

HENRY KREISEL AND TONI MORRISON: CLOSURE AND NON-LINEARITY

A NEW AESTHETIC OF CLOSURE: THE NON-LINEAR COSMOLOGIES

OF

HENRY KREISEL AND TONI MORRISON

By

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Abstract

The Judaeo-Christian mythic tradition postulates a universe with absolute limits in both time and space, as typified by the biblical books *Genesis* and *Revelations*. In the first chapter of my thesis I examine the way in which works of literature written from within this tradition necessarily have definite endings characterized by a return to a state of unity and an end to narratable incidents. Such endings may be interpreted as an affirmation of Apocalypse and of the eventual end of linear (and narrative) time.

This theoretical framework cannot, however, account for the approaches to closure evidenced in literature of atrocity: the unprecedented nature of the event narrated necessitates a total re-evaluation or replacement of interpretive models. Thus we see structural innovations built around radically new interpretive strategies in the writings of post-Holocaust Jewish authors faced with the inapplicability of the Judaeo-Christian paradigm as a model for understanding. Of special relevance is Emil Fackenheim's concept of *Tikkun Olam* ("mending of the world"), which searches--and reconfigures--Jewish tradition in creating a uniquely Jewish response to the Holocaust. The practical implications of this paradigm shift, particularly as manifest in Henry Kreisel's *The Betrayal*, forms the focus of the second

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chapter.

In a similar fashion, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* draws formal inspiration from African mythic cosmologies and makes use of African oral narrative techniques. These strategies serve to re-focus the discourse in the novel in such a way that the previously unheard or unauthorized voices (particularly those of slaves and of women) are foregrounded. By reinvesting the bearers of stories with the means to tell those stories in their own terms, Morrison creates a specifically African-American analogue to the Jewish concept of *Tikkun Olam*, a healing of wounded individual and cultural memory through a reaffirmation of cultural specificity. This is the focus of the third and final chapter.

Table of Contents

Chapter One.....	page 1
Chapter Two.....	page 26
Chapter Three.....	page 51
Works Cited or Consulted...	page 81

Chapter One

Novels end. This much is obvious. With the hindsight that comes with twenty-five hundred years of a continuous literary tradition, it seems to have required very little perspicuity on Aristotle's part for him to observe that all plots have a beginning, a middle, and an end. What was more remarkable about Aristotle's seminal organicist axiom was his further observation that "well-ordered plots...will exhibit these characteristics, and will not begin or end *just anywhere*" (Aristotle 546--emphasis added). Whether or not one agrees with Aristotle's definition of exactly what constitutes a "well-ordered plot,"¹ one must acknowledge that the beginnings and, more particularly, the endings of plots are significant moments, for these are the boundaries beyond which the story does not extend. Beginnings and endings, besides providing the obvious starting and stopping points for the author, combine to create a frame within which is positioned the remainder of the text. As such, these terminal

¹ To wit: "...beauty consists in amplitude as well as in order... [therefore a plot must have] sufficient amplitude to allow a probable or necessary succession of particular actions to produce a change from bad to good or from good to bad fortune" (Aristotle 546-7) Of course, Aristotle is speaking of early Greek drama, which is, by virtue of its public mode of presentation, greatly limited in scope of action and span of performance time when compared to the private, written form of the novel.

points are keys to understanding the patterning--or deliberate absence of patterning--of spatial and temporal material within the text.

When proposing to write about closure in the novel, it is important first to clarify exactly what one means by "closure," as the word has been used in countless different and often contradictory contexts. Closure, although it can be used to refer to the structural features of the ending, is not exclusively a structural feature as such, and should not be so understood; neither plot nor conclusion, in themselves, creates closure. Rather, closure--for our purposes, at least--refers to the logic of a text's ending, to the way in which the ending works with or against the rest of the text in determining interpretive strategies and delimiting possible readings.²

A corollary issue when speaking of closure, however, is that of authorial intentionality: although the text is a thing unto itself and must be first considered as just such a discrete object, one must also be aware that each text is also a *constructed* object. Whether its construction is deliberately and consciously planned by the author, or is merely an unconscious stringing together of elements, each text is invariably written by someone, and is specifically about something. As such, the

²This definition is indebted to Marianna Torgovnick's *Closure in the Novel*. Torgovnick argues that "The test [of a 'closed' text] is the honesty and the appropriateness of the ending's relationship to beginning and middle, not the degree of finality or resolution achieved by the ending" (Torgovnick 6), and this is the basis of my definition also.

way in which the text achieves or refutes closure is necessarily influenced to some degree by the intentionality of the author. This is particularly significant in overtly political literature, literature that grapples with social concerns, literature that aspires to have some utility value, some social function or import. Literature of atrocity, as we shall later see, clearly belongs to this class of socially-interested literature. Accordingly, our exploration of closure in literature of atrocity must deal not only with the question of *how* (structurally and semantically) the text creates closure, but also with the question of *why*--why is the structural urge towards closure handled the way it is; what are the ramifications of such an approach; and why is the particular approach in question more effective or appropriate than another might be?

An ending, whether comprehensible or not, whether tending towards comedy or tragedy, whether an invocation of Heaven, Hell, or a continued state of purgatorial existence, is a necessary part of a completed text, and as such necessarily bears upon the body of writing which precedes it. Aristotle, in his elegantly simple way, recognized this fact also: "by end [I mean] 'a state that is the necessary... consequent of something else, but itself has no consequents'" (Aristotle 546). In this paper I will consider, among other things, the way in which the various threads of a narrative (plot, recurrent symbols and motifs, etc.) are tied off or left loose, how the ending logically derives from the rest of the text and logically fulfils (and thus brings an

end to) the sequence of events that comprises the plot. I will also explore the way in which these textual features generate aesthetic and ideological interpretations of the text.

On the most basic (literal) level, a closed text is simply a completed word sequence, self-contained and primarily self-reflexive. The words of the closed text are arranged in a fixed order as determined by the author, and that order follows some sort of internal logic unique to the text. This is the sort of order that Northrop Frye speaks of when distinguishing the "centripetal" from the "centrifugal" text: "the other direction is inward or centripetal, in which we try to develop from the words a sense of the larger verbal pattern they make" (*Anatomy* 73). Closure, by this token, may be understood as the presence of a centripetal or inward-looking unity to the text, one which consolidates the fragments of meaning contained in discrete phrases into a single, larger meaning. The individual characters and narrator(s), although retaining their status as ideologically and semantically distinct speakers within the closed text, also merge in much the same way that the many voices of a choir, while singing distinct parts, all come together to create a unified work of art. In "Discourse in the Novel" Mikhail Bakhtin notes that each distinct linguistic element in the text, "together with its most immediate unity, figures into the style of the whole, itself supports the accent of the whole and participates in the process whereby the unified meaning of the whole is structured and revealed" (Bakhtin 262). At no time do the individual speech

acts in the text lose their autonomy or significance: rather, they gain added significance through their relation to, and dialogue with, the other speech acts that form their context.

Thus the closed text, although a unified artistic object, is not necessarily one in which a single voice is dominant to the point of drowning out or devaluing other lesser voices. However, it is furthermore not one which necessarily seeks to cause the reader to respond to it in a single and unified fashion. Umberto Eco cautions that "what in fact is made available [in a closed text] is a range of rigidly preestablished and ordained interpretative solutions" (Eco 51), from which one might easily see how the idea of textual closure might naturally inspire fear of monolithic and inflexible interpretations in the minds of post-modern and deconstructionist critics. The object of such fear, however, is more properly the reader (or the reader's society) than the text, for the text alone can never enforce such a rigid standard of interpretation. The closed text relies on the reader's acceptance of an equally closed and totalizing system of interpretation; as long as a reader is free to interpret a text as she or he chooses, absolute closure (in an aesthetic sense) is never a certainty no matter how comprehensive the aesthetic argument of the text might be. Eco does acknowledge this, of course: "a work of art," he cautions, "...is a complete and closed form in its uniqueness as a balanced organic whole, while at the same time constituting an open product on account of its susceptibility to countless different

interpretations which do not impinge on its unadulterable specificity" (Eco 49). The aesthetically open text, we see, denies neat conclusions and simple, single readings; its possible meanings refract the light of the reader's own experiences and multiply upon deeper consideration.

Although all of the varied works that can be reasonably gathered under the umbrella-phrase "novel" are closed in the literal sense of the word, it would be overly reductive to say that a novel's ending is no more than the final link in a chain of causally-related events. This would be no more true than to say that a novel is identical to a synopsis of its plot. To place such undue emphasis on the temporal aspect of the novel is to slight its equally significant spatial aspect. A novel unfolds before the reader event by event, page by page (although neither the events nor the pages need follow a strictly linear order, as the single example of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* amply demonstrates), until a conclusion is reached and there are no more pages to be turned. As the word "unfold" suggests, however, when the conclusion is reached the novel is present in its entirety, spread out before the reader's retrospective eye like a map, as it were. Although specific details (minor incidents, place names, perhaps passages of dialogue) will be remembered imperfectly or not at all, major events, characters, and relationships within the text are understood by the reader to

be as fully explained as the author feels is necessary.³ Whether or not specifically recalled by the retrospective reader, all of the evidence deemed pertinent has been presented, all of the significant features of the terrain surveyed.

From this vantage point outside of the flow of novel-time the text is no longer perceived primarily as a linear time-sequence. The question "What happens next?" is replaced by the question "What does it all mean?" After the conclusion comes simultaneity of impression as events can be freely re-ordered in the reader's memory according to thematic and symbolic associations as much as according to mere temporal proximity. Although it is on this spatial level of conception that it becomes possible to speak of closure in an aesthetic sense--for the simultaneous comprehension of a text is necessary if one is to view it as a unified work of art, as aesthetic response demands--one must again be aware that this in no way suggests that a reader is limited to a single unified response. Rather, the reader is free to modify and revise his or her sense of the aesthetic impact of the text, to hold conflicting and possibly even irreconcilable opinions about it. The text may be designed to provoke a single unified response in readers, but the subjectivity of the act of reading makes the enforcing of such a uniform response a practical impossibility. In terms of

³Marianna Torgovnick, in *Closure and the Novel*, concurs: "it is difficult to recall *all* of a work after a completed reading, but climactic moments, dramatic scenes, and beginnings and endings remain in the memory and decisively shape our sense of a novel as a whole" (Torgovnick 3-4).

aesthetics, then, closure implies not just an awareness on the reader's part of the text's existence as a simultaneity, but also a corollary willing appreciation of the text *as* just such a simultaneity. It does not, however, imply any sort of necessary totalization of aesthetic response stemming from authorial manipulation of readers.

I do not wish to suggest by all of this that a simple organic model of functional unity accounts entirely for the structure or content of the novel. Although one may quite safely speak (again after the fashion of Aristotle) of certain unities of design which can be found in most texts, this in no way implies that every word of a given text exists only in support of that overall design. The novel *is*, I would repeat, a unified and complete object on a textual level--hazarding a tautology, one might say that everything a novel contains is a necessary part of what it is: if it contained more, or less, or other than what it does, it would quite literally be a different novel. To say, however, that the novel as a unified whole necessarily aims to inspire in the reader a unified aesthetic response or to make a unified political or social statement would be inaccurate--in fact, the opposite is generally the case: the novel, as a genre, deliberately and vigorously resists closure on any level beyond the literal. The novel *is*, to use Mikhail Bakhtin's term, a heteroglossic form, one that--precisely because it privileges internal discords and tensions--defies unified analysis or single interpretation: "the language of the novel is a system of

languages that mutually and ideologically interanimate each other. It is impossible to describe and analyze it as a single unitary language" (Bakhtin 47). Although the many tongues of the novel are necessary components of the whole, it neither does nor can follow that they all speak towards the same point. Krieger, writing of this clash of discourses within the text, notes that "we...perceive within the work conflicting elements that seek at once to control the particulars within it and to give them the freedom to challenge--indeed to threaten--its very definition as a single, integral entity" (Krieger 46). The very existence of narratable situations challenges the assumption that non-narratable conclusions are possible. Dissent, rebellion, or even simple irrelevance are all legitimate possibilities for the internal voices of the novel. Such voices, although they in no way disrupt closure in the simplest sense of the term, are instrumental in the novel's struggle against closure on the aesthetic and ideological levels.

In chapters two and three of this paper I will examine the way in which two novels categorizable as "literature of atrocity" come to terms with the structural demand for closure made by the text while at the same time actively resisting aesthetic and political closure. I hope to show that certain similarities exist between two otherwise markedly different authors, similarities which arise from the two authors' respective attempts to grapple with an unimaginable event around which their narratives are centred. The narrators of the two novels must

each tell a story which is--within conventional parameters and by means of conventional techniques--untellable. The act of narration, however, is a prerequisite if the narrator is to escape the grip of the past, for the event in question effectively exists outside of time. The event is so horrific that it beggars all logical or causal attempts at explanation, and a rupture of existing modes of temporal understanding (and of narration) ensues. The central event thus resides in both a perpetual present of experience and an immanent potential future of recurrence until contextualized (and hence restored to its rightful place in the past) by the act of narration. The narrative, though, must treat the past event in such a way that it is neither altered nor mitigated, for to do so would be to deny the full atrocity of the event. It must instead confront the historical reality of atrocity openly and seriously. Precisely how to do this becomes the pressing problem faced by the two novelists we shall later examine--existing modes of narration being inadequate, the act of narration itself must be reinvented, reinvested with explanatory power through a reconfiguration of temporal sequence in the novel. It is only in such a way that the event can be comprehended and thus transferred from the domain of unassimilated sense perception to that of memory. The event must become contained within the new temporal understanding of the narrator, allowing time to resume its arrested motion.

A corollary issue of central importance is that of

mythological cosmology. Novels are about time, and the way time is represented in the novel is indicative not only of the novelist's conception of time, but of the mythological framework underlying the novelist's society, as well. Umberto Eco notes that "in every century the way that artistic forms are structured reflects the way in which science or contemporary culture views reality" (Eco 57). This is to say that every culture, in every age, has a dominant paradigm which influences the construction and interpretation of artistic works. This influence need not be a positive one, as an artist may--and often does--react against the dominant paradigm, but the paradigm is nevertheless always present as a formative influence on the work. Unless artist and audience share the common ground of the paradigm as a model for conceptualizing reality the work becomes incomprehensible, or at the very least is interpreted in a fashion distinctly other than that intended by the artist. And, although authorial intention is perpetually falling out of vogue in critical circles, it is still a commonplace that art is a communicative medium, and as such requires that artist and audience share some kind of common language, be it literal, symbolic, musical, semiotic, or other.

This dominant paradigm may be conceived of in a static and spatial form, much in the way that an individual text may be reconceptualized through that of retrospection. Northrop Frye, writing of specifically mythological paradigms, observes that "there is a curious analogy to the shift in the critical process we have traced from participating in a narrative movement in time

to studying a structure that is spread out before us in space. If we 'freeze' a myth...we get a single metaphor-complex; if we 'freeze' an entire mythology, we get a cosmology" (*Great Code* 71). A mythological cosmology, then, is a static spatial representation of the dominant paradigm; societal notions of time, in such a cosmological rendering, are represented in purely spatial terms. Frye notes, for instance, that "paganism, thus frozen, seems to be dominated by the vision of cyclical recurrence." One might object to his insensitive labelling of 'natural' or 'cyclical' paradigms as 'pagan,' in that all religions outside of the Judaeo-Christian tradition are lumped together in an undifferentiated mass by such a term; however, there is still truth to his further observation that "nature suggests no beginning or end in itself, because we see it within the mental categories of time and space, and beginnings and ends in time and space are not really thinkable, easy as it may be to talk about them" (*Great Code* 71).

In contrast to the cyclical myths of "paganism," Frye describes a temporally linear Judaeo-Christian mythological cosmology. This model "stresses a total beginning and end of time and space" (*Great Code* 71), which is represented paradigmatically in the principal Christian text, the Bible, with an absolute beginning of both time and space in Creation, and a corresponding absolute end located in the Apocalypse. A similarly finite and linear conception of time is observable within the Old Testament. The Hebraic God, however, is a "God of

history"; as such, He does not exist entirely outside of linear time as does the Christian God. The end of the Old Testament, as Frye notes, nevertheless "prophesies an end, not precisely to time, but to history as we have known it" (*Great Code* 71), suggesting that a narrative stance positioned outside of and yet concerned exclusively with linear time is both possible and necessary for understanding the patterns of rise and fall that characterize the history of Judaism, as with Christianity.

Texts originating from within certain paradigms, then, should exhibit structural parallels with each other and with the paradigm itself: when "frozen," to borrow Frye's term, the texts should demonstrate an overall spatial pattern analogous to that of the "frozen" mythical universe writ small, since both paradigm (on a social level) and author (as an individual influenced by that paradigm) conceive of and represent time in a similar--some would argue identical⁴--fashion. Hugh of Saint-Victor, a Medieval scholastic and theologian, observed as much in the twelfth century: "the whole sensual world," he wrote, is "as a book written by the hand of God" (cited in Watson 17). Here God

⁴See Karla Holloway's assertion that "...mythologies are not discrete units of structure as much as they are features of a surviving sense of how language enables the survival and transference of memory.... Because memory is critical to mythologies, then the privilege that memory traditionally represents over myth--that of representation (accuracy) over figuration (metaphor)--is dissolved within the disappearance of the chasm between memory (history) and myth (figuration). What remains are the historical figurations of mythologies" (Holloway 94). Thus, for Holloway, there are no myths that are not fictional in form and expression, and there are no fictions that are not mythical in tone and timbre, in the Afro-American tradition of which she speaks, at least.

the Creator becomes God the Author, and the implicit analogy between textual and mythological representations of time and space is made explicit. Reality--"the whole sensual world"--is the subject matter of both mythology and text; of course, this textual reality would be represented, for Hugh and his contemporaries, in terms that are strictly in accordance with the rectilinearity of the Bible's own paradigmatic structure.

Fictions created from within a culture that accepts such a linear and teleological paradigm as the Judaeo-Christian one thus demonstrate distinct beginnings and endings in both time and space and are characterized by a sense of purposeful motion from a start towards an ending. The endings, likewise, tend to resolve and negate the state of disquiet that is introduced in the beginning. "They all lived happily ever after," in comedy at least, becomes the inevitable conclusion to, and logical negation of, "once upon a time."⁵ While the latter statement introduces a situation charged with narrative potentiality, the former describes an exhausted set of possibilities: everything that can go wrong, has, and everything that can then be set to rights also has. The English-language novel, a form that developed and initially flourished primarily in just such a culture, clearly demonstrates this species of structural logic in many instances.

⁵Oddly, there seem to be no equivalent stock phrases in tragedy, perhaps because of the general tendency of folk-tales towards comedic resolution, perhaps because tragedy depends on the idiosyncrasies of individual fate whereas comedy derives its strength from a reaffirmation of community and is thus more easily generalizable into story-telling tropes.

This is not to suggest that the novel is a form trapped within certain narrow paradigmatic constraints: as I have already noted, the novel genre defines itself largely in terms of its ability to liberate the act of narration from the constraints of any single hegemonic discourse. However, even in the course of reacting against a paradigm, traces of that paradigm are necessarily evident. Regardless of whether any given novel affirms or denies the temporal and structural logic of Judaeo-Christian cosmology, that logic can be detected in the text in some form. One cannot question assumptions without acknowledging the presence of assumptions in the first place.

D.A. Miller's concept of "the narratable" is of help here in demonstrating the paradigmatic analogy that exists between the "frozen" form of the pre-modern European novel and the mythological cosmology of the Bible. Those events in the novel which are narratable, Miller proposes, are "the instances of disequilibrium, suspense, and general insufficiency from which a given narrative appears to arise"; these narratable events are "opposed to the 'nonnarratable' state of quiescence assumed by a novel before the beginning and supposedly recovered by it at the end" (Miller, ix). Applying this scheme to the major narrative of the Bible,⁶ we see that the source of the "narratable" is clearly

⁶Although the potential for such a reading of the Bible is present in Miller's book, he does not attempt one. The following paragraph, then, is my own negotiation of a middle ground between Miller's concept of the narratable and some of Frye's biblical criticism, especially the "Specific Encyclopaedic Forms" essay in *Anatomy of Criticism* (303-14).

the original sin, at which point the non-temporal quiescence of Eden gives way to the world of linear, historical time. The continued existence of sin becomes the "instance of disequilibrium" which the narrative of human history struggles to reconcile, and the predicted Apocalypse is thus the recovery of a state of equilibrium, at which time all sin (all "narratable" elements) will be cast out and "Death will be no more" (Revelation 21:4). The Tree of Life (which grants freedom from death, hence release from temporality) from which Adam and Eve were barred upon their first sinning (Genesis 3:22-3) re-appears in the final vision of Apocalyptic union, and the narrative of human history is brought to a close (Revelation 22:2).

A similar pattern, although much-diminished in scope, is evident in many early English novels. There is a tension in the novel form between the frustration of reconciliation (*peripeteia*) and the inevitability of the eventual righting of initial wrongs: Bakhtin describes this as the conflict between the "specific 'impulse to continue'...and the 'impulse to end.'" He further notes that these two conflicting impulses "are characteristic only for the novel" (Bakhtin 32). The structural demands of the novel, in accordance with this Biblical mythological model, predicate an ending which annihilates the possibility of further narration. At best, the conclusion of one narrative provides a jumping-off point for a new (structurally and thematically discontinuous) narrative, but the conclusion is nevertheless a necessary intermediary step. Novels that end in marriage or

death (and their numbers are legion) are, in effect, an affirmation of the Biblical mythical cosmology; their respective analogues are the comedy and the tragedy. The third possibility, that of continued (but unresolved) existence without any clearly narratable elements remaining, typically manifests itself in the postscripts common to eighteenth and early nineteenth-century novels. In these postscripts the future history of minor and surviving characters is cursorily presented to the reader-- although life goes on, the narrative does not.

Consider, for example, Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*; it serves our heuristic purpose nicely, for it demonstrates all three possible types of ending. After the deaths of Clarissa Harlowe and Richard Lovelace it becomes clear (from Anna Howe's limited perspective, at least) that the downward spiral of Clarissa's corporeal life has been reversed: she has ascended to a divine reward, transforming her earthly tragedy into a divine comedy through the twin powers of her faith and her pen. Richard Lovelace, her paramour and defiler, undergoes a parallel shift from conquering (and comedic) victor in life to bathetic and tragic loser. After Clarissa's death he degenerates into a species of madman out of remorse for his wickedness, is killed in a duel by Clarissa's righteous cousin, is judged by his survivors to have done insufficient penance, and is considered surely to be in Hell. Finally, a meagre six page conclusion (out of 1500 total pages) describes the varying degrees of peace, prosperity, and reconciliation--tempered, of course, by remorse for their

respective roles in the death of Clarissa--which the remaining characters find. The narratable and disquieting conflict between the two principals, a conflict which inaugurates the novel's action, is resolved, and time without "narratable disequilibrium" resumes, but--to revisit our cartographic metaphor--the map is blank and featureless from this point on.

Frank Kermode, in his seminal 1967 study of closure, *The Sense of an Ending*, speaks in a similar way of the spatial patterns evident in literature of the Judaeo-Christian tradition: "Broadly speaking, apocalyptic thought belongs to rectilinear rather than cyclical views of the world.... [When thinking of the novel,] basically one has to think of an ordered series of events which ends, not in a great New Year, but in a final Sabbath. The events derive their significance from a unitary system, not from their correspondence with events in other cycles" (Kermode 5). The novel form, dominated as it has traditionally been by writers steeped in the conceptual framework of Judaeo-Christian thought, naturally reflects that framework in its own structures. Beyond this simple correspondence, though, Kermode suggests that the "concordance of beginning, middle, and end...is the essence of our explanatory fictions, and especially when they belong to cultural traditions which treat historical time as primarily rectilinear rather than cyclic" (Kermode 35-6). For Kermode, this "concordance" is not just a structural analogue but an imperative: if a fiction is to make sense of experience, then the author, Kermode declares, must project his or her self

"past the End, so as to see the structure whole, a thing we cannot do from our spot of time in the middle" (Kermode 8).

Of course, such a statement assumes the rightful dominance of a rectilinear model of temporality, but beyond that, it also assumes that the subject matter of the novel can always and in every case be comfortably accommodated to the structural demands of such a temporal model. What Kermode is suggesting, in effect, is that writers of novel-form fictions naturally operate within a rectilinear temporal model, and that it is always possible to "see the structure as a whole" (i.e. adequately account for any experience) by viewing it in the context of just such a rectilinear mythological universe. What happens, though, when this is not the case? This is the question that writers such as Toni Morrison and Henry Kreisel are eventually forced to face as they construct their narratives out of the raw material of atrocity.

In the writing of literature of atrocity, we have already noted, certain events which are central to the narrative are simply not narratable in any traditional sense, for they defy conventional notions of causality. Consequently, they also fail to correlate with the expectations of the Judaeo-Christian tradition of apocalyptic thought and writing. Apocalypse, the end of linear time (and of time in general), is also the time of judgement, of redemption, of the apportioning of rewards and the serving of justice. The apparently apocalyptic nature of the events surrounding the Holocaust and the emancipation of African

Americans from slavery, however, proved to be illusory. Although great social upheaval and destruction occurred, and although linear time appeared to be disrupted, the ensuing time of judgement did not follow. Rather, the world after apocalypse emerged looking and acting very much like the world before: racism and anti-Semitism persisted, sinners and criminals went-- for the most part--unpunished, God failed to manifest Himself in history. After the disruption of time, time resumed; the End was revealed not to be an end at all. Judgement, annealment, and resolution did not occur, and so the events in question could not be considered properly apocalyptic within the existing mythological framework. To use Miller's language, the narratable elements of history are not adequately resolved; no neat closure, no end visible in time and space, is apparent. There is no convenient place for the narrative to stop, no way to reach the concordance that Kermode posits as "essential to our explanatory fictions."

In the case of literature of atrocity a clear rupture of social unity is perceived by the author, with a concomitant clear absence of available neat end points and fictional concordances: if the artist chooses to grapple with social realities, this rupture must be reflected in the art produced. There are two possible ways in which this may be done: the presence of the rupture may be laid bare in a text which deliberately seeks to evade closure, to evade aesthetic and ideological unities. The shape of such a text would thus be a deliberately imperfect whole

in reflection of the broken nature of the society it chooses to represent. Such a text seeks to diagnose the extent of the rupture, but not necessarily to heal it, although diagnosis is generally a necessary first step on the road towards recovery.

The other alternative is to observe the presence of the rupture but also to gather up the pieces and reassemble them into a new model of functional unity. This act is fundamentally revolutionary: out of the salvageable pieces of a broken interpretive cultural paradigm a wholly new and distinct model must emerge. Whether this new model is a radical reconfiguration of the old one or an entirely different model in the place of the old one depends upon the availability of an alternate model as well as on the salvageability of the old one. What is certain, though, is that the dominant paradigm of the pre-atrocity society (and thus, the dominant narrative modes of that society, as well) cannot remain intact and functional in the face of an absolute rupture.

When faced with the presence of ruptured social unity writers must first ask themselves what actually transpired, and then ask how mythical systems of conception can be used in the effort to explain or accommodate the historical presence of the event responsible for the perceived rupture. There are two obviously useful answers to that question, as well as a third response which is problematic at best. First, one can reconfigure the mythological tradition, redefining the nature of beginnings and of endings, the relationship between time and

events, and the significance of apocalypse as an ending point.⁷

If one is to insist upon the apocalyptic character of the atrocity in question--and many of those who reject dominant explanatory models *do* so insist--then one must reconsider the notion of apocalypse (and with it, notions of time, history, and teleology). Under such reconsideration, apocalypse can no longer constitute an absolute end; it must mark the inauguration of a new (not necessarily better) era of time, rather than an end to all time.

Such an approach to dealing with the unprecedented character of atrocity is primarily conservative, in so far as it seeks to maintain intact as many of the major premises of the existing tradition as possible, altering only those elements that prove to be irreconcilable with the experience of the survivors. At the same time, though, this approach acknowledges that a fundamental change has occurred; the atrocity is considered a radically unique and unprecedented event, one requiring an equally unprecedented response. Tradition can only point the way towards such a response; it can never actually provide it. Tradition, in this instance, provides a sense of continuity for the survivors;

⁷I do not wish to suggest that a mythological frame of reference is something that can be changed like a haircut, casually and without serious repercussions. However, the upheavals of atrocity necessitate an inversely correlative upheaval as a response: painful though it may be, substantial change is the only genuine response to the challenge of atrocity. The Jewish notion of *hurban* is relevant here: an *hurban* is an event so far-reaching in its repercussions that it ushers in a new era in Jewish history, changing forever the character of life as a Jew. See p. 29 (chapter 2) for a more detailed explanation of this concept.

it becomes a touchstone, a central point around which identity can be reestablished. This is the response that we shall explore in chapter two: the discounting of invalid narrative strategies that we see throughout Henry Kreisel's *The Betrayal*, and the tradition-based (although by no means tradition-bound) *Tikkun Olam* that figures so centrally in the writings of Emil Fackenheim.

The second possible response to the perceived insufficiency of existing mythical and paradigmatic explanatory systems is more profoundly revolutionary in character. Rather than modify the existing paradigm, one may simply reject it. The danger inherent in this approach is that unless another paradigm already exists and is accessible the revolutionary individual or group is left without any sort of explanatory framework. And without such a one, the atrocity that necessitated reevaluation in the first place remains unexplained, uncontextualized, unresolved. The trauma of past events stays perpetually fresh so long as it exists outside of any means of dealing with it. Without a conceptual framework, old wounds to the psyche remain unhealed and un-healable. Accordingly, for such a revolutionary approach to work, an alternate (and adequately explanatory) paradigm must be readily available. Thus we see in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* a reliance on African and African American narrative technique and tradition, foregrounding the substitution of an African mythological cosmology in place of the Judaeo-Christian one that traditionally underlies the novel form.

The third and final response to atrocity that we shall consider is the most profoundly conservative of the three, in so far as it seeks to maintain the dominance of the problematized interpretive paradigm through the suppression of alternate possible interpretive systems: the response in question involves denial either of the event itself, or of the significance of the event. The first option represents a total betrayal of the historical reality of the situation, and strips the victims even of the reality of their memories. For a survivor--or for a writer dealing with the events--such a response is obviously unthinkable; sadly, history shows that it is both a possible and not uncommon response, both among those to blame for the atrocities and among those not directly involved. This approach is, in effect, a perpetuation of the atrocity itself: it denies voice to the victims, denies them their very status as victims. And without access to voice, without opportunity to apply narrative and interpretive strategies, without the opportunity to attempt healing of wounds, the remembered pain of the atrocity continues *ad infinitum*, as long as memory continues.

The second possible form of this response, denial of the radical aspect of the atrocity while acknowledging the atrocity itself, is somewhat less problematic. Although in itself not a necessarily invalid response (it seems to be a matter of definition as to what constitutes or does not constitute the fulfilment of apocalyptic prophecy and what constitutes an irreparable breach in an interpretive paradigm, and these things

are subjective) it is also not a particularly helpful response. Maintaining that nothing new or substantially problematic has occurred effectively places the blame on the victims for not being able to cope with the atrocity in a traditional manner. This has the effect of forcing survivors to rely on inadequate models, rather than allowing the radical redefinition that is necessary for resolution to come about.

In the remainder of this thesis, then, I hope to demonstrate the way in which Kreisel's *The Betrayal* and Morrison's *Beloved* align themselves within this spectrum of possible responses, and subsequently explore the way in which the two texts structurally re-orient themselves in order to accommodate the necessary paradigmatic changes. Although the above categories of response are only abstractions, and no single response is likely to correlate exactly with the characteristics I have noted, the categories may usefully be considered as tendencies of response, if not as absolute prescriptions for recovery.

Chapter Two

Any artistic attempt to represent The Holocaust--the systematic dehumanization and murder of some six million Jews throughout German-controlled territories during World War II--poses enormous problems for writers of fiction. Traditional narrative techniques and modes of representation have proven inadequate for the task of conveying an experience that arguably falls outside of the parameters of ordinary imaginative understanding, both qualitatively and quantitatively. The literary and linguistic palette of pre-War European fiction contained neither vocabulary nor technical tools specifically geared towards creating a textual document capable of accurately depicting the reality of the atrocities committed. Accordingly, in the years immediately following World War II little significant literature about the Holocaust emerged, with the notable exception of numerous biographical accounts from witnesses and survivors. Of fiction, though, there was virtually nothing at first: some early critics even went so far as to suggest that silence was, if not the only, certainly the most appropriate response to the atrocities of the modern age.⁸

⁸As late as 1966 George Steiner can still suggest that "it is better for the poet to mutilate his own tongue than to dignify the inhuman either with his gift or his uncaring... Precisely because it is the signature of his humanity, because it is that

However, in spite of such doom-saying prohibitions, a new technical vocabulary quickly developed as writers and theorists sought and gradually discovered ways around the problems they encountered in their efforts to imaginatively represent the actuality of the inconceivable.

A paradox is inevitably present when one undertakes to write an ordered, comprehensible account of what has been described as a "world without values, with its meticulously controlled lunacy and bureaucracy of suffering" (Alvarez 26). Lawrence Langer, in *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*, formulates this paradox as follows:

surrender to silence would be a surrender to cynicism, and thus by implication a concession to the very forces that had created Auschwitz in the first place. But... art's transfiguration of moral chaos into aesthetic form might in the end misrepresent that chaos and create a sense of meaning and purpose in the experience of the Holocaust. (Langer 2)

Thus formulated, the way between the horns of the dilemma is easily sighted, albeit not so easily attained: what one must strive to do is depict the Holocaust in such a way that the chaos is not misrepresented, in such a way that the horror is neither effaced nor sensationalized, and in such a way that the characters appear to be neither maudlin and sentimental in their resistance nor subhuman in their sufferings. The reality of the Holocaust, however, is such that it often exceeds the scope of

which makes of man a being of striving unrest, the word should have no natural life, no neutral sanctuary, in the places or season of bestiality" (Steiner 54). Recall also Theodore Adorno's well-known assertion that "after Auschwitz, there is no poetry."

the artist's imagination; to adhere to the above directives requires a delicate and often treacherous balancing between realism and absurdity, between the mundanely familiar and the utterly inconceivable. The challenge, then, is to find images appropriate to the subject matter, to create an imaginative framework that can somehow accommodate the presence of the unimaginable within it, but at the same time resist confining the unimaginable by means of neat logical and rhetorical categories of representation.

Earlier we observed that the rectilinear and historical concept of time which is characteristic of the Judaeo-Christian tradition is also typical of the traditional novel form, and that a direct connection (but not a simple base-superstructure linkage) obtains between a mythical cosmology or conceptual paradigm and the structural arrangement of works of literature produced in the society where that paradigm is dominant. In a society of relative stability literary forms will also tend towards stability (although absolute stability is an impossibility for either one), permitting a set of conventional assumptions and approaches to accrete, whereas a society in flux will tend to demonstrate an equally fluctuating sense of literary form and technique. It follows from this that when an event of epochal proportions occurs, an event that calls into question the very foundations of the dominant social or religious paradigm, there is a concomitant call for a total re-evaluation of literary forms in that society. Non-dominant forms, formerly marginalized

and suppressed, begin to find room for expression as alternate modes of conception are sought out. No longer able to represent adequately human experience in any meaningful way, outdated formal techniques must be modified or discarded until gradually a new set of normative forms emerges, forms which are more accurately representative of the new social paradigm which is itself gradually emerging.

The Holocaust is, beyond all question, just such an epochal event in Jewish society: some have gone so far as to call it the third *Hurban*, placing its historical significance for Judaism on a par with the destruction of the two Temples in Jerusalem.¹ An *Hurban* ("destruction") is distinguished from other cataclysmic events, such as the expulsion from Spain in 1492, in that it ushers in an entirely new era in Jewish history--it is not simply a massive social trauma, but the catalyst for a complete social and religious reconfiguration. It is, furthermore, an irreversible intercession of God in history, and can be neither foreseen nor averted. The destruction of the First Temple (586 B.C.E.) precipitated the Jewish diaspora, while the destruction of the Second Temple (70 C.E.) led to the establishment of the synagogue. What the third *Hurban* will usher in--if indeed the Holocaust *is* a third *Hurban*--remains to be seen. What is clear is that the Holocaust is conceived of by Jewish philosophers and

¹ Steven T. Katz provides a concise summary of Ignaz Maybaum's analysis of the Holocaust as *Hurban* in *Jewish Philosophers* (233-7); in addition, all historical information in this paragraph is taken from that source.

theologians as a massive challenge to the assumptions that underlie the existing paradigm, a challenge that demands radically new forms of response if a serious response is to be made at all.

This challenge has been met with numerous and varied answers of both fictional and theological tenor over the years.² Since, as we have noted above, there is a radical similarity between fictional forms and dominant conceptual paradigms (which are themselves generally formulated in religious and hence theological terms), an analysis of successful theological response to the Holocaust should shed light on the structural innovations found in post-Holocaust fictional writings. The response we shall consider is Emil Fackenheim's--although the

²Perhaps the most influential response, and the one we shall focus on, has been Emil Fackenheim's call for Jewish affirmation and survival (*To Mend the World*). Richard Rubenstein has incorporated elements of psychoanalytic theory and mystical paganism in his "God is Dead" response (*After Auschwitz*), arguing against the idea of the Jews as a 'chosen people' and urging the Jews to transcend what he considers the superstition of religion in favour of an enlightened and liberated cosmopolitanism. Ignaz Maybaum places the Holocaust in the context of the Jewish history of persecutions, considering it both destructive and constructive. Unlike other theologians, Maybaum is willing to consider Hitler an agent of God and the Holocaust as a sacrifice of six million innocent Jews for the purification of a sinful world (*The Face of God After Auschwitz*). Both Maybaum and Eliezer Berkovitz, in opposition to Fackenheim, consider the Holocaust "unique in the magnitude of its horror but not in the problem it presents to religious faith" (Katz *Philosophers* 240); Berkovitz differs, though, in thinking of the Holocaust as a simple case of martyrdom, albeit martyrdom on an unprecedented scale. As such, his response is essentially a reiteration of the traditional Jewish concept of *hester panim* ("the hiding face of God"), aligning him more explicitly than other Holocaust theologians with the work of Martin Buber (*The Eclipse of God*, for example).

majority of his relevant works were written some ten to twenty years after Kreisel wrote *The Betrayal*, the seeds of Fackenheim's response can be detected in Kreisel's work, and offer a useful commentary on the structural and moral ambiguities that both Kreisel (as author) and the character Mark Lerner (as narrator) struggle to reconcile within the text.

Central to Fackenheim's theory are the concepts of rupture and *Tikkun Olam* ("healing the world"). That the Holocaust is a rupture, a complete and unbridgeable gap between the survivors and their tradition, Fackenheim has no doubt:

Historical continuity is shattered...even if [God] were to speak to us, we have no way of understanding how to 'recognize' Him. We need a new departure and a new category because the Holocaust is not a 'relapse into barbarism,' a 'phase in an historical dialectic,' a radical-but-merely-'parochial' catastrophe. It is a total rupture. (Fackenheim Reader 185)³

To continue living as Jews without healing this rupture is, for Fackenheim, an impossibility. If divorced from their religious heritage by the Holocaust, Jews become, in effect, no longer Jews; if this occurs, then Hitler's plan can be said to have been successful, if perhaps not on the original terms of the Final Solution. What the survivors must do, Fackenheim asserts, is reach back across the gulf separating them from their past and reaffirm their faith in a "God of History" and a vital Jewish tradition. This line of argument, though, brings Fackenheim face to face with an existential quandary: confronted with the silence and the perceived absence of God during the Holocaust, how can

³Hereafter referred to as simply the *Reader*.

one make an unconditional statement of faith in that God? The obvious response, and the one that many have made, is that it is impossible, that either "God is dead," as Nietzsche and Sartre would have it, or that God has turned His face away from His chosen people, is no longer present in history,⁴ and is inaccessible to humanity. Out of necessity, Fackenheim rejects both of these possibilities.

To reaffirm faith in a saving God is no easy task when that God so obviously did not intervene during the slaughter of the six million. The *Tikkun* ("act of healing") that Fackenheim insists is required is a statement of total faith in God, one which will call forth an equal affirmation of faith and healing from God Himself: "Their strength, when failing, is renewed by the faith that despite all, because of all, the 'impulse from below' will call forth an 'impulse from above'" (Reader 198). There is a tenuous dialectical balance between the fundamental necessity of the *Tikkun* and the equal impossibility of making it:

If (as we must) we hold fast to the children, the mothers, the *Muselmanner*, to the whole murdered people and its innocence, then we must surely despair of any possible *Tikkun*; but then we neglect or ignore the few and select...whose *Tikkun* (as we have seen) precedes and makes mandatory our own. And if (as also we must) we hold fast to just these select and their *Tikkun*, then *our Tikkun*, made possible by *theirs*, neglects and

⁴ See, for example, Rubenstein's *After Auschwitz*. Buber's *Eclipse of God*, although in agreement with the general principle that God has "turned His face away," offers a very different, much more affirmative interpretation of God's silence, one much more amenable to Fackenheim's own thinking. God, for the two latter thinkers, is indeed beyond human perception at Auschwitz; as they are quick to observe, however, the *imperceptibility* of God in no way necessarily equates to the *death* of God.

ignores all those who performed no heroic or saintly deeds...and who yet, murdered as they were in utter innocence, must be considered holy. (Reader 195)

Faced with the moral imperative of performing an impossible act of faith, the *Tikkun Olam* that Fackenheim calls for draws its strength from faith in a God who is entirely inaccessible to human apprehension or petition until the *Tikkun* has already occurred.

This "healing of the world," then, can never be more than a tenuous and fragmentary healing, an urgent holding-together of the pieces that remain. Moreover, it is, for Fackenheim, always an act of defiance. It is in this defiant mode that he formulates his "614th Commandment"--that "*the authentic Jew of today is forbidden to hand Hitler yet another, posthumous victory*" (Reader 159). The simple act of being a Jew in a world which has proven itself inimical to Jews on the grounds not only of their *actions* but of their merest *being*, Fackenheim maintains, is an act of defiance and an affirmation of the continued vitality of Judaism as a religious faith.

Fackenheim's directives, when summed up, are primarily practical and ontological in nature: they are not so much philosophical inquiries (although they are certainly that as well) as they are calls to action. And this action, he would assert, must be threefold in its execution: it must include a reaffirmation of faith in a viable Jewish future, a reaching back across the rupture of the Holocaust to reconnect contemporary Judaism with historical tradition, and a continual struggle in

the present moment to acknowledge the presence both of death and evil and of life and goodness: "*[W]e are forbidden to turn present and future life into death, as the price of remembering death at Auschwitz. And we are equally forbidden to affirm present and future life, at the price of forgetting Auschwitz*" (Reader 159). This simultaneous act of faith and mourning for past, present and future all at once is the heart of Fackenheim's writing. He embraces the totality of possible human experience and detects the presence of a Hebrew God in that totality.

A simple linear chronology in which a perpetual present moment moves towards an unrealizable future and away from an unconnected past is of no relevance in this conception of a possible human response to history and atrocity. David Kaufmann, paralleling Fackenheim's theology in the realm of literary theory,⁵ writes:

...time and plot, individually and as they interact, are functions of what is traditionally called Revelation. Narrative is an expression of human interaction with, *for lack of a better term*, the Divine. Now, the tension of life "in the midst" finds its source in the alternatively immanent and transcendent nature of this interaction, and here, too, is located the force of narrative. The narrative present is immanent; narrative past and narrative future are transcendent. Closure forms the congruence between immanence and transcendence, between... perception on the one hand and memory and expectation on the other. (Kaufmann 92)

⁵Kaufmann does not explicitly acknowledge Fackenheim's writings as an influence on his own work; their ideas, however, demonstrate a high degree of compatibility, such that I choose to consider them together here.

If God is to remain a part of human experience, then time must be compacted into a simultaneity. For a Jewish author seeking to recover some semblance of meaning after the Holocaust, this is the major hurdle to be overcome, the only means of reaching back across the rupture of the Holocaust.

Henry Kreisel, although writing well before Fackenheim had definitively formulated his response, grapples with the problem of gathering together the fragments of memory in *The Betrayal*. Karen Gurttler observes his attempt to "shed a new light upon, and to make comprehensible, the phenomenon of the breakdown, under the pressure of violence and terror, of the moral principles governing human actions, and to set new standards of assessment" (Gurttler 99). Gurttler further notes that "the incomprehensible forces of a dehumanized time...lie beyond the conventional norms of valuation" (99), but she pursues this line of thought no further, and does not observe that the structural re-orientation of linearity within the text is in fact a manifestation of this need for author, narrator and characters alike to transcend conventional norms of valuation.

The necessary linearity of literary forms, especially the novel (which depends so heavily for its success on its handling of temporal elements) obviously works against Fackenheim's dictum: unlike works of visual art, which can be perceived as simultaneities, or even musical compositions, which permit multiple voices to sound simultaneously without degenerating into chaos, words must be written on the page singly and sequentially,

making truly simultaneous representation of past, present, and future an impossibility. As E.M. Forster once noted of Gertrude Stein,

She cannot [abolish chronology] without abolishing the sequence between the sentences. But this is not effective unless the order of the words in the sentences is also abolished, which in turn entails the abolition of the order of the letters or sounds in the words. And now she is over the precipice. (Forster 67-8)

The disjunction between the structural demands of Kaufmann's non-linear imperative and those of Western culture's primarily rectilinear and chronological modes of narrative thus creates a tension throughout Kreisel's text as author, narrator and characters all struggle to come to terms with the need for a more satisfactory way of representing their experiences.

The central narrative of the story, Theodore Stappler's first-person recounting of his perceived betrayal at the hands of Joseph Held, is constantly beset by difficulties. Stappler is unable to formulate his experiences in any meaningful way, given the narrative models available to him. Raised within the Judaeo-Christian tradition that accepts linear narrative as a definitive means of conveying meaning, he tries to construct a simple linear narrative out of his experience by following conventional fictional forms: "...let me tell you everything in order, because if I tell you everything in order, then perhaps in the end I'll know what to do" (135). Here he acknowledges both the deliberately linear structure of his narrative and the explanatory function of his fictions. His actual methods,

however, belie his expressed intentions. As the narrator notes of Stappler's story-telling tactics, "He was not to be hurried. Time and time again when I wanted him to get to the central issue, he altered the course of the conversation"(48).

Stappler's instinctual non-linear response to his situation is constantly confounded by his rational and intellectual belief in the ordering power of a linear tale told to an impartial observer. He intuits the limitations and shortcomings of linear form but, lacking access to any more amenable formal approaches, continues to cling to the only model he has for understanding his experiences. His linearity, though, is continually disrupted, fragmented, and undermined by his actual story-telling. The discontinuous fragments of his narrative require another linear narrative--Lerner's--before they can be read in a linear fashion. By themselves they are oblique, abortive, and incoherent; essentially non-linear, they make no (linear) sense. There is, in fact, no linear sense to be made of them: his memories are of a world gone mad, in which moral absolutes dissolve and once-meaningful distinctions become meaningless.

This oblique approach to narration that Stappler continually resists is actually a much more successful technique than his abortive attempts at linearity. It has been suggested that "perhaps the most convincing way [to represent the Holocaust in prose] is that by which dreams express anguish: by displacement, disguise, and indirection"(Alvarez 26). Kreisel seems to have anticipated Alvarez' position, for the only time that we, as

readers, actually approach the central issue of the text is through Stappler's recounting of his dreams; we only see the Holocaust through a sideward glance by one who himself has only brushed across the very margins of the horror. Through his mother's presence in the imagery of his recurrent dream, the Holocaust makes its only appearance in the text. Trapped in the middle of a stagnant lake, surrounded by petrified trees and gaseous fumes (63), Stappler's mother is forever out of reach, cut off from him by his inability to do more than cry out to her for forgiveness. Her face, "elongated and extraordinarily pale" (62) like a concentration camp inmate, holds no emotion except sorrow. Betrayed to the authorities and eventually executed in a Nazi death camp, she remains alive only in Stappler's dreams, and then only as a dignified victim, forever out of reach, forever beyond solace, and--significantly--without a voice: "In the dream she never talked" (63). Reduced to a mere memory, Stappler's mother joins the ranks of the millions of European Jews stripped of liberty and identity and ultimately murdered.

Rachel Brenner has observed the "*The Betrayal* does not depict the reality of the concentration camp. In that respect...the text leaves the completion of the deported Jews' story to the reader's historical knowledge. Rather than dwell on the horror, the novel examines the issue of humanist responses to the catastrophe of the Holocaust" (Brenner 281). And that humanist response is best typified by Stappler's dream, in which

he sees himself as a rootless wanderer in a trackless desert waste, searching for meaning in life:

...in his terror he [Stappler] sought refuge in the shadow of a red rock, but the rock threw no shadow, and so, stumbling on, at last he found a cave and crawled into the darkness of its black, gaping hole, and there squatted on the ground, his knapsack still on his back, his alpenstock still in his hand. Thus squatting, he pondered, but without any real hope, how he might ever get out of this desert, live again like a human being in a rational society, stop being agitated and terrorized by weird manifestations, cease to flee from rock to rock, grow roots anew, like the willow tree, and have his place again among men, in a universe that was not entirely unfriendly. (62)

The hostile environment and his cave refuge (symbols of alienation) as well as his alpenstock and knapsack, all serve to mark Stappler as a transient, homeless wanderer. His futile hope (to "live again like a human being in a rational society") rises from this sense of transience, but the faceless, pervasive character of his fear stems from the fact that he can blame no one individual, and must accordingly think of all of humanity as potentially to blame for his exile.

Unwilling, though, to accept the role of rootless outsider and powerless observer that his dreams thrust upon him, Stappler tries desperately to re-place himself within the old meaning system. A natural story-teller and impersonator, we are informed (53-4), he calls on the full extent of his talents when narrating the central events of his experience, imitating to the best of his ability the voice of an impartial observer, of a capable judge. Since, however, it is his own subjective experience that he seeks to evaluate--as he notes early on in the text, "I am of

course subjective...I tell you what I feel"(33)--he is unable to step outside of this subjectivity, unable to achieve the distance that he suspects will allow him to perceive the pattern of his life and thus determine its meaning:

...all at once, outwardly calm, and in a very even voice, he began to talk about that central experience. He would try to recall it, he said, as objectively, as dispassionately as possible... Except for two or three moments, when the drama of the situation carried him away, the voice remained dry, matter-of-fact, at times was even a trifle pedantic. Clearly he was speaking in this way very deliberately because he feared, as he explained, that he might otherwise falsify the events about which he spoke. (67-8)



The voice he is imitating is of course none other than that of his main auditor, Mark Lerner, professor of history and self-professed detached observer of life. Hoping to arrive at truth through academic pedantry, Stappler only moves away from it, traps himself in what Lerner refers to as "all the ironies, all the paradoxes of history" (4).

Thus Stappler's story, when completed, provides no illumination: his approach to narrative is incompatible with the *Tikkun* that is required, and cannot bring about the sense of wholeness that he seeks. Trying to impose his already-validated linear narrative methods onto an experience that requires a distinctly non-linear response, one that can unite past, present, and future, he is eventually forced to acknowledge failure. In the end nothing has been resolved, no new understanding has been arrived at:

So it ended, with a whisper. The cathartic, cleansing emotion was not released. Perhaps it could not have been. Held's dark night and deep hell were there

still. He carried them with him. And Theodore Stappler's tragic burden was there still. It had in no way been lightened. (184)

It is ironic that the same train of thought by which Lerner uncovers Stappler's error leads Lerner, as narrator, back into repeating it. Observing the futility of Stappler's actions, he nevertheless naively (one might say 'obtusely') places his own faith in the ability of linear narrative to make sense of what has transpired: "It was at this very moment, in fact, that I suddenly decided that I would set all this down, so that the act of writing would in itself be a kind of relief." (184) Lerner seeks the catharsis and cleansing that the other characters are denied, but his search follows the same route that led the others only to darkness and unresolvable stasis.

Lerner reveals himself to be even more closely bound than Stappler by traditional concepts of linearity and historiography - he is a professor of history by vocation, and is constantly thrust by the other characters into the traditional historian's role of impartial observer, official witness, and judge. At the beginning of the novel his faith in the power of historical analysis to create meaning is unshaken; he can comfortably end a lecture about the impossibility of accurately judging historical figures (4) on a "rather high and sombre note" of certainty without demonstrating that he is aware of the self-contradictoriness of this stance.

In the place of the sensitivity to individual persons and circumstances that he advocates to his students, Lerner

substitutes florid rhetoric and sweeping, almost meaningless generalizations, telling his students:

Everybody does things on principle only, you know. At least for public consumption. Everybody wants peace and everybody is merciful. It is always the other man who is cruel and vindictive. That is the world's tragedy. (6)

Feeling "self-satisfied" and "a little smug" after his lecture, Lerner extends his generalization from the field of history to that of literature: "The death of Marat...has all the aspects of a cheap melodrama. In fact, a writer wouldn't dare to invent it. It would seem too absurd, too corny" (6). It is clear that Lerner--at the novel's outset, at least--conflates the explanatory roles of historiography and fiction in his mind; good fictions equate to easily explicable historical situations, while those improbable situations where "the divine and the satanic are so finely balanced that no ultimate judgement is possible, and the figure remains forever paradoxical" (4) are merely "cheap melodrama," badly constructed fictions to be dismissed out of hand.

When Lerner is plunged into the midst of a cheap melodrama of his own, confronted with a real situation in which the divine and the satanic are so equally matched that he can neither judge the participants nor dismiss the whole problem with a wave of his rhetorical wand, he is forced to re-evaluate his assumptions. As Robert Lecker has observed, "*The Betrayal*...deals with a man who attempts to deny the threat of external experience by entrenching himself and his perceptions in a *well-ordered but narrow sense of*

place" (Lecker 87, my emphasis); this attempt, of course, is largely unsuccessful. Faced with the inability of his historical methods to make sense out of the moral quandary of Theodore Stappler and Joseph Held, Lerner eventually experiences a breakdown of his neat categorical thinking. His notions of a historically distinct past, present and future conflate, and his smug morality becomes powerless to distinguish right action from wrong:

I could no longer differentiate the past from the immediate present. Everything was now, and yet everything seemed to have happened somewhere in the distant past. And I could no longer be sure of my own part in the events. The more I tried to detach myself, the more involved, the more entangled, I became... I could not ultimately pass judgement. If Theodore Stappler and Joseph Held had paralysed each other, they had paralysed me, too. We seemed now to circle endlessly around the problem which Held's action posed.
(195-6)

Lerner is thus brought to a recognition of the inadequacy of his methods to find meaning in the events of the Holocaust.⁶

The image of the three central characters revolving endlessly and helplessly around a central dilemma is a fruitful one, for the story of Theodore Stappler's quest for revenge and redemption, in one sense, does not end at all. In the novel's penultimate paragraph Stappler makes an unfulfillable promise for yet another letter, one that will tell all. Even without this

⁶This inability to find individual meaning relative to atrocity is also noted by Charles J. Gaspar in his examination of Vietnam War literature: "The literature [of war] also expresses a concern with historical knowledge that is initially frustrated and then only attained with difficulty, as one changes perspective" (Gaspar 28).

hanging ending, though, the story certainly lingers beyond what the narrator senses should logically be a conclusion, albeit an unsatisfying one. When the long-anticipated confrontation between Stappler and Held fails to decide decisively the issue in favour of either character, Lerner acknowledges that although the impetus for narration has vanished, no sense of an ending fills that now-vacated space:

In our room all passion seemed to have been spent, but there was no relief. A dull ache remained. Nothing had been settled, nothing resolved. I longed for something tremendously dramatic to happen... I longed for some climactic moment to occur, for some cathartic relief. (182)

Events have arranged themselves, though, in such a way that Lerner is unable to find a perspective that explains and justifies them; his telling of the story, he senses, is doomed to continue, hoping against hope that the necessary catharsis will manifest itself, that the unresolved cadence will somehow return to the tonic. The linear framework that Lerner expects his as-yet-unwritten narrative to conform to has already proven itself inapplicable, but Lerner is unable to conceive of a different mode of narration, and so he writes a story that he knows from the outset he cannot end.

At the end of the final chapter (203) Lerner wilfully destroys the evidence of Held's suicide in an attempt to force a sense of completion onto the story he is already planning to write. Long before this point in the novel he is aware that he is constructing a fiction even as he participates in it, believing that his life itself is, in fact, a form of fiction

which he writes. But trapped, as Kermode would say, "in the midst," he is unable to anticipate either the ending or his appropriate role in it. Accordingly, he consciously acts in such a way as to bring about the events that seem most likely to lead to a traditionally linear closure.

When Lerner steals the empty pill bottle from Held's nightstand he is able to tell Katherine with seeming conviction that "it is finished" (198); however, an effacing of evidence, a retreat into silence and denial, is not an acceptable solution. Lerner, as a professional historian, must be aware of this. Nevertheless, he attempts to bury an issue that is not yet resolved, telling Katherine a Phoenician lie in order to create a false sense of closure and of moral rightness for her; perhaps this explains the presence of the "spectres" (213) that haunt their later relationship. Katherine is clearly aware, on some level at least, of the unfinished state of affairs. Lerner is not only aware of, but in some ways also responsible for, this unfinished state; the Postscript can be regarded as his attempt to set the record straight, to provide a second, more appropriate, ending for the story.

It is interesting to note that the Postscripts actually were written much after the completion of the rest of the novel (they were rushed in just before it went to press, in fact),⁷ suggesting that Kreisel himself was still wrestling with the

⁷Kreisel explains the late addition of the Postscripts in a letter to J. Marshall dated March 25 1964 (Neuman 149).

limitations of the linear form that the novel itself conforms to, was himself as dissatisfied with first ending as Lerner seems to be. In any case, Lerner (as narrator) recognizes that Stappler's return after more than five years of absence and silence signals a need to re-evaluate conclusions--nothing has been laid to rest in the first ending, although many things have been obscured and forgotten.

Roughly twelve years of narrative time elapses between the body of the text and the writing of the second postscript. The reason for this time delay is that the narrator wishes to impose a sense of finality on a story that can have no resolution: himself unable to act, he returns to the tale after twelve years in the hope that recent developments will have sufficed to break the moral deadlock. At the end of the text proper the story has simply fallen apart: Theodore Stappler has vanished; Joseph Held has committed suicide; Katherine, only peripherally present in the text at the best of times, has collapsed into the sheltering arms of the neutral Maxwell family. Only Mark Lerner remains, and his self-professed ironic and aseptic detachment from the issues, we have already ascertained, is not an adequate means for reaching conclusions about the events recounted by Stappler. No more can be narrated at this first ending because no-one capable of bringing about a traditional resolution remains; accordingly, the story simply stops.

The first Postscript, dated 1960, is obviously deemed by Lerner to be unsatisfactory or incomplete: if he had been

satisfied, there would have been no 1964 Postscript following. The 1960 Postscript ends with Stappler disappearing into the remote north of Canada in search of "a new life" (215). But he does not know why he is leaving; he simply has "an impulse to go." This impulsive flight from society and from the past, like Lerner's own earlier attempt to find closure through denial of the facts, is not an adequate technique for grappling with the spectres of atrocity--reconciliation with history cannot be achieved through negation. The past and the future both (for history looks both forward as well as back for its meanings) must be positively engaged--a *Tikkun* must be performed--if a new meaning system is to be developed, one that can deal with the question of human responsibility and morality in an irrational and seemingly amoral universe.

Stappler, by the time of his final letter, seems to have made strides towards the development of just such a meaning system. He begins by unburdening himself of the tired moral concepts of his old language:

He demanded to know...what I meant by 'escape' and by the gratification of 'romantic impulses.' These were just words, he said. They meant nothing to him. (218)

In their place, he finds joy in a new language not tainted by its relation to the events of his past. Moreover, Stappler has finally developed a positive system of values: "What was important, he said, was that he could live and be useful" (218). The categorical imperatives and moral absolutes by which he previously interpreted his life are thus replaced by a nascent

urge towards *Tikkun*, towards healing. Although the stripping away of old languages and ideals can be read negatively as yet another betrayal of the past, this is unfair: Stappler continues to write in the language he claims to have rejected, but with a new awareness of its powers and its pitfalls. He does not so much discard the past as he recontextualizes it, creating new and valuable meanings in old and exhausted words.

Stappler's encounter in Vienna with an old schoolteacher provides the impetus for this shift: crushed by the collapse of his dreams of revenge, he wanders aimlessly through the burned-out streets of town until recognized by Zeitelberger, a man who speaks and acts "as if the mere fact of survival, of just living, was already an achievement" (214). Zeitelberger's quiet insistence that Stappler should dedicate himself to the task of rebuilding-- "'Teach people,' he said, 'heal people'"--is a call to begin the *Tikkun* that will mend not only the physical world (Zeitelberger lives, significantly, "somewhere in the direction beyond the bombed-out houses") but the spiritual world as well. And this call has immediate effect on Stappler: "I lifted myself out of my despair. I was fortunate because I could do it... So I went back and started again... And here I am, you see, a new man" (214-5). His transformation is not complete, but he has made a beginning, has finally managed to move beyond the despair of his dreams, in which he

...ponder[s], but without any real hope, how he might ever get out of this desert, live again like a human being in a rational society, stop being agitated and terrorized by weird manifestations, cease to flee from

rock to rock, grow roots anew, like the willow tree,
and have his place again among men, in a universe that
was not entirely unfriendly. (62)

Answering the call to teach and to heal, Stappler begins the *Tikkun*, and the way out of the desert of his dreams begins to be made clear.

In spite of these promising signs of renewed growth and life on Stappler's part, however, the text ends ironically with his death in an avalanche. In his last letter he claims no longer to be driven by romantic impulses, even though, as he himself acknowledges, his final act--a rescue mission on an unstable snowfield--may be read as a deliberate atonement for his earlier inaction. His motives purified, in his own mind at least, Stappler seems finally to have found a way to bridge on a personal level the gap between hope for the future and respectful memory of the past. And then the descending snow cuts the story off, just shy of resolution. All the reader is left with is the "curiously neutral and passive voice of officialdom" (216) announcing the dry facts of death, and Stappler's unfulfillable promise to "write...a long letter to make up for [his] long silence" (218).

Lerner, as narrator, is forced to give up the story at this point. With both of the principal characters dead, any hope of resolution (with its attendant notion of moral judgement) is finally, irrevocably, lost. Lerner's attempt at establishing meaning in accordance with a rectilinear paradigm is ultimately shown to be as fruitless as was Stappler's, and Stappler's 'long

silence' seems to have swallowed both him and his story.

However, in one final irony, we realize that the narrator, through the act of telling the story, has somehow fulfilled Stappler's promise; the 'long letter' gets written after all.

Stappler's story may not have an end, but it is at least not lost and buried in the snow with his body.

Stappler, throughout the novel, feels compelled to recount his experiences because he cannot betray the truth of his past, but he is also unable to successfully narrate those experiences because traditional form and technique have failed him.

Accordingly, he gives his story to a historian, to one who (hopefully) understands how to make sense of the past; Stappler trusts Lerner as historian to do just that, to understand the importance of telling his tale and getting it right. Lerner, by constructing a linear narrative that both tells the story *and* demonstrates the inability of linear temporal and narrative models to ever fully tell the story, does all he can to accurately depict Stappler's dilemma. Stappler does not want to destroy or replace systems, he only wants them to work; all of his pain and bewilderment stems directly from this failure of his systems to work. But if Lerner had invented or sought out a radically non-Western but never the less effective technique and told Stappler's story that way, he would have missed the greater half of the task. Should he have successfully recounted (re-presented) the events as they occurred, from safely within the context of a more amenable and functional framework, Lerner would

have necessarily omitted all of the questioning, the failure to comprehend, the unalleviable torment of a guilt-ridden man unable to exorcise his self-doubts and return to a quiescent, non-narratable, state of being. The text Lerner (and Kreisel) constructs must not come to rest, for if it does, it ceases to be ~~an accurate representation of the restless and unresolvable~~ experiences of its central characters.

Chapter Three

The concept of *Tikkun Olam* which has been so central to our analysis of Henry Kreisel's *The Betrayal* is, according to Emil Fackenheim, a uniquely Jewish response to a uniquely Jewish catastrophe, the Holocaust: "The Holocaust...is but one case of the class 'genocide.' As a case of the class: 'intended, planned, and largely successful extermination,' it is without precedent and, thus far at least, without sequel. It is unique" (Fackenheim *Reader* 135).¹ Fackenheim is correct, in at least one sense, in calling the Holocaust unique: although racial pogroms are lamentably common in modern history, the particular horrors of the Apocalypse are without evident parallel.

In another sense, though, Fackenheim is wrong. He pushes his argument for uniqueness too far, extending that claim in too many directions. One hesitates to accept his absolutist position about the uniqueness of the Holocaust as a "case of the class: extermination" when one considers the efforts of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, or even the incessant racial wars in the Balkan region or in north Africa. One specific target of Fackenheim's absolutist argument is the analogy many are willing to draw between the Africans killed in the middle passage and the ensuing

¹Hereafter referred to as the *Reader*.

American slave trade and the Jews killed at Auschwitz.

Fackenheim makes a distinction between these two groups of slaughtered innocents, seeking to defeat the notion that the sufferings of slaves were comparable to those of the inhabitants of *l'universe concentrationnaire*. His distinction is one of kind, rather than the obviously inapplicable one of magnitude:

If the crime of Auschwitz is so unique, so is the threat to the faith of its victims... Other believers (Jewish and Christian) have been tortured and murdered for their faith, secure in the belief that God needs martyrs. Black Christians have been tortured and murdered for their race, finding strength in a faith not at issue. The children of Auschwitz were tortured and murdered, not because of their faith nor despite their faith nor for reasons unrelated to the Jewish faith. The Nazis, though racists, did not murder Jews for their 'race' but for the Jewish faith of their great-grandparents. (Reader 127)

The Black Christians that Fackenheim perhaps too cursorily notes were "murdered for their race, finding strength in a faith not at issue" were as much without choice in the matter as ever any persecuted Jew was; they were as unalterably black as any Jew was ever unalterably Jewish. Furthermore, the Nazi definition of a Jew as anyone having at least one Jewish great-grandparent is closely paralleled by the commonly-accepted (and equally institutionalized) distinction among slave owners that anyone of so little as one-eighth African ancestry was "qualified" to be considered as a slave.

More could be said about both the similarities and the differences obtaining between the two groups. But more is not needed, and can only serve to distract us from the more central issue of this paper, that of artistic representation. It is

sufficient to note that the two experiences--however alike or dissimilar--demand similar responses from the survivors, from those who bear witness. It is their responses that concern us, above all else, in this paper.

Before I go on, though, I should make my position clear: I do not wish to compare directly the sufferings of the American slave trade and those of Auschwitz. I do not wish to rank them one above the other in terms of horror, of culpability or reprehensibility, of sheer applied demonism. Such comparisons are necessarily betrayals and denigrations of *both* historical realities. As Fackenheim says, "let each human evil be understood in its own terms" (*Reader* 126), for it is only then that proper dignity and respect can be afforded to the sufferers, proper abhorrence directed towards the perpetrators. The history of slavery in America, although as paralytically horrific in its scope as well as its details, is entirely distinct from the sufferings of the Jews under the Nazi regime. The very magnitude of the two occurrences makes them solitudes; no adequate analogues exist, not even each other, no matter what commonalities they share. Are they unique? Perhaps not. But incomparable? Most certainly.

Having said all of this, though, I persist in suggesting the applicability of Fackenheim's *Tikkun Olam* as a means of understanding not only Jewish responses to the Holocaust but African-American responses to slavery as well. The reason for this is that, although the events themselves are each

respectively without parallel, there does remain at least one common term: the survivors. In both instances those who suffered were human beings denied their humanity by other human beings; in both instances those who survived to bear witness were human beings forced to wrestle with the frailties of human memory and the limits of human comprehension and compassion.

Fackenheim's *Tikkun Olam*, then, is (although a response rooted in Jewish tradition and expressed in Jewish terms) primarily a human response to a human catastrophe. Although the particular form of Fackenheim's affirmation is a Jewish one, the basic motions of his dialectical movement are much more universal in their applicability. To remember the past in its entirety without losing sight of the future; to find strength in the possibility of future existence by expressing it in terms of past existence (tradition); to define one's identity in the same terms that were appropriated by the effort to destroy that identity; to simply go on *being* as a response to the threat of non-being; and to be always aware of the fragility and transitory nature of the wholeness recovered through these actions: these are the practical dicta of *Tikkun Olam*, whatever their roots, and none of them predicate Jewishness as a necessary part of their performance or their success.²

²Of the three elements of Fackenheim's *Tikkun*, ("a recovery of Jewish tradition, ... a recovery in the quite different sense of recuperation from an illness; and ... a fragmentariness attaching to these two recoveries that makes them both ever-incomplete and ever-laden with risk"--*TMW* 310) only the first is phrased in explicitly Jewish terms, and even this term is only specifically Jewish because of the nature of the rupture that it is a response

Accordingly, I propose to extend my reading of Fackenheim from the sphere of Jewish Holocaust literature into the realm of African-American literary responses to slavery, specifically to Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. As Susan Bowers notes, "Morrison shares with post-Holocaust Jewish artists the monumental difficulties attendant of depicting the victims of racial genocide" (Bowers 61). Although voiced in different syllables, the call is the same: to reaffirm identity, to re-establish historical and communal continuity, and above all else, to carry an awareness of the full horror of the past boldly and hopefully into a future that otherwise offers little reason for hope. The six million murdered Jews of Auschwitz are fully distinct from the "sixty million and more" dead Africans to whom Morrison dedicates *Beloved*, but the survivors share a common humanity and struggle to overcome common difficulties, and it is with this commonality in mind that I cross over from one atrocity to another.

Before we can begin any serious analysis of the structural innovations of Morrison's *Beloved* as a response to the historical presence of atrocity, we must first make explicit the particularly African-American character of the mythological and interpretive paradigms that underlie the text, reading *Beloved* not primarily as a reaction to the Western paradigm but as an

to. There is nothing in the general character of the response itself that limits its applicability solely to Jewish catastrophe. Fackenheim's *application* of these elements, however, is particularly Jewish--a staunch Zionist in his later writings, he interprets the establishment of the state of Israel itself as the only possible fulfilment of the *Tikkun* necessitated by the Holocaust (TMW 311-12).

affirmation of a distinct paradigm with roots in African culture and religion. Morrison herself, in her 1984 essay "Memory, Creation, and Writing," describes her art as both a deliberate evasion of the literate and literary Western tradition and as an affirmation of artistic standards and practices that are uniquely African in origin:

Literary references...can supply a comfort I don't want the reader to have because I want him to respond on the same plane as an illiterate or preliterate reader would. I want to subvert his traditional [Western] comforts so that he may experience an unorthodox one: that of being in the company of his own solitary imagination....

In the Third World cosmology as I perceive it, reality is not already constituted by my literary predecessors in Western culture. If my work is to confront a reality unlike that received reality of the West, it must centralize and animate information discredited by the West. (Morrison "Memory" 387, 388)

She goes on to enumerate the stylistic features that she considers indigenous to the African-American artistic tradition:

If my work is faithfully to reflect the aesthetic tradition of Afro-American culture, it must make conscious use of the characteristics of its art forms and translate them into print: antiphony, the group nature of art, its functionality, its improvisational nature, its relationship to audience performance... (Morrison "Memory" 388-89)

Gayl Jones detects a similar stylistic bent in Morrison's writings, noting the way in which Morrison "balances the strengths from each tradition by...speeding up time with oral tradition;...introducing elements of song into the dramatic structure and narrative voicings[;]...employing open-ended resolutions like those of the dilemma tale"(Jones 13). A similar list of features is offered in Isidore Okpewho's *Myth in Africa*.

Okpewho lists community participation, vocal music, repetition and reiteration, and ambiguous word-play as the primary features of oral narrative strategy in African oral narratives (Okpewho 91-97), suggesting that Morrison's "aesthetic tradition of Afro-American culture" is closely evolved from an African aesthetic tradition.

Much work has already been done cataloguing the informing presence of an African-American aesthetic in Morrison's *Beloved*;³ what has previously gone without sufficient notice is the fact that this aesthetic tradition is inseparable from--as deriving directly from--an African mythological and cosmological tradition. One of the defining characteristics of that tradition is its unique concept of time: "The linear concept of time in western thought," John S. Mbiti writes, "with an indefinite past, present, and infinite future, is practically foreign to African thinking" (quoted in Ray 41). Ray further explains that the African concept of time is both plural and subjective: "Time is episodic and discontinuous; it is not a kind of 'thing' or commodity. There is no absolute 'clock' or single time scale. Time has multiple forms, coordinated in different ways, each having a different duration and quality" (Ray 41). With such a

³Rodrigues and Sale consider the formal relation between *Beloved* and, respectively, the blues and the oral story-telling tradition, while Krumholz and Schmutde examine the significance of specific African-American folkloric tropes (trickster figures, haunts, etc.) present in *Beloved*. Other relevant studies include journal articles by Wilentz and Bell, as well as Vashi Cruchter-Lewis' article in Braxton and McLaughlin's *Wild Women in the Whirlwind* anthology and Gayl Jones' treatment of Morrison's *Song of Solomon* in *Liberating Voices*.

decidedly non-linear conception of time, one is not surprised to discover that African oral narrative strategies are also primarily non-linear in their approach to organizing information. Morrison's *Beloved*, steeped as it is in a tradition which traces its roots back to this African mythological framework, is naturally equally non-linear in terms of its temporal arrangement.

A dialectical tension between past and future for the recently freed slaves is at the heart of Morrison's *Beloved*. As much has been observed by several other critics--Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, for example, writes that "this tension between needing to bury the past as well as needing to revive it, between a necessary remembering and an equally necessary forgetting, exists in both the author and the narrative" (Rushdy 569).⁴ Given the above-described African paradigm as the explicitly declared interpretative model underlying the text of *Beloved*, one should expect to find that time functions in such a discontinuous and subjective way, simultaneously uncovering and recovering history

⁴See also, for example, Deborah Guth's observation that "*Beloved* is...a novel about memory and the resurrection of the past. More to the point for us, it explores the conflict between the imperative to remember and the desperate need to forget" ('Wonder what...' 83) or Susan Bowers' observation that "*Beloved* is a novel about collecting fragments and welding them into beautiful new wholes, about letting go of pain and guilt, but also about recovering what is lost and loving it into life... What *Beloved* suggests is that tomorrow is made possible by the knowledge of yesterday" (Bowers 74). Most tellingly, Bowers concludes the cited passage with a quotation from Elie Wiesel concerning his Auschwitz experiences, emphasizing the perceived direct link between responses to the Holocaust and to slavery that we have already noted in her writing.

as a result of the multiple contemporaneous functions of time and memory. What has not been observed, however, and what I propose to demonstrate, is how the balancing of the two dialectical poles in the novel, which stems from an African and African-American conception of time, closely corresponds to those temporal characteristics which Fackenheim ascribes to the act of *Tikkun Olam*.

Sethe, the central character in *Beloved*, is fully aware of the burden of the past. Her own personal experiences--which include having her milk taken, her back split open, her mother and her only friends hung, as well as having to kill her own daughter as the only means of protecting her from the slave-catchers--in addition to the stories she has heard from other escaped slaves all combine to constitute a painfully complete experience of atrocity. At the novel's outset, though, she is unaware of the dialectical balancing act, the *Tikkun*, that is necessary to restore her life to a semblance (however tenuous) of wholeness. Rather, "to Sethe the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay" (52). We are later told that Sethe's "brain was not interested in the future. Loaded with the past and hungry for more, it left her no room to imagine, let alone plan for the next day" (87).

Wholly engaged with the task of coping with the past, Sethe has spent the eighteen years since the murder of her daughter mired in what is effectively an atemporal existence, engaged in a solitary struggle to make sense of a personal history that is

beyond the simply senseless, bordering even on the incomprehensible. Oblivious to the present moment, incapable of desiring or even anticipating the future, Sethe's temporal horizons are delimited by the narrow and danger-fraught realm of the past. The novel, then, charts Sethe's efforts to come to terms with the past, to re-place memory within a contextual framework that will, without compromising the integrity of memory, permit her to resume temporal existence and reconnect herself with her community.

Sethe, however, is not to be blamed for her dwelling on the past; as much as she does this, equally so does the past come to dwell with her. In her article "A Blessing and a Burden: The Relation to the Past in *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, and *Beloved*," Deborah Guth observes that "instead of memory reviving the past,...it is the resurrected past--the actual presence of *Beloved*--that slowly summons memory in its wake. This inversion is significant; *Beloved*'s return is no reflection on the shaping, revitalizing power of memory. On the contrary, she emerges in the flesh to challenge a continuous process of forgetting, refusal, and evasion" (Guth 585). The past, whether incarnate or in the form of memory, refuses to limit itself, refuses to remain merely the past. Also, more significantly, it refuses to be forgotten. The events of Sethe's past constitute an unhealed rupture, moments out of time. Only by restoring them to their proper temporal place can they be laid to rest; only after they

have been properly remembered can they begin to be forgotten.⁵ >

The most obvious example of this transgressive past is the one Guth gives, that of Beloved's persistent haunting of the house at 124 Bluestone and her eventual return to the flesh as a woman the age that the "crawling-already?" daughter would have been had she lived. The same unwillingness to remain in the past, though, applies equally to all unreconciled memories, or, more particularly to what Sethe calls "rememory." She warns her daughter Denver about the restlessness of the past in an early passage:

'I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place--the picture of it stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened.' (44-5)

The past, it is clear, regardless of its relation to a particular individual via personal memory, is an active part of the present, at least in the underlying mythology of *Beloved*. In itself this is not problematic; the presentness of the past only poses a danger when it is unassimilated, uncontrolled "rememory" that intrudes. The persistence of memory itself is not inherently dangerous; the contents of Sethe's (or any other escaped slave's) memory, however, are painful and often irreconcilable and

⁵See pp. 67-70 for a more detailed treatment of this issue.

unresolvable images requiring some sort of coping mechanism.⁶

The intrinsic interrelatedness of past and present is further underscored by the fact that no-one in the novel regards the presence of a ghost, in itself, as alarming or even unusual. Baby Suggs believes there are ghosts everywhere: "Not a house in this country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief. We lucky this ghost is a baby" (5). When Paul D first comes into contact with the spiteful spirit of Beloved, all he wonders is "'You got company?'" (10). And Sethe herself even expresses her own quite serious intention to come back as a ghost, if that's what it takes to watch over her last remaining daughter: "I'll protect her while I'm alive and I'll protect her when I ain't" (56). The blurred boundaries between life and death and between past and present in the text reflect a distinctly African cosmology: the sharp distinctions of traditional Western thought are not invested with any sort of validity.

There is a direct link between these two kinds of blurring; the way in which the past is represented in the text is explicitly paralleled by Morrison's treatment of ghosts, and the treatment of both stems directly from a body of African and African American cultural beliefs that form the mythological underpinnings of the text. Benjamin C. Ray notes of the African relationship between the dead and the living that "what is of importance...is not the afterlife itself but the way in which the

⁶Jean Wyatt convincingly argues that Sethe's intrusive and often painful "rememories" follow very closely the symptomatology of posttraumatic stress disorder.

dead continue to be involved in this life among the living" (Ray 140), and this observation is certainly borne out in the text. Ghosts, in the minds of the black community of *Beloved's* Cincinnati, have as much a right to exist as any other person-- and an equal obligation to behave themselves. As Ella, the leader of the group of women who exorcise *Beloved* at the end of the novel, notes,

...nobody needed a grown-up evil sitting at the table with a grudge. As long as the ghost showed out from its ghostly place--shaking stuff, crying, smashing and such--Ella respected it. But if it took flesh and came in her world, well, the shoe was on the other foot. She didn't mind a little communication between the two worlds, but this was an invasion. (315)

Death, then, no longer represents any sort of absolute *eschaton* in the text or in the minds of the community, and the dead are thus not conceived of as having gone away. Dying does not separate an individual from the community; as Ella notes, only bad behaviour can do that. And that is why Sethe, just as much as *Beloved*, is dead--in Ella's eyes and the eyes of the community, at least--for eighteen years: Sethe, Ella feels, is "prideful, misdirected, and...too complicated. When she got out of jail and made no gesture toward anybody, and lived as though she were alone, Ella junked her and wouldn't give her the time of day" (315).

The first task of the *Tikkun Olam*, we have already observed, is to embrace the past--not to condone it, not necessarily to make any rational sense of it, but certainly to hold it always in conscious awareness and to examine it unflinchingly, to arrive

"at once [at] a *surprised acceptance and a horrified resistance*" (TMW 247). Thought, Fackenheim further observes, must be "determined to place itself and the evil to be thought, as it were, into the same space" (TMW 247). The consciousness, dwelling as it does in the perpetual present moment, must reach back to the past, incorporate it into its present awareness. In Sethe's case, however, the past has reached forward to incorporate her at the novel's outset. Surrounded by memory and yet wholly absorbed in the task of denying memory, Sethe is unable or unwilling to place evil and thought in the same space. Because of this, she is unable to take the first necessary step towards *Tikkun* and wholeness. Sethe is not to be faulted for this, though: even the mere act of placing thought in the same space as evil can be an impossibly difficult one without help. And this is why Sethe spends the eighteen years preceding the start of the novel merely beating back the past; without the support of community, she can do no more.

When the last surviving person who shares her root memories of slave life reappears without warning, Sethe is shocked into an awareness of the past that she has thrust down inside of her, and the process of confronting long-deferred memory begins: "As if to punish her further for her terrible memory, sitting on the porch not forty feet away was Paul D, the last of the Sweet Home men" (7-8). Of note here is the fact that the reawakening of the living past is construed as "punishment for her terrible memory." By not facing her past, Sethe has betrayed it; by leaving her

tale untold, she has effectively condemned her history and the history of those who remain only in her memory to silence and eventual oblivion. And it is precisely because of this betrayal that the past has come back to her with such a vengeance. But Paul D, himself hiding a heart full of memories too painful to contemplate, offers Sethe the support that she needs to begin the painful process of (re)membering her story:

'What about inside?'
 'I don't go inside.'
 'Sethe, if I'm here with you, with Denver, you can go anywhere you want. Jump, if you want to, 'cause I'll catch you, girl. I'll catch you 'fore you fall. Go as far inside as you need to, I'll hold your ankles. Make sure you get back out.' (57)

And with this reassurance Sethe can finally begin to tell her story, to reattach herself to community (and to temporal continuity) through the act of story-telling.⁷

Even with Paul D's help, however, Sethe's task proves unmanageable; with the return of Beloved incarnate, Paul D is "moved" out of the house and ultimately driven off, while Sethe is gradually drawn into a hopeless struggle to justify her past actions, "whispering, muttering some justification, some bit of clarifying information to Beloved to explain what it had been like, and why, and how come" (309). It is Denver, by now excluded from the dangerously obsessive mother-daughter bond that Sethe and Beloved have formed, who first realizes the futility of Sethe's efforts:

⁷I will be examining the function of story-telling and the significance of the act of narration at greater length elsewhere in this chapter.

Denver thought she understood the connection between her mother and Beloved: Sethe was trying to make up for the handsaw; Beloved was making her pay for it. But there would never be an end to that, and seeing her mother diminished shamed and infuriated her. (308)

And it is, finally, Denver who moves from the first stage of the *Tikkun* (embracing the past) to the second stage: re-establishing bonds of community and historical continuity, "recovery in the...sense of recuperation from an illness" (TMW 310).

As a child, the truth about Sethe's actions stopped Denver's ears until her friendship with the ghost of the "crawling-already?" baby re-opened them. Her childhood was thus spent becoming familiar with the true nature of the past. She is the first to recognize the incarnate Beloved as Sethe's daughter, long before even Sethe does; she is also the first to recognize the threat that Beloved--the past running loose and vengeful in the present--represents to herself and to Sethe. With the help of yet another ghost, that of her grandmother, Baby Suggs, Denver is the one who acts to break the circle of self-absorbed and futile love of the past that threatens to consume her family. She accomplishes this by reaching out to the larger community of escaped slaves living in Cincinnati, but this is not possible until the ghost of Grandma Baby reminds Denver of the importance of sharing sorrows by recounting some of her own:

Denver stood on the porch in the sun and couldn't leave it. Her throat itched; her heart kicked--and then Baby Suggs laughed, clear as anything. 'You mean I never told you nothing about Carolina? About your daddy? You don't remember nothing about how come I walk the way I do and about your mother's feet, not to speak of her back? I never told you all that? Is that why you can't walk down the steps? My Jesus my.'

But you said there was no defense.

'There ain't.'

Then what do I do?

'Know it, and go on out the yard. Go on.' (300)

Acknowledging her own defencelessness against the evil of the world, Denver makes the requisite act of faith,⁸ steps out into the world, and reconnects herself with her community and her heritage.

Reacquainting herself with the women of her community as she goes about returning the dishes that have been left, full of food, at her doorstep, Denver unwittingly triggers a flood of healing memories in the minds of the women. The bitterness and pride that have divided the community begin to be replaced by more positive memories of the past:

All of them knew her grandmother, and some of them had even danced with her in the Clearing. Others remembered the days when 124 was a way station, the place they assembled to catch news, taste oxtail soup, leave their children, cut out a skirt.... They remembered the party with twelve turkeys and tubs of strawberry smash. (306)

Paul D's help alone is not sufficient; nor is Denver's. It is only with the support of the full community that Sethe's memory can be healed. Her experiences, they remember, are a part of

⁸Fackenheim makes it clear that a *Tikkun* is, above all else, an act of faith: the self-same situation that necessitates the *Tikkun* also makes it such that "we must surely despair of any possible *Tikkun*" (Reader 195). Reason balks at such a dilemma--faith alone is capable of resolving it and enabling the performance of the necessary yet impossible action. This paradox is the same one Denver wrestles with on the steps of 124--knowing that there is no defense against the evil of the world, she nevertheless must rely on the goodness of that world to support her and to save her. It is only an informed act of faith ("Know it, and go...") that enables her to step off the porch at all.

theirs, as are her misfortunes. It is here that we see the practical application of Sethe's warning about the public quality of rememory. If, as Sethe warns, memories are free to 'float around out there outside [one's] head," then the whole community is potentially at risk when those memories turn mean. As such, it is the responsibility of the whole community to guard against the dangers of unresolved memories, helping each other to lay their stories to rest.

When Denver tells Janey about her family troubles, Janey guesses the truth, and before long Denver's story has become a communal story, passed around and exaggerated or attenuated as the individual teller sees fit:

The news that Janey got hold of she spread among the other coloredwomen. Sethe's dead daughter, the one whose throat she cut, had come back to fix her. Sethe was worn down, speckled, dying, spinning, changing shapes and generally bedeviled.... It took them days to get the story properly blown up and themselves agitated and then to calm down and assess the situation. (313)

As a result of her daughter's act of telling, Sethe re-enters the consciousness of the community, in effect becomes a member of that community for a second time. And it is only then, reclaiming and reclaimed by her community, that Sethe can begin to be free from the deadly grip of the unspeakable past, the "devil-child" that has drained her energy finally driven away.

Having scoured the depths of her memory for every painful detail, and then having put those memories to rest, only one element of the *Tikkun* remains to be completed: Sethe must take her awareness of the past and carry it into the future. Denver

has, to a lesser extent, already performed this task. Denver's past, however, is far less in need of healing, and no act of Denver's, by itself, could possibly heal Sethe in any case. Healing, dependent on faith, requires the participation of the entire community. The act of restoring Sethe to her community thus also restores her to a natural relationship with the past and the present moment; reinstated within the communal temporal paradigm, Sethe is finally, and for the first time in the novel, faced with the possibilities of the future. Unable to accept that challenge on her own, Sethe follows Baby Suggs' example in retreating to her bed, contemplating colours, and withdrawing from life. As she tells Paul D, "'Oh, I don't have no plans. No plans at all'" (334). But Paul D refuses to accept that answer. He draws Sethe back from the brink of collapse, once again pledging his support. The significant difference this time is that he encourages her to re-enter not her past but her future: "'Sethe,' he says, 'me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow'" (335).

And with Sethe's hesitant acceptance of Paul D's love--"Me? Me?" she asks--the *Tikkun Olam* is completed. Sethe reintegrates past, present and future, holding the barbed and brittle fragments of memory dear to her even as she turns to face the possibility of continued existence within a newly-reestablished supportive community. Fackenheim is quick to warn, and I to second, that there is no guarantee that such a *Tikkun* will be successful, no guarantee that the healing has been permanent or

complete: the fragmentariness of the new community and the incipient wholeness of the survivor, he warns, "makes them both ever-incomplete and ever-laden with risk" (TMW 310). That same weakness, Fackenheim further notes, is paradoxically also the source of the *Tikkun's* strength: "without the stern acceptance of both the fragmentariness and the risk, in both aspects of the recovery, our...*Tikkun* lapses into inauthenticity by letting theirs [those who have already performed a precursor *Tikkun* to heal the same rupture], having 'done its job,' lapse into the irrelevant past" (TMW 310). Since it is an imperfect and incomplete *Tikkun* at best, it is constantly in need of renewal; itself an act of faith and memory, it necessitates, to perpetuity, a similar act of faith and memory on the part of all the survivors and all their descendants.

We have already noted (in chapter 2) that one of the peculiarities of the *Tikkun* is the reconfiguration of time that it demands. By conjoining past and future time in the present moment, a singularity of time is created, one in which linear temporal models become inapplicable as means of explaining experience. The future no longer flows through the present towards the past in any sort of regular or predictable fashion. As a result, linear time loses its privileged position as the dominant model, while circular, static, even random modes of temporal organization become (potentially, at least) equally applicable.

In Henry Kreisel's *The Betrayal* we observed the breakdown of

the linear temporal model and the consequent lack of finality and sense of discontinuity that resulted when a new temporal model was not available in its stead. In Morrison's *Beloved*, however, a fully-functioning paradigm with deep historical roots is available. *The Betrayal*, moving towards an as-yet-undeveloped theory of *Tikkun*, does no more than deconstruct the faulty paradigm, for it is written from within the perspective of the world-view being questioned⁹, specifically for the purpose of questioning that world-view. Not availing itself of a functional external perspective--a narrative model not based on linear temporality--the text cannot resolve the formal problems it raises, mythologically or narratively. *Beloved*, on the other hand, need not present itself in such purely negative terms, for it not only dismisses an inapplicable paradigm, but demonstrates a viable alternate paradigm complete with corresponding alternate narrative strategies. Whereas Kreisel's narrative model is firmly entrenched in the (no longer functional) Western tradition, Morrison is steeped in an alternate tradition, and is thus able to resolve some of the narrative dilemmas that Kreisel only brings to the reader's attention.

I do not, however, mean to suggest by all this that there are no useful narrative strategies available within the Western literary tradition for dealing with non-linear temporal

⁹The narrator, Mark Lerner, resides in what Robert Lecker calls "a well-ordered but narrow sense of place" (Lecker 87) -- Lecker here is referring to Lerner's mental, not physical, environment, of course.

sequences. Quite the opposite is true, as the dismembered phrases of Gertrude Stein, the fragmentary pastiches of William Burroughs, and of course the circular mythological structure of Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* all serve to indicate. Nor do I wish to suggest that these Western techniques are unavailable to Morrison, or unavailed of by Morrison. Her use of various decidedly Western techniques is well-documented, even as her subversion of these techniques is noted.¹⁰ However, just as Fackenheim insists that an authentic Jewish response to the Holocaust must be firmly rooted in Jewish tradition, so Morrison looks back to uniquely African and African American models in her effort to appropriately respond to the horrors of slavery. The story Morrison chooses to tell is not one that can be adequately told from within any paradigm other than that of the survivors of slavery. "Sethe's infanticide," Andrew Levy writes, "cannot be justified; for the same reasons, it cannot be rendered speakable... [T]he institutionalized parameters of guilt and responsibility do not provide the vocabulary to 'tell,' legally or narratively, the anomalies of a slave mother's infanticide" (Levy 117). Morrison accordingly taps the "telling" voices of slaves and of women, voices always excluded from the "institutional parameters" of power in American society, both then and now. In so doing, she creates a new set of parameters

¹⁰For example: "*Beloved* creates an aesthetic identity by playing against and through the cultural field of post-modernism" (Perez-Torres 689); "Morrison fuses arts that belong to black and folk tradition with strategies that are sophisticatedly modern" (Rodrigues 153). See also articles by Levy, Krumholz.

operating outside of the institution and without any sort of an appeal to the institution as a source of legitimation, parameters capable of accommodating what would otherwise be considered an untellable story.

We have already noted the importance of the storytelling act among the women of Sethe's community in *Beloved*; we have not, however, explored the importance of this oral tradition in shaping Morrison's narrative strategies. Sethe tells her story through an elaborate process of deferrals and circumlocutions, but her narrative power is located as much in the physical presence of her speaking voice as in her words and strategies:

It made him [Paul D] dizzy. At first he thought it was her spinning. Circling him the way she was circling the subject. Round and round, never changing direction, which might have helped his head. Then he thought, No, it's the sound of her [Sethe's] voice...
(197)

Morrison here is attempting to reproduce on a textual and literary level the visceral effect of listening to an oral narrative, wherein the success of the tale is often as dependant on the physical strategies of the narrator as it is on his or her choice of words.¹¹ The voice itself, we see here, becomes a

¹¹Okpewho notes that "the histrionic exertions of the artist...are employed not only to enliven the work of narration but indeed to lend credibility to the details of the story" (Okpewho 92). See also Maggie Sale's observation that "each version of [the central murder episode in *Beloved*] gains authority from the performance and persona of the teller, from his or her ability to involve or persuade others. The teller is implicated in her or his particular version of the (hi)story and each version, or (hi)story, is as true as the teller (writer) can make it, where that 'truth' depends upon an allegiance and agreement between teller and listener" (Sale 42).

narrative strategy, sound replacing sense as the conveyor of meaning. Later, the women of the community also go beyond the power of words, singing until they find "the sound that broke the back of words" (321); in so doing, they also locate the source of their power in the speaking voice rather than in the words spoken. The same can be said of Morrison's own storytelling: she orchestrates multiple voices to tell a story whose meaning lies elsewhere than in the demotic value of the words that surround it. It is an "unspeakable" tale, but not an untellable one.

Although *Beloved* is a written text, there is an undeniably oral quality to it. Sethe's story is told not by a single, central authority figure but through the collaborative efforts of a number of characters, none of whom possesses the whole "truth." The narrative circles endlessly around just a few central events: the act of infanticide is described from three different perspectives, the story of Denver's birth in the waters of the Ohio river from even more. Approaching events obliquely, the narrative serves to fragment knowledge, dispersing understanding amongst all of the tellers. Furthermore, each piece of the story can be told only in the presence of a listening audience: Denver tells her stories first to Beloved and later to Janey and the community, Sethe hers to Denver, then to Paul D and Beloved. Stamp Paid shares his knowledge with Paul D, and Paul shares his with Sethe. Between them all they gradually assemble enough information to reach a consensus and to come to an understanding, but at no time do they make claims for completeness,

infallibility, or authority. By fragmenting the story in this manner, Morrison undercuts traditional Western assumptions about the role of narrative in determining truth. The assumption that we saw challenged in Kreisel's *The Betrayal* (in chapter two of this thesis)--that a linear narrative told by a single narrator can produce complete understanding--is here invalidated even before the act of narration begins.

Morrison herself writes of Black literature that "the text, if it is to take improvisation and audience participation into account, cannot be the authority--it should be the map. It should make a way for the reader (audience) to participate in the tale" ("Memory" 389). Here she underscores the importance of the speaker/audience relation as a preferred alternative to the typically Western author/reader relation posited by the novel form. Morrison clearly intends for *Beloved* to be heard as well as seen, an unruly child of a novel recreating on a textual level the effect of an oral narrative. Telling a story rather than writing it serves to invoke a tradition in which the unauthorized and unauthoritative voice can be heard, one in which the subjectivity of the personal account is elevated to an equal status with that of the objective report. Karla F. C. Holloway explains that "*Beloved* proposes a paradigm for history that privileges the vision of its victims. Traditional processes of historiography are revised in this inversion" (Holloway 169). The voices of the slaves are thus foregrounded and given expression, voices that traditional historiographic techniques deliberately

attempted to silence. By privileging the slaves' versions of history (although never investing them with any semblance of absolute truth status) Morrison throws into doubt the rightness--if not the objective truth value--of scientific objectivism (the schoolteacher)¹² and journalistic reporting (Stamp Paid's newspaper clipping).

Accompanying this radically different paradigm is a mythical cosmology quite unlike that of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Traces of Christian myth and symbolism are evident throughout the text (the tree on Sethe's back, her "baptism" at the moment of exorcism, the name Beloved itself taken from scripture, to name just a few). That mythical system, however, is constantly undercut by its use in the text, its elements incorporated in fragmented or inverted forms to suggest their limited applicability, if not their outright rejection.¹³ Baby Suggs' celebrations in the Clearing are a prime example of such an inversion. Deliberately using the language of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-11), Baby Suggs inverts each Beatitude in turn, giving back to the people their earthly selves and exposing the divine rewards promised them as a hollow sham:

'Here,' she said, 'in this here place, we flesh; flesh

¹²Linda Krumholz notes that schoolteacher, whom she calls "a moral absolute of evil," is evil precisely because he "is an embodiment of the wrong *methods*" (Krumholz 398).

¹³For a much more detailed analysis of the primary Christian symbols in the text and their various inversions, see Guth's "'Wonder what God had in mind:' *Beloved's* Dialogue with Christianity." Guth strangely chooses to ignore the significance of Baby Suggs' inverted Sermon on the Mount in her survey.

that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it... And no, they ain't in love with your mouth. Yonder, out there, they will see it broken and break it again... And O my people, out yonder, hear me, they do not love your neck; put a hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up. And all your inside parts that they'd just as soon slop for hogs, you got to love them. The dark, dark liver--love it, love it, and the beat and beating heart, love that too. More than eyes or feet. More than lungs that have yet to draw free air. More than your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize.' (108)

Instead of endorsing linear time, and instead of encouraging her audience to defer happiness until some ill-defined and scarcely credible afterlife arrives, Baby Suggs, through her sermons and her communal songs, urges the black community to find and hold what happiness they can in the present moment.¹⁴ Not only does she deny the grace of God, she *blames* the grace of God for the cruelties perpetrated on slaves. She exhorts her audience to find what she considers the only true grace, that which you bestow upon yourself.

By radically re-visioning the Christian mythological notion of an ultimate end to time and an accompanying final reward, Baby Suggs re-replaces the future within the present moment; the final reward becomes immanent, present in every moment as long as it is

¹⁴Bernard Bell observes in *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition* that "sermons, prayers, spirituals, hymns and sayings are the residual oral forms employed in Afro-American novels to reinterpret, reenact or reject this Judeo-Christian redemptive view of history" (24).

sought in every moment.¹⁵ Here we can see the similarity to *Tikkun*-time, time in which notions of linearity are demonstrably misleading and potentially dangerous. Given the cultural content and context of the text, though, such a notion of time is more obviously an extension of traditional African concepts of temporality than an imitation of Jewish theological inquiry.

Benjamin C. Ray writes of time in African religious rituals that "eternity can be joined to temporality by repeating the creative acts of the gods (who span both dimensions) in ritual action. This is possible because of the special nature of ritual time...[which] is cyclical, not linear" (Ray 41). Since African mythology looks backwards through time to a lost "golden age" rather than forward towards an Apocalypse, a belief in the circularity of ritual time allows for the possibility of return to a state of perfection through the performance of ritual.¹⁶

The poetic epilogue of the novel expresses similarly non-linear sentiments. The story, deliberately lacking an authorial centre capable of providing a definitive interpretative strategy,

¹⁵This is also a highly political act on Baby's part: by urging former slaves to reject Christian belief in an afterlife, Baby is urging them to free themselves from a doctrine that legitimizes, even glorifies, their oppression at the hands of other so-called Christians. Baby urges them, in effect, to give up being the meek and humble (who are blessed and shall inherit the earth) and to claim their share of the earth *right now*. It is not just a call to healing; it is a call to arms.

¹⁶"...traditional African thought turns to the past for redemptive and soteriological power: it does not look to the future.... In ritual, the mythical past is thus constantly recoverable. It is not...an irretrievable "graveyard" of time, but rather a constant source of new beginnings, of ontological renewal" (Ray 41).

eventually disappears without explaining itself. Morrison refuses to provide a key to crack the code of words in the novel, leaving interpretation in the hands of her audience. It comes to seem nothing more than "an unpleasant dream during a troubling sleep" (337), a dream without a fixed meaning, without a verifiable base in waking experience. As such, it is open to interpretation by anyone and everyone--in fact, it encourages the act of interpretation, practically demands it.

Natural images of long grass, lichen, streams and--most significantly--the weather figure prominently in the final paragraphs of *Beloved*. Holloway observes that "for Morrison, myth becomes a metaphorical abandonment of time. Because metaphor is represented as origin in myth, its instantiation in the place of history abandons the dissonance of time" (Holloway 172). Nature, the radical source for all mythical cosmologies with cyclical concepts of time, continues uninterrupted in its cycles while the once remembered, twice forgotten events of Sethe's life vanish into obscurity. *Beloved's* fading footprints will match anyone's feet, suggesting that her story is not particular to person or place, but is potentially anyone's story; when her footprints vanish "as though nobody ever walked there" (337) everyone's potential story becomes no-one's. *Beloved's* story gradually merges with the natural cycle and becomes myth. Having finally been fully and properly remembered, the events behind the haunting of 124 can begin to be forgotten. Assimilated by time, the events are assimilated by nature as

well--the vestigial traces of memory still remaining are described as having a metaphorical identity with purely natural phenomena:

The rest is weather. Not the breath of the disremembered and unaccounted for, but wind in the eaves, or spring ice thawing too quickly. Just weather. (338)

As such, these traces too are outside the parameters of history; the oral narrators have spun a tale out of the gaps and silences of American history, and in the end the story shifts back into those gaps, which have by now been claimed as home by the tellers. The act of eliding traditional (Western) narrative technique is an affirmative one, as it claims for its own those spaces that traditional technique is unwilling to delve into. The "thoughts of the women of 124, unspeakable thoughts, unspoken" (245) find a voice, but it is a voice that refuses to take upon itself the mantle of authority, for it is the voice of a woman and of a community that holds authority itself responsible for the shape of the story that must be told.

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