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MISS/MS/MRS-INTERPRETED: RE-EXAMINING GENDER AND
LANGUAGE IN ARCHETYPAL FIGURES AND PATTERNS OF MORRISON AND
WALKER

THESIS

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Master of Arts Degree in the Graduate School
of Texas Southern University

By

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2021

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By

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Texas Southern University, 2021

Assistant Professor Iris M. Lancaster, Advisor

Language, as an expression of consciousness, is an integral tool of construction and destruction, because it serves as the foundation of an individual's perception and affects one's ability to process information. One cannot conceptualize that which they have no language for, and throughout literary periods and genres, language has been intentionally used to articulate the various manifestations of consciousness that exist beyond time, cultures, and individual experiences. In literature, this is demonstrated through the presence of archetypal patterns and figures that contribute to the development of a character's mythic journey. Although archetypes demonstrate the commonalities within humanity, much of the language that defines their function and nature is inherently gendered, and consequently contributes to the erasure, minimization, subjugation, or vilification of marginalized individuals who do not uphold the implicit gender assignments that exist within them. This contributes to limited, and often inaccurate interpretations of characters that exist outside of pre and post-colonial, patriarchal,

heteronormative informed perspectives. Because of this, the language used to describe and define archetypal figures and patterns should be examined irrespective of gender, so that they do not further perpetuate perspectives that intentionally marginalize people that exist beyond these antiquated interpretations of consciousness.

Much of the theoretical framework surrounding archetypes is attributed to psychologist Carl Jung, however, Jung's writings often lend to a narrow exploration of archetypal figures and patterns, particularly because much of Jung's own work denies an unbiased perspective about people of different abilities, gender, sexual orientations, and racial identities. Based on this limitation, the theoretical framework of Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés is a useful starting point for further exploring archetypes beyond a Eurocentric, cisgendered male perspective. Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, *Song of Solomon*, and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, must be analyzed for their African aesthetics and myths because each novel offers archetypal figures and patterns that transcend Western mythology and cisheteropatriarchal interpretations of Black womanhood.

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Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu

A person is a person through other people

First, giving honor to the divine and infinite source of creation, in all of its manifestations. Thank you for life and for love.

To the ancestors, named and unknown, I am because you were, and I give thanks for your guidance, protection, and provision. To ancestress Morrison, I give thanks for the gift of language and liberation.

To my parents, I give my honor and gratitude. Thank you for encouraging me to read, write, and to pursue my goals with fervor.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; ...does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge.” (Toni Morrison, Nobel Lecture 1993)

This excerpt from Morrison’s speech addresses the power of language and is an ancestral offering intended to address and challenge the violence that is perpetuated against people via ideological and linguistic hegemony. Ultimately, this thesis is comprised of a socio-psychological literary analysis of several books and novels with the intention of contextualizing the impact of interpreting myth and literature of African descendants through the lens of occidental knowledge. Although there is existing scholarship that delves into deities and archetypal figures in Morrison’s and Walker’s novels, books like *Myth, Literature, and the African World* by Wole Soyinka, *Mythatypes: Signatures and Signs of African/Diaspora and Black Goddesses* by Dr. Alexis Brooks de Vita, and *Women Who Run With the Wolves* by Dr. Clarissa Pinkola-Estés, provide nuanced criticism, thus contextualizing the mythical construction and archetypal figures and patterns in *Beloved*, *Song of Solomon*, and *The Color Purple*. There remain infinite opportunities to explore how the forms of these novels, along with their archetypal and mythatypical characteristics, signify cosmological ideas, cultural values, and historical experiences that are indigenous to the African diaspora.

Both Morrison and Walker construct concurrent mythic journeys for characters in *Beloved*, *Song of Solomon*, and *The Color Purple*- all of whom possess ancestral, deified,

and human qualities- that transcend chronological order and linear thought. By infusing elements of African myth and oral tradition, Morrison and Walker create multi-layered characters who signify African deities and- also serve as symbols for rituals such as initiation and naming. More specifically, through their language, Morrison and Walker signify historical and spiritual information from the African diaspora. Through these characters- and their archetypal rituals, Morrison and Walker create cyclic realities that intimately contextualize the lives of African descendants- *Beloved*, *Song of Solomon*, and *The Color Purple* integrate linguistic patterns and diction that are indigenous to the African diaspora.

The aforementioned literary works illustrate the relationship between perception, language, and hegemony. For this reason, analyzing each of these novels through the framework of Jungian archetypes and classical mythology creates a traditional lens that poses the risk of misinterpreting Morrison's and Walker's works and further perpetuating Eurocentric cisheteropatriarchal perspectives that contribute to the oppression of women and gender non-conforming individuals, African descendants, and other marginalized communities. To examine the complexities of Morrison's and Walker's novels- without articulating the significance of their language or contextualizing the diverse archetypal figures and mythic patterns beyond Eurocentric, cisheteropatriarchal thought- is violence. Literary critics have a responsibility to re-examine existing scholarship, with particular focus on the relationship between language, archetypal figures, mythical patterns, and ideological hegemony. In "The Black English Oral Tradition in the Works of Toni Morrison," Atkinson explains that "language defines a culture's style and method of looking at life and the individual's place within that culture." Atkinson also cites

Kreisteva, who asserts that “[language] is also ‘the margin,’ the demarcator of beauty, and the repository of a culture’s defining boundaries: right, wrong, good, bad, and its liminal thresholds” (Kreisteva 231). Because language informs how information is perceived, existing research regarding archetypes in *Beloved*, *Song of Solomon*, and *The Color Purple* illustrates the significance of their linguistic stylizations. In these works, Morrison and Walker integrate African aesthetics, cosmology, and language to depict myth, ritual, and culture that are signified, in part, through their archetypal figures and mythatypical patterns.

In “‘She was Laughing at their God’: Discovering the Goddess Within in *Sula*,” Pessoni explains that “Jung and his followers tend to ontologize the archetypes, seeing them as authentic constructions of existence uninfluenced by social reality. The danger, then, in an ontologized archetypal reading is that one may inadvertently maintain the sexist or racist status quo by failing to acknowledge that even archetypes may be tainted by ideology” (440). This assertion is often demonstrated by misinterpretations and misnamings of archetypal figures and patterns in Morrison’s and Walker’s novels. By interpreting their works through the lens of classical mythology and Jungian analysis, scholars frequently fail to distinguish how descendants of chattel slavery- especially in the United States- exist within and beyond said characterizations of femininity. Jungian archetypal analysis perpetuates what Pessoni describes as “patriarchal consciousness,” a “psychic state of mind...which often exhibits signs of hostility toward nature as well as toward any quality traditionally associated with the feminine: nurturance, community, contiguity” (440). Although not limited to any gender or race, this patriarchal consciousness is maintained and enforced by ideological and linguistic hegemony. By

continuing to analyze these novels through the framework of occidental interpretations of cosmology, gender, myth, and ritual lends to further dehumanization, erasure, and misinterpretation of Morrison's and Walker's characters, and the lives and legacies of countless people.

To avoid further disenfranchising the literary legacies of writers of African descent, this research challenges existing archetypal analysis specifically by highlighting the limitations of patriarchal consciousness in relation to the richly diverse mythic construction and archetypes in Pan-African literature. By examining the archetypal and mythatypical elements in *Beloved*, *Song of Solomon*, and *The Color Purple*, beyond the traditions and scholarship of Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung, the misinterpretations of Morrison's and Walker's novel are evident. In order to contextualize the diverse elements and patterns, and to challenge the ideological and linguistic hegemony that their research perpetuates, the scholarship of Dr. Alexis Brooks de Vita centers African and indigenous folklore and utilizes diction that challenges some of the implicit racial, gender, and other biases of Eurocentric research.

Language, as an extension of consciousness, is an integral tool of construction and destruction. Whether by verbal or written expression, the words that are used to articulate one's internal self or to communicate observations about external experiences reveal much about an individual's values. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis states that the structure of a language determines a native speaker's perception and categorization of an experience (Oxford). Morrison and Walker use both English and African American English to describe their characters and experiences, thus contributing to multi-perspectives and concurrent plots. Morrison's and Walker's infusion of the African epic

and Black English oral traditions thus create multiple stories that can only be interpreted by native speakers. Although some existing criticism of Morrison and Walker utilizes classical myth and Eurocentric archetypes to examine the mythopoeic elements in their work, this maintains the ideological and linguistic hegemonies of colonizing thought and prevents readers from recognizing how Morrison and Walker use language to signify rituals of naming and initiation. By integrating these techniques, Morrison and Walker transform words into symbols, and conversations into rituals of initiation and naming.

In *Beloved*, *Song of Solomon*, and *The Color Purple*, Morrison and Walker explore the longstanding effects of chattel slavery upon African descendants born in the United States. Although these novels are fictional, each bear witness and testimony to realistic experiences of people of the African diaspora. Through their characterizations, integration of oral tradition, African cosmology, myth, and ritual, Morrison and Walker richly convey the emotional, physical, and spiritual implications of intergenerational dynamics in the African American community that are intimately shaped by chattel slavery, Jim Crow, and other infrastructures of systemic racism. The archetypal figures and mythatypical patterns in Morrison's and Walker's novels thus serve as symbols and dynamic rituals that transcend the pages upon which they are printed.

Archetypes are patterns or universal truths found across cultures, eras, and diverse media. Archetype means "original pattern" and is composed of 'archein,' which means 'original or old' and 'typos,' which means 'pattern, model or type'" (Golden 1). In literature, the presence of archetypal figures and patterns ultimately contributes to the development of a character's mythic journey. Unfortunately, much of the language that describes and defines archetypal figures and patterns maintains cisheteropatriarchal

ideology that contribute to the commodification, erasure, subjugation, and vilification of marginalized people who do not align with the values and social norms of predominant Western rhetoric. For this reason, existing criticism of Morrison's and Walker's novels offers limited interpretations of characters who exist outside of pre and post-colonial, patriarchal, heteronormative informed perspectives. Therefore, characteristics of archetypal figures and patterns require decolonial deconstructive analysis in order to ensure accurate, culturally competent interpretations of their work.

CHAPTER 2

MISINTERPRETED MYTH

Beloved, *Song of Solomon*, and *The Color Purple* illustrate the rich connections between African cosmology, myth, and ritual. Although existing scholarship about these novels does offer some insight regarding archetypes and myth, some scholars continue to use Eurocentric archetypal analysis to interpret these works. Because Jungian and universalist theory are most used for psychoanalyzing myth, critics have infinite opportunities to more accurately explore the myth, folklore, ritual, and symbology within Morrison's and Walker's works. In *Beloved*, *Song of Solomon*, and *The Color Purple*, the characters are dynamically constructed and simultaneously depict ancestral, deified, and human qualities. Although Jungian archetypes provide some context for patterns, they often fall short because they fail to recognize cultural and historical signifiers that create layered archetypal and mythatypical elements. These elements further lend to the unique construction of myth in Morrison's and Walker's novels. Additionally, the mythic journeys of each character are developed, in part, through Morrison's and Walker's integration of African cosmology and Black American oral tradition. Through their characters and the interpersonal dynamics, both Morrison and Walker offer valuable examples of how descendants of chattel slavery in the United States did and continue to exist beyond the status quo of white supremacist infrastructure and ideology. In each of these novels, the characters are simultaneously constricted and liberated by their gender assignment. Their constriction and liberation are simultaneous and contingent upon their interpersonal relationships, with each character's descent, ascent, and resolution often

unfolding in a cyclic reality. In *Beloved*, Sethe, Denver, and Beloved concurrently represent different and similar archetypal figures and mythatypical patterns. Each of their respective mythic journeys is contingent upon the presence of one another so that although their journeys are separate, they are very much the same. In *Song of Solomon* this is depicted through the characterizations of and intergenerational dynamics between Pilate, Reba, and Hagar, who all galvanize Milkman's mythic journey and contribute to the overall plot resolution. In *The Color Purple*, Nettie, Sofia, and Shug represent figures that contribute to Celie's mythic journey towards liberation and self-actualization.

Jung describes the psyche as being comprised of the shadow (anima/animus), the self, and the ego. Through his mapping of the psyche, Jung's theory distinguishes an inner and outer world, in which the conscious and unconscious self are accessed. One aspect of Jung's theory that greatly affects archetypal analysis is the function of the anima/animus, and the characterizations of femininity and masculinity that they represent. Jung's model of the psyche is particularly counterintuitive to interpreting African and indigenous peoples and their work, in part because it fragments consciousness into binaries that differ from their own cultures and cosmologies. In *Black Feminist Theology*, Trace asserts:

In contrast to Western traditions of Judaism and Christianity, the new religion of 'Blackness' espoused by Morrison rejects patriarchal monotheism and the dichotomization of reality. Mutually exclusive categories, such as good and evil, life and death, soul and body, God and nature, master and servant, reminiscent of Christianity, do not exist in Black feminist theology, which internalizes rather than objectifies deity. In a monistic vision of the universe, good does not exist apart from evil, there is life in death and death in life, and image and physical object coexist (Trace 16).

Trace and other scholars, such as Wole Soyinka, identify how Eurocentric and Western traditions differ from African traditions. Their assertions demonstrate where

classical myth and Jungian analysis prove ineffective for interpreting works by people of African descent. Additionally, their research illustrates how Eurocentricity enforces ideological hegemony by centering Hellenistic and Judeo-Christian history and language. Because Jung's theories about the conscious and unconscious, ego and self, femininity and masculinity maintain ideologically hegemonic values, Jungian archetypal analysis often lends to misinterpretation of non-European people's articulations and aesthetics.

Robert Graves explores the significance of Jung's theories and their connection between mythic elements and classical Greek literature but asserts that Jung lacked the "gift for concise expression, nor poetic understanding, nor sense of history that contribute to iconotropic instances" (Graves 250). These instances are the result of myths being "accidentally or deliberately misinterpreted" (Graves 250). In *The Hermeneutic Background of Jung*, William E. Smythe and Angelina Baydala argue that "since Jung's archetypes lack clearly defined boundaries of logical concepts, there is no way to decide conclusively whether any two archetypal expressions are of the same or different archetypes" (Smith and Baydala 67). At the Eranos Conference in 1946, Jung presented his final reformation of archetypes and clarified the distinction between archetypal expressions and archetypes as such, postulating that archetypal expressions are images and ideas whereas archetypes as such are "irrepresentible and fundamentally inaccessible to articulate knowledge" (Smith and Baydala 65). By creating said distinction, Jung sought to characterize the archetypes and collective unconscious in biological and metaphysical terms, thereby circumventing the limitation of poorly defined logical properties of archetypes. Jung also described his method as "'hermeneutic,' in contrast to what he considered was Freud's 'semiotic' approach" (Smith and Baydala 60).

According to Smith and Baydala, Jung's hermeneutic method implies a personal and interpersonal based comparative approach; however, "Jung never developed a comprehensive theoretical framework for hermeneutic inquiry. His rich, interpretive approach to symbolic meaning in practice did not culminate in a consistent, theoretically articulated hermeneutic methodology" (Smith and Baydala 67). Because Jung's methodology does not address the "historic-empirical-ethical-psychic structure in which the ritual archetype is housed," interpreting archetypal figures and patterns through his framework proves inadequate (Soyinka 10). In *The Hermeneutic Background of C.G. Jung*, Smythe and Baydala share one of Jung's early explanations of his methodology:

...the essence of hermeneutics, an art practiced in former times, consists in adding further analogies to the one already supplied by the symbol: in the first place subjective analogies produced at random by the patient, then objective analogies provided by the analyst out of his general knowledge. This procedure widens and enriches the initial symbol, and the final outcome is an infinitely complex and variegated picture the elements of which can be reduced to their respective *tertia comparationis* (Smythe and Baydala 60).

Although Jung distinguishes his methodology as hermeneutic, his research often fails to acknowledge the nuances of cultural symbols or ritual archetypes. Morrison, through her integration of oral African tradition, uses signifying language to characterize and describe persons, places, and rituals that are complexly layered with historical and mythic elements. Because of Morrison's signifying language, analysts must identify the cultural, cosmological, historical, and mythopoetic symbols that are signified through her diction, the characters, and their dialogue. Jung's hermeneutic framework does not provide pragmatic, culturally competent interpretations of existing symbols to accurately contextualize the archetypes that he characterizes. As Soyinka poignantly explains in *Myth, Literature, and the African World* that "on the authority of European ethnologists who lack the language to penetrate the Australian and other natives' own significations of

'dreaming' 'experiencing', 'thinking' and so on, Jung proceeds to identify the territories of dream, fantasy, psychotic... with the historic-empirical-ethical-psychic structure in which the ritual archetype is housed" (Soyinka 10). This assertion is important because Soyinka identifies the invalidity of Eurocentric interpretations of non-European ritual archetypes. As previously mentioned, Morrison and Walker utilize language and oral tradition techniques that transform their language into symbols and rituals. By failing to identify the "historic-empirical-ethical-psychic structure in which the ritual archetype" is housed, readers and critics risk misinterpreting the characters, literary form, and cultures that are both signified and signifiers. Additionally, Jung's assertion that symbols offer analogies and that analysts provide further objective analogies based on general knowledge is deeply problematic.

As history unfolds, the biases of Jung and his research demonstrate how one's gender, race, and sexuality- amongst other qualities- inform how their perception and lived experiences are informed and influenced. This will later be illustrated through a literature review of Morrison's and Walker's novels. Although Jung's hermeneutic methodology accounts for certain mythological motifs such as the shadow, anima/animus, wise old man, mother, maiden, and Self, Smith and Baydala argue that Jung's writings give the "misleading impression that archetypes comprise a small and finite set" (67). Jung's contributions regarding archetypes influence an overwhelming amount of scholarly research and theory; however, his writings often lend to a narrow exploration of the infinite manifestations of archetypal figures.

According to critic Demaris Wehr, "Jung and his followers tend to ontologize the archetypes, seeing them as authentic constructions of existences uninfluenced by social

reality” (Pessoni 440). Because the framework by which archetypes are most commonly understood is fundamentally tainted by the historical institutional gatekeepers who affirm subjectively informed beliefs about race, gender, and sexuality, amongst other intersectionalities, there is much to be discussed regarding the significance of culturally specific language in relation to the characterization of traditional feminine archetypes. Because existing frameworks that inform how archetypes are often characterized remain riddled with biased language, the research of Drs. Clarissa Pinkola-Estés and Alexis Brooks de Vita are vital for examining archetypal figures and mythotypical patterns in *Beloved*, *Song of Solomon*, and *The Color Purple*.

Beloved is a novel that contextualizes the significance of gender and language in relation to the construction of archetypal figures and mythotypical patterns. *Beloved* re-envisions the life of Margaret Garner, the daughter of Priscilla and Robert Garner, who fled from enslavement. Margaret Garner was born on a plantation in Boone County, Kentucky, and along with her husband, children, and other enslaved people eventually fled towards Canada. Unfortunately, they were pursued and surrounded in Cincinnati, and rather than surrender to the U.S. Marshalls, Margaret slit the throat of her two-year old daughter Mary and stabbed herself and other children. Mary died immediately; however, Margaret and her remaining children were captured, imprisoned, and set to be returned to a plantation in New Orleans. According to an interview with her husband, Margaret often expressed that it would be “better for them to be put out of the world than live in slavery” (Cincinnati Museum Center). *Beloved* intimately examines Garner’s sentiment, and with each character, Morrison illustrates the complexities circumstances that enslaved people faced due to the inhumane violence of chattel slavery.

The novel unfolds non-chronologically and the chapters are written from the perspectives of different characters. *Beloved's* structure is significant, in part, because the non-linear fragmentation reflects characteristics of traditional African epics, and the novel is rich with scenes that depict call and response, witnessing and testifying, music, and naming- all of which are elements of African oral tradition. Atkinson explains that "witness and testify is a shared collective memory, a cultural ritual that promotes solidarity and cohesion, creating a living archive of African American culture...shared experience, emotional, physical, communal, historical---it is social empathy. Testifying articulates and validates the shared experience through gesture, sign, symbol, or verbal expression" (24). Through her use of diction and dialogue, in conjunction with the novel's form, Morrison portrays the mythic journeys of each character. By signifying these oral traditions and integrating formal elements of traditional African epics, Morrison creates a multidimensional plot that simultaneously integrates the past, present, and future in order to contextualize the violence and values within the African American community.

Beloved opens with a narrator explaining that Sethe and her family were living in Ohio, in a home that was being terrorized by a spirit. The novel's non-linear form incorporates elements from African oral tradition, and through her characters and their dialogue, Morrison creates rituals and symbols within the novel, thus establishing an additional layer of myth and ritual. Sethe, her daughter Denver, and other ancillary characters simultaneously navigate the past and present, in part because of the spirit's chaos and disruption in their home. Morrison explains "by 1873, Sethe and her daughter Denver were its only victims. The grandmother, Baby Suggs, was dead, and the sons,

Howard and Buglar, had run away by the time they were thirteen years old” (Morrison 1). Sethe, her dying mother, and adolescent daughter had spent ample time trying to wage “a perfunctory battle against the outrageous behavior of that place” and it is revealed that the home is inhabited by the spirit of Sethe’s deceased baby” (Morrison 2). Through the interpersonal dynamics between Sethe and other characters, readers are transported between a physical and spiritual realm in a non-linear fashion. As the novel unfolds, the reader learns that the spirit is the deceased infant daughter that Sethe killed in order to save her from the atrocities of being enslaved. Although Sethe ultimately reaches Ohio with her daughter Denver and two sons, she is ostracized by the community and lives a life of seclusion. Although Sethe is physically free, she remains bound and tormented by the experiences of her past and the present antagonizing from the baby’s spirit. After gathering chamomile, Sethe returns to her front yard, only to face another relic of her past at Sweet Home. Greeted by Paul D, after eighteen years of separation, Paul D and Sethe begin conversing about their respective paths that led them to their present reunion. Through their conversations, the readers learn about the chaos and violence that they experienced while at Sweet Home. Eventually, Paul D moves in with Sethe, Denver, and the baby’s spirit, and his presence impacts the relationship between Sethe and Denver. Shortly after Paul D’s arrival, Sethe, Paul D, and Denver go into town for the carnival. Upon leaving, they encounter a peculiar woman, who they eventually deduce is the reincarnated spirit of Sethe’s deceased baby. As Sethe and Denver care for Beloved, they simultaneously commune, honor their matrilineal legacy, address intergenerational trauma, and reshape their futures.

Song of Solomon also explores the intergenerational trauma within a family of African descendants in the United States. Like *Beloved*, *Song of Solomon* integrates formal elements from the traditional African epic, along with techniques that originate from African oral traditions. In *Song of Solomon*, readers observe the dynamics between Macon Dead III and his family members. Macon Dead III (called Milkman) is the only son of a successful and ruthless landlord in Michigan and is somewhat of a disappointment. Although his relationship with his father is strained, Milkman is surrounded by female relatives who tend to and love him deeply. Although Milkman is loved and supported by his mother, aunt, and cousins, Milkman is inconsiderate, self-centering, and undisciplined.

As the novel unfolds, the reader learns of several familial indiscretions and dynamics that lead to Milkman's forging relationships with his father's estranged and vilified sister Pilate, as well as his cousin Hagar, which is incestuous. Milkman eventually becomes restless and sets out on a journey to recover some gold that he believed Pilate to have hidden. Upon arriving at his destination, he does not discover gold, but instead, a midwife named Circe, who delivered his father and aunt. Circe shares with him the history of his family, and Milkman, inspired by all that he has learned, eventually sets out to return home. Although Milkman is the protagonist of this novel, his aunt Pilate, and cousins Reba and Hagar are important characters in the construction of his mythic journey. Pilate and Hagar represent ancestor, deity, and humanity, whilst reflecting multidimensional expressions of consciousness to Milkman. Because of their multifaceted characterizations, Pilate and Hagar catalyze Milkman's descent, ascent, and ultimate transformation of intergenerational tragedy.

The Color Purple is an epistolary novel that offers additional representation of archetypal figures and mythatypical patterns that further illustrate the intergenerational dynamics and trauma within the African American community. Similarly to the aforementioned novels, *The Color Purple* utilizes multiple narrators who contribute to the novel's mythic construction and cyclic reality. The novel opens with Celie's addressing God and describing being repeatedly raped by her father. Inevitably, Celie becomes twice spoiled, and her father takes both children away. Amid losing her children, Celie's mother also dies, and Celie begins to fear for the safety of her younger sister Nettie.

Celie, having navigated severe sexual trauma and emotional abuse, encourages Nettie to focus on her education, so that she may escape their harmful environment. A man by the name of Mr. _____, a widower with several children, sees Nettie at church one day and asks their father for Nettie's hand in marriage. Celie and Nettie's father does not allow Mr. _____ to marry Nettie, and instead, offers up Celie the eldest, with a list of all of the reasons that Mr. _____ should take her as his bride. Although he describes Celie as "spoiled. Twice." and that asserts that "she too old to be living here at home," Celie's father persuasively explains that "she'd come with her own linen," and that "she can take that cow she raise down there back of the crib" (Walker 9). Eventually, Celie meets Sofia, and Shug Avery- women who are significantly different from her, but who mirror the divine and human aspects of herself that she has yet to embody. Through her observations of and relationships with each of these women, Celie's journey towards self-actualization is manifested, and Celie transcends the tragedy of existing as a poor, unloved, African- American woman. *The Color Purple*, like *Beloved* and *Song of*

Solomon, demonstrates the cyclic reality of these archetypal figures as they relate to the construction of their mythic journeys.

By identifying culturally significant archetypal and mythatypical figures in patterns that are constructed through the characterizations and plots in the aforementioned novels, the limitations of Jungian analysis and Estés's research are evident. Chapter two, therefore, provides an in-depth comparative analysis of three archetypal figures from Estés's *Women Who Run with the Wolves* in relation to Morrison's characters Sethe, Denver, and Beloved. To better contextualize culturally pertinent symbols and patterns in *Beloved*, *Song of Solomon*, and *The Color Purple*, the research of Brooks de Vita and Wole Soyinka are briefly discussed to illustrate how the limitations of classical and Jungian theory contribute to the misinterpretations of signified rituals, symbols, and patterns unique to the African Diaspora. Chapter three examines the archetypal and mythatypical figures and patterns in *Song of Solomon*, with emphasis on Pilate Dead and her multidimensional characterization that illustrates how race and gender are differently characterized for women of African descent. Chapter four explores the archetypal and mythatypical patterns in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, with emphasis on the impact of cisheteropatriarchal gender expression in relation to Celie, Sofia, and Shug's characterizations. Chapter five summarizes how cisheteropatriarchal language and rhetoric maintain the hegemonic ideals that contribute to the misinterpretations and superficial readings of *Beloved*, *Song of Solomon*, and *The Color Purple*.

CHAPTER 3

THE MYTHIC AND MYTHATYPICAL PATTERNS IN *BELOVED*

In *Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*, Estés identifies the archetypal patterns and expressions of the Wild Woman by providing psychoanalytic analyses of traditional indigenous fairy tales. Estés begins by asserting that “wildlife and the Wild Woman are both endangered species...the spiritual lands of Wild Woman have, through history, been plundered or burnt” (Estés 1). This assertion supports the basic premise of her research, in that language as a tool of hegemony, erases cultures and gives false testimony of the lives of marginalized people. The plundering and destruction of colonized peoples is further perpetuated by the words used to describe and define them. Estés explains that “it is not so coincidental that wolves...and wildish women have similar reputations. They all share related instinctual archetypes, and as such, both are erroneously reputed to be ingracious, wholly and innately dangerous, and ravenous” (Estés 1). Consequently, Estés develops her own characterizations of the Wild Woman by describing the shared psychic qualities within both groups and highlighting that both women and wolves “are experienced in adapting to constantly changing circumstances” (Estés 2). *Women Who Run with the Wolves* identifies fifteen stages that the Wild Woman archetypal figure encounters, including an initiation, retrieval of intuition, identifying traps, returning to oneself, nourishing the creative life, and several others. To contextualize each stage, Estés shares folklore from various cultures, and provides her own psychoanalysis of the stories’ symbols and

metaphors. Through *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, readers are provided additional framework by which they can engage other mythic stories, and their own.

Estés, a female Jungian psychoanalyst, poet, and *cantadora* infuses language that illustrates beliefs and values that more accurately reflect the cultures of which the stories are indigenous. As a *cantadora*, or keeper of the old stories, her knowledge and understanding of ancestral and cultural memory are significant. As a poet, whose poems are written in English and infused with Spanish, Estés' work bridges gaps of consciousness, of culture, and of experience. As a female Jungian psychoanalyst, Estés' intersections of identity challenge some of the ideological hegemony of cisheteropatriarchy; however, some of her assertions maintain inherent biases of Western psychosociological research. She explains that "traditional psychological theory too soon runs out for the creative, the gifted, the deep woman. Traditional psychology is often spare or entirely silent about deeper issues important to women: the archetypal, the intuitive, the sexual and cyclical, the ages of women, a woman's way, a woman's knowing, her creative fire" (Estés 4).

Although the Wild Woman archetype provides additional context for interpreting myth, Estés' characterizations and research maintain Eurocentric characterizations of gender. More importantly, her work perpetuates gender assignments and expressions that deeply mirror Victorian-era femininity. This is harmful because many cultures of non-European ethnicity have their own definitions of gender that are vilified and reduced to primitive, savage, and ultimately, antithetical to Western cisheteropatriarchal rhetoric.

Estés writes:

I call her Wild Woman, for those very words, *wild* and *woman*, create *llamar o tocar a la puerta*, the fairy-tale knock at the door of the deep female

psyche. *Llamar o tocar a la puerta* means literally to play upon the instrument of the name in order to open a door. It means using words that summon up the opening of a passageway. No matter by which culture a woman is influenced, she understands the words *wild* and *woman*, intuitively” (Estés 5).

This is significant because it acknowledges the power of language and its relationship to “opening of a passageway.” Arguably, because language informs consciousness and how it is understood, by defining the Wild Woman archetype, Estés opens a passageway for people to interpret archetypal figures and patterns beyond their existing knowledge.

According to Pessoni, “archetypes are in a constant state of flux, recreating themselves over and over again” (440). In an interview, Toni Morrison further explains that “archetypes...are not fixed images.” These descriptions confirm the impermanence of archetypes and are significant because they acknowledge the historical relevance of pre-existing archetypes, while making room for the infinite expressions that will exist beyond time. Estés initially describes the Wild Woman by identifying “her” from varying perspectives. The Wild Woman “would perhaps be called the id, the Self, the medial nature. In biology it would be called the typical or fundamental nature” (Estés, 6). Amongst other descriptions, Estés describes the Wild Woman as the “the Life/Death/Life force, she is the incubator. She is intuition, she is far-seer, she is deep listener...She is ideas, feelings, urges, and memory. She has been lost and half forgotten...She is the one who thunders after injustice. She is the one we come home to.” (Estés 12). Estés’ characterization of the Wild Woman is infinite, rooted in pre-existing archetypes, and further developed through her own ethno-clinical and analytical psychology.

Although Estés’ research is useful for identifying archetypes through a culturally diverse lens, her work demonstrates the limitations of Jungian psychoanalysis in relation to how myths are interpreted. Because Estés describes her archetypal figures and patterns

in a linear nature and maintains some of the inherent Eurocentric cisheteropatriarchal assignments of femininity and masculinity, her work cannot serve as a sole source for interpreting *Beloved*, *Song of Solomon*, and *The Color Purple*. Therefore, examining the aforementioned novels through concepts presented in Wole Soyinka's *Myth, Literature, and the African World* is paramount. As mentioned, Jung and Estés contextualize myth using language that depicts chronological order and linear thought. Soyinka, however, explains that "this seeming cosmic anachronism is in fact a very handy clue to temporal concepts in the Yoruba world-view. Traditional thought operates, not a linear conception of time but a cyclic reality" (Soyinka 10). Furthermore, Soyinka explains that "neither 'child' nor 'father' is a closed or chronological concept. The world of the unborn, in the Yoruba world-view, is as evidently older than world of the living as the world of the living is older than the ancestor-world" (Soyinka 10). This cyclic reality, therefore, is an integral aspect of analyzing *Sethe and Beloved*, *Pilate and Hagar*, and *Celie and Shug*, in that although there are archetypal parent and child figures, they simultaneously represent ancestor (death), deity (divinity), and humanity.

Soyinka also asserts that "Jung, begetter of so many racist distortions of the structure of the human psyche, interchangeably employs ritual archetypes and images of psychotic fantasy. While the intrusion of archetypal images into the psychotic condition) or fevered, drunken deliriums for that matter) is an acknowledged occurrence, Jung's perception becomes narrowed in his indifferently hierarchic relation of such products of the disturbed mind to the immanent quality of the ritual archetype" (Soyinka 34). Soyinka also explains that the profession of the psychoanalyst lies in the sorting out of the new discrete images from their hostile environment: he has no equipment (as an

outsider) for the equation of such images themselves with the essence-reality of their origin. Soyinka shares a Yoruba proverb: *Bi o s'enia, imale o si* (if humanity were not, the gods would not be). Because the Dark Mother archetype and subsequent patterns of her journey unfold in a linear tradition, characterizing Sethe as the Dark Mother fails to articulate the significance of the cyclic and intertwining nature of her relationship with Beloved and herself. Their cyclic experiences require that their ancestral, living, and spiritual identities all be acknowledged, simultaneously, for them to successfully navigate their respective journeys.

Because Jungian theory fails to address how the intersections of race and gender impact the contextualization of archetypal figures and patterns, some existing analyses about Morrison and Walker's novels remain deeply misinformed and harmful to the intellectual and spiritual legacies of people of African descent. Although Soyinka's *Myth, Literature, and the African World* provide poignant criticisms of occidental interpretations of African work, Dr. Brooks de Vita offers additional insight for recognizing rich mythatypical patterns of Pan African authors. De Vita offers the term "mythatype" as a "signifying reminder" that ultimately challenges "conflation with universalist Jungian arguments about the "primitive" mind and the assumed positive or negative cross-cultural value of multiculturally held symbols, which are implied in the use of the term "archetype" (de Vita 6). She further asserts that "the fact that Pan-African women writers regularly invoke certain symbols such as trees, rain, and wind in the metaphorical depiction of their protagonist's dilemmas and decisions become abundantly clear (de Vita 6). Brooks de Vita's *Mythatypes* provides nuance that existing archetypal analysis lacks, particularly because she contextualizes the impact of Kongo and Ifa

cosmology as they relate to cultural symbols across the African Diaspora and within the literature of several Pan-African women writers. The research of Brooks de Vita and Estés offer rich context for further analysis of the construction of myth in Morrison's and Walker's novels because their works provide additional language and insight that disrupt the hegemonic assertions imbued in Jungian archetypes.

In her analysis of *La Llorona* and other folklore, Estés contextualizes the Wild Woman archetype. Although her analysis is rooted in Jungian theory, by examining the mythic journey of Sethe, Pilate, and Celie in Morrison and Walker's work, the opportunity to re-envision archetypal figures and patterns becomes abundantly clear. Walker and Morrison infuse classical elements of drama, myth and tragedy in conjunction with elements of African cosmology, folklore, and ritual to provide insight about the experiences of people of African descent whilst simultaneously challenging Eurocentric archetypal characterizations.

Beloved offers several archetypal personifications, each contributing to the resolution of Sethe's, Denver's, and Beloved's own mythical journeys. Sethe's time and ultimate escape from Sweet Home represent a descent into an underworld of chaos, death, and destruction. In Morrison's description of Sethe's escape from Sweet Home, she writes: "Down in the grass, like the snake she believed she was, Sethe opened her mouth, and instead of fangs and a split tongue, out shot the truth" (Morrison 32). In this instance, the simile illustrates Sethe's dehumanized existence, while alluding to the Biblical curse of the serpent and woman. In Genesis 3:14-15, God curses the serpent to crawl on its belly and eat dust all the days of its life, while cursing Eve with painful childbirth, submission to her husband, and multiplied sorrows. The allusion of the cursed

serpent and woman continues when Morrison writes, “so she crawled and Amy walked alongside her” urging her along and making her “think that maybe she wasn’t, after all, just a crawling graveyard for a six-month baby’s last hours” (Morrison 34). Although this biblical interpretation lends to Sethe’s reflection on the Judeo-Christian motif of the cursed serpent, as previously explained, Western myth cannot be the sole source of interpreting Morrison’s symbols and metaphors. Although the serpent can be found across the globe, its’ symbolism varies from culture to culture. In *Mythatypes*, Brooks de Vita explains that the snake is often a symbol for African goddesses, and briefly recounts the tale of Mawu, the Great Mother of the Dahomey tradition, who “reverses the roles and assigns death” (Brooks de Vita 56). Sethe’s characterization as a snake is but one illustration of how Western mythology lends to the misinterpretation of archetypal figures and patterns in Morrison’s work.

Like Brooks de Vita, Estés also offers additional context for understanding Sethe’s characterizations. In her novel, Estés share the story of *La Loba*, a woman with many names “who lives in the hidden place, awaiting lost and wandering people” (Estés 24). Estés explains that “the sole work of La Loba is the collecting of bones. She collects and preserves especially that which is in danger of being lost to the world” (Estés 25). Sethe and Denver, prior to the arrival of Paul D and Beloved, are trapped in the purgatory that is 124 Bluestone, patiently awaiting the arrival of their loved ones. Although Baby Suggs, Howard, and Buglar left 124 Bluestone, Sethe and Denver remain physically bound and spiritually connected to their home. Morrison writes, “so Sethe and the girl Denver did what they could, and what the house permitted, for her. Together they waged a perfunctory battle against the outrageous behavior of that place...For they

understood the source of the outrage as well as they knew the source of light” (Morrison 4). Denver and Sethe attempt to “end the persecution by calling forth the ghost that tried them so” by holding hands and inviting it to come on (Morrison 4). When the spirit does not respond accordingly, Sethe asserts “if she’d only come, I could make it clear to her” (4). In this exchange, Sethe and Denver align with La Loba’s archetype, by calling out to the spirit to bring about transformation of their circumstance.

La Loba represents the fundamental origin of the wide-ranging expressions of the Great Mother archetype and “can be thought of as representing un cuento milagro, a miracle story...It is a resurrection story about the underworld connection to Wild Woman. It promises that if we will sing the song, we can call up the psychic remains of the wild soul and sing her into a vital shape again” (Estés 27). Estés’s use of “underworld” arguably asserts Western characterizations of mythology; however, in the Kongo cosmogram, this underworld would instead be a spiritual realm that does not necessarily exist in a lower or different dimension than the physical realm. Estés explains that “La Loba sings over the bones she has gathered. To sing means to use the soul-voice. It means to say on the breath the truth of one’s power and one’s need, to breathe soul over the thing that is ailing or in need of restoration” (Estés 27). La Loba’s function is to call sickness and death by name, thereby giving power to healing and wholeness. Although the baby is not living, Sethe and Denver call upon her, thus conjuring Beloved in physical form.

Sethe’s character greatly aligns with the Great Mother archetype, in part because she loves her children so deeply. Rather than to subject her baby to the violence and trauma of chattel slavery, Sethe chooses to end her baby’s physical life. When

challenged by Paul D about her decision, Sethe asserts “it ain’t my job to know what’s worse. It’s my job to know what is and to keep them away from what I know is terrible. I did that” (Morrison 165). This aspect of Sethe’s killing her baby is often interpreted through classical and Jungian analysis, as the dark or tragic Mother archetype. Rather than accept Paul D's criticism of “You got two feet, Sethe, not four,” Sethe challenges the cisheteropatriarchal characterizations of the Mother archetype (Morrison 165). Although archetypes are often described as universal patterns that exist indiscriminately of one’s culture or era, Pessoni explains that Morrison “recognizes the danger of relying too heavily on one manifestation of an archetype” (443). Morrison masterfully weaves several archetypal figures and patterns to construct complex characters whose mythic journeys are uniquely illustrative of descendants of chattel slavery in the United States. As Pessoni asserts, “archetypes are not fixed images. No one set of archetypal images should be considered the one and only true archetype” (p. 440). This is further demonstrated by the archetypal figures described by Estés, as well as the mythatypical figures and patterns offered by Brooks de Vita.

Similarly to La Loba, Sethe collects the dead, while affirming and memorializing her life, and their love. Although some scholars examine Sethe through the lens of classical and Jungian archetypal analysis, Sethe transcends the chaotic or Dark Mother archetype. In ““She was Laughing at their God’: Discovering the Goddess Within in *Sula*,” Pessoni asserts that “The Great Goddess archetype which appears in Morrison’s novels functions as a unifying force, connecting human beings to one another and to nature in moral, social, and physical interdependence” (p. 440). Morrison’s

characters exist within and beyond their respective mythic journeys, and they navigate the cyclic reality of their ancestral past, human present, and divine future.

Later in the novel, *Beloved* asks Sethe about her mother. Sethe then recalls a conversation with Nan, the community's midwife, who explained to Sethe that her mother "threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names, she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around" (Morrison 62). Rather than being discarded, Sethe is named for the man whom her mother was willingly engaged. Although Sethe did not name her infant, she memorializes her by inscribing *beloved* on her tombstone. By using the word "beloved" as an adjective and proper noun, Morrison creates a multi-dimensional signifier that simultaneously depicts the ritual of naming and witnessing. Both Sethe and her mother, through the killing, burial/disposal of their children, reclaim their personal autonomy and bodily agency.

Sethe and her mother also exemplify the ritual of naming and bearing witness to the lives of those whom they loved. Sethe's mother was hanged when Sethe was a young child, and consequently she has few clear memories about her mother's expressions of love. Despite not speaking her mother's native tongue and not being raised closely with her biological mother, Sethe is determined to love her children and to protect them from the violence of chattel slavery. This exchange is significant because Morrison uses the character's dialogue to illustrate the oral tradition of witnessing and testifying, and the significance of naming. Nan, who endured frequent rapes and violence along with Sethe's mother, bears witness and gives testimony to Sethe that she was born of a loving

union and deeply loved. Interestingly, Beloved initiates this memory when she asks Sethe “Your woman she never fix up your hair?” (Morrison 60). Through this encounter, Morrison further develops the cyclic reality, in which Beloved transports Sethe and Denver into the past while they exist in the rememory in the present. In this exchange, Beloved is simultaneously the ancestress/spirit that connects Sethe to her inner child, while Denver bears witness to this exchange.

The theme of naming exists throughout Morrison’s literary corpus, but particularly in *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon*, the character’s names demonstrate the ancestral significance and ritual of naming. Although Sethe’s baby girl is unnamed, she was memorialized with beloved inscribed on a pink headstone. The word beloved is a seven-letter word that is both an adjective, and in this instance a proper noun. Beloved is an adjective here and serves as an affirmation of her baby’s existence. Unlike her mother, who disposed of babies without naming or marking their graves, Sethe buries her baby. According to Ralph Story, Sethe’s mythic journey is, in part, about her “inner quest for completeness; her destiny was to fulfill her promises as a mother; to love, to cherish, to protect, to teach, and to give” (Story 22). Sethe gave her baby the freedom to live beyond the harm of chattel slavery, in an act of unconditional love and ritual sacrifice. Sethe’s sacrifice, however, prevented her from being loved by her deceased baby, and feared by her remaining daughter.

Throughout various cultures and spiritual traditions of the African diaspora, names are often imbued with values that are not easily recognized by outsiders. In *Mythatypes*, Brooks de Vita provides a rich survey of mythatypes by “isolating recurrent symbols” that are unique to the African diaspora and “analyzing them for context for

their possible mythical relevance” (Brooks de Vita 4). She cites Holloway’s *Moorings and Metaphors* to explain that “the writings of these women have “inversive, recursive and sometimes even subversive structures that...give it a dimension only accessible when its cultural context is acknowledged” (Brooks de Vita 4). Arguably, *Sethe*, *Beloved*, and *Denver* reflect the mythatypical pattern of the triple goddess, but beyond mother, maiden, and crone, their characterizations reflect attributes of the orishas Yemoja, Oshun, and Oya. Yemoja, who has several manifestations, is most often recognized as orisha of motherhood. Oshun, who also has many manifestations, is the orisha of purity, love, and sensuality. Oya, like Yemoja and Oshun, has several manifestations, but is the orisha of death, rebirth, and transformation and is described as “mother of children and mother of corpses” (Brooks de Vita 92). Each of the orishas have their own colors, numbers, and additional symbology that are diversely represented in *Beloved*, *Song of Solomon*, and *The Color Purple*.

One of the signifiers that Morrison includes in *Beloved* is the word beloved. Morrison uses beloved as a symbolic word, but also characterizes this word by its’ namesake figure. Beloved, as a mythatypical representation of the triple goddesses, catalyzes all the characters’ mythic journeys, but the word is significant because its seven letters signify Yemoja, whose number is seven. Additionally, the character Beloved exhibits attributes of Oya, the orisha of destruction and rebirth. Through Beloved’s characterization which aligns with Oya, Morrison adds an additional layer to her signifying of Yemoja, the mother of Oya. Beloved, therefore, is a symbolic word and figure of maternal love and protection, destruction and rebirth, who helps to facilitate the ancestral and intergenerational healing for Sethe and Denver.

Estés describes another archetypal expression of the Wild Woman, through the story of La Llorona, “who runs to the river with her two children and throws them into the torrent. The children drown, and La Llorona falls to the riverbank in grief and dies” (Estés 326). Upon reaching heaven, La Llorona is denied entrance until the souls of her children are recovered from the river. According to one interpretation presented in her novel, La Llorona “threw the babies into the river because they would have such a hard life” (Estés 327). Sethe, describing the journey of getting her children from Sweet Home to 124, says “or maybe I couldn’t love em proper in Kentucky because they wasn’t mine to love” (Morrison 164). Sethe recognized that at Sweet Home her children were not her own and could not be properly protected because they were subject to schoolteacher’s inhumanity, and similarly to one of the versions of *La Llorona*, Sethe kills her baby as an act of love. According to Estés’ analysis of *La Llorona*, archetypal mothers who kill their babies represent a severance from their own psychic ability to create, sustain, and nurture the physical manifestations of their womanhood. Sethe’s act of unconditional love thus illustrates the presence of the Wild Women archetype, who for fear of having her children, ideas, and manifestations destroyed, chooses instead, to kill them.

Sethe’s characterizations offer similar patterns of the archetypal figure La Llorona, with Sethe’s deceased child and Beloved serving similar roles as La Llorona’s children. Through their deaths and lives, Sethe and La Llorona are riddled with grief and required to make peace with their children’s spirits in order to heal and progress. Beloved tenderly describes Sethe as “the face I found and lost in the water under the bridge. When I went in, I saw her face coming to me and it was my face too...She smiles at me and it is my own face smiling. I will not lose her again. She is mine” (Morrison

216). Much like the souls of La Llorona's children, who transitioned through a body of water into the otherworld, *Beloved* describes a similar pattern by identifying the water under the bridge. Estés asserts that "in symbology, the great bodies of water express the place where life itself is thought to have originated. In the Hispanic Southwest, the river symbolizes the ability to live, truly live. It is greeted as the mother, La Madre Grande, La Mujer Grande, the Great Woman, whose waters not only run in the ditches and riverbeds but spill out of the very bodies of women themselves as their babies are born" (Estés 327). Because *Beloved* explains that she was lost and found in the water under the bridge, the water serves as a symbolic representation of Sethe's and *Beloved*'s psychic connection, and arguably, a metaphor for the connectedness to the collective unconscious. Through the lens of Estés' Jungian psychoanalysis, *Beloved* symbolizes the connection between spiritual and physical realms, and represents how the unseen, the subconscious, and supernatural manifest through the bodies of water.

Although Estés's Jungian framework provides additional layers for interpreting *Beloved*, Brooks de Vita's mythatypical research more accurately contextualizes the cosmological and cultural influence of the African diaspora in relation to the construction of myth and symbolism. Morrison uses water throughout the novel as a physical and metaphorical place for conduction, reflection, and rebirth to occur. Morrison writes, "a fully dressed woman walked out of the water...Everything hurt but her lungs most of all. Sopping wet and breathing shallow she spent those hours trying to negotiate the weight of her eyelids" (Morrison 50). Morrison's description of *Beloved* is another allusion to her multidimensional nature of deceased spirit, human, and deity, further demonstrating

Holloway's assertion about the "metaphor of the goddess/ancestor" (Brooks de Vita 4). Brooks de Vita expounds upon Holloway's assertion, explaining that:

It is through identification of a protagonist with a perceived ancestor and in the conflation of the deceased ancestor with spiritual forces or female deities that the work transcends a narrow or individualistic space and enters a realm that Holloways terms "spiritual." The interactive relations among protagonist, ancestor, and deity, Holloway concludes, animate African American and West African women's literatures concurrently on three levels of time, experience, and existence: the individual (which may or may not be contemporary), the historical, and the mythical (Brooks de Vita 4). The spiritual realm that *Sethe*, *Denver*, and *Beloved* navigate through their interpersonal relationships greatly illustrate Holloway's assertion. Perhaps the best example of Morrison's multidimensional animation of time, experience, and existence is towards the end of the novel, through *Beloved's* dialogue with *Sethe*. Morrison writes:

You are my face; I am you. Why did you leave me who am you?
 I will never leave you again
 Don't ever leave me again
 You will never leave me again
 You went in the water
 I drank your blood
 I brought your milk
 You forgot to smile
 I loved you
 You hurt me
 You came back to me
 You left me
 I waited for you

You are mine

You are mine

You are mine (Morrison 217)

The lines “Don’t ever leave me again,” “I loved you,” and “I waited for you,” represent Beloved’s childlike innocence and need for Sethe, which are commonly attributed to the divine child and orphan archetypes as such. Brooks de Vita, however, poignantly explains that “these associations link her to her mother, her grandmother, who suffered the Middle Passage and Yemoja, Yoruba goddess of the sea. Beloved’s reverie of death and rebirth allows her to transcend linear time and become representative of her theological and historical community” (Brooks de Vita 42). These associations further illustrate the limitations of Jungian archetypes, in that they fail to articulate the “refiguring that spirals the future back to embrace, fulfill, and incorporate the past and present” (Brooks de Vita 42). This excerpt conveys the cyclic reality of their existence and relationship, intertwining their past and present lives in both the physical and spiritual realm. Furthermore, it demonstrates how African myth contributes to the multifaceted characterizations of Sethe and Beloved, as ancestor, child, and deity.

Beloved also exemplifies the emblematic voice of La Llorona’s babies when she articulates “You hurt me, You came back to me, You left me, I waited for you” (Morrison 215). According to some, these lines convey Sethe’s harm and Beloved’s hurt, and distinguish Sethe as the archetypal mother, and Beloved the archetypal child or orphan. Brooks de Vita, however, asserts that “Beloved has been inscribed in a community whose discourse, to be intelligible, must eschew the linearity of the colonizing narrative and spiral back to its own multiple layers of relevance, as symbolized by the Kongo/*Ifa* cosmogram linking spiritual and material worlds, past and

future, through the perfected conduit of Sethe at the crossroads as the cosmic tree of perpetual creation and recreation through destruction” (Brooks de Vita 42). Beloved and Sethe are sometimes interpreted as separate archetypes; however, due to the non-linear nature of their existences, to interpret them as separate archetypal entities is to deny the legitimacy of Morrison’s brilliant mythic construction. Morrison consistently uses setting to portray the metaphorical underworlds of her character’s mythic journeys:

Beloved closed her eyes. ‘In the dark my name is Beloved.

Denver scooted a little closer. “What’s it like over there, where you were before? Can you tell me?”

“Dark,” said Beloved. “I’m small in that place. I’m like this here.”

The dialogue between Denver and Beloved is one of the first instances where Morrison alludes to the realm beyond the physical world, the place that coincides with what Estés characterizes as La Loba’s place, where “the spirits manifest as personages and La voz mitologica, The Mythological Voice of the deep psyche, speaks as poet and oracle. Things of psychic value, once dead, can be revived. Also, the basic material of all stories existent in the world ever, began with someone’s experience here in this inexplicable psychic land, and someone’s attempt to relate what occurred to them there” (Estés 29). Morrison’s description of 124 Bluestone further portrays the significance of setting as a catalyst for each characters’ respective mythic journey. Sethe’s and Denver’s home, 124 Bluestone, similar to La Loba’s place, serves as a portal by which the mythological voice communicates and is heard. This is best demonstrated by Paul D’s conversation with Beloved when he asks, “did Somebody tell you about this house?” Beloved explains that “She told me. When I was at the bridge, she told me” (Morrison 65). This bridge, although a physical location, represents the bridge between the living and dead, or from a Jungian framework, the conscious and collective unconscious. Sethe

suggests instead that it “must be somebody from the old days, the days when 124 was a way station where messages came and then their senders” (Morrison 65). Morrison uses the setting of 124 Bluestone to represent both a physical and psychic location that reflects what Estés describes as “the place where visitations, miracles, imaginations, inspirations, and healings of all natures occur” (Estés 29). Beyond Jungian analysis, Morrison infuses the mythatypical characteristics of Yemoja through the setting and signifying name of 124 Bluestone. As previously mentioned, the ritual of naming is evident throughout her body of work. The ritual of naming, and the names chosen are often layered with multiple meanings. In the instance of 124 Bluestone, the significance of the address is represented by the signified deity Yemoja, whose number is 7 (1+2+4), and whose initiates often adorn themselves with blue and clear crystals (stones). By naming the location 124 Bluestone, Morrison signifies Yemoja and her mythatypical function as the great mother and source of all. As Sethe, Denver, and Beloved navigate their relationships within the walls of 124 Bluestone, they ultimately find healing through mothering themselves and tending to one another.

In “Sacrifice and Surrender: Sethe in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” Story cites Rigney, who explains the supernatural aspect of 124 represents the belief that “the spirit world is everywhere- in the houses, in the trees, in the rivers, and it represents...the insistence on a myth beyond history and on an identity that is both racial and individual” (Story 23). 124 Bluestone represents the place, which Jung called the collective unconscious, where “the biological and psychological worlds share headwaters” (Estés 29). Beloved’s arrival to La Loba’s place demonstrates the metaphorical significance of

Sethe's unwillingness to leave the home, despite its haunting while also representing the duality of death and rebirth.

Beloved's arrival to 124 Bluestone represents her spiritual and physical rebirth from the otherworld and marks the physical place that catalyzes Sethe's and Denver's cultivation of awareness and reclamation of power by remembering and resolving that which was hidden, lost, and previously unknown. Through reexamining the mythic elements of feminine archetypal characters *Beloved* illustrates the significance of Morrison's layered characterizations that illustrate the diverse mythatypical and archetypal qualities of indigenous and African cultures. More importantly, through Sethe and Beloved's archetypal characterizations, each woman experiences a rebirth that transforms them into Wild Women. This, the essence of the Wild Woman, who is illustrated through a vast array of archetypal figures such as *La Loba*, is reserved strictly for those who search for that which is dead, sing over those dead bones, and breathe into them the truth of one's power and one's needs. Although classical and Jungian archetypes fail to articulate the significance of such patterns, Estés's *Women Who Run with the Wolves* provides additional context that transcend some of the limitations of Jungian archetypal analysis.

CHAPTER 4

MORRISON'S MYTHIC CONSTRUCTION IN *SONG OF SOLOMON*

Song of Solomon depicts the initiation and subsequent mythic journey of Macon Dead III, who is deeply impacted by intergenerational trauma. Morrison integrates formal elements of traditional African epic, along with techniques indigenous to African oral tradition, which contributes to the multi-dimensional structure and progression of the novel. *Song of Solomon* is constructed in a manner that demonstrates the significance of non-linear time and cyclic thought. *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon* illustrate moral dilemmas through Morrison's depictions of the atrocities, immediate aftermath, and longstanding implications of colonization and chattel slavery for African descendants living in the United States. Furthermore, both novels are fictionalized renderings that re-envision historical occurrences as a source of mythical construction. Whereas *Beloved* is an imagining of the lived experience of Margaret Garner, *Song of Solomon* involves the legacy of the Igbo people who resisted enslavement at Dunbar Creek on St. Simons Island. Morrison alludes to this legacy-turned-folklore in the beginning and ending of the novel.

By utilizing "The Flying African" folklore, Morrison's novel is particularly significant because it affirms Brooks de Vita's postulation of Soyinka's *Myth, Literature, and the African World*. Brooks de Vita writes, "Soyinka describes the interactive universe as 'a proverb of human continuity which is not unidirectional,' but in which the 'paradigm of this experience of dissolution and re-integration...in the ritual of archetypes' 'continues as an 'existing' consciousness of cosmic entanglement in the community,'

demanding ‘an intelligent communication of what is indeed, pure essence’” (9). Soyinka’s articulations of Yoruba cosmology and theology and its contribution to mythical construction in African literature demonstrate why Western rhetoric cannot be used to analyze the archetypes, mythatypes, rituals, and symbols used by people of the African diaspora in their art and literature. Soyinka explains:

Traditional thought operates, not a linear conception of time but a cyclic reality. One does not suggest for a moment that this is peculiar to the Yoruba or to the African world-view...but the degree of integrated acceptance of this temporal sense in the life-rhythm, mores and sociali[z]ation of Yoruba society is certainly worthy emphasi[z]ing, being a reflection of that same reality which denies periodicity to the existences of the dead, the living and the unborn (Soyinka 10). Morrison illustrates this cyclic reality through alternating perspectives that describe past occurrences in present context. For example, the novel begins with the suicide of Mr. Smith, who leaps to his death. As the scene unfolds, characters gather around and sing:

O Sugarman done fly away
Sugarman done gone
Sugarman cut across the sky
Sugarman gone home... (Morrison 6)

This song appears throughout the novel and signifies the oral tradition of folklore and the ritual of song. Later in the novel, Milkman’s aunt Pilate and cousins Reba and Hagar sing the song after Hagar proclaims that “some of my days were hungry ones” (Morrison 49). In this instance, Pilate, Reba, and Hagar sing together as a soul-nourishing ritual. Towards the end of the novel, Milkman learns the entire song, after watching the children in Shalimar playing a game to the same tune. He realizes that the song is about his family, and its lyrics recount the history of his ancestors and their ancestral home.

*O Solomon don't leave me here
 Cotton balls to choke me
 O Solomon don't leave me here
 Buckra's arms to yoke me
 Solomon done fly, Solomon done gone
 Solomon cut across the sky, Solomon gone home (Morrison 303).*

By integrating these song lyrics throughout the novel, Morrison integrates mythic elements and oral tradition techniques that are specific to the African diaspora. Morrison's integration of the "The Flying African" folklore through song contributes to the overall structure and progression of the novel's plot, and the resolution of Milkman's mythic journey. Although Milkman is the protagonist of this novel, his aunt Pilate and cousin Hagar are important characters who represent ancestral, deified, and human characteristics, thereby contributing to the multidimensional layers of myth in the novel. Furthermore, because Pilate and Hagar simultaneously signify ancestral, deified, and human mythatypical patterns, they also serve as reflective metaphors of Milkman's consciousness, thereby creating the cyclic structure of the novel. Because of their qualities, Pilate and Hagar help to facilitate Milkman's descent, ascent, and ultimate transcendence of intergenerational tragedy, and they contribute to the reclamation of agency and personal development of Milkman, and the Dead family.

Written a decade prior to *Beloved*, *Song of Solomon* is another useful body of work to examine mythatypical and archetypal figures and patterns. Written in 1977, *Song of Solomon* was considered controversial, in part, because of sexually explicit language and the portrayal of incestuous relationships. The novel's protagonist, Milkman Dead, is born to an upper middle-class African- American family in Detroit, Michigan. His father, Macon Dead Jr., is a wealth-chasing landlord who married the daughter of the only African American doctor in town. Milkman is his father's namesake; however,

everyone in town calls him Milkman. His father is deeply disturbed by this nickname, particularly because “the giving of names in his family was always surrounded by what he believed to be monumental foolishness” (Morrison 15). Through the characters’ names, Morrison integrates the ritual of naming as a signifier of oral tradition and history. Towards the end of the novel, after Milkman has learned the history of his ancestry, Morrison writes “when you know your name, you should hang on to it, for unless it is noted down and remembered, it will die when you do” (329). Through the ritual of naming, integration of the African epic poem, and the infusion of Black oral tradition, Morrison creates a multidimensional mythic tale. More specifically, the aforementioned techniques are further developed by the layering of female characters, whose ancestral, mortal, and spiritual qualities allude to the mythatypical pattern of the triple goddess.

Early in the novel, Ruth, Milkman’s mother, is seen breastfeeding Macon Dead III by Freddie, a tenant and employee of her husband. Having witnessed Mrs. Dead breastfeeding her beyond nursing-aged son, Freddie garrulously mentions that he “knew a family- the mother wasn’t too quick, though- nursed hers till the boy, I reckon, was near ‘bout thirteen. But that’s a bit much, ain’t it” (Morrison 14). As Freddie prepares to leave, he “found the phrase he’d been searching for. ‘A milkman. That’s what you got here, Miss Rufie. A natural milkman if ever I seen one. Look out, womens. Here he come. Huh!’” (Morrison 15). Freddie discloses his discovery throughout the community, and from thereon, Macon Dead III is christened Milkman.

Much to Macon Jr.’s chagrin, Milkman’s nickname is used throughout the community. Despite being Macon Dead Jr.’s only son, and successor of the Dead legacy, Milkman is regarded with bitterness, disgust, and uneasiness by his father. Macon Dead

Jr.'s contempt for his son, sister Pilate, and wife Ruth, combined with his avarice all contribute to the disdainful interpersonal dynamics within the family. Macon Dead Jr. wants nothing more than for Milkman to follow his example and learn the family business; however, Milkman shows little discipline or dedication to his father's business. Macon Jr.'s disdain is further exacerbated by Milkman's budding relationship with Pilate. Macon Jr. asserts that Pilate "can't teach you a thing you can use in this world. Maybe the next, but not this one. Let me tell you right now the one important thing you'll ever need to know: Own things. And let the things you own own other things. Then you'll own yourself and other people too" (Morrison 55). Although Milkman is named after his forefathers, he lacks the awareness, character, knowledge, and skill necessary to continue their ancestral legacy. Morrison explains, "Milkman was ignorant. That was his problem. He wanted to be comfortable, and he didn't want to go anywhere, except to chase something that was elusive, until he found out that there was something valuable to chase" (Morrison and McKay 420). Milkman's mythic journey and personal development are, in part, catalyzed by his relationship with Pilate, and his eventual pursuit of Pilate's hidden gold.

Although Milkman's relationships with his immediate family members vary from impersonal, to strained, and at times, violent, Milkman is most often cared for and tended to by his mother, aunt Pilate, and cousin Hagar. McKay asserts that "Milkman Dead lives in a world in which women are the main sources of the knowledge he must gain, and Pilate Dead...is his guide to that understanding" (Morrison and McKay 414). As the protagonist, Milkman's initiation and mythic journey require him to develop his self-

awareness, and his growth and self-actualization are catalyzed by the roles of women in his life.

Morrison writes, “not that Pilate or Reba felt the possessive love for him that his mother did, but they had accepted him without question and with all the ease in the world. They took him seriously too. Asked him questions and thought all his responses to things were important enough to laugh at or quarrel with him about” (Morrison 79). Milkman’s relationship with Hagar is perhaps one of the most controversial, in that she is his cousin; however, Hagar “babied him, ignored him, teased him-- did anything she felt like, and he was grateful to see her do anything or be any way” (Morrison 93). His relationship with Hagar “made him generous...wide-spirited...Wide-spirited and generous enough to defend his mother, whom he almost never thought about” (Morrison 69). Pilate, Reba, and Hagar provide Milkman with affirmation, authentic warmth, and validation that he does not receive in his other relationships. Pilate, as the matriarch, and Reba and Hagar, as her descendants further demonstrate a unique element of African-American fiction. Although these three women are individuals who represent several archetypal figures and mythatypical characteristics, they simultaneously contribute to the cyclic reality that connects ancestor, deity, and human, thereby facilitating intergenerational healing, reclamation of ancestral legacy, and ultimately, resolution.

Pilate, whose mother died while giving birth to Pilate, is named by her illiterate father. Pilate’s naming and characterization illustrate another layer of Morrison’s mythatypical construction. That is to say that Pilate’s name and attributes further contextualize her multi-dimensionality. Pilate’s naming signifies the importance of oral tradition and portrays the connection between ancestral legacy and personal destiny.

Macon Jr. explains that their father Macon Dead followed the tradition of blindly selecting “names from the Bible for every child other than the first male. And abided by whatever the finger pointed to” (Morrison 18). Despite being told by midwife that he could not give his daughter a man’s name, particularly the name of “Christ-killing Pilate,” Macon Sr. asserts that her name will be Pilate because that’s where his “finger went down at” (Morrison 19). When the midwife asserts that Macon should not “give this motherless child the name of the man that killed Jesus,” Macon retorts “I asked Jesus to save me my wife” (Morrison 19). Pilate was but a baby, and yet a destructive force for Macon Dead’s nuclear family.

Through Pilate’s birth and her mother’s death, Morrison illustrates the concurrent life and death cycle, rebirth, and regeneration. Although born human, Pilate’s characterization includes symbols that align her with the mythatypical qualities of Oya, a multidimensional spirit. She is child, destroyer, Macon Dead Jr. describes Pilate as “no good...a snake, and can charm you like a snake, but still a snake” (Morrison 54). Pilate, like Sethe, is described as the animal that represents the fall of humanity. Interpreting this symbol by Jungian terms would lend to Pilate’s signifying the animus, or unconscious masculine side of a woman; however, the snake (throughout the African diaspora) is a symbol of the goddess. In *Mythatypes*, Brooks de Vita summarizes several deities, including:

“a Great Mother called Mawu, who created the world ‘riding in the mouth of a great snake.’ When their work was done, Mawu threw fire into the sky...finally sending her snake to coil beneath the earth and support the world’s weight.”

“...the rain goddess, Bunzi, a rainbow serpent such as Haitian Voudun’s Damballah.”

“...deadly aspect of Hathor (Het-Heru) is the cobra goddess...Wedjat...the third and all-seeing eye, the searing power of the sun spitting out ‘her venomous and fiery spells of wisdom.’ She is eternally reborn with each shedding of her skin.”

“Mamy Wata”...a “Western African term for a mermaid-like woman often depicted with snakes.” (56-57)

Through her examples, Brooks de Vita provides in-depth context from diverse cosmologies of the African diaspora that allow for proper interpretation of Pilate’s mythatypical significance.

Pilate is a complex character whose qualities are fluid, yet distinct. Pilate’s fluidity and non-conformity further signify her ancestral, divine, and human function throughout the novel. In her humanity, she is an entrepreneur, a woman, a mother, a protector, and a provider. In her divinity, she is powerful, an agent of justice, and able to heal and restore others through her physical and spiritual knowledge. Although Morrison depicts Pilate with language that distinctly highlights Pilate’s fluidity, and a spectrum of divinity and femininity, scholars often misinterpret her characterizations as gender non-conforming and masculine. Pilate “was the one who was ugly, dirty, poor, and drunk. The queer aunt whom his sixth-grade schoolmates teased him about” (Morrison 37). Pilate’s ugliness, poverty, and overall undesirability are further exacerbated by Morrison’s juxtaposition of Pilate and her mother. Much of Pilate’s descriptions in the novel are spoken by Pilate’s brother, Macon Jr. Although they are family, Macon Jr.’s gender and socioeconomic status influence his perception of purpose and value and lend to his harsh criticism of Pilate. Consequently, Pilate and Macon Jr. create binary oppositions that contribute to Milkman’s understanding of power and value. Macon Dead Jr. describes his mother as “Light-skinned, pretty. Looked like a white woman to me. Me and Pilate don’t take nothing after her” (Morrison 37). Because of Pilate’s

physical characteristics as a dark-skinned female, and African descendent born in the United States- Pilate's characterizations serve as a point of reflection for examining internalized racist cisheteropatriarchal ideology. Macon Dead Jr. tells his son that "if you ever have a doubt we from Africa, look at Pilate. She look just like Papa and he looked like all them pictures you ever see of Africans. A Pennsylvania African. Acted like one too. Close his face up like a door" (Morrison 54). Despite Macon Jr.'s discouragement, Milkman is drawn to Pilate, and as a result of their relationship, Milkman discovers the truth of his ancestral origins and his own personal power. Pilate's character is dynamic, as she is simultaneously an ancestral figure, deity, and human. She is the keeper of their ancestral history, cultural wisdom, and source of transformative love. Through Pilate's actions and conversations, Milkman is provided with previously inaccessible knowledge and understanding.

Pilate's dynamic nature is further demonstrated through her relationships with her daughter Reba and granddaughter Hagar. Their intergenerational dynamics create a layering of characters that signify the mythatypical pattern of the triple goddess. In classical mythology, the triple goddess is comprised of the mother, maiden, and crone, however Morrison's improvisation of the triple goddess draws upon African cosmology. Pilate, Reba, and Hagar embody the attributes of deities such as Oya, Oshun, and Yemoja, or Auset, Sekhmet, and Nebt-Het. In one instance, Pilate rushes to Reba's side, after learning from Hagar that she was recently assaulted by a new lover. Pilate slowly grabs her knife and walks out to address the man, saying:

Now, I'm not going to kill you, honey. Don't you worry none. Just be still a minute, the heart's right here, but I'm not going to stick it any deeper. Cause if I stick it any deeper, it'll go straight through you heart. So you have to be real still, you hear? You can't move a inch cause I might lose control. It's just

a little hole now, honey, no more'n a pin scratch. You might lose about two tablespoons (Morrison 96).

In this exchange, Pilate embodies mother and deity, and throughout the novel, she exhibits the mythatypical patterns of the Ifa deities Yemoja, Oshun, and Oya. Similarly to these deities, Pilate expresses her feminine nature in ways that are misinterpreted for masculine expression. In *Mythatypes*, Brooks de Vita challenges an assertion made by Jungian analyst Neumann, who wrote that “Just as world, life, nature, and soul have been experienced as a generative and nourishing, protecting and warming Femininity, so their opposites are also perceived in the image of the Feminine; death and destruction, danger and distress, hunger and nakedness appear as helplessness in the presence of the Dark and Terrible Mother” (Brooks de Vita 56). Brooks de Vita articulates the relationship between darkness and femininity as distinct mythatypical signs and patterns of African goddesses and identifies the “slavery-supporting stereotypes” that perpetuate misinterpretations of African women (56). Moreover, she asserts that “the female figure...is seen as a particularly frightening paradox in the worldwide human psyche” and “that archetypal descriptions illustrate the complex difficulties...in which white is always good and darkness must necessarily represent what is terrifying if not absolutely evil” (56).

Song of Solomon relies less on classical mythology, centering African folklore and ritual as the framework for Milkman’s mythical journey. Morrison’s language and characterizations serve as signifiers that contribute to the cyclic reality and multidimensional personifications of ancestor, deity, and human. Pilate, Reba, and Hagar simultaneously signify the mythatypical characteristics of Oshun, Oya, and Yemoja or Auset, Sekhmet, and Nebt-Het to convey the multifaceted dimensions of motherhood,

womanhood, and love. Through his relationships with Pilate, Reba, and Hagar, Milkman learns of his ancestral history, experiences the transformative power of loss and love, and ultimately learns how to fly.

CHAPTER 5

GOD(D)IS LOVE: CELIE'S SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

The Color Purple offers additional representation of archetypal figures and mythatypical patterns that illustrate distinct Pan-African mythatypical patterns that contribute to the cyclic reality and multidimensional characters who challenge cisheteropatriarchal characterizations of femininity. Through the relationships of Celie, Nettie, Sofia, and Shug, Walker contextualizes how femininity exists on a spectrum, and how their fluidity, is in part, related to their mythatypical qualities. These women are characterized with attributes that seemingly diminish their femininity and consequently their value in a cisheteropatriarchal community; however, by identifying their mythatypical qualities, Celie, Nettie, Sofia, and Shug illustrate the spectrum of feminine expression.

The novel opens with Celie addressing God and describing being repeatedly raped by her father. Inevitably, Celie becomes pregnant, and her father takes both children away. Amid losing her children, Celie's mother also dies, and Celie fears for the safety of her younger sister Nettie. Celie, having navigated severe sexual trauma and emotional abuse, encourages Nettie to focus on her education, so that she can escape their harmful environment. A man by the name of Mr. _____, a widower with several children, sees Nettie at church one day and asks their father for Nettie's hand in marriage. Celie and Nettie's father do not allow Mr. _____ to marry Nettie, and instead, offers Celie the eldest, with a list of reasons that Mr. _____ should take her as his bride.

Although he describes Celie as twice spoiled and asserts that she is too old to remain in the family home, Celie's father persuasively explains that "she'd come with her own linen," and that "she can take that cow she raise down there back of the crib" (Walker 9).

Similarly to biblical story of Laban- the father-in-law of Jacob, and father of Rachel and Leah- Celie's father negotiates the marriage of his eldest and least desirable daughter. Begrudgingly, after three months, Mr. _____ agrees to marry Celie. Mr. _____, and much like her father- Mr. _____ is unkind, violent, and dependent upon Celie for the mental, physical, and sexual labor required to support his children, farm, and personal desires. The correlation between Celie's betrothal to Mr. _____ and the biblical story of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel serves as an extended metaphor that demonstrates the harmful implications of cisheteropatriarchal standards on women. Both Celie and Nettie are denied agency, in this instance, by their father and Mr. _____.

Ultimately, *The Color Purple* illustrates the complex intersections of class, gender, and race for African Americans. Celie, Sofia, and Shug experience cisheteropatriarchal violence that they navigate or transcend, in part, because of their ancestral, human, and deified qualities. Celie, Nettie, Sofia, and Shug all serve as reflections of consciousness for one another, mirroring the human and divine aspects of themselves that they previously could not access. More importantly, through Celie's letter writing to God, Nettie, and herself, Celie conceptualizes her personal views of gender, divinity, love, and sexuality. Through her observations of and relationships with each of these women, Celie's journey towards self-actualization is manifested, and Celie transcends the tragedy of existing as a poor, uneducated, undesirable, and unloved African- American woman. Through these interpersonal dynamics, *The Color Purple*

depicts a cyclic reality that is constructed through the mythatypical pattern of layering figures (multiple goddesses), whose individual and collective mythic journeys unfold concurrently.

Celie's and Shug's characterizations align with the everyman and orphan archetypal figures, as they are common, impoverished, and abandoned or harmed by their parents. Sofia's characterization aligns most with the outlaw Jungian archetype. Beyond these classifications, Brooks de Vita describes the mythatype of the triple goddess, explaining that "sometimes the triple goddess serves as a dualistic figure: two members of the triune deity represent apparent polar opposites, such as sexual promiscuity and vengeful death, or virginity and motherhood, while the third figure stands between them and mediates their interactions with each other with their human suppliants" (115). A variation of this triple goddess mythatype appears in *The Color Purple* through Celie, Nettie, Sofia, and Shug. Celie is often the fixed figure, with Celie, Sofia, and Shug fluctuating as maiden, mother, and crone. Celie's, Sofia's, and Shug's characterizations illustrate polar expressions of motherhood, retribution, and sexual agency that are juxtaposed to convey the violence enacted against African American women because of cisheteropatriarchy.

In *The Color Purple*, Walker's characterizations create binary oppositions that lend to the layering of characters. By juxtaposing various attributes, each character serves as a mirror to one another, allowing them each to reflect, learn, and gain insight about themselves and their personal desires and needs. While Celie is consistently described as dumb, passive, ugly, and undesirable, she is also described as hard-working, capable of maintaining a home, and sexually experienced. Shug is described as a woman

of ill-repute and is described by Mr. _____'s sisters as "not so pretty" and "too black" (Morrison 21). Sofia is described as "pretty" with "bright skin" and "smart" by her lover Harpo; however, Celie asserts that "she ain't that bright. Clear medium brown skin...Hair notty but a lot of it, tied up on her head in a mass of plaits. She not quite as tall...but much bigger, and strong and ruddy looking (Morrison 32). This juxtaposition of qualities illustrates the 1.) internalized misogynoir that informs how African- American women are measured within their community, and 2.) the cisheteropatriarchal ideologies that assert that women are inherently domestic, nurturing, and accommodating to men's desires and needs. Celie and Shug, as dark-skinned ugly women, are thus harmed because they are not conventionally attractive, and although they accommodate Mr. _____'s desires and needs, they perpetually experience violence within their community. Sofia, although considered more attractive by their community's standards, still experiences violence because she asserts herself with people who attempt to violate her personhood and dictate how she can exist.

As Celie's letters continue, she shares her most intimate thoughts, complex emotions, and the occasional humorous exchange amongst supporting characters in her life. Initially, Celie's letters are addressed to God and Nettie; however, she eventually begins writing letters to herself. As the novel unfolds, Celie shares a conversation between herself and Shug with Nettie. During their conversation, Shug asks Celie "what happen to God?" and Celie questions "Who that?" (Walker 199). As their conversation continues, Shug challenges Celie's blasphemous disposition and tells her "Miss Celie, You better hush. God might hear you." Celie replies "Let 'im hear me, I say. If he ever listened to poor colored women the world would be a different place" (Walker 200).

Through their conversation, Shug asks Celie to describe God, and as Celie begins to identify who God is, Shug explains that “God is inside you and inside everybody else...But only them that search for it inside find it...God ain’t a he or a she, but a It” (Morrison 202). Celie is then encouraged to unpack her internalized cisheteropatriarchal notions of God, and to “git man off your eyeball, before you can see anything a’tall. Man corrupt everything (Morrison 204). Shug, as Celie’s confidante, friend, and lover conveys a tenderness and spiritual wisdom that help Celie to grow in her personhood and divinity.

All of Celie’s letters represent a ritual of divine communication and connection, illustrating Celie’s developing cosmology and shifting consciousness. Arguably, Celie’s letter writing can be interpreted more deeply through Brooks de Vita’s explanation of the mythatypical pattern of Oya. Brooks de Vita writes:

“Oya is goddess of the justifying word: ‘particularly associated with female strength, it is she who stands behind any individual’s ability to use the spoken word as a weapon.’ The goddess’s traditionally defined verbal power is extended...to the written word... Therefore, the years of...journal writing would serve as apprenticeship to the goddess of words and justice, Oya: Where there is violence, there is Oya” (116).

Celie’s mythic journey towards self-actualization is represented through her ritual of divine communication and communion and is simultaneously facilitated by the doubling of Shug’s and Sofia’s human and divine qualities. Although Brooks de Vita makes this assertion regarding *Juletane*, Celie, Sofia, and Shug, all illustrate the connection to spoken and written word as a transformative and weaponized source of power. Nettie, who taught Celie how to read and write, grants her the goddess’s gift. Additionally, Celie, Nettie, Sofia, and Shug use verbal and written language to articulate and eventually challenge the injustices that they experience.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; ...does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge.” (Toni Morrison, Nobel Lecture 1993)

Language, as an extension of consciousness, shapes one’s ability to identify, engage with, and interpret infinite manifestations of consciousness. Language molds minds. Language informs ideologies and identities. As Morrison explained during her Nobel Lecture, oppressive language...is violence. Although language is forever transforming, it is pertinent that critics and readers identify how their language and the language used in literary works influence their experience and understanding of the works. By examining the significance of language in relation to the construction of *Beloved*, *Song of Solomon*, and *The Color Purple*, critics can more accurately identify and engage with Morrison’s and Walker’s novels.

Although existing archetypal analysis provides some context for the symbolism found throughout Morrison’s and Walker’s novels, the cultural and historical signifiers imbued in their language creates dynamic archetypal and mythatypical elements. Utilizing classical myth and Eurocentric archetypes to examine the mythopoeic elements in their works perpetuates ideological and linguistic hegemonies of colonizing thought and prevents readers from recognizing how Morrison and Walker use language to signify rituals of naming and initiation. Through these techniques, Morrison and Walker contextualize mythic journeys that center African cosmology and Black American oral tradition, and thus challenge the ideological and linguistic hegemony of English, and the

traditional literary canon. The characters, their dialects and dialogues, in conjunction with each novel's composition, allow readers to engage with the myths, folklore, and ritual archetypes in their work. By infusing elements of African myth and oral tradition, Morrison and Walker create multi-layered characters who signify African deities and also serve as symbols for rituals such as initiation and naming.

In *Beloved*, Sethe's and Denver's initiation is catalyzed by the arrival of Beloved. Through their layered characterizations, Morrison illustrates the significance of naming while infusing the metaphysical attributes of African deities. Similarly, in *Song of Solomon*, Morrison imbues the attributes of African ancestors and deities to galvanize Milkman's initiation and mythic journey. Through Pilate's, Reba's, and Hagar's actions, Milkman learns about ancestral legacy, personal accountability, and transformative love—thus leading to his own self-actualization. In *The Color Purple*, Celie's initiation is catalyzed by Nettie, Sofia, and Shug. Walker's novel illustrates the complex intersections of class, gender, and race for African Americans. Celie, Sofia, and Shug experience cisheteropatriarchal oppression that they learn to navigate, in part, through their layered characterizations. Celie, Nettie, Sofia, and Shug all serve as reflections of consciousness for one another, mirroring the human and divine aspects of themselves that they previously could not access, thus leading to their concurrent independent and communal initiations. Through their interpersonal relationships, each woman's initiation contributes to their self-actualization and wellbeing. In each of the aforementioned novels, the mythic journeys and initiations are contingent upon the presence of one another so that although their journeys are separate, they are very much the same. For this reason, these works transcend the novel as genre, serving as testimonial rituals that

affirm the oral traditions, historical experiences, and spiritual legacies of descendants of the African diaspora.

This research was pursued to further contextualize and affirm the legacy of African and Black English oral tradition in literature. It serves as an introductory source for identifying the ideological and linguistic hegemonies perpetuated by examining Morrison's and Walker's work through the lens of classical mythology and Jungian-influenced archetypes. Additionally, this body of work celebrates the rich mythic construction of Morrison's and Walker's novels. Moving forward, this research will incorporate E.A. Budge's *The Gods of the Egyptians*, additional works from Dr. Brooks de Vita, and Dr. Bess Montgomery's *The Spirit and the Word: A Theory of Spirituality in Africana Literary Criticism*. Montgomery's research describes the Ifa paradigm, identifying principles and symbols that are indigenous to the African spiritual system of Ifa. Her research will assist with further developing the mythatypical analysis of Oya, Oshun, Yemoja in Morrison's and Walker's novels. Additionally, E.A. Budge's *The Gods of the Egyptians* includes additional context for the feminine deities Auset, Sekhmet, Nebt-Het. Whereas this text offered comparative analysis between Western and African theories, the forthcoming research will primarily explore the relationship between the semiotics of African American literature and African cosmologies.

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