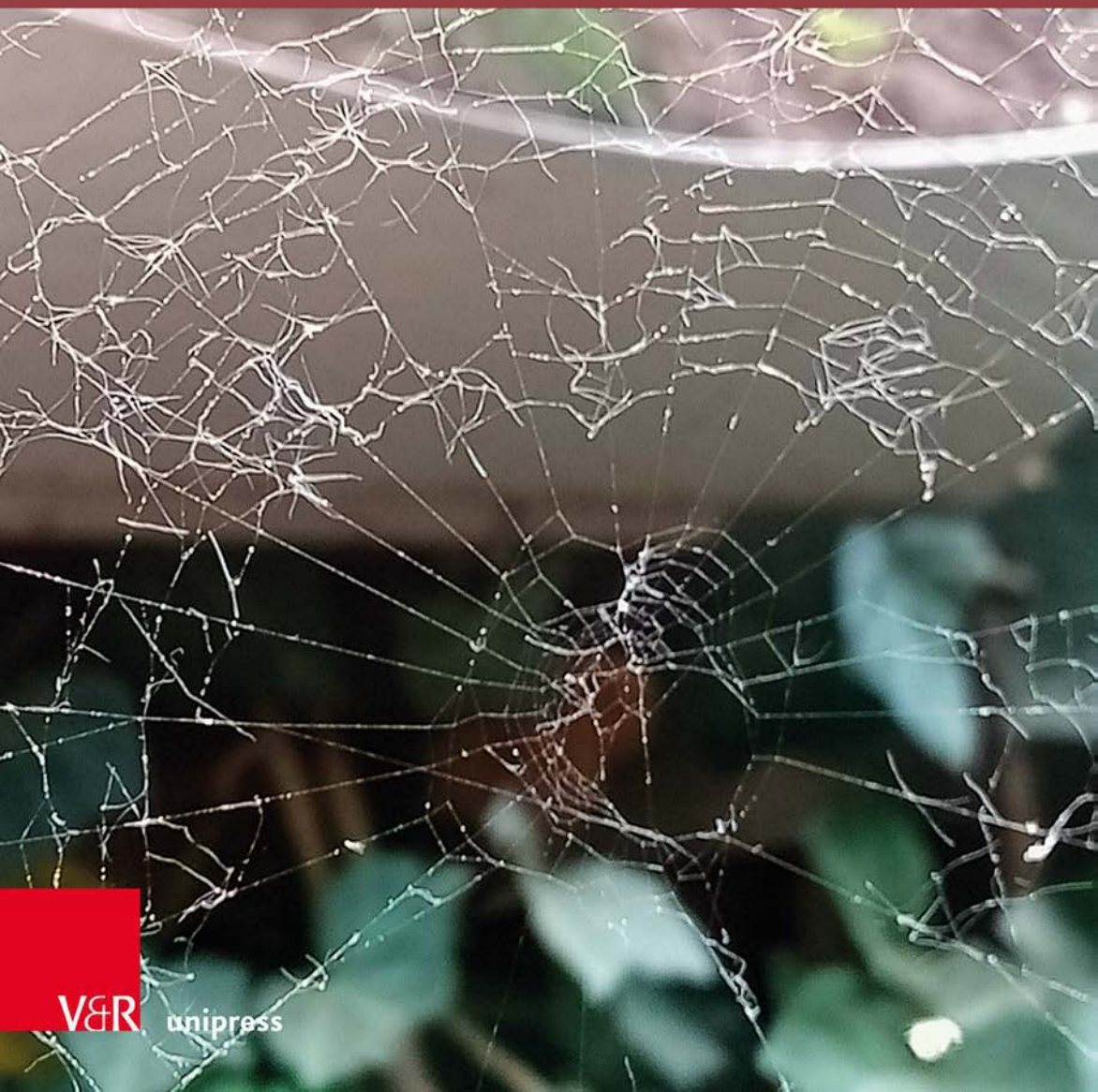


Grażyna Maria Teresa Branny

Intertextualizing Collective American Memory

Southern, African American and
Native American Fiction





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Passages – Transitions – Intersections

Volume 12

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List of Abbreviations

AA!	<i>Absalom, Absalom!</i>
B	<i>Beloved</i>
BP	<i>The Bingo Palace</i>
BM	<i>Blood Meridian</i>
FHU	“The Fall of the House of Usher”
GHCh	<i>God Help the Child</i>
JE	“Jordan’s End”
LA	<i>Light in August</i>
L	<i>Love</i>
LM	<i>Love Medicine</i>
KW	<i>The Known World</i>
M	<i>A Mercy</i>
OD	<i>Outer Dark</i>
PD	<i>The Painted Drum</i>
PDWLI	<i>Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination</i>
RN	<i>Requiem for A Nun</i>
P	<i>Paradise</i>
S&F	<i>The Sound and the Fury</i>
SS	<i>Song of Solomon</i>
S	<i>Suttree</i>
T	<i>Tracks</i>
VCFT	“Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time”

Acknowledgments

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Preface

This monograph titled *Intertextualizing Collective American Memory: Southern, African American and Native American Fiction* has evolved out of a series of monothematic texts published in volumes and periodicals released by different publishers, both in and outside of Poland, over a period of seventeen years (2001–2018). The appearance of this volume at this point in time has been made possible by the relatively recent (second decade of the 21st century) political and ideological openings in the United States on the official level towards the acceptance of the difficult truth of American history with regard to slavery, racism, and extermination of Native American tribes. What has facilitated the appearance of this volume of literary criticism on the public level is a relatively recent appearance and popularization of such social movements related to the above issues as *Black Lives Matter* and *Me Too*, both of which, quite significantly, originated in the United States in the second decade of this century.

The present intertextual study of collective American memory evolved from a series of journal articles and chapters in books, which have since been updated and revised, released by various Polish and foreign publishers. Two of the texts appeared in the *Journal of Literature and Art Studies* and in the *Sociology Study* in the United States; one was published in Slovakia as part of the *Journal of Interdisciplinary Philology* issued by University of Žilina. Two more, also released abroad—in Spain and Germany—appeared as chapters in books published at University of Castilla-La Mancha in Cuenca and Peter Lang Verlag in Frankfurt, respectively. The remaining texts are based on chapters of volumes edited at various Polish universities: Warsaw University, the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, KEN University (formerly Pedagogical University) in Kraków, the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, University of Silesia, and last but not least, the State Higher Vocational School in Krosno.

The volume focuses on seventeen novels by five American writers: *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), *Light in August* (1932), *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), and *Requiem for a Nun* (1951) by William Faulkner; *Beloved* (1987), *God Help the Child*,

Love (2015), *A Mercy* (2008), *Paradise* (1997), and *Song of Solomon* (1977) by Toni Morrison; *The Bingo Palace* (1994), *The Painted Drum* (2019), and *Tracks* (1988) by Louise Erdrich; *Blood Meridian* (1985), *Outer Dark* (1968), and *Suttree* (1979) by Cormac McCarthy; and *The Known World* (2003) by Edward P. Jones. The book likewise considers a cycle of Native American short stories by Louise Erdrich, titled *Love Medicine* (1984), and three Southern short stories by three Southern authors: “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839) by Edgar Allan Poe, “Jordan’s End” (1923) by Ellen Glasgow, and “Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time” (1958) by Peter Taylor.

The volume consists of seven parts, with two chapters to each, excepting Part Four, which comprises three chapters. Part One is devoted to the aestheticization of the *collective memory*, or rather *collective amnesia*, of the white American South, in the context of the region’s two main social taboos of *incest* and *miscegenation*, as considered against the grain of Maurice Halbwachs’s theory about the continuity of collective memory. The literary texts discussed in Part One include two William Faulkner novels: *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Sound and the Fury*; Cormac McCarthy’s novel *Outer Dark*, and the three aforementioned Southern short stories. Part Two dwells on the sins of the white Southern *patriarchy* in Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*, *Light in August*, and *The Sound and the Fury* as well as *Suttree* by Cormac McCarthy and “Jordan’s End” by Ellen Glasgow, with all five texts pitted against the representation of the issue in relation to the African American patriarchy in Toni Morrison’s novel *Love*. Part Three revolves around gender and race *empowerment* in the context of the little-known phenomenon of the *intra-racial* slavery of indentured servitude in colonial times in Toni Morrison’s *A Mercy* and mental *re-colonization* of free African Americans in the times of slavery in Edward P. Jones’s *The Known World*, where the issue is considered in the context of Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s concept of *black aesthetics*. Part Four tackles *race(lessness)*, *gender*, and *othering* in Toni Morrison’s *Paradise* in the context of her critical essay *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), as read against the Lacanian perspective on Faulkner’s *Light on August*, coupled with the present-day representations of all three issues in Morrison’s *God Help the Child*. Part Five focuses on traumatized African American femininity and *black motherhood* in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and William Faulkner’s *Requiem for a Nun*. Part Six deals with the question of assimilation and *literacy* v. ethnicity and *orality* in William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*, Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*, and Louise Erdrich’s *Tracks* and *The Painted Drum*. The closing Part Seven of the book centers on *myth-making*, *historicity* and *ahistoricity* in Louise Erdrich’s two Native American novels: *Tracks* and *The Bingo Palace* as well as her short story cycle *Love Medicine*, considered in the light of Hayden White’s concept of the *burden of history* and Van Wyck Brooks’s notion of *usable past*, as applied also to Cormac McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian* pitted against Mark Twain’s classic of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Introduction

A combined contextual, intertextual, and comparative approach to Southern, African American, and Native American collective memories applied for the purpose of the present book, allows some taboos or other controversial issues related to the historically, ideologically, sociologically, and psychologically conditioned patterns of behavior prevailing in the aforementioned social and ethnic milieux to be tackled. As regards the Southern context, the said patterns of behavior, largely originating in the times of slavery, but sometimes going all the way back to the early colonial period, have become embedded in the collective memory of the white Southern patriarchy. As, objectively speaking, deplorable, and thus potentially a source of guilt, those patterns have been largely relegated to the white mainstream's collective subconscious, or else aestheticized, if not simply committed to a complete and deliberate collective amnesia of the American South.

While pitting William Faulkner's novels as a white Southern writer intertextually¹ against Toni Morrison's African American writing, the present study builds a premise whereby in some of her books Morrison rewrites her white predecessor in order—as she claims in her essay *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*—to restore the African American presence into 'visibility,' which, as she consistently claims, her ethnic sisters and brothers have been denied all along both in American history and mainstream American literature. Hence, as demonstrated in the present book, Toni Morrison's African American fiction, in the shape of *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved*, *Paradise*, and *Love*, constitutes, respectively, a "signification" (in the understanding of Henry Louis

1 Intertextuality is defined here after Julia Kristeva, in the sense of a work of art being "part of a larger fabric of literary discourse, part of a continuum including the future as well as the past" (Murfin & Ray 249), as well as in the Bakhtinian understanding of dialogic discourse as developed by Kristeva, "a dialogic work" defined as "one that permits numerous voices or discourses to emerge and to engage in dialogue with one another" (Murfin & Ray 111; emphases of entries removed).

Gates, Jr.)² on the mainstream Southern writing of William Faulkner in his *The Sound and the Fury*, *Requiem for a Nun*, *Light in August*, and *Absalom, Absalom!* As such, Morrison's texts enter into a Bakhtinian dialogue with Faulkner's, creating new meanings in the process, which interact textually and ideologically with one another, reflecting back on both the white Southern and African American collective memories, or amnesia, in general, and Faulkner's and Morrison's own approaches to both in their novels, in particular.

On the white Southern side, the representation of the issue is further extended to include a contemporary perspective provided by Cormac McCarthy, whose novels *Outer Dark* and *Suttree* are made to enter into Bakhtinian dialogics with Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, respectively, thus bringing the latter's well camouflaged because denegativized³ taboo themes into relief by spelling out their heretofore unspoken and denied themes related to the collective memory, or rather amnesia of the white South. On the African American side, Toni Morrison's perspective as a female writer is enriched by that of her African American male counterpart Edward P. Jones in his celebrated novel *The Known World*, both writers, among others, dwelling on those aspects of African American collective memory that belong to the postcolonial legacy of their people, which continues to mar their personal and family lives as well as their mentalities to this day (cf. Morrison's *Love, Paradise, A Mercy* and *God Help the Child*).

With regard to the white v. Native American collective memories, the focus in this book is on the contextual and intertextual valences of the writings of Louise Erdrich in *Love Medicine*, *The Bingo Palace*, *Tracks*, and *The Painted Drum*, as considered against Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, and McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, and in the ideological contexts of Van Wyck Brooks's concept of *usable past*⁴ and Hayden White's notion of the *burden of history*.⁵ Both theories are seen here as promoting white collective amnesia

2 Gates defines "signifying" as "a uniquely black rhetorical concept, entirely textual or linguistic, by which a second statement or figure repeats, or tropes, or reverses the first" and which "can exist only in the realm of the intertextual relation" (49).

3 Denegation in François Pitavy's understanding of the term as applied to Faulkner's fiction is tantamount to asserting presence by absence, or absence by presence, in the sense of a fact being the more present (absent) for the absence (presence) of the apparent reasons for that presence (absence). As understood by Pitavy, denegation is a psychological term, which refers to the speaker. In calling Sutpen in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* a "nothusband," Rosa Coldfield does not mean that he did not ever become her spouse but that he was "the more present for being perceived as the negative of a husband" (Pitavy 1989: 29).

4 Brooks understands history as "the creative impulse" rather than "the successful fact" (Blake 423), and sees the "spiritual past" as having "no objective reality" but "what we are able to look for in it" (337).

5 For Hayden White history, and thus also the collective memory of that history, is delimiting and oppressive, because halting rather than promoting progress (Peterson 983).

rather than preserving collective memory as understood by Maurice Halbwachs,⁶ where it is the word that creates the reality rather than the reverse, to suit the ideologies of various interest groups (cf. *Light in August*, *Blood Meridian*, *God Help the Child*, and *The Painted Drum*), in accordance with Jacques Lacan's understanding of the Saussurean theory of the Signifier and the signified.⁷

* * *

The collective memory, or rather amnesia, of the white American South, as discussed in Part One of the present book, titled "The Unspoken and the Un-speakable: Southern Taboos Aestheticized and Denegativized," concerns two basic taboos of the region related to its plantation past, i. e., *incest* and *miscegenation*. The former, practised in the white South under the guise of close brother-sister, father/mother-daughter/son, or first cousin relationships, under the conditions of slavery surfaced on the crossroads of races and generations in the shape of the so-called *shadow families*, which emerged as a result of miscegenation. Those proliferated on Southern plantations, especially after the abolition of slave trade in 1808, with numerous mixed race children fathered by white planters, or/and their sons and male cousins, originally for economic reasons i. e., to be exploited as a free workforce. Not infrequently, they were born to the mixed race female children of the white perpetrators through rape, or enforced prostitution. This phenomenon was conveniently "sanctioned" by contemporary slave laws issued in support of the plantation economy after 1808 (Williamson 1993: 28, 99, 385–388; 1980: 55–56).

Chapter 1 in Part One, titled "The 'Pearl Effect' of the Collective Amnesia of the South: Sisters, Brothers, and Fathers in Southern American Fiction," focuses on the very issue of brother-sister relationships as denegatively represented in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Sound and the Fury*, and aestheticized in Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Fall of the House of Usher," Ellen Glasgow's "Jordan's End," and Peter Taylor's "Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time." The term "*pearl effect*," coined by Joel Williamson (1993: 402), is applied in the chapter to describe the *collective amnesia* of the South with regard to its two main taboos of *incest* and *miscegenation*. The term itself refers to a handy mechanism of veiling over the truth about the region so as to prevent it ever from becoming

6 Halbwachs believes in the continuity of collective memory, including the ethnic one (78–84) for, as he claims, "there is no universal memory. Every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time" (Rossington & Whitehead 143).

7 In "The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious" (1966), Lacan points to the arbitrary relationship within the Saussurean distinction between the Signifier and the signified, *Signifiant* and *signifié*, the word and the object in the real world that it refers to, stressing the domination of the former over the latter, which surfaces in its uppercasing in the formula S/s.

exposed either by an insider (e. g., Tom Bascomb in Taylor's tale), or an outsider (e. g., the narrator in Poe's and the doctor in Glasgow's). Just as a pearl is formed out of an irritant which, in time, acquires a smooth and shapely surface to become aesthetically appealing, all social, or/and moral taboos of the South with time underwent the process of aestheticization, which is rendered through artistic representation in Poe's and Taylor's short stories in question. Alternatively, those taboos became socially, and, in effect, morally, absorbed into and appropriated by the hermetic Southern milieu through its "doing pretty" practice of keeping up appearances, as becomes apparent from Glasgow's story. By thus 'legitimizing' the taboo practices, this process secured their integration into the 'morality,' or rather immorality, of the mainstream of the region, i. e., the white Southern male, whose interest had invariably lain in the preservation of the historical *status quo* of the ante- and early post-bellum Southern reality, as shown by Faulkner and Glasgow.

Elaborating further on the topic, Chapter 2, titled "The Southern White Collective Subconscious: From William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* to Cormac McCarthy's *Outer Dark*," attempts to expose the "pearl effect" in relation to the two intertextually considered Southern novels featuring *incest*. Almost half a century after Faulkner, McCarthy gives voice to what must have appeared "unspeakable" in Faulkner's South, i. e., the truth not so much about incest itself as about its tangible consequences in the shape of *incestuous progeny*. The presence of the same in Faulkner's fiction surfaces denegatively, i. e., through its oxymoronic absence, which is why, or—shall we say—despite which, it has hitherto remained largely 'invisible' in Faulkner criticism, the issues of the actual fatherhood of Caddy's daughter Quentin IV, or the paternity of Mrs. Compson's two sons Benjy and Jason, having been virtually turned a blind eye on. By contrast, Cormac McCarthy's *Outer Dark* physically features incestuous progeny in the shape of the nameless Holmes baby, only, however, to symbolically annihilate it through paternal cannibalization, which functions in McCarthy's novel as a pertinent, albeit shocking, metaphor for incest in general—and one between a brother and a sister in the white ante- and early post-bellum South in particular—chiefly, as becomes apparent in the light of *Absalom, Absalom!* discussed in Chapter 1 of Part One—as a safeguard against miscegenation in the name of the region's racial purity.

In both chapters, the combined contextual and the intertextual approach to Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and McCarthy's *Outer Dark* (1968), as read against both *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) and the three Southern short stories, helps to shed light on the essence, causes and consequences of the *collective amnesia* of the white South with regard to *incest* and *miscegenation*. In the light of McCarthy's novel, the South can be said to have "cannibalized" its incestuous white progeny morally and ideologically, which is denegatively rendered in

Faulkner through Benjy's idiocy and Quentin IV's father- and motherlessness, while in McCarthy, reductively, through the anonymity and then cannibalization of the Holmes baby. Hence, in both cases the existence of incestuous progeny is somehow denied, often *in blackface*, and thus rendered 'invisible' by the white Southern *patriarchy*.

As seen from both chapters of Part One, an analogical policy of denial and obliteration on the part of the white Southern patriarchy applies to their attitude to *gender*, which, paradoxically, damns their idealized Southern *belles* (Mrs. Compson and Caddy in Faulkner; Rinthy Holmes in McCarthy)—more often than not the most likely victims of their own incestuous practices—to the stigma of prostitution, promiscuity, familial and social ostracism, or downright annihilation. This phenomenon backfired in familial ingrownness and eventual extinction (the Ushers in Poe; the Dorsets in Taylor), or genetic and moral degeneration (the Jordans in Glasgow; the Compsons in Faulkner). In this context, a relegation by the white South of both of its taboos (of incest and miscegenation) to the *collective subconscious*, or committing them to collective amnesia, may be likened to an attempt at a programmatic ideological "cannibalization" of Southern memory. However, as shown by Maurice Halbwachs's theory about the continuity of the collective memory of a specific cultural or ethnic group (1950: 78–84), such an act of manipulation applied to collective memory is inevitably doomed to failure.

Part Two of the book, titled "Sin and Redemption: Southern White and African American Patriarchies," continues the *patriarchal* topic of Part One with its application to both the white Southern milieu, in Cormac McCarthy's *Suttree* in Chapter 3, and the African American one, in Toni Morrison's *Love* in Chapter 4. Both chapters demonstrate how, ironically, if not downright tragically, the pathological behavioral patterns that had been over generations perpetrated by the white Southern males in the role of oppressors backfired in the post-bellum and later African American communities, where they are not uncommon even today, through their encoding in the collective memories of the African American patriarchy as a self-destructive post-colonial, and often gender-oriented, legacy, which involves *intra-racism*, *pedophilia*, and *gender-related abuse*. Hence, in the absence of the former oppressor, their perversities and destructive behavioral patterns begin to take a long-term *re-colonizing* toll of self-directed oppression.

Chapter 3, titled "Demythologizing the South: McCarthy's *Suttree* v. Faulkner's *Sutpen*," constitutes a combined intertextual and comparative approach to McCarthy's eponymous novel in relation to William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, with the latter's *Light in August* and *The Sound and the Fury* as well as Ellen Glasgow's short story "Jordan's End," as points of reference. The chapter demonstrates Cormac McCarthy's attempt at *demythologizing* the South in *Suttree* (1979), complete with "doing pretty," *incest*, and fear of *miscegenation*, in

which he proposes a procedure reverse to *myth-making* presented in his other novel *Blood Meridian* (1985), discussed in the last chapter of this volume. In debunking the myth of the aristocratic South, McCarthy defamiliarizes it by suggesting a moral alternative in the form of its downtrodden *Others*, i. e., the poor white and the African American Souths, whose authenticity, liveliness, and empathy defy the affectation, lifelessness and decadence of Southern aristocracy.

Chapter 4 in Part Two, titled “‘But it’s not love’: Collective Memory and Patriarchy in William Faulkner and Toni Morrison,” focuses on the African American *patriarchy*’s post-colonial emulation of the white patriarchal practices by intertextually pitting Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) against Morrison’s *Love* (2003). This comparison demonstrates how the familial collective memory, or rather the collective amnesia of the white patriarchal South concerning their taboo practices of *incest* and *pedophilia*, rebounds in the form of the re-colonized African American patriarchal mentality of Bill Cosey, where the one-time victim perpetrates the degenerate sexual practices of his former oppressors in his own family, the scapegoat remaining what it used to be in both cases, i. e., *gender*, in the shape of the African American female (cf. (H)/hooks 2001: 59). It is on this point that the critical approach presented in this volume differs from the usual criticism of *Love*, which tends to highlight the issues of race, social position and power as the book’s main themes to the detriment of the mental *re-colonization* of African American patriarchy, particularly with regard to *pedophilia*. And this, ironically, against the grain of the *collective memory* of the white South, which has invariably ascribed sexual perversity to a black-skinned culprit, no matter the facts or the truth of the matter. Apparently, it is Morrison’s “signification” on Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* in *Love* that deliberately camouflages the theme of *pedophilia* in her novel, as if in her actual anticipation of the book’s bland critical reception, but, in truth, with the view to eventually exposing and compromising black *pedophilia*, even if ‘sanctioned’ by slavery or African American marriage, the subject that Faulkner himself could never spell out in his times.

This “conspiracy of silence” in matters of incest and *pedophilia*, whether in Faulkner or Morrison’s novel or criticism, which is discussed in this chapter, is apparently related to the fact that both Cosey and Sutpen belong to the elite of *power* and *money*, even if the former is an African American while the latter, originally, a poor white risen to the ranks of Southern aristocracy whether by hook or by crook. The fact is that both use their wealth and social position to ruthlessly exercise gender- and child-related abuse.

Just as sin in both Faulkner and Morrison involves *corruptio optimi*, redemption entails a prevention of the same. Thus, what saves Cosey’s apparent great-granddaughter Viviane and Sutpen’s great-grandson, the mixed race idiot boy Jim Bond, from falling victim to patriarchy—whether African American or white, respectively—is, paradoxically, juvenile delinquency and homelessness in

the former case, and idiocy and racial impurity in the latter. Entailing social/familial, or mental/racial absence, a sort of *tabula rasa* state, both situations, respectively, mark the characters' denegative freedom from/ignorance of the damning ancestral legacies of their pathological families, which, incidentally, by virtue of the mental re-colonization of the African American patriarchy in an act of their subconscious internalization of white supremacy, is mistakenly perceived and adopted by them as a mark of status and prestige. The said absence functions as a simulacrum of the *collective amnesia* of white Southern patriarchy about incest and pedophilia, which, paradoxically saves the innocents in both novels from *corruptio optimi*.

Part Three of the book, titled "Intra-Racial Indenture and Slavery v. Gender and Race Empowerment," explores the little known colonial phenomenon of same-race indentured servitude in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* (2008) and *intra-racial slavery* practiced by free slaves on the eve of the Civil War in Edward P. Jones's *The Known World* (2003), where it is thus related to the issues of *power* and *wealth* rather than race or skin color, as opposed to Toni Morrison's *Love* in Part Two. Part Three combines, parallels, and juxtaposes the white colonial and ante-bellum African American milieux and their respective collective memories as well as the issues of enslavement and freedom, adding the Native American context to the bargain in *A Mercy*, while recapitulating the topics of *patriarchy*, *gender-related abuse*, and the mental *re-colonization* of the African American figure. It likewise introduces the redeeming notion of the female *empowerment*, or, in other words, the empowerment of *otherness*, the issue which will be continued in the subsequent section of the volume.

Chapter 5, titled "A Re-Invention of Self v. Collective Memory in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*," demonstrates how *collective memory* can become an impulse for *self-invention* and thus *empowerment* for the victimized female representatives of three races—white, African American, and Native American (respectively represented in the novel by Sorrow, Florens, and Lina)—who are in reality enslaved by remaining under the alleged 'protection,' as the official colonial nomenclature had it, i. e., in *indentured servitude* to a Dutch settler Vaark, who, not so long before, because of abject poverty, himself required such 'protection' back on the Old Continent. With his death, his 'women' are dangerously (as stressed by Morrison) deprived of his 'protection' although simultaneously set free to assume responsibility for themselves against the grain of the then patriarchal European ideology, which had cast them the role of slaves for life. However, such a *re-invention of self* is, ironically, denied to their hitherto white male 'protectors,' chiefly on account of their self-imposed enslavement by their own collective memory of white colonizers. Among others, this memory surfaces in their hypocrisy in calling indentured servitude euphemistically 'protection' rather than by its proper name of slavery, both in relation to their 'female servants'—irre-

spective of race—and their own women enslaved by fears of the loss of such ‘protection’ either through widowhood or religious non-conformity (Rebekka Vaark). In the end, it is the African American mother of the girl called Florens that defies the collective victim memory of her *race* and *gender* with the idea of self-invention in warning her daughter against the dangers of “giv[ing] dominion of [herself] to another” (Morrison 2008: 165).

Chapter 6 of Part Three, entitled “Southern Harlequinade and ‘the Signifying Monkey’: *The (Un-)Known World* of Edward P. Jones,” shows how African American collective memory acquires a grotesque form by becoming its own denial, or how it takes the form of “signifying” aimed at facing the shameful truth about itself. This happens when the *collective memory* of the white ante-bellum South becomes appropriated and internalized by its African American ‘victim’ Henry Townsend, as it was by Bill Cosey in Toni Morrison’s *Love* in Part Two. Freshly freed from slavery through his own parents’ sacrifice, the former himself becomes their owner, slave trader, and a victimizer—an extreme but not at all a rare Southern phenomenon in the ante-bellum South, which was tantamount to assuming ‘protection’ over, or rather ownership of, another, as is the case in Toni Morrison’s *A Mercy* in the previous chapter. In Jones’s novel, both the mental *re-colonization* of the African American male figure, exemplified in Henry Townsend, and the subsequent *decolonization* of the collective African American female memory regarding *gender*-related abuse through the *trickstery* of the allegedly “loony” slave-artist Alice, take the form of “signifying,” which is meant to subvert the opinion of African Americans about their status as solely victims of slavery, and solely the victims of the white South, as is the case of Henry Townsend (cf. Gates, Jr. 1987: 240).

In the opinion of Henry Louis Gates, Jr., it is not only African American mentality but also literature and literary criticism that should be subjected to such decolonization through *black aesthetics* originating in the ethnic *orality* of the African American culture, the fact which, in the first place, has led the West to perceiving it as primitive and its followers as non-human—the perspective that became an inseparable aspect of both the European and American collective white memories well into the 20th century. The issue of the *orality* of ethnic cultures as opposed to the *literacy* of the Western world finds its continuation in Parts Six and Seven of the present study.

The mental decolonization of the former slaves spoken of in *The Known World*, i. e., the truly *UNknown world* of Jones, also applies to the issue of the African Americans’ perception of themselves, which should aim at erasing from their collective memory the binary opposition between their culture and the white mainstream American one, where, in the opinion of Toni Morrison, theirs would be structured as the negative of the former, i. e., worthless, immoral, ugly, and primitive (PD 52).

Part Four of the book, titled “Race(lessness) and Gender: ‘Miscuing’ and ‘Signifying,’” which consists of three chapters, hinges on and continues the topics of the previous chapters, i. e., *patriarchy*, *gender*, *pedophilia*, *miscegenation* and mental *re-colonization* as well as introducing the themes of the *criminalization* of *gender* in Chapter 7 and *race* in Chapter 8, by focusing on those two arbitrary categories as markers of identity which generate *otherness*. As such, *otherness* functions in the *collective memories* of both the white and the African American Souths as stereotyping which organizes reality on both the ideological and linguistic levels by holding sway over it even to the point of destruction (cf. Lacan 1977: 148, 158). Part Four likewise continues the motif of “*signification*” introduced in the previous chapter in relation to Jones’s narrative method in *The Known World*, as also Faulkner’s and Morrison’s narrative techniques in *Light in August* and *Paradise*, respectively, discussed in this section. In Faulkner’s case, this narrative technique, apparently deriving from the ethnic *orality* of the African American culture, as claimed by Gates (cf. Chapter 6), takes the form of *denegation*, while in Toni Morrison’s of “*miscuing*,”⁸ both oxymoronic techniques amounting to two aspects of the same kind of narrativity, which, in both novels discussed in Part Four serves to ridicule the very category of *otherness* by reducing it to absurdity.

Chapter 7 of Part Four, titled “‘Playing in the Dark’ of Race and Gender in Toni Morrison’s *Paradise*,” focuses on a contextual reading of Toni Morrison’s 1997 novel against her famous critical essay *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), which reveals the phenomenon of *gender invisibility* in contemporary America, irrespective of the color of skin, the phenomenon analogical to race ‘invisibility’ in mainstream white American literature that Morrison criticizes in the said essay. Hence, in *Paradise* it is *gender* rather than *race* that functions as a mark of *otherness*, which leads to a witch-hunting tragedy in the WASP style, this time in an all-black town of Ruby ruled by warring fractions of differently hued African American inhabitants of the town. Morrison’s technique of “*miscuing*” allows her to put an equation mark between *malelessness* and *racelessness*, or between the absence of racial markers among the all-female “Convent” inmates in the book and the absence there of the *patriarchate*. Likewise, in Ruby, the color of skin remains solely an arbitrary marker of identity so long as it does not coincide with gender. Ironically, it is the latter category that, as demonstrated by Morrison, launches the most hideous and destructive process of *gender stereotyping*, carrying it to the point of *gender criminalization*, which builds on the convergence of the appropriated *collective*

8 “Miscuing” is described by D. E. McDowell as “disappointing the very expectations the narrative arouses, forcing the reader to shift gears, to change perspective” (85).

WASP *memory* of the one-time colonizers (Salem) and that of the formerly colonized (slavery) in the shape of African American *patriarchy*.

In Chapter 8, titled “Collective Memory and Stereotyping in Faulkner’s *Light in August* and Morrison’s *Paradise*,” an intertextual consideration of both novels reveals Faulkner’s denegatively camouflaged message that the action of his novel, as much as that of Morrison’s, takes place in a racially homogeneous milieu, albeit, by an “obverse reflection” (Faulkner 1929: 106) in relation to Morrison’s, i. e., almost exclusively in the white South (excepting a few episodic figures). Hence Joe Christmas’s alleged *otherness*—the fact likewise confirmed by his outward whiteness—for which he is lynched and castrated, is only seemingly race-related. This does not change the fact that his innocence as regards the murder of Joanna Burden remains as much in the sphere of ‘*invisibility*’—both in the white South and in literary criticism—as does his actual white identity despite Faulkner’s efforts to remove the odium of a murderer from his name by making him into a Christ figure. What, likewise, remains ‘invisible’ in both *Light in August* and the book’s criticism is the true identity of Joanna Burden’s murderer, who, as I am trying to prove in this chapter, is in fact another Joe—not Christmas but Brown. However, the latter’s guilt as the culprit remains hidden under his ‘proper’ skin color although not necessarily under his denegatively structured surname—which, ironically, serves to confirm the Southern stereotype: black, therefore criminal. The very fact that Faulkner’s denegative construct of Christmas has been so consistently taken at face value by his critics for over the eighty years since the publication of the novel only proves the truth of what he must have foreseen himself—that racial stereotyping dies hard, the denial of which fact only serves to confirm the *collective amnesia* in matters of race not only in the American South.

Furthermore, intertextuality applied to *Paradise* and *Light in August* brings forth in the latter novel what constitutes the main focus of the former, i. e., the *invisibility of gender*, the issue largely ignored in Faulkner’s time—although not necessarily by the writer himself—considering his presentations of his white female characters (Milly Jones, Lena Grove, Joanna Burden and Mrs. Hines). Finally, an intertextual approach to both novels demonstrates that Faulkner’s oxymoronic method of writing, in which he *denegatively* asserts presence by absence, and vice versa, is akin to African American “*signifying*.” In other words, the way in which he chooses to camouflage Christmas’s racial identity, the identity of the true murderer of Joanna Burden as well as the “*invisibility*” of gender appears to be tantamount to African American *trickstery*, whose aim is to deliberately mislead the reader, and the critic alike, with the view to making them reflect on the nature of their own prejudices.

Chapter 9 of Part Four, titled “A Dissolution of *Otherness* in Toni Morrison’s Last Novel *God Help the Child*,” is devoted to the author’s 2015 novel focusing,

somewhat perversely, on the arbitrariness of temporal, epistemological, moral and racial divides, and thus invalidating the very notion of *otherness*. By a dexterous merger of binary oppositions, Toni Morrison makes binariness as such—an ideological construct of the white mainstream culture—appear artificial. Thus, in her novel, childhood merges with adulthood through the traumas of *pedophilia* that live on; touch with no touch as the evil touch of a parent equals an abhorrence of touching the child *Other*; truth becomes identical to a lie when it proves as destructive as lying in good faith; *miscegenation* becomes invalid as passing blackness blends with blue blackness when the former conceives the latter; and, finally, appearances merge with reality in the ironic title of the book, which smacks of both *pedophilia* and *gender*-related abuse. Taking an utterly holistic, and thus redeeming, view of the nature of things, Morrison seems to suggest that borderlines are a consequence and a manifestation of a lack of balance, which therefore needs to be redressed through love, mutual understanding, and maturation. By referring to the recently sprung social movement of *Me Too*, the chapter expands on the previously raised issue of *pedophilia* and anticipates the theme of *black motherhood* signaled in the previous chapter and continued in the subsequent one.

Part Five, titled “Collective Memory and Trauma: African American Femininity and Motherhood,” intertextualizes the traumatic *collective African American memory* of *thwarted maternity* as represented in William Faulkner’s *Requiem for a Nun* (1951) and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), while continuing the previously discussed issues of *racial*, *gender*- and *child*-related *abuse* and victimization as well as *decolonization*. Hinging on Toni Morrison’s previously discussed theory of the ideologically conditioned ‘*invisibility*’ of *race*, and the ‘*invisibility*’ of *gender* irrespective of the color of skin, as exemplified in Chapter 7 of Part Four by Toni Morrison’s *Paradise* and Chapter 8 in relation to William Faulkner’s *Light in August*, Part Five adds the notion of the ‘*invisibility*’ of *black maternity* as shown by both writers. What is more, it adds another form of criminalization by the mainstream American culture to the heretofore discussed *criminalizations of race and gender*, i.e., the *criminalization of black motherhood*. It likewise continues the discussion of Faulkner’s and Morrison’s narrative techniques of “*signifying*” and “*miscuing*.”

Chapter 10, titled “Thwarted Black Maternity in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and Faulkner’s *Requiem for a Nun*,” demonstrates that the taboo issue of *black motherhood* could only come into its own and be fully dramatized four decades after Faulkner, with the heretofore unspoken truth, because largely “unspeakable” from either the perspective of the white mainstream American culture or the African American position of ‘*invisibility*,’ to which it had been reduced by the former. At long last, the “unspeakable” truth in the form of Middle Passage for the first time saw the light of the day in Morrison’s *Beloved*