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Seventh Children of America:

Trauma and Shame in Toni Morrison's

*Beloved* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*

Bachelor's Diploma Thesis

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*I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently,  
using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.*

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Author's signature

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## 1. Introduction

The paraphrase in the title of my thesis refers to the work of W. E. B. Du Bois, the African American scholar, sociologist and civil rights activist who fought for the equality of African Americans in the American society dominated by whites. In his book of essays *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois argues that “the history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self” (n. pag.). He further claims that “after the Egyptian and Indians, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world” (n. pag.). Racial inferiority, the focal point of Du Bois’ work, pervades also the work of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, two African American women writers whose works, *Beloved* (1987) and *The Color Purple* (1982), respectively, will be analysed in this thesis.

But race matters are not the only issue in the thesis, even though they provide the foundation for the main area of interest in this work – the occurrence of trauma to which the characters of the two novels are exposed, and consequences it has upon their lives. In the thesis I try to analyse the sources of trauma together with the effect it has not only upon its direct victim but also on those who are related to the traumatized person. I will argue that both writers agree on the power of human relationships as the most important for the healing process of the traumatized characters of their books. However, while Morrison highlights the power of the mother/daughter relationship, Walker centres her novel on the power of the female bonding.

Both Morrison and Walker, though contemporary writers, are already being considered classics among modern African American female writers; they have both received numerous literary awards, including the Pulitzer Prize (Walker in 1983, Morrison in 1988)

and, in the case of Toni Morrison, also the Nobel Prize for literature (1993). The rich narrative style of their writing brings to life the painful experience of abused, oppressed women who are searching for their place within the community; they masterfully capture the blending of one's past with present and with almost a psychoanalytic competence describe the tortuous path of traumatized persons towards their healing. This is not to say that Morrison's and Walker's work is focused solely on women; men have their irreplaceable position within their stories and, similarly to the female characters, also their male counterparts are bearers of traumatic and shameful experiences which further affect their lives.

My approach to the analysed books is mainly comparative. Although the novels deal with similar issues (oppression, abusive relationship, racial segregation, intra-racial violence), the plot of both books takes place in different periods (*Beloved* just after the American Civil War, *The Color Purple* in 1930s) and they also differ in the underlying causes of trauma and shame of the main characters. Whereas Sethe, the central character of *Beloved*, is deeply traumatized by the humiliation and sadistic physical violence she has experienced while enslaved, Celie, the main character of *The Color Purple*, is from an early age exposed to sexual abuse, violence and oppression first by a person she believed to be her father (Walker 3, 102), later by a man she is forced to marry (40, 71). Another difference is in an approach of both writers to the male characters of their books; it will be illustrated in my thesis that Walker, compared to Morrison, depicts the male characters in her novel in a much less favourable light.

Before I proceed to the analysis of the two novels and their focus on trauma and shame experienced by their characters, I find it useful to provide some psychiatric and psychoanalytical accounts of the impact of shame and trauma on the individual. In the theoretical part I will also touch upon the history of the slavery in the USA and will bring to the attention the race relationships in the South of the United States of the first half in the 20<sup>th</sup>

century when most of the states passed Jim Crow's laws. This historical and cultural background will help me expose the ubiquity of trauma and shame of African Americans in the USA which will be further examined through the fictional characters of both analysed novels.

### 1.1 "The Man on My Face is Dead": Brief Introduction to the History of Slavery

There will never be a time when I am not crouching ... the man on my face is dead ... Some who eat nasty themselves I do not eat the man without skin bring us their morning water to drink we have none ... small rats do not wait for us to sleep ... we are all trying to leave our bodies behind ... (Morrison, *Beloved* 248)

These terrifying words, spoken by Beloved, the mysterious girl whose existence is never really explained (it is not clear whether it is a ghost of Sethe's murdered daughter or an abused girl from a village nearby, who managed to run away) reflect the horrors of the Middle Passage that brought enslavement to the Americas. Encyclopaedia Britannica describes the conditions on the ships used for carrying slaves from Africa across the Atlantic as so atrocious and appalling that "on average twenty per-cent of slaves died during the voyage" (Middle Passage). Millions of Africans were forced to make this journey across the Atlantic; a journey which on average took from one to three months (Middle Passage). Valuable information can be also find in the slave narratives of those who survived those journeys, such as Olaudah Equiano (c. 1745 – 1797), a former slave who later purchased his freedom and became active in the movement for the abolition of the slave trade. His words correspond with Beloved's feverish description of the dreadful experience while helping to decode her puzzling utterance: "I had never seen among any people such instances of brutal cruelty ... The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate ... brought on a sickness among the

slaves, of which many died ... The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable” (n. pag.).

First ship laden with Africans arrived at the Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619 where they were considered indentured servants, not yet slaves (Takaki 54). In 1661 the slavery became institutionalized by law and “eight years later the Virginia legislature defined a slave as a property, a part of the owner’s ‘estate’” (Takaki 56). The slave master had an absolute control over the slave life; the slave was a piece of property which could be bought and sold like an animal. The slave was allowed no stable family life. Forced fragmentation of slave families is reflected in *Beloved* several times and as will be argued later in the thesis, the destruction of family bonding is one the most serious sources of psychological trauma, together with physical and psychological humiliation and abuse caused by whipping, gagging, branding, dismembering or raping. Slave owner was even allowed to kill a slave, as is documented in the autobiography of Frederick Douglass (c.1818 – 1895), a former slave and one of the most eminent human rights leaders:

The wife of Mr. Giles Hicks, living but a short distance from where I used to live, murdered my wife's cousin, a young girl between fifteen and sixteen years of age, mangling her person in the most horrible manner, breaking her nose and breastbone with a stick, so that the poor girl expired in a few hours afterward. ...It was a common saying, even among little white boys, that it was worth a half-cent to kill a “nigger”, and a half-cent to bury one (n. pag.).

It took another 250 years before, in 1865, slavery was formally outlawed in the United States by the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. But even after the abolition the white population demanded racial segregation in all public facilities and held itself superior in all aspects of social, cultural and political life. Their attitude was supported by

local and state laws which “openly eschewed the rule of law in favour of white supremacy ... treating blacks as unworthy of legal protection” (Godsil), known as Jim Crow’s laws.

Trauma caused by slavery plays an essential role in Morrison’s *Beloved*; it is the haunting memories of horrors experienced while enslaved what leads Sethe’s hand when cutting the throat of her baby daughter. The racial segregation during the Jim Crow era forms the background of Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*: it caused the death of Celie’s biological father and it is behind the ruined life of Sophia. Before providing an analysis of representation of shame and trauma in Morrison’s and Walker’s fictions, it is useful to start with general psychiatric and psychoanalytic accounts of the impact of shame and trauma on an individual as well as on a community.

## **1.2 Trauma and Shame as Factors Affecting Human Behaviour**

Paul Valent, one of the pioneers in the treatment of trauma, has described trauma as “the nemesis of our lives. Sometimes it swamps us; at other times it haunts us. It is the fracture that stops us from running as we would wish. The word trauma comes from the Greek word meaning wound, or penetration as in stabbing. Technically, the penetration can range from minor to lethal, but it always leaves a scar and a vulnerability” (Valent qtd. in Alexander 3). As described by Judith Herman, a psychiatrist who specializes in traumatic stress, a trauma can be either “acute”, caused by a single event, or “chronicle”, developed in a response to a prolonged or repeated immense suffering (23). Among the common responses to the event which is too distressing to bear is the state of the so-called “double consciousness” (Herman 24), when the distressing event has been banished from memory. Herman further observes that “traumatic symptoms have a tendency to become disconnected from their source and to take on a life of their own (25). Traumatic symptoms are divided into three categories by Herman: “hyperarousal”, “intrusion”, and “constriction”: “Hyperarousal category reflects the persistent expectation of danger; intrusion reflects the indelible imprint of the traumatic

moment; constriction reflects the numbing response of surrender” (25). Traumatized persons sustain a damage to the basic structure of the very self; they lose trust in themselves, in other people, as well as in the surrounding world and their assumptions of love, kindness, morality and values; their very identity is disrupted (Herman 25-26). Herman’s observations are reflected in Walker’s description of Celie at the beginning of the story, when traumatized Celie feels “too tired to think” (Walker 18). Her paralysed submission is further illustrated in her reply to her younger sister Netie, who tries to encourage her to stand up for herself: “but I don’t know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive” (18). Referring to Herman’s categorization of traumatic symptoms, Celie at this stage falls into the “constriction” category. Similar symptoms can be identified also in Sethe, in *Beloved*, while “the persistent expectation of danger”, which defines the “hyperarousal” category, quite aptly captures the behaviour of Sethe’s daughter, Denver. More detailed description of the traumatic symptoms of the characters mentioned above will be provided in the following chapters of my thesis.

When the traumatized event concerns the whole community, as is the case of war, the Holocaust or slavery, the reaction to a traumatic injury differs. According to Alexander, the collective tends to “construct symbolic constructions and framing” around it and move along from there, while creating stories and characters (3). However, the scars, engraved by pain and suffering of individuals, sustain, “marking their [collective] memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander 3). Thus socio-historical trauma of African Americans, origins of which stems from the five-hundred-year old history of slave trade and the resulting consequences, has created a racial divide between Blacks and Whites and remains unsettled until now. As Toni Morrison observes in her essay “The Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation”, the racial issues “continue to haunt African Americans in the race divided society where race still matters” (Morrison, “The Rootedness”).

While trauma and its consequent impact on individuals as well as collective has been widely recognized by professionals in the field of psychology, psychiatry or psychotherapy, as well as by literary scholars, it has been observed by Adamson and Clarke that the significance of shame was somewhat neglected (vii). While on one hand they refer to shame as to a “central human emotion” (1), they are also aware that the tendency to deny the emotions any real significance in our understanding of the world is, to a certain extent, still deeply rooted in our culture: “[T]he ideology of science has for the most part tended to disregard and undervalue both the affective and the imaginative dimensions of human experience. The serious study of the imaginative realm is often dismissed as antiobjective and antirealistic” (2). Nevertheless, Adamson and Clark claim that the situation is changing and this powerful emotion is beginning to receive the attention it deserves. The imaginative world of literature, with its metaphors and symbolic language, offers an “acute insight into inner reality” (Adamson and Clarke 1), thus providing the perfect evidence for understanding psychological reality; an evidence which would be hard to gather by other means. And it works in both directions; scientific and psychoanalytic understanding of the affective reality enhances our understanding of literature.

When trying to come up with the clear definition of shame, Adamson and Clarke refer to the work of such a great philosophers as Sartre and Lacan, who perceive shame as “negative affect central to defining experience of objective self-awareness, involving the alienation of self through a paralyzing self-consciousness in relation to the other” (Adamson and Clarke 8). Quite large space in Adamson and Clarke’s work is also dedicated to the question of distinction between shame and guilt (22-23), emotions which, by some philosophers, for example Ruth Benedict, are regarded as distinctively different while others, for example Silvan Tomkins, see them as almost identical: “One and the same person often experiences these two emotions at the same time, and they would seem to have very close

relationship; the person who has committed the ‘sin’ is very frequently ashamed of what he has done” (Tomkins qtd. in Adamson and Clarke 23).

Shame affects are particularly relevant when focused on the question of race, gender, or on any kind of social injustice or inequalities of power, thus in situations when a person, or a group of people, feels insecure or even inferior. These are topics which are central to the books I analyse. The following chapters of my work will focus on the traumatic experiences of the fictional characters of *Beloved* and *The Color Purple*, caused by racial inferiority, abusive partnership or black-on-black violence. I compare the importance of the parental bonding, especially the mother / daughter relationship, which is the main theme of *Beloved*, to the power of female solidarity as it is stressed in *The Color Purple*. I will argue that both writers see the power of the community as the most important for the healing process of their characters to help them to find their personal strength and free themselves from the oppression which is casted upon them either by the abusive partners, their own traumatized self or deeply patriarchal and racist society.

## **2. Her Story**

Right from the very beginning, the readers of Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* are thrown into the house which is haunted by a ghost. There are only two other inhabitants to this house, Sethe and her daughter, Denver. Step by step, Morrison unfolds a multi-layered story full of pain and suffering the roots of which are wedged at the racist oppression experienced by African Americans during slavery. Depicting the degradation and trauma to which African Americans were exposed, she also emphasizes the consequences of such experiences upon its victims, at the centre of which is Sethe's murderous assault on her children. Olivia McNeely Pass compares the structure of Morrison's novel to the way people usually react when learning to accept a death of a beloved person, or even their own death. McNeely Pass bases her theory on the findings of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, a physician who studied terminally ill patients and who claims that "there are five stages that a person goes through while learning to accept his or her death: Denial and Isolation, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance" (Kubler-Ross qtd. in McNeely Pass). While Sethe's emotional involvement, especially the way she is trying to deal with the death of her baby daughter, corresponds with this theory, I disagree with McNeely Pass upon the last stage, the acceptance. As I will argue in the following chapter, contrary to McNeely Pass I do not perceive Sethe as a healed person who learns to accept the death of her daughter but rather as someone who is defeated by traumatized self and guilty consciousness.

### **2.1. Sethe**

Central to the story, Sethe is a former slave who manages to escape from slavery only to become the prisoner of her own traumatized memories and guilty conscience, stemming from the horrified experiences of slavery which leads her to the killing of her infant daughter. Though freed from the prison, the community avoids her, rejecting both the fierceness of the killing as well as her seeming pride and lack of fear. The isolation which has been casted

upon her by the surrounding community is shared by Denver, the only one of her four children who has stayed with her, and by the ghost who both women believe to be the spirit of the daughter Sethe killed. Terrorised by the mischievous ghost, Sethe patiently accepts its attacks, taking its rage upon her as the instigator of its premature, violent death. It is only upon the arrival of Paul D that she starts to hope that there could be a better future waiting for her.

Morrison found the inspiration for Sethe in Margaret Garner, a fugitive slave who, in the winter of 1856, ran, together with almost twenty other slaves, from border counties of Kentucky in hope of reaching Cincinnati, Ohio, which was a “geographical location and its efficient abolitionist organization made it a main starting point on the Underground Railroad”, reports Julius Yanuck in his article “The Garner Fugitive Slave Case”. Yanuck explains that not to raise an unwanted attention by its large number, the group divided into two smaller parts; one band consequently managed to reach Canada. The other group, which consisted of members of Garner’s family, had been, however, betrayed and the slave-owners came to collect them, recalling the Fugitive Slave Law. Margaret Garner, apparently after realising that nothing could save them from capture, reached for a butcher knife, slicing the throat of her three year old daughter. After that she turned against other three of her children but was disarmed before she could seriously injure them. Upon being arrested she was heard to say “...that she would rather kill every one of her children than have them taken back across the river” (Yanuck). The trial which followed

... precipitated a controversy between the national government and the state of Ohio. ... but the Garner case had yet another meaning for the nation. It demonstrated forcefully the deep personal tragedy of slavery. The way Margaret Garner’s little daughter died embarrassed the South and disturbed the North more than a hundred arguments of antislavery philosophers. (Yanuck)

Despite the many similarities between Sethe and Margaret Garner (they were both pregnant during their attempt to escape; they both reached Cincinnati in Ohio, they had four children), Morrison did not wish to mirror the life story of Margaret Garner. In the foreword to *Beloved*, Morrison explains:

The historical Margaret Garner is fascinating, but, to a novelist, confining. Too little imaginative space there for my purposes. So I would invent her thoughts, plumb them for a subtext that was historically true in essence, but not strictly factual in order to relate her history to contemporary issues about freedom, responsibility, and women's 'place' (Morrison, *Beloved* XI)

Thus, upon real foundation, Morrison builds an imaginative drama of the heroine who "would represent the unapologetic acceptance of shame and terror; assume the consequences of choosing infanticide; claim her own freedom" (Morrison, *Beloved* XI) .

Eighteen years after the infanticide, Sethe lives her isolated life, trying hard to keep the painful and disturbing memories away. Fighting a battle she cannot win, "she [Sethe] remains haunted by her traumatic and humiliated memories" (Bouson 135). After the arrival of Paul D, the past comes alive with yet greater intensity. Little by little she reveals her traumatic and shameful experiences aloud to him. Upon Sethe's life story Morrison brings the torturous and degrading life of the African American slaves closer to the readers' eyes, exposing the "white supremacist ideology" during the slave era (Bouson 131). This perceived the African American slaves as inferior creatures with animalistic features and habits (Bouson 131). Thus the reader learns about the horrors of Sethe's childhood: born into the slavery to the mother she only saw once or twice as she (her mother) was not allowed to take care of her child except for the first two or three weeks of Sethe's life (Morrison, *Beloved* 72). There is not much we get to know about Sethe's mother, except that she is forced to work extremely hard: "By the time I woke up in the morning, she was in line. If the moon was bright they

worked by its light" (72). She has a mark burnt on her skin, a mark slave-owners used to brand their property; same system they used for cattle. And then one day she is hung; for reason Sethe never finds out. Later Sethe learns that she is not the only child her mother had had, having been repeatedly raped by whites. But she is the only one her mother did not throw away: "She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names, she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him" (74). Sethe's mother is not the only one who refuses to nurse the children which are the consequences of rape; Morrison brings the attention to it once more, in Ella, one of the "coloured women" in Cincinnati who comes to Sethe final rescue (304): "She [Ella] had delivered but would not nurse a hairy white thing, fathered by the 'lowest yet'. It lived five days never making a sound." (305). Together with lynching, branding or even killing, raping was yet another common example of a "dirtying power of racist representation" (Bousoin 131), often times serving as a means of reproduction, or, as pointed out by Bousoin: "to the slaveholders the slaves ... had the advantage of reproducing without cost" (Bousoin 131). To the African American slave women, the renunciation of children born as a result of rape was an act of resistance against the dirtying humiliation; to the apologist of slavery it was evidence to their belief that African American slave-mothers were primitive, with no real attachment to their children.

## **2.2 Family Values in *Beloved* and *The Color Purple***

Morrison, as well as Walker, emphasizes the importance of family values, while at the same time they confront the reader with the consequences of absent parenting or sexual violation executed within a family. The direct influence of the nuclear family upon the development of an individual is confirmed by Hermann: "A secure sense of connection with caring people is the foundation of personality development. When this connection is

shattered, the traumatized person loses her basic sense of self” (38). Herman further argues that “the traumatic event destroys the belief that one can be oneself in relation to others. Unsatisfactory resolution of the normal developmental conflicts over autonomy leaves the person prone to shame and doubt” (38). Herman’s observations are mirrored in the fictional characters of both books; all of them have been exposed to traumatic experiences since an early age. Both Sethe and Celie lose their mothers; they are exposed to the “double victimisation” being black and being females (Pellicer-Ortín and Andermahr 98). In the following paragraphs I will argue that whilst *Beloved* highlights the importance of the mother/children relationship, in *The Color Purple* the parental issues and maternity as such are somewhat shadowed, while the emphasis is on the female bonding.

Since the age of thirteen, Celie has been the victim of sexual assaults, committed by her presumed father. In direct consequence to that she delivers two children which have been taken from her right after their birth (Walker 4). Her humiliation and violation does not stop even after the arranged marriage to Albert, a widowed father of four children. Only it is now her husband who abuses her, perceiving her only as a sexual object and as someone who is there to take care of his children, his house and his fields. The “patriarchal repression” of Celie (Tucker) is emphasized by silencing her: “[Y]ou better not never tell nobody but God. It’d kill your mammy” (Walker 3) were the words of the man she believed to be her father after raping her. Celie is not only silenced, she is also presented as someone not to be listened to: “She tell lies” (10) says Alphonso to Albert when handing her over to him. The purpose of this strange remark is explained by Tucker as an attempt to discredit Celie in case she would try to speak about the violation she was exposed to. It was mentioned before that one of the defensive reaction to a prolong suffering is the “double consciousness” (Herman 24), when victim tries to banish the traumatic experience form her memory. In Celie’s case this is reflected not only in her silencing but also in her inability to name her male oppressors; thus

she refers to Alphonso, the man she considers to be her father as “he” and to her husband, Albert, as “Mr –”. Tucker suggests that “naming is a means of having power”, and she further argues that “Celie needs to be able to name in order to establish selfhood”.

Thirteen is a significant landmark also in Sethe’s time-line; it is at this age that she arrives at the Sweet Home, a plantation in Kentucky. A year later she delivers her first child, but in contrast to Celie, Sethe’s children are not the result of rape, they are the consequence of a loving relationship. Contrary to the general practice mentioned above, which did not respect family ties among slaves and denied them the right to keep their children, for a short while Sethe is able to enjoy both; she gets the permission to marry a man she falls in love with and they are allowed to live together with their children (Morrison, *Beloved* 70). Her living conditions dramatically change after the death of the original owner of the plantation, Mr Garner. The absurdity of the name of the plantation, Sweet Home, is magnified under the sadistic and heavily racist views of its new supervisor, the schoolteacher. Sethe, pregnant with her fourth child, becomes a victim to cruel beating and repeated degradation and she, together with her husband and all other slaves from the plantation, decides to run away. Her three children, two boys and a baby girl who Sethe is still nursing, are sent to their grandmother, Baby Suggs, in advance. Unfortunately, the schoolteacher learns about their escape plan; in direct consequence to that, some of the men are killed, some chained. Sethe is the only one who manages to reach their pre-planned destination and reunites with Baby Suggs and her children, including her fourth child, Denver, born during the escape. Morrison depicts Sethe’s journey towards the liberty as a manifestation of her “fiercely protective mother love” (Bousoin 142), reflecting on a racial discourse which viewed slave women as “animalistic breeder women” (Bousoin 139) with no attachment to their children. Sethe is determined to reunite with her children despite her pregnancy and severely beaten body; she is fixated on the idea to nurse her baby-daughter with her own milk (Morrison, *Beloved* 97). Her strong

maternal instinct is exposed again when she recollects her feelings of pride and happiness after the reunion with her children to Paul D: “I was big, Paul D, and deep and wide and when I stretched out my arms all my children could get in between ... Looked like I loved em more after I got here” (190). When the schoolteacher comes to recollect Sethe and her children, she cannot bear the idea of putting her children through the same experience of racist oppression and humiliation she herself knows so well; her act reflects the conviction “That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn’t like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn’t think it up” (297). Herman describes the enormous and unexpected strength some people find when exposed to a traumatic event:

The ordinary human response to danger is a complex, integrated system of reactions, encompassing both body and mind. Threat initially arouses the sympathetic nervous system, causing the person in danger to feel an adrenalin rush and go into a state of alert. Threat also concentrates a person’s attention on the immediate situation. In addition, threat may alter ordinary perceptions: people in danger are often able to disregard hunger, fatigue, or pain. Finally, threat evokes intense feelings of fear and anger. ... They mobilize the threatened person for strenuous action ... (Hermann 24)

Overwhelmed with panic, Sethe attempts to kill all four of her children and before anyone can stop her, she slits the throat of her older daughter; an infant whose name we never learn; who remains to be called Beloved. For Sethe this act reflects the ultimate manifestation of her maternity love.

Contrary to the strong maternal love displayed by Sethe, Celie’s maternal instinct seems to be severely damaged. Impregnated twice by her presumed father when she herself is barely a teenager, she is deprived of her children shortly after their birth and for several years

she is not even sure whether her children are alive (Walker 4). Thus she keeps her maternal feelings buried, affected also by the non-existent relationship with her mother who “[e]very year ... she was pregnant, every year she became weaker and more mentally unstable, until ... she died” (158). Celie believes that it was “his [Alphonso’s] story [that] kilt her” (7). While the term “his story” may refer to the sexual assaults on Celie and their consequent denial to his wife, Tucker offers yet another explanation: “[A] reference to the fact that Celie’s mother, ill from excessive work and childbearing, has tried to fit the patriarchal script of the submissive wife with no voice and no power”. Significant is also the relationship between Celie and Mr-’s children which is exposed when Harpo, Mr-’s oldest son, wakes up in the middle of the night, scared by a nightmare which reminds him of a murder of his mother he was a witness of, and comes to Celie for consolation. Celie remains unmoved, admitting to herself: “I don’t feel nothing for them. Patting Harpo back not even like patting a dog. It more like patting another piece of wood ... Anyhow, they don’t love me neither, no matter how good I is” (Walker 30). Celie compares Harpo to a piece of wood, to an object instead of a human being, which symbolises the suppressed feelings of traumatised Celie who perceives herself also as an object, a tree, in an attempt to detach herself from the pain imposed on her by her abusive husband (Walker 23). While such depersonalization and lack of emotions are being considered as one of the traumatic reactions of persons overwhelmed by terror and helplessness (Herman 25), it also resembles the common practice in slavery times which perceived slaves as objects, a part of property, a medium of exchange. Pellicer-Ortín and Andermahr argue that “the abuse imposed by the white man on any black person (male and female) is thereby re-enacted by the black male on the black female” (99). This argument is supported by Tucker who points out that Celie is sexually abused by Alphonso as a substitute of her mother, later by Albert as a replacement of his dead wife, as well as his lover, Shug Avery. Moreover, she is given to Albert instead of her sister, Nettie, and she is handed over as

if she was an animal (Tucker). In accordance with the slavery analogy, Celie's detachment from Mr –'s children evokes also the previously mentioned resistance of slave women by rejecting the children born as a result of sexual exploitation and the rejection of the black nanny stereotype. Walker further develops this attitude in the character of Sophia, the Harpo's wife.

The complete opposite of Celie, Sophia is everything but submissive. Born to a family with a dominant father and six brothers and five sisters, she learns to approach the world as a battlefield. "All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. ... A girl child ain't safe in a family of men", she tells Celie after finding out that she advised Harpo to beat her (Walker 38). Sophia is unwilling to accept the subordinate role predetermined to women of that time and refuses to be dominated by anyone, whether it is her husband, or the white society. The price she pays for her rebellion is devastating. After she refuses to work as a maid of a white town's mayor, thus rejecting "the traditional racial role model projected onto African American women which dates back to the times of slavery – acting as the stereotypical black mammy from the plantation myth" (Pellicer-Ortín and Andermahr 101), the mayor slaps her, finding her refusal insulting. Sophia returns the blow in a result of which she ends up in prison, beaten so severely that some of the wounds are of permanent character (Walker 82). Her prison sentence is later changed into the long term servitude in the mayor's family; this servitude bears the symptoms of slavery, as Sophia is not allowed to leave the place for years (94-98). Crippled, deprived of her independence, of her family, Sophia silently fulfils her responsibilities around the house and assists in raising the mayor's children; her resistance is demonstrated by the contempt she holds the mayor's family in and by the cold detachment from the children she is supposed to look after. Years after her release from this servitude she tells to Eleanor Jane, mayor's daughter, who comes to visit Sophia with her little son, Raynolds Stanley: "No Ma'am ... I do not love Raynolds

Stanley Earl. ... I got my own troubles ... and when Raynolds Stanley grow up, he's gon be one of them" (239-241). Sophia's remark reflects not only her resistance against the members of mayor's family, but also the racial tensions of the American society.

The forcible separation of Celie and Sophia from their children evokes the disintegration of families in slavery times, which forbade marriages among slaves and separated family members by selling them away. This would probably happen also to Sethe and her children, had she not killed one of her daughters first, before she could have been taken from her by the schoolteacher. The following chapter of my thesis will concentrate on Denver, Sethe's surviving daughter and the only one who stayed with Sethe after everyone else left her.

### 3. “The Charmed Child”: an Analyses of Denver

In his book *Trauma: A Social Theory* Jeffrey Alexander specifies the basic needs of a human being. He claims that “security, order, love and connection” are necessary for a healthy personal development and an abrupt violation to any of these needs inevitably leads to a strong feeling of distress which, in relation to the intensity of such abruption and its duration, more than often develops into a trauma (8). Denver seems to be deprived of them all; and yet Morrison creates in her one of the strongest characters of her book, a symbol within whom the traumatized and dirtied past of African American slaves diminishes in favour of a new born future in liberty. Vulnerable and oversensitive at first, Denver metamorphoses into an independent woman confident enough to break away from the isolated life and to accept and sustain her place within the community. However, as my thesis is aimed at depicting the aspects of trauma and shame within Morrison’s (and Walker’s, respectively) work, the following lines will concentrate on traumatized feelings of Denver, on the sources of such feelings and the actions she took in response.

It is hard to imagine that anyone growing under the circumstances Morrison puts Denver through could develop into a confident, independent person. Even before her immediate birth Denver is forced to fight for her life. She survives brutal beating of heavily pregnant Sethe, her consequent stampede to freedom, the birth in the middle of nowhere. As if nothing could separate Denver from her mother, unharmed, she survives Sethe’s attempt to kill her and the consequent time in jail where “rats bit everything in there but her” (Morrison, *Beloved* 51). And she does not desert her mother even after everyone else runs away, dies or turns his back on her.

Throughout the full eighteen years Denver shares the isolated life with Sethe, where their only company is the “lonely and rebuked” (16) ghost of her sister. “A charmed child”, that’s how Sethe introduces Denver to Paul D, meaning that there is no need to worry about

her as nothing can harm her (50). In a way, Sethe seems to be right. Denver sustains everything physically unharmed. But she suffers emotionally. Approaching her suffering from the modern psychoanalytic perspective, it is safe to argue that she suffers from the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The traumatic symptoms, claims Herman, can “interfere with the child’s ability to concentrate, learn, and perform daily activities at home and in school ... their sense of identity, self-esteem, and their view of the world as a safe place is often altered“ (25). In accordance with the three main categories of the post-traumatic stress disorder mentioned earlier (hyperarousal, intrusion and constriction), Denver fits into the “hyperarousal category”, the category which reflects the persistent expectation of danger (Hermann 26). But it is not the mischievous ghost of her dead sister she is afraid of. It is the outside world she apprehends, the world which forced Sethe to kill her daughter and Denver is afraid that it can happen again (Morrison, *Beloved* 242).

Denver learns about the killing at school. Curious remark enquiring about Sethe and the murder petrifies her; too afraid to hear more about it, she loses her hearing for two years (122-123). When she realizes that her sister not only died but was killed by her own mother, she starts to live in a permanent fear that Sethe may kill her one day, too: “All the time, I’m afraid the thing that happened that made it all right for my mother to kill my sister could happen again. ... Whatever it is, it comes from outside this house, outside the yard ... So I never leave this house...” (Morrison, *Beloved* 243). She also realizes that the real reason her brothers ran away from home was not for their fear of this ghost but for the fear of their mother (124).

Trapped in a spiral of dialectic feelings of love, fear and loneliness she learns to appreciate the company of the mischievous spirit and longs for her daddy to come back and put everything in order. She feels safest in Baby Suggs room dreaming about her and idealising her daddy: “My daddy was an angel man. He could look at you and tell where you

hurt and he could fix it too.” (246). Alexander describes such an escape from reality into the world of imagination as one of the defensive reactions of people exposed to traumatic events: “Rather than activating direct cognition and rational understanding, the traumatizing event becomes distorted in the actor’s imagination and memory” (9). Excited at first by the presence of Paul D who has been the first visitor to their house in twelve years, she soon resents it, realising that he is not her awaited daddy, and condemns her mother for the affection with which she approaches him. Worst of all, he seems to free the house from the presence of ghost, “the only other company she had” (Morrison, *Beloved* 23). But the ghost, similarly to the traumatized past, is not so easily to get rid of and comes to life: “Beloved returns from the dead as a physically traumatized and emotionally abandoned child in an adult body” (Bouson 150).

A strange young woman who introduces herself as Beloved turns up one day near their house; Denver is the first to recognize in her the ghost of her dead sister. But sometimes she thinks Beloved is “more” than her sister. According to Bouson, “Beloved is also an excessive character that mobilizes and accumulates meaning after meaning as the narrative unfolds, becoming identified not only with Sethe's shameful and painful memories but also with the collective and disremembered shame and trauma of the slave experience” (152). Following Bouson’s theory, Beloved also represents “sexually abused slave women”, referring to a rumour that she might be an abused girl “which had been locked up by some whiteman for his own purposes, and never let out the door” (Morrison, *Beloved* 141). This is strengthened by Beloved’s comment: “... he hurts where I sleep he puts his finger there ... and said beloved in the dark and bitch in the light” (251, 285). The multiplicity of the Beloved’s cryptic character further points at the deadly experience of those who survived the Middle Passage and were consequently compelled to slavery. Bouson claims that “the fact that Beloved comes back as reincarnated ghost conveys not only the peculiar

dissociative quality – the depersonalization and derealization – of extreme trauma but also the haunting quality of traumatic and humiliated memory” (Bouson 152).

Right from the start Denver becomes emotionally attached to Beloved. She feels that she must protect her from Sethe: “I have to warn her... Maybe it’s still in her the thing that makes it all right to kill her children. I have to protect her” (Morrison, *Beloved* 243). Sethe, on the other hand, perceives Beloved’s return as a sign of forgiveness and as a chance to relieve her guilty consciousness: “I’ll explain to her ... Why I did it. ... When I’ll explain it, she will understand, because she understands everything already” (236). But Beloved does not seem to understand. Her demands are bigger and bigger and her devotion changes into a rage; Beloved’s behaviour is identical to the behaviour of a seriously traumatized person as described by Herman:

... the relationships are driven by the hunger for protection and care and are haunted by the fear of abandonment ... by idealising the person to whom she becomes attached, she attempts to keep at bay the constant fear of being betrayed. Inevitably, however, the chosen person fails to live up to her fantastic expectations. When disappointed, she may furiously denigrate the same person whom she so recently adored (Herman 76).

The more aggressive, demanding and accusatory Beloved’s approach is, the more apologetic and repentant is the response of Sethe. As aptly grasped by Bouson, what at first appears to be a healing process for Sethe, giving her the opportunity to “lay down her burdened past and live in peace”, has changed into a fight for life instead (Bouson 154). Denver, who originally sided with Beloved, believing that she must guard over her against her mother “in case the thing that was in her was out, and she would kill again” (Morrison, *Beloved* 283), realizes that it is not Beloved, but Sethe, who is in danger. Unable to satisfy Beloved’s never-ending demands, desires and complains, unable to convince her about her love and receive

forgiveness, Sethe succumbs in the “constriction” phase, using Herman’s terminology; a state which reflects “a numbing response of a surrender” (Herman 26). Denver recognizes that it is solely upon her to save her mother, and herself, from dying. Fighting away the fear and mistrust of the outside world as well as the shameful feelings inflicted by the current situation in their house and the state Sethe is in [“Who could she stand in front of who wouldn’t shame her on learning that her mother sat around like a rag doll, broke down, finally” (Morrison, *Beloved* 286)], Denver sets herself out to ask for help from the community.

#### 4. The Female Bonding in *Beloved* and in *The Color Purple*

In *Beloved* the importance of community, or, more specifically, the power of the female bonding, comes to the spotlight at the very end and it is symbolised by the group of women who gathered in front of Sethe's house to perform some kind of exorcism in order to save Sethe from the deadly power of her dead child (Morrison, *Beloved* 304). In *The Color Purple* the female bonding proves to be the central theme throughout the entire novel. Proudfit suggests that "Celie's bonding" is supposed to substitute for the underdeveloped mother/daughter relationship, which is necessary for the development of a "mature female identity" (Proudfit). Celie loses her mother at the very young age; physically she loses her at the age of fourteen, but mentally her mother recedes much earlier. Until the age of two we can assume that Celie was being raised in a loving family, being the only child of a successful farmer (157). But then one day white merchants, jealous of his success, kill her father. Celie's mother, pregnant at that time, never recuperates from this tragedy: "[A]lthough her body recovered, her mind was never the same" (Walker 158). Thus in one day Celie loses her loving father, emotionally she loses her mother, and she stops being the only child as her mother gives birth to her sister, Nettie (158). While the bond between Celie and her mother is severally damaged, affected at first by a "psychotic episode and later through [her mother's] sickness and depression" (Proudfit) as well as by the forced silence surrounding Celie's pregnancies, the relationship between the two sisters (Celie and Nettie) is exceptionally strong. Proudfit argues that older Celie actually assumes the role of a surrogate mother to Nettie (as well as to other children which come in consequence to a new marriage of her mother to Alphonso). Celie takes care of the housework and protects Nettie from the sexual assaults of Alphonso. After Celie's marriage to Albert, whom she refers to as Mr— almost until the very end of the novel, and after her forced separation from Nettie, Celie feels "worse than being buried" (Walker 19). She remains emotionally buried until meeting the blues

singer and a life-long lover of her husband, Shug Avery. And, rather unexpectedly, it is this unconventional, free-spirited and independent woman who opens and frees Celie's buried self and transforms her into a confident and self-sufficient person.

When Shug encounters Celie for the first time, her reaction reflects the traces of female rivalry. "You sure is ugly", utters Shug who herself does not look her best taking into account that she is very ill; "[s]icker than [Celie] ever seen" (Walker 44-45). The sarcasm in Shug's words reflects the jealousy of Sethe's status of being Albert's lawful wife, position which has been denied to Shug regardless their long, undisguised love and their three children. This assumption is supported by Shug's description of a suffering Albert's first wife, Annie Julie, was exposed to due to her marriage to Albert: "Poor Annie Julia ... She never had a chance. I was so mean and so wild, Lord. I used to go round saying, I don't care who he married to, I'm gonna fuck him. I used to keep Albert away from home for a week at the time" (112). Lindsey Tucker claims that "[s]ince a rivalry exists only when the male is the central figure, the establishment of female bonding has the effect of nullifying that rivalry and uniting everyone". This aptly corresponds with the relationship between Mary Agnes and Sophia. While Mary Agnes does not hesitate to fight Sophia over Harpo, Sophia's separated husband and a current partner to Mary Agnes (79), she risks her own life when trying to help to free Sophia from the prison (89). The value of their (Mary Agnes and Sophia's) female bonding is exposed also by their shared care for children; while Mary Agnes sets herself for a career of a blues singer, she trusts her daughter to Sophia's care, who raises her together with her own children (197).

The protective role of a community is stressed also in Morrison's novel, even though it comes to the spotlight at the very end of the story. When starved and desperate, Denver finally overcomes her fear and approaches the community, knocking on the door of the only woman she remembers from the time she attended the school, Lady Jane. The word quickly

spreads around and the women within the community unite in feeding her first and later providing her with physical support as well (Morrison, *Beloved* 290-300). Thirty women gather in front of Sethe's house, illustrating, as Bousoon point out, "the potentially healing communality of those who have survived a common traumatic experience" (157).

Quite a large space has been given to the female voices so far in my thesis; thus the following chapter will concentrate on the male element and analyse the subject from the traumatised manhood perspective. The analysed men are going to be represented by Paul D. whose relationship with Sethe is essential for the development of the plot in *Beloved*, and Albert, once a sensual lover to Shug Avery, later abusive husband to Celie, to be finally transformed into calm and meditative man in *The Color Purple*.

## 5. His Story: Analysis of Paul D. and Albert

The “double victimisation” of women due to being “black and being females” (Pellicer-Ortín and Andermahr 98) has already been discussed in this thesis. However, African-American men were equally exploited. The frustration stemming from “being black and being male” in the American society is coined down by Du Boisian concept of “double consciousness”: “The American Negro ... simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face” (Du Bois n. pag.). The traumatized manhood of African American men will be analysed on the character of Paul D. and Albert.

Not remembering his parents, Paul D grows up in Sweet Home plantation. Not having his own family, the plantation is closest to be called home he has ever had. But sweet it is not. Even though the ownership of Mr Gardner seems to be quite benevolent, the benevolence is limited by the Sweet Home territory which the slaves are forbidden to leave. As much as Mr Gardner likes to call his slave-men men, their manhood is shamefully repressed. There are only two people on the plantation whose manhood Paul D would not question: Halle, who befriends Sethe, and Sixo, who has his Patsy, the Thirty-Mile Woman. The others are “so sick with the absence of women they had taken to calves” (Morrison, *Beloved* 12); an experience shamefulness of which never leaves Paul D’s consciousness. And it is connected with Sethe, too; he copulates with cows to relieve himself of the desire for Sethe, the only woman on the plantation (30). His already traumatized manhood suffers even more after the arrival of a new owner of the plantation, the schoolteacher. The schoolteacher strongly disagrees with the benevolent provisions practiced at the Sweet Home and sets his own rules, depriving them “first of [their] shotgun[s], then of [their] thoughts” (259). The absolute lack of freedom and any kind of independence embodies itself for Paul D in puzzling doubts about his already

troubled understanding of manhood: “Garner called and announced them men – but only on Sweet Home, and by his leave. Was he naming what he saw or creating what he did not?” (260). Sitter claims that Paul D, raised in a slavery, without the role model of his father or any other male person he could identify with, associates manhood with the “objectified image of another” (Sitter). Thus under the supervision of Mr Garner he believes he is a man because Mr Garner tells him so. However, his confidence in his manhood is shattered with the arrival of the schoolteacher, as he admits to Sethe: “Schoolteacher changed me. I was something else and that something was less than a chicken” (Morrison, *Beloved* 90). Paul D. attempts to unsuccessfully escape from the slavery twice; first from the schoolteacher, second time from another slave-owner, Brandywine. He ends up brutally beaten, is forced to wear a collar, chains, leg iron, a bit. He is caged and even sexually abused when he is forced to perform oral sex on his guards (127-29). His trauma is so enormous that he is unable to speak about it and locks his emotions and memories into a “rusty tin box” determined never to open it again (54, 133). Things start to change after he re-encounters with Sethe in her 124 House in Cincinnati, eighteen years after their departure from the Sweet Home. Paul D and Sethe immediately become lovers. However, his shattered manhood and the challenges he encounters in Sethe’s house prove themselves too large to be overcome. No sooner does he get rid of the ghost than it comes back in flesh. Right from the beginning, Paul D has to compete with Sethe’s daughters for her affection which is not an easy task at all as Sethe’s motherly instincts have proved themselves to be exceptionally strong; she tells him at the very beginning of their reunion that should she be forced to decide between him or her daughter [Denver], the daughter would win: “Excuse me, but I can’t hear a word against her. I’ll protect her while I am alive and I’ll protect her when I ain’t. ... That’s the way it is. ... If I have to choose – well, it’s not even a choice” (54). Paul D does not want her to choose, he wants to join them, to share their lives, to have a little space there for him. At the end it is not Sethe and her

feverish confession of killing her daughter (188 – 95) what deprives him of this space. And it is even not Beloved, who moves him round the house like a “rag doll” (148); it is his own self. It is his traumatized manhood that prevents him from refusing Beloved’s sexual coercion; in consequence to that his sense of shame deepens until he is unable to look Sethe in the eyes. Sethe, whose love is “too thick” (193), whereas he has locked his feelings into a “rusted tin box” (54), allowing himself to love “just a little bit; everything, just a little bit, so when they broke its back, or showed it in a croaker sack, well, maybe you’d have a little love left over for the next one” (54). Not strong enough to cope with all these, he leaves. And it takes him few months before he is able to shake off the white slave holders values imprinted on him, and before he realises that manhood is not something that can be given or taken away by someone else.

Walker seems to be much harder on her male characters. When Morrison depicts Paul D as “the kind of man he could walk into a house and make the women cry” (Morrison, *Beloved* 20), what she implies is that the women feel secure to open up in his company and to entrust him with their sorrows. Nothing could be more distant from Albert at the beginning of the story. He certainly does make the women cry, too, but this is down to his violent and abusive manners. When Celie first meets Albert, he is a widowed father of four children, currently looking for a wife to take care of his household (Walker 8). At first, he is dating Nettie, Celie’s younger sister, but when he asks for her hand, Alphonso, their stepfather, refuses to let her go, claiming that she is too young to marry. In fact, Alphonso, who is attracted to Nettie himself, is not willing to surrender from her and offers Celie instead (13). After some hesitation, Albert accepts that; moreover, the way Celie is handed over to him reflects the status imposed on her throughout the most of the marriage: she is perceived subordinate, inferior human being, subjected to the constant humiliation as well as physical and psychological violence and abuse.

While we learn that Albert has at least seven children, four from his first wife, Annie Julia, and three with his long life lover, Shug Avery (14, 111), there is almost no sign of any kind of loving relationship between Albert and his children. The only one of his children the reader gets to know by name and whose character is further developed throughout the story, is Harpo, Albert's oldest son. According to Pellicer-Ortín and Andermahr, the aloofness and instability in African American families dates back to the times of slavery which "separated the family members ... selling of males and older children" (100). The dominant and patronizing attitude with which Albert approaches his son imitates the relationship between Albert and his father. And just as Harpo is too weak to oppose Albert, similarly Albert is not strong enough to stand up to his father when forbidden to marry the woman he loves, the blues singer, Shug Avery (111). The more powerless he feels towards the argumentation of his father: "[T]his my house. This my land. Your son Harpo in one of my houses, on my land. Weeds come up on my land, I chop' em up. Trash blow over I burn it" (53), the more ashamed and angry he gets, turning his rage against his wife: "He beat me ... [f]or being me and no you" says Celie to Shug one day (71). There is a striking difference between the man Albert once used to be and between the man he is now. While Shug remembers him as a great lover, excellent dancer and a man who could make her laugh, she is shocked after finding out what an abusive and violent husband he is to Celie. And yet, it is through his enduring love for Shug that reader starts to see a different side of Albert.

Albert and Shug remain lovers despite his two marriages; when Shug falls ill he even takes her to his house and asks Celie to help him take care of her (42). Rather unpredictably, out of their mutual care of Shug, Albert and Celie start to form some kind of an alliance, stemming from their shared love for Shug (55). Their relationship develops after Albert, influenced by Shug, stops beating Celie; they even try to make love together (101). But before their relationship could be developed any further it is smashed to pieces when Celie finds out

that Albert has been hiding letters that her sister, Nettie, has been sending to her all along. The reason why Albert kept Nettie's letters from Celie is never really explained. What Walker might suggest is that his feelings for Nettie are stronger than we have expected. We know from Celie's letters that Albert is considered to be Nettie's boyfriend for some time and they are regularly seeing each other; he even asks to marry her. Celie also notices that the refusal of his offer to marry Nettie leaves him speechless and that it takes him three months before he agrees to Celie instead (6 - 11). Considering how brief Celie's letters were at that time and how much information about this relationship there is, such speculation might be legitimate. And it would also explain why Albert does not destroy Nettie's letters but keeps them all in one place; people tend to keep things belonging to the person they love. Even more so if such a person is away. This is confirmed by Celie when she says: "Now that I know Albert is hiding Nettie's letter, I know exactly where there is. They in his trunk. Everything that mean something to Albert go to his trunk" (113). Nettie's resistance to Albert after he marries her sister is a final blow to his feelings and expectations. Just as Shug Avery remains his lover even after he marries his first wife, he similarly hopes to continue the relationship with Nettie despite being married to her sister.

When Celie finds out about the hidden letters, she leaves Albert. Moreover, she leaves with Shug Avery, whom she forms a loving relationship with. But before she leaves, she curses Albert, openly expressing her immense hatred for him and calls for a revenge (186-87). The sudden change, the unexpected and unwanted loneliness which is filled with Celie's hateful words, defeat him and, for a while, Albert succumbs into a state which resembles the "constriction phase" of traumatized people, that is "the numbing response of a surrender" (Herman 26).

At the end of their stories, Albert and Paul D find themselves in a remarkably similar situation. They both realize that "[m]anhood is the heart of the man, manifested in ... his

respect for the otherness of others, tenderness for their sorrow, and sense of responsibility for helping them to be their ‘best thing[s]’” (Sitter). What Morrison and Walker stress as important for the healing process of both man is that one does not have to keep his emotions and feeling suppressed in order to be a real man. On the contrary, it takes a lot of courage and personal strength to live in accordance with his very own principles, to be able to stand up to a superior authority, be it a racist and patriarchal society or a patronizing father.

## 6. Conclusion

Drawing on the work of two African American women writers, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, this thesis discusses the occurrence of trauma and shame in the novels *The Color Purple* and *Beloved*. The main aim consists in analysing the sources of traumatic and shameful experiences of the fictional characters and in illuminating the process of healing which enables the traumatized persons to retain their injured self.

The paraphrase in the title of the thesis evokes the work of the African American civil rights activist, W. E. B. Du Bois, and his theme of “double consciousness”, which reflects the traumatic experience of an “American Negro”, an issue which is explored in the analysed books. To get a complex picture of the trauma of the African Americans in the white American world, the introductory chapter offers a brief history of the slavery in America, horrors of which have imprinted itself into a collective memory of African Americans, causing traumatic experience which is shared by the whole nation. The USA remained racially divided even after the official abolition of slavery in 1865. The white population demanded racial segregation in all public facilities and held itself superior in all aspects of social, cultural and political life. This segregation was even supported by an official legislation, known as Jim Crow’s laws. The traumatic experience caused by slavery is explored in Morrison’s *Sethe* and *Paul D.*, whereas the racial segregation of the Jim Crow’s era is reflected in Walker’s *Sophia* or in the killing of Celie’s biological father.

Apart from racial issues, both writers focus their attention on trauma and shame caused by an abusive relationship, intra-racial violence, incest, suppressed manhood. It has been argued in the thesis that trauma can be caused by a single event as well as by a prolonged exposure to emotional deprivation, physical violence or abuse.

Morrison’s *Sethe*, heavily traumatized by the physical abuse and humiliation she experienced while enslaved, after her escape kills her infant-daughter rather than allow the

schoolteacher to return her back to slavery. Inspired by the Margaret Garner case (1856), this act is perceived as the ultimate manifestation of the maternity love which is one of the main themes in *Beloved*. Consequent isolation, casted upon Sethe by the neighbouring community which is frightened by the fierceness of this act, further deepens Sethe's traumatized self, hunted by her guilty consciousness and painful "rememories".

Sethe's isolated life is shared only by Denver, her youngest daughter, an emotionally traumatized girl whose everyday life is framed by the constant expectation of danger. Even though she loves her mother, she is afraid of her because she knows that she killed her sister and Denver is afraid that she might do it again. Knowing that "that something" what made her mother "to kill their own" (Morrison, *Beloved* 242) comes from outside of the house, she is afraid to leave it. Hungry for the company of other people, she becomes emotionally attached to a mischievous ghost Denver and Sethe believe is the spirit of the dead baby.

The presence of Beloved, first in the form of an invisible but loud and "rebuked" ghost of the dead infant and later as a young female remains mysterious throughout the story and is heavy with symbolism. Her cryptic character points out at the deadly experience of African slaves during the horrors of the Middle Passage, it evokes the forced fragmentation of slave's families and it also resembles the sexually abused women. Her role within the story is irreplaceable; she is the key to the Pandora's boxes in which Sethe, Denver and Paul D are hiding their suppressed emotions. Even though the initial outburst of such feelings seems deadly and almost destroys its bearers, it proves to have a healing power after all.

While Morrison stresses the mother/daughter relationship, Walker concentrates on a different kind of female bonding. Celie, the central character of *The Color Purple*, is silenced by the long-standing oppression and sexual abuse she experienced since her teenage years, first from her presumed father and later from her husband. She finds her voice through the influence of strong, independent women, be it her sister Nettie, Sophia, the wife of her

stepson Harpo, and, most importantly, Shug Avery. It is through this female bonding that Celie learns the real value of herself, that she finds the strength to stand up for her rights and takes her life into her hands. The powerful metaphor of Celie's life is in the art of quilting, because, as pointed by Tucker, "it involves the making of a useful object from material which is customarily regarded as worthless: scraps and throwaways. Yet what can be created out of these worn bits is a truly beautiful and useful work of art". Thus Celie puts the bits of her learned experience together to create her own life.

It would be wrong to assume that Morrison and Walker concentrate solely on women. Walker, who proclaims herself a "womanist", thus emphasizing her commitment to the paradigm of a female struggle, describes womanism in this respect as "committed to survival of wholeness of entire people, male and female" (qtd. in Temple). Men within these novels find themselves in the similarly exploited situation as women do.

Paul D has never had his own family. Born in the slavery and without any male role-model he could identify with, he is in constant confusion regarding his manhood. He is exposed to immense physical and psychological suffering: brutally beaten, sexually abused, tortured and humiliated. His trauma is so enormous that he decides to lock his memories, feelings and emotions, into an imaginary "rusty tin box" and never to open it again. It is only after he reunites with Sethe and her daughters, Denver and Beloved, that his suppressed emotions come to life again and he is finally able to come to terms with his manhood.

While Paul D. was missing a male role-model he could identify with, Albert's manhood was suppressed by his dominant and patronizing father who ruled his life; it was his father's land and his father's house Albert was living in (Walker 53). He even forbids Albert to marry the woman he loves. Too weak to stand up to his father, he turns his rage against the women he marries instead. Because of his abusive behaviour, he becomes partly responsible for the death of his first wife, Annie Julie, and for a long-term emotional and physical

suffering of his second wife, Celie. His guilty consciousness finally defeats him and after Celie leaves him, he succumbs into a state of deep depression, from which he emerges a new man. This previously abusive, selfish and violent man changes into a man who respects and cares for others.

It is this fairy-tale ending of both novels which raises some negative criticism, commenting upon the “unrealistic character development” (Harris qtd. in Proudfit). To these critics Alice Walker replies: “Let’s hope people can hear Celie’s voice. There are so many people like Celie who make it who come out of nothing. People who triumph” (qtd. in Proudfit). Regardless the happy endings, Morrison and Walker approach the sensitive issues of African Americans in the American society, such as racial inferiority, intra-racial violence and abusive relationships and they are united in their belief in the healing power of the human relationship.

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## RÉSUMÉ

Drawing on the work of two African American women writers, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, this thesis discusses the occurrence of trauma and shame in the novels *The Color Purple* and *Beloved*. The main aim of this work consists in analysing the sources of traumatic and shameful experiences of the fictional characters and illuminating the healing methods which enable the traumatized persons to retain their injured self.

Although the plot of both books takes place in different periods (*Beloved* just after the American Civil War, *The Color Purple* in 1930s), both writers deal with similar issues, focusing their attention on trauma and shame caused by a racial inferiority, abusive relationship, intra-racial violence, incest, suppressed manhood. To get a complex picture of the trauma of the African Americans in the white American world, the thesis offers also a brief history of the slavery in America, horrors of which have imprinted itself into a collective memory of African Americans, causing traumatic experience which is shared by the whole nation. Moreover, the theoretical part of the thesis provides some psychiatric and psychoanalytical accounts of the impact of shame and trauma on the individual. It has been argued in the thesis that trauma can be caused by a single event as well as by a prolonged exposure to emotional deprivation, physical violence or abuse.

In the thesis I will compare the importance of the parental bonding, especially the mother/daughter relationship, which is the main theme of *Beloved*, to the power of female solidarity as it is stressed in *The Color Purple*. I will argue that both writers see the power of the community, the power of human relationships, as the most important for the healing process of their characters.

## RESUMÉ

Tato práce rozebírá dílo dvou afroamerických spisovatelek, Alice Walkerové a Toni Morrisonové, a soustředí se na zachycení traumatického jednání a pocitů studu v dílech *Barva nachu* a *Milovaná*. Hlavním záměrem této práce je analýza původu těchto traumatizujících zážitků literárních hrdinů obou knih a současně zachycení způsobů, které umožní traumatizovaným osobám návrat k zdravému a plnohodnotnému „já“.

Ačkoliv děj obou knih probíhá v různém období (*Milovaná* těsně po Americké občanské válce, *Barva nachu* ve třicátých letech minulého století), obě spisovatelky se zaměřují na podobné problémy, a to zejména rasovou nerovnoprávnost, násilí a zneužívání v partnerských vztazích, sexuální zneužívání mezi příbuznými, potlačované mužství. Pro komplexní představu podstaty strádání Afroameričanů v „bílé“ Americe, tato práce nabízí stručnou historii otroctví v Americe, které se nesmazatelně vtisklo do kolektivní paměti celého národa. Teoretická část práce se navíc věnuje i stručnému nástinu dopadu traumatických poruch na jedince z pohledu psychiatrie a psychoanalýzy. Z práce je zřejmé, že trauma může být vyvoláno jak konkrétní událostí, tak dlouhodobým vystavením emoční deprivaci či fyzickému násilí.

Ve své práci porovnávám význam rodičovských vazeb, a to zejména vztah mezi matkou a dítětem, což je ústředním tématem *Milované*, s významem ženské solidarity, zdůrazňované v *Barvě nachu*. Docházím k závěru, že obě spisovatelky shodně považují lidské vztahy za to nejdůležitější v ozdravném procesu svých literárních postav.

Alice Walker. To the Spirit: Without whose assistance.Â  WHATEVER ELSE The Color Purple has been taken for during the years since its publication, it remains for me the theological work examining the journey from the religious back to the spiritual that I spent much of my adult life, prior to writing it, seeking to avoid. Having recognized myself as a worshiper of Nature by the age of eleven, because my spirit resolutely wandered out the window to find trees and wind during Sunday sermons, I saw no reason why, once free, I should bother with religious matters at all. I would have thought that a book that begins "Dear God" would immediately Alice Walker won the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award for her novel The Color Purple, which was preceded by The Third Life of Grange Copeland and Meridian. Her other bestselling novels include By the Light of My Father's Smile, Possessing the Secret of Joy and The Temple of My Familiar. She is also the author of two collections of short stories, three collections of essays, five volumes of poetry and several children's books.Â  Verified Purchase. Alice Walker's epistolary novel first published in 1982 went on to win the National Book Award and a Pulitzer Prize. Not bad for a book that is just a series of letters. But once you start to read it you realise why it won prizes and has been so popular with many people over the years. Follow the journey of Celie and Shug Avery during the Jim Crow era in Alice Walker's The Color Purple. Activities include characters, plot, themes, & more!Â  She falls in love with a woman, a controversial topic even today, and through Shug Avery she finds her sense of self worth and her identity; eventually, she also finds her dear sister Nettie is still alive, and addresses her letters to Nettie. It is Celie's perseverance and unwavering hope in the goodness of the strong women around her that allows her to survive even the most devastating personal failures by those she loves. Eventually, Celie finds happiness, talent, and her own inner strength.