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SPEAKING THE UNSPEAKABLE: HOW TONI MORRISON'S BELOVED MAKES HARRIET JACOBS' INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF A SLAVE GIRL SPEAK IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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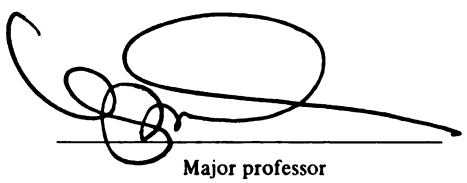

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SPEAKING THE UNSPEAKABLE: HOW TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED* MAKES HARRIET JACOBS'S *INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF A SLAVE GIRL* SPEAK IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

SPEAKING THE UNSPEAKABLE: HOW TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED* MAKES HARRIET JACOBS'S *INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF A SLAVE GIRL* SPEAK IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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According to Pierre Macherey and Terry Eagleton, a literary text is forbidden to speak certain things by virtue of ideological pressures. It is incomplete in the sense that it contains gaps and silences. Therefore, readers and crtitics are responsible for filling in these gaps and silences in order to make the text speak. Gaps and silences can also be found in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents*, which focuses on memory of the things past and on the construction of subjectivity in words. However, some ideological pressures have forced Jacobs to remain silent about certain issues such as sexual history or sexual desire. Toni Morrison's *Beloved,* which serves as a twentieth-century reading of a nineteenth-century female slave's experience, has broken some of these silences. It reveals what is in the gaps and silences of, for example, sexual conduct. As a twentieth-century "slave narrative" that revisits an era of slavery, it is a commentary on its literary antecedent *Incidents* and has made a good attempt to "fill in the blanks that the slave narratives left," to use Morrison's words. Nonetheless, this 20th century text still has its own silences determined by its relationship to the ideology of the time, leaving some gaps and silences for the reader to fill in, and this will be a topic for future study since the time period is too close to contemporary readers for them to see more clearly.

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Speaking the Unspeakable: How Toni Morrison's *Beloved* Makes Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* Speak in the Twentieth Century

They were forced to quiet down certain aspects of their experience, aspects they were too kind or too political or too savvy to reveal.
----Toni Morrison----

We investigate the silence, for it is the silence that is doing the speaking.
---- Pierre Macherey----

I

A close examination of literary critical sources has demonstrated that few of them have centered on how twentieth-century neo-slave narratives echo nineteenth-century slave narratives in terms of breaking the silences of sexuality, complete womanhood and constructed black female subjectivity in earlier narratives.[1] In other words, breaking the silence is seldom addressed as a subject of study in its own right, especially in the late twentieth century. It is even rarely addressed as one of the most useful theoretical discourses to help understand how some modern literary texts have tried to break the silences detected in their antecedents, the phenomenon of which is characteristic of black literary tradition. One instance of an interconnectedness between these narratives written in the past two centuries lies particularly in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861, hereafter *Incidents*) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987).

While many dissertations and many other critical sources written in the 1990's have attempted to tie the two narratives together,[2] they primarily center on such critical approaches as postmodernism, post-structuralism (semiotic study), psychoanalysis or postcolonialism rather than on explorations of the inherent relationship between the two works: how a neo-slave narrative breaks the silences existent in its antecedent. It follows

that they sometimes overlook the fact that the two books -- as slave narratives of female enslavement written in two centuries -- are inextricably linked to each other. Therefore, a reading within a context of how Toni Morrison speaks out what Jacobs remains silent about will shed much light on how modern readers can read *Beloved* as a modern interpretation of what has been discussed about slaves, abused female slaves in particular, as victims of the system of slavery.

Even though a few critics have come to the consensus that there are unspoken things and silences in *Incidents*, they maintain -- within a broader scope -- that silences can be viewed primarily as a rhetorical strategy or as a discourse of resistance or agency. For instance, with a focus on the silence as a signifier of an indeterminate discourse, Katheryn Lynn Rios bases her 1994 dissertation on feminist identity politics and asserts that, since "African American women's literature [is] resistance literature" which demonstrates "a struggle against cultural hegemony and for control over self-representation through writing" (1994:99), the silence in the writings of Harriet Jacobs and Toni Morrison is basically a "discursive strategy of resistance to cultural domination and appropriation....by which" they construct their subjectivity and try to present the "problematic role of motherhood (1994:1970).[3] Rios seems to have explicated Jacobs's silence on the basis of its strategic function within a context of a cultural conversation between the white-dominant society and the subordinate black community. She argues that the silence in such literary texts as slave narratives derives from unequal social and gender relationships and this has silenced black women writers in one way or another. While it is true that the hegemony of the society actually keeps most of these writers silent, there is yet another argument that the silence *per se* does not necessarily project

itself as something deliberately contrived but rather is something that is manipulated by a set of ideas in the form of common sense in a special historical moment: that which Marxists define as ideology. [4] It follows that black women writers, if they want to move from the private household into the public sphere, must face the limitation described by Pierre Macherey, a French Marxist, that "in order to say anything, there are other things which must not be said"(1978:85). Moreover, as Macherey reminds us, these writers -- as all writers -- are unable to see the silences that mark their work. It is only other writers, readers and critics that can identify and break these silences by filling in the text's (inevitable) gaps.

Like Rois, Jon Martin Hauss addresses the silence in slave narratives from a semiotic perspective. With a focus on the "intertextual relationships of " modern black women writings "with the early autobiographies," Hauss maintains that Harriet Jacobs employs a masking strategy so as to "publicize the radical contradictions of culture and social desire between white readers and black ex-slave writers" while Toni Morrison, together with Alice Walker (I would include Sherley Anne Williams too),[5] has self-consciously constructed an obvious intertextuality with early narratives (Hauss 1998:4). To make his argument, Hauss draws on Houston Baker's idea of blues in an ideological discourse and suggests that slave narratives written in the past two centuries have demonstrated a conflict between two "class ideologies -- blues ideology and white ideology" (1998:4). Hauss further argues -- on the basis of his interpretation of Houston Baker -- that Jacobs tries to embrace the white reader's ideology by using rhetorical skills even as she introduces her reader to the complex realities of black womanhood. However, Hauss views different ideologies as different cultural signs of both class and

gender distinctions: signs that appear as coded material in the narratives. By focusing on two class ideologies, he attempts to "interpret [the] gender-specific blues signs and argue that the structure of these blues configurations serves as a black feminist ideology" (Hauss 1998:4). [6]

Another critic P. Gabrielle Foreman also discusses the issue of the spoken and the silenced in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents*. She maintains that there is a veil drawn in the narrative and "in many ways Jacobs negotiates her way through her narrative, creating gaps and silences on her own terms" (Foreman 1990: 317).[7] She also claims that the title is an indication of absence in its own right since Jacobs chooses some events while excluding others, leaving them veiled and undertold. Therefore, the choice of incidents on the part of Harriet Jacobs is taken as her rhetorical strategy to satisfy her potential readers so that she can move from the private to the public and consequently gain social recognition as a free female slave. Foreman further illustrates this by quoting one of Jacobs's 1857 letters to Amy Post in which Jacobs writes that: "There are some things I might have included but that there are some things that I might have made plainer -- Woman can whisper her cruel wrongs into the ear of a dear friend much easier than she could record them for the world to read" (1987:242). As far as Foreman is concerned, her focus on a textual reading of the silence in *Incidents*, such as her argument that language is an agent, led her to ignore -- to some extent -- to read the text within its nineteenth-century American social and historical contexts.

In contrast to Foreman and some other critics, I contend, following Pierre Macherey and Terry Eagleton, an English Marxist, that silences also derive from the pressure of ideology instead of simply from strategic concerns. My approach then will

focus on Marxist feminist principles, which can not only help us theorize the relationships between slave narratives and neo-slave narratives but also help us see more clearly how they have found echoes in each other and maintain a strong tie to the black literary history. The *raison d'etre* for this argument arises from a concern about the relationship between ideology and black women writings. It goes without saying that women's position in a patriarchal society is limited by ideology and social institutions -- so too is the position of women writers who struggle for recognition and claim a place in the male-dominated literature. As for Harriet Jacobs and other nineteenth-century black women writers, the situation was even worse, in comparison with what white women writers had confronted. They stood, to use Deborah Gray White's words, "at the crossroads of two of the most well-developed ideologies in America, that regarding women and that regarding the Negro" (1985: 27) and were silenced by the whole social system when they attempted to speak about their personal experiences under slavery. Their purpose, in writing, was to show the cruelties of slavery such as sexual abuse or master's manipulation of a slave girl's feelings, to construct their own subjectivity, and to demonstrate the intellectual and moral worthiness of individual African-Americans who have escaped slavery. However, they refused, according to Katherine Fishburn, "to elaborate" on their experiences and would rather "take refuge in silence" since they were well aware that if they were to be heard at all, they needed to cover themselves.[8] In like manner, Toni Morrison reminds us that the nineteenth-century political ideology presented itself (as all ideology does) as "immutable, natural and innocent" (1996:2), and this has made possible a self-evident fact that black women's writings in the nineteenth-century were severely limited by a white power structure that doubted not only their

intellectual capabilities, but also their very humanity as women. Unable to conform to the prevailing antebellum sexual ideology and the notion of "true womanhood," which emphasized purity, piety, and domesticity, these women had to create a new script by distancing themselves from sexual stereotypes formed by the nineteenth century ideology of black women, redefining themselves and creating identities that could fit the experiences of those living in slavery, poverty, and subjugation under the dominant culture. What we can now see is that the (naturalized) limits and pressures of the nineteenth century ideology would have placed black women writers in danger were they to have discussed in "great physical detail" their experience as slaves.[9]

Unlike their nineteenth-century counterparts whose works were "almost always framed by white-authored texts," black women writers, especially those at work in the second half of the twentieth century, have come to turn inward and address their own race (Winter 1992:48). They have been more concerned with the social-historical relations of race, class, and gender and have been engaged in constructing subjectivity, identity and exploring strategies of revising black women's writings in the nineteenth century. They have tried to create a collective history in relation to individual history by creating the fictive neo-slave narrative and by filling in the silences in earlier black women's writings.[10] One of the reasons for their doing so is that this time period of the twentieth century, with its different social, political and cultural milieu, has rendered speakable what was formerly silenced in the nineteenth century, most particularly, for my purposes, the unutterable spaces of sexual vulnerability, rape (or the threat of rape), womanhood or motherhood. [11] A good case in point is Toni Morrison who aims at making the unspeakable speak. It is she who -- consciously or unconsciously -- has transformed what

is immutable in the nineteenth century into what, in accordance with Terry Eagleton, is "historically mutable" in the twentieth century (1976:94). Morrison has made clear, in short, that black women's writings demand a new definition of self in a different historical moment.[12] Her 1987 *Beloved* placed the need for what she calls "re-memory" at the center and has tried to cross "the boundaries of space, time, history, place, language, corporeality and restricted consciousness in order to make reconstructions and mark or name gaps and absences" (Davies 1994:17). More specifically, *Beloved* relates itself more to Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents* and has broken some silences in terms of sexuality and sexual desire. As far as Morrison is concerned, the silence in the nineteenth-century slave narratives "was the order of the day. Some of the silences were broken, and some were maintained by authors who lived with and within the policing narrative." In order to probe further into the silences, Morrison is more interested in the "strategies for maintaining the silence and the strategies for breaking it" (Morrison 1992:51). She has made similar comments in her book *Playing in the Dark* (1992). There, she suggests that it is the responsibility of the twentieth century black writers to break silences in early American slave narratives as well as in the larger Afro-American literary tradition.[13] At this point, I would suggest that Toni Morrison's attempt to break silences can be addressed on two different levels. The first involves breaking the larger cultural silences imposed by the external forces of dominant ideology and, in so doing, gaining recognition for Afro-American literature as a whole; the second involves breaking the silences imposed by internal forces which present themselves as naturalized and internalized ideologies at work on the part of black writers, and which make them willingly avoid speaking certain things. This situation can be detected in works written by

the nineteenth-century African-American writers themselves. In both aforementioned cases, there has been something unspoken because of ideological pressures. I would argue that it is ideology that has, among other things, positioned black women's literature in a silent place --whether collectively or individually -- and when Toni Morrison uses *Beloved* to break the boundary of silence in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, she is inevitably projecting upon black literary tradition a twentieth-century ideology as a result of black women's liberation movement beginning in the late 1960's. What she has been addressing hinges basically upon the relationships between literature and ideology, the paradigm of which is set up by Pierre Macherey and Terry Eagleton in particular.

II

Ideology is present in the text in the form of its eloquent silences.... It is criticism's task to demonstrate how the text is thus 'hollowed' by its relation to ideology [since it] exists because there are certain things which must not be spoken of.

---- Terry Eagleton ----

Both Pierre Macherey and Terry Eagleton have pondered the relationships between a text, history and ideology.[14] In accordance with Macherey, there is an internal displacement of ideology in a literary text which in turn can not say all that the writer intends to say. This displacement is primarily a result of spontaneous restrictions and rules in literary practice, and leaves a literary text inevitably incomplete. It follows that we should direct our attention to what literary texts can not say rather than what they have said. In support of his argument, Macherey discusses the issue of silence in some depth in Chapters 15 and 16 of *A Theory of Literary Production* (1978). He asserts, as I have already indicated, that "in order to say anything, there are other things which must not be said"(85). Therefore, a literary text is always incomplete because it necessarily contains gaps and silences. For Macherey, literary production epitomizes a certain ideology and history which manifest themselves not in their external relations to literary texts but in their presence of concealment within these texts. However, we can study these texts, reveal "the secret" in them and make them nearly complete. One way of doing this is to invent some useful forms of statement to help with the revelation. Critics are, therefore, supposed to demonstrate "the unconscious which is history" in literary texts instead of probing further into "a historical explanation which is stuck on to the work from the outside" (1978:94).[15] For him, an exploration of useful forms will help break the silence existent in literary texts, the argument of which has in many cases

brought about readings of Harriet Jacobs's silences on a textual level so that many critics have tried to unfold the veil of silence or break the silence by examining the text *per se*.

Terry Eagleton, on the other hand, rejects the vulgar Marxist notion that literary texts function as a part of social superstructure and are therefore simply a passive reflection of the economic base. His criticism draws heavily on Pierre Macherey but at the same time modifies Macherey's interpretation of literature-ideology relations. He holds a slightly different view by suggesting that a text is a production of ideology and ideology is generally concealed and naturalized in the text. On his view, ideology refers to the "processes whereby interests of a certain kind become masked, rationalized, naturalized, universalized, legitimated in the name of certain forms of political power"(*Ideology* 2000:202).[16] A text is ideologically forbidden to speak certain things and is incomplete in the sense that it has internalized certain interests of power.[17] It is a power relation in the form of common sense that manipulates what literary texts ought to say. In sum, ideology is basically naturalized and concealed in literary texts. Eagleton argues on this basis that "the task of ...criticism... is to articulate that of which the discourse speaks-without-saying-it" and it is the reader's responsibility to make a text speak (*Criticism* 1976:91). However, the focus should not be on finding Macherey's "useful forms of statement" because, Eagleton maintains, "ideology is less a matter of the inherent linguistic properties of a pronouncement than a question of who is saying what to whom for what purposes" (*Ideology* 2000:9). He also disagrees with Macherey, who suggests that the internal contradictions in literary texts arise from "internal disarray by [their] relation to ideology.... and [they] are not to be grasped as the reflection of real historical contradictions" (*Criticism* 1976:93, 95). It seems to him that Macherey stands

between Marxist and structuralist elements of thought and overlooks the relations between literature and history, with his main focus on what has happened within a text. Eagleton maintains that literature is a production of ideology which in turn signifies history and eventually history "is the ultimate signifier of literature, as it is the ultimate signified" (1976:72). In short, he is countering Macherey's interpretation of literature-history relations. Eagleton further argues that "if the text's internal conflicts are not the reflection of historical contradictions, neither are they the reflection of ideological ones" (1976:95). It is obvious that, whatever their differing points of view, both Macherey and Eagleton have come to realize that any literary criticism that ignores the relations between literature, history and ideology would be deeply flawed because the three aspects are inextricably linked.

Their critical principles have thrown much light on the following project which aims at reading two texts in terms of breaking silences within two historically different ideological contexts. In other words, the major concern is how to apply their theories to reading specific literary texts -- female slave narratives in particular. Writing within the oppressive structure of their society, black women writers of slave narratives confronted, as Katherine Fishburn has suggested, the dominant "bourgeois ideology of mid-nineteenth-century America" as well as that of the abolitionist movement and the myth of domesticity." [18] Under such circumstances, their texts have left something unsaid, the absences of which reveal the ideological assumptions which these women writers find hard to voice.[19] Nonetheless, women writers in the twentieth century have been able to voice what these slave narratives fail to say. They have bridged the gap and broken the

silence in their counterparts' works. And this returns us to what Macherey and Eagleton have claimed to be the task of criticism.

I would employ Eagleton's "speaks-without-saying it" paradigm to first "investigate" (Macherey's term) how Jacobs's *Incidents* remains silent under the nineteenth-century ideological pressure of womanhood and sexuality and then examine how Toni Morrison -- a writer critic -- uses *Beloved* to break Jacobs's silences and makes a nineteenth century text speak in the twentieth century. Unlike some other critics such as P. Gabrielle Foreman or Jon Martin Hauss, I would not center on how the text breaks the silence within itself or on a semiotic level. Neither would I follow Joanne Braxton and Sharon Zuber who have interpreted the silence as a "construction" that Jacobs has used to break the silence in her own text. [20] My approach aims at theorizing the relationships between the two primary texts and tries to explore how they focus on presenting their memories of things past and the discursive construction of subjectivity against the barriers set up by the society. On this basis, I would analyze how Harriet Jacobs and Toni Morrison have tried to help their characters realize the dream of individual accomplishment after revealing certain secrets on behalf of those who are born female and black, and who have, like Linda Brent and Sethe, encountered sexual abuse, rape (or attempted rape), and deprivation of complete womanhood or motherhood. From my point of view, recognition of female slaves' sexual identity would boil down to the recognition of their humanity. Even though chances were slim for the nineteenth-century black women writers to better their situations because of social and ideological hegemony, they were able to express their resistance in the form of slave narratives by speaking about their experiences under slavery. Their counterparts (probably descendants of slaves) in

the twentieth century have been able to revise these stories and created neo-slave narratives in the late 1960's in memory of the never-to-be forgotten past.

III

Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women...., they have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own.

---- *Incidents* ----

...it is in the nature of the work to be incomplete, tied as it is to an ideology which silences it at certain points.

----Terry Eagleton ----

To initiate our discussion for this part, it is necessary to examine what silence means for feminist criticism. This would contribute to a better understanding of the way that *Incidents* is incomplete in nature. Maggie Humm delineates silence in *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory* (1995) as follows: the silence of women

> stands both for our oppression in patriarchy and also for our techniques of passive resistance.... Silence also means "absence" in the theories that take women to be in the situation of absence in relations to language; that is, forced to use a discourse that is inadequate to express reality fully.... [and for black feminists], the transformation of silence into language and action can be an act of self-revelation. The breaking of silence is the bridge of differences. (266-67)

What Humm underscores in this passage is that political and cultural oppressions have affected not only women's life but also their consciousness of their sexual identity and sex roles. As a result, women have had to resort to a special discourse to help themselves expose such oppressions in one way or another. In Harriet Jacobs's case, her sense of self with a true sexual identity is suppressed under both patriarchy and slavery. She is aware of her sexual identity but is supposed to confine it within a culture in which black women are denied access to true love, sexual pleasure, complete womanhood and motherhood.

She can only construct a discourse of silence when she presents her encounters with sexual exploitation as well as the American myth of black womanhood under slavery.[21] It follows that there has been a limited space of sexuality which in turn results in certain silences in her book.

In her introduction to Jacobs's *Incidents*, Jean Fagan Yellin states as such, "[p]assages presenting her sexual history, ... are full of omissions and circumlocutions" because, according to Jacobs, it is much "easier for a woman to 'whisper' of sexual activities and abuses to a 'dear friend' than to 'record them for the world to read'" (Yellin 1987:xxi). This statement makes it clear that Jacobs appears to "consciously" omit lengthy descriptions of sexual activities. Nonetheless, such silences as articulated by Jacobs can also be addressed from what Pierre Macherey and Terry Eagleton have suggested to be the incompleteness in literary texts. As we have seen, Eagleton states clearly that "it is in the nature of the work to be incomplete, tied as it is to an ideology which silences it at certain points."[22] He also suggests that the author, in order to communicate truth, basically "finds himself forced to reveal the limits of the ideology within which he writes" (1976: 35). Accordingly, the reader is responsible for finding out these limits, breaking the silences, and filling in the "hollows" (Eagleton's term). Even though Jacobs openly (if perhaps disingenuously) insists that she has no intention of "[gaining] sympathies," we might still keep in mind that there lie certain gaps between her narrative and her public announcement as a result of her having internalized what passed for common sense within the discourse of the slaveocracy. I would suggest that Harriet Jacobs is well aware of the two dominant ideological pressures in terms of gender (domesticity) and race. At the time when she exposes women's sexual oppression and

exploitation under slavery and describes all the unexplainable ordeal that she has gone through, she remains silent about her own sexual history and sexual desire when she addresses a readership composed of Northern white women and abolitionists. Under such circumstances, she has to invite her readers to fill in the gaps, to make her text speak what she cannot say, and depend on them to know about the sex she can only allude to in her narrative.

Unlike most other critics who have centered primarily on how sexual exploitation or blues ideology have left a trauma on Jacobs's past, I would bring into focus the omission of sexual activities and sexual desire in *Incidents* by observing how the nineteenth-century ideologies have positioned Harriet Jacobs in a difficult situation and how she attempts to construct her subjectivity under these pressures. Once again, Katherine Fishburn's comments on the nineteenth-century ideologies shed much light on the following discussion. She holds that bourgeois ideology in the mid-nineteenth-century America is one of capitalism, liberal humanism, and Christianity. One of the ways that this ideology is represented can be found in the power relationship of gender, most particularly in the form of sexual repression, which denies women sexual identity and sexual desire. As Michel Foucault observed of this era, "[s]exuality moved into the home" (Foucault 1990:3). Writing within such a context, women writers of sentimental novels, in particular, tended to be silent on the subject of sex and represent women as submissive, domestic and passive. Sexuality was in effect invisible in these novels. As for black women writers, in addition to facing the same limits as their white counterparts, they also had to work under the ideological pressure of stereotypes that insisted on their promiscuousness.[23] Their position "at the nexus of America's sex and race mythology

has made it more difficult" for them to escape the mythology about them" (White 1985:28). Henceforth, they were not only silenced as women but also as black women. All this boils down to the fact that sexuality is not "innate" but rather is a reflection of "political and cultural institutions that affect the condition of individual life and consciousness"; it is "the social process which creates, organizes, expresses and directs desire" (Humm 1995:262). In accordance with nineteenth-century ideologies, Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents* bears within itself restraints set upon women's writings in general and its author is careful not to present many details when exposing sexual exploitation. Writing in the tradition of sentimental novels and under the ideological pressure upon women as a whole, Harriet Jacobs brings to the center her silent position from which she speaks about sex.

To take such a position, Harriet Jacobs has to take into consideration racial attitudes as well as literary expectations of her. She has to confine herself to the ideology and the power relations built around her. On the one hand, there is the power relation centered around gender with patriarchy at the center, wherein women are substantially passive and submissive --whether white or black. They are prevented from speaking freely especially in terms of sexuality, which has moved out of the public arena back into the home in the nineteenth century. On the other hand, there is the power relation on the basis of race (white and black, slave masters and female slaves in particular). Black women are confronted with oppression both as slaves and women. This situation has made it impossible for them to speak out certain truth except to conceal it in what Jacobs herself might refer to as "loopholes." Writing within the context of patriarchy and slavery, Harriet Jacobs has to base her narrative first on nineteenth-century

"sentimentality and domesticity" (Fishburn 1997:117) and structure her book around her family and her concerns about her children's freedom. In this spirit, her account is mainly focused on a discourse of sentimental tradition and domestic fiction; it is not surprising, therefore, her presentation of Dr. Flint's sexual advances (or perhaps even attempted rape) is couched primarily in metaphoric language and otherwise indirect descriptions. By employing this self-protective discusive strategy, she has tried to demonstrate how Dr. Flint keeps threatening her sexual identity and then her children. Throughout her narrative, for example, she constantly alludes to her ordeal in terms of sexuality by saying that "the degradation, the wrongs, the vices that grow out of slavery are more than I can describe. They are greater than you would willingly believe" (28); that Dr. Flint caused me "days and nights of fear and sorrow"(29); and that "no pen can describe" the insults inflicted upon her by her master (77). For Jacobs, Dr. Flint is the "epitome of corrupt of white male power" (Carby 1987:57) that keeps manipulating her first in the form of sexual harassment of one kind or another, then with an attempt at concubinage, and finally with an intervention in her finding true love and protecting her children. However, Jacobs omits detailed descriptions of sexual advances and episodes. They become verbal advances or linguistic sexual advances instead. All the reader can apprehend from her narration are instances of how Dr. Flint "*whispered* foul words" in her ear when she was fifteen and "*peopled*" her " young mind with *unclean* images, such as only a vile monster could think of..."(27). [24] There are also instances where she remarks that her own literacy has enabled Dr. Flint to slip notes into her hand for sexual purposes, but she never reveals what has been written on those notes (31). She also tells her readers that Dr. Flint even attempts to bring her to live with him in the same room to help take care of his daughter.

Even though she remains silent about this episode except to say that her mistress slips in unexpectedly at night to check on her behavior, the reader can nonetheless tell what danger she might have encountered when living under the same roof with her master who has desired her for so long. When Dr. Flint found out that Jacobs fell in love with a free colored man, he flew into a rage. He even started to work on a house where he could keep her not only out of his wife's sight but also fulfill his desire to have her. For years, Dr. Flint went out of his way to seduce her and "pollute" her "mind with foul images" and "destroy the pure principles" that Jacobs has internalized under her grandmother's influence. Nonetheless, the powerless Jacobs could not stop him from violating her in any way except that she herself "became reckless in despair" (54). She might hope that, by telling her experiences under slavery, she could provoke the compassion from her white women readers and call their attention not only to her ex-enslavement but also to other female slaves who still live in the bondage of slavery.

As mentioned earlier, Harriet Jacobs omits episodes of sexual activities in her narrative. This is best seen by her narration of her relations to two lovers and to her white lover, Mr. Sands, in particular. When she chooses to have him as her lover, she does not mention any sexual intimacy between them because, under the ideological pressure, she literally can not break the social norm in which people generally maintain that sexual activities between whites and blacks, if they ever happen, are virtually for reproductive purposes but not for love. They would blame blacks for any consequences even though Jacobs insists that "the condition of a slave confuses all principles of morality, and, in fact, renders the practice of them impossible" (55). To excuse herself from any potential blame, Harriet Jacobs claims that "to be an object of interest to a man who is not married,

and who is not her master, is agreeable to the pride and feelings of a slave, if her miserable situation has left her any pride or sentiment" and that "the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others" (56). By saying so, she seems to bring up not an issue of morality but one concerning her situation as an abused woman who has tried to find her way out. Ultimately, she chose Mr. Sands in order to "fend off the sexual threat of her master Dr. Flint" (Foreman 1996:77) and had two children by Mr. Sands even though she "had resolved to be virtuous" (56). Nonetheless, she omits almost every detail of their seeing each other except that she alludes to their sexual intercourse when she announces in front of Dr. Flint that "in a few months I shall be a mother" and then "I was again to be a mother" (77). "The truth was out" about her relations with certain man who has fathered her child. She feels "humiliated" because virtuousness is what has been expected of women within an ideological context. As we later find out, Harriet Jacobs is blamed for bringing "disgrace" upon "dead mother" and "herself" and is in danger of "exposure" (56,58). However, people would not have blamed her too much (including her grandmother) if her children had been fathered by Dr. Flint since such an event was nothing unusual under slavery. It is said that Dr. Flint has more than ten children by female slaves yet no one has spoken unfavorably of him because he is the master and he has the power over his slaves. Except for the abolitionist and the slaveholders' wives, most people in the nineteenth century took sex between masters and their female slaves for granted. Therefore, we have every reason to say that Jacobs's sexual history is indicative of her helplessness under sexual exploitation rather than her willingness to violate the so-called moral codes set up for good womanhood and good behavior.

I would also suggest that Harriet Jacobs is well aware what it means to be a female slave and that sexual abuse is innate in slavery, and she can not skip any part of it without talking about sexual exploitation. Like other black women writers at the time, she also placed sexual oppression at the heart of the indescribable corruption of slavery. As she said, slavery was a curse for black men but more a curse for black women. The race-sex paradigm in the institution of slavery has confined black women to "double enslavement" since they were slaves and women at the same time.[25] Aside from the life on plantation and in white households, they were also victims of sexual oppression, which was a prevalent practice under slavery and turned out to be among the worst of all evils inflicted upon slaves. [26] At the very outset of their enslavement, they had to "cope with sexual abuse" (White 1985:79). They were confronted with rape (or attempted rape), felt insecure when approaching maturity and were constantly reminded of their sex image as both objects of reproduction and sexuality. These have shaped the miserable experience of all black female slaves and have left a historical trauma on them as a whole. For Harriet Jacobs, black female slaves are identified with animals of reproduction or objects of sexuality. They are weak and more vulnerable to sexual abuse and violence. Beauty proves not a blessing but a great curse for a slave girl who "learns to tremble when she hears her master's footfall" and "will be compelled to realize that she is no longer a child" (28). "That which commands admiration in the white woman only hastens the degradation of the female slave" (78), because, Jacobs writes, she does not own her beauty as well as her body and is always at the mercy of her master who contrives to seduce her whenever possible. After that, she may be sold, with her baby at the breast (55). Not only is she deprived of womanhood or motherhood but also she has

no right to claim her body and maintain a space of sexuality of her own. She, together with other black female slaves, is "not allowed to have any pride of character. It is deemed a crime ... to wish to be virtuous" and "the condition of a slave confuses all principles of morality, and, in fact, renders the practice of them impossible" (1987:31,55). These are good cases which are indicative of the fact that, living "in bondage," they "were prevented from protecting their own virtue" (Fishburn 1997:116).

What is more, they were also denied access to complete womanhood within which sexual desire and activities can claim an important place. In the case of Harriet Jacobs, she not only dares not claim her sexual self but also willingly denies herself any sexual desire. There is a tension between her willingness to be a true woman and unwillingness to reveal it. As a matter of fact, it is evident that expressions of sexual desire are missing in Jacobs's *Incidents*. But this does not necessarily mean that she is silenced because of the dominant ideology imposed upon "good womanhood." Instead, she omits this part in order to counter the stereotype constructed by the American myth of black womanhood.[27] In other words, if we say that Harriet Jacobs writes under ideological pressure in order not to offend her white women readers or violate the social norms implemented for women in general, we might also keep in mind that it is also another aspect of ideology imposed upon black women in particular that has silenced her in terms of sexual desire. At this point, I would agree with Rois who suggests that "although Jacobs discreetly revealed her sexual exploitation, she too may have *resisted* revealing certain aspects of her sexuality" (1994:108 emphasis added). However, I would argue further that this resistance also arises from her determination to write against the myths and prejudices of white people toward black women and counter the

stereotypes constructed within the nineteenth-century ideology of black women. Harriet Jacobs, like other female slaves, lived in nineteenth-century America where virulently negative ideologies concerning black women were well developed. Accordingly, her situation was more complicated when she tried to communicate the dual form of oppression she experienced as a female slave. Confined to what at the time were immutable codes of black female sexual behavior and a fixed system of ideas which would not allow her to reveal some of the worst secrets of slavery, she was not only prudent about conducting a conversation with her white female audience but also careful not to communicate the stereotype of black women to them. Even though she promised "to tell the truth, and will do it honestly" at any cost (53), her truth was the unutterable truth that was spoken in a special way and she had no intention of making people presume that she was a fallen woman. It follows that, instead of speaking the unspeakable, Harriet Jacobs "did not actually withdraw the veil that concealed the 'monstrous features' of slavery that afflicted the black woman's body-self" (Fishburn 1997:116).

In her 1985 book, Deborah Gray White points out that "in antebellum America, the female slave's chattel status, sex, and race combined to create a complicated set of myths about black womanhood" (28). Black women at the time were viewed as totally different from the Victorian lady.[28] They were "sensual beings" who inherited the tradition of "uncontrolled lust" or contriving to gain a lover, and their sexual habits were said to "render the men callous to all the finer sensations of love and female excellence." Moreover, they were "lewd and lascivious" and "libidinous" and capable of excessive reproduction which was thought to serve as a good evidence of black women's lust. They

become a public topic in terms of reproduction and sexual activities, and their sexual bodies were neither "private" nor "personal" but became "public" and "familiar" (White 1985:29, 30, 31, 32). People took it for granted, White further argues, that

> [w]hether or not slave women desired relationships with white men was immaterial, the conventional wisdom was that black women were naturally promiscuous, and thus desired such connections and that sometimes they tend to go beyond racial boundaries for sexual satisfaction (White 1985:38).

Patricia Hill Collins conducts a similar analysis in *Black Feminist Thought* (2000). She suggests that black women were treated under slavery as "pornographic objects and [were portrayed] as sexualized animals, as prostitutes" on the basis of "the controlling image of jezebel" (Collins 2000: 147). Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents* does not illustrate or otherwise support any of these rationalizations about black women. Consciously or unconsciously, Jacobs keeps herself out of their reach. It goes without saying that, throughout the book, she intends to confine herself to purity and virtuousness even if slavery never gives her a chance to succeed in these intentions. She is forced to do not only something that would offend white people but also would confirm their suspicions that black women indulge themselves in promiscuousness by claiming men other than those from their own race. Jacobs's sexual activities with Mr. Sands, as it appears, are less passionate. The reader can not tell if they desire each other sexually nor are desired by each other. Sexual desire is excluded from her narration whereas children are included. She conceals this desire -- as I would suggest-- not only because she is a woman but also because she is a black woman living under all unfavorable myths and racial prejudices. She only intends to assert her right of being a female being instead of

exposing herself as a sexual actor for physical satisfaction. Therefore, there are no descriptions of her "private moments with Mr. Sands" (Foreman 1996:80) and "her continued relations with [him] and her own response to her second pregnancy are submerged in the subtext of the two previous chapters and in the space between paragraphs" (Smith 1990:224).

Katherine Fishburn summarizes Harriet Jacobs's silence on the level that Jacobs "is prevented from speaking by the formal choice she has made to participate in the discourse of sentimental fiction. She is also prevented, perhaps, by a desire to silence what has already been spoken in too many nineteenth-century 'anthropologies,' pro-slavery tracts, and male slave narratives" (1997:123). We might also add that Harriet Jacobs is well aware of ideological pressures in terms of how black women should behave themselves. Put another way, Harriet Jacobs is aware of the sexual image applied to black women and has tried to negate such an image in order to shape her own sexual self. She conceals the secret of veiled sexuality with an attempt -- consciously or unconsciously-- to counter the sexual stereotypes formed under the dominant patriarchal and racial ideologies. But -- and this is the key – I would contend that she would not have seen this as ideological pressure since it had become so natural and universal in the nineteenth century. At this point, I would suggest that it was her counterparts in the twentieth century who have seen what she failed to see as ideological pressures. The following discussion of Toni Morrison's reading of ideological pressure in the nineteenth century will show that Harriet Jacobs was unaware how ideological pressure had either denied or censored women's sexuality.

IV

Differential relations between text and ideology... are historically mutable... and demand specific historical definition.

---- Terry Eagleton ----

Anything dead coming back to life hurts.

----*Beloved* ----

Even when some critics maintain that Toni Morrison tells the story of slavery that, as I would argue, can be passed on in *Beloved*, she goes beyond what Harriet Jacobs has told in her slave narrative. [29] Writing in the late twentieth century, Toni Morrison retells what Harriet Jacobs can't tell in the nineteenth century by inserting graphic representations of sexuality and complete womanhood in *Beloved* and henceforth breaks the silences in *Incidents*. This echoes exactly with Terry Eagleton's argument that "[d]ifferential relations between text and ideology... are historically mutable" (Eagleton 1976: 94). While political ideology is, according to Toni Morrison, immutable and natural, yet she can distance herself from her antecedent and retells a similar story within a different ideological discourse. In 1984, Morrison comments on the relationships between literature and history as follows: "[if] we don't keep in touch with the ancestor...we are, in fact, lost" (1984:344)[30] and reconstructing memory will help achieve such a purpose. She further contends that nineteenth century black women were "vulnerable to displacing themselves into something other than themselves" and, therefore, her work must "bear witness and identify that which is useful from the past and

that which ought to be discarded"[31] (1984:241, 385-90). Written in this spirit, *Beloved* serves the purpose of not only revising slave narratives in terms of sex and gender but also retelling untold stories in the nineteenth century slave narratives. On Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu's view, it is not only especially recognized as a famous neo-slave narrative in the twentieth century which attempts to revive "Harriet Jacobs's early emphasis on the enslaved woman" (Beaulieu 1999:2) but also applauded for revealing some secrets in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents* a century later. While it is true that *Beloved* is as much a presentation of black life or survival in the era of slavery and its aftermath as a redefinition of black femininity and sexuality for black women, we should also keep in mind that, written in the spirit of the feminist movement in the late twentieth century, *Beloved* bears within itself the black mentality in the present, which involves not only an attitude towards the here and now but also the past. It presents history as (we think) it was, lets the characters speak from the nineteenth century and presents female slaves' experience without apologizing to its modern audience. In other words, in contrast to Harriet Jacobs who has her white women readers in mind, Toni Morrison wrote *Beloved* from an African American perspective in order to re-examine "the slave narrative's traditional presentations of motherhood, sexual purity, and literacy" (Kubitschek 135). In this novel, sexuality, among other things, which was long suppressed in the past and rarely addressed in the slave narrative, is no longer an unspoken secret; instead, it has become historically redefined even though the memory of the past still hurts. It pulls back the veil over the shocking and painful incidents under slavery and presents witness to the interior lives of the female slave. Therefore, as a commentary on its literary antecedent, *Beloved* functions as a kind of literary criticism and an interpretation that fulfills both

Macherey's and Eagleton's call for the reader to make a text speak. In the same vein, it also fulfills what Angela Davis maintains to be black women's legacy of " tenacity, resistance and insistence on sexual equality" (1983:29). Be your "best thing" is at the center of this legacy (*Beloved* 1987: 273).

While I agree with Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu, who maintains that Toni Morrison, together with Sherley Anne Williams and J. California Cooper, has tried to draw on slave narratives for inspiration to work on issues of gender and mothering in particular, I would also contend that it is not only motherhood but also womanhood and sexual identity that these black women writers intend to construct in neo-slave narratives. [32] It is also, among other things, the silence of sexuality (suppressed desire on this occasion) that *Beloved* has tried to break. With this novel, Toni Morrison constructs and deconstructs "reality [fully] in order to be able to function in it" and tries to "explore how a people" or an individual "absorbs and rejects information on a very personal level about something that is undigestible and unabsorbable, completely" (*Conversations* 1994:235). Moreover, she underscores how a woman can speak out or act out her suppressed desire without caring about sensual ideology or prejudices against black women in the nineteenth century. She asserts that "[the] past has to be revised. The way one thinks about things has to change" (*Conversations* 1994:264). This is what has made Toni Morrison's *Beloved* a twentieth-century reading of slave narratives and a projection of the late twentieth century black ideology upon black females' lives during and after slavery.

The well-known historian Darlene Clark Hine suggests in 1994 that "perhaps the most challenging task confronting black women under slavery was how to maintain a relatively healthy opinion of themselves as sexual beings. To the slave masters they were

remunerative slave breeders and vulnerable sexual objects" (Hine 1994:4). Her statement points to the fact that the system of slavery worked unfavorably against female slaves who were denied protection of and access to their sexualized womanhood. Living under slavery, these women were not entitled to any right to claim their bodies as their own. They were sexually desired and abused by other men (their masters) and it is unlikely that they could have had any chance to think of themselves as "healthy sexual beings." Under such circumstances, most of them kept silent like Linda Brent in *Incidents*. Harriet Jacobs, writing in the tradition of sentimental fiction and abolitionism, has centered Linda Brent's life mainly upon "avoiding her master's lust and her mistress's jealousy" (Foster 1994: 58). Throughout the text, Linda Brent (Harriet Jacobs) is seen to have coped with her situations passively and silently, especially the relationship to the master's sexual advances. When she contemplated what effects practices of sexual abuses might have on her daughter who was born a slave too, she couldn't help but lament hopelessly that her heart "was heavier than it had ever been before" and that she "felt how much easier it would be to see her die than to see her master beat her about" (1987: 77,86). However, instead of keeping silent about sexual exploitation, as Linda Brent did, Sethe, who is also speaking to us from the nineteenth century,[33] is made to break the silence not only by telling the truth but also by bearing "a tree on [her] back" as evidence of sexual exploitation and a reminder of her traumatic past when she was an abused slave (1987:15). It is not surprising that -- some time after she was abused ruthlessly by her master's nephews -- she took extreme measures to commit infanticide simply for fear that her experience might extend to her baby daughter who in turn would bear, like her, abuses of slavery. Her traumatic experience under slavery is not unusual indeed. Toni

Morrison, for example, describes in *Beloved* how another female ex-slave, named Ella, also suffered from sexual abuse, which happened in her puberty when she "was shared by father and son," and which resulted in her disgust for sex eventually (256). Morrison has tried to bring to the foreground how slavery has disabled female slaves and deprived them of their sense of self and womanhood, and then disabled them as women. It is not only an individual experience but also an experience for black women as a whole.

What makes *Beloved* unique perhaps also lies in its revelation of sexual abuse of black men. This is unprecedented in any of the nineteenth-century slave narratives. On this level, the novel not only speaks what black women writers cannot say about female sex but also what black male writers do not include in their slave narratives. When Paul D. was in prison, three white men were their guards who forced the forty-six prisoners to kneel down in front of them and satisfy their "whim" by having oral sex with them. They called it "breakfast" (fellatio) (1987:107). The following is a typical passage from *Beloved*:

> Breakfast? Want some breakfast, nigger?
>
> Yes, sir.
>
> Hungry, nigger?
>
> Yes, sir.
>
> Here you go.
>
> Occasionally a kneeling man chose gunshot in his head as the price, maybe, of taking a bit of foreskin with him to Jesus. (*Beloved*: 107-08)

There is also a special signal of " Hiiii" or "Hoooo" to indicate " what was enough, what was too much, when things were over, when the time had come" (108). Such a graphic

scene of oral sex between white men and black men has the power, even in the twenty-first century, to horrify and offend readers. [34] In essence, it can be viewed as a kind of rape inflicted upon the forty-six male slaves by the three white men and is a manifestation of dominance and power which control slaves in whatever ways white people feel pleased. With this description, Toni Morrison extends her revelation of the evil of slavery to black men in addition to black women.

In terms of sexual being and complete womanhood, "few black women of the nineteenth century could meet the idealistic standards of True Womanhood" given the material conditions of slavery. Meanwhile it was almost impossible for these women to keep their virtue and chastity (Rios 1994:109). For Linda Brent (Harriet Jacobs), her sexual being is perhaps achieved on the basis of escape from sexual exploitation. She offers herself to Mr. Sands who is a white man instead of the "colored young man" who is her first true love for the simple reason to elude Dr. Flint. She is not free to choose her love and has to either subject herself to her master or turn to someone who is less threatening than a slave holder. Sethe, on the other hand, is allowed to maintain her virtue until she marries Halle. By portraying the slave men at Sweet Home as respectful of Sethe's virginity, Toni Morrison lays to rest the stereotypes of black men and black women being sexually promiscuous. In so doing, in contrast to Harriet Jacobs, she also portrays a sexual relationship as a loving, respectful relationship: within which Sethe and Halle have sex, not because they are forced to, but because they love each other and are married. As a matter of fact, Sethe's sexual being is built upon her love with someone of her own choice when she and Halle "coupled" (26) either in the corn fields or on " the dirt floor" (26) even though her sexual body was subsequently abused terribly.

On many occasions in the novel, Toni Morrison presents graphic descriptions of sex and sexuality, which has never been touched upon in the slave narrative. One instance is that Sethe brings to the foreground sexual exploitation explicitly instead of alluding to the rape (or attempted rape) and demonstrates that black women are, unfortunately, "sexually available wherever and whenever" (Wyatt 1997:184). [35] When Linda Brent (Harriet Jacobs) alludes to possible sexual abuse by saying "My owner... sought in every way to make me miserable. He didn't resort to corporal punishment, but to all the petty, tyrannical ways that human ingenuity could devise"(1987:19), she leaves much space for the reader to fill in because of her fear of offending the sensibilities of her white women readers and of being judged by the standards of good womanhood. She also suggests that she has been degraded by the sexual advances from the doctor and considers herself a fallen woman. What Harriet Jacobs does here-- as discussed already-- is to follow the nineteenth-century literary tradition when writing under the dominant ideological pressures. For Toni Morrison, on the other hand, Sethe's first "fall" occurs when she attempts to escape Sweet Home Farm where she is caught by schoolteacher and her milk is sucked dry by schoolteacher's nephews. Morrison exposes sexual exploitation to the full with her detailed description as such: "those boys came in there and took my milk. That's what they came in there for. Held me down and took it."(16) This incident has left not only a traumatic memory on Sethe who keeps saying "they took my milk" (17) but also a stigma of a "chokecherry tree" on her back which reminds her of the oppressed past and her abused body (17). In a sense Sethe was sterilized as a woman later on. For many years henceforth, "she could remember desire" but "she had forgotten how it worked" (20). Such an exposure of sexual exploitation is what Harriet Jacobs-- like

many of her counterparts in the nineteenth century-- has failed to dwell on in her *Incidents*. Morrison, however, has managed to "transmit readily comprehensible messages to a historical audience" by situating her characters in the nineteenth century and addressing her twentieth-century readers and this is her principle of stretching the reader's imagination.

In matters of sexuality, instead of implying sex between a white man and a black (slave) woman like Harriet Jacobs does in her *Incidents*, Toni Morrison puts her pen to graphic representations of sexual desire and intercourse between black people rather than between slaves and their masters. For Sethe, her house 124 is a "discourse" and a community in which the reality of ex-slaves is fully expressed not only through her own efforts but also through the help of her two daughters. They have managed, among other things, to counter what Denver would later describe as the situation in which "[s]laves not supposed to have pleasurable feelings on their own; their bodies not supposed to be like that, but they have to have as many children as they can to please whoever owned them. Still, they were not supposed to have pleasure deep down" (1987:209). Instead they "always listen to" their bodies and love them (209). Here Toni Morrison undoes the tension that we might find in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents* by stating openly that black women can claim and manipulate their bodies at the same time. They are not only born for the purpose of reproduction but also for complete womanhood. When Sethe has sexual intercourse with Paul D. for the first time after gaining her freedom eighteen years later (20), and has sex with him "just about every day" (115), her desire was aroused again, her body was given back to her and her rememory was stirred in her (189). Ever after that, she not only pieces together her memory but also reclaims what she has lost for

so long: her mature sexual identity. She is not only sexually desired by a man who used to turn to "fucking cows, dreaming of rape" in Sweet Home (11) but also possesses sexual urges herself. In this sense, freedom for her is as much as from physical bondage as from sexual suppression. As a matter of fact, this is Toni Morrison's projection of the twentieth-century black feminist ideology upon her reading of a black woman's experience in the nineteenth century. In accordance with her, there is a need for black women living now feel "freer to work for their vision of black liberation, freer to assert an independent role" (White 1999:222). Put another way, since forms of sexuality are shaped by both political and cultural institutions, as Humm has pointed out, Toni Morrison is voicing contemporary black women's desire to defend themselves against the denial of "sexual agency to black women" and solve "their present problems" (White 1999:263).

Toni Morrison not only lets Sethe speak out for herself but also includes Beloved in terms of gaining recognition of sexuality. While she died very young because of her mother's "thick love," Beloved returned as a mature woman and wanted to claim her right to womanhood and sexuality. As Patricia Hill Collins reminds us, slavery inhibited black women's "ability to have a 'big love,' whether for children, for friends, for each other, or for principles such as justice"; in this situation, the "systems of oppression often succeed because they control the 'permission for desire" and "harness the power of deep feelings to the exigencies of domination" (Collins 2000:149-50). Beloved is able to insert her desire only after she returns to the present and makes herself a real sexual being. She has no man to claim except Paul D. She slipped into the storeroom in which Paul D. slept and insisted that he " touch [her] on the inside part" (1987:116):

> She moved closer with a footfall he didn't hear and he didn't hear the whisper that the flakes of rust made either as they fell away from the seams of his tobacco tin. So when the lid gave he didn't know it. What he knew was that when he reached the inside part he was saying, "Red heart. Red heart," over and over again. Softly and then so loud it woke Denver, then Paul D. himself. (1987:117)

Throughout her sexual intimacy with Paul D. from that day on, it was Beloved's sexual desire and "old hunger" (1987:120) that manipulated the man. He couldn't resist her whenever "she turned her behind up" and asked him to touch her on the inside part (1987:126). Under no circumstances can the reader see such a strong manifestation of sexual desire in Jacobs's *Incidents*. Where Harriet Jacobs dare not claim her true sexual desire, Sethe and Beloved speak out for her and for black women in general. What's more, along those lines of detailed descriptions in *Beloved*, it is also important to note that the sexual body can now be displayed to the public without any sense of embarrassment on the part of a black female character or her author. When she came out of 124 standing in the doorway towards the end of the novel, she "had taken the shape of a pregnant woman, naked and smiling in the heat of the afternoon sun.... she stood on long straight legs, her belly big and tight.... Her smile was dazzling" (261). Even though this is not a story to pass on, Toni Morrison has been brave enough to voice black women's hope for the liberation of sexual desire as well as that of their sexual bodies in her twentieth-century reading of the nineteenth-century slave narratives. By creating a real ghost of Beloved, Toni Morrison has not only made "history possible" and "memory real" (Conversations 1994:249) but also made it possible for a literary text to break the

silence in its earlier counterpart within a historically mutable literature-ideology discourse.

V

Silences are being broken, lost things have been found... Invisible things are not necessarily "not there"; a void may be empty, but is not a vacuum.

----Toni Morrison ----

When Hazel Carby points out in 1993 that "the consequences of being a slave woman did not end with the abolition of slavery as an institution but haunted the texts of black women throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth..." ("Voice" 1993:76), she includes in this statement a message that the evil of slavery inflicted upon female slaves has had a long lasting influence on black women's life. The harrowing stories they told and have told in literary works are indicative of their traumatic experiences under slavery and are carried on for memory and re-memory in different literary texts by black women writers. What earlier writers can not speak has become speakable in the modern times.

As far as Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents* is concerned, when it aims at telling Jacobs's own encounter with sexual exploitation, it actually makes itself, as Stephen Robert Rascher asserts,

> the birthing room of many of the focal points of the twentieth century revisions of the slave narrative. Sexual exploitation, maternal concerns for family, a black women's network of support -- these defining aspects of the genre appear repeatedly in the more recent revisions. More important, however, Jacobs exposes rich-black, cultural soil that anticipates the subsequent ideological position of the contemporary slave narrative form. These moments of exclusively black culture....

are examples of meaningful, coded folk material that Hurston, Walker, and Morrison employ to define more accurately the black novel.(1998:31)

Beloved is such a novel aimed at continuing the unspoken in a modern context. However, it is not only a revision of the past, it also entails Toni Morrison's ideological position at the time when she set her mind on retelling a nineteenth-century female slave story to address modern racist attitude in a racial discourse.[35] She not only frames her novel on the basis of what so many other critics have suggested to be family life and motherhood but also tries to construct female subjectivity by voicing what Harriet Jacobs's cannot say in her narrative. For her, perhaps one of the aspects to demonstrate female identity involves the liberation of sexuality. Patricia Hill Collins has presented a similar analysis in *Black Feminist Thought* (2000). According to her, "[j]ust as harnessing the power of the erotic is important for domination, reclaiming and self-defining that same eroticism may constitute one path toward Black women's empowerment" (*Thought* 128). The fact that sex and sexuality have been missing in the nineteenth-century slave narrative does not necessarily mean that they were not present in the lives of the narrators, be they male or female. It is the social, political and cultures pressures that has suppressed them without giving them a chance to be spoken. When Toni Morrison articulates that her purpose of creating her works is to "extend, fill in, and complement slave autobiographical narratives ... along with personal recollection" ("The Site" 255), she is trying to fill in the gap and break the silence in her antecedent's text and speak the unspeakable in the late twentieth century. On this level, her novel *Beloved* has helped her expose her own ideological code for an interpretation of a nineteenth-century female slave story, which in turn addresses racial issues still found in the present. Although we

can use Toni Morrison's novel to fill in the gaps and silences in *Incidents*, we are too close to see Morrison's own silences and gaps. The only thoughts arise on the basis of the above analysis in terms of *her* silences might relate to the modern sense of guilt. However, perhaps this will become a topic for future literary study of black female writers such as Toni Morrison. [37]

Notes:

1. I owe my research on Harriet Jacobs and Toni Morrison to my stay at MIT in the summer 2000. I collected most of the databases I needed for my thesis then. I was able to get hold of some dissertations through the interlibrary loan program at Michigan State University in the summer 2001. Journals and books are two other major sources for my project.

2. A close examination of dissertations and other critical sources -- written especially in the 1990s -- on the two texts has indicated a radical shift of literary criticism of the two books. Critics tend to tie *Incidents* and *Beloved* together within a context of, for instance, post-modernism, cultural studies, psychoanalysis, and post-colonialism. What follows is a variety of interpretations of the two books on such a basis. Angelyn L. Mitchell's 1992 dissertation is centered on "cultural, ideological, and aesthetic change in the literary tradition of African-American women novelists"(1992: 2816). She has put Toni Morrison, together with two other black women writers, within a postmodern context and has conducted an intertextual exploration of *Beloved* and tried to demonstrate how contemporary writers revise their antecedent texts such as that written by Harriet Jacobs. Those who focus on a cultural studies approach have tried to discuss Jacobs and Morrison within a context of black community and culture and intended to explore how they work on the two writers writing in different eras. For example, Stephen Robert Rascher's 1998 dissertation tries to relate contemporary black women writers such as Hurston, Walker and Morrison to the nineteenth century slave narratives. For him, the slave narratives have formed "the bedrock of literary genre which subsequent black women writers revise"(1998:3821). Therefore, modern black women writers simply introduce some elements such as cultural viewpoint. Morrison, for example, goes out of her way to rewrite or reconfigure the traditional black woman slave narrative by echoing both fictional and factual accounts from a nineteenth-century newspaper and creates a past embodied in a ghost character. Another 1998 dissertation contests the concept that "any self is constructed only in accordance with a dominant culture or in reaction to it" by centering on a cultural studies approach when the author Samantha Manchester Earley brings Olaudah Equiano, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Toni Morrison together. On her view, "Americans should move beyond traditional Eurocentric or Afrocentric paradigms in order to interrogate ways of knowing, to pose new questions, and to posit alternative discursive realities"(1998:2022). In her 1998 dissertation, Katherine Lynn Heenan explores the relationship between gender and rhetorical situations as well as thematic content and rhetorical strategies. She relates Harriet Jacobs and Toni Morrison to how language functions in the construction of slave narratives. For her, black female writers such as Harriet Jacobs have not only tried to construct a self and a past but also searched for a language to speak for themselves within the institution of slavery. She then asserts that Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, which is the twentieth-century version of slave narratives, follows the black literary tradition by adopting a similar rhetorical strategy. I think Earley's dissertation overlooks the fact that literary criticism can not take into consideration a literary text without exploring certain paradigms that have worked on social, political and cultural aspects presented by

literature. Any effort to ignore literature within a context of certain paradigm would be flawed.

3. Katheryn Lynn Rios's "Silence as a Discourse: Resistance in the Writing of Women of Color" can be found in DAI, 55, no.07A or got through an interlibrary loan program. Rios painstakingly theorizes silence as a discourse of resistance by challenging such categories of interpretations and analysis as "motherhood" or "the post-colonial subject." I owe much to her summarizing interpretations of silence taken from a range of genres. This has helped me think beyond what silence really means for women writers. For me, it does not necessarily entail a strategic function of resistance, as many of the critics have pointed out, nor serve as a component of a binary formulation of silence versus speech. I center my project on an ideological construction of silence in the two slave narratives.

4. According to Louis Althusser, ideology hides itself as common sense. In this project I do not engage the Marxist debates over ideology as to whether it is real or imaginary (on this subject, see Althusser's *For Marx*. Vintage Books: New York, 1970). Instead, I use Pierre Macherey's and Eagleton's meaning of the word ideology, which basically states that ideology is the means by which the bourgeois or ruling class maintains its dominance by controlling the way the working class and other oppressed groups see themselves. This is not to say that ideology can not be tested. Instead, it is to emphasize how pervasive and powerful its influence on society is(for discussions of this, see Raymond Williams's *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1977).

   My research has found that there has been one primary discussion of *Beloved* on the basis of Althusserian ideology. In her 1999 essay on *Beloved*, the author Ariene R. Keizer goes out of her way to refine Althusser's theory of ideology by pointing out some flaws in its theoretical framework. Keizer actually aims at challenging Althusser's theory of ideology for ignoring the "processes of ideological conflict—conflict between world views—within a single socioeconomic formation"(1999:116). She focuses mainly on "interpellation" with explorations on how, for instance, Morrison's Sethe and Paul D. are "interpellated" by their masters or "called" by their own ancestors and respond to them. For her, Sethe and Paul D. eventually re-create themselves as a new cultural entity on the basis of resisting hegemonic ideology by keeping to the black community in the form of verbal and musical improvisation. She maintains that Althusser erred when he failed to explain ideology in a "bicultural or multicultural context like American slavery."

5. Sherley Anne Williams' *Dessa Rose* (1986) is an acclaimed historical novel and a neo-slave narrative which is written on the basis of the blues.

6. Jon Martin Hauss's "Masquerades in Black: A Cultural Encounter in Late Antebellum American Literature" can be found in DAI, 51, no.11A or got through an interlibrary loan program. Like Rois, Hauss has also made strenuous efforts to explore how silences have functioned in some women writers' works. He centers his discussion on a semiotic approach with some discussions of how black and white

ideologies work in slave narratives written in the past two centuries and views different ideologies as different cultural signs that appear as coded material in the narratives. However, he attaches too much importance to intertextuality. He ignores the fact that twentieth century black women writings identify themselves with the nineteenth-century slave narratives in the sense that they distance themselves from the nineteenth-century ideology. In this way, they are not only able to see more clearly the conflict between two class ideologies but also to incorporate their own ideology into their work without simply repeating exactly the blues ideology. For a similar discussion of using silence as a strategy to confront different ideologies, see Elizabeth Miller Thames's "Writing from the Lion's Mouth: Strategy, Struggle, and Self Definition in Three Nineteenth-century African-American Texts " MAI, 35, No. 05: 1997:1152.

7. Foreman's choice of words, "gaps and silences," is unfortunate because it confuses the issue here. Macherey's and Eagleton's argument regarding gaps and silences rests on the premise that authorial intention is unwillingly in thrall to ideology—i.e., no choice is involved.

8. In Chapter 3 of her book *The Problem of Embodiment in Early African American Narrative* (1997), Katherine Fishburn delineates at a great length the absence of the body in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents*.

9. *Ibid*, chapter 3. The situation of being female slaves is more complicated when it comes to a communication of their physical experiences in slavery. Most of them went through sexual abuse of one kind or another but they would have been in danger if they choose to speak. Therefore, they had to keep silent and refuse to elaborate. Here Katherine Fishburn quotes Houston A. Baker's 1991 book *Workings of the Spirit: The Poetics of Afro-American Women's Writing* in which Baker poses such a question as "What tale can the daughters tell without incurring contempt?"(1991:20) This is exactly the concern of the nineteenth-century black women writers.

10. The term "neo-slave narratives" was first used by Bernard Bell in *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition* (1987). According to him, neo-slave narratives are "residually oral, modern narratives of escape from bondage to freedom" (Bell 1987:289). He suggests that Margaret Walker's *Jubilee* (1966) is the first neo-slave narrative while Rushdy claims that Gaines's *The Autobigography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1968) would be the first. Currently, the neo-slave narrative has become an accepted term to refer to "contemporary novels that assume the form, adopt the conventions, and take on the first-person voice of the ante-bellum slave narrative" (Rushdy 1999:1). Some of the most famous neo-slave narratives include *Flight to Canada* (1976), *Dessa Rose* (1986), *Beloved* (1987) and *Middle Passage* (1990).Two other famous literary books on this genre of neo-slave narratives were written by Ashraf H. A. Rushdy (*Neo-slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form*. Oxford University Press:New York & Oxford, 1999) and Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu (*Black Women Writers and the American Neo-Slave Narrative: FemininityUnfettered*. Greenwood Press: Westport, Connecticut & London, 1999).

11. Some famous black women writers writing such books about black women's experiences include Zora Neale Hurston (*Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 1937), Alice Walker (*The Color Purple*, 1983), Sherley Anne Williams (*Dessa Rose* 1986), and Toni Morrison (*Beloved*, 1987). Their works have had a far-reaching influence on American black literary tradition.

12. Ideology is a set of ideas fixed in a specific historical moment. It will change more or less as time progresses. As a reflection of ideology, literary texts in different time periods also change in terms of what to say or not to say. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is an example of a text that has tried to redefine black womanhood and sexuality in the twentieth century. According to Eagleton, the relationships between text and ideology are "historically mutable" and this can been seen very clearly if we tie Jacobs's *Incidents* and Morrison's *Beloved* together.

13. In her famous book *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison discusses in Chapter 2 how American slavery and slave writings are connected to Enlightenment and Romanticism. To echo with boom of the nineteenth-century printing industry as well as abolitionism, slave narratives became a publication boom too. However, they fail to "destroy the master narrative" and silence in these narratives is the order of the day. For more pertinent discussions, see Morrison's book published in 1992. Toni Morrison is more concerned about breaking silences for the whole African-American literature that has been ignored for a long time. For her, to establish a collective identity is more important. However, this is also indispensable to each individual work that has helped African-American literature claim a certain place in American literature. I think this is the basis on which Toni Morrison has directed her attention to breaking silences in works such as Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents*. For similar comments on silences can be found in her 1989 essay " Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature." in *Criticism and The Color Line: Desegregating American Literary Studies*. ed. Henry B. Wonham. Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, New Jersey: 1996.

II

14. Hazel V. Carby is a literary critic who has addressed in depth the relationship between African-American women writings and the function of ideology. When she discusses Afro-American women novelists in her book *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (1989), she points out that ideology has played an important role in the way that they work on their texts. Her position echoes what Pierre Macherey and Terry Eagleton have suggested about the relationships between literature, history and ideology and has posed a question on theorizing an appropriate approach to reading female slave narratives written in the past two hundred years.

15. *A Theory of Literary Production* was first published in French in 1966. The edition I use for this thesis was published in English in 1978. I assume that Terry Eagleton read the French edition when he wrote *Criticism and Ideology* in 1976. This work serves as his response to different understandings of the relationship between

literature and ideology. Pierre Macherey delineates forcefully that ideology establishes restrictions and rules to forbid literary works to say certain things. It is criticism's task to reveal the secret and study the rupture between the implicit and the revelation.

16. As far back as the 1970s, Terry Eagleton discussed in detail ideology and its relations to literary discourse and history. He conducts a comprehensive study of ideology and traces the development of the concept of ideology in his *Ideology* first published in 1991.

17. In other words, the author is, without consciously realizing it, ideologically forbidden to write certain things.

18. Katherine Fishburn discusses the relative absence of the body within a context of the nineteenth-century ideologies. For more detailed discussion, refer to *The Problem of Embodiment in Early African American Narrative* (1997): pp115-125.

19. See Maggie Humm's *Practicing Feminist Criticism: An Introduction* (1995). One of her statements in the book might fit what I am discussing here in terms of silences and ideology. She claims that "[a] text's unsaid—the things about which it is silent—can tell us a great deal; absences reveal ideological assumptions which an author finds hard to voice. " (1995:35)

20. Braxton and Zuber try to explore the "dimension of silence as they operate both in Linda Brent's narrative and in Harriet Jacobs's construction of it." Their discussion focuses on Jacobs's attempt to break silences on four levels. They initiate their discussion by pointing out that literacy is the first step to break the silence imposed upon all slaves. However, they think the key silences lie in the sexual and emotional abuse of slave women at the hands of their masters. They assert that Jacobs explores the themes of silence and silencing at several levels. On the one hand, slave women are silenced by physical violence on the part of the powerful slaveholders who try to exploit their sexual bodies and suppress their resistance. As a form of resistance, Harriet Jacobs breaks this silence by turning to a white lover and having two children with him. In so doing, she gains control over her emotional feelings without submitting her self to Dr. Flint. On the other hand, slave women are also silenced by their white mistresses who participate in the silencing of black women because they themselves are silenced by the patriarchal ideology. Therefore, they are powerless to prevent white men's sexual abuse of slave women. I would suggest that their analysis is flawed because they fail to go beyond the textual boundary and see more clearly what lies beneath the silence in the narrative. For detailed discussion, refer to "Silences in Harriet 'Linda Brent' Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*" in *Listening to Silences: New Essays in Feminist Criticism.* ed. Elaine Hedges & Shelley Fisher Fishkin, Oxford University Press: New York & Oxford, 1994.

III

21. In her book *Ar'n't I A Woman: Female Salves in the Plantation South*, Deborah Gray

White traces in the first chapter the development of ideological expectations of women in general and black women in particular. She especially delineates how American ideology has built up a myth unique to America under slavery. For her, ideological prejudice against black women has positioned them in a situation equal to that of animals. They were simply tools of reproduction and representation of uncontrolled licentious behavior. For more discussions, see her book published in 1985.

22. Although Terry Eagleton states that literary works are in their nature incomplete, we can not generalize it to all texts and to the cultural life in general. The reason that I employ his notion of incompleteness is that it is manifest itself very clearly in Jacobs's *Incidents*. The author herself lives under two ideological pressures and has to be careful about what to say or not to say, hence leaving much space for the reader to fill in. Toni Morrison later fills the space in *Beloved.*

23. See note 21.

24. Emphases are added here.

25. For a detailed discussion of "double enslavement" see Deborah K. King " Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology." in *Words of Fire*. ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall. The New Press: New York, 1995: 294.

26. In her book *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-construction of American History* (1994), Darlene Clark Hine discusses in detail what slavery means for female slaves. She maintains that "unlike males slaves, female slaves suffered a dual form of oppression. In addition to the economic exploitation that they experienced along with black males, females under slavery were oppressed sexually as well. Sexual oppression and exploitation refer not only to the obvious and well-documented fact of forced sexual intercourse with white masters but also to those forms of exploitation resulting from the very fact of her female biological system. For example, the female slave in the role of the mammy was regularly required to nurse white babies in addition to and often instead of her own children. (Hine 1994:27).... Another major aspect of the sexual oppression of black women under slavery took the form of the white master's consciously constructed view of black female sexuality. This construct, which was designed to justify his own sexual passion toward her, also blamed the female slave for the sexual exploitation that she experienced at the hands of her master" (Hine 1994: 28).

27. See note 21 for a detailed discussion of this issue.

28. See note 20 for more information.

IV

29. In her 1998 dissertation "Whose Story Is It?: A Rhetorical Analysis of American Women's Slave Narratives in Fact and Fiction," Katherine L. Heenan asserts that

Beloved tells stories to help preserve historical memory and demonstrates how Toni Morrison focuses on meaning instead of literal truth. For her, it is a "remarkable exploration, extension, and revision of the nineteenth-century slave narrative" by revealing the "problems of familial separations and reunions, of identities lost and found, of abuse, sexual exploitation and rape, brutality, humiliation, and dehumanization" (1998:162). Her analysis is mainly centered on how *Beloved* serves as a rhetorical strategy to tell the story of slavery passed on. I would add that it is not simply an intended attempt to retell the same story. It bears something within itself that goes beyond what Heenan claims to be the merits of the novel. It has made the unspeakable speak, which is suppressed under slavery: sex and sexuality.

30. See Toni Morrison, "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation," in *Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Evaluation.* ed. Mari Evans. New York: Doubleday, 1984.

31. See Toni Morrison, "Memory, Creation, and Writing, Thought: A Review of Culture and Idea 59 (December 1984: 385-90).

32. Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu centers her argument on two shifts in neo-slave narratives in the twentieth century. First of all, she suggests, neo-slave narratives include gender in their works with an attempt to recognize women and motherhood for fuller humanity since this is invisible in slave narratives by male-authored narratives. Secondly, they shift their focus "from literacy and public identity to family" (13). They are not so much slave narratives as they are freedom narratives. For more information, see Beaulieu, 1999.

33. Even though Sethe speaks to Morrison's twentieth-century readers from the nineteenth century, she is not literally the speaker. Toni Morrison essentially stretches her imagination of the nineteenth century within the twentieth-century context and speaks for Sethe and other characters as well.

34. This also suggests how Toni Morrison is able to challenge even contemporary ideology.

35. See *Beloved* (p16-17) for descriptions of being raped.

36. *Beloved* is based on a nineteenth-century newspaper story about a black female slave Margaret Garner who killed one of her babies on her way to escape slavery.

37. The question remains, however, whether Toni Morrison gets it "right"; that is, in speaking for a nineteenth-century slave woman (Margaret Garner in particular, all slave women in general), does Morrison, a powerful twentieth-century novelist, go, too far in her descriptions of slave woman's sexuality ? Does she capture it accurately? Both questions we have no clear anwsers to. The other question, of course, that this paper has not addressed is that of Morrison's own agency as compared to Jacobs's agency (or relative lack thereof).

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