



## Article

# Call Her Beloved: A Lexicon for Abjection in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*

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**Abstract:** What does it mean to mourn for the loss of lives that are rendered ungrievable by history? More importantly, with what language does one grieve the loss or despoliation of lives that are rendered ungrievable through disremembrance? This study reads such concerns as represented in two novels by Toni Morrison: *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*. Drawing on theorizations of the Other and the Abject in the philosophies of Emmanuel Levinas and Julia Kristeva, respectively, the readings of Morrison's novels presented here seek to conceptualize the impacts of racial and racist oppression as the fallout from experiences of othering in the extreme. Confronting the desecration of human life and dignity engendered through racism, the study argues, is a descent into abjection. Through exploring Morrison's narrative project, as explained in her non-fiction, this study seeks to conceptualize a possible lexicon for grieving the Abject without appropriating it or in any way diminishing its specific and radical alterity as a despoiled being.

**Keywords:** African American studies; ethics; critical race theory



**Citation:** Kumar, S. Satish. 2022. Call Her Beloved: A Lexicon for Abjection in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*. *Literature* 2: 47–61. <https://doi.org/10.3390/literature2020005>

Academic Editor: Carolyn M. Jones Medin

Received: 20 January 2022

Accepted: 24 March 2022

Published: 29 March 2022

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Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name. Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her, and even if they were, how can they call her if they do not know her name? Although she as claim, she is not claimed. In the place where the long grass opens, the girl who waited to be loved and cry erupts into her separate parts, to make it easy for the chewing laughter to swallow her all away.

It was not a story to pass on.

So they forgot her. Like an unpleasant dream during a troubling sleep. Occasionally, however, the rustle of a skirt hushes when they wake, and the knuckles brushing a cheek in sleep seem to belong to the sleeper. Sometimes the photograph of a close friend or relative—looked at too long—shifts, and something familiar than the dear face itself moves there. They can touch it if it like, but don't, because the know things will never be the same if they do.

This is not a story to pass on. (Morrison 2004, p. 323)

<sup>1</sup>One could chance upon such a passage and pause to contemplate that which is most apparent in it—the two ways in which the phrase “to pass on” may be read. The author seems to suggest that while such stories are difficult to ignore, they are equally difficult to tell. Morrison also indicates that the proximity of such narratives, as indicated by the fact that the subjects of such narratives are always within reach of being touched. One almost hears echoes of the opening lines from Paul Celan's “Tenebrae”, “*Nah sind wir, Herr, nahe und greifbar* / We are near, Lord, near and within reach”. The author suggests, that while such narratives and therefore their subjects are within reach of touching, one either does or does not reach out for them with the knowledge that, touching it would change everything. This thing—which for all intents is the subject of such narratives, for we cannot seem to address them quite as a being, is therefore often deemed untouchable despite being within

reach. Moreover, the untouchability of this thing seems to stem from a fear, in this case a fear of change which one may of course interpret in more ways than one. What is the nature of such a change? What is it that changes should one reach out and touch it? Why does the possibility of such a change engender fear? These are all valid questions. It is not the fear of the unknown, because something that is within the reach of one's touch cannot be wholly unknown or wholly unfamiliar. The choice in question then may not necessarily always be a conscious one, but in the moment that one is face-to-face with this thing that is always ever present, reaching out for it and/or touching it, is always an active choice.

The acts of seeing and touching, and the cognitive and narratological function they serve, seem to be underlying themes in Morrison's works and are evoked in a variety of different ways. This is observed in her very first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), which perhaps continues to be one of the most haunting stories the author has ever told. The story of Pecola Breedlove is harrowing, but the horror of it far exceeds the trauma of the individual. While Pecola's tragedy is profound, what compounds the horror of her tragedy is the fact that we are forced to bear witness to it. There is something that is immediately revolting on a visceral level. It is a tragedy shorn of any possible grandeur. Furthermore, it also lacks the traditional sense of causality or redemptive potential offered through a moment of recognition that one usually associates with the tragic as a literary mode, both of which mitigate the true horror of the human condition that one is often forced to confront in bearing witness to suffering. It is often the tragic grandeur of the suffering subject, frequently associated with ideas such as the ennobling purpose of adversity, that makes the regarding of another's pain somewhat bearable. Take such hermeneutic crutches away and all one has is the abyss. This is one of the operational inquiries that Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* grapples with. Order must be restored, for the terror of true chaos is overwhelming. The order of causality comforts us and therefore allows us to bear witness to tragedies such as that of Oedipus'. If we consider the Aristotelean understanding of tragedy, he did after all have a flaw that would unwittingly become his undoing. Moreover, the horrific lengths to which Laius and Jocasta go, to prevent the fulfillment of the prophecy made by the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi, ironically facilitate its fulfilment. The horror of the tale is further softened by Oedipus' ensuing quest for redemption, and further on the question of redemption also somewhat recedes into the background following the dramatic events leading up to Oedipus' exile from Thebes. Whether ultimately redeemed or not, in Sophocles' dramatization of Oedipus' story, he lived out the remainder of his years in Colonus, and upon his death is mourned. For those who mourn Oedipus, there is a language for their grief. They mourn for him as a father or as a sovereign. However, as the narratorial voice in *The Bluest Eye* reiterates at the end of the novel, for Cholly Breedlove, for Pecola Breedlove and most significantly for their child who died from being born "too soon", it was "much, much, much too late" for there to be any grieving.

Claudia and her younger sister Frieda are the only two characters in the entire novel who express any concern for Pecola's unborn child. The young girls may be completely unaware of the extent to which Pecola's predicament is horrifying for the rest of the community living in that neighborhood of Lorain, Ohio. However, one may also argue that it is precisely such an innocence that allows them to find a language with which to mourn the death of Pecola's baby. What begins with the opening realization, though it was "kept" quiet, that no marigolds bloomed in the fall of 1941, and it was *not*, as they had earlier believed, because Pecola was having her father's baby, comes full circle in the end of the novel. Claudia's reflections are almost cinematically superimposed on the image of a now seemingly deranged Pecola rummaging through garbage—"A little black girl who yearns for the blue eyes of a little white girl", Pecola who had been raped twice by her father Cholly, who had conceived a child from being raped twice by her father Cholly, was seen searching the garbage—"after the baby came too soon and died" (Morrison 2007, p. 204).

And now when I see her searching the garbage—for what? The thing we assassinated? I talk about how I did *not* plant the seeds too deeply, how it was the fault of the earth, the land, of our town. I even think now that the land of the entire

country was hostile to marigolds that year. This soil is bad for certain kind of flowers. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear, and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live. We are wrong, of course, but it doesn't matter. It's too late. At least on the edge of my town, among the garbage and the sunflowers of my town, it's much, much, much too late (p. 206).

The concluding sentence of the novel either articulates the impossibility of grieving or suggests its indefinite deferment. However, what can such a deferment mean? Why is it indefinite? What happens to the object of mourning during such a suspension (or prohibition) of grieving? It might seem one is invoking the infamous pop-philosophy adage that begins with, "If a tree falls in the forest . . . ". That is not, however, the case here. Debates regarding the existence of the unperceived object do not hold water in explaining the deferment of grieving, simply because it is not that one cannot perceive the object, but rather that one chooses not to engage with its presence.

In the context of Morrison's work, such a question of choice, though vividly ensconced in the suffering of individual characters, represents a larger question that is as philosophical as it is historical. The articulations of grievability and ungrievability in works such as *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* equally address the processes by which an object is rendered ungrievable in the first place.<sup>2</sup> I argue that such a process is one of othering in the most extreme, that stems from a feeling of what Julia Kristeva in *The Power of Horror* famously described as abjection—the feeling one experiences when faced with the Abject. It is not forgetting but rather disremembering that effectively speaking makes the Abject ungrievable. To reiterate the earlier stated, whether conscious or not, to disremember is an active choice. As Morrison would often remark, "racism is a scholarly affair".<sup>3</sup> Disremembering, whether we regard it as an event or as a process, must be discursively facilitated and sustained, and what is inherently pernicious about it is that it draws any and all attention away from its constructedness. While disremembering is still a choice, the construction of it through discursive processes makes it appear as being the most natural and sometimes even the only choice. We may not always understand the danger that memory poses or the ways in which a reckoning with the past might cause the present to completely unravel, but we seem to reach an unsaid consensus that remembering is not a viable option.

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For Morrison's historical and narratorial consciousness, as she explains in *Playing in the Dark*, such discursive processes that structure remembrance and disremembering, manifest as a circumscription of her freedom to think, "as an African American woman writer", in her, "genderized, sexualized, wholly racialized world" (Morrison 1993, p. 4). As an American writer, who must always be recognized through the use of such qualifiers, even the mere acknowledgment of literary presences such as hers necessitates the defining of a locationality other than the "mainstream" of that which is identified as American literature—a singular national literary entity that "has clearly been the preserve of white male views, genius and power" (p. 5). The question, however, extends beyond the individual entity of any one African American author within larger constructions of American literature; rather, it points to discursive structures that facilitate and sustain the disremembering of what Morrison calls the "Africanist" presence in the United States of America. In this series of three lectures, Morrison reflects on the literature and literary culture of the period often described as the "American Renaissance". She does so for two easily identifiable reasons. Firstly, it was in this period, starting around the early 1800s and lasting till the beginnings of the Civil War, she argues, that a sense of "Americanness" begins to most concretely emerge in literary and cultural discourses. Secondly, Morrison seeks to further problematize the conventionally held notion that such a sense of national identity emerging around this period in American history was completely uninformed by and largely ignorant of the "Africanist" presence in America. The argument she makes relates to the complex

and intricate ways in which collectivities of selfhood (in this case, nationhood) are often founded in contradistinction to designated collectivities of alterity. In the specific case of an American national culture, Morrison argues that the most conveniently proximal collectivity of such otherness at the time was the “black presence” (Morrison 1993, p. 5).

These speculations have led me to wonder whether the major and championed characteristics of our national literature—individualism; masculinity; social engagement versus historical isolationism; acute and ambiguous moral problematics; the thematics of innocence coupled with an obsession with figurations of death and hell—are not in fact responses to a dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence. It has occurred to me that the very manner by which American literature distinguishes itself as a coherent entity exists because of this unsettled and unsettling population (p. 6).

Morrison returns to a similar thematic in her more recent collection of lectures, titled *The Origin of Others*. As the title suggests, she seeks to explore the constructions of otherness in American literary discourses, and thereby broadens the scope of her initial inquiries in *Playing in the Dark*. While Morrison perseveres with the question of the “black presence” in the American literary and cultural consciousness, she reflects more on the processes by which a discursive alterity, which in turn facilitates disremembering, is inscribed over an experiential otherness. In doing so, she also reflects upon her own role as a writer and a member of the very same experiential collectivity upon whom such discursive alterities have historically been inscribed. *The Origin of Others* is a more mature reflection on not only the experience of inhabiting the margins, but on the processes through which marginalization is achieved and sustained. She moves between the processes of becoming and being Other. The difference is subtle—almost too subtle—and the subtlety is as intentional as it is necessary. In *The Origin of Others*, Morrison uses the metaphor of estrangement. She begins by stating that there are benefits to “creating and sustaining an Other”. The statement is shortly followed by close reading of passages from Flannery O’Connor’s short story, “The Artificial N—r” (Morrison 2017, p. 19). As we see from her brief reading of O’Connor’s short story, it is the act of first identifying and then defining the Other that facilitates the creation of a discursive space that sustains alterity (p. 22). The sustaining of the Other’s alterity in turn reciprocally sustains the Self’s selfhood. In such a sense the figure of the lawn jockey—“The Artificial N—r”—at the end of O’Connor’s story demonstrates how the black presence was vital to the sustaining of white definitions of humanity. However, also at the end of the story it is Mr. Head and young Nelson who are moved by beholding the figure of the black lawn jockey. As Morrison notes:

The education of the boy is complete: He has been successfully and artfully taught racism and believes he has acquired respectability, status. And the illusion of power through the process of inventing an Other (p. 24).

Therefore, the inventing of an Other and a discourse that sustain its alterity hinge on identifying an entity or collectivity that can be imbued with attributes of strangeness, foreignness or difference. Such discourses also, however, seek to erase the very entity or collectivity upon whose existence they are founded. In other words, the very contrapuntality upon which the categories of selfhood and otherness are based then collapse into a discursive totality. As we see towards the end of “The Artificial N—r”, the presence and countenance of the lawn jockey are inscrutable; Mr. Head and young Nelson stand before it, “as if they were faced with some great mystery” (p. 24). Such a discursive totality can only function on abstractions that obscure the processes of becoming and treats the state of being—in this case of being Self or being Other, as an immutable category. Once abstracted, such categorical immutabilities are sustained through narrativizations that in turn discursively sustain them by detracting from the processuality of abstraction itself. Abstraction, however, always leaves traces and reminders of its processuality, like the lawn jockey in O’Connor’s story that reminds one of the place of black peoples in a majority white America. The black body, albeit diminutivized in the form of a lawn ornament, serves

as a discursive anchorage that establishes the order of things. Young Nelson and Mr. Head are lost in Atlanta and wander into a seemingly affluent white neighborhood. As Morrison notes in her reading of the text, being in a markedly white space makes them anxious, and seeing the black lawn jockey offers them a strange sense of comfort.

When finally they enter an all-white neighborhood, their fear of not belonging, of becoming, themselves, the stranger, destabilizes them. They are calmed and rescued from this threat only by seeing a visual connection to what they believe is a shared racism of whites of all classes—the artificial n---r (p. 23).

This is the instruction in racism that Morrison alludes to. It is not just the learning of one's place in the order of things, but rather learning to take comfort in such knowledge. The "white definition of humanity", as Morrison calls it, is dependent on the black presence in precisely such a way—its survival depends on the internalization of an order of things by all things ordered within it (p. 20). Even after slavery, wherein the "white definition of humanity" was dependent upon a dehumanized commodification of the black body, the figure of the black lawn jockey endures, not merely serving as a diminutivized vestigial reminder of a past brutality. Its presence denotes a continuity in the ontological correlation between whiteness and humanity that is sustained by the covert dehumanization of the black body. What else is racism sustained by—in the United States or elsewhere—if not by such a correlation that can no longer overtly parade as fact or truth?

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So, the question one essentially begins with is, as Morrison suggests, how is the Other abstracted and, more importantly, why must such an abstraction be sustained? As mentioned earlier, the metaphor of touch, in the way that it is deployed by Morrison, emphasizes the fact that "touching it" will cause "things to never be the same again". It is precisely such an encounter with alterity that she seeks to facilitate through her work. It is not something that one can seek out, because the possible subjects (or objects) of such narratives have been abstracted by being actively disremembered. When we come face to face with it, we do not know how to address it, and yet it endures. The only way to approach it is perhaps through one's imaginative faculties, but to imagine the violence of abstraction is equally a descent into abjection. It is terrifying because it undoes the very binaries that fortify an identification in the Self. The Subject demands explanation for the violence of its abjection and being as it is an instrument for such a violation, the Self is undone in the face of the Subject. In such an encounter, the Self must admit complicity in the abjection of the Other—the despoliation of a once otherwise located Self. Such a reckoning calls into question a fundamental humanity that ontologically reinforces any identification of the Self in an idea of humanness or humaneness. Hence, it is equally absurd to distance acts of violence, even the most spectacular ones, from the realm of human action. As Toni Morrison explained in a 1998 interview with Australian journalist Jana Wendt that was the subject of a fair bit of controversy, history has borne witness to several events of spectacular violence, and that one cannot help but acknowledge that such events are more common and endemic to the human condition than we would like to believe.<sup>4</sup>

One finds echoes of such a sentiment in Hannah Arendt's report on Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem. It would be unethical, for example, to preclude the operations carried out during the *Shoah* from the realm of humanity. The *Shoah* was carried out by human hands, and it is precisely this fact that demands moral and ethical considerations—is it ethical for a human being to enact such violence on another human being? The categorical "banality of evil", therefore, resides in the fact that we do not perceive the human condition as being capable of atrocities of magnitudes such as the *Shoah*, the Middle Passage or the Congolese genocide, and the list could carry on endlessly. The fact that such a list is potentially endless signifies that such instances of spectacular violence are more common than we would like to acknowledge. In not liking to or not choosing to believe that violence is a commonplace occurrence, one repeats the same cycle that rationalizes violence in the first place—processes



of othering and dehumanizing. In separating such excesses of violence from the realms of human action, one is also separating them from larger contemplations of the human condition. However, when one is forced to confront the humanity of the inhumane or inhuman, one is also forced to contemplate one's own complicity in such extremes of violence. One is implicated quite simply by virtue of belonging to the larger collectivity denoted by the human condition. Hence, to return to the metaphor of touch, should one reach out and touch "it", and confront the experience of such excesses of violence within the realms of human action, the comfort one takes in one's *de facto* humanity—one's place in the order of things, starts to erode. What is one left with then?

Therefore, we go to great lengths to not contemplate, for example, the genocidal potential endemic to the human condition. Such denial, which then becomes the basis for forms of systemic disremembering, is expressed in a variety of ways. One may deny the human capacity for violence by simply refusing or questioning the veracity of historical events when such a capacity for violence manifests. Shortly after World War II, when the knowledge of the Nazi pogrom started to become increasingly public, there was an almost knee-jerk denial of the fact that the *Shoah* had happened. Such denial was not limited to the more obvious political motivations alone but found somewhat fertile ground in the academy as well. British-born French scholar Robert Faurisson was perhaps the most well-known of such examples, as evidenced by his infamous 1974 letter to the Yad Vashem, that systematically explained the inconceivability of the Nazi death camps and therefore the *Shoah*. Faurisson for many years after continued to argue the inconceivability of the Nazi pogrom. As George Steiner would later reflect, his use of the word "inconceivable" was at once fascinating and disturbing.<sup>5</sup> Is one to infer that in Faurisson's understanding the *Shoah* did not happen, or at least that the atrocities were not to the magnitude that they have been reported, because they were inconceivable to him? How can one conceive of the massacre of greater than 11 million people? Can one think of 11 million people in any real or relatable terms, let alone their genocide? And were one able to contemplate or conceive of their individual and collective anguish, would it not be altogether debilitating? I realize I am not stating anything new here. Till this date in the United States, one will find groups of people who believe that slavery was "not as bad" as history makes it out to be. Does not the brutality of the "bit" or the "cat-o'-nine-tails" pose a harsh cognitive dissonance when located within imaginaries of the "great antebellum houses" and "Southern hospitality"? I am not the first person to put such thoughts to words, and I will certainly not be the last. Hence, I will say this; yes, the contemplation of such magnitudes of suffering is horrifying, especially if one also is called upon to acknowledge a human capacity for inflicting it. Therefore, when we do confront such events wherein the immense capacity for the inflicting of violence manifests within the human condition, we find ways to cope with its realization. We demand that the reckoning of such horrors also provide a means for their katharsis.

We either go to the extreme of denying the human capacity for violence, by labeling the perpetrators of egregious acts of violence as inhuman or we treat the suffering of others as we would a Greek tragedy—as a means to our own katharsis, while taking comfort in a sense of gratitude over being neither the perpetrators nor victims of violence. Either way, we are not called upon to inhabit such experiences of violation, and that is what makes narratives such as *The Bluest Eye* or *Beloved* especially difficult to engage with. Inviting an "unwilling audience"—as Morrison explains in her preface to the Vintage international edition of *Beloved*—to partake of such an experiential world, even momentarily, through narrativization is by no means a simple task. Such an already difficult task is even further complicated by the enterprise of finding an amenable lexicon with which to tell such stories. Herein operates the double-bind that Morrison invokes in the epilogue to *Beloved*; these are stories one struggles to "pass on". The sincerity with which the young narrator speaks of Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* is as shocking as it is disarming. It is not that a language does not exist for the telling of Pecola's story. Rather, it is only perhaps in language that one can encounter Pecola's abjection. The reason we struggle with such stories is because they

challenge the safety and comfort of abstractions—truth, goodness, beauty, etc.—the very foundations upon which a “moral universe” may be constructed. Through the story of Pecola Breedlove, for example, one is compelled to contemplate how this “little black girl who yearns for the blue eyes of a little white girl”, was reduced to the thing that searches the garbage, for yet another thing that was “assassinated”. More importantly, as the young narrator reflects at the end of the novel, it also forces the townsfolk to contemplate their complicity in driving her to such a state of non-being. In the end, Pecola becomes a sort of *pharmakos*, that purges the community of the horror of her own existence.

All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed. And all of our beauty, which was hers first and which she gave to us. All of us—all who knew her—felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. Even her waking dreams we used—to silence our own nightmares. And she let us, and thereby deserved our contempt. We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength. (Morrison 2007, p. 205)

Therefore, to think that the abjected does not participate within what we define as a “moral universe” would be to severely limit the question of morality itself. In this context, when we speak of the “ethical” or the “moral”, we are not simply designating right from wrong. The question here is not what is or is not the right thing to do. While one is speaking of the categories of right or good in theoretical terms, one is not necessarily speaking in empty or vacuous abstractions. I am certain we have all at one point or another encountered those utilitarian “thought experiments” that lay claim to profound insights into the moral and ethical dilemmas of “right action”. Most of these exercises follow the formulaic construction that requires one to contemplate the committing of an otherwise “immoral”, “unethical” and sometimes heinous act in the interests of preserving the “greater good”. I recall encountering one such question in a freshman philosophy seminar. If I recall correctly, we were contemplating the murdering of 15 infants in order to save the lives of 15,000 adults. The details of the events leading to such a contemplation of multiple infanticides eludes me; however, as is the case with most of these “thought experiments”, one is usually encouraged to think in terms of a no-exit situation. Such “thought experiments”, as Michael J. Sandel acknowledges in his book *Justice: What is the Right Thing to Do*, are “imperfect guides to action”, while maintaining that they still serve as “useful devices for moral analysis” (Sandel 2009, p. 24). I do not wholly disagree, particularly if the focus in such contemplations is not the action itself—in this case, actively killing 15 infants or assuming complicity through inaction in the deaths of 15,000 adults—but rather the processes that leads one to act. However, more importantly, such a contemplation still dwells on a binary that implicitly accords differential value to one over the other. It implicitly values action over inaction or suggests that the lives of those being secured outvalue the lives of those sacrificed by sheer weight of numbers. Even so, the lives taken in lieu of the lives saved are still accorded value through an act of sacrifice, and hence one could assume some value to those lives, albeit sacrificial. The lives of the 15 infants come to mean something in the Utilitarian frame that consumes them, because they can be bartered for the lives of 15,000 adults. How about if we do not have the luxury of according such “meaning” to the lives that we take or tacitly standby and watch being taken? What if the *pharmakoi* were killed or attacked just for sport? The reason I often find such “thought experiments” facile is because one now lives with the ever-growing realization that, on a daily basis, several lives are lost across the world—infant, adult and geriatric alike—and the loss of these lives do not account for any “greater good” in the world. Binary utilitarian morality cannot account for lives that can be taken or lost, but never sacrificed; lives that embody in the truest sense

of what Giorgio Agamben alludes to in his work as a “bare life”. It is in such an emptying of value that one can begin to contemplate the Abject.

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Abjection, as Julia Kristeva explains in *Powers of Horror*, may be understood as:

... one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. (Kristeva 1982, p. 1)

In the way Kristeva sets up a philosophical and theoretical frame, abjection is an “affective” response to the presence of the “Abject” (p. 1). It is important to recognize that the Abject is different from an object—it can neither be named nor imagined, nor is it an “object” that through its otherness eludes one’s desire (p. 1). The Abject, quite simply, is the impossibility of meaning, and the only property the Abject shares with an object is the fact that one can confront it (p. 2).

I endure it, for I imagine that such is the desire of the other. A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A “something” that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me (p. 2).

A mitigation of the horror of the Abject, and the feeling of abjection it generates when one confronts it, is sought in attempts to objectify it. Such objectification, by which one means an imposition of the possibility for meaning and understanding, is not difficult because, like the object, the Abject is “opposed to I”. Opposition here, to extend Kristeva’s definitions, is something that brings the Abject into proximity with I, and such a proximity in this case brings both horror and a desire to remedy the negative affect of horror. Therefore, we seek to confront the Abject—which is the impossibility of meaning—as an object that holds potential for meaning. More commonly, such meaning is sought through acts of judgement that seek to reduce the Abject to a possible object for redemption or condemnation. Through such a process of objectification, the radical alterity of the Abject is diminished from being absolutely Other to becoming an Other, one that is less threatening, less horrifying and offering the future possibility of a redemption into the paradigm of the Self or the I. As observed earlier, the fact that Oedipus can be mourned as a father and a sovereign after his passing, somewhat mitigates the horror of his tragedy. Therefore, interpreting the Abject then becomes an act of othering it from itself so that it is less oppositional to the I. Objectification becomes the only way to cope with abjection, because as Kristeva rightly points out, the Abject in and of itself cannot be assimilated. What connects the Abject to horror is its simultaneous proximity and in-assimilability. The struggle to rehabilitate the absolutely “Other” is also a struggle to counteract the horror of the Abject.

Conversely, abandoning the Abject as absolutely “Other” is an attempt to negate its proximity to I, and consequently the interdependent and dynamic nature of a possible relationship between what Emmanuel Levinas defines in *Otherwise than Being* as “being and not-being”. As a species or collectivity of being the abjected inhabits a limen between the totalities of Self and Other. It is not Self, but as Morrison poignantly explains in the epilogue to *Beloved*, should one stare at it too long, “something more familiar” appears to move (Morrison 2004, p. 324). Confronting the Abject fills one with fear, because the Abject ostensibly appears no different from oneself. In order for the Abject to not fill one with fear, it must be made meaningful in one way or another—its alterity either magnified or diminished. If it is absolutely othered, there is no common ground from which to approach



it. One shares nothing in common with the total stranger. The Abject, however, is not absolutely Other but, rather, I would contend that it is perhaps the exterior most point at which selfhood can still be experienced—even if only as a trace. Such a diminishing of selfhood to the spectrality of a trace is perhaps what Kristeva seeks to explore through her study of abjection: the estrangement of the Self from itself in confrontation with the Abject. So, unlike the “absolutely Other” that Levinas posits in works such as *Totality and Infinity*, the Abject is not wholly other and yet other enough. Then again, does absolute alterity not also function as a metaphor to explain proximity? The stranger is wholly other, but is also within range of being faced, insofar as one can come face-to-face with the stranger. The absoluteness of alterity, one might argue, functions then as both a metaphor and a metonym. It is a metaphor for the wholly Other, but contains within it the possibility for an ethics of encounter with more proximal alterities.

The Other, however, in Levinas’ philosophical framework seems always absolute in its alterity. In *Totality and Infinity*, he states: “L’absolument Autre, c’est Autrui” (Levinas 2015, p. 39). The “stranger” on the other hand is similar to the Other, but seems different in one crucial regard—accessibility or proximity. The stranger is within reach, but escapes one’s grasp, one has no power over him—the stranger is truly free (p. 39). However, Levinas also points out that the stranger and I are “the same and the other” (p. 39). The stranger is still separated from me by his alterity; however, unlike the “absolutely other”, there is a possibility for a recognition. The alterity of the stranger seems less absolute, not in the sense of a movement towards unity, but perhaps towards dialogue. Particularly in works such as *Totality and Infinity*, alterity is understood in terms of exteriority. However, it is “interiority” that resists “totalization”—interiority makes possible that which is “no longer historically possible” (p. 55). Extending his ideas on the solitariness of being from his earlier works such as *Time and the Other*, in this work Levinas identifies interiority as being bound with the “first person of the I” (p. 57). However, the separation of interiority in such a case is seen in a positive light, because it is not the separation of solitude, but rather a “radical separation” that accords each being “its own time” (p. 57). It is such a separation of interiority, in individualistically resisting totalization, which in Levinas’ schema is the absorption of the entity’s time into a “universal” time, that makes possible the idea of “Infinity” (p. 60). We begin to see at this point how a radical separation from the other and the absolute alterity of the Other start to develop an ethical lexicon for an engagement and a possible relationship with the Other.

It is at this point in the discussion that Levinas introduces “Desire”. Desire can arise only where there is separation. However, such a “Desire” is not one that seeks a totalization, sublimation or transcendence of separation—the very condition for its existence.

Infinity is not the “object” of a cognition (which would be to reduce it to the measure of the gaze that contemplates), but is the desirable: that which arouses Desire, that is, that which is approachable by a thought that at each instant *thinks more than it thinks*. The infinite is not thereby an immense object, exceeding the horizons of the look. It is Desire that measures the infinity of the infinite, for it is a measure through the very impossibility of measure. The inordinateness (*démesure*) measured by Desire is the face. Thus, we again meet with the distinction between Desire and need. Desire is an aspiration that the Desirable animates; it originates from its “object”; it is revelation—whereas need is a void of the Soul; it proceeds from the subject. (p. 62).

Desire for the Other can only come to a Self that lacks in nothing—a self that does not need to assert or exert its selfhood upon another (p. 62). Only a Self that is secure in its interiority can desire exteriority, only in such a case can intellect aspire towards transcendence (p. 82). It is such an aspiration, one might postulate, that moves one to endeavor for knowledge of the Other. However, such an aspiration to know the Other does not ever posit a possibility of transcending the fact of separation. Transcending in Levinas’ scheme does not imply an erasure of the interiority of subjects. The Other, therefore, is not an object, neither is it an “object of desire” considering it is not something one can strive to

possess through either power or knowledge. It is quite simply the Desired. In later works such as *Otherwise than Being*, transcendence implies a responsibility towards the Other; it also becomes closely associated with the phenomenon of “exteriority”. Particularly in *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas provides a possible site for “exteriority” in what he defines as the “Being’s other”. This “otherwise than” is not a site in the locational sense of the term, neither is it a *telos*—for a teleology would imply a certain finitude albeit deferred; rather, it signals a process. As Levinas observes, “Being and not-being illuminate one another, and unfold a speculative dialectic which is a determination of being” (Levinas 2013, p. 3). Furthermore, he observes:

To be or not to be is not the question where transcendence is concerned. The statement of being’s other, of otherwise than being, claims to state a difference over and beyond that which separates being from nothingness—the very difference of the *beyond*, the difference of transcendence. But one immediately wonders if in the formula “otherwise than being” the adverb “otherwise” does not inevitably refer to the verb to be, which has been avoided by an artificially elliptical turn of phrase. Then what is signified by the verb to be would be ineluctable in everything said, thought and felt (pp. 3–4).

It is this space of the “otherwise than” that then becomes, one might argue, the site of encountering and engaging alterity—a possibility for dialogue. In the everyday, one might think of such sites for encounter and engagement as locational, however, such a locationality also signals transcendence. Therefore, in positing transcendence as an attribute to such sites of encounter, one is not signaling a collapse back into Being. By qualifying transcendence in terms of both exteriority and responsibility, Levinas emphasizes the impossibility of an erasure or resolution of the “radical separation” which he defines as fundamental to being-in-the-world. The “otherwise than” is precisely the site for a contemplation of ethics, because it necessitates that “radical separation” not be resolved or synthesized into an overt or covert “totalization” in Being. It is a space where one can begin to imagine an engagement with alterity that stems from a deep respect for the radical alterity of the Other, and while such a site allows the Self to approach the absolutely Other with both Desire and Responsibility, it does not demand of the Other a performance of alterity that does not “disturb the being at home with oneself”. The condition of exteriority, from which stems the notion of transcendence as a responsibility towards, demands of the “being at home with oneself” a moral courage to overcome the fear and trembling caused by the stranger’s contemporaneous otherness and sameness.

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It is the possibility or impossibility for such sites of encounter and transcendence that becomes a point of departure for my return to Morrison’s work. I am thinking of two specific moments in *Beloved* that problematize such notions in very unique and specific ways. For Levinas, the stranger is free, and only free beings can be strangers to one another:

The absolutely foreign alone can instruct us. And it is only man who could be absolutely foreign to me—refractory to every typology, to every genus, to every chronology, to every classification—and consequently the term “knowledge” finally penetrating beyond the object. The strangeness of the Other, his very freedom! Free beings alone can be strangers to one another. Their freedom which is “common” to them is precisely what separates them (p. 74).

I have often wondered what such a freedom can mean in contexts such as the narratives presented in *Beloved*, or *The Bluest Eye*. For Levinas, a being is free when it independently inhabits its own time—an idea that he evolves from his critique of Martin Heidegger’s notion “being-in-the-world”. One might construe this to mean a sort of actualization. For the entity of a being to be actualized, such a being must claim identity in its phenomenal existence in the world and such a claim is made through existing in time (Heidegger 2010, p. 18). It is in the experience of being in time or of temporality that being-in-time, or what

Heidegger calls *Dasein*, “finds its meaning” (p. 19). Extending such an idea of temporality—the experience of being in the world through being in time—Levinas argues an ethical foundation to relationships between beings. To be free, as Levinas then argues, is to be in one’s own time, which in this sense would mean having the freedom to experience one’s own temporality and thereby having the capacity to actualize one’s entity—the interiority of the Self. The Self that is fulfilled in such an experience of its own interiority can then form relationships with similar but otherwise located beings—the same and the other. The Other and I are the same because we both have claimed mastery over our own temporalities, and it is because we are actualized in our own separate respective temporalities that we can be strangers unto each other. We are separate, yet equal, and this is what allows for us to encounter one another ethically. However, how does one encounter a being that has no time? What ethics can one imagine in the face of a being that has been denied its own temporality and is simultaneously unassimilable in another’s time? Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* or Beloved in *Beloved* represent the possibility of precisely such an entity.

Alternatively, one might argue that Levinas also provides a foundation for an ethical imagination for being towards the Other, inasmuch as the absolutely Other can instruct the Self. What knowledge and knowing can the Other facilitate? Is this a demand that I make of the Other? Moreover, as noted in the beginning of this essay, what if the knowledge that exteriority offers is overwhelming and even terrifying because it presents a possible undoing or unraveling of the Self? There are several moments in *Beloved* that allude to such a crisis. There is a brief moment when Schoolteacher’s nephew, the same man who had violated Sethe—“who had nursed her while his brother held her down”—was trembling without knowing it, after having learnt that Sethe had killed her child (Morrison 2004, p. 176). He keeps asking why Sethe would do something like “that”? Because she was beaten? He even admits that he had felt immense rage in the past when he had been beaten or humiliated, but he would never have done something like “that”. He cannot even articulate the deed itself; instead, he keeps saying “What she want to go and do that for?” (p. 177). This is a crucial moment. In a story that is otherwise devoid of the “white gaze”, the incorporation of a white voice is as critical as it is intentional. Something greater is at play in Nephew’s trembling and his unawareness of the same—perhaps something similar to the fear that would lead someone like Faurisson vehemently contend that the *Shoah* could not have happened, because it was inconceivable. Nephew makes the connection, between Sethe’s previous abuse and her present action, but the acknowledgement of it terrifies him. More importantly, what terrifies him even more—should there be a connection between Sethe’s violation and her present actions—is the fact that he participated in it, and therefore partook in the responsibility for her actions, which to him has to be inconceivable.

While a crucial point in the narrative, Nephew’s fear and trembling are inconsequential in the larger scheme of things. The confrontation that Morrison facilitates through her work is not between the exteriorities and interiorities of Black and White Americas. Especially in the present moment in our history as a peoples, one need not belabor the point that these are two distinct experientialities of nationhood. Moreover, the experiential pluralities that span across any identitarian category, though often perceived as conflicting, are in fact constitutive of difference which is an incontrovertible existential fact. Equally true is the fact that difference forms the basis for a justification of violence and violation. Hence, as the author herself has admitted on numerous occasions, narrow conceptions of existential and experiential realities constituted in an idea of interminable conflict do not captivate her literary imagination. If one thinks of the worlds we inhabit in terms of conflict, then all one understands of them is conflict. The choice that is alluded to in the epilogue to *Beloved* could also be read in such a light. The knowledge that one could in fact reach out and touch it, but that “things will never be the same” if one does, presents the possibility of one’s temporality being infringed upon by another’s. There is, however, a crucial difference here; the Other being described in this case does not seem to be bound by temporality. The stranger and I are, as Levinas suggests, Others unto one another because each of us inhabit our distinct temporal experientialities and our separation inasmuch as we inhabit the

world through our separate interiorities. Levinas also suggests that it is such a separation of interiorities that gives each being its entity or identity, while also forming the basis for relationality between beings. The ethics of relationality between beings, he argues, is founded in a recognition of and respect for such a separation between the interiorities of beings. As strangers unto one another, we are all free beings. Responsibility towards the Other then, as Levinas understands it, is the free being's commitment to the freedom of Other beings—every being inhabiting its own time or temporality.

The Other, in the context of the epilogue to *Beloved*, I would therefore contend represents an alterity of a different order. The Other in such contexts is the Abject. The Abject is also free—not because it exists in its own time, but rather because it is timeless. In the interests of simplification, one might say that the Abject is a being that is without interiority and one that has been disallowed the possibility for actualization. It is atemporal in the sense that it cannot be in time, its temporality has been interrupted, and therefore it can exist outside of time—it merely is. The Abject's existence cannot be rationalized through its being in time, because it is a being without an interiority. Therefore, when we come face to face with it, we are beyond the realm of ethics. The Abject, Kristeva argues, is similar to the object as one can be confronted by it. What one encounters in the Abject, however, is the impossibility for meaning, and it is through such an impossibility that the Abject wields the power to horrify.

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This brings me to the second instance from the novel that I wish to examine in such a light. I would even argue that in many ways this moment forms a significant narrative dénouement within the novel and forms a basis for the epilogue. As I argued, the freedom of the Abject is based on the fact that it has been emptied of temporality, upon which rests a being's interiority. Its very untenability of being makes it free, and unlike the solitary being that can close in upon itself within the confines of its interiority, the Abject's solitariness is different because it is rendered devoid of an interiority:

There is a loneliness that can be rocked. Arms crossed, knees drawn up' holding on, this motion, unlike a ship's, smooths and contains the rocker. It an inside kind—wrapped tight like skin. Then there is a loneliness that roams. No rocking can hold it down. It is alive, on its own. A dry and spreading thing that makes the sound of one's own feet going seem to come from a far-off place. (Morrison 2004, p. 323)

Moreover, such an untenability of being makes it so that Abject can also take on any form, any attribute, and because it is truly at large, the Abject can assume habitation within any temporality—it has the power to haunt. It is not desired, and is rendered incapable of desiring, and hence the Abject 'invents desire' (p. 283). The alterity of the Abject, if we can even begin to contemplate such an absolute otherness, which is the total absence of being or more specifically beingness, means it is irreducible to temporality and is therefore the abyss. However, we as beings can only contemplate the Other as "Otherwise than Being", and therefore in an encounter with the Other our engagement is a movement from interiority towards exteriority, which we may conceive of as an otherwise located interiority. An ethics based in the fundamental freedom of beings cannot engage the absence of Being or Non-Being. The Self is tasked with the responsibility of upholding the freedom of the Other, and this is perhaps what makes the Abject truly terrifying. The Abject's freedom is of a different order. It cannot be a stranger, because it is not a being otherwise than mine, but verges on the complete absence of being. Such a verging on absence poses the threat of completely consuming my own interiority when I come face to face with the Abject, because it is neither wholly presence nor is it completely absence. The Abject, when it presents itself to us, is a site where once a being existed. It is familiar, because its presence signifies an entity that once could have been, quite like the belongings of children that Kristeva observes in the glass cases in the museums at Auschwitz (Kristeva 1982, p. 4).

However, the familiarity immediately turns to horror, because what we encounter is the presence of an absence.

In *Beloved*, we are presented with such an encounter through the novel's eponymous character. As readers, we invariably find ourselves contemplating the entity of Beloved. In my experienced of reading and teaching the novel, questions have ranged from, "Who is Beloved?" to "What is Beloved?" and everything in between. The only time we truly hear her speak, her speech is unpunctuated and largely undecipherable. We hear echoes of familiarity at various points in Beloved's monologue. Images of closed, dark, overcrowded, claustrophobic spaces seem to invoke experiences of the Middle Passage. We can conjecture but can never truly know what she is actually describing; all we get are vague flashes of the familiar. The impact Beloved has is markedly different when she appears before us through the eyes of the town's womenfolk towards the end of the novel.

The singing women recognized Sethe at once and surprised themselves by their absence of fear when they saw what stood next to her. The devil-child was clever they thought. And beautiful. It had taken the shape of a pregnant woman, naked and smiling in the heat of the afternoon sun. Thunder-black and glistening, she stood on straight legs, her belly big and tight. Vines of hair twisted all over her head. Jesus. Her smile was dazzling. (Morrison 2004, p. 308)

What we find described in the novel prior to this moment is strongly evocative of an exorcism ritual. The women walk to 124 Bluestone on at three in afternoon on a hot a humid day, not knowing what would work, because they did not necessarily know what they were dealing with, they brought whatever they thought would work, be it 'things around their necks,' Christian faith or a mixture of both (p. 303). Thirty odd women gather outside Sethe's house. They chant, they pray and ultimately, they hum because "In the beginning there were no words, and they all knew what that sound sounded like" (p. 305).

This preverbal sound then becomes the appropriate address that draws the haunting out, and the women all see Beloved for the first time. As indicated in Ella's motivation to help free Denver and Sethe from Beloved's habitation of 124 Bluestone Road, the women recognize parts of themselves in Sethe's predicament. Ella, who is most convinced of the dire need for a rescue, leads the charge in the mission—"There was also something very personal in her fury. Whatever Sethe had done, Ella didn't like the idea of past errors taking possession of the present" (p. 302). Later, as the women chant and pray outside 124, Ella briefly remembers the child she had conceived from being raped over a period of time by her white master and his son. She recalled that "She had delivered, but would not nurse, a hairy white thing, fathered by the 'lowest yet'" (p. 305). The thought of "that pup coming back to whip her" moves her to work even more fervently to save Sethe (p. 305). In many ways, Ella becomes representative of the exterior ethos of this scene and of the women gathered there. Their voices finding the right unison to form the necessary harmony becomes representative of a kind of empathy that ultimately unites the women in their shared historical trauma. What the women see when Sethe steps out onto the porch of 124 is more than just a flesh and blood woman standing beside her—Beloved becomes a corporeal totem for their shared pasts.

The novel from the very start circles around the themes of black womanhood and particularly motherhood which are located within a historical context of slavery. When the women come face to face with Beloved, there is an uncanny convergence between Beloved's presence and their historical experientiality. Beloved takes on the beingness of every enslaved woman who was raped repeatedly on the slave ships that bore her to America, and in the plantations thereafter; who like Sethe's mother or Ella let die every child conceived from being raped. In her naked and pregnant form, she is every black woman who was sold as a breeder and like Baby Suggs gave birth to the next generation of slaves after the Slave Trade was officially outlawed. Standing on that porch on that hot summer afternoon, the women outside 124 saw history embodied, and as Ella believed this past could not be allowed to take possession of the present. It is in such a sense that Beloved is timeless.



In the passages that follow, we see the possibility of a future for Sethe and Paul D together. We also learn of Denver's certainty for a future, which becomes a very poignant fulfillment of the unsaid prophecy carried down the river by the bluefern spores at the time of her birth. She is the only character in the narrative to have been born into freedom, brought into the world by "a slave and a barefoot whitewoman with unpinned hair", who because they were undisturbed "at their work" could ensure her passage into the world, "appropriately and well" (p. 100). Unlike the rest of the characters, *Beloved* stands alone, and her smile is as mystifying as it is uncanny. As a reader, I often wonder what becomes of her, and by her, I mean *Beloved* as a flesh and blood entity—the woman who is perhaps carrying Paul D's child. Who is the man without skin? Why is he looking at her? If she really is Sethe's daughter returned from the dead, is she doomed to relive the cycle of being a pregnant black woman on the run? What becomes of the child that she will give birth to? The narrative, however, does not allow us to dwell on such concerns; our attention is quickly redirected to the future, now that the past has been exorcised from the present. It is only in the epilogue that we dwell on *Beloved*, but in absentia. Only her absences indicate that she was once present.

The ending of *Beloved*, like the closing passages of *The Bluest Eye*, have always given me pause. The conjectures are of course endless. What did the author mean? What do we as readers glean from it, especially in the present political climate not just in the US, but the world over? We may argue the necessity of *Beloved*'s exorcism and read into it the unbearable burden of history and memory. We may even postulate the foundations of an "anti-racist" pedagogy in Morrison's writings for our pressing academic and cultural needs. None of these claims or explanations are unfounded, and should we place them upon the text, quite like the footprints that come and go from the water in the epilogue to *Beloved*, "they will fit" (p. 324). Morrison's work is particularly generative in conceptualizing anti-racist thought and work. As I observed in my reading of Nephew's unconscious trembling, the racist's trepidation upon realizing the magnitude and pervasiveness of racism and the fallout from one's complicity as beneficiaries and actors within racism while important, are in the final analysis meaningless in addressing the lasting trauma racism engenders in its victims. It is also true, as Morrison has often remarked, we are all victims of history, but we do not all suffer in the same way. Quite simply put, anti-racist thought cannot assume "white-guilt" as its starting and focal point. The real conflict, if one at all exists, is confronting in all its terrifying glory the living impacts of racism—bearing witness to what the women gathered outside 124 Bluestone Road saw that afternoon.

Interestingly enough, should one place Morrison's aforementioned reading of O'Connor's short story alongside the scene of *Beloved*'s appearance at the end of the novel, one observes a very meaningful reversal. Mr. Head and young Nelson take comfort in beholding the diminutivized fetish of a black figure set across the backdrop of whiteness. *Beloved*, when she appears before the group of black women who come to rescue Sethe, is anything but diminutive—she appears almost larger than life. In the preceding passages, *Beloved* is described as "getting bigger" and as consuming everything in the house (p. 285). She is not a diminutivized fetish for history, but rather a living totem that embodies a vast historical shared experience. She cannot be contained. She cannot be objectified. She consumes everything because there is nothing one can offer her. Quite like the "we" invoked in Paul Celan's poem, she is near and all we can do in her presence is pray. The ritual that surrounds *Beloved*'s appearance towards the end of the novel is evocative of prayer that ends in a sort of communion—"The make a hill" (p. 309). If there is anything that Morrison's work teaches us, especially in the context of these two novels, it is just that: confronting the terrifying burden of history, because as much as we would like to believe, the past is never past. All we can offer *Beloved* or Pecola Breedlove is prayer, and by this one does not only mean prayer in the Judeo-Christian or more generally religious sense, but rather in the senses of acknowledgement and submission. We can grieve for the being that once resided where now the Abject haunts and traces its absence around us. We cannot lay claim to the Abject and yet assume complicity in its claim. As Morrison writes in the

epilogue to *Beloved*, we cannot look for her because she is not lost and even if we look for her, how could we if we did not know her name. We may not know her name, but we all know what she was once called, because she once was.

Beloved.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This present piece is extracted from a larger project that seeks to understand the ways in which historical and generational trauma that are based in extreme experiences of otherness have been narrativized in literature, and how such narrativizations may become generative sites for the contemplation of an ethics towards alterity. It is within such a context that this project sought to engage with Toni Morrison's fiction and non-fiction writings as creating a lexicon for imagining what Carolyn Jones Medine has often described as the inenarrable, Morrison's fiction offers an opportunity for holding space within which one can imagine an ethical relationality with the absented (as opposed to an absentee) Other. It is such an absented Other, who is the subject of violent disremembering, that I call the "Abject" in the context of my larger project. I also contend that the only ethical relationality towards the Abject is at once one of responsibility and supplication. I seek to understand through such experiences of otherness in the extreme, whether it is possible to extant paradigms for an ethics towards alterity to accommodate the Abject. I recognize that the relationship between racism and abjection has been theorized in a variety of ways, including more recently an Afropessimist frame. The absence of this framing in this piece is not an indication of a disagreement with the premises or the conclusions of Afropessimism as a hermeneutic frame. It is rather an attempt to think of racism in terms of instincts/proclivities/desires endemic to the larger human condition. I also argue that it is such a politics of desire that in turn shapes systemic forces that engender inequity and inequality as fundamental to human collectivities. This piece and the larger project from which it is extracted, therefore, seek and reflect—as Toni Morrison does in works such as *Playing in the Dark* or *The Origin of Others*—on the processes of othering and the violence that it makes permissible rather than arriving at specific and conclusive epistemologies regarding the nature of abjection itself. To such an end, the methodology adopted here borders one being exegetic, and seeks to foreground a hermeneutics that is located at the interstices of textuality and experientiality.
- <sup>2</sup> The use of grievability and ungrievability as concepts in this piece draw from their theorizations in works such as *Precarious Life* and *Frames of War* by Judith Butler.
- <sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WoTELoC8Q0M> (accessed on 23 March 2022).
- <sup>4</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WoTELoC8Q0M&t=1209s> (accessed on 23 March 2022).
- <sup>5</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFvF\\_okrNas](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFvF_okrNas) (accessed on 23 March 2022).

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