

〈原著論文〉

The Presence of the Ghost and the Sweet Bay Tree in Toni Morrison's *Home*

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要旨

トニ・モリスンの第十作目の長編小説『ホーム』(2012)は、朝鮮戦争帰還兵の主人公フランク・マネーとその妹イシドラ(シー)の「ホーム」を探す旅を通じて、アフリカ系アメリカ人の視点でアメリカの過去の一時期を語り直す作品である。物語は第三人称の語り手による叙述とフランクによる一人称の語り手が交錯して進んでいく。本論ではまず、物語に登場する亡霊的な「ズート・スーツの男」の存在について論じた。この亡霊的存在は過去の意味を問い直し、主人公兄妹の記憶をつなぐ上で有効である。次に、『ホーム』における植物、とくに故郷のジョージア州ロータスの川辺に生える月桂樹の役割に注目した。物語の終盤、フランクがシーを伴い人骨を再埋葬する場面における鮮やかな月桂樹は、傷つきながらも未来を向いて生きようとする二人を象徴する存在である。この場面でシーの視界をよぎる「おかしなスーツ」の男は、『パラダイス』に登場する黒いスーツの小柄な男と同様、超自然的存在であり、別世界からの使者とみなすことができると推論した。

キーワード：アフリカ系アメリカ人, ホーム, 亡霊, 埋葬, 月桂樹
African American, home, ghost, burial, sweet bay tree

1. Introduction

In Toni Morrison's novels, the presence of ghosts is phenomenal. There are many memorable ghosts in her novels: L from *Love* (1992), a father-like man inviting Pilate and Macon Dead in *Song of Solomon* (1977), and most notably, the title character of *Beloved* (1987). The ghost who makes her eponymous presence felt in *Beloved* would surely be the most celebrated supernatural element of Morrison's stories (Beaulieu 141). In her tenth novel *Home* (2012), too, a remarkably visible ghost with his iconic zoot suit plays an important role in the story. We can also recognize the spirit of an unborn baby "somewhere close by in the air, in this house" (131). Thus it is not surprising that the ghost is one of the most fertile and beloved topics in Toni Morrison scholarship (Bennett 2). In this essay, I will examine the presence of the ghost in Toni Morrison's *Home* and the ways in which it negotiates traumatic memories with the present. Then I will explore the meaning of colors

and representation of the sweet bay tree in the novel.

2. The zoot-suited man in *Home*

Like all of Morrison's novels, *Home* is an attempt to reclaim a period from the American past from an African-American perspective. It tells the story of Frank Money, a 24-year-old veteran of the Korean War and his journey back to his hometown, a small Georgia town named Lotus, in order to rescue his medically abused younger sister Ycidra (Cee). When he returns from the war, Frank finds himself in segregated America in the 1950s. He intends to remain in Seattle, however, he undertakes his cross-country journey to the South when he receives a letter asking him to "(c)ome fast. She be dead if you tarry" (8).

During his journey back to his hometown, Frank comes across a strange man in a zoot suit. When the zoot-suited man first appears in the novel, he is a fellow traveler seated next to Frank who is on

the train to Chicago:

He turned and, more amused than startled, examined his seat partner—a small man wearing a wide-brimmed hat. His pale blue suit sported a long jacket and balloon trousers. His shoes were white with unnaturally pointed toes. The man stared ahead. Ignored, Frank leaned back to the window to pick up his nap. As soon as he did, the zoot-suited man got up and disappeared down the aisle. No indentation was left in the leather seat. (underline mine, 27)

We suspect this zoot-suited man is a ghost because there is no indentation left in the seat. Later it becomes clear that this man is a ghost when the same little man appears at Frank's bedside in Chicago. He sees "the same little man in the pale blue zoot suit" with "his wide-brimmed hat unmistakable in the frame of light at the window" (33). The zoot-suited man disappears when Frank asks him questions. Although Frank doesn't want "some new dream ghost" (34) for his company besides the hallucinations he's had, this ghost seems benign giving no harm to him. Rather, it seems as if the ghost watches over Frank's journey to the South.

A zoot suit is a men's suit with high-waisted, balloon trousers and a long jacket. Zoot suits were first associated with African Americans in urban communities such as Harlem, Chicago, and Detroit. Then they were made popular by jazz musicians in the 1940s. Thus we can suppose the man in the pale blue zoot suit is most probably African American.

Toward the end of the novel, the ghost appears to Cee for the first time. Cee's body is now healed by the skills and care of the community of women in Lotus, and her soul begins to recover when she faces how deeply she feels her inability to bear children. She also begins to quilt. As Valerie Smith points out, quilting is "an expression of her creativity that enables her to transform scraps into a product that is both beautiful and functional" (135). Cee is not a helpless girl depending on others any more.

Frank and Cee walk toward the edge of town,

then turn onto a wagon road just like they followed as children. Together, they retrieve the bones of a corpse, wrap them in Cee's quilt, and place them at the base of the sweet bay tree. There Cee has a glimpse of the small man:

While he dug she watched the rippling stream and the foliage on its opposite bank.

"Who's that?" Cee pointed across the water.

"Where?" Frank turned to see. "I don't see anybody."

"He's gone now, I guess." But she was not sure. It looked to her like a small man in a funny suit swinging a watch chain. And grinning. (144)

Above the newly-made grave, the olive-green leaves of the sweet bay tree glow beautifully in the setting sun. Thus the grinning of the ghost can be interpreted as a sign of approval of the respectful burial. Frank himself thinks "he could have sworn the sweet bay was pleased to agree" (145).

Remarkably, it is not Frank but Cee who sees the zoot-suited man in this burial scene. In transferring visibility of the ghost from Frank to Cee, "Morrison suggests that their journeys are similarly bound to a shared past" (Bennett 154). Sharing a vision as well as a traumatic childhood memory emphasizes the bond between the siblings.

3. Burial of the past

I have traced the appearances of the zoot-suited man and their meanings in the previous section. In this section, I will examine the significance of the burial in the novel.

At the beginning of the novel, Frank as a child witnesses the burying of a black man with his sister Cee. Although the corpse is not identified, it has "black foot with it creamy pink and mud-streaked sole" (4), a black man. At the end of the novel, 24-year-old Frank excavates the bones from the ground. He believes they belong to the man he saw and reburies them properly with Cee under the sweet bay tree.

Kathleen Brogan argues that modern ghost stories offer a way for minority writers to come to

terms with their lost cultural identities:

Ghosts in contemporary American ethnic literature functions similarly: to re-create ethnic identity through an imaginative recuperation of the past and to press this new version of the past into the service of the present. (4)

Furthermore, Brogan regards "*Beloved* as a literary 'second burial,' in which the victims of the slave trade, whom Morrison calls the 'unceremoniously buried,' are exhumed to be reburied properly in the novel's narrative tomb" (27). Indeed, by confronting grown-up Beloved and struggling with her, Sethe tries to compensate her murder of a child in the past. At the end of the novel, Beloved is driven away by her living daughter Denver and the community around their house.

In *Home*, Frank Money and his sister Cee literally conduct the second burial under the sweet bay tree by a stream.

For Frank, this does not only mean an appeasement of the childhood nightmare.

During the Korean War, Frank shot a innocent girl in her face just because she aroused his sexual desire he didn't know he had. This violence caused his trauma. It was so dreadful that he had to hide his sense of guilt and shame by mourning his dead friends deeply. However, toward the end of the novel, he comes to think that "there were worthwhile things that needed doing" (135), that is, the burial of the bones under the sweet bay tree. Thus, the burial has a double significance for Frank.

4. Representation of the sweet bay tree

From her first novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970), the botanical world is one of the key elements in Toni Morrison's novels. At the beginning of *The Bluest Eye*, Claudia MacTeer, the principal narrator and a friend of Pecola Breedlove, reflects on her childhood perceptions of past events:

Quiet as it's kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941. We thought at that time, that it was because Pecola was having her father's baby that the marigolds did not grow. (1)

From her childhood point of view, a botanical aberration or a skip in the natural order of things was connected with the hollowness of human beings. *The Bluest Eye* is a season book, implying that everything is a part of a cycle.

In *Beloved* (1987), the chamomile sap in the field is a trigger for Sethe to reflect on her unspeakable past on the Sweet Home plantation in Kentucky from which she fled:

She might be hurrying across a field, running practically, to get to the pump quickly and rinse the chamomile sap from her legs. (7)

When the last of the chamomile was gone, Sethe went around to the front of the house, collecting her shoes and stockings on the way. As if to punish her further for her terrible memory, sitting on the porch not forty feet away was Paul D, the last of the Sweet Home men. In this scene, the haunting image of sycamores trees and the arrival of Paul D force Sethe to face her memories of the past. Morrison uses both plants and flowers impressively and effectively in her other novels like *Song of Solomon*, *Paradise*, and *Home*.

In *Home*, the sweet bay tree by a stream in Lotus plays an important role reflecting Frank and Cee's states of mind. First, I will examine the scene in which Cee recalls her childhood memory with her brother:

Often they sat by the stream, leaning on a lightning-blasted sweet bay tree whose top had been burned off, leaving it with two huge branches below that spread like arms. (52)

In this scene, the damage to the tree caused by an external force is emphasized, reflecting the situation of the siblings who were ill-treated by their grandmother and racially discriminated against by society. The sweet bay tree here is a metaphor of the agony of their undesirable experiences.

Next, I will investigate the meaning of a colored world to Frank. Frank suffered from what we now call the PTSD caused by the war. One of his symptoms was a sudden disappearance of colors followed by incontrollable emotions and behaviors.

He was quiet, just sitting next to a brightly dressed woman. Her flowered skirt was a

world's worth of color, her blouse a loud red. Frank watched the flowers at the hem of her skirt blackening and her red blouse draining of color until it was white as milk. Then everybody, everything. All color disappeared and the world became a black-and-white movie screen. (underline mine, 23)

He learns the draining of color is a sign of his trauma, and he is relieved when a hint of color returns to him. Thus we can surmise that colors and Frank's psychology are deeply interlaced in this novel.

When Frank returns to Lotus, he has to readjust himself to the town and people in the small community. The sweet bay tree is an existence that Frank can rely on. Thus Frank goes to the bank of the stream and "he squatted beneath the sweet bay tree" (132). He could not believe how much he had once hated Lotus. Now it seemed both fresh and ancient, safe and demanding. Beneath the tree, he realizes his sister now is gutted, infertile, but not beaten like the sweet bay tree.

Next, I will examine the ways in which the sweet bay tree is represented in the penultimate chapter. In this chapter, Frank excavates the bones of the victim of the lynch mob he saw in his childhood, wrapping them in the colorful quilt Cee made:

Carefully, carefully, Frank placed the bones on Cee's quilt, doing his level best to arrange them the way they once were in life. The quilt became a shroud of lilac, crimson, yellow, and dark navy blue. Together they folded the fabric and knotted its ends. (143)

The quilt is made of various cloths and has many colors accordingly. Cee determines to look straight for the retrieving to overcome her weakness of the past. After retrieving the bones, the siblings go on to give them a proper and respectful burial. It is highly significant here that Frank chooses the ground besides the sweet bay tree as a tomb:

Quickly they found the sweet bay tree—split down the middle, beheaded, undead—spreading its arms, one to the right, one to the left. There at its base Frank placed the

bone-filled quilt that was first a shroud, now a coffin. (144)

Frank is determined to place the tomb under the sweet bay tree—split down the middle, beheaded, undead.

Valerie Smith succinctly accounts for the sibling's burial:

For both together, it means retrieving the bones of the victim of the lynch mob, wrapping them in Cee's quilt, and giving them a proper and respectful burial. By reclaiming their personal secrets, they are able to reclaim Lotus as their literal, physical home. Through their willingness to confront their past, they find their true home within them in the memories they share. (135)

After the second burial of the man, Frank could believe that his deed was approved by the tree:

Wishful thinking, perhaps, but he could have sworn the sweet bay was pleased to agree. Its olive-green leaves went wild in the glow of a fat cherry-red sun. (145)

The representation of the sweet bay tree has changed from a damaged figure into a strong and beautiful one. The tree is alive and well while retaining the irrecoverable physical damage it received. It is obvious that Frank imposes his renewed self-image on the colorful tree. As Smith points out, Frank and Cee find their true home within them in the memories they share through their willingness to confront their past.

At the end of the novel, both of them appease their traumatic memories and are about to start a new life in Lotus, their hometown. The novel ends with Frank's meditation and the calling from Cee:

I stood there a long while, staring at that tree.

It looked so strong

So beautiful.

Hurt right down the middle

But alive and well.

Cee touched my shoulder

Lightly.

Frank?

Yes?

Come on, brother. Let's go home. (147)

The ending suggests they are going home

together and Frank concludes his journey back home.

5. Conclusion.

As the title suggests, *Home* probes the meaning of "home." In her 1997 essay entitled "Home," Morrison observes that she has to live in a racial house, a world already constructed out of racially-biased power relations. Yet, as a writer, she could "relocate, redesign, even reconceive the racial house" into "a home" of her own (4). *Home* is another attempt to recreate a home of their own for the African-American siblings: Frank and Cee. Moreover, it is remarkable that the representation of the sweet bay tree reflects their various shades of emotions. Morrison's deliberate use of the natural world is most effective in portraying subtle emotional shifts of the characters in the novel.

As we have seen in the previous section, Frank excavates the bones of a murdered man and reburies them carefully under the sweet bay tree. For Frank, the burial is an act of atonement for his merciless murder of an innocent girl in Korea, and he is partially appeased by his actions in the last scene as the scenery is described as peaceful and full of life.

It is not a coincidence that a small man in a funny suit reappears in this burial scene and Cee has a glimpse of him. The question here is who is this man? It is obvious that he is a supernatural presence as he left no dent in the seat when Frank sees the man on the train. Lear Cohen assumes that he is a manifestation of Frank's precarious mental states. It could be true but this cannot explain the last scene when Cee, not Frank, sees him. Yoshiko Okoso suggests that this man takes on a religious aspect in her "Translator's Afterword," in the Japanese translation of *Home*. Okoso likens the man in the zoot suit to a small walking man in Morrison's earlier novel *Paradise*. In *Paradise*, the tribe leader Zechariah and his son Rector see a small man in the woods at dawn. The small man is "dressed in a black suit." Zechariah regards this phenomenon as a message from God, and he builds a new town on the spot. In *Home*, the small man accompanies Frank's journey to his

hometown. The fact that he reappears near the sweet bay tree implies the ghost and the tree are related, guiding the siblings to a new home.

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