

**The Iconography of the Madonna and the American
Imagination (2) : Roxana's Daughters**

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要約

アメリカ文学に現れた「聖母子」の図像学 (2) —ロクサナの娘たち—

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いまから一世紀前、1894年に『のろまのウィルソン』(*Pudd'nhead Wilson*) というサミュエル・クレメンス (Samuel Langhorne Clemens)、通称マーク・トウェインの作品が刊行された。南北戦争以前のアメリカ南部を舞台にしたこの小説は、黒人奴隷のロクサナが「子殺し」を思いつく場面が始まる。結局、「子殺し」を思いとどまるこの母親は「赤ん坊すり替え」という犯罪を犯すことになる。黒人奴隷ロクサナは、クレメンスが創造した唯一の大人の女性で、当時の書評をかりると、『赤ん坊すり替え』(= 奴隷制への挑戦) という許し難い犯罪行為にもかかわらず、その母性愛ゆえにきわめて人間的に描かれ、読者の共感を呼ぶ」という。小論は、『のろまのウィルソン』におけるロクサナの「子殺し」の意味を考察し、さらに、ロクサナ同様の苦渋を経験したもう一人の「黒い聖母」(Black Mother)、現在アメリカ文壇きってのストーリー・テラーであるトニ・モリスンの『ビラブド』(Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, 1987) のセス・サッグスの「子殺し」を検討するものである。

なお本稿は、19世紀から現代まで、アメリカ文学に現れた「聖母子像」の解説をとおしての、「アメリカ小説再読」試みの一編である。これまで本紀要に掲載 (Vol. 37, No. 3 & Vol. 38, No. 3) の論考の場合と同様に、本稿も構想のアウトラインの開示および記述の域を超えるものでない。まず、構想の全体像を明確にするためのワーキング・ペーパーであることをお断りしておきたい。

... slave women are not mothers'

What impressed an anonymous reviewer of Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894) is the portrayal of the black woman, Roxana. "Her gusts of passion or of despair, her vanity, her *motherly love* and the glimpses of nobler feelings that are occasionally seen in her elementary code of morals," continues the commentary, "make her very human, and create a sympathy for her in spite of her unscrupulous actions."² Given in 1895, the remark is extraordinary in that it notes both the positive and negative, or the admirable and despicable aspects of the sole adult woman Twain ever created which make her "very human" and sympathetic despite "her unscrupulous actions." Roxana is both tender-hearted and extremely vain of her personal appearance. What down-trodden slave woman will ever think of wearing her newly-bought Sunday clothes as she contemplates on self-annihilation by drowning herself and her baby in the river?

Roxy's attempted infanticide which leads to her unscrupulous and criminal act of swapping the babies constitutes the dramatic *donnée* of Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* set in an antebellum Southern town, Dawson's Landing, where the facetious Wilson plays a detective with his collection of finger prints of both the white and the black. *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Twain's "Daniel come to judgement," rights Roxana's "undoing" of patriarchal slave-holding society, and brings order to Dawson's Landing and Twain's book to a close. So it appears. The resolution of the story, however, leaves all concerned, except Wilson the vindicated hero, worse victims of slavery. The true heir who is brought up as a slave finds it next to impossibility to rehabilitate himself in his rightful place in society: "The poor fellow could not endure the terrors of the white man's parlor, and felt at home and at peace nowhere but in the kitchen" (PW 114).³ The usurper-murderer is sentenced to imprisonment for life, but as he is now a valuable "property," his creditors sell him down the river, the very fate his mother tries to spare him by making him white and free.

As for Roxana, the black mother, the white society *seems* more tolerant, and condones her criminal act; the forever-displaced master, who suffers twenty-three years of slavery at her hand, continues the pension of thirty-five dollars a month. Just the same, the damage done to her is too deep for money to heal, the narrator recounts: "the spirit in her eye was quenched, her martial bearing departed with it, and the voice of her laughter ceased in the land" (114). Such narrative mode suggests a waste of so much that is good and vibrant in Twain's black Madonna, reminiscent of the attributes of that "aboriginal radiance" Jung called "the great mother," and whose rendition in the book impressed the anonymous reviewer. As the reviewer aptly observes, Roxy arouses a certain sympathy in the reader despite her attempted infanticide prompted by her "motherly love" as well as by her self-interest.

The history of infanticide is as ancient as human history. In her book *Of Woman Born*, Adrienne Rich states: "Legal, systematic infanticide was practiced in Sparta, in Rome, by the Arabs, in feudal Japan, in India, in traditional China, and it has always been a form of population control in preliterate societies."⁴ Social and political engineering has

also been part of such practice; the killing of weak and malformed infants of both sexes, twins regarded as monsters, and female children have been sacrificed and borne the brunt of official infanticide. Under Christianity, infanticide was forbidden as a policy; yet the law was no deterrent for the crime of infanticide by countless women burdened with unwanted children, children forced upon them by rape, ignorance, poverty, or even marriage. In Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" there is a reference to cases of maternal infanticide committed in a colonial New England village.⁵

In this paper the term "infanticide" is to be understood as "maternal infanticide" by slave women who are led to commit the crime *because of* their motherly concern for the fate of their children as slaves. The purpose of this exploration on "the iconography of the madonna and the American imagination" is to examine the meaning of Roxana's attempted infanticide in Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, and then to trace the similar fate of Roxana's fictional daughter in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) in which the theme of love is stitched onto the fragments of "slave narratives."⁶

I

In her latest book of critical essays, *Playing in the Dark* (1992), Toni Morrison points out the problem Willa Cather avoids to address to in her *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940). Her criticism of Cather's unsatisfactory treatment of the issue is a manifestation of Morrison's Africanist stance. She contends that Cather's portrayal of Sapphira and the slave girl (significantly no name is given to the girl in the title) rests on the assumption that a white mistress "can count on the complicity of a mother in the seduction and rape of her own daughter," because that assumption is based on another assumption that "slave women are not mothers." Its implication is that "... they are 'naturally dead,' with no obligations to their offspring or their own parents" (Morrison 21). Such presumption on the part of white society naturally precludes the notion that the blacks are human beings.⁷ It is just such assumption that Twain's black Madonna refuses to accept with a fierce ferocity, which is compared to an eruption of a volcano.

Pudd'nhead Wilson begins, in quite an innocent mood, with the idyllic picture of a slave-holding town. Its modest frame dwellings are covered by climbing rose vines, honeysuckles, and morning glories with the gardens in front fenced with white palings. The reader's attention is then directed to "a breed of geranium" and their intensely red blossoms which accent "the prevailing pink tint of the rose-clad house-front like *an explosion of flame*" (PW 3. Emphasis added). The red blossoms of innocent "breed of geranium" like "an explosion of flame" amidst the prevailing pink anticipates Twain's black Madonna in her "volcanic irruption of infernal splendors" (PW 13). Thus the reader is alerted at the outset that the issue at the heart of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is that of skin color.

Furthermore, the reader soon realizes that the grandees of the town are not blessed with their offspring except for Percy Northumberland Driscoll. And the story closes with his rightful heir, the real Tom Driscoll, who can neither write nor read; the town is left without an heir to "the old order." Such is the ironic consequence Roxy's attempted

infanticide achieves at the close of the story; Wilson's restitution of order remains, therefore, only partially successful. Her failed infanticide is indeed a thwarted expression of the unrealized murder of her master, her child's father, and the "patricide" committed in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* becomes a disguised murder of a master by a slave.

On the first of February, 1830, two boy babes were born in his house: one to him [Percy Driscoll], the other to one of his slave girls, Roxana by name. Roxana was twenty years old. She was up and around the same day, with her hands full, for she was tending both babies (PW 5).

Here Roxana as a black Madonna is clearly defined. She bears the enigma of a single mother, not by her choice like Hawthorne's Hester, but by nature; a black woman bears a child to her white master whose identity remains forever unknown.⁸ "She is up and around the same day," because she is to be a nursing mother to the white child, her mistress's child as well. The primary loyalty and responsibility of a slave woman, therefore, goes to her master/mistress and not to her own child; thus slave women are made into something else—breeding chattel and wet nurses—other than "mothers." As Morrison's remark goes, "slave women are not mothers."

Yet in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* Roxana is portrayed as a queenly figure, reminiscent of the archetypal mother/goddess, whose martial bearing distinguishes her from other black women; she is far from a beaten and obliging slave woman. Her very name, Roxana which means "shining," resounds with echoes of her namesake, the romantic heroine of *Cyrano de Bergerac*. In her regal manner Roxy can well be Hester's peer. Moreover, she is free from the taint of adultery since the antebellum Southern society decrees no penalty for "breeding chattel" whose alleged promiscuity is used as convenient excuse for white exploitation of black women.

She was of majestic form and stature, her attitudes were imposing and *statuesque*, and her gestures and movements distinguished by a *noble and stately grace*. Her complexion was very fair, with the rosy glow of vigorous health in the cheeks, her face was full of character and expression, her eyes were brown and liquid, and she had a heavy suit of fine soft hair which was also brown... (PW 8. Emphasis added).

Curiously enough, the picture reveals a regal woman who is as white as anybody, and her baby with flaxen curls also appears to be white. The heavy suit of her soft hair is, however, hidden bound within a checkered handkerchief, like Hester's glossy hair concealed in her gray cap, which is no other than the indication of her suppressed self identity. Moreover, one sixteenth of her black blood makes her a slave and that same "fiction of law and custom" (PW 9) likewise makes her child a slave.

If Roxana is free from the letter "A" Hester has to wear on her breast, she is constantly reminded of the invisible taint of her blood, which teaches her to be meek and humble in the slave-holding Dawson's Landing. She hardly questions the institution of

slavery, because it is the one constant variable in the society of which she is a part. She acknowledges not only white supremacy but also the hierarchy existing in that society.

She is the archetypal black matriarchal figure, whose daughters populate the novels set in the South: to name only a few, Faulkner's Dilsey (*The Sound and the Fury*) and Nancy (*Requiem for a Nun*), or McCullers's Berenice (*The Member of the Wedding*) readily come to mind. Twain's black Madonna deviates, however, from the stereotype; she is not meant to represent only the positive side of a loving, simple, pious Black Mammy which makes her so endearing to popular imagination. Roxy is a chronic liar, a petty thief; she cajoles and threatens; and she has her moments of passion, which makes her "very human."

The explosion of her passion occurs, like a flowering of red blossoms of geranium against the prevailing pink house front, when she is threatened by the worse than death fate in store for her son; she is made aware of the injustice a slave woman has to acquiesce—"a slave's natal isolation"—that a black mother is deprived of "motherly feeling." Only then the mother love latent within her surfaces; yet she is helpless to save her own child from his fate except by killing him. Paradoxically, the mother/nurturer turns into mother/goddess who must withhold rather than give life to the child. "Her child could grow up and be sold down the river! The thought crazed her with horror. . . . 'Dey shant, oh, dey *shan't!*—yo' po' mammy will kill you fust!" (PW 13). She debates to herself: "Dey can't sell *you* down the river. I hates yo' pappy; he ain't got no heart—for niggers he aint, anyways. I hates him, en I could kill *him!*," Since she knows she cannot kill the white man—"I hates him, en I *could* kill *him!*"—she concludes that she has to kill her son in order to save him: "Oh, I got to do it, yo' po' mammy's got to kill you to save you, honey." The sole compensation she can offer her son is to die with him, because only death will set them free from the misery of this world: "'Come along, honey, come along wid Mammy; we gwyne to jump in the river, den de troubles o'dis worl' is all over—dey don't sell po' niggers down de river over *yonder*'" (PW 13).

Roxana commands the center stage in this opening scene of Twain's book; here she is not a submissive slave but a simple loving mother crazed with the thought that if her son grows up, a worse than death fate awaits him. And this black mother is no simple Black Mammy; Roxy is vain of her personal self hidden beneath the checkered handkerchief, which asserts itself in "a volcanic irruption of infernal splendors" as she prepares herself for her death. Twain's metaphor for the outburst of her passion is of special interest here in that it is compared to an explosion of mother earth, latent natural forces ready for irruption at any time. Roxy in her festive splendor is absorbed in contemplation of her own beauty; she is then touched on her tender spot, her "mother heart." In contrast to her gaudy splendor her child looks beggary in his rags.

The changing of clothes does not, however, end in itself, leading to her another unscrupulous act of swapping the babies themselves. In their different outfits the mother and the child become too precious to be annihilated and sacrificed. The "fiction of law and custom" which makes them slaves is, after all, a "fiction"; in their changed attire they are as good as any white person in Dawson's Landing. After swapping the babies Roxy tries to justify her act by recalling a precedent committed by white people⁹:

“Dah, now—de preacher said it his own self, en it ain’t no sin, ’caze white folks done it. *Dey* done it—yes, *dey* done it; en not on’y jis’ common white folks, nuther, but de biggest quality dey is in de whole bilin’ . . .” (PW 15). Roxy even confuses the Calvinistic tenet of predestination with arbitrary distribution of happiness and misery in the world—it is black slaves that are invariably condemned in this life: “I hates yo’ pappy; he ain’t got no heart—for niggers he ain’t, anyways.”

By making this black woman pathetic even to the point of absurdity, Twain makes a sly comment on the evil and injustice of slavery practiced in antebellum South. The poignancy here is in the racial ambivalence of the black mother and the child who appear almost white. Furthermore, even a greater irony is that poor Roxy is unaware of the fact that she regards her child as “property” she is at liberty to do whatever she wants to—even to kill it, just as the white society regards her, a slave, as property at its disposal. By making her child white and free—she provides her son with a father—the paradoxical nature of her racial identity is spelled out upon her very self. Now her own child (part of herself) becomes the master who treats her (the mother) as his slave. Thus the mother-child relationship becomes the slave-master relationship—the subversion of natural order—in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*. Roxy knows that “her new master” is her own flesh and blood, and she cannot tolerate the pain and suffering at the hand of her own child, because she also knows that he is by law and custom a slave like herself. The bitter realization Roxy comes to by making her son white and free can be read as the author’s indictment not only of the injustice of slavery but also of the misplaced mother love which creates another kind of slavery. Roxy suffers from the complex subjugation of slavery and motherhood, which can be the meanest form of self-sacrifice.¹⁰ The portrayal of Twain’s black Madonna in *Pudd’nhead Wilson* exposes the crux of the injustice done to the blacks by the whites, the inhumanity done literally by one’s own flesh and blood.

However, after the excellent beginning of Twain’s story, in which Roxy is given the center stage, *Pudd’nhead Wilson* soon falls flat as it develops into a melodrama of the betrayed mother and the tyrannical son, and into a farce with the entrance of Italian twins. What is important with this exploration of Roxana as the black Madonna is that Twain used the “slave narratives” prevalent in his time,¹¹ and disguised the killing of the master by the slave as a family tragedy, that of patricide which the infanticide by the black Madonna might have prevented. Instead the whole course of Twain’s book accommodates itself to the change made by Roxana’s “unscrupulous actions” and his black Madonna becomes a potential threat to the assumption that “slave women are not mothers.”

II

The infanticide in Twain’s *Pudd’nhead Wilson* does not materialise by sheer accident; Roxy’s seemingly innocent act of swapping the babies’ clothes results in the criminal act of playing “god” in swapping the babies, for which she is to pay her due. The failed infanticide by Twain’s black mother is carried out successfully by another black mother,

Sethe in Morrison's *Beloved*, a Pulitzer Prize winner, set near Cincinnati in post Civil War period. Morrison's black Madonna is defiant in her queenly manner, and is as unscrupulous as Roxy in murdering her child(ren), and as in the case of Twain's black Madonna Sethe is left to herself after a short imprisonment, because a deranged wild slave woman is of no value. The slave woman of supreme value schoolteacher bragged about is now worthless as property : "Right off it was clear, to schoolteacher especially, there was nothing there to claim" (*Beloved* 149)¹²

Morrison's story—there are more than one story—of Sethe and her family "saga" begins as follows :

124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children. For years each put up with spite in his own way, but by 1873 Sethe and her daughter Denver were its only victims (*Beloved* 3).

Right away the reader is drawn into the story teller's confidence that the story is about "a baby's venom," very potent one at that, which infects the house where a family used to live, but where only Sethe (the mother) and Denver (the daughter) are left to outlive the spite, and finally to exorcise the demon/ghost who almost dismembers the mother. Likewise, the reader is also given a clue to some terrible incident in the chronicle of the family at 124 Bluestone Road. In *Beloved*, a book dedicated to the "sixty million and more" who died, Morrison turns back to the history of slavery, and stiches a spellbinding story of the mother and the daughter(s) onto the fragmented slave narratives which disclose the brutal exigencies of slavery.

Beloved chronicles the vicissitudes of a black family around 1873 ; the infanticide—"not a story to pass on" (*Beloved* 274) —takes place sometime in the year 1855, when barely a month in freedom Sethe is threatened by her mistaken belief that she *and her children* are to be remanded by slave catchers. In terror Sethe attempts to murder all of her children and succeeds in killing only one of them, the "crawling-already" baby girl, for whose sake she makes a hazardous journey across the Ohio River, which Huck and Jim fail to make, into freedom. *Beloved* is a story of Sethe the black Madonna and of the penance she undergoes for the murder of her child, symbolically called "Beloved." It is a drama of insatiable love—"too thick love"—between the mother and the daughter : the mother wanting the daughter in order to be healed, and the daughter desiring for the mother she has never known.

The novel is also a story of Sethe and her other daughter Denver who find each other and are reconciled at the close of the novel. Just as Twain's Roxana challenges the assumption that "slave women are not mothers," giving testimony to her "motherly feeling" in a moment of outrage, so does Morrison's Sethe Suggs remain a mother throughout the book, which records the ordeal of motherhood : "Needing to be good enough, alert enough, strong enough, *that* caring—again. Having to stay alive just that much longer. O Lord, she thought, deliver me. Unless carefree, mother love was a killer" (*Beloved* 132). The crux of "mother love" here is that the infanticide committed in the name of that love explains the maternal darkness which surfaces like "a volcanic

irruption” to which an outburst of Roxy’s passion is compared in Twain’s *Pudd’nhead Wilson* examined earlier in this exploration of the black Madonna.

Beloved presents a portrayal of the black family that stay together, and at its center reigns Sethe the mother. A strong sense of family ties permeates the fragmented “slave narratives” Morrison draws upon in the novel. Sethe’s is “the amazing luck of six whole years of marriage” to the same man who fathers every one of her children, when “men and women [are] moved around like checkers” (*Beloved* 23). Baby Suggs, her mother-in-law, manages to keep her last child Halle for twenty years : “The last of her children, whom she barely glanced at when he was born because it wasn’t worth the trouble to try to learn features you would never see change into adulthood anyway. . .” (*Beloved* 139). Seven of the eight children Baby Suggs “breeds” are taken away from her and “moved around like checkers” by slave traders. (Retrospectively then, it becomes clear that Twain was also familiar with such “slave narratives” when he let Huck talk about Jim’s love for and devotion to his own children and his wife he plans to buy out.) Morrison’s story of a black family challenges the assumption that “slave women are not mothers” and that “they are ‘naturally dead’ with no obligations to their offspring and their own parents.” If there is a story yet to tell, she seems to say, it is just such story of love among black parents and children. More significantly, it is Sethe the daughter-in-law, and not Halle the son, that cherishes and carries on the family bond Baby Suggs dreams of perpetuating in Morrison’s family saga.

Sethe and her husband Halle belong to a “good” master who treats his property well, reminiscent of the model given in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). The death of Mr. Garner, the good master, however, changes their fortunes at Sweet Home, when they are left in charge of the brutal man known as schoolteacher, whose meanness is shown in the “game” played by the white men who suck milk at Sethe’s breast, a grotesque abuse of black women as white children’s wet nurse. The slaves on the plantation plan for an exodus ; Sethe sends her three children to her mother-in-law, the unchurched preacher, whose house in the suburbs of Cincinnati serves as a way station on the underground railroad. And after great hardship Sethe gets through herself ; another child is born on the way with the assistance of Amy Denver, and the baby is named after this white girl. “Young and deft with four children” (*Beloved* 157), Sethe tries to make home together with Baby Suggs. For her husband fails to join them because his spirit breaks down en route to freedom, when he hears of the humiliation forced upon his wife by schoolteacher. The survival of Baby Suggs and her daughter-in-law rests on their sheer guts and mother wits, as it were. They are the black matriarch whose type is given in Twain’s portrayal of Roxana. As has been observed already, however, light in her eye is quenched and her laughter is heard no more in the slave-holding town. On the other hand Morrison’s black Madonna is redeemed by Paul D’s love after *Beloved* (and her ghost) departs from 124 Bluestone Road.

In *Beloved* Sethe Suggs is presented as an example of strong and authoritarian matriarchs that populate Morrison’s novels. In their power both as nurturer/mother and destroyer/goddess they are Kali, the “black mother” of Hindu religion. Eva Peace in

Sula burns her son to death when the child for whom she sacrifices her leg turns out to be a worthless wreck. She has no compunction in killing her son, because she simply has to destroy what offends her out of self-interest. Likewise, Sethe is ruthless in murdering her child with an ax, yet her infanticide is quite different from Eva's because it is motivated by "too think love." Sethe the child murderer is remembered as a hawk that protects its young; Stamp Paid wonders if the infanticide happened at all, eighteen years ago, a pretty little slavegirl split to the woodshed to kill her children, snatching them like a hawk on the wing (*Beloved* 157–58). The aggressiveness of mother love is here compared to a hawk that snatches its fledglings with its claws, just as the image of "a volcanic irruption" is employed to illustrate the maternal darkness seething within Twain's black Madonna.

What all four—schoolteacher, a nephew of his, a slave catcher and a sheriff—find in the shed is an aftermath of the "massacre":

Inside, two boys bled in the sawdust and dirt at the feet of a nigger woman holding a blood-soaked child to her chest with one hand and an infant by the heels in the other. She did not look at them; she simply swung the baby toward the wall planks, missed and tried to connect a second time, when out of nowhere. . . the old nigger boy, still mewling, ran through the door behind them and snatched the baby from the arch of its mother's swing (*Beloved* 149).

The above quoted scene of the infanticide in *Beloved* is a grim reality, far from the highly theatrical scene Twain's black mother makes at the outset of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, which blurs the very moral issue the crime entails. Sethe "holding a blood-soaked child to her chest with one hand and an infant by the heels in the other" is indeed a bloody variation of the iconography of the Madonna and the child, reminiscent of the prototype in this exploration of the motif—Hester and Pearl in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. As Roxana is forced to swap the babies because of her "motherly feeling," so is Sethe compelled to murder her child (ren) rather than send them back to slavery. And as in the case of Roxana the law has little or nothing to do with the infanticide; instead Sethe and Denver have to live on the periphery of the community just as Hester and Pearl are spaced out in their cottage on the edge of the Colonial New England town in Hawthorne's romance. Indeed the crux of maternal infanticide is that the dynamic that allows the slave women to kill rather than send their children back to slavery transcends the law.

But in *Beloved* the infanticide is made a serious moral issue, as remembered eighteen years after the incident by Paul D and Sethe in the following dialogue: Sethe murders her child because it's her job "to keep them[her children] away from what [she knows] is terrible [slavery]." Just the same, she is told, "*What you did was wrong, Sethe*" (*Beloved* 165. Emphasis added). Sethe defies the law as she is convinced that her love of children is all the excuse she needs, which more than justifies her felonious act of child murder. The infanticide then is a superb expression of mother love and at the same time of dark mysteries of motherhood, both ends of a spectrum, the mother/nurturer superseded by the destroyer/goddess of the myth.¹³

Nonetheless, the fact of infanticide is made a matter of great gravity and consequence in Morrison's novel. No matter what, nobody has right to maim or kill another life. Sethe is to endure the excruciating trial when Beloved returns claiming the love of which she is deprived. As has been mentioned earlier, Morrison stitches the fragments of "slave narratives" and tells a grim story of parasitic relation between the mother and the daughter, which is different from the mother and the son relationship. For unlike the son with whom the mother can never identify herself, the mother finds the other self she could identify with in the daughter. Hence the conflict between the mother and the daughter can be made mutually empowering. (We recall that Roxana's child is a son, who easily betrays and deserts the mother, and not a daughter who eventually returns to the mother.) Adrienne Rich points out this crucial difference as follows: ". . . the daughter. . . knows herself potentially her mother's inheritor : she, also, may bring life out of her body" (186).

In *Beloved* Morrison dramatizes the relentlessness of love acted out between the mother and the daughter, because the absence of mother love is regarded as of great gravity in the story of a family narrated in her novels. In her first novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970) it is the absence of mother love that destroys Pecola, for Pecola the ugly duckling is invisible to her own mother who believes in the beauty myth that beauty, physical beauty alone, will make one worthy of love and attention. The rejection of her children—Pecola and Sammy—is connected with her rejection of love of any kind. So when Pecola visits her mother at the white man's house where Pauline works as a maid, and soils the polished floor of *her* kitchen, Pauline simply ignores her daughter who is not welcome at the only place where she could be somebody. To the frightened white girl's question "Who were they, Polly?" the Black Mammy answers, "Hush, Don't worry none" (*The Bluest Eye* 63), consoling her. Pauline the mother rejects "her black offspring for the white child" (Harris 50). Pecola's tragic story takes place during the year 1940–1941; Morrison seems to suggest that the assumption that "slave women are not mothers" still holds true to some black mothers as sheer strategy of their survival. Pauline has to be permissive to the white child in order to keep the job and to be somebody herself ; her life depends solely on her rejection of her own blackness, that is her own daughter. Thus the old story that black mothers are " 'naturally dead' with no obligations to their offspring or their own parents" is perpetuated.

But Sethe Suggs is quite different from Pauline ; she is proud and self-sufficient and independent. She manages to keep herself intact on the plantation before her marriage and she has "the amazing luck of six whole years of marriage" to Baby Suggs' "somebody" until their separation. She commits infanticide because of her mother love. Nonetheless, the very authority of mother love is questioned in Morrison's *Beloved*, that the sacred mother love does not authenticate the murdering of the child. Beloved returns to the house on 124 Bluestone Road first as ghost, then as the 18 year old Beloved, sister to Denver. She begins to feed upon Sethe ; she becomes plump as the mother shrinks, while Sethe lives out the fantasies that she can be mother to the daughter she has never known

(Harris 159). After Beloved comes to live with them Sethe becomes completely indifferent to Denver, her other daughter, giving all her time and attention to Beloved, whose claim on Sethe is insatiable because she expects her mother to be everything.

Giving everything—her very life is threatened—to Beloved, Sethe experiences the helplessness of an infant child who asks for acceptance by a cruel parent, thereby learns to understand the isolation Denver undergoes, while Denver tries to save her mother from the relentless demands (the attention and love she herself desires) made by Beloved upon the mother. In her loss of Beloved, Sethe finds Denver the daughter. Here the melodrama of the betrayed mother and the cruel son in Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is transformed into a psychological drama of the mother and the daughter who together work out to find themselves in order to be made whole. They claim one another, prey on one another: "The longing she saw there. . . was bottomless" (Beloved 58). Finally, Sethe comes to understand Denver, her solitude and timidity, which she wants to protect.

Beloved's and Denver's desire for a mother becomes that of every one for the mother/nurturer whose other face is that of destroyer/goddess. The question of infanticide, either attempted or accomplished, examined in the foregoing discussion, becomes that of mother love. The intricate dynamic which allows a slave mother to murder her children rather than have them sold down the river or dragged back to slavery illustrates the crux of mother love (Harris 159–160). Then the question arises: Is infanticide, caused by that mother love, so great a crime that only such excruciating punishment of mythic dimension as Sethe has to endure is appropriate? The answer Morrison offers in the novel is to be understood as an affirmative one. Indeed, motherhood is an onerous and thankless task because we expect our mothers to be everything. "Needing to be good enough, alert enough, strong enough, *that* caring—again. Having to stay alive just that much longer. O Lord, she [Sethe] thought, deliver me. Unless carefree, mother love was a killer."

NOTES

1. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 21.
2. An Anonymous Review quoted in the Norton Critical Edition of *Pudd'nhead Wilson and Those Extraordinary Twins*. ed. by Sidney E. Berger (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980), pp. 215–16. Emphasis added.
3. Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980), p. 114. Hereafter all references to Twain's text will appear in this form within the discussion itself.
4. Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born* (New York: Bantam Book, 1976), p. 263.
5. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Young Goodman Brown and Other Stories*. ed. Brian Harding (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 122.
6. "Slave narrative," a special form of American autobiography, is a written record by an escaped or freed slave of his or her experience of slavery. It appeared as an important kind of abolitionist literature in the period before the Civil War. *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) is the best-known example. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself* (1861) is also such an example. At the time of its publication the author's name is omitted on the title page of the first edition. Now Harriet A. Jacobs's *Autobiography* is available

in Jean Fagan Yellin's edition (Harvard University Press, 1987). Mark Twain must have been familiar with such slave narratives.

7. Huck Finn poses a similar question as to the humanity of his black friend, Nigger Jim, and intuitively acknowledges that he is as white inside as white people. "...; and I do believe he [Jim] cared for his people as white folks does for their'n. *It don't seem natural, but I reckon it's so*" (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Chapter 23. Emphasis added).
8. The identity of the father of Roxy's child, however, is not hard to guess in Twain's text. Right at the beginning is given a two-line "paragraph" which reads: "Then there was Colonel Cecil Burleigh Essex, another F. F. V. of formidable calibre—however, *with him we have no concern*" (p. 4. Emphasis added).
9. The precedent here implied is perhaps King Solomon's wise judgement on the case of two women and the child recorded in *I Kings*3: 16–28, to which reference is also made in the dialogue between Huck and Jim in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Chapter 14).
10. Marilyn French, *War Against Women* (New York: Summit Books, 1992), pp. 13–15. Cf. The same author's *Her Mother's Daughter* (1987).
11. See Note 6.
12. Toni Morrison, *Beloved: A Novel* (New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), p. 149. Hereafter all references to the novel appear in this form within the discussion.
13. Trudier Harris, *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991), p. 152.

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