents. In One Writer's Beginnings, Welty discusses the different approach her mother took from her father. She writes, "…as I stood between them with the water running over my toes, he the optimist was the one who was prepared for the worst, and she the pessimist was the daredevil…" (45). Though these opposing approaches were familiar for Welty, she also says herself that "getting [her] distance, a prerequisite of [her] understanding of human events, is the way [she] began work" (Welty, One 21).

In The Optimist's Daughter, opposing value systems fuse as Laurel McKelva watches her father die with her new step-mother, Fay, at her side. In Laurel's mourning, she reminisces about the relationship of her parents as well as about her relationship with her late husband.

These opposing value systems have nothing to do with race. Welty's fiction primarily depicts black characters living in predominantly white communities. Similar to most of Welty's other work, The Optimist's Daughter is void of any developed black characters. Despite this, the novel is clearly related to how American society was dealing with the racial conflicts of the time and what Derrida describes as the "othering" of ourselves, and specifically of blacks in America. Although white, Fay represents the "other" in Mt. Salus. She is oppressed by the polite, well-educated community of Mt. Salus. Laurel, however, is also an "other" since she no longer lives in Mt. Salus, and though the narrator sets Laurel and Fay in clear opposition, the two women share similarities, although they fail to perceive so, thus creating confusion and confluence between antagonist and protagonist.

Jazz (1992), set during the Harlem Renaissance, is more blatant in its treatment of bi-polar forces that reflect the racial conflicts of the time. Morrison cautions critics against molding her work into the literary canon and against comparing her style to that of other authors. In fact, when asked who she is like, she says, "…my effort is to be *like* something that has probably only been fully expressed in music" (Taylor-Guthrie 152). An opposing duality exists in her use of language that she describes as coming from a "black aesthetic" to depict black culture in a nation with a predominantly white population that has been depicted to date by white writers. She capitalizes on this opposition, pushing it to the extreme through highly polarized language and non-chronological plot lines, simultaneously moving "backwards and forwards in time" (Peach 115), jolting the reader out of traditional reading practices and encouraging them to come to their own revised conclusions.

Many character conflicts reveal the duality and opposition in Jazz and The Optimist's Daughter: Violet Trace's opposition to Dorcas Manfred, as well as to her husband Joe Trace,

who loves both the women; Laurel McKelva's opposition to her step-mother, Fay, and Judge McKelva whose love for both women forces them to find their similarities. In addition, opposition is found in each novel's settings – New Orleans and Mt. Salus, Mississippi; Harlem and Vesper County, Virginia, the polar language used to develop characters and plot, and the nontraditional opposing qualities of many of the supporting characters (specifically Major Bullock in The Optimist's Daughter and Golden Gray in Jazz). In multiple aspects of these two novels, we see a juxtaposition of bi-polar forces working against as well as in tandem with each other resulting in "confluence" in Welty's work and in "abjection" in Morrison's.

Duality and opposition are central topics depicted and addressed by many scholars. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis was based on the duality of the conscious and the unconscious, the persistent death wish we experience throughout our lives, and the love/hate relationship between sons and fathers as well as daughters and mothers (Oedipal and Electra complex). In Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud addresses the innate duality of life and death instincts: "Our views have from the very first been *dualistic*, and to-day they are even more definitely dualistic than before – now that we describe the opposition as being, not between ego-instincts and sexual instincts but between life instincts and death instincts" (47). Furthermore, he claims, "We started out from the great opposition between the life and death instincts. Now object-love itself presents us with a second example of a similar polarity – that between love (or affection) and hate (or aggressiveness)" (47). This "great opposition" is recognized by Welty herself when she discusses the inherent life and death in fiction in The Eye of the Story. She states, "The plot is, of course, life *versus* death, which includes nearly every story in the world" (88). She also discusses the duality of the "reality" Chekhov creates in his short stories, quoting him as saying "Life is terrible and marvelous…" (Eye 62).

Past the conflicts found in life and death, love and hate, truth and fiction, opposition exists in singularity. The opposition of Joe Trace's eyes, of Violet's violent side, and Major Bullock's masculine and feminine sides are examples of opposition found in a single character. Philosophers and scholars have focused on single words that contain a bipolar duality and that have contradictory meanings.[2] Of particular relevance, Jacques Lacan elaborates on the contradiction inherent in *jouissance*. In explicating *jouissance*, Dylan Evans states, "the result of transgressing the pleasure principle is not more pleasure, but pain, since there is only a certain amount of pleasure that the subject can bear. Beyond this limit, pleasure becomes pain, and this 'painful pleasure' is what Lacan calls *jouissance*" (92). Kristeva takes this implicit contradiction even further by uniting the contradictory meanings of a word and explaining it in terms of our own identity. As she defines abjection, she writes, "If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire, which, as a matter of fact, makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is *abject*, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva 1-2). Relating abjection to our own personal identity (a central theme in both Jazz and The Optimist's Daughter) Kristeva claims, "… I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself*" (3). Kristeva's concept of abjection plays a strong role in the polar opposition that Morrison creates in Jazz.[3] Kristeva also unites the concepts of "othering," and abjection through *jouissance* by explaining how one can transform into another. As she discusses man's fear of "the other" and how he finally faces it, she claims that "Abjection then takes the place of the other, to the extent of affording him jouissance, often the only one for the borderline patient who, on that account, transforms the abject into the site of the Other" (Kristeva 54).

Welty and Morrison often unite conflicting ideas through their use of metaphors. These metaphors reflect on the oppression present in the conflict of each novel. For example, Morrison uses an inverted Garden of Eden in Jazz that reverses ideas on racial oppression. In Jazz's Garden of Eden, the partaking of fruit, pears in the case of Joe and Violet at the end of the novel, results in a new found freedom. In addition, the serpent in Jazz does not necessarily represent evil. The narrator that could symbolize the serpent is not evil, but fluctuates between reliable and unreliable, secretive and gossipy, personable and omniscient. Similarly, Golden Gray's name itself serves as the metaphor of his bi-racial heritage which plays with traditional ideas of oppression. Oppression in The Optimist's Daughter is found in the Mt. Salus community's treatment of Fay and represented in everything from Mardi Gras – the setting where Judge McKelva dies – to the entrapment of the bird in the McKelva home.

Shedding light on other oppressed communities, Susan Sontag addresses the duality of metaphors and disease in Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors. In the latter, Sontag opens the text with a definition of metaphor from Aristotle: "'Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else.' Saying a thing is or is like something-it-is-not is a mental operation as old as philosophy and poetry, and the spawning ground of most kinds of understanding, including scientific understanding, and expressiveness" (5). In fact, Welty and Morrison are merely repeating the contrast of good and evil found in the Garden of Eden, only they present such strong contrasts – contrasts that are defined as polar opposites and that define abjection – that they ask readers to revise their traditional concepts of hierarchies, such as those between reality and memory, black and white, love and hate.

Welty and Morrison infuse opposition into their fiction through the centrality of opposition in three ways that: the duality of settings, the contradictory language in these stories,

and the presence of opposing qualities between primary characters as well as within a single character.

The setting of Judge McKelva's death is curious and telling in its dual nature, especially considering the importance of place to Welty. The novel opens in a hospital in New Orleans with Mardi Gras approaching. New Orleans's long history of celebration and tragedy is well known. Not only is it a unique American city of predominantly French ancestry, but also a city where African Americans have created a rich culture of music, cuisine, art, and nontraditional religious practices. After undergoing cataract surgery, Judge McKelva is cared for by both his daughter and his new wife. Though the doctor is initially optimistic, Judge McKelva dies on Fat Tuesday, which also happens to be Fay's birthday. Known for its elaborate and decadent celebrations, Mardi Gras also has a dark side, as indulgence implies a lack of adherence to societal rules and structure. The voodoo and pagan rituals began as an opportunity to indulge the soul prior to the deprivation period of Lent. The polar contrast between indulgence and deprivation, as well as between celebration and mourning, are defining elements of Mardi Gras. In discussing Morrison's Beloved, Susan Corey identifies the dual make-up of Mardi Gras: "[L]ike the Mardi Gras preceding the season of Lent, the mood of joy is diminished by the allusions to the Last Supper with its overtones of betrayal, suffering, and tragic death – of sorrow mixed with joy" (41). In Jazz, Violet explores her own sorrow and joy by placing the photo of Dorcas on her mantel. As she looks at the women whom her husband loved and murdered, and whom she defaced, she finds resolution in the conflicts between herself and Joe.

Fay's sorrow and joy are evident while she is in New Orleans, only not to celebrate Mardi Gras. Never having visited New Orleans before, Fay longs to be a part of the celebration. This is demonstrated when Fay shares the beads that were thrown at her in the street with the

Judge who lies motionless in a hospital bed. Yet Fay is also trapped in the boredom of sitting by the Judge's bedside. The thrill and fright that she feels when she actually encounters the celebrations (just after Judge McKelva's death) are apparent as she rides back to the hotel.

> Fay grabbed Laurel's arm as she would have grabbed any stranger's. "I saw a man – I saw a man and he was dressed up like a skeleton and his date was in a long white dress, with snakes for hair, holding up a bunch of lilies! Coming down the steps of that house like they're just starting out!" Then she cried out again, the longing, or the anger, of her whole life all in her voice at one time, "Is it the Carnival?" (43)

Not only does this passage include a definite representation of abjection in Fay's conflicting feelings of "longing" and "anger," but it also clearly represents life and death in the Carnival scene described, reminding us of the sorrow and accompanying joy surrounding death. Later in the same scene, the contrasting reactions of Fay and Laurel to the Judge's death are evident as well. The morbidity and danger of the skeleton and the snakes are juxtaposed with the beauty and freshness of the wedding dress and lilies. Another juxtaposition in this scene is Fay's active questioning of who to blame for her husband's death opposed to Laurel's passive relinquishment to the doctor's proclamation.

The taxi cab continues to wind through the streets of Mardi Gras; Welty describes what Laurel and Fay each observe.

> Laurel heard a band playing and another band moving in on top of it. She heard the crowd noise, the unmistakable sound of hundreds, of thousands, of people *blundering*. "I saw a man in Spanish moss, a whole suit of Spanish moss, all by himself on the sidewalk. He was vomiting right in public," said Fay (43).

The extreme contrast between these two characters continues to be depicted. Making their way back to their hotel, Laurel is overwhelmed by the multiple bands she listens to, whereas Fay's response fluctuates between sheer joy and disgust. The narrator brings to attention the abjection of the scene as Fay describes the public vomiting; Fay, in her typical self-centered fashion, believes the abjection was "forced" on her.

Welty's italicizing of "blundering," to describe the Mardi Gras revelers, is noteworthy. The revelers who experience the decadence, indulgence, *jouissance* and abjection of Mardi Gras, end up *blundering*. Blunder, according to The Random House College Dictionary, is defined as "*n.* 1. a gross, stupid, or careless mistake. –*v.i.* 2. to move or act blindly, stupidly, or without direction or steady guidance." Here, Welty draws attention to the ambiguous, indifferent lack of direction and guidance in which such indulgence, such depravity, such conflicting celebration and sorrow result.

The story then moves, after a train ride, to Mt. Salus, Mississippi – a traditional community with a Main Street, courthouse, Presbyterian church, and plenty of down home Southern gentility amongst the garden clubs, bridesmaids, and even the veteran that still goes by his military title. Interestingly, Laurel and Fay's train ride is the same transition mechanism Morrison uses in Jazz to go from one setting to another, although Morrison's train begins in a rural area and moves to an urban setting. New Orleans is contrasted by the stability and comfort Mt. Salus exudes – Fay would never be frightened in Mt. Salus as she was in New Orleans. The contrast is enhanced by the amount of light that Welty includes in her description of Laurel's home.

> The McKelva house was streaming light from every window, upstairs and down. As Tish passed the row of parked cars and turned up into the driveway, Laurel saw that the

> daffodils were in bloom, long streamers of them reaching down the yard, hundreds of small white trumpets. Tish lightly touched the horn, and the front door opened and still more light streamed out…" (51).

In contrast, almost all of Fay's and Laurel's interactions in New Orleans occur at night, including when Judge McKelva dies. The Hibiscus Hotel where Fay and Laurel stay in New Orleans is described as "a decayed mansion" that "was far along in the course of being demolished" (17). Through this highly contrasted description of setting, Welty makes it clear that Mt. Salus is a place where the McKelvas flourish, not where they deteriorate and die.

Jazz is set primarily in Harlem in the 1920s, an era that became known as the Harlem Renaissance, a precarious time when blacks had gained certain freedoms, but continued to confront segregation and clear discrepancies between their rights and the rights of whites. Morrison emphasizes the contrast between North and South by including descriptions of Vesper County, Virginia, where Violet and Joe met. The reader's glimpses of Vesper County juxtaposed with the scenes in Harlem focus the reader's attention on the characters' abilities to feel emotions vividly and on the difference in their abilities to remember their emotions in each setting. Joe's distinct memory of how he met Dorcas in Harlem is contrasted by little memory of how he met his wife. "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). The raw emotion that Violet expresses, such as that at Dorcas's funeral, lying down in the streets of Harlem, and even with her pet birds, isn't possible in Vesper County. Only after they travel to the City on a hypnotic train ride is the emotional repression released, allowing them to gain an ability to

remember their feelings. In fact, as they enter the city on the train, the characters suddenly are not just able to feel and remember their emotions, but they are able to feel the City's emotions and to anticipate their return feelings: "They weren't even there yet and already the City was speaking to them. They were dancing…they stared out the windows for first sight of the City that danced with them, proving already how much it loved them. Like a million more they could hardly wait to get there and love it back" (32).

Though Joe and Violet met and fell in love in Vesper County, they have, for the most part, repressed those emotions and memories. In contrast, their relationship is a struggle in Harlem, yet their emotions are crystal clear and easily portrayed despite that what they are creating are painful memories that need to be confronted. This contrast between repressed memories from the rural South and vivid memories of the urban North creates an unusual and nontraditional dichotomy between where the characters have their roots and where they make their future. Commenting on the difference between the sharp memory people have of a city compared to the forgetfulness of the country, the narrator states,

> He forgets a sun that used to slide up like the yolk of a good country egg, thick and red-orange at the bottom of the sky, and he doesn't miss it, doesn't look up to see what happened to it or to stars made irrelevant by the light of thrilling, wasteful street lamps. […] But I have seen the City do an unbelievable sky. Redcaps and dining-car attendants who wouldn't think of moving out of the City sometimes go on at great length about country skies they have seen from the windows of trains. But there is nothing to beat what the City can make of a nightsky. […] Close up on the tops of buildings, near, nearer than the cap you are wearing, such a citysky presses and retreats, presses and

> retreats, making me think of a free but illegal love of sweethearts before they are discovered. (34-35)

The description of how these migrants viewed so differently the rural southern landscapes versus the urban northern landscapes is told from the perspective of a very confident, omniscient narrator. The conflicting duality in the novel is evident in Jazz's narrator, since later in the story, the narrator becomes unreliable and personal.

The narrator's undefined and mysterious identity is yet another way that Morrison represents and draws attention to "the other" as well as to the double-consciousness in the black community, a double consciousness discussed in detail by Denise Heinze in The Dilemma of Double-Consciousness, that W. E. B. Du Bois defines as "a state of affairs in which an individual is both representative of and immersed in two distinct ways of life" (Heinze 5). Not only does the reader feel that each of the characters is being watched by this omniscient narrator – creating this double-consciousness, but the narrator's fluctuating and contradictory identity makes us aware that (s)he defines her/himself differently each time (s)he appears. Just as evident in this description is the extreme juxtaposition of how the characters feel (or forget to feel) about where they came from versus where they are now. This explanation of the emotions they must stifle in the South also explains their need to fully express their emotions in the North once the repression is lifted. Anne-Marie Paquet-Deyris comments on the oppressive factors of the South and their effects on "Black Manhattan" as "a space of resistance in which all sorts of cultural practices resurface under oppressive conditions" (219). At the end of the passage, we see the duality of love already seeping through the text. The narrator describes love by using two opposing adjectives: "free" and "illegal."

In the 1920s, Harlem was in transition. Blacks migrated to Harlem from the South, Midwest, and New England to be where they could leave the past behind and imagine a better future. A transition occurred not just in who lived in Harlem and what Harlem represented, but went as deep as who owned Harlem: Harlem was not only a creative hub for blacks, but also a financial one. Tenements were being bought by blacks who saved their money, or by groups of blacks who understood the importance of owning. Harlem was a microcosm of America in the 1920s. Due to the energy and products of new-found freedom, the differences between blacks and whites, along with the contrasts of good and evil, were being reconsidered. "The City therefore be[came] an acting site of *reconstruction*, of potential and actual articulation of some *traumatic* traces of the past [my emphasis]" (Paquet-Deyris 221). This serves as a fitting place to set the story of a man trying to discover a mother he never knew through an affair with an 18-year-old girl who has nothing (other than the man she sleeps with) in common with the woman who is her lover's wife.

The opposing characters in Jazz are numerous: Violet versus Dorcas, Joe versus Violet, Dorcas versus Felice, Violet versus Violent, Wild versus Dorcas, to name a few. The duality of the setting and the opposition between the two primary settings are equally layered. The narrator describes the City using a violent metaphor: "Daylight slants like a razor cutting the buildings in half" (7). The metaphor of the "cutting razor" reflects and enhances that of the plot that contains traces of violence as well as traces of enlightenment for each character. Just after this description, the narrator reiterates the residents' focus on the future: "History is over, you all, and everything's ahead at last" (7). This focus on the future following the need to heal the past is apparent in The Optimist's Daughter as well. The narrator in Jazz also ensures that the reader is constantly aware of the opposing forces of good and evil in the city. "Word was that underneath

the good times and the easy money something evil ran the streets and nothing was safe…" (9). In "Toni Morrison's Jazz and the City," Paquet-Deyris proclaims the inherent duality of the City acting as "friend and foe" (222).

Racial identity is a fundamental element in Jazz as it is in all of Morrison's work. The story of a black couple who married in the South, migrated north, and are found struggling with their identities at the start of the novel, is appropriately set in Harlem, as it was one of the few places in America in the 1920's where blacks could be comfortable being themselves. Harlem, a borough that was finding its own identity, is the backdrop of a story about the ways in which we discover identity, and a story where people with little in common (similar to Fay and Laurel in The Optimist's Daughter) must look closely at their differences and resolve them in order to continue their lives. In this case, Violet resolves her conflict with Dorcas by finding out as much as she can about her after she has been murdered by her husband. Violet constructs a profile of her husband's dead mistress by getting to know her friends, her relatives, and the people with which she worked. She even studies a picture of her that she puts in plain sight on her mantle. Though Morrison does not state the role of race in their identity struggles, the struggle of identity for Violet, and equally important for Joe, only exist because of white society's oppressive values – a result of slavery – with which they have been trying to adapt. This identity struggle that resulted from the calamities of slavery is most apparent in Golden Gray as he discovers that he is the product of a black slave father and white slave-owning mother. "During the Harlem Renaissance, the City functions as the privileged site of a positive construction of blackness, countering, as Morrison says, the white 'construction of blackness and enslavement [in which] could be found not only the not-free but also, with the dramatic polarity created by skin color, the projection of the not-me'" (Paquet-Deyris 223).

In The Optimist's Daughter, Laurel faces her conflicting emotions with her father and his relationship with his two wives, as well as with her own conflict with her husband's death. Her conflicts are confronted alone in the comfort of her childhood home in Mt. Salus. Yet, the conflict is introduced in a sterile hospital just outside the extremely vibrant city of New Orleans, during its most festive time of year. The sharp contrast in setting echoes the sharp contrast between Fay and Laurel, emphasizing the centrality of opposition as a theme in the novel. Ultimately, the extreme and constant opposition creates ambiguous and indifferent feelings similar to Fay's responses to Carnival that fluctuate between exhilaration and fear. In Jazz, the conflict between Joe and Violet Trace is on full display in the community as it is told by an unidentified narrator that appears to know a lot about the Harlem neighborhood where the story takes place. The narrator imagines Joe and Violet's history in Vesper County for them in order to help them resolve their own conflicts. These contrasting settings reflect the contrast between characters, the descriptive language in both novels that fluctuates between contrasting poles, and the conflict in plot in Jazz and The Optimist's Daughter. The highly contrasted places where all this occurs lead the reader to ambiguous conclusions. As Paquet-Dyris states, "Harlem's fundamentally constructive/destructive ambiguity seems to be built into a text which alternately reflects the open space of romantic possibility and, at the same time, re-presents, literally embodies the reality of physical defeat and death" (Paquet-Deyris 228).

Morrison and Welty consistently characterize a single scene, character, or emotion, with language that represents polar opposition. In the following examples, the contrasting language is at its height and anticipates a key conflict in the plot. The first example in The Optimist's Daughter describes the "atmospheric oppression" Laurel experiences rushing into the hospital to her father's side, sensing Fay's impatience with the Judge.

> A strange *milky radiance* shone in a hospital corridor at *night*, like *moonlight* on some *deserted street*. The *whitened* floor, the *whitened* walls and ceilings, were set with narrow hands of *black* receding into the distance, along which the *spaced-out* doors, graduated from *large* to *small*, were all *closed*. Laurel had never noticed the design in the tiling before, like some clue she would need to follow to get to the *right place*. But of course the last door on the right of the corridor, the one standing partway *open* as usual, was still her father's.
>
> An intense, tight little voice from inside there said at that moment in high pitch, "I tell you enough is enough!" (my emphasis, 31-32)

Welty's description of the hospital corridors clearly reflects and magnifies the tense opposition in the plot. Specifically, the "milky radiance" of the hospital juxtaposed with the darkness of night and the "deserted street," the "whitened" floor, walls and ceilings compared to the black in "the distance," the doors which are "graduated from large to small" and which are all closed with the exception of her father's which steers her to "the right place," are all examples of language showing opposition that reflects the intense personal conflict the characters face with each other. On the surface, the language creates a mood that hides the extreme conflict that remains the undercurrent for what Laurel perceives as the confluence of life. Only when we look closely at the language do we realize how extreme it is. Further, the duality inherent in Fay's final words to Judge McKelva, "Enough is enough," leaves Fay's intent ambiguous. Is Fay the one that has had enough? Has the Judge? Has Laurel? Are they satiated, or depleted, with patience?

As postmodern theorists would predict, these conflicting situations lead to ambivalence and a lack of resolutions. In this situation, Laurel realizes what takes place in her father's hospital room, and responds by halting. "A thousand packthreads seemed to cross and crisscross

her skin, binding her there" (32). Welty has cleverly created the "packthreads" in this scene through the use of opposing adjectives that crisscross and lead us to Laurel's inhibited, "halted" reaction. Fay, despite being the one who causes the scene, uninhibitedly continues to lash out at the doctor once all is over. Fay departs the hospital screaming "Thank you for nothing!" (43) while Laurel subtly and vaguely places her hand on the cab's window.

A second example in The Optimist's Daughter in which Welty uses extreme oppositional language (which in this case reveals similarities between Laurel and Fay) occurs at the conclusion, just before Laurel threatens Fay with the breadboard made by her late husband.

> And in irony [Laurel] saw herself, pursuing her own way through the house as single-mindedly as Fay had pursued hers through the ceremony of the day of the funeral. But of course they had had to come together – it was useless to suppose they wouldn't meet, here at the *end* of it. Laurel was not *late*, not yet, in *leaving*, but Fay had *come early*, and in time. For there is *hate* as well as *love*, she supposed, in the *coming together* and *continuing* of our lives" (my emphasis, 177).

The dependence of resolution on immanent conflict holds true in this passage. Welty, in a story focused on time, illustrates a scene where the protagonist and antagonist have one final meeting, an inevitable meeting where love and hate meet, and are confronted in the same town, in the same family, and somehow find a way to co-exist. Though Laurel and Fay may try their hardest to define themselves by how they are not the *other*, they discover that they are related, in this case by a Judge that one calls father and the other calls husband. This passage also serves as another demonstration of the confluence of opposing forces that Welty is consistently addressing in the novel.

Opposing language that actually contradicts itself is rampant in Morrison's work. Many scholars have commented on Morrison's use of bi-polar language to jar the reader out of passive reading. The result is to be caught in between two extremes: "In its sense of terror and sublimity," to use a metaphor of Errol McDonald's, Morrison's world "hearkens back ultimately to Romantic literature, a sense of knowing there are things out there too high to get over, too low to get under, a sense of heaven and hell'" (Taylor-Guthrie 287). In Jazz, Morrison fuses what we often try to sharply define as black and white, and makes our perception golden and gray. This occurs most obviously when a character is coming to terms with his or her identity. For example, when Golden Gray reconsiders his identity after hunting down his father, the narrator tells us,

> Only now, he thought, now that I know I have a father, do I feel his *absence*: the place where he *should have been* and *was not*. Before, I thought everybody was one armed, like me. Now I feel the surgery. The *crunch* of *bone* when it is sundered, the *sliced flesh* and the tubes of *blood* cut through, shocking the bloodrun and disturbing the nerves. They dangle and writhe. Singing *pain*. (my emphasis, Morrison, Jazz 158)

Golden Gray exemplifies the postmodern concept that we define objects (even our own selves) by what they are not, what they are *other* than. We are present only because of some *other's* absence. This duality is just one example of how Morrison shows that clarity can result from the juxtaposition of opposing forces. "For her what is absent is at least as important as what is present" (Page, Traces 55). We not only witness the beginning of Golden Gray's new found identity in this passage, we also feel the numbness that results from such highly contrasted, extreme language. Through the description of his "crunched bone" and "sliced flesh," the reader also experiences a disruption in his or her nerves. Only after our knowledge of the pleasure

Golden Gray experienced in the ignorance of his heritage, can we see the pain, a "singing pain," even a pleasurable plain. Morrison's extension of Freud's pleasure principle is evident everywhere in the novel, from Joe's murdering of Dorcas, Violet's stabbing of Dorcas's corps, and Violet and Joe's exploration of why both had to happen in order for them to be happy with themselves and with each *other*. Immediately following his epiphany, Golden Gray appropriately declares the things that will not happen, including his being "healed," being "angry," or needing the arm that he doesn't have. The double, triple, and even quadruple negatives oppose and conflict with each other and finally lead the characters and the reader beyond the double consciousness of blacks in America. Morrison goes into elaborate detail about this double consciousness in Playing in the Dark. Marc Conner summarizes her meaning of double consciousness in The Aesthetics of Toni Morrison: Speaking the Unspeakable. He states,

> The double-voicedness of the African-American text consequently requires that African-American writing be approached in a similarly doubled manner, one that is cognizant both of the specifically African features of the writing, but also the western, or Anglo-European, features of that writing. Only such a doubled vision is capable of perceiving, and interpreting, the manner in which the text moves between the two traditions (xix-xx).[4]

Though referring to Delta Wedding, Betina Entzminger's reflection on Welty's representation of Derrida's "other" in African Americans holds true in The Optimist's Daughter as well. "Through her preoccupation with the contrasts of black and white, dark and light and through her dehumanizing description of Pinchy, Welty employs what Morrison describes as 'othering' techniques in this passage. Morrison sees white American writers employing 'literary

techniques of *othering*…'" (Entzminger 58). The "othering" Morrison and Entzminger refer to is identified and used not only in reference to the double-consciousness of African Americans, but also by psychoanalysts who describe the process that infants go through when seeing themselves in a mirror for the first time. This is an infant's first realization that "I" exist, but that simultaneously "he" or "she" exists as a perception by someone else, including his or her own "I." Postmodern theorists also use "othering" in reference to the outsider that exists within. I use "the other" as defined by all of these scholars as an example of how Morrison and Welty create opposition and confluence in describing contradictory qualities in the settings, characters, and plots of their texts.

"Othering" appears later in Jazz as Violet Trace confirms her identity and explains to Felice, Dorcas's best friend, how she came to find herself. As she does, she creates and destroys memories, people, and her own identity until she comes up with an ambiguous self. This passage is a clear metaphor of yet another of Derrida's practices – this one of representing the simultaneous existence/nonexistence of something by placing the word under erasure as in ~~Violet~~. Violet begins the conversation:

> "What's the world for if you can't make it up the way you want it?"
>
> "The way I want it?"
>
> "Yeah. The way you want it. Don't you want it to be something more than what it is?"
>
> "What's the point? I can't change it."
>
> "That's the point. If you don't, it will change you and it'll be your fault cause you let it.
>
> I let it. And messed up my life."

"Messed it up how?"

"Forgot it."

"Forgot?"

"Forgot it was mine. My life. I just ran up and down the streets wishing I was somebody else."

"Who? Who'd you want to be?"

"Not who so much as what. White. Light. Young again."

"Now you don't?"

"Now I want to be the woman my mother didn't stay around long enough to see. That one. The one she would have liked and the one I used to like before…" (208). Though the language can seem chaotic and conflicting, the message is clear: Violet not only finds her identity, but teaches it to the friend who helps her. The ordinary, conversational, rhythmic and highly contrasting language Morrison uses teaches the reader, as it teaches Felice, that creation is only possible through destruction. Identity is a result of being lost. Change is inevitable, but we have to plan for it and live for ourselves in order to be content.

Another interesting duality is apparent in the supporting characters of Jazz and The Optimist's Daughter. Major Bullock in The Optimist's Daughter (similar to Golden Gray in Jazz) is a supporting character that reveals wavering dualities which destroy a traditional stereotype, in this case, that of the strong military man. Major Bullock is introduced to the reader when Laurel arrives in Mt. Salus for her father's funeral. Surrounded by the women of the community, the Major is the only person crying. Welty's description of Major Bullock reflects his dichotomous personality. He enters the room "swinging out into the hall…" (52) and exiting the house with the Judge's clothes in a "swaying" gesture: "It swayed more widely than

he swayed in negotiating the turn on the landing" (54). Major Bullock fulfills the macho stereotype by carrying the luggage for the women, but contradicts the stereotype in his dramatic display of emotions – reflecting Fay's dramatic reactions. In fact, the Major is the only Mt. Salus member who appears to sympathize with Fay, stating several times, "Poor little woman" (52, 100). Instead of the Major being a pillar of strength for Laurel, Laurel ends up comforting the Major. Laurel "went and laid her cheek for a moment against Major Bullock's, aware of the tears on it and the bourbon on his breath" (55). Major Bullock, dependent on alcohol to help him through this time, is surrounded by independent women, including Miss Bullock, Mrs. Pease, Mrs. Bolt, Miss Adele, and all of Laurel's bridesmaids.

Always tending to the fire, Major Bullock has a constant need for warmth and comfort. In this recollection, told as dramatically as Fay acts, the Major confuses his own dramatics with the Judge's and projects how he would like to be viewed rather than how the Judge really was. The Judge's steady and still humbleness in the hospital contrasts with the Major's dramatic sentimentality. Laurel voices her feelings of "unfairness" to this false recollection, hurting the Major's feelings, and the ambiguity of mystery resolves the conflict: "The mystery in how little we know of *other* people is no greater than the mystery of how much, Laurel thought" (my emphasis 81). Welty personally comments on this mystery in The Eye of the Story as well: "One element… is surely the underlying bond that connects all the arts with place. All of them celebrate its mystery. Where does this mystery lie? Is it in the fact that place has a more lasting identity than we have, and we unswervingly tend to attach ourselves to identity?" (119) Welty's quote not only sheds light on her feelings about the mystery in art, but also the fragility of personal identity and how easily it sways.[5] The struggle to define the identity of place, person,

as well as to define motivations when they are all constantly evolving is a mystery unsolved in both Jazz and The Optimist's Daughter.

The dual makeup of Golden Gray is apparent on numerous levels. In traditional Morrison fashion, hierarchies, such as that found in Golden Gray's parents: black slave and white slave owner, are inverted causing readers to question the relationship between opposing forces and the motivations for committing horrific acts. Golden Grey is the epitome of the ambiguity that results from contrasting, opposing elements, and a discussion of his conflicting background will be extended in the next chapter. The most prominent dualities Golden Gray embodies are between black and white, and between good and evil. The good and evil found in Golden Gray's world, is that found in Gnosticism – an ancient religion in which opposing forces, such as heaven and hell are more closely related than in other religions.

As evident by the epigraph she chooses for Jazz, Morrison is guided heavily by Gnosticism (O'Keefe). Morrison explores, as Gnosticism does, the motivations of what readers first perceive as blatant forms of evil (murder and destruction) in order to alter our perception of right and wrong. Her fiction does not ask us to judge right and wrong, but asks us, perhaps, to broaden our views on morality, race, and love. This ambiguity leads us to doubt traditional morals and recreate a new image of society, represented in this novel by the Garden of Eden, where everything can be remade. Morrison, as well as Welty, encourages us to revisit our perceptions of good and evil so as to lead us to the question of justice in society.

Morrison's attention to the dual makeup of all things is found not only in her fiction, but in her interviews as well. In a 1981 conversation with Charles Ruas, she discusses different connotations of good and evil, stating,

> It always interested me, the way in which black people responded to evil. […] Evil was a natural presence in the world. What that meant in terms of human behavior was that when they saw someone disgraceful, they would not *expel* them in the sense of tarring and killing. I think that's a distinct cultural difference, because the Western notion of evil is to annihilate it. That may be very cleansing, but it's also highly intolerant" (my emphasis, 100-101).

Morrison's quote reveals her feelings about the difference between how the black community deals with evil in comparison to how the Western, or white, community deals with it. Her feelings also reflect Kristeva's definition of abjection as Morrison talks about the reluctance of blacks to *expel* evil, and instead tolerate it, revert it and use it for good. In the same interview, Morrison describes the "haven" she creates in her fiction, "a place… where you can react violently or sublimely, where it's all right to feel melancholy or frightened, or even to fail, or to be wrong, or to love somebody, or to wish something deeply, and not call it by some other name, not to be embarrassed by it" (Ruas 109).

Morrison and Welty are apparently open to all of life's possibilities, even those that oppose and contradict. Through the depiction of these opposing forces, they draw attention to conceptions of good and evil, truth and deception, hate and love, even right and wrong. Further, the characters in both Jazz and The Optimist's Daughter take justice into their own hands, possibly suggesting that readers make their own judgments of right and wrong. Writing in a time when the distinction between blacks and whites, men and women, heterosexuals and homosexuals are all being questioned, Morrison and Welty are obviously challenging the conceptions of these opposing terms in order to broaden society's political views, as well as their views about love.

Chapter 2: Abjection in Toni Morrison's Jazz

Discussing her work with Sandi Russell in 1986, Toni Morrison states that "Black women writers look at things in an unforgiving/loving way. They are writing to repossess, re-name, re-own" (McKay 46). The opposition between love and un-forgiveness is evident in this quote, but Morrison's explanation for the motivation of black women authors also directs readers to the duality and inversion present in her writing. Implicit in her statement is that something must first be possessed before it is repossessed, named before re-named, and owned before re-owned. Morrison's interest in the relationship between subject(ive) and object(ive) is also apparent; the disparity between and similarities of the two relate to double-consciousness as well as to inverted hierarchies and the role this inversion plays in individual identity. These textual themes are reflected in the epigraph of Jazz. Excerpted from *The Nag Hammadi*, "Thunder, Perfect Mind" defines her identity, stating "I am the name of the sound/and the sound of the name./I am the sign of the letter/and the designation of the division." Signification and the oral nature of identity is the focus of the first two lines. The interplay of the two stresses how easily identity can change and even be inverted into its opposite. In the third and fourth lines, the speaker claims to be signification itself, as well as the representation of division. The entire passage reveals an instability of identity, and offers no answer to the question of how to reconcile our contradictory identities – suggesting perhaps that resolution is not necessary or may be impossible. What the epigraph does not reflect (but her quote does) is the mysteriously silent theme of all of Morrison's fiction – and one that is most difficult to understand in terms of its dual nature: love.

Morrison wastes no time in introducing the plot of her story, nor in introducing the theories in which this text is based. Deconstruction and Kristeva's concept of abjection are

pervasive in Jazz, as they are in all of Morrison's novels – a fact that Amy Leigh White addresses in her study entitled Reframing the Subject: Abjection in Twentieth-Century American Literature. White hypothesizes on Morrison's motivation for creating abjection, explaining that "If a racist or slave society produces unstable selves, and an unstable self's potential to do damage is great, then it is no surprise that Morrison's fiction is filled with abject characters who, in turn, create abject relationships with others" (293-4).

In interviews, much of what Morrison says she is attempting to accomplish in her writing reflects deconstructionist thought. The instability of Jazz*'s* narrator follows deconstruction's focus on the instability of language and identity. In fact, some critics believe that the narrator is Thunder, Perfect Mind – a perception supported by the narrator's contradictions, as well as her fluctuation between an omniscient and limited point of view. Further, a final outcome consisting of contradicting characteristics is strengthened by Gnosticism in the novel. Gnosticism, unlike Christianity, does not see good and evil as separate entities, but fuses heaven and hell – commingling devils and angels – and merges polar opposites, discouraging followers from making judgments between right and wrong, forcing them to be content with slippery identities. This same idea was captured by Claude-Edmonde Magny in his "The Duplicity of Being." He states, "One day we discover that a certain object, which until then we believed to be well defined and to have certain precise and recognizable characteristics, can appear under the aspect of another which is conceptually as different as can be" (25). The fusion of conflicting elements and extreme contrast in language and identity is central to Gnosticism. Karen King relates it to the "self/other" concept which Jacques Derrida writes about and Kristeva expands upon. King states, "As in comparable dualistic categories of self and other (such as citizen/foreigner, Greek/barbarian, Jew/Gentile, Christian/pagan), the other achieves its existence and identity only

by contrast to the self" (3). In addition, jazz's central role enforces duality, as well as our ability to remake perceptions, definitions and identities as a central theme in the novel. As Ralph Ellison said about jazz,

> [there is] a cruel contradiction implicit in the art form itself. For true jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group. Each true jazz moment… represents (like the successive canvasses of a painter) a definition of his identity: as individual, as member of the collectivity and as link in the chain of tradition (qtd. in Gates, Signifying epigraph).

This statement asserts the critical and complex role of relationships between and against individuals and communities in jazz (and claims that visual art possesses the same quality), suggesting a claim which will be discussed later: that the process that Violet and Joe (as well as Laurel McKelva) go through to resolve their conflicts is a process that involves conflict between individuals and communities. This is the same process a society goes through as it finds its own identity. In other words, an analysis of the juxtaposition of polar opposites and the tensions that they spawn in a community, is necessary to understand our own dual identities, that are often composed of contradictions; these contradictory characteristics do not cease, but in our awareness of them, our conflicts become resolutions and vice versa. Problems of a community are solved by looking at the individuals they are made of; an individual's problems are often solved by looking at the community in which they reside. Since Ellison included painting in this analysis of jazz, we can assume that other art forms, including dance and writing are characterized also by contradiction.

As stated earlier, both Welty and Morrison illustrate the duality of individuals and communities on multiple levels. Drawing on the characteristics of Gnosticism and

deconstruction, Morrison's illustrations are more extreme. She inverts our traditional ideas of good and evil – often by using the Garden of Eden as a metaphor – and depicts the abject in many scenes. Before I cite examples in Jazz and discuss what these examples accomplish, I will establish extreme opposition as a primary factor of Gnosticism, deconstruction, and abjection.

Gnosticism is clearly characterized by the duality of single identities – including that of God. Gnosticism, according to Harold Bloom, "is a knowing, by and of an uncreated self, or self-within-the self, and [this] knowledge leads to freedom…" (American Religion 2). "The eminent scholar of Gnosticism, Elaine Pagels, comments in exegesis, 'to know oneself, at the deepest level, is simultaneously to know God: this is the secret of *gnosis*…Self-knowledge is knowledge of God; the self and the divine are identical" (Owens 2). Not only do the setting, the narrator, and the music (described by Alice Manfred as wild and by the narrator as structured) in Jazz possess this Gnostic duality but every character in the novel has a dual identity, either physically, like Joe's "two-color eyes" (39) or Golden Gray's mixed heritage, or emotionally – Violet's "violent" and gentle nature, or Alice Manfred's simultaneous resentment and acceptance of life. Describing Alice's background, Morrison writes, "The moment she got breasts they were bound and resented, a resentment that increased to outright hatred of her pregnant possibilities and never stopped until she married Louis Manfred, when suddenly it was the opposite" (Jazz 76). Gnosticism's fusion of dual forces is extreme because it goes past the duality of people and their identity, and extends it to God.

> While affirming the ultimate unity and integrity of the Divine, Gnosticism noted in its *experimental encounter* with the numinous, dualistic, contrasting manifestations and qualities. Consider the Gnostic affirmation that man, in some essential reality, is also God. This is a statement tinged with duality: Man, though not God, is. (Owens 4)

The binary nature of Gnosticism is illustrated here. But I do not want to forget the unity that is also inherent, and that is just as much a part of my argument, and equally a part of Jazz and The Optimist's Daughter. Just as resolution depends on conflict (and vice versa), duality (or multiplicity) depends on unity. In discussing German philosopher Hans Jonas's contribution to Gnosticism (Jonas published the first volume of *Gnosis und spatantiker Geist*), Karen King states, "Throughout his work, Jonas argued that a Gnostic myth must be seen, not merely as a conglomeration of disparate elements, but as a unified whole" (117).[6]

As Philip Page notes in his essay "Traces of Derrida in Toni Morrison's Jazz," all of Morrison's fiction contains elements of deconstruction. It is evident that she is familiar with Derrida's theories and her fiction reflects many of the concepts that make up deconstruction.[7] Morrison is as blatant as using the word "trace" as Joe and Violet's last name; "tracing" and "signifying" are key concepts Derrida defines and explores in Of Grammatology and Writing and Difference. The concept of "differance," a term originating from Derrida, is relevant and applicable to Morrison's and Welty's work. An untranslatable French term, *differance* reflects Ferdinand de Saussure's idea that "in language there are only differences without positive terms. For the signifier and signified to exist and operate, it is inescapably necessary for them to differ between themselves; if they would not be related except by a species of identity or redundancy…" (Harmon 154). Differance is reflected in Jazz in the relationships between conflicting characters, such as how Felice is essentially defined by how she is not Dorcas. Differance is also apparent in the identity of a singular character, such as when Violet describes the "me" that she had to kill in order discover her "me." In order to define herself, she has to destroy her "other" self (209).

Another key concept of deconstruction that pervades Jazz is the presence of something made possible only by its absence. Dorcas is only truly present in Violet's life after her death (and arguably also in Joe's, since he never knows who she really is until he murders her); Joe and Violet's life in Vesper County is only remembered after they have left and have made a life in Harlem; the narrator's presence is strongest when she reminds us of her absence in the story she tells: at the novel's conclusion, the narrator admits, "I thought I knew them and wasn't worried that they didn't really know about me" (Jazz 220).

It is no coincidence that Morrison draws strongly from Gnosticism as well as deconstruction, for Gnosticism and deconstruction share many central themes. This is recognized by Harold Bloom, who proclaims, "Gnosticism was the inaugural and most powerful of Deconstructions because it undid all genealogies, scrambled all hierarchies, allegorized every microcosm/macrocosm relation, and rejected every representation of divinity as non-referential" (Agon 152). Further, Morrison focuses the reader on the inversion of good and evil that she creates in her own Garden of Eden by fully illustrating and providing the motivation for the abject situations that characters find themselves in: Violet defacing the corpse of her husband's mistress, Joe encountering his dead mistress's best friend, Golden Gray confronting "Wild"-ness. In each circumstance, the characters come face to face with what they fear most, something they loathe and yet are mysteriously and passionately attracted to. Amy Leigh White notes how Kristeva captures the many shades of abjection.

> Morrison's fiction is filled, then, with what Terry Otten calls 'horrific love.' As Otten explains, 'There is an underlying strain of cruelty and violence that can erupt in [Morrison's] most sympathetic and victimized characters and compel them to inflict

> frightful destruction on seemingly innocent people. They seem capable at once of enormous criminality and unmitigated love' (White 294).

The polar duality of Gnosticism and deconstruction is enhanced and brought to its zenith through Kristeva's concept of abjection. In discussing the prohibition of incest, Kristeva reflects on the extreme make-up of the subject, of abjection and *jouissance*, and the resulting opposition found.

> Incest prohibition throws a veil over primary narcissism and the always ambivalent threats with which it menaces subjective identity. It cuts short the temptation to return, with abjection and jouissance, to that passivity status within the symbolic function, where the subject, fluctuating between inside and outside, pleasure and pain, word and deed, would find death, along with nirvana (Kristeva 63-64).

Morrison capitalizes on the dual definition of abjection, often inverting our traditional conceptions as she explores the motivations of love. "Conceptions of the abject are always founded on the binary opposition of purity/pollution" (Peach 181). Every character in Jazz experiences love in all its abjectness. The character of Golden Gray – his background, his newfound identity struggle, his resolution of it, and his process of discovering love – creates the perfect example of polar opposition, abjection, and the ambiguous unity that results. This is Morrison at her most metaphoric.

When Golden Gray first encounters the wet "berry-black woman" only referred to as "Wild," abjection, deconstruction, Gnosticism, and the double-consciousness of African-Americans collide in a scene that shows his intense repulsion and simultaneous attraction to her. On his way to find his father, Golden Gray, appearing prince-like in what the narrator imagines to be a phaeton, fortuitously stumbles upon "a naked berry-black woman." Morrison's intention

to focus on the eroticism of the woman, as well as her relation to the forbidden-fruit in the Garden of Eden, is evident in her specific description. Just as terrified as Golden Gray, the woman tries to flee, but "knocks her head against the tree she has been leaning against" (144). Before the characters even meet, the inversion of identity – in this case, of the tree – is apparent. The tree, which has been Wild's source of stability, that which holds her up, turns into the o/abject that knocks her out, that destroys her stability. Instead of checking on her safety, Golden's first instinct is to flee, just as was Wild's. Golden becomes aware of the abjection of the situation after convincing himself that what he saw was not real, but a "vision:" "the pride he takes in his horse; the nausea the woman provoked," both "black, naked, and shiny wet" (144). Despite their noted similarities, he wants to mount the horse, yet reject the woman. The "vision" he first tries to convince himself of seeing reminds the reader of the mystery, the unreality that the characters of Jazz so easily slip into. This mystical element in Morrison's fiction encourages the reader to question the facts that are presented and keep an open mind to the truth of the literal/objective and the figurative/subjective. "Morrison's use of the grotesque [a word easily interchangeable with the abject] [is] a multi-faceted aesthetic phenomenon that enables the artist [and the reader] to disrupt the familiar world of reality in order to introduce a different, more mysterious reality" (Corey 31). Golden Gray immediately feels "ashamed" of his first reaction, and, feeling drawn to the naked black woman as he feels repulsed, he ventures to her side to ensure that this was just a vision.

The eroticism of Morrison's language comes out strongest as Golden comes close to Wild. "She is still sprawled there. Her mouth and legs open. A small hickey is forming on her head. Her stomach is big and tight. He leans down, holding his breath against infection or odor or something. Something that might touch or penetrate him" (144). Contradiction results again

in ambiguity in this erotic moment as the narrator falters to describe what Golden Gray is afraid of "touching or penetrating him," naming it merely "something." Golden Gray is fearful of anything penetrating him, of anything affecting him. Morrison insists that the reader realize her inverted moral metaphor as she portrays a man conceived by what counters the stereotypical identity of a mulatto, Golden's ethnic makeup coming from a black slave man and the consensual daughter of a white slave owner. And yet, Golden is intensely fearful of the penetration of the abject. Not only is the word "penetrate" interesting for its erotic connotation, but also for its abject connotation. For just as the same motion for "expelling" ourselves is the same in which we establish ourselves, our fear of penetration is the same as our desire for it. Kristeva writes,

> The body's inside… shows up in order to compensate for the collapse of the border between inside and outside. It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one's 'own and clean self' but, scraped or transparent, invisible or taut, gave way before the dejection of its contents. Urine, blood, sperm, excrement then show up in order to reassure a subject that is lacking its 'own and clean self.' The abjection of those flows from within suddenly become the sole 'object' of sexual desire – a true 'ab-ject' where man, frightened, crosses over the horrors of maternal bowels and, in an immersion that enables him to avoid coming face to face with an other. (53)

To Kristeva, the collapsing distinction between inside and outside relates to our ability to see our "other." This is evident in Golden Gray when he finally stops seeing black as other than him. No longer is there a difference between the "nigger" woman or his "nigger" father and him.

The French term *jouissance* provides further insight into the feelings evoked when faced with abjection, and also connects the metaphor of AIDS discussed by Susan Sontag. Used by

several scholars, including Derrida, jouissance refers to the suffering that results from too much pleasure, stemming from Freud's idea that what exists beyond a certain amount of pleasure is pain. Feelings of jouissance are affiliated with the emotions surrounding sexual intercourse as it can bring intense pleasure, and yet, also cause pain and destruction, a concept more fully understood when we consider the potential of HIV infection. Drug addiction can be placed in the same category. Penetration between two individuals, or between a person and a needle, can conjure up feelings of fear. Susan Sontag's ideas around the metaphors for illness and AIDS add an additional layer of meaning to the topic. Although we emotionally fear the infection, the penetration, of foreign bodies that make up a disease, our bodies simultaneously desire these acts that cause infection. We see these conflicting emotions in Joe Trace when he hunts his lover, Dorcas, in order to kill her. An irony is found in how HIV is most frequently contracted – through two processes where penetration occurs, sexual intercourse and the sharing of needles by drug addicts. For Joe, the penetration of the bullet into Dorcas was both an act of love and an act of destruction. Further, there is another dichotomy present in the public's popular judgment of those who contract AIDS. "The unsafe behavior that produces AIDS is judged to be more than just weakness. It is indulgence, delinquency—addictions to chemicals that are illegal and to sex regarded as deviant" (Sontag, AIDS 25). It is interesting that this judgment is reminiscent of how Mardi Gras is often perceived. Sontag also comments on the metaphorical nature of the "genealogy" of AIDS which is reflective of the penetration that Golden Gray fears, as well as his realization of becoming an "other" in this situation.

> AIDS has a dual metaphoric genealogy. As a micro-process, it is described as cancer is: an invasion. When the focus is transmission of the disease, an older metaphor, reminiscent of syphilis, is invoked: pollution. […] In the description of AIDS the enemy

is what causes the disease, an infectious agent that comes from the outside. (Sontag, AIDS 17)

Sontag cites a description that appeared in *Time* magazine in late 1986 that provides a second metaphor for the irony, the duality of how the AIDS virus operates. This doubling is also applicable to Morrison's frequent depiction of African-American double-consciousness. The *Time* article states, "On the surface of that cell, it finds a receptor into which one of its envelope proteins fits perfectly, like a key into a lock. Docking with the cell, the virus penetrates the cell membrane and is stripped of its protective shell in the process…" (qtd. in Sontag, AIDS 18). Joe, in many ways, has been penetrated by Dorcas, stripping himself of his protective shell – an act of love that comforts and destroys him at the same time. Dorcas has also penetrated Violet's protective shell, causing Violet to first react violently against Dorcas and then, over time, come to empathize and care for her. The description of how the AIDS virus develops uses language that is scientific as well as erotic – a nontraditional pairing that some would consider in opposition.

This analysis of the penetration of a virus into healthy cells and the metaphors that Sontag discusses are also applicable to the penetration that Golden Gray fears when he stumbles upon Wild. Though his initial instinct is to fear whatever the "something," – the love – that threatens to touch or penetrate him, he eventually embraces it. Similarly, Alice Manfred feared jazz music for its untamed and unstructured qualities (Morrison, Jazz 56-7). If she would have stopped thinking of it as a virus that infects youth with sexual thoughts, she would have realized the love it inspired.

When describing Golden Gray's encounter with Wild, Morrison acknowledges Freud's concept of the death wish when Golden Gray's emotion upon finding her "dead or deeply

unconscious" is that of relief.[8] Golden determines that "[t]here is nothing he can do for her" (144-45). But then he notices that "[s]omething inside her is moving." At this point, Golden Gray's double-consciousness addressed by Denise Heinze returns. Heinze defines this double-consciousness using Du Bois's term: "[It is] a state of affairs in which an individual is both representative of and immersed in two distinct ways of life. Patricia Collins calls it the 'outside within status' in which 'outsider allegiances may militate against [black women] choosing full insider status, and they may be more apt to remain outsiders within'" (Heinze 5). This "outside within status" is created as Morrison writes of Golden Gray's interaction with Wild: "He does not see himself touching her, but the picture he does imagine is himself walking away from her a second time. He is uneasy with this picture of himself…" (145). If we follow Heinze's suggestion that "Morrison invites her readership to come along with her… in a journey into double-consciousness in which the final destination – truth and understanding – is only the beginning" (13), then where does this scene lead us? What is beyond "truth and understanding?"

Morrison's intent to lead the reader to moral ambiguity is apparent here as she portrays the double-consciousness that she refers to in various interviews. We first see Golden Gray remove himself from the scene in which he is both appalled and enamored. Morrison then draws attention to the fact that this is the second time that Golden Gray wants to flee from Wild. Morrison then focuses on the reason for this confused feeling of "uneasiness" that Golden Gray experiences. She writes, "…there is something about where he has come from and why, where he is going and why that encourages in him an insistent, deliberate recklessness. The scene becomes an anecdote, an action that would unnerve Vera Louis and defend him against patricide" (145). Is Morrison asking the reader to see this scene as an anecdote for the underlying meaning of the novel? How can we deny Morrison's intent to explain the motivation

for this feeling of abjection? Golden Gray not only thinks of the past and the disgust that he felt when learning of his "nigger father," but he also appears to be anticipating the love he will find in his future with this "nigger woman."

Morrison finishes this paragraph with a one word sentence after Golden Gray claims that this action would "defend [himself] against patricide." The word is "Maybe." Morrison is again conveying multiple meanings in one ambiguous word. By concluding the paragraph with "Maybe," she simultaneously reminds us that this story is being told by an unreliable narrator; she illustrates the doubt that Golden Gray feels about his motivations; she reminds us of deconstruction's central concept that what is signified is only a representation, not a truth; she foreshadows the change of Golden Gray's feelings toward this "black, liquid female" (145), and she leaves the reader with a feeling of uncertainty and ambiguity.

As the scene progresses, Morrison continues to use conflicting adjectives to describe one object. Golden Gray's boots are "splendid" and "muddy." After the heavy rain that he travels through stops, Morrison describes the last hour of his journey as "filled with recollections of luxury and pain" (146). He takes great care in wiping his horse down after pulling into the shed, yet pulls the naked woman – which he equated earlier with his horse – through the mud with only a coat (which he worries will be ruined permanently) covering her, and finds a woman's dress to replace the coat. The untraditional and contradictory adjectives are rampant. Obviously Morrison uses this drastically opposing language on purpose. What is her motivation?

One consistent element in Morrison's fiction is her focus on inverting the reader's perception of what would first be considered an insane and brutal act, into a perfectly sane and empathetic act of love. Motivation is critical in all of Morrison's novels.[9] In Beloved, how can Seth murder her own daughter? How can Hagar attempt to kill Milkman six times in Song of

Solomon? How can Joe murder his lover, and how can Violet stab her corpse? Through a detailed depiction of what leads her characters to commit such acts of horrific love, Morrison forces her readers to question their traditional views of what is considered an act of destruction, and what is considered an act of love. In her fiction, Morrison merges these two acts, which are traditionally considered opposing, creating a confluence of love and destruction. Though the plot lines revolve around the motivation of the characters' horrific acts, Morrison inverts traditional views in every aspect of her novels. In Jazz, Golden Gray hunts for his father out of hatred for the "nigger" that makes him. Yet he ends up discovering his identity through a "nigger" woman he stumbles upon, inverting his hate for his black father into love for this black, wild woman. Joe convinces himself that he is hunting Dorcas out of his intense love for her, and, yet, he simultaneously hunts her out of a desire to kill her; for Violet, the inversion is present as she defaces her husband's mistress after she is dead. Her motivation is twofold – because she despises her, and because she wants to be that person with whom Joe could be vulnerable and trusting. The dichotomy of abjection is present in all of these circumstances.

The scene in which Golden Gray stumbles upon Wild is also characterized by an immense amount of defilement – the mud all over Wild, Golden's boots and coat, Wild's "dirty bare feet" that Golden Gray is fearful of touching his "muddy boots" (145) – and cleansing liquids – the "trickle of blood down [Wild's] jaw" (146), the persistent rain, the sweat on the glistening horse. In discussing the abjection of filth, excrement, and menstruation, Kristeva also notes the cleansing nature of these elements. Morrison is not only using the elements of mud, rain, blood, and excrement to draw our attention to their simultaneous polluting and cleansing qualities, she goes a step further and uses these elements to explore the dual identity of the characters that experience defilement. Kristeva also connects the defilement of abjection with

the disturbance of identity. She writes, "It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva 4).

The destruction of borders and rules is pervasive in Morrison's fiction, and she is not afraid to admit this in her conversations with other scholars. "In particular, Morrison has frequently expressed… the desire to dignify African-American and feminine epistemologies that differ from the traditionally privileged mode of Western, scientific, masculinist knowledge" (O'Keefe 333). Furthermore, Linden Peach comments, "The circular, multifocal nature of Morrison's novels, blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction, history and fable, and literary and oral cultures hardly needs pointing out" (19). The circular nature of Jazz is symbolized by the Okeh records that Joe and Violet listen to and that permeate their lives.

As Golden Gray begins to break down his own rigid conceptions of identity – a person that is either white or black, not equally both – Morrison draws our attention back to the double-consciousness that Golden feels. In the process, Golden broadens his ideas on what a "nigger" is. When Golden brings Wild into his father's home, "he is not sure he is not being watched by someone in the house. In fact he hopes he is; hopes the nigger is watching open-mouthed from a crack in the planks that serve as wall" (146). Golden Gray again creates an outsider within as he preps his horse and the naked woman, and then walks into his father's house with the intent to commit patricide. Patricia Williams's explanation for why double-consciousness developed in African-Americans sheds light on why in situations in which he feels both pride and disgust, Golden Gray creates an "other" that watches over him. She states,

> Very little in our language or culture encourages looking at others as parts of ourselves…[;] the distancing does not stop with the separation of the white self from the

> black other. In addition, the cultural domination of blacks by whites means that the black self is placed at a distance even from itself… So blacks in a white society are conditioned from infancy to see in themselves only what others, who despise them, see (White 242-3).

The ironic inversion of Golden Gray's situation in which he begins viewing himself as his father perceives him rather than how his white mother has seen him is brought to our attention by Williams's explanation. If the African-American double-conscious evolved from always having to view oneself, as an object, in terms of how white culture viewed the object, by inverting this and viewing the object as other blacks do (as a subject), a sense of confidence is gained in the *other* identity. Morrison addresses this as she describes the inversion of Golden Gray's definition of "nigger." She does so by reflecting on Golden's past,

> Well, Vera Louise was anxious; True Belle just smiled, and now he knew what she was smiling about, the nigger. But so was he. He had always thought there was only one kind – True Belle's kind. Black and nothing. Like Henry LesTroy. Like the filthy woman snoring on the cot. But there was another kind – like himself (149).

By stepping outside the identity that he is most familiar with and considering an*other* identity, Golden's concept of "nigger," and of identity in general, is broadened, which ultimately opens his mind to the concept of loving "Wild."

Denise Heinze notes the unique position that gives Morrison the ability to capture this double-consciousness. When we consider Morrison's current status as a highly regarded author who is unanimously placed in a canon dominated by white men, and simultaneously consider her background, this ability is not so surprising.[10] Heinze notes Morrison's personal transcendence

of double-consciousness while she continuously creates characters which are fixed in it. Specifically she comments,

> Indeed, [Morrison] is in the truly remarkable position of being able to articulate with near impunity two cultures – one black, the other white American. By orchestrating this sense of connectedness between cultures rather than attempting to dissolve the differences, Morrison's successful career appears to have transcended the 'permanent condition' of double-consciousness that afflicts her fictional characters. (10)

Even if we focus solely on the story of Golden Gray, the oppositions in Jazz are too numerous to cover. My focus is on the motivation for this polar opposition as well as what it creates in the fiction of Morrison and Welty. One underlying theme in both authors' work, and which Morrison has said all of her novels revolve around, is love. She has stated, "The search for love and identity runs through most everything I write" (Taylor-Guthrie 278). In speaking about what black people represent, Morrison commented, "Black People, as a group, are used to signify the polar opposites of love and repulsion…" (Taylor-Guthrie 282). Morrison's statement epitomizes Kristeva's concept of abjection. The love that Golden Gray finds is a perfect example of the polar emotions found in love and how we reconcile these polarities.

After Golden Gray realizes the multiplicity of identities surrounding the word "nigger," the rain stops, and Golden Gray's abject feelings toward the berry-black woman begin to fluctuate. "He doesn't understand any of it," (149), and worries that "the liquid black woman might wake or die or give birth or…" (149). Or what? Become him? The closeness of death and birth are literally and figuratively present here. At the same time, Morrison's invitation for the reader to invent the story, just as the narrator does, persists and becomes stronger as the story progresses until, at the conclusion, the narrator asks her reader "to make [it]. Remake [it]. You

are free to do it and I am free to let you" (229). Morrison's encouragement of repetition is often found in Jazz. Golden Gray's denial of his black heritage continues as he remembers how "the awful looking thing lying in wet weeds was everything he was not as well as a proper protection against and anodyne to what he believed his father to be, and therefore […] himself" (149). Morrison foreshadows the inversion of Golden Gray's feelings for Wild by looking back to when Golden first saw her, wondering, "was the figure, this vision as he thought of it, a thing that touched him before its fall?" (149) Morrison again draws our attention to the mystery of identity, as well as its duality, and the inversion of its definition, suggesting that finding our identity is closely linked to finding love.

The narrator at this point reclaims her presence in a story in which she is absent, which she is making up, and in which she admits to being an "unreliable" source. She compares the wild-berry woman to a deer, to Violet – "[e]verything about her is violent" (153) – and again shows Golden Gray's fear, and knowledge of this fear, that his repulsion could turn itself upside down. The narrator claims, " there is nothing to prevent Golden Gray from believing that an exposed woman will explode in his arms, or worse, that he will, in hers" (153). Coupling the comparison of Wild to a deer with the imagery of Wild exploding in Golden Gray's arms (or vice versa) is insightful when considered in context of Morrison's metaphor of the Garden of Eden. Instead of representing what one might predict her to choose as the metaphor for Wild – the serpent – in Eden, Morrison represents Wild as a docile deer and specifically focuses on the deer's eyes. The imagery of an "explosion" in this scene conjures up several opposing references, most notably the explosion that scientists cite in the Big Bang theory, which is in direct contrast to some religious scholars' theory of the beginning of time: Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The explosive nature of this relationship also could be seen as a combustible

collision of forces that appear bipolar, but are in fact explosively compatible, not destructive, but creative, just as the result of the Big Bang theory.

At the end of this chapter, in the daze of "knowing too little and feeling too much" (161), Golden Gray seems open to an inversion of his feelings about Wild. The narrator compares it to the "serene power that flicks like a razor and then hides" (161). Finally, Morrison uses a flashback, or a flash-forward (the time frame here is ambiguous), to when Henry LeStory's help comes into the cabin and tends to Wild. As this section concludes, Morrison returns to Golden Gray's perception of the wild berry-black woman, to the wild of the Garden of Eden, and foreshadows his openness to inverted emotions; Golden Gray is "ready for those deer eyes to open" (162).

Morrison's recreation of the Garden of Eden in Jazz is an appropriate place to enter a discussion of the conflicting emotions that make up love – a discussion that continues in the analysis of Welty's creation of confluence in The Optimist's Daughter. How do Golden Gray's repulsive feelings about Wild turn into explosive feelings of affection? How do Joe and Violet's feelings of betrayal, deception, and a restrictive identity turn into freeing happiness, or as Morrison states herself, "…a freedom in which a great deal of risk is involved" (Taylor-Guthrie 275)? Morrison cleverly achieves this inversion through abject stories that display how closely love is related to good and evil, and how easily it can blur what much of society has so quickly labeled black and white, right and wrong. Liz Lewis states, "[The] representation of how a monstrous act can be simultaneously an act of love explores moral ambiguity. From a moral point of view although we cannot condone murder we can understand… Joe's acts to be empowered by love rather than evil" (Lewis 4). Morrison explores the motivations of what readers first perceive as blatant forms of evil (murder and destruction of a corpse) in order to

shatter our perception of right and wrong. This ambiguity leads us to rid ourselves of traditional morals and recreate a new image of the Garden of Eden where everything can be remade. Just as Golden Gray is, at first, fearful of the initial explosion in Wild's arms, it is understandable that readers may fear the new Eden Morrison creates, where identities, metaphors, and what has been defined as love, are inverted. In a 1989 interview with Bill Moyers, Morrison comments on the needed openness of a reader in order to allow this inversion to occur. In response to Moyers' questions, "Are you aware when you're writing that you're going to invade my imagination? That you're going to subvert my perception? Were you intentionally trying to do that?" Morrison responds: "Totally. I want the reader to feel, first of all, that he trusts me. I'm never going to do anything so bad that he can't handle it. But at the same time, I want him to see things he has never seen before. I want him to work with me in the book" (274). In her use of the Garden of Eden, Morrison follows Kristeva's definition of the abject and "draws [the reader] toward the place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva 2). Realizing that she is dealing with traditions, stereotypes and moral concepts of right and wrong that have existed since Adam and Eve, Morrison does not hesitate to confront and oppose the perceptions that have been instilled in her readers. Again Kristeva's discussion of abjection provides insight on the emotional result of Morrison's portrayals of polar opposition:

> A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A "something" that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it,

> annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture. (Kristeva 2)

Morrison is indeed addressing the primers of her culture. In many interviews she has stated that she is solely interested in sharing and shedding light on the African American experience.[11] Though black and white is only one dichotomy addressed in this thesis, the tension between race is definitely the underlying force for every dichotomy in Morrison's fiction. Morrison portrays the black experience in America with full knowledge that up to this point the portrayal has been dominated by Anglo-American authors. Her way of focusing on this difference is to delve into the story of how African-Americans have lived in an Anglo-American society and coped (whether consciously or unconsciously) with seeing themselves through the opposing and oppressive white vision of society. This underlying double-vision and the role it plays in experiencing love is what makes Morrison's work relevant to all of her readers. In some way or other, we all deal with oppression and have coped by using an *other*.

Psychoanalysis claims that the pleasure of the *presence* of something (such as the return of a child's mother) only exists because of the pain of its/her *absence*.[12] This concept brings some clarity to the dual characteristics of love. The lead characters of Jazz must confront the side of love often ignored and wished was absent (the hurtful, selfish side) in order to appreciate both sides of love in their relationships. This difficult and discomforting side of love for both Joe and Violet is found in their absent mothers. Joe hunts for a mother that abandoned him as a child, wishing he had any kind of mother, whether she be "whore" or abusive, anything but the "indecent speechless lurking insanity" (179) she represented; Joe finally marries Violet "because [he] couldn't see whether a wildwoman put out her hand or not" (181). Violet wonders what "the one and final thing [her mother] had not been able to endure or repeat" (101) and caused her

to throw herself down a well, “miss[ing] all the fun” (99). Violet is rescued then from the falling of her mother into a well by the falling of a man out of a tree. But Joe and Violet aren’t able to love each other until they reach back into the past, metaphorically, and hunt down that absent side of love that haunts them – an achievement made possible through the abject situations they find themselves in: of Joe’s killing the girl he believed he loved, of Violet’s defacing the corpse of the same girl at her very own funeral, and of their both remaking that destructive relationship with the girl’s best friend – a darker version of herself – into a healthy relationship that even the omniscient narrator had been unable to predict. In other words, Joe and Violet find the “sad and happy” side of love (3) through the life and death of Dorcas. As True Belle says, “Thank God for life, and thank life for death” (101).

This double-sided, whole love – one that we appreciate in its presence and absence – is only found through repetition. “For Derrida, only by repetition – also implied by the image of tracing – does one escape from [a] well/trap” (Page, Dangerous 165). For Violet, the well ends up representing the happy side of love as well as the sad side of her mother’s death. She actually holds onto it in her love for Joe, “rest[ing] her hand on his chest as though it were the sunlit rim of a well” (225). As the reader is asked at the end of the novel to make and remake the story, we can imagine Violet falling asleep on Joe’s chest, “resting her hand on the sunlit rim of a well” night after night. For Joe, his vision of a wildwoman with blood “slowly forms itself into a bird with a blade of red on the wing” (225). This fusion of the absent past with the fragmented present transcends good and evil. In Nietzsche’s words “Whatever is done out of love takes place beyond good and evil” (70).

For Golden Gray, the inversion of the absent love, which Joe and Violet must find in the wells and wildernesses of their past, is present in the search for his father. The narrator hints at

Golden's future and what he has experienced, revealing that the danger he is in could be reversed. Golden could be "feeling nothing and knowing everything," but his feelings that "rise from the darkness" (161) are love. The narrator also confirms the importance of repetition and memory. She says of Golden Gray, "But he has felt it now, and it may come again. No doubt a lot of other things will come again: doubt will come, and things may seem unclear from time to time. But once the razor blade has flicked – he will remember it, and if he remembers it he can recall it. That is to say, he has it at his disposal" (161). As Page states, "Once in the mind, the scene or act becomes not mere presence but productive combination of presence and absence, becomes not mere work to be consumed but text to be endlessly reread" (Dangerous 166-67).

Morrison reveals the duality of love by portraying both sides – the absent and present, the horrific and the sublime – of this mysterious emotion, and, by inverting the traditional concepts of good and evil, she recreates our vision of the Garden of Eden. Through this process, she transcends our connotations of pleasure and pain, subject and o/abject and reverses sin into a state of fullness, of plenty, turning it around into living beauty (Kristeva 123). Morrison encourages us to accept difference and embrace it as a necessity to a fulfilled life. In Kristeva's words, she asks us to face the abject head on. "In the end, our only difference is our unwillingness to have a face-to-face confrontation with the abject" (Kristeva 209). Morrison realizes the challenge in confronting the extreme opposition that the abject poses, but she pushes her readers through the depiction of a series of abject situations. These events show a broad range of emotions which oppose and often conflict with each other. Morrison resolves the conflict of emotions in untraditional ways, forcing the reader to question their expectations, and the hierarchical society in which they learned these expectations.

Chapter 3: Confluence in Eudora Welty's The Optimist's Daughter

Eudora Welty was just as aware as Morrison of the close relationship between polar opposites and depicts these polarities in her fiction. In her short story "The Wanderers," for example, the narrator states, "Virgie never saw it differently, never doubted that all the opposites on earth were close together, love close to hate, living to dying; but of them all, hope and despair were the closest blood – recognizable one from the other sometimes, making moments double upon themselves, and in doubling, double again" (Collected Stories 452-453). The doubling of contrasting, even contradicting, elements is clear here, but in most of Welty's work, the conflict is more subtle than in Morrison's fiction, making the opposition not as jarring, and the resulting confluence easier to miss.

Though Eudora Welty rarely portrays face-to-face confrontations with the abject, there remains a challenge posed to her characters, and to the reader, to look closely at the oppositions that might first appear incompatible. In Welty's work, opposing forces lie side by side and then merge into a unified whole. Welty develops layers of opposition that create an instability that resembles the premises of deconstruction. Similar to the abject, or in Susan Corey's terminology the "grotesque," that Morrison creates, the instability in Welty's texts "disrupts the familiar world of reality in order to introduce a different, more mysterious reality" (Corey 31). "This clash of incompatible elements" in both novels adds to the "interpretive energy by stimulating readers to discover new connections and new meaning" (Corey 36). In addition to focusing on the fragmentation and the process that each character must go through in order to reconcile the conflicts between opposing characters and within themselves, Welty describes the resulting confluence in detail. Welty was writing The Optimist's Daughter at the same time that Derrida's Speech and Phenomena, Of Grammatology, and Writing and Difference were published (1967).

Whether intentionally or not, Welty captures Derrida's concept of differance. When discussing Morrison's Jazz, Philip Page defines differance as an "attempt to identify the indescribable gap between every pair of binary oppositions, the gap that allows them to exist, the 'presence-absence' [Of Grammatology 71] that, never known directly, allows everything else to be comprehended. The trace is the 'archephenomenon of memory' [Of Grammatology 70], the play between the past and the present, the residue of the past that allows the present consciousness to exist" ("Traces" 57). In The Optimist's Daughter, this "presence-absence" is exemplified when the narrator plays with the past, present, and future, and when the plot fluctuates between reality and memory. This fluctuation creates instability in our perceived traditional hierarchies and inverts these hierarchies in a similar fashion as does Morrison. Welty, however, uses different techniques.

Opposition is evident in many of the elements of The Optimist's Daughter, including its setting, the emotions displayed by each character, its symbolism, and, most centrally, the contrasting characteristics of the novel's protagonist, Laurel, and antagonist, Fay. Welty scholar Rebecca Mark notes this layering of opposition and the meaning that is derived: "In a text which functions both as text/ile, meaning is derived through moments of dispersion and confluence, repetition, juxtaposition of images of texture and color, emerging patterns, as well as linear progression and closure" ("Wild" 332).

Though racial differences linger in the background, the differences of socioeconomic class are much more central in Welty's fiction. Morrison has been criticized for addressing racial differences solely from the African American perspective. Welty, on the other hand, has been criticized for giving too little attention to the issue of race in the South. Betina Entzminger notes that in Welty's fiction, "The interaction between black and white is explored only from the

white perspective. Partly because of such characterizations, Eudora Welty has been criticized for not commenting more critically on southern race relations in her writing" (65). I disagree with Entzminger and assert that Welty is addressing race relations as she addresses human relations in her writing. Even in her fiction in which no black characters are depicted, Welty explores the differences and similarities between conflicting characters, whether they are of different classes, geographical births, or moral beliefs. Welty comments that "People are not Right and Wrong, Good and Bad, Black and White personified; flesh and blood and the sense of comedy object" (One 150). Though she broadly defines her feelings about differences in humanity, the racial differences that she witnessed during her entire life in Mississippi are always included.

Welty addresses human relations from the inside out, and strongly believes that "nothing was ever learned in a crowd, from a crowd, or by addressing or trying to please a crowd" (One 153). Hence her focus is on individuals in a community and the internal, and often solitary, process they go through to resolve their instable and contrasting identities. Though she seldom directly portrays the racial tensions prevalent in the South (with the exception of "Where is the Voice Coming From?" and "The Demonstrators"), Welty was keenly aware of the tensions created by opposing forces and consequently represented this opposition in her work. Like Morrison, Welty was concerned with portraying the inequalities between black and white in the South and questioning traditional perceptions of these differences. "Though many of her characters may view southern racial traditions uncritically […] Welty herself did not, as suggested by her identification with Miss Eckhart, the woman who defied tradition" in the story "June Recital" (Entzminger 65).[13] Welty was also aware of the ambiguity that results from portraying such conflicts and inverting hierarchical structures, leaving many of her stories open ended. In her insightful essay, "Must the Novelist Crusade?" she states, "There is absolutely

everything in great fiction but a clear answer. Humanity itself seems to matter more to the novelist than what humanity thinks it can prove" (Eye 149).

The question that persists as I explore the ways in which Morrison and Welty depict opposition is what does the depiction of so much opposition create? What does the reader take away? Are there signs in each text that suggest what these two authors want to accomplish, politically, by their constant portrayal of opposition? Axel Nissen poses a similar question in his essay "Queer Welty, Camp Welty":

> The Optimist's Daughter represents a pitched battle between opposing forces, incarnated in the figures of Laurel and Fay. This is a battle between, on the one hand, rarified sensibility, middle-class propriety, and decorum and, on the other, gut instinct, working-class theatricality, and folk wisdom. On a different and higher level, the novel also appears to stage a conflict between two aspects of Welty's own sensibility: her moral earnestness and its accompanying evocative, sonorous style and her apparent enjoyment of the awful and the "unnatural." How can these seemingly contradictory attitudes be reconciled? (227)

Welty's "contradictory attitudes" resemble many of the contradictory definitions that make up deconstruction: jouissance, difference, and Kristeva's abjection. Through a close reading of several passages in The Optimist's Daughter, the reconciliation of these contradictory attitudes becomes clearer.

In The Optimist's Daughter, the primary tension is between the brash and unsophisticated Fay, and the reserved and protective Laurel. From the opening hospital scene in New Orleans, Laurel and Fay's strong differences are quickly established revealing how they are both divided and connected by Judge McKelva. Laurel is characterized as "quiet-faced," wearing "clothes of

an interesting cut and texture," "her hair still dark" (3). Fay's simple gaudiness is portrayed in the "gold buttons" of her dress coupled by the sandals on her feet. In contrast to Laurel, Fay is small and pale. As Dr. Courtland diagnoses the Judge, the narrator establishes the extensive past of Laurel's relationship with her father while noting Fay's lack of a past with the Judge. Fay's outsider or "other" status is clear even to her, and she vocally expresses her feelings of being left out, revealing her self-centered personality, interrupting the doctor's prognosis with statements such as "I don't see why this had to happen to *me*" (8) and "Isn't my vote going to get counted at all?" (10) Though she selfishly believes everything should revolve around her, Fay, as the oppressed in this novel, also experiences a double-consciousness, always aware of how the Mt. Salus community views her – a perception supported by a comment she makes before leaving the funeral to return to Texas. She exclaims, "at least my family's not hypocrites. […] If they didn't want me, they'd tell me to my face" (99). She is the "other" that defines the sophistication and gentility of everyone else. Yet, ironically, the epitome of sophistication and good judgment (represented by Judge McKelva himself) brought Fay into the Mt. Salus community.

Coincidentally, Welty uses much of the same symbolism and metaphor in The Optimist's Daughter as found in Jazz: the freeing of birds, trains that move us from a place of despair to a place of hope, gardens that heal, and spaces in characters' pasts that must be remembered and remade in order for characters to move on and to love. Welty also uses hands as symbols in this novel, hands that represent everything from a welcoming to a goodbye, from the ability to create to the ability to destroy, and, in Laurel's case, to symbolize the active role she takes in fusing her fragmented past by the leafing through of old letters that her mother had saved. Welty even names Laurel's late husband "Phil Hand," thus displacing Laurel McKelva with Laurel Hand. Structurally, Welty presents this story of painful loss and healing experienced by two women of

vastly differing backgrounds in a similar fashion as Morrison does in Jazz. The healing occurs as Laurel remembers her past through nonlinear flashbacks that reveal the difference between memory and reality. The flashbacks also provide support for the differences between Laurel and Fay, as well as Laurel's perceived differences between her father's first and second wives.

The two novels are dissimilar in how the characters deal publicly with their conflicting emotions. In Jazz, the conflicts between Violet and Joe, Dorcas and Joe, and Violet and Dorcas come to a climax in a very public way. In contrast, the conflict in The Optimist's Daughter between Laurel and Fay climaxes in the privacy of the McKelva home. Laurel does everything she can to keep any drama related to her relationship with Fay, the Judge, and anyone else for that matter, out of the eye of the community. Laurel values privacy. This is Laurel's personal story, a fact made known when we look at the limited narration of the novel. In comparison, Jazz's narrator fluctuates quickly between being a gossipy member of the community and an intimate friend of the Traces. This fluctuation allows the conflict in Jazz to be addressed publicly and personally, showing the two sides – internal and external – of each character's struggle with identity. The community clearly plays as strong a role as do the individuals in forming the identity of Violet and Joe. By the novel's conclusion, however, Joe and Violet learn to identify themselves and their relationship on their own terms. In The Optimist's Daughter, Laurel's evaluation of her identity and specifically how it relates to her father, as well as to her mother and her late husband, occurs in her mind. Though the Mt. Salus community and Fay play a role in Laurel's identity struggle, Laurel must go through the process alone, with the help of letters and memorabilia she finds in her parents' secretary.

Both Morrison and Welty understand the equal role that the community plays in defining individuals, and vice versa. But Morrison illustrates conflict with a focus on the community and

Welty illustrates conflict with a focus on the individual. When we read interviews with each author, Morrison states time and time again her interest in depicting the lives of African Americans in the community, while Welty repeatedly focuses on her need to look within in order to create her characters, and states her belief that conflict is often resolved internally for her characters. In One Writer's Beginnings she comments on this necessary introspection: "Through travel I first became aware of the outside world; it was through travel that I found my own introspective way into becoming a part of it" (76).

The community and the individual contribute to the conflict that builds between Laurel and Fay. The narrator quickly establishes the opposition in the opening scene of the novel. Fay and Laurel are characterized not only through opposing physical and emotional qualities, but also through how they perceive their surroundings (Fay sees the vibrancy of Mardi Gras whereas Laurel is only annoyed by it), how they react to their surroundings (Fay cries out and addresses the corpse of the Judge, while Laurel asks her friends to "stop her"), and how they finally cope with their loss (Fay flees to Texas with her family while Laurel locks herself in her parents' bedroom). Though Laurel and Fay couldn't be more opposite, they are linked by Judge McKelva and must find common ground when Fay returns to the McKelva home early, just before Laurel departs for Chicago. In this climactic scene, the primary differences between the two women (Fay belongs to the future, Laurel belongs to the past) are made clear to the *other*. Yet they have inevitably come together, "of course, they had had to come together" (177). Though a tension may always exist between their contrasting currents, a merging also occurs, and similarities emerge in this encounter: "in irony [Laurel sees] herself, pursuing her own way through the house as single-mindedly as Fay had pursued hers through the ceremony of the day of the funeral" (177). The confluence of these vastly opposing characters occurs, whether visibly

or not, just as that of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers occurs whether during the day in plain sight, or at night, invisible to the eye. As Howard Moss in his *New York Times Book Review* analysis points out, "a fact that floated behind the scenes becomes apparent at the same moment: [Laurel] and Fay share a common emptiness; both of them are widowed and childless" (McHaney 220). Laurel realizes the confluence of the rivers, the birds, the "morning world" only from afar. Perhaps she is too close to her conflict with Fay to realize the confluence that exists between them. Similarly, Golden Gray, as well as Joe and Violet Trace, remove themselves from abject situations in order to discover the similarities that bind them to that which they first had been appalled. For Laurel, the double-consciousness and "othering" process comes when she is unconscious, sleeping, and dreaming of her trip to Mt. Salus with her late husband.

Though the primary conflict in The Optimist's Daughter is between the opposing characters, Laurel and Fay, Welty recognizes and portrays opposition in many forms in the novel, including in the settings of New Orleans and Mt. Salus, between the Mt. Salus community and Laurel and Fay as individuals, and between the characters' (and readers') actual reality and perceptions of that reality as created in memory. This latter pair of oppositions is also prevalent in Jazz. Whereas Morrison focuses on the extreme emotions that result when one encounters the abject, Welty focuses on the inevitable merging of these two forces and the resulting confluence, drawing the reader's attention to the similarities apparent in her opposing elements. Though many forms of opposition can be discussed in The Optimist's Daughter, Welty establishes opposition through Fay's and Laurel's contradicting senses of place and time, as well as their differing relationships with the community.

Laurel and Fay are first and foremost from entirely different places – places that represent drastically different socioeconomic positions, educational backgrounds and awarenesses of their surrounding culture. Howard Moss notes that "the pun implicit in the word 'place' comes alive in [Welty's] new novel; its colloquial meaning – caste, class, position – is as important as its geographical one" (McHaney 218). Ironically the confluence is found when we realize that Laurel's birth place in Mt. Salus is the place that Fay ultimately calls home, and Laurel's ultimate home is far from the Mt. Salus community where her past lies. Not only do Laurel and Fay originate from two small towns that, though both in the south, are depicted as drastically different from each other, both also flee from their home towns: Fay from Texas to Mississippi, and Laurel from Mississippi to Chicago.

Though the narrator doesn't directly tell us of Fay's socioeconomic status or educational background, these characteristics are apparent in her mannerisms and in the mannerisms and speech of her family when they arrive at the Judge's funeral. Through carefully crafted dialogue, Welty shows the family's admiration for, and "jealousy" (67) of, the two-story house and the expensive coffin in which Fay has buried her husband. We also learn that the rest of the Chisom children, who weren't allowed to come to Mt. Salus because "you don't ever know what germs they might pick up in a strange place" (68), were left in a "trailer" (68) back in Madrid (pronounced with emphasis on the first syllable). It is apparent that Fay is an outsider in her Mt. Salus home. She impulsively flees the funeral to head back with her family to Texas. Her "excuse" for leaving Mt. Salus to heal is stated simply: "I'd just like to see somebody that can talk my language" (97). Ironically, "Salus" in Latin means health and well-being. Unlike Laurel, Fay doesn't find Mt. Salus an appropriate place to heal.

The differences between Fay's and Laurel's valuations of the past and respect for time are additional examples of opposition between the characters. Considering Welty's attention to time in her fiction, this difference between Laurel and Fay is significant and reflects how each character feels about death.[14] Laurel strongly values the past and treasures the memories of her family. Fay makes it clear that she "belongs to the future" (179) and cares so little about her family that she lies about their existence, never sharing a single story about her life in Texas. Fay's literal dislike of the marking of time is evident when she curses the grandfather clock in her home and declares, "Oh, how I hate that old striking clock! […] It's the first thing I'm going to get rid of" (100). Laurel shows her affection for the clock when she sees that it has stopped, and realizes that the last time it was wound was by her father. Hugh Silverman in his chapter titled "Derrida, Heidegger, and the Time of the Line" provides insight on how feelings towards time reflect one's feelings towards death. He connects Heidegger and Derrida in a discussion on the line(s) they use simultaneously to present and erase the meaning of a word. For instance, Derrida would present it with a single line to strike through the word: ~~Fay~~, whereas Heidegger would present it with two intersecting lines: Fay (158). In opposition to Derrida's signification of absence and presence, Heidegger's intersecting lines create a moment of confluence; Derrida's single line suggests a sudden, single, and, yet, open ending. Heidegger's lines show the intersection of life and death just as Laurel begins to see them in her realization of the confluence of rivers, birds, her and her husband, and by the novel's end, her and Fay. Fay can not see an intersection, and only sees a single line of life, ignoring and denying time, which represses her fear of death. In reference to Fay, the narrator even states, "Death in its reality passed her right over" (131). As Silverman states, "At the juncture of the two [lines] there arise the very basic questions of life and death, living and dying, survival in life and the coming of

death. The line 'between' marks the achievement of life and/or death as a question" (163). Fay's feelings about time reflect her fear of death. If she does not acknowledge the passing of time, she need not acknowledge the coming of the end. The reader witnesses Fay's fear of death when she sees the juxtaposition of life and death in the streets of New Orleans during Mardi Gras. Her fear is manifested when she attempts to "scare [Judge McKelva] into life" by shaking and screaming at him. Her dramatic reaction when she sees the Judge in his coffin reveals her unwillingness to acknowledge death. She weeps, "Oh, hon, get up, get out of there" (85).

Fay has time only for living and wants nothing to do with death. Laurel, in contrast, appreciates and respects the structure that time gives life, has the patience to create designs for fabric as a career, and respects death, taking the time to carefully remember the details of her father's, mother's, and husband's pasts. Later in the story, when it comes to her late husband, Laurel, like Fay, wants to deny death's reality.

Welty opens the novel with Dr. Courtland announcing the importance of time to the Judge's healing. Laurel's and Fay's reactions show their varying views. Laurel calls her studio in Chicago to inform them of her extended stay, giving herself more time to spend with her healing/deteriorating father, then says to Fay, who objects to her staying, "Father'll need all the time both of us can give him" (16). The Judge then wakes up and asks, "'What's the time, Fay?' 'That sounds more like you,' [Fay says], but didn't tell him the time" (17).

A deconstructive reading of <u>The Optimist's Daughter</u> reveals not only the difference between Fay and Laurel, but also the instability of their language, their identities and their values.[15] Much of this is revealed by the narrator who comments on the unreliability of memory and how easily and quickly our actions can contradict our words. The narrator points out the fluctuation between Fay's significance and insignificance in the lives of the Mt. Salus

community, especially when she is physically absent. Despite critics' insistence that this is Laurel's story (a mistake easily made as Welty misdirects readers with the novel's title), Fay's presence is felt in the entire story and felt most strongly when she leaves for Texas to be with her family. Fay is present at the start of the novel with her husband separating her and Laurel; she is present at the end as Laurel leaves Mt. Salus and her childhood home whereas Fay remains as head of household. In the third section of the novel in which Laurel is left at the house alone, the story revolves around Fay's presence in the Mt. Salus community. Fay's mysterious presence could be compared to Wild's invisible presence in Vesper County. Philip Page, in discussing the presence of Derrida in Jazz, states that "[Wild] simultaneously is and is not; she is 'everywhere and nowhere'" ("Traces" 57). Laurel's neighbor's first words in this third section are "'Well, we got her out of the house […] 'Fay's gone!'" (105) The conversation never veers from Fay's role in Mt. Salus for the entire scene – their actions contradicting their words that Fay had no place in the community. Even Laurel's only words in the scene, once prodded by the women, "I hope I never see her again" (112), seem contradictory since the only way Laurel eventually resolves her conflict with Fay is when she comes face to face with her.

Laurel and Fay's resolution to their conflict in the novel's closing scene defines abjection: one filled with anger and disgust, while simultaneously filled with love and affection. Their intersection must occur for Laurel to feel closure and to find contentment with her past. Fortuitously, as Laurel points out the differences between herself and her widowed step-mother, Fay counters with even more insightful differences, such as her belief in the future compared to Laurel's belief in the past. Yet similarities are found. The similarities that bring them together, even if just for a moment, creating confluence out of abjection between the two, co-exist with their differences.

After Fay has departed for Texas, Laurel's neighbors discuss the McKelva household in the McKelva back yard while Laurel works in the garden. The women stumble upon a similarity between Laurel and her father that silences them all. They realize that both Laurel and the Judge chose mates from outside the Mt. Salus community, suggesting that both were looking for an "other" to themselves. This similarity links Laurel's love for her late husband with that of her father's for Fay. The connection between Fay and Laurel becomes apparent as we consider that Laurel's love for Philip as an "other" could be applied to a love for Fay who represents another "other," another outsider. Miss Adele silences everyone with this fact: "[Judge McKelva] didn't find Becky in Mount Salus." And Miss Tennyson links Laurel to the realization with, "And of course that's one of the peculiarities Laurel inherited from *him*. She didn't look at home to find Philip Hand" (116). At this epiphany, Laurel stands upright in the garden to dismiss her neighbors – fleeing from a truth that keeps returning: the truth that there are an equal amount of similarities as differences between Fay and herself. Welty concludes this scene with the symbolism that appears frequently in the novel – birds, in this case cardinals that reflect what is happening between Laurel and Fay. The cardinals are "flying at their tantalizing reflections." "'Oh, it's a game, isn't it, nothing but a game!' Miss Adele says" (117). The game between the birds represents Laurel's and Fay's game of looking at each other, not realizing that the other could be their own tantalizing reflections.

Later the same day, as Laurel sits alone in her parents' room, she begins to challenge the differences that she had assumed lay between herself and Fay, questioning "Have I come to be as lost a soul as the soul Fay exposed to Father, and to me?" (131) By the novel's conclusion, the similarities manifest themselves in actions rather than thoughts. In reaction to Fay's reminder that Philip Hand is dead, Laurel raises the breadboard to strike Fay. Laurel's impulsive action

reflects the impulsive and dramatic nature of Fay when we reflect on the scene that she made when seeing the Judge lying dead in the coffin. Just as Fay was making a fool of herself in Laurel's eyes, Fay comments on Laurel's action, saying, "I'll tell you what: you just about made a fool of yourself" (178). The similarities between the opposing characters continue to build. What we initially thought separated the two actually connects them; and the thing that we thought offended Laurel most is what she ends up needing most: to live like Fay lives – not in the past, but for the future. Laurel raises the breadboard that represents the bind between Laurel, her husband, her mother, and her father, "level between the two" (178). Despite its sentimental value, Laurel ultimately leaves the breadboard behind with Fay. The symbolism of the breadboard is significant as it simultaneously represents Laurel's past connections with her family as well as the connection between Laurel and Fay. In each other's eyes, neither "knows how to fight" (178). And in a meaningful reversal of fortunes, it is Laurel who leaves the past behind for her future in Chicago and Fay who stays in Mt. Salus with the history that was largely created in her absence. The hands with which Miss Adele's first-graders wave at Laurel not only wave goodbye to a resolved past in Mt. Salus, but they also welcome in a "unknown" future in Chicago that, following Fay's lead, Laurel has learned to anticipate optimistically.

Welty uses the narrator as Morrison does in Jazz to draw the reader's attention to the ambiguity between love and hate that occurs between opposing characters. When Joe and Violet Trace finally resolve their conflicts, the narrator's prediction, or fantasy, of another tragic murder in reality manifests itself as affection and admiration towards Felice, who is a "true-as-life Dorcas" (197). Welty allows her readers to imagine the same reversal of what we might expect to happen to Laurel and Fay with what happens in reality. When Laurel and Fay confront each other a final time, in the house that connects them, the narrator points out that "there is hate as

well as love… in the coming together and continuing of our lives" (177). But before this realization is made by Laurel, the narrator foreshadows this inevitable reversal when Laurel remembers that her mother *predicted* Fay's intrusion of the McKelva family. The narrator reflects,

> Experience did, finally get set into its right order, which is not always the order of other people's time. […] Fay was Becky's own dread. What Becky had felt, and had been afraid of, might have existed right here in the house all the time, for her. Past and future might have changed places, in some convulsion of the mind, but that could do nothing to impugn the truth of the heart. Fay could have walked in early as well as late, she could have come at any time at all. She was coming. (174)

The narrator not only asserts the inevitability of Fay's presence, but also foreshadows the reversal of the roles that the past and future play in Laurel's and Fay's lives.

Fay not only represents the *other* in opposition to Laurel; Fay is the *other* – representing a free spirited and uninhibited force to whom the entire Mt. Salus community defines their tight knit and reserved values. This is an example of deconstruction's assertion that everything is defined in comparison to its opposite. What separates the communities in The Optimist's Daughter, as opposed to the racial separation between communities in Jazz, is socioeconomic class. Fay's family, portrayed as lower class and uneducated, represents the extreme opposite to the McKelvas' gentility and intelligence. Similarly, the characteristics of the other communities in the text – the Mt. Salus community and the Dalzells – are portrayed as complete opposites. Welty not only differentiates between communities through the assignment of opposite characteristics and actions, she also clearly defines these communities through the use of group labels. For instance, when Laurel and Fay arrive in Mt. Salus on the train, they are greeted not

by individuals, but by a community of "six bridesmaids" that comfort Laurel. Fay immediately questions why they are there and removes herself from the scene to take charge of the funeral, distinguishing herself as an individual, as the *other*. The Dalzells are also distinctly defined as a community as they eat in a circle in the hospital waiting room – an image reflective of a tribal gathering. These clearly defined communities along side the clearly defined individuals (Fay and Laurel) that represent opposite ends of a spectrum add yet another layer of opposition in Welty's novel. Yet these communities not only enforce the tension and conflict in the novel, they also represent the unity and love that result. Ralph Ellison's concept of "the puzzle of the one-and-the-many" is relevant to the tension and unity present in the novel. Ellison defines it as "the idea that any entity is simultaneously unified yet divided, a whole yet an aggregation of parts. For example, the United States exists as a whole yet as regions, states, subgroups, and individuals; and, even though a discrete self is usually presumed, any individual exits in a multiplicity of roles, traits, and other factors" (qtd. in Page, Dangerous 3).

In an interesting reversal of roles, at the end of the novel, Laurel becomes the *other* to the Mt. Salus community as she says goodbye and heads to Chicago with no reason for a return visit. Fay then becomes part of the Mt. Salus community, whether embraced or not, and, presumably, begins to create her own past in Mt. Salus. This reversal of roles reflects the reversal of what happens to Joe, Violet, and Felice (in opposition to what the narrator predicts), as well as to the reversal of Violet as a very public *other* that she represents in Harlem at the start of the novel to an integral and quiet part of Harlem that she becomes by the novel's end. The "trace" that they so prominently left by murdering and defacing Dorcas has been erased and a new "trace" with Felice is being created, leaving them content in their new-found, and private love for the *other*.

A final layer of opposition between memory and reality pervades The Optimist's Daughter. This opposition builds and climaxes in the scene where Laurel reflects on the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers and creates the comparison between the river's confluence and the confluence found between herself and her late husband. This opposition also closely reflects the deconstructive concept that perception is unstable, fluctuating between reality and fantasy. Throughout the novel, the difference between what is remembered and what is real is blurred. This is evident early in the novel when Laurel rushes back to her father's side at the hospital on a "night like tonight," feeling "the atmospheric oppression of a Carnival night" (31), running down the hospital corridor that gave off a "strange milky radiance… like moonlight on some deserted street" (31). Later in the novel, this blurring is reflected in her hallucination of her late husband's voice crying out to her "I wanted it!" after a long night of fusing her mother and father's relationship with her and her husband's. This blurring is similar to that found in Jazz between Joe and Violet's reality with the reality imagined by the narrator. Even the scene where Laurel remembers the confluence of "the morning world" is introduced in a state somewhere between memory and reality. The narrator introduces the scene with, "She had dreamed that she *was* a passenger, and riding with Phil. They had ridden together over a long bridge. Awake, she recognized it: it was a dream of something that had really happened" (159). Laurel's conscious memory and unconscious dreams merge here in this scene of many-layered confluence.

Welty's and Morrison's creations of reality through memory versus literal reality center around the perception of love. In Jazz, the abject love that both Joe and Violet publicly display when Joe shoots and Violet stabs Dorcas transforms itself into a private love that they share "under the covers because they don't have to look at themselves anymore" (228). No longer

needing to look at themselves symbolizes the end of the double-consciousness that they had previously felt. They no longer perceive love violently as they had learned from their oppressor in the South, but they experience it peacefully. This newfound experience of love is coupled with several non-traditional practices for the characters, such as their need for little sleep and the different schedule in which they lead their lives. In The Optimist's Daughter, the confluence that was created by Laurel's marriage with Phillip is not real. It is a memory that she creates, a confluence represented by rivers and birds; a mystery "morning world" (160) where everything is clear and the separate forces that created such beautiful confluence are in the past. But the reality of love, as we see at the novel's end, is that confluence is created only through painful confrontation. Laurel and Fay, in coming together, confront each other with their differences, and in doing so, discover similarities. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the clarity Laurel perceived in the morning world is only a memory; her perception of love, when the narrator depicts it in reality, is inverted, becomes mysterious, and the characters end up living their lives as each *other's* nemesis had taught: Fay in the past, Laurel for the future.

The opposition and confluence of life and death are brought to our attention in Laurel's memory on the train with Phil. Laurel's memory concludes as she ponders, "And we're going to live forever. Left bodiless and graveless of a death made of water and fire in a year long gone, Phil could still tell her of her life. For her life, any life, she had to believe, was nothing but the continuity of its love" (160). Life everlasting is only found, according to the Christian faith portrayed by the Mt. Salus community, in death. Perfect eternal love is only found in death. Laurel's belief that Phil and she will live forever, that their love was perfect, is only a perception conjured up in her mind after his death. Fay, in her mind, was trying to scare her husband into

life, yet, the reality was that she scared the Judge into his death. Perception and reality are at extreme opposition in this novel as they are in Jazz.

Through the depiction of opposition, Welty, as well as Morrison, asks readers to reevaluate their ideas on love and encourages them to liberate themselves from their traditional conceptions about this emotion. As Patrick Samway suggests in his reading of The Optimist's Daughter,

> What this community (Mt. Salus), whose memory of the past drives their social engines, must learn to recognize as they talk and interact with one another is that Wanda Fay and the Judge were most likely a happy couple who loved one another. Once they accept the truth that is before them, once they open themselves up to love and its revelatory nature, they, too, might be liberated. (117)

Whether Laurel will realize, once she returns to Chicago, the love that exists between her and Fay is unknown. Whether Fay will ever use the breadboard that Laurel leaves behind, whether Fay will create a past with the Mt. Salus community, or whether she will continue to define herself as an individual belonging to the future, are unknown. The narrator makes a point to tell us that the hands that wave to Laurel as she is raced to the airport by "the bridesmaids" are unidentified as are the resolutions to Fay and Laurel's conflicts. Have they healed from the loss of father and husband(s)? Will they resolve their pasts with their futures? Ultimately, in the disparity between reality and perception, love is also unknown.

If love is devotion and support, then love existed between Laurel and Phil, between Fay and Judge McKelva. If love is comfort and security, then love exists between the Mt. Salus community and Laurel, between Fay and her family in Texas, as well as within Laurel and Fay. But what about the less stable side of love? What about the strong, hurtful side of love that

makes us change and grow? When taking into consideration the abject side of love, love flourishes between Fay and Laurel. This love is connected by Fay's husband, Laurel's father: a judge who served as mayor of a community that never seems to grow or evolve, a judge that is represented in Welty's novel as a king, even as a god. Perhaps we as readers, should not be so quick to judge love, to define love, or to declare its absence or presence.

Chapter Four: Finding Love

The art of writing is highly valued by both Morrison and Welty. Through their writing, they do more than tell a story, capture an era, or resolve a conflict. Their fiction transcends traditional concepts of identity and love learned from Western culture. Welty has said herself that it is her "wish, indeed [her] continuing passion… not to point the finger in judgment but to part a curtain, that invisible shadow that falls between people, the veil of indifference to each other's presence, each other's wonder, each other's human plight." (Eye 355). Both authors capture what Nietzsche writes about in Beyond Good and Evil. In describing what "makes life worth living," he states "essential 'in heaven and on earth' is that there be *obedience* in one direction for a long time" and then gives the following as examples of why we should value life: "virtue, art, music, dance, reason, intellect – something that transfigures, something refined, fantastic, and divine" (78).

From the start of their careers, Morrison and Welty challenged traditional conceptions of love. Morrison's first novel, The Bluest Eye, addresses the predominant white society's love based on physical characteristics of a doll with blond hair and blue eyes. The novel's protagonist, Pecola Breedlove, is fully aware of this fixed aesthetic of love, but pulls apart her "beautiful" doll, deconstructing what the doll is made of before she determines whether she loves her or not. In Morrison's third novel Song of Solomon, "[l]ove turns to rage (a reversal of Cholly's attempt to transform hate into love) and Hagar embarks on a murderous rampage, content to be feared if not loved" (Heinze 30). Critics and scholars have noted that as Morrison inverts black and white hierarchies, she portrays untraditional forms of love. In her essay entitled "Beauty and Love: The Morrison Aesthetic," Denise Heinze concludes by stating that for Morrison "love is not the exclusive property of, nor most brilliantly expressed in, marriage.

Love, for her, flares in the most unromantic, asexual settings and between the least likely beneficiaries" (54).

We find the opposing forces of love and hate reflected in the source of the epigraph of Jazz. The excerpt comes from a female declaration of contradicting identity from *The Nag Hammadi*. When we look at the entire text of "Thunder Perfect Mind," not only does the speaker claim that she is "the name of the sound and the sound of the name," she also asks, "Why, you who hate me, do you love me, and you hate those who love me?" (Parrott 272) As we might expect, love and hate lie close to each other, are even as interchangeable as good and evil, black and white, gold and gray, separation and unification. As Kristeva writes, "The world of illusions brings to light or embodies the prohibition that has us speak. Thus, it gives *legitimacy* to hatred if it does not *invert* it into love" (133).

The two sides of love are reflected in Welty's fiction as well. In her first collection of stories, A Curtain of Green and Other Stories, Welty writes about untraditional love in "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies," "Why I Live at the P.O.," "Old Mr. Marblehall," "Death of a Traveling Salesman," "A Worn Path," and others. Love in these stories ranges from pursuing two loves at once, which results in deception ("Old Mr. Marblehall"), love found through isolation ("Why I Live at the P.O."), imaginary love ("A Worn Path"), and love between people who are usually thought incapable of loving ("Lily Daw and the Three Ladies").

By depicting such extreme opposition in their fictions, both authors suggest that there are no clear distinctions between opposites.

> In the African world view, there are no clear demarcations between life and death, sacred and secular, or spiritual and material. Instead, the focus is on the reconciliation of oppositions in which the cosmos, as well as every community, is a 'balance force field'

[Smitherman 108] and in which harmonies, coherence, compatibility, and equilibrium are the highest goals (Page, Dangerous 11).

Welty and Morrison create ambiguity in their novels and encourage their readers to question their views of fiction and reality by using language that illustrates extreme opposition of the places and situations that their characters encounter. Specifically, the presence of abjection in the conflicts of Jazz and The Optimist's Daughter asks readers to re-evaluate the difference between opposition and confluence. Further, Morrison's use of an unreliable and indefinable narrator asks readers to question their perceptions of what really happens in Jazz while Welty's depiction of varying memories of Judge McKelva, Becky McKelva, and Phil Hand asks readers to question the true identities of each character as does Morrison's use of dual qualities found in each of Jazz*'s* characters. When readers evaluate both novels from a deconstructionist perspective, they are led to evaluate opposites such as reality and illusion, poor and rich, good and evil, and right and wrong. Both novels, ultimately, lead readers to question traditional ideas of love, inverting what we might view at first as disgust into passion, and what we view as restlessness into contentment. Kristeva reverses love into sin, suggesting that these two opposing words also lay side by side – a concept easily found in Jazz when we consider Joe and Violet Trace's sins committed towards Dorcas, and easily found in The Optimist's Daughter when we think of Fay's unintentional murdering of Judge McKelva. Kristeva asserts, "Neither debt nor want, sin, as the reverse side of love, is a state of fullness, of plenty. In that sense, it turns around into living beauty" (123).

In The Art of Loving, Erich Fromm defines the aesthetic of love that Morrison and Welty create in their novels, insisting that love is indefinable and rare, yet attainable by anyone willing to work at it. According to Fromm, love does not just happen, love is created – just as any art is.

Fromm emphasizes that love is not passive, but active; one does not fall in love, but creates it; love is primarily giving, not taking; "[t]o love is a personal experience which everyone can only have by and for himself" (97); "the ability to be alone is the condition for the ability to love" (101). This active, free love that originates inside is exemplified in Jazz and The Optimist's Daughter. In fact, I am arguing that the opposition that Welty and Morrison depict leads to a freeing of their characters' conflicts, and results in a newfound, indefinable and free love.

This love is symbolized in both novels with birds. As the narrator first tells us of Joe and Violet's situation on Lenox Avenue, she ends the first paragraph that summarizes the entire story with this significant symbol: "when she got back to her apartment she took the birds from their cages and set them out the windows to freeze or fly, including the parrot that said, 'I love you'" (3). As the story develops, birds come to represent Joe's invisible mother, Wild, along with the freedom and transience by which she is characterized. At the story's end, a bird comes back into Joe and Violet's life. The bird, a little battered and worn, just like its owners, was purchased by Violet (reflecting the active role she plays in her newfound love with Joe) and doesn't find love from companionship, or any of its basic needs like food or shelter. It finds love through art, or music in this case:

> [Violet] guessed the bird wasn't lonely because it was already sad when she bought it out of a flock of others. So if neither food nor company nor its own shelter was important to it, Violet decided, and Joe agreed, nothing was left to love or need but music. They took the cage to the roof one Saturday, where the wind blew and so did the musicians in shirts billowing out behind them. From then on the bird was a pleasure to itself and to them (224).

Joe and Violet's idea of love seems to mirror Fromm's idea of love as the bird is first a "pleasure to itself," and then to others. This prioritizing self before others focuses our attention on independent identity and loving oneself, just as Joe and Violet had to do before discovering the love in their relationship – loving their own identity and where they came from before they could love any *other*. In this case, the bird doesn't need an "other," to love, just music, suggesting perhaps that jazz is "the other" in the novel. Morrison appears to understand love outside of person-to-person relationships, arguing that love is found equally in the enjoyment of, or a passion for, art. In opposition to Morrison, rarely, if ever, does Welty discuss romantic love in her nonfiction or in interviews. Her love is expressed towards literature, writing, and her photography. In One Writer's Beginnings, she shares her discovery of this love. Welty's passion for the written word is an inversion of Jazz's narrator's passion for the reader. In a sense the written word, represented by the narrator of Jazz, loves the reality of the reader, rather than the author (Welty or Morrison) loving the fiction they create. As Rebecca Mark says of The Golden Apples, "the degree of identification between artist and object collapses the duality of the subject/object split and allows for a much more fluid relationship between author and text" (Dragon's 68).

The symbolism of birds is also prevalent in The Optimist's Daughter. Welty hints at Laurel's inability to experience love when the letter from her grandmother is found. The letter reads that "she would like to send [Laurel] one of my pigeons. It would eat from her hand, if she would let it" (154). Perhaps Laurel's grandmother is only commenting on the impatience of children to let birds eat from their hands. But by including this piece of information among so much information that Laurel finds looking through the letters of her parents after their deaths, this could also be a comment on Laurel's inability to let love fall into her life. Later, a chimney

sweep traps itself in the house on Laurel's final night in her home and cannot free itself. In her frazzled state, Laurel seems to misunderstand what the bird, and what love, needs in order to free itself. The town's handy man is the one to realize, "it ain't trying to get in. Trying to get out" (165). Laurel can't seem to understand what it needs, commenting, "Why won't it just fly free of its own accord?" (167) Finally, Laurel captures it herself, and in the release, the bird takes flight. In the moment of release, Laurel can't even see the bird as an object; it is an indefinable set of wings that returns upwards towards the sky. Welty writes, "Something struck her face – not feathers; it was a blow of wind. The bird was away. In the air it was nothing but a pair of wings – she saw no body any more, no tail, just a tilting crescent being drawn back into the sky" (168). Welty depicts love as indeterminate and mythic. Just after Laurel frees the bird, and burns her parents' letters that contain the history of the home, she takes a stance against Fay and her lack of value for the past. Though she does not realize it, she stands against the same thing that she is doing herself, destroying the past and leaving it behind – living only for a future, the future that awaits her in Chicago.

The difference between community and individual and how the two feed off of one another is something Morrison and Welty experienced in their personal lives and address in their fiction. Both authors experienced much of their lives in solitude. Both women were raised in traditional households with parents who were married their entire lives, but Welty never married and Morrison divorced shortly after having two sons, making her a single mother for most of her life.[16] Though both authors were alone for much of their lives gaining a strong sense of independence, both experienced and witnessed many forms of love and had a profound love for creating works of art, such as a novel, a portrait, a jazz riff or a photograph. Clearly, both women were artists, depicting the society around them, depicting places and people in all their

contradictory and opposing qualities, representing and misrepresenting the love we remember in death as well as the love that is omnipresent in life.

On the surface, love, in Jazz, is evident between Joe and Violet Trace. It is a hard fought and private love found under the covers at times when most people aren't sleeping (228). Ultimately, love is rampant in the novel: between Joe and Dorcas, Violet and Felice, Joe and Wild, Violet and her mother, even Violet and Dorcas. Though Joe and Violet's public confrontations with Dorcas were all that were visible to the community, love is present. The narrator's love for the city, and the secret love she has for the reader, is also present. In The Optimist's Daughter, love is most evident between Laurel and her late husband, Judge and Becky McKelva, even Fay and Judge McKelva. Though expressed quite differently, love is also found between Fay and Laurel. Though the opposing characters are clear on what separates them – Laurel's past, Fay's future – it is exactly what separates them that connects them. It is identical to the illusion of confluence between Laurel and Phil that Laurel created in her mind, only the confluence between Fay and Laurel is no illusion. Fromm's theory of love, published in 1956, captures what Morrison and Welty seem to be encouraging as they depict the setting, characters, and scenes that make up the stories in Jazz and The Optimist's Daughter. The extreme opposition that they use leads the reader to an aesthetic of love described by Fromm. Taking Morrison and Welty's backgrounds into consideration, these authors' intent to capture this active and personal concept of love that isn't unlike the creation of fiction should come as no surprise.

Untraditional love is a central theme in Morrison's and Welty's fiction as they both challenge love's traditional conceptions. Morrison's frustration with society's limited definitions of love is apparent in an interview with Anne Koenen (1980). She not only discusses the many different forms of love found in Sula, The Bluest Eye, and Song of Solomon, but also her own

definition of love that is contrary to Western civilization's. Specifically, Morrison says, "if you love god they think you are backward, if you love your mother they think you got some Freudian thing... Now if you have a friend that you love somebody will think that you are lesbian or homosexual. So what's left? There's nothing left to love, except the children and the member of the opposite sex" (Koenen 73). In the same interview, Morrison says what interests her is a different notion of love – a love that "probably is very closely related to blues." This statement was made more than a decade before the publication of Jazz. A love that is "contrary to Western civilization… quite contrary to the overwhelming notion of love that's the business of the majority of culture. This [love] is different, not only that I grew up with both cultures, but the one that came to my aid in times of crisis was always one that was not the majority of culture" (Koenen 71).

Morrison's and Welty's fictions illustrate how the elements of deconstruction can invert not only hierarchies and conceptions of opposites, but also of love. Morrison draws heavily on these deconstructive elements in Jazz, challenging mainstream culture's ideas on one of its most fundamental concepts: identity. At its most extreme, this inversion forces readers to doubt what they thought was true all along. For example, at the end of Jazz, the narrator addresses the reader directly about her own feelings of love, and her inability to express them. Since Morrison has established the narrator as contradictory, unreliable, personable, and omniscient, the monologue makes a profound statement about the limitations of love, as we traditionally think of it. The narrator shares the new love discovered between Joe and Violet – a love that was unpredicted and surprising to the narrator, and follows the conclusion of their tale with a surprising revelation about her own love, a public love that the narrator has only experienced in secret, but has "longed, aw longed to show" (229). The love that the narrator describes is a

sensual, intellectual, and one-sided love since the reader was entirely unaware of it until the narrator reveals it in italics. But by putting her love in writing (even if it is in italics and not said "aloud"), the narrator is signifying her love, making the first step to consensual love, though clearly a non-traditional love, since the narrator is fictional and the reader is not. This is yet another bridge that Morrison builds between fantasy and reality that challenges readers to broaden their ideas of love and identity.

At the novel's conclusion, Morrison reveals a love between two untraditional entities: the fictional narrator of Jazz and the reader of the story. Following her declaration of love to the reader, the narrator claims that she has "been waiting for this all [her] life" (229). The "this" she refers to is of course the love that she experienced during the time that the reader "lifted" and "turned" the pages of her story with their "fingers" (229). Before she asks her reader to read it again, to make and remake her, or her story, she claims that she was "chosen to wait" all her life (229) because she can. This highly untraditional love challenges readers' traditional concepts of love, asking them to broaden their ideas on who can love whom and how. The narrator not only reveals her intense, one-sided love towards the reader, but also claims that this is how it was meant to be; she was "chosen" to fall in love like this.

Welty draws our attention to the ambiguous connection between fiction and fantasy as Laurel remembers the "perfect love" that existed between her and Phil. But just before Welty generously shares with us Laurel's insightful recognition of confluence and the memory-created perfect love, she brings to the reader's attention sides of love we often do not realize or want to admit to: anger, suffering, weariness, jealously, grief. She considers her mother's dying love for her father and remembers the anger in it. As she grips Laurel's and her husband's hands, Becky McKelva cries in anger. The narrator tells us, "it was anger at wanting to know and being denied

knowledge; it was love's deep anger" (148). Is this a knowledge that escapes Welty as well? Or is it a knowledge that she is sharing with her readers? As she considers her father's love for both his wives, Laurel realizes, "[b]oth times he chose, he had suffered; she had seen him contain it. He died worn out with both wives" (151). Remembering Fay's self proclaimed label as Becky's "rival," Laurel clarifies Fay's jealousy in her mind: "[Rivalry] is not between the living and the dead, between the old wife and the new; it's between too much love and too little. There is no rivalry as bitter" (152). But how is Laurel or Fay supposed to know how much love is too much, or too little? How are readers supposed to know that? The narrator comments on the love of Judge McKelva, leaving ambiguous whom he loved too much and whom he loved too little. Shortly thereafter, Laurel is overwhelmed by emotion after discovering a letter written by her grandmother in which Laurel's name actually appears. She "put[s] her head down on the open lid of the desk and [weeps] in grief for love and for the dead. She lay there with all that was adamant in her yielding to this night, yielding at last. Now all she had found had found her" (154). Not only does the narrator point out Laurel's realization of how close love, life, and death are to each other, but she inverts the concept of Laurel finding information into information finding her, which in turn helps Laurel find herself – an inversion similar to many of Morrison's.

The ambiguity that results from polar opposition, as well as the ambiguity of love, is also present in politics today. Referring to the immasculinity of the west portrayed in "Brokeback Mountain," Maureen Dowd wrote in a New York Times article about George W. Bush that "A president who hates dissonance, who prefers a world in black and white, is now confronted by confusing gray shades everywhere he looks" (A23). Morrison and Welty are authors clearly interested in social issues of their time. They not only depict relationships in Harlem and in the South, they use untraditional narrators and non-linear plot lines that throw readers into a world

where opposites are quite similar and what we might typically view as wrong becomes right, what we might see as different is very similar, and people that the other characters in the novels might want to hate, actually end up loving. Morrison and Welty are challenging justice and attempting to do as Nietzsche suggests: attempting to create something divine.

Many questions arise from the critical analysis of extreme opposition in Jazz and The Optimist's Daughter. What if love isn't the answer to all conflict? What if love can't heal all wounds? What if love has nothing to do with passion, has no tingle, no fate, no feeling involved at all? Where would that leave us as a society? Would society simply consist of individuals wandering about the earth randomly, bumping into each other, trying to make meaning out of life when in reality there isn't any? What if relationships are insignificant and there is no such thing as a soul-mate? What if our concepts of love were all wrong? Could the word love merely be a signifier, a four letter word that we use as a substitute for a reality of love? Could love simply be a phantom – a temporary relief of stress, anger, hatred, judgment? Inevitably this phantom emotion always disappears as we wake from our dreams, and life in all its dullness, in all its contentment, in all its everyday routine continues. One wonders if love is the biggest lie of all.

But perhaps love is that dull, routine contentment that makes up most of our life. Morrison comments on the importance of love in an interview: "It's so uninteresting to live without love. Life has no risk. Love just seems to make life not just livable, but a gallant, gallant event" (Moyers 268). The significance of love to Morrison is also evident in her most recent novel titled Love. In the same interview, Morrison discusses her use of love as a metaphor for the "inner city." Bill Moyers asks her, "If you were writing for the rest of the country about the 'inner city' today, what metaphor would you use?" Morrison responds by stating simply, "Love. We have to embrace ourselves. Self-regard" (266-67). Perhaps what

Morrison and Welty are depicting through extreme opposition, abjection, and confluence is an aesthetic of love that is all encompassing – a love that is unrecognizable when it escapes our hands and soars through the air, or that merely needs music floating through the air, or that dances into our lives once we have explored what we thought was our opposite.

End Notes

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[1] About Morrison, Barbara Hill Rigney states, "In all her novels, Morrison implies the primacy of the maternal and the semiotic in the economy of language in order to achieve signification and a higher form of poetic (and also political) truth" (12).

[2] An example of a word with contradictory meanings is *pharmakon.* Plato defines the Greek word p*harmakon* as "a drug, a healing remedy or medicine, an enchanted potion or philter, a charm or spell, a poison, a means of producing something, a dye or paint" (Silverman 8).

[3] In discussing the "grotesqueness" – a concept closely related to Kristeva's abjection – of Morrison's fiction, Susan Corey brings up the opposing definitions that Wolfgan Kayser and Mikhail Bakhtin assign to the word. Kayser's is a "negative" grotesque, while Bakhtin's is a "positive." "In Kayser's model, the grotesque expresses primarily the alienation estrangement, and terrifying disorder underlying daily life in the twentieth century. In contrast, Bakhtin looks back to the late medieval period where he finds the grotesque functioning as an agent of change and transformation, a reminder of a regenerating reality behind the surface of everyday life" (Corey 33).

[4] Conner comments further on the double-consciousness that Morrison depicts, citing her ability to address the political and the artistic, going beyond the double consciousness of African Americans, making her work simultaneously topical and universal. He states, "Morrison's view of the vocation of the African-American writer shifts between the two poles of the art/politics debate – her position is double-voiced, just as the African-American tradition has been through this century: it has a cultural specificity that resists interpretation outside of that culture; and yet it has a universality that speaks to all people" (Conner xxii).

[5] Kristeva also notes the fragility of identity and its relation to the sacred. In Powers of Horror, she questions, "One aspect founded by murder and the social bond made up of murder's guilt-ridden atonement, with all the projective mechanisms and obsessive rituals that accompany it; and another aspect, like a lining, more secret still and invisible, non-representable, oriented toward those uncertain spaces of unstable identity, toward the fragility – both threatening and fusional – of the archaic dyad, toward the non-separation of subject/object, on which language has no hold but one woven of fright and repulsion?" (57-8)

[6] King further states that "although libertinism and asceticism are seemingly at opposite ends of the ethical spectrum, underlying both is the view that the moral life was just another trap set by the wicked world rulers to tie Gnostics to the body and further entrap them in the material world. The Gnostic response to every invitation to join in the life of the world, with all its delights and duties and disappointments, Jonas said, was a resounding refusal. Libertinism and asceticism were equally capable of expressing that refusal. Hence, he claimed, these two very different types of behavior actually arose from a single principle: anticosmic dualism" (124).

[7] Morrison lived in Paris at the same time as Derrida, prior to his death in 2005.

[8] Later, this death wish is inverted, as Morrison writes, "Now [Golden Gray] hopes she will not die" (146).

[9] Welty realizes the importance of motivation in plot as well. In The Eye of the Story she states, "The plot is the Why. Why? Is asked and replied to at various depths; the fishes in the sea are bigger the deeper we go" (90).

[10] Morrison says in an 1985 interview with Claudia Tate, "Ohio is a curious juxtaposition of what was ideal in this country and what was base" (Peach, 3).

[11] See specifically Toni Morrison's conversation with Claudia Tate (1983) in Conversations with Toni Morrison, edited by Danille Taylor-Guthrie. Morrison states, "When I view the world, perceive it and write about it, it's the world of black people" (157). Also, in Salmon Rushdie's "An Interview with Toni Morrison," Morrison says "I *was* interested in black people's reality" (37).

[12] Freud describes this process in Beyond the Pleasure Principle as fort/da.

[13] In One Writer's Beginnings, Welty writes of her identification with the character Miss Eckhart. "As I looked longer and longer for the origins of this passionate and strange character, at last I realized that Miss Eckhart came from me. […] She derived from what I already knew for myself, even felt I had always known. What I have put into her is my passion for my own life work, my own art. Exposing yourself to risk is a truth Miss Eckhart and I had in common" (101).

[14] In her essay "Some Notes on Time in Fiction," Welty states, "Time in a novel is the course through which, and by which, all things in their turn are brought forth in their significance – events, emotions, relationships in their changes, in their synchronized move toward resolution" (167).

[15] Howard Moss states in his review that "the struggle between Laurel and Fay is a battle of values" (McHaney 218).

[16] Eudora Welty's father died relatively young, leaving Eudora's mother a widow for nearly forty years.

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