



Project
MUSE[®]

Today's Research. Tomorrow's Inspiration.

The Gender of Diaspora in Toni Morrison's Tar Baby

Goyal, Yogita.

MFS Modern Fiction Studies, Volume 52, Number 2, Summer 2006, pp. 393-414 (Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: 10.1353/mfs.2006.0046



 For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/mfs/summary/v052/52.2goyal.html>



THE GENDER OF DIASPORA IN TONI MORRISON'S *TAR BABY*

Yogita Goyal

The idea of tradition has always been central to Toni Morrison's fiction. While each of her novels presents a different way of understanding (in increasingly complex ways) the importance of memory, heritage, and history for African Americans, the much-neglected novel, *Tar Baby*, offers perhaps the most interesting and internally complex meditation on the meaning of tradition. Critics usually read the novel as a fairly simple defense of tradition, where Morrison warns against the dangers of losing touch with racial and ancestral memories, by way of a symbolic contest between a black man in tune with nature, family, and history, and a modern, cosmopolitan and rather shallow woman, who refuses to acknowledge the value to any of these.¹ The novel, moreover, is unique in Morrison's oeuvre for its overt references to the currently influential concept of diaspora. Set largely on a fictional Caribbean island, the novel urgently asks the question, what does diaspora mean? Can racial unity offer a clear alternative to Western oppression? Can a unified black diasporic identity counter the modernity that alienates and fragments? And finally, can tradition prove a guide to modern black subjects, furnishing a usable past? Provocatively gendering these alternatives, the novel, I will argue, reaches no simple conclusions to these questions. Skirting the simplicities of Afrocentrism as well as traversing the anti-essentialist ground of black Atlantic studies, the novel delineates complicated, shifting, and deeply equivocal interactions between nationalism, gender, and diaspora.

While the novel has usually been read for its focus on class and gender, my attempt is to reread it through the lens of debates about diaspora and nationalism. Seen from this angle, I suggest, the novel's conflicts do not resolve in a neat harmony as a defense of "ancient properties" (*Tar Baby* 305). Instead, the conflicts alluded to spiral out in ever more complex and uncontainable ways, proliferating in the process all the contradictions that make diaspora a stimulating concept today. In its explication of diaspora, the novel's narrative form reveals two distinct generic strains, those of myth and realism, that may be mapped on to ideological conflicts about the meaning of diaspora. The first strain opens the novel in the fictional setting of Isle des Chevaliers, a Caribbean island, depicted in a mythic mode where all the characters convey a larger symbolic resonance. In this mode, Morrison creates a sense of a sentient nature that is itself the repository of any idea of tradition, continuity, or resistance blacks might need today. Morrison deliberately presents this mode as outside of modernity and rationality, and requires readers to suspend disbelief about talking butterflies, ghostly female presences hanging from trees, or invisible horsemen riding through history. The novel uses this mode, I will show, to accrue a sense of diasporic presence that exists beyond the particulars of time and space. Allied with nature, and powerful in its mythology, this idea of diaspora offers a way of rejecting the norms of white culture, and is linked to the history of resistance to slavery. Here, black culture is authentic, confident, and everlasting. An anthropomorphized Caribbean landscape, the "diaspora mothers," and Son together emblemize this mode, which fuses the three to suggest a seamless, organic unity between nature, myth, and human beings.

This register of myth is in tension with a second mode, which uses realism to embed an understanding of diasporic encounters as fraught with conflict. Used primarily for the action set in the cities, New York and Paris, the realist mode is represented by Jadine, a quintessential city girl, who is self-reliant and unfettered, but also narcissistic, insensitive, and selfish. Characterized largely by snappy dialogue rather than by lush evocations of everlasting nature, this mode works against the sense of diaspora constructed by the earlier mode, as the realist representation of multiple diasporic encounters (Afro-Caribbean vs. Afro-American, US Southern vs. Northern) reveals nothing but incessant misunderstanding, suspicion, and prejudice. In doing so, this mode indicates a skepticism about the value of tradition, particularly in its relation to constructions of gender, and offers alternative ways of negotiating the modern world.

The tension between these two discrepant modes furnishes several insights about diaspora, modernity, and tradition. First, in

marked contrast to the undifferentiated black Atlantic subject assumed by most theorists of diaspora, Morrison carefully stratifies the hierarchies of power and place.² Showing that race matters as well as place, Morrison highlights the misunderstandings between Afro-Caribbean and Afro-American characters, as well as those between the Philadelphia Negroes and the "undocumented men" (*Tar Baby* 166). Any essentialist definition of race is accordingly destabilized as Morrison shows how race is only one of many links in the chain of significations that comprises black identity. Moreover, in contrast to the male subject assumed by most theorists of diaspora, Morrison muddles the conventional ascriptions of gender, with Jadine symbolizing mobility, and Son symbolizing home. While most cultural nationalist narratives assume that women are the carriers of culture, and much of Morrison's work indicates this too, this novel reverses such logic to make Son the repository of all that is authentic and precious about black culture.

Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, Morrison's generic choices open up a field of inquiry that—while leading to no neat answers—raises important questions about the place of tradition. Morrison uses the two distinct genres to index two different representations of diaspora at cross-purposes to complicate and displace any certainty one could have about either model.³ While the conception of diaspora at the mythic level affirms unity, the representation of diaspora at the realist level makes apparent the fact of fracture. As the novel's intertext of the folk tale of the tar baby indicates, everything that looks authentic can just as easily be artifice. In the end, a deeply ambivalent representation of the value of tradition emerges as the contradictions embedded in the novel find no resolution in realistic terms. In this way, even as Morrison provides us with an injunction to revere tradition, she simultaneously deconstructs the basis for articulating a stable vision of what such tradition might look like. This double movement not only enables narrative open-endedness but also offers a fruitful point of departure for a theorization of the fundamental impossibility of defining diaspora.

Viewing Morrison through diaspora theory does not simply involve reading her work retroactively, but recognizing that her turn to the black diaspora in *Tar Baby* accompanies growing interest in diaspora and helps us define its conceptual coordinates more effectively.⁴ Existing at the cusp of the decline of black nationalist discourse and the rise of diaspora studies, the novel helps open up the seams between the two that are frequently glossed over. A diasporic reading thus achieves two things at once: it excavates a gendered critique of black nationalism and thus re-evaluates Son and Jadine, and second, it points to the narrative schisms in the novel—the friction between

the mythic and realist elements of the novel—that index an ambivalent espousal of tradition. The romance between Son and Jadine that is at the heart of the novel provides Morrison with the means to interleave larger questions about resolving intra-racial conflicts, as well as inter-racial ones. The romantic union of Son and Jadine could allegorize the coming together of North and South, the lower and upper classes, the assimilated model and the inassimilable Son, the urban and the rural, and of course, men and women. Not surprisingly, such a union is impossible in more ways than one, as the conflicts between Jadine and Son stand in for larger failures to connect.

The conflict between Son and Jadine pivots on gender. *Tar Baby* presents two distinct ways of assessing this conflict, a cultural nationalist one and a diasporic or black Atlantic one. A nationalist reading, valuing racial unity, necessarily sees Jadine as inauthentic. Imagining the black race as a family, black nationalism seeks to contain rather than reinforce intraracial conflicts. In contrast, recent theories of diaspora criticize such assumptions of unity, emphasizing instead the divisions within such models of nationalism. Diaspora identities prize fracture, discontinuity, and ambiguous encounters. Son's black nationalist approach to tradition, rendered in a mythic mode, suggests that rootedness is far more important than mobility, and every displacement carries with it the embedded memory of a stable past. As an authentic representative of blackness allied at once to the mythic female presences as well as to a masculine itinerant culture, Son functions in opposition to the white Western world. In contrast, Jadine follows a broadly cosmopolitan approach, where rootedness and tradition signify backwardness, and an easy elite status enables a smooth ability to uproot and retrench. Looking to the world's global cities like New York and Paris, and devaluing the small towns of Florida as well as the Caribbean island without modern amenities, Jadine can ultimately feel comfortable only in a city or a plane. Rather than viewing Jadine as inauthentic, however, if we read her resistance to rootedness as a gendered critique of black nationalism, her stance becomes legible within the logic of postessentialist diaspora identities.⁵ While black feminist critics have long been sensitive to the gendered ideology of nationalism, they have not celebrated Jadine's defiance of its strictures, in the way that they have argued for the independence of *Sula*, for example. In contrast to the critical reception of similar figures, Jadine's mobility has frequently been censured by literary critics, who suggest that Morrison portrays her as insufficiently black *and* as insufficiently female, captive to the values of her white patrons—the candy-king heir Valerian and his beauty-queen trailer-park wife Margaret.⁶ If we follow the claim of theories of diaspora that rootedness can be replaced by an

emphasis on routes, however, we can re-evaluate Jadine's function in the novel. When viewed as a cosmopolitan or diasporic subject, Jadine appears, not simply as inauthentic, but as characterized by a fundamental restlessness that cultural critic Paul Gilroy has identified at the heart of the black Atlantic.⁷ This restlessness enables her to reject the rigid gender roles that Son requires of her even as it separates her from the "diaspora mothers."

Nationalist discourses are widely credited with a certain fetishization of women as signs of an authentic cultural identity in the name of tradition, one that defines difference from the colonizer's world.⁸ *Tar Baby* offers an eerily similar conception of womanhood, when it proposes the proper role of women as daughters and mothers, as figures of nurture rather than independence. The "diaspora mothers" articulate this notion, representing what Morrison calls "an exceptional femaleness" (*Tar Baby* 183). The novel constantly associates them with emblems of fertility such as eggs and breasts, situating them as emblems of a maternal notion of womanhood. As the heir to this tradition, Son is animated by dreams of the "pie-ladies" in the church basement, while Jadine, in her rejection of "ancient properties," is clearly pressing against what she perceives are narrow constraints of race and nationality, and looking to be what she calls a different kind of woman. In this way, Morrison reveals with great sensitivity the kinds of demands a project of cultural nationalism makes on women, entailing—among other things—a reproductive definition of womanhood. Jadine refuses to "settle for wifely competence when she could be almighty, to settle for fertility rather than originality, nurturing instead of building" (269). Interpreting her desire to be a different kind of woman within a standard nationalist framework, Son and the diaspora mothers view Jadine's independence as a threat to the community, and her mobility (rather than as a sign of transnational affiliation or self-reliance) as a sign of alienation. It is worth remembering that when associated with men, such mobility is often seen in a positive light.⁹ Morrison herself equates mobility with black men approvingly in an interview when she exclaims:

They are really moving! . . . going from town to town or place to place or looking out and over and beyond and changing and so on—that, it seems to me, is one of the monumental themes in black literature about men. That's what they do. It is the Ulysses theme, the leaving home. And then there's no one place that one settles. . . . Although in sociological terms that is described as a major failing of black men—they do not stay home and take care of their children, they are not there—that has always been to me

one of the most attractive features about black male life.
. . . the fact that they would split in a minute just delights
me. ("Intimate Things" 26)

It is possible that Jadine has not been read in this way because, as Trudier Harris writes, it is "easy to be unsympathetic to Jadine" because "African American folk culture has not prepared us well for a female outlaw" (128). Read within a different tradition—one that values cosmopolitanism, hybridity, and ambivalence—we can evaluate Jadine's rejection of a reproductive and essentialist conception of women, as well as assess more carefully her critique of Son's nationalism and of the diaspora mothers.

In contrast to the mobility of men, of course, is the function of women as stable purveyors of tradition. To use Morrison's words again: "there's the black woman as parent, not as a mother or father, but as a parent, as a sort of umbrella figure, culture-bearer" ("Intimate Things" 27).¹⁰ Jadine is removed from both poles. She is estranged from the vagabond itinerancy of the men, on the basis of her class and gender, and from the women because she feels no need to parent or to receive and transmit cultural values. Jadine makes it clear that she finds imposed identities unbearable. Not only in relation to gender but also in terms of race, she refuses to accept the logic of binary choices, "blackening up or universalizing out" (64). Looking for a conception of self beyond the given logic of racial determinism, Jadine wishes to "get out of my skin and be only the person inside—not American—not black—just me" (48). She explains her choice of a life in Paris precisely as a search for more broad options. She tells us that she felt that she had three choices in the United States: "marry a dope king or a doctor, model, or teach art at Jackson High. In Europe she thought there might be a fourth choice" (225).¹¹ Straining against normative formulations of blackness and womanhood, Jadine is angriest with Son "for pulling that black-woman-white-woman shit on me . . . if you think you can get away with telling me what a black woman is or ought to be" (121). In her articulation of a desire to transcend the constraints of race and gender, Jadine furnishes an important critique of the gendered logic of black nationalism.

Jadine's rejection of feminine roles may be read as a resistance to being sexually exploited. Watching a bitch in heat being sniffed, mounted, and deserted by several dogs, she decides "at the age of twelve in Baltimore never to be broken in the hands of any man" (124). In Eloe, she is constantly objectified, seen as Son's "prize woman." Son's friends "looked at him with love and looked at her like she was a Cadillac he had won, or stolen, or even bought for all they knew" (253–4). Son's former wife is similarly objectified as

having "the best pussy in Florida" (254). Son's friend, the appropriately-named Soldier, believes that Son "wouldn't know a good woman from a snake" as "when it comes to women he thinks with his dick" (255). In contrast to Soldier's ribaldry, Rosa and Old Man entail a certain amount of repression when it comes to sex. Son and Jadine have to spend the night in separate rooms, prompting Jadine to think of the place as "Paleolithic," as she feels "stuck here with a pack of Neanderthals" (257). She feels "obscene" and a "slut" (253, 254) in Rosa's eyes, and assaulted by the night women who crowd into the tiny room Son has sneaked into to make love to her. Significantly, the night women are "taking away her sex like succubi, but not his." "Like ants out of a hive" (258), they pour into the room and taunt her with their femininity. This is what prompts her to think of Eloë as "rotten," "boring," "a burnt-out place" with no future (259). She experiences the feminine presence of the night women as a threat: "The night women were not merely against her . . . [they] were all out to get her, tie her, bind her. Grab the person she had worked hard to become and choke it off with their soft loose tits." This leads her to the declaration that embraces her orphaned status: "No, Rosa. I am not your daughter, and he is not your son" (262). Contrary to what Ondine says, Jadine has to develop her self only by rejecting the role of a daughter. Son and Jadine are thus diametrically opposed, as his status as son exists at odds with her refusal to be a daughter.

As the conflicts between these two different versions of black identity unfurl, the novel attempts (with questionable success) to stabilize them with a fixed referent in the mythic presence of the "diaspora mothers." To do so, *Tar Baby* elaborates a conception of black diasporic unity that transcends time in heavily mythicized language. Even as Morrison sets up the explicit contest between nationalism and feminism in the symbolic conflict between Son and Jadine, she attempts to simultaneously dissolve the contentions by appealing to the mythic register, where black culture can exist in harmony with itself and with nature. This mythic register is personified by various female bodies and presences (both realistic and magical)—the diaspora mothers, who function as authentic emblems of an enduring black womanhood. Timeless in their existence, the mothers are the symbolic mothers of global black culture, who have not been displaced or contaminated with the workings of history. According to their estimation, (and critics have generally agreed with such an estimation), Jadine is a race traitor, or the tar baby captive to white culture. In contrast to such readings, I want to suggest that the novel ultimately affords a deeply ambivalent representation of the "diaspora mothers," one that suggests that the past may threaten individual identity as much as nurture it.

A closer look at the diaspora mothers makes it clear that their authority stems from the power of myth itself. Morrison represents the mothers as part of nature itself, thereby locating them beyond the constraints of history or politics. The novel, accordingly, begins in the Caribbean, where Morrison renders the landscape mythic, as blind horsemen mate with the swamp women in the trees, rejecting the control of the island by the colonial invaders. Nature itself is a major character in the Caribbean section of the novel. The moon, the fog, the water-lady of the ocean, emperor butterflies, and soldier ants complete the picture, making it appear as if (as Morrison claims in an interview) the human drama is merely a transient fragment of the picture, and nature offers a different perspective on history and human actions.¹² Deliberately stylized as feminine, the mythic frequency of the novel suggests unity and harmony, where distinctions between past and present are meaningless. This level of myth offers the only images of permanence in the novel, where everyone and everything else exists in a state of flux and temporary location.

The anthropomorphized vision of the Caribbean places the human beings as lesser than life, and nature as the real owner of the Caribbean. The novel's lush descriptions of the wounded nature of the island lend authority to the diaspora mothers and Therese who are linked to the reproductive definition of womanhood. Rather than simply signifying anticolonial resistance, such a strategy raises further questions as the Caribbean stands as the site of authenticity, where primal nature asserts itself, and masks cannot be maintained for long. Rendered through a heavy veil of symbolism, the Caribbean island's primary consciousness is that of a sentient nature, allied with the land, the memory of the island's inhabitants, and the history of slavery and colonization. In this way, Morrison personifies the island as suffering the violation of colonial exploitation, as the river itself is diverted and becomes a "poor, insulted, brokenhearted river," a "poor demented stream," and finally, a swamp (10). Morrison thus represents colonization as an assault on nature, telling us that "when laborers imported from Haiti came to clear the land, clouds and fish were convinced that the world was over" (9). Such a narrative strategy seamlessly connects the Caribbean land, animals, birds, and trees with its inhabitants, all of whom organically represent the violation of something pure, natural, and timeless.

This organic view presents the black diaspora as speaking with one voice—in a fusion of legend, history, and myth, the blind horsemen riding the island and the diaspora mothers all over the world call to Son and Jadine to join them, to know their ancient properties, to be fit sons and daughters. Here, black culture in various sites—the Caribbean, the US South, the African presence in Paris—all rendered

through dreams, visions, myths, and legends exists seamlessly.¹³ At the mythic level, the diaspora does not exist in time; it exists outside of time. It is worth considering why this representation of diaspora as mythic memory requires a turn away from the literal or the realistic or the historical, towards fantasy, legend, and fable. Contrary to the conventions of magic realism, where the real and the fantastic exist side by side, casting doubt on the veracity of each, prompting the question, what is real, in this novel, it does not seem as if the fantastic elements work in the same way.¹⁴ Rather, they create a background chorus of voices that forcefully embody the idea of tradition and racial authenticity.

Such authenticity is also the preserve of the diaspora mothers, who are indisputably authentic in racial terms. For example, the African woman in Paris is "that woman's woman—that mother/sister/she; that unphotographable beauty"; they are also primitive, as the swamp women tell us: "the first world of the world had been built with their sacred properties; they alone could hold together the stones of pyramids and the rushes of Moses's crib" (46, 183). Although largely identified with the Caribbean (and to some extent the rural South) the true diaspora mothers can carry such authenticity with them, even to Paris, like the African woman who makes Jadine feel "lonely and inauthentic" (48). Morrison comments on the African woman in an interview, affirming her authenticity: "She is the original self—the self that we betray when we lie, the one that is always there." Morrison also calls her "the genuine article" and "a real, complete individual who own herself" ("Interview" 147, 148). The authenticity of the African woman and the other diaspora mothers allies them to the sentient nature of the Caribbean, as the two fuse into a single vision of myth. In this way, these real-life women (Ondine, Therese, Rosa, the African woman) are aligned with the mythic swamp women hanging from the trees in the Caribbean, as well as the night women crowding into Jadine's room in Eloë, as their ability to transmit cultural continuity conquers distance as well as temporal division.

Son is the true son of these diaspora mothers—like them, he is authentic, natural, primitive, and non-materialistic. In contrast, Jadine experiences the diaspora mothers as a threat, as presences that will annihilate her very self, either by choking her or drowning her in the swamp. This at least opens up the possibility that while the diaspora mothers can be the means to suture the individual to the community, they can do so only in a mystical or magical sense. As Morrison presents no realist figuration of such a suturing, she raises serious questions about the loss of self attendant on such a subsumption into a collective. Such a view further requires women

to be authentic markers of stable cultural identity, and embodiments of a maternal or reproductive identity.

If we consider the character of Son in further detail, more complications arise. While it is possible to see Son as a defender of tradition and Jadine as his opposite, a closer look destabilizes this binary, as both Son and Jadine appear as representatives of migration or mobility at different points in the novel, inhabiting the role of the cultural orphan. While Jadine appears as the figure without any roots at certain moments, and Son is rooted in Southern folk values, at other times, Son's immersion in that culture is shown to be illusory, as he is part of that group of "undocumented men" who have "an inability to stay anywhere for long" (166). In this way, Morrison makes it impossible for any critical reading to arrive at any certainty regarding the stability of such categories as home, rootedness, or wandering. By equivocating and switching roles so rapidly, Morrison reveals the deeply unstable (and often contradictory) underpinnings of such ideologies (as nationalism and diaspora).¹⁵

Although constantly on the move, Son's dreams remain fixed in Eloë, as his itinerancy never translates into mobility for its own sake, in contrast to Jadine, who does not see any one place as home. He claims, "You're not *from* anywhere. I'm from Eloë" (266). Son's mobility functions very differently from that of Jadine, as it is explicitly linked to a politics of resistance. Morrison describes him as a "man without human rites: unbaptized, uncircumcised, minus puberty rites or the formal rites of manhood. Unmarried and undivorced. He had attended no funeral, married in no church, raised no child. Propertyless, homeless, sought for but not after" (165–66). Son explains that "He never wanted to live in the world their way. There was something wrong with the rites. He had wanted another way." Son rejects the materialistic world, and becomes part of an "international legion of day laborers and musclemen, gamblers, sidewalk merchants, migrants, unlicensed crewmen on ship with volatile cargo, part-time mercenaries, full-time gigolos, or curbside musicians. What distinguished them . . . was their refusal to equate work with life and an inability to stay anywhere for long. . . . Anarchic, wandering, they read about their hometowns in the pages of out-of-town newspapers" (166). Paul Gilroy highlights a similar mobility in *The Black Atlantic*, suggesting that work has always signified oppression to blacks in the West. Gilroy contends that "in the critical thought of blacks in the West, social self-creation through labour is not the centre-piece of emancipatory hopes. For the descendants of slaves, work signifies only servitude, misery, and subordination." (40). Gilroy further maintains that "the expressive cultures of the black Atlantic world have been dominated by a special mood of restlessness" that would

"evoke and affirm a condition in which the negative meanings given to the enforced movements of blacks are somehow transposed. What was initially felt to be a curse—the curse of homelessness or the curse of enforced exile—gets repossessed" (111). Son's "restlessness" as an undocumented man leads him to a strong critique of capitalism, colonialism, and racism. While Jadine's subject position enables a critique of Son's gendered underpinning that assumes a fixed idea of tradition and home, and resorts to myths of origin, Son's symbolic position as an itinerant black nationalist emblem enables a strong critique of her assimilation to colonial and racist paradigms of consumption. Informed by his memories of Eloë and his experiences at sea, he challenges Jadine's Eurocentric education, claiming that

whatever you learned in those colleges that didn't include me ain't shit. . . . Did they tell you what was in my heart? If they didn't teach you that, then they didn't teach you about nothing, because until you know about me, you don't know nothing about yourself. And you don't know anything, anything at all about your children and anything at all about your mama and your papa. (264–65)

In this way, he positions her as an alienated subject, captive to Western mythologies of black backwardness, even as he aligns himself with an unbroken lineage of a black past and its future destiny.

Two things challenge his stance, however, and do not allow him to stand at the moral center of the novel. First, his critique of Jadine's rootlessness assumes fairly simplistic hierarchies of gender, and second, his critique of New York similarly relies on a conception of diminished masculinity and improper gender roles. In his relationship to narratives of rootedness, it is worth recalling Gilroy's argument again. Gilroy suggests that "the acquisition of roots became an urgent issue only when diaspora blacks sought to construct a political agenda in which the ideal of rootedness was identified as a prerequisite for the forms of cultural integrity that could guarantee the nationhood and statehood to which they aspired" (112). Similarly, Son affirms roots only when confronted with Jadine's rootlessness and with her disregard for black traditions. His definition of home therefore stabilizes only when confronted with her mobility. His critique can accordingly be read as essentially in service of his gendered nationalism. Moreover, his criticism of Jadine hinges on rigid and proper conceptions of the identities of men and women. He argues that "[y]ou turn little black babies into little white ones . . . you turn your men into white men, and when a black woman treats me like what I am, what I really am, you say she's spoiling me." In a similar manner, he stands against hybridity of all kinds, believing that "there are no 'mixed' marriages.

It just looks that way. People don't mix races; they abandon them or pick them" (270). By the end of the novel, the limits of his perspective become clear as he is forced to acknowledge hybridity. When he sees a young Caribbean girl, Alma Estee in a red wig, he realizes that he does not understand anything any more and he has to concede that it "was all mixed up" (299). Just as Jadine forgets Alma's name and calls her by the generic "Mary," Son has no means of understanding Alma's desire for a red wig. Alma's perspective thus helps position Son along a spectrum of patronizing and colonial attitudes towards the Caribbean islanders, rather than as their champion.

In addition to its gendered limitation, Son's symbolic value as a figure of resistance works only in the mythic space the novel constructs in the Caribbean, where he is allied with nature itself, and with the blind horsemen. When he reaches New York, he feels diminished. He realizes that his anger about Valerian's apples does not travel with him to New York: "He needed the blood-clot heads of the bougainvillea, the simple green rage of the avocado. . . . Here prestressed concrete and steel contained anger, folded it back on itself to become a craving for things rather than vengeance." Just as the bathtub in his hotel room reveals how "the leaden waves of the Atlantic . . . [and] the bored treachery of the sea" become "a playful gush of water that did exactly as it was told" Son himself assumes a docile role "in the hands of civilization" (221). He can only exist, therefore, as a powerful presence in a primitive and symbolic capacity.¹⁶ In New York, he further realizes that

there weren't going to be any impalas or water buffalo; no mating dance, no trophies. There were dice instead of tusk; a job when he wanted a journey. And the lion he believed was exclusive to his past—and his alone—was frozen in stone (can you beat it?) in front of the New York Public Library in a city that had laughed at his private's uniform. Like an Indian seeing his profile diminished on a five-cent piece, he saw the things he imagined to be his, including his reflection, mocked. Appropriated, marketed and trivialized into décor. He could not give up the last thing left to him—fraternity. (168)

Here Son articulates a sense of loss in a world of shrunk possibilities, a world that offers limited opportunities for heroism and adventure, particularly as an expression of masculinity. Water buffalos and mating dances recall—albeit faintly—another scene of heroism, possibly in Africa where manhood was fierce and stable. He refuses to reduce such heroic desires and aspirations to a simple job. The lion of his past, like the commodification of the Indian, leads him to reject the

materialism of New York City in favor of Eloë. Following a separatist logic ("the lion" that was "his alone"), he resorts to fraternity as the alternative. He values the companionship of men because he has lost everything else. Such fraternity necessarily excludes Jadine, requiring that she be separated from his childhood friends and endure their reduction of her identity to a sexual one. Son's reaction to men in New York affirms his gendered logic. Seeing them not as real men, but ones who had given up the task of being "black and men at the same time," he describes them as having lost their masculinity: "They had snipped off their testicles and pinned them to their chests; they put the weighty wigs Alma Estee dreamed of on their heads and feathery eyelashes on their eyes" (216). Rather than a critique of capitalism alone, therefore, Son's rejection of New York also comes from his masculinist ideas. His invective for Jadine in the sexualized language of female stereotypes makes this obvious; he calls her "Gatekeeper, advance bitch, house-bitch, welfare office torpedo, corporate cunt, tar baby side-of-the-road whore trap" (219–20).

If Son's perspective loses validity on account of his sexist definitions of manhood and womanhood, Therese is subject to a similar deficiency. Rather than appearing as an object of veneration alone, a woman with "magic breasts" and ancient wisdom, Therese reveals severe limitations in her knowledge and perception. She thinks of America, for instance, as a giant space of bodily deformation, where "American women killed their babies with their fingernails" (150). In addition to a site of sterility, America is also a place where the biological identities of men and women are distorted:

Therese said America was where doctors took the stomachs, eyes, umbilical cords, the backs of the neck where the hair grew, blood, sperm, hearts and fingers of the poor and froze them in plastic packages to be sold later to the rich. . . . Where everybody on the television set was naked and that even the priests were women. Where for a bar of gold a doctor could put you into a machine and, in a manner of minutes, would change you from a man to a woman or a woman to a man. Where it was not uncommon or strange to see people with both penises and breasts. (151)

Therese's critique of America, rather than functioning as an anti-colonial rejection, institutes various oppositions between nature and artifice. While the Caribbean is overflowing with fertility, America has become so consumed with materialism that it has forgotten the proper roles for men and women. Therese's reproductive definition of black womanhood further relies on the demonization of white women and their reduction to their body parts alone.¹⁷ Gideon reinforces her

stereotyped assumptions as he shares stories of abortion from his American sojourn. Moreover, he defines racial identity not as socially constructed, but pre-determined, when he criticizes mulattos. He tells Son to forget his "yalla" because "it's hard for them not to be white people. . . . Yallas don't come to being black natural-like. They have to choose it and most don't choose it" (155). While Son places an enormous amount of value in Therese and Gideon, it is difficult for readers to follow his lead in light of these statements about race and gender. Son's limits are further made apparent when he realizes that he has no way of understanding the black people of New York: "How long had he been gone, anyway? If those were the black folks he was carrying around in his heart all those years, who on earth was he?" He feels as if he's "being confronted with a whole new race of people he was once familiar with" (217). Son's limits make it clear that he too suffers from blinkered vision, and cannot make authoritative pronouncements that would guide the reader. He realizes by the end of the novel that his investment in the "original dime" was illusory, as Jadine "made him see it the way it was, the way it really was, not just a dazzling coin, but a piece of currency with a history rooted in gold and cloisonné and humiliation and death" (299). In this way, in the dramatic conflict between Son and Jadine, neither can be upheld as a reliable authority on race or gender, as Morrison uses the two to displace the other's certainties and to reveal their limitations.

If our expectations of gender roles are destabilized in the novel's portrayal of Son and Jadine, they are further challenged when we consider the novel's main intertext—the tar baby story. The folktale, though available in several versions, usually concerns a white farmer who sets a trap for the rabbit by creating a tar baby. The rabbit escapes the clutches of the tar baby by asking to be thrown into the briar patch, where his survival skills have no match as he was born and bred there. Most critics read Jadine as the tar baby created by white culture to trap Son, the authentic racial subject, and his escape into myth as his return to a briar patch.¹⁸ While this reading certainly works, several other interpretations are also possible. In fact, Morrison's usage infinitely complicates the folktale that is already resistant to the imposition of a single, stable meaning. Rather than recalling the white farmer's tar baby alone, Morrison has suggested in interviews that she was interested in redefining its meaning as she recalled the use of the term as a racial epithet for black girls. She says, "For me, the tar baby came to mean the black woman who can hold things together" ("Language"122). If we follow this definition, Jadine clearly does not fulfill the function of tar, as she is unable to hold things together. For Morrison, Jadine represents someone who "has all the benefits of what the white Western world has to offer;

what would the relationship be with the rabbit who really comes out of the briar patch?" ("Toni Morrison" 102). In this way, Morrison's question is a way of probing the connection between the rabbit and the tar baby, between authenticity and artifice, the rural and local against the cosmopolitan, and finally, the mythic or magical against the brutally realist, without reaching any clear answers.

Morrison's manipulation of the tar baby story ultimately reveals no resolutions, offering further equivocation instead. Given the novel's frequent associations of Son with blackness and with tar, it is equally possible to read him as a tar baby for Jadine.¹⁹ In this reading, she is the rabbit who escapes to her briar patch in Paris, while Son's idea of his briar patch, Eloë, is shown to be illusory. Once Jadine visits Eloë, Son's dream of Eloë as a haven of rest and stability collapses, as he is forced to acknowledge the hollowness of his vision. Another way of interpreting the folk-tale intertext is to see the diaspora mothers as tar babies. They certainly possess what Morrison calls in an interview "the tar quality," the ability to make something stick, precisely the quality that Jadine rejects ("Conversation" 131). The association of the swamp women with tar is evident in the scene where Jadine literally sinks into a pit of tar, and the swamp women welcome her descent into slime. Similarly, the African woman is described as "tar-black" and could function as a tar baby for Jadine, symbolizing the trap of authenticity (46). One could then argue that Jadine frees herself from all these traps by returning to her briar patch in Paris.

None of these interpretations can be valued above the other—the novel keeps offering them up and displacing them. As these varied meanings build up, what ultimately emerges from the tar baby intertext is a strong resonance of equivocation and entanglement. Further complications are also possible when we turn to the novel's conclusion. The novel's ending is deliberately obfuscatory—Son's "lickety-split" movement into the island suggests three things at once—the rabbit returning to the briar-patch, the horse-riders riding their horses, and the men in New York who have given up being men and look neither left nor right (306). If Son's embrace of the mythic mode is ambiguous, Jadine's return to Paris is also open to question. Earlier, she had greeted New York City with the same delight, saying that "This is home. . . . If ever there was a black woman's town, New York was it" (222). By the end she realizes that New York was not home and "there were no shelters anyway. . . . No matter what you did, the diaspora mothers with pumping breasts would impugn your character. And an African woman, with a single glance from eyes that had burned away their own lashes, could discredit your elements" (288). She does, however, resolve to return to Paris and engage with this African woman and let go of dreams of safety. There is no such

ending for Son, as he is tricked by Therese into joining the legendary blind horsemen who inhabit the Caribbean island. For Son, the only briar patch then is the space of myth. While he may have roots in a past, he cannot find either a present or a future in any realistic sense. In order to reconstruct Son as a true diasporic nationalist son, the novel has to violate the codes of realism as the conflicts opened up by the narrative have no resolution without recourse to the mythic register. Diaspora emerges as a mythic memory, one that manifests itself in nature and in the landscape, but this mythic memory cannot be translated into the present and the future.

In essence, this construction of diaspora as a mythic memory is compatible with the Afrocentric turn critiqued by such contemporary theorists of diaspora as Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, who posit the idea of diaspora as a figure for instability, ambiguity, and hybridity. Hostile to any simple notion of rootedness or return, such contemporary theories of diaspora highlight discontinuity instead, calling (in Gilroy's words) for an appreciation of "routes" rather than "roots" (*Black Atlantic* 19). These theories pointedly revise earlier definitions of diaspora structured by a teleology of origin, scattering, and return. While older conceptions of diaspora posited an organic link to Africa, and imagined both symbolic and actual returns to the homeland, the new one focuses on displacement itself, maintaining that nationalist constructions of racial identity rely on essentialist mystification. Stuart Hall argues for the proliferation of multiple black identities and locations, no longer looking to Africa for a unified racial consciousness. Calling for a "politics of ethnicity predicated on difference and diversity" Hall argues that the "black experience" must be seen as a "diaspora experience" ("New Ethnicities" 447), defined "not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity . . . by hybridity" ("Cultural Identity" 402).

This conception of diaspora resonates in *Tar Baby* when the novel develops a representation of diasporic encounters at the realist level, what may be called "actually existing" diaspora, where differences, disagreements, and miscommunications between various members of the black diaspora abound. At this level, the novel offers marvelous representations of the contentions between different members of the black diaspora, between black and white, male and female, nature and culture. Persisting alongside the mythic mode of diaspora as one seamless voice, the novel's conflicts and tensions also make available the realist notion of diaspora, one where contentions rule. At the historical, realist level, diaspora exists as contention and fracture, very much within time, subject to class and all the tensions and hierarchies of power. Sydney and Ondine see Son as a "swamp nigger" (191); Jadine calls him a "river rat" with "Mau-Mau,

Attica, chain-gang hair" (159, 113). Sydney, as a bourgeois African American, chastises Son, declaring that "I am a Phil-a-delphia Negro mentioned in the book of the very same name. My people owned drugstores and taught school while yours were still cutting their faces open so as to be able to tell one of you from the other" (163). In a similar manner, all the African Americans condescend to the inhabitants of the Caribbean island, they in turn greet them with suspicion and dislike. Indexing the complex play of power between different members of the black diaspora, the realist representation of these fractious encounters destabilizes common assumptions about black unity and racial identity.

As the novel oscillates between these two distinct notions of diaspora, the question Morrison had posed earlier is never answered: the root of the conflict between Jadine and Son was that "One had a past, the other a future and each one bore the culture to save the race in his hands. Mama-spoiled black man, will you mature with me? Culture-bearing black woman, whose culture are you bearing?" (269). No clear answers emerge to these questions. This raises the question of whether diasporic connection is only possible in a mythical realm. The mythical realm assumes, foregrounds, and demands connection. All the ancestors appear as a collective presence, calling one of their own—they assume community and the need for continuity. Their vision relies on a seamless suturing of the past, the present, and the future. At the level of actual encounters, however, all we see is misunderstanding and conflict, antagonism, misrecognition, and threat. Thus, the register of myth that assumes diasporic unity, sits uneasily with the historical and political aspects of the narrative. If Son reifies race, while Jadine denies it, the novel itself seems unwilling to choose between the two. Morrison has suggested that nature functions as a chorus in the novel. If so, in a novel where it is hard to find any character whose point of view remains unquestioned, nature can function as the repository of value. But nature—no matter how skillfully it is anthropomorphized—cannot contain the dilemmas thrown up in the realist register of the novel.

Recent theorists of diaspora have highlighted such questions of difference and discontinuity. Gilroy repeatedly argues against "purity and invariant sameness" (188), while Kenneth Warren highlights "ambiguities that inhere in diasporic thought—ambiguities that make diasporic visions possible" (393). Brent Edwards goes so far as to say that diasporic "exchange is never a neat and happy call and response between blacks in different places in the diaspora. It is equally shaped by a profound series of misapprehensions, misreadings, persistent blindnesses, and solipsisms, a series of self-defeating and abortive collaborations, a failure to translate even a basic grammar of black-

ness" (291). Morrison's novel emphasizes precisely these ambiguities and failures, as it moves between highly divergent conceptions of race, nation, and gender. But rather than concluding with a mere representation of these differences, *Tar Baby* makes it clear through its mythic frame that the possibility for such union exists, and is valuable. Even as the novel dramatizes the failed romance between Son and Jadine, it makes available an ideal of unity. In this way, Morrison does not end up with an a priori defense of rootlessness; instead she carefully lays out the value of memory, tradition, and continuity. But such continuity can only exist with the loss of self that Jadine rejects and Son finally embraces.

In this way, even though the novel provides a stable level of diasporic unity, it is shot through with the evidence of contentions. The realist conception of diaspora does not cancel out the mythic as Morrison wishes to retain both at the same time, inducing a sense of paralysis. The open-endedness or the irresolution of the novel may be read as symptomatic of the difficulty of such a project of constructing a viable model of diaspora whose political content can accommodate both a realist and a mythic register. Morrison's resolution creates an impossible tension between realism and myth, between politics and fantasy, suggesting that diaspora as a viable option can only be represented in mythic terms and not with recognizable political content. Riddled with contradictions, diaspora can accordingly exist only as an aesthetic repository for the contemporary black writer. *Tar Baby* elaborates this constitutive paradox of the notion of diaspora, as the realist and mythic registers of the novel work at cross-purposes to construct highly divergent narratives about individual and cultural identities. As such, even as Morrison's novel explicitly asserts the value of cultural memory and tradition, it simultaneously undercuts the basis for identifying a stable definition of tradition or authenticity.

Notes

I would like to thank Madhu Dubey for her encouragement and feedback on earlier versions of this essay.

1. See for instance, Karen Luisa Badt, Patrick B. Bjork, Jan Furman, Karla Holloway, Doreatha Mbalia, and Judylyn S. Ryan. For more recent readings that go beyond such a binary between Son and Jadine, see Lauren Lepow, Linden Peach, Ann Rayson, and Craig Werner.
2. For example, Arjun Appadurai, Homi Bhabha, and Paul Gilroy theorize migration and diaspora in widely influential ways, but indicate few

criteria for distinguishing between particular subjects of diaspora. Even though most theories of diaspora champion notions of hybridity, difference, and polyphony, the normative diasporic subject that emerges remains masculine, mobile, and Western. For discussions of definitions of diaspora, see Clifford and Tölölyan.

3. The contradictions Morrison lays out are captured perfectly in the dissonance between the dedication of the novel and its epigraph. Morrison dedicates the novel to her own female ancestors, women who "knew their true and ancient properties," evoking a sense of continuity and tradition and wisdom of women who can nurture the next generation. In contrast, the epigraph highlights difference and discontinuity: "For it hath been declared . . . that there are / contentions among you. "
4. Accordingly, it makes sense that *Tar Baby* is published after *Song of Solomon* and before *Beloved*, allowing us to trace a line of continuity of ascending complexity in Morrison's representation of the past.
5. The black nationalist vision of the race as a family has been critiqued for its anti-feminism and homophobia by scholars like Wahneema Lubiano and Phillip Brian Harper. For a discussion of diaspora and black women writers, see Davies.
6. Representative of this point of view are essays by Coleman, Holloway, Lee, Mbalia, and Mobley.
7. However, even as Jadine approaches certain elements of a black Atlantic subject in her contempt for rootedness and for the fixity of racial or ethnic categories, she departs from its other parameters, as I discuss later.
8. Partha Chatterjee, for example, argues that nationalism in the colonized world seeks to define its difference from the West by reducing women to emblems of unchanging tradition and spirituality.
9. One may think of Morrison's characters from her other novels, such as Milkman Dead, Paul D., or Ajax. Susan Willis explicitly contrasts Jadine to figures like Milkman, whose alienation can be successfully reversed by cultural mentors like Pilate.
10. Morrison's conception of women as culture-bearers recalls Eva, Sethe, and Pilate. For a discussion of maternal politics in Morrison, see Badt, Willis, and Mobley.
11. It is worth mentioning that Paul Gilroy makes a similar case in *The Black Atlantic* for the freedom Europe offered to black intellectuals like W. E. B. Du Bois and Richard Wright.
12. In "Rootedness" Morrison discusses her inclusion of a choral note in her fiction. With respect to *Tar Baby*, she writes that the chorus is "all of nature thinking and feeling and watching and responding to the action going on in *Tar Baby*, so that they are in the story: the trees hurt, fish are afraid, clouds report, and the bees are alarmed" (341–42).

13. This view of diaspora as a simultaneity of black history and experience existing at a plane outside of the ordinary is also discernible in several recent diaspora novels. For instance, the epilogue of Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River* collapses geographical and temporal difference into a simultaneous paean to diasporic survival. Similarly, in Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*, as Avey Johnson travels to the Caribbean, she also travels back in time to the Middle Passage, experiencing physically the bodily trauma of slavery to realize the meaning of the past and its value.
14. Though Morrison herself questions the use of the term "magic realism" for her fiction, several critics have persuasively argued for its relevance, particularly to *Beloved*.
15. Jadine, however, is not the only rootless character in the novel. At one level, everyone is homeless and rootless in the novel, both the white and the black characters. Valerian lives in self-imposed exile, while Margaret complains that she simply lives on a plane. Sydney is unconsciously nourished by memories of a past in Baltimore he has left behind. Even Son, who is interpreted as the symbol of stability, though invested in the image of stable black Southern culture, is constantly on the move. It is thus not easy to locate continuity and permanence in a novel dominated by temporary habitats. Even the novel itself moves between the various spaces of the Caribbean, Paris, New York, and Eloe. The only permanence is at a mythic level.
16. It is significant accordingly that "there wasn't a permanent adult job in the whole of the city for him, so he did teenager's work on occasion" (227).
17. To some extent, the novel also questions its own mythic fabrications. For instance, Gideon suggests that the blind horsemen are blind not because of their resistance to slavery, but as a consequence of "second-degree syphilis" (153). Likewise, Therese first assumes that Son is Jadine's lover from Paris, who has followed her to Isle des Chevaliers in the face of familial opposition to the lovers.
18. Trudier Harris offers the most detailed explication of the folktale and Morrison's reinvention. Also see Craig Werner who argues that the novel links African-American folk tradition to Barthes's theory of myth.
19. We first see Son in Jadine's bedroom, trying to press his dreams of the pie-ladies into hers, an attempt that Morrison describes as follows: "He barely had time to breathe into her the smell of tar and its shiny consistency" (120).

Works Cited

- Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996.
- Badt, Karin Luisa. "The Roots of the Body in Toni Morrison: A Mater of 'Ancient Properties.'" *African American Review* 29 (1995): 567–77.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Bjork, Patrick Bryce. *The Novels of Toni Morrison: The Search for Self and Place Within the Community*. New York: Lang, 1992.
- Chatterjee, Partha. *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986.
- Clifford, James. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997.
- Coleman, James. "The Quest for Wholeness in Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby*." *Black American Literature Forum* 20.1/2 (1986): 63–73.
- Davies, Carol Boyce. *Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Edwards, Brent Hayes. "Three Ways to Translate the Harlem Renaissance." *Temples for Tomorrow: Looking Back at the Harlem Renaissance*. Ed. Genevieve Fabre and Michel Feith. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2001.
- Furman, Jan. *Toni Morrison's Fiction*. Columbia, SC: U of South Carolina P, 1996.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Columbia UP, 1994.
- . "New Ethnicities." 1989. *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. Ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Ching. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Harper, Phillip Brian. *Are We Not Men: Masculine Anxiety and the Problem of African-American Identity*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996.
- Harris, Trudier. *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1991.
- Holloway, Karla F. C. "African Values and Western Chaos." *New Dimensions of Spirituality: A Biracial and Bicultural Reading of the Novels of Toni Morrison*. Ed. Karla Holloway and Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos. New York: Greenwood, 1987. 117–30.
- Lee, Dorothy. "The Quest for Self: Triumph and Failure in the Works of Morrison." *Black Women Writers: 1950–1980*. Ed. Mari Evans. New York: Anchor, Doubleday, 1984. 346–60.
- Lepow, Lauren. "Paradise Lost and Found: Dualism and Edenic Myth in Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby*." *Contemporary Literature* 38 (1987): 363–77.
- Lubiano, Wahneema. "Standing in for the State: Black Nationalism and 'Writing' the Black Subject." *Is it Nation Time: Contemporary Essays on Black Power and Black Nationalism*. Ed. Eddie Glaude, Jr. Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 2002. 156–64.
- Marshall, Paule. *Praisesong for the Widow*. New York: Penguin, 1983.

- Mbalia, Dorothea Drummond. *Toni Morrison's Developing Class Consciousness*. Selingsgrove: Susquehanna UP, 1991.
- Mobley, Marilyn. "Narrative Dilemma: Jadine as Cultural Orphan in Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby*." *Southern Review* 23 (1989): 761–70.
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. New York: Penguin, 1988.
- . "Toni Morrison." Interview with Charles Ruas. Taylor-Guthrie 93–118.
- . "A Conversation with Toni Morrison." Interview with Judith Wilson. Taylor-Guthrie 128–37.
- . "An Interview with Toni Morrison." Interview with Nellie McKay. *Contemporary Literature*. 24 (1983): 413–29.
- . "Intimate Things in Place: A Conversation with Toni Morrison." Interview with Robert Stepto. Taylor-Guthrie 10–29.
- . "The Language Must Not Sweat: A Conversation with Toni Morrison." Interview with Thomas LeClair. Taylor-Guthrie 119–128.
- . "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation." *Black Women Writers: 1950–1980*. Ed. Mari Evans. New York: Anchor, Doubleday, 1984. 339–45.
- . *Song of Solomon*. New York: Penguin, 1987.
- . *Tar Baby*. New York: Penguin, 1981.
- Peach, Linden. *Toni Morrison*. London: Macmillan, 2000.
- Phillips, Caryl. *Crossing the River*. New York: Vintage, 1995.
- Rayson, Ann. "Foreign Exotic or Domestic Drudge? The African American Woman in *Quicksand* and *Tar Baby*." *MELUS* 23.2 (1998): 87–100.
- Ryan, Judylyn S. "Contested Visions/Double Vision in *Tar Baby*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 39 (1993): 597–622.
- Taylor-Guthrie, Danille, ed. *Conversations with Toni Morrison*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1994.
- Tölölyan, Khachig. "Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment." *Diaspora* 5.1 (1996): 3–36.
- Warren, Kenneth. "Appeals for (Mis)recognition: Theorizing the Diaspora." *Cultures of United States Imperialism*. Ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease. Durham: Duke UP, 1993.
- Werner, Craig. "The Briar Patch as Modernist Myth: Morrison, Barthes and *Tar Baby* As-Is." *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison*. Ed. Nellie McKay. Boston: Hall, 1988. 150–67.
- Willis, Susan. "Eruptions of Funk: Historicizing Toni Morrison." *Black American Literature Forum*. 16.1 (1982): 34–42.