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The Expression of Gender Equality in Three American Narratives The Slum, Sab and Beloved

Yasmin L. Shariff

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THE EXPRESSION OF RACIAL AND GENDER EQUALITY IN THREE AMERICAN
NARRATIVES: *THE SLUM*, *SAB*, AND *BELOVED*

A Thesis

by

YASMIN LAYLA SHARIFF

Submitted to Texas A&M International University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2020

Major Subject: English

The Expression of Racial and Gender Equality in Three American Narratives: *The Slum, Sab,*
and *Beloved*

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August 2020

Major Subject: English

ABSTRACT

The Expression of Racial and Gender Equality in Three American Narratives: *The Slum*, *Sab*,
and *Beloved* (August 2020)

Yasmin Layla Shariff, B. A., Texas A&M International University;

Chair of Committee: Dr. Deborah Scaggs

The pages to follow examine literary representation of people of color, particularly women, in regards to racial and gender equality in a nineteenth century hemispherically American context. *The Slum* (1890), *Sab* (1841), and *Beloved* (1987), though from different countries, and time periods, present a continuum of the intersectional struggle for equality in the ongoing narrative of the Americas hemispherically. “American” and “Hemispherical” refers to North America, Central America, South America and the Caribbean in a political and sociological sense. These novels are set side by side to highlight the historical and societal similarities. The characters in this literature reflect American society in a variety of ways, from surviving slavery to living in relative freedom and from being voiceless in literature to various literary voices expressed.

In addition, the novels analyzed create a narrative for the subjugated specific to African-Americans and mixed-race people that highlights the importance of matriarchal voices. Also, the novels analyzed highlight a growing awareness of intersectional themes represented in literature. While *Beloved* is the “best” of the three works by today’s standards in regards to sensitivity to

the intersectional issues at hand, without the kind of representation in the earlier narratives, ideas about race and gender would be stagnant.

As a result of the growing literary awareness of intersectional themes one can examine *Beloved* as it provides profound subjectivity with the various African American matriarchal narratives creating a polyphony of voices. What links the texts are the author's attempts to confront racist and misogynistic paradigms and express a multitude of realities. *The Slum* by Aluisio Azevedo, *Sab* by Gertrudis Avellaneda, and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison contribute to the dialogue of racial and gender oppression in the Americas by providing a wide spectrum of women's narratives.

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Also, I must express my love and gratitude to my parents, Marcia and Habib Shariff, and brother, Tariq Shariff, for all their care and support. I hope I make you eternally proud. Dad, I wish to be the continuation of your dream that began in 1963 when you emigrated to the U.S. from Pakistan to attend college yourself.

Lastly, but certainly not least, this is dedicated to all who suffered and experienced subjugation, regardless of time or place historically, our struggle and our voices are one.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to be a woman writer in a culture whose fundamental definitions of literary authority are, as we have seen, both overtly and covertly patriarchal? If the vexed and vexing polarities of angel and monster, sweet dumb Snow White and fierce mad Queen, are major images literary tradition offers women, how does such imagery influence the ways in which women attempt the pen?

Gilbert and Gubar, *Mad Woman in the Attic*

Liberation Narratives

Literature can change minds and lives by inspiring agency, self-esteem, and purpose in readers. Literature also can transform our perceptions of the world and ourselves. For example, in *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), Douglass describes how he was influenced by abolitionist ideology in a speech by someone he calls “Sheridan,” which he read from *The Columbian Orator*, the only book he owned as an enslaved young man. Douglass describes the impressions of the speech on his young intellect as “a bold denunciation of slavery, and a powerful vindication of human rights” (40). Between that inspirational speech he read, newspaper articles and conversations he describes of occasionally hearing Douglass began to learn and understand what abolitionism meant. Douglass elaborates:

I got one of our city papers, containing an account of the number of petitions from the north, praying the abolition of slavery in District of Columbia, and the slave trade between the states. From this time I understood the words abolition and abolitionist, and always drew near when the word was spoken, expecting to hear something of importance to myself and fellow slaves. (42)

For Douglass literature enlightened him to the concepts of abolition. Reading, metaphorically and literally, lead Douglass to the paradigms that eventually inspired him to take the risk to escape from slavery. He states, “The light broke in upon me by degrees” (42). Literature had a gradual enlightening effect for him, inspiring him to eventually escape his treacherous living

This thesis follows the journal model of *Arizona Quarterly*.

conditions.

Literature with themes of liberation can inspire and at times define the human experience; an earlier example is the Exodus narrative, the Biblical story of Moses leading the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. This narrative is so central to the Abrahamic religions and played a major role in the African-American abolitionist and civil rights movement. With the example of the liberation story of Exodus, one can see the universal appeal of liberation stories, as well as the personal power these kinds of stories can elicit. In his book *Judaism: An Introduction*, Jacob Neusner writes, “If I think of myself as having gone forth from Egypt, I have to tell about myself personally the story of the Exodus, make the story my own. That means I have to translate my everyday experience into the heightened reality embodied in that story” (13). Neusner expresses how narratives of liberation are central to our humanity by illustrating how they inspire the individual and bring individuals closer together as groups. Similarly, Valerie Smith in *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative* discusses how narrative creation, rather than just the remembrance of stories, are empowering for individuals. Smith explains this concept, “Blacks who wrote accounts of their bondage and escape demonstrate link between language and power” (4). While Neusner and Smith are speaking in regards to specific populations, this same idea can be extended to all of humanity as liberation narratives can be found in a vast array of cultures throughout history. This illustrates one of the many ways that the past is not past, as narratives continue to live on in the mind and can help one create a personal narrative with the wisdom and inspiration one gathers from it. Furthermore, literature depicting atrocities and the social justice movements are reminders to the reader of the ongoing struggle for a more just world, whether those people lived a thousand years ago or twenty years ago. The novels *The Slum*, *Sab*, and *Beloved* are of liberation narratives as all three stories

highlight the voices of enslaved or formerly enslaved individuals long for and often work for liberation from slavery as well as racist and misogynistic paradigms. The multitude of voices of enslaved, or formerly enslaved, individuals in these narratives work as reminders to the reader of the struggle for freedom, the price paid, and the wisdom that can be gained from various perspectives.

With the aforementioned in mind, literature records history, as well as acts as a player in history when it reminds the reader that while many advancements may have been made for women's rights and racial equality, the struggle is ongoing. Much like the narrative of Frederick Douglass, these stories examined defy stereotypes and, sometimes, transcend systematic oppression although they are fictional. In addition, literature from different countries in the Americas, not only the United States, share important concepts on human rights while highlighting abolition, racial equality and women's rights.

These three novels are set in the nineteenth-century, though *Beloved* was written in the twentieth century, and illustrate a myriad of grave injustices faced by African Americans and people of mixed race. For example, *Sab*, by Cuban writer Gertrudis Avellaneda, is a Romantic novel, published in 1841, that confronts issues of racial and gender inequality. This narrative was published eleven years before *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), though it is lesser known in North America.

The heroic male protagonist of the story is an enslaved mixed ethnicity man named Sab. He is in love with a Spanish plantation owner's daughter, Carlotta, who he grew up alongside. She is also unjustly subjugated, in her case for being female. Another narrative that puts a magnifying glass to nineteenth-century issues of racial and gender inequality is Aluisio Azevedo's naturalist novel *The Slum*. This text describes the socio-economic injustice of

Brazilian society intertwined with racial and gender inequality. The most modern of these “case studies,” written almost a hundred years later, is *Beloved* by Toni Morrison. The protagonist of this novel is a formerly enslaved African-American woman who strives in extreme ways to transcend the hardships of her life. She is emotionally and metaphorically haunted by her past as she attempts to free herself (and her children) from slavery and create a better life.

The pages to follow analyze the evolving literary representation of people of color in regards to racial and gender equality in the Americas, in the nineteenth century, when the characters depicted transitioned from slavery to freedom. This literature depends on matriarchal narratives to sufficiently express this multitude of narratives. Specifically, the literature to be analyzed and compared illustrates the intersectionality of racial and gender equality that are parallel within North American and Latin American society.

The term “intersectionality” was coined by Kimberley Crenshaw, scholar of race theory, in regards to expanding the idea of feminism to include the realities of African American women in a way that results in antiracist ideologies. A more general definition may be that the term intersectional means the overlapping issues of race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group. In the article “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” Crenshaw explains, “The court's refusal in *DeGraffenreid* to acknowledge that Black women encounter combined race and sex discrimination implies that the boundaries of sex and race discrimination doctrine are defined respectively by white women's and Black men's experiences” (139). In this quote, Crenshaw is writing about a court case that reveals how African American women’s social inequality needs to be addressed in an absolutely dire and urgent manner. That manner that is the response for those interested in true equality would be intersectional.

All three narratives examine a convergence of racial and gender discrimination that can be examined as intersectional because they express the realities of women of color. In addition, matriarchal narratives and worldviews in the pages of the aforementioned narratives are integral to these stories. Particularly, intersectional matriarchal narratives. For example, while Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, written in 1987, has a large body of scholarship, it is not perceived within a larger context of where its narratives fit within the contexts of other African American and female narratives of the Americas. Furthermore, both *The Slum* and *Sab* are lesser-known novels with important matriarchal narratives that can lend much to one's perspective on the history of racial and gender inequality in American literature. Furthermore, the aforementioned novels give *Beloved* a historical context to use as a framework for the novel and future narratives of historically subjugated people.

A "Polyphony" of Voices in *Sab*, *The Slum*, and *Beloved*

Another vital feature these novels have in common is the polyphonic nature of the narratives within them. The term "polyphony," as coined by Mikhail Bakhtin, is when various characters voices narrate in a novel creating a myriad of perspectives and "truths." The multitude of voices result in a "plurality of equally authoritative ideological positions" in a narrative rather than just one "truth" spoken by one narrator (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 7). This is significant because a multitude of subjugated voices being equally expressed provides the reader a chance to understand and gain wisdom from various world views and subjectivities that have been historically marginalized.

While the numerous theorists referenced in the pages ahead are vital to this examination of the novels *The Slum*, *Sab*, and *Beloved*, Bakhtin's theories of polyphony are particularly central to this thesis. Various viewpoints expressed in a novel simultaneously existing side by side is what makes a narrative "polyphonic," as what exists within each of the narratives

aforementioned. In the chapter titled “Dostoevsky’s Polyphonic Novel” in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* Bakhtin describes Dostoevsky as a truly polyphonic author because of what he described as a “visualizing power was locked in place at the moment diversity revealed itself –and remained there, organizing and shaping this diversity in a cross section of a given moment” (30). The similar “diversity” of thought that is expressed simultaneously in the three stories set in the nineteenth century provides the reader with a complex perspective of the novel’s characters and themes. It is this multitude of subjectivities that are expressed in *The Slum*, *Sab* and *Beloved* will be examined in the pages ahead as they provide a multiverse of thought on slavery, racism, and sexism.

Historical Background

Although each country in the Americas has its own particular history, the narrative accounts of slavery and abolitionism in North America, South America, and the Caribbean share many profound commonalities. A hemispherically American perspective, as in covering North and South America, expresses the shared history of slavery, abolition, and women’s rights gives one a deeper understanding of the very roots of the countries of the “New World.” In an article titled “Hemispheric Studies” by Renee Hudson in *Oxford Bibliographies* it states: “The field tends to be dominated by literary studies, but a number of scholars have considered what a hemispheric framework means for the field more broadly, pointing to how it can reinvigorate American studies by highlighting transnational connections and decentering the United States” (1). The transnational connections in the three novels express the hemispheric history and themes of race and gender subjugation in the Americas.

Widespread use of enslaved people from Africa spread across the “New World” in the seventeenth century in colonies run by the British, Spanish, Portuguese, and French. Starting as far back as the early sixteenth century, the Portuguese transported enslaved people from Africa

to Brazil. As early as 1619, slave ships brought enslaved Africans to the British colonies in North America. Eventually abolitionist movements gained momentum in the nineteenth century in Britain and the United States. Often, these movements were intermixed with women's suffrage movements, especially in the northeastern United States. By the 1830s, Britain had ended slavery in its empire. Yet, in the Americas, the economies were rooted in agriculture and slave labor; hence, abolition would come later in the century. The southern part of the United States had an economy based in slavery from the cotton plantations at this time. In Latin America, economies were based in the sugar trade, which was very profitable, and subsequently, slavery did not end there until later in the nineteenth century. Edwin Williamson expands upon this in *The Penguin History of Latin America*:

The demand for labour in the burgeoning sugar industry of Brazil was to lead to an enormous expansion of the African Slave trade. The demand would grow a few decades later in the 1580s when planters in the islands and coastal areas of the Spanish Indies began to seek a replacement for vanishing Indian manpower. How many slaves imported into Brazil is not reliably known. The Bahia alone received some 5,000 to 8,000 slaves a year. (173)

Due to this immense reliance on slave labor, Brazil would not abolish slavery until 1888. In contrast, the Civil War ended slavery in the United States by 1865. By this time, the development of the so-called "New World" was in large part owed to the hard work of enslaved peoples from the African Diaspora. This shared diaspora history belongs to the Americas and has helped form Pan-American female archetypes whom rose out of the ashes of slavery.

In the Americas, women of color have contributed significantly to culture and advanced society into the unique cultural landscapes seen today. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, in both North and South America, women of diverse origins have risen in power, changing the political and social landscapes because of their hard work. While European and North American feminism is often studied and spoken about, South American feminism may be lesser known.

Virginia Sánchez Korrol and Marysa Navarro discuss shifts in South American feminism in “Women as Feminists and Workers”:

As early as the mid-nineteenth century, Brazilian feminist newspapers and journals such as *O jornal das senhoras* prioritized the “social betterment and moral emancipation of women.” Edited by former school teacher, Joana Paula Manso de Noroma, the journal operated on the premise that women were intelligent and capable and merited equality. The journal portrayed women as integral and contributing parties in the home, dispelling stereotypical images of the female as a doll-like spoiled, one-dimensional producer of children. (85)

Historically and culturally, women’s narratives have the power to be catalysts for change.

Besides the political advancement of women’s rights, African and mixed ethnicity women also brought spirituality, music, dance, and other contributions to the Americas where they took root and prospered. That is to say that women empower themselves and each other not only in the professional realms but also in everyday life at home and in relationships, as well.

While the above may sound “feminist,” feminist ideology was not perpetuated consciously by many African-American women and women of color but rather a sense of sorority and survival empowered women of color in hemispherical society. In *Women of Latin America and the Caribbean* (1999), Navarro and Korrol observe that “Feminism throughout Latin America and the Hispanic Caribbean directly benefited middle class women and drew support from an urban, professional, or white-collar sector” (88). Most African and non-white women in these societies were of a lower economic status and did not subscribe to any “feminist” doctrine for the most part; they simply tried to survive.

Sab, The Slum, and Beloved within a Historical Context

The novels *Sab* and *The Slum* address various sociological issues that African-American and people of color, particularly women, faced in nineteenth century Latin America. While for the most part these characters are not feminist, the female characters efforts to empower themselves and improve their lives are evident in the narratives through their sorority and

connection. In these two narratives, the nation-building and sense of identity built along lines of race, ethnicity, and gender in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Brazil are depicted. Women of color were enslaved or severely marginalized often living in abject poverty in nineteenth century Latin American. Both novels illuminate within their pages this systematic subjugation and dehumanization. According to Navarro and Korrol, in the Americas, movements for abolition and women's rights overlapped and were often intersectional:

In countries like Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Brazil, movements for the abolition of slavery in the last third of the nineteenth century paralleled attempts to integrate women into expanded educational structures. Emancipations for slaves, it was generally believed would spark awareness of the lack of consideration, equality and opportunity where women were concerned. (73)

Similarly, in the nineteenth century, Gertrudis Avellaneda (Cuba) and Aluisio Azevedo (Brazil) were already writing for abolition of slavery, racial integration, and women's rights. They both are examining intersectional issues in their literature through a polyphony of perspectives. In these two narratives, the nation-building and sense of identity built along lines of race, ethnicity, and gender in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Brazil are examined through various characters.

While written over a hundred years later in 1987, *Beloved* by Toni Morrison also examines slavery and the post-slavery period, though in the United States. The effects of slavery on African-American women is analyzed and expressed through a polyphony of voices much like the other two novels. However, the emotional and psychological struggles for African Americans, particularly women, are illustrated and analyzed with a variety in detail of their subjectivity. Morrison paints a much more detailed and emotional picture of her protagonists than in many of the aforementioned works dealing with racial and gender equality. However, in *Beloved*, there are parallel themes of identity, racial equality, and civil rights that are expressed through the narratives of the nineteenth-century African-American and mixed ethnicity

characters. The narratives of historically marginalized characters in *The Slum*, *Sab*, and *Beloved* are analyzed throughout this thesis creating a dialogue about the characterization of African-American and other people of color. However, the focus is more specifically on a polyphony of women's narratives that can be found in each of these stories that illustrates many of the intersectional issues at hand.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

As we have seen, the slave narrators illuminate the relationship between narrative authority and personal authority in places in which they transform received literary and ideological conventions.

Valerie Smith, *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative*

Introduction to the Literary Theorists

The Slum, Sab, and Beloved, though from different countries and historical periods, highlight the intersectional struggle for equality in the form of narratives, particularly the stories of women. However, the thinkers analyzing the aforementioned novels have varying awareness of the intersectionality of race and gender issues in these works. Each of the novels confront race and gender in the nineteenth century, yet, when examined through the lens of these literary theorists the narratives are illuminated with twenty-first-century relevance.

The literary theorists of marginalized narratives covered in the pages to come—Edward Said, Christine Sharpe, Mikhail Bakhtin, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar—provide the lens to view the gaps in racial and gender analyses in the three novels. Particularly, Bakhtin’s theories provide theoretical influence in this examination of three novels. However, the other literary critics provide a framework for addressing the racial and gender issues examined in the literature at hand. The objective of this literature review is to examine the literary critics that analyze marginalized narratives, often matriarchal, through an intersectional and polyphonic lens.

Matriarchal Narratives in Literary Theory

The literary canon of the West and its respective literary theory both have a deep-rooted history in Eurocentric patriarchy. Most of the literature considered classic and most often studied is written by European men and about male characters while being analyzed by individuals who do not see an alternative to this literary patriarchy. More recently in the late twentieth and early

twenty first centuries, literature has gained a multitude of female and multi-ethnic voices. As a result, more literary theorists have been examining the patriarchy and Eurocentrism of Western literature. In late twentieth century a slew of theorists started to examine and challenge that mono-narrative in literature and what they consider a patriarchal literary theory. Edward Said, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar and Valerie Smith are twentieth century writers in the forefront of that movement to bring more awareness of marginalized people within a literary context.

One book in the forefront of feminist literary criticism is *Mad Women in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, published in 1979. By analyzing both the patriarchal nature of nineteenth century literature and examining Victorian women writers Gilbert and Gubar provide groundbreaking literary criticism. For example, the writers examine the foundational paradigms of Western Literature and literary theory, “For Western Literary History is overwhelmingly male—or more accurately patriarchal— and Bloom analyzes and explains this fact, while other theorists have ignored it, precisely, one supposes because they assumed literature to be male” (47). By confronting the many concepts about literature and authors in nineteenth century literature from authors and literary critics *Mad Woman in the Attic* examines literary history and highlights a need for female narratives that are stereotypical and that break free from those constraints. Gilbert and Gubar analyze female stereotypes in Victorian literature, meaning that not all heroes are male and not all insightful authors are male in society’s chief literary movements. For example, Gilbert and Gubar point out that according to the literary critic Bloom “literary history is intensely (even exclusively) male, and necessarily patriarchal” because the critic focuses on literature being primarily about “war fare between fathers and sons” (47). In *Mad Woman in the Attic* this paradigm is proven to be both unnecessary and untrue. By examining profound female

authors and characters of the nineteenth century, Gilbert and Gubar express the power of female narratives. In *The Slum*, *Sab* and *Beloved* a myriad of female characters with powerful stories provide evidence that literature can have impactful women characters. Particularly in *Sab* and *Beloved*, matriarchal narratives are polyphonic and influential to the plot and development of the novels.

Gilbert and Gubar point out that “the patriarchal notion that the writer ‘fathers’ the text just as God fathers the world is and has been all-pervasive in Western Literary civilization” (4). To offset the inequality in the Western literary canon and the theory of that body of work, Gilbert and Gubar analyze female characters and authors in a nineteenth-century Western literary context. Often, the hierarchy of power found in literary thought includes a Eurocentric perspective, so there is no wonder that feminist works, and works that sympathize with equal rights for women, also evoke an egalitarian ethos for equality between races and classes. Abolitionist, feminist, and activist writers not only sympathize with the other cause, but also advocate for equal rights for all.

While Gilbert and Gubar analyze inequality in literary theory, they also examine the necessity for women to write narratives for representation in literature of women and identity-building for writers and readers alike. They write:

Because a woman is denied the autonomy—the subjectivity—that the pen represents, she is not only excluded from culture (whose emblem might well be the pen) but she also becomes herself the embodiment of those extremes of mysterious and intransigent Otherness which culture confronts with worship or fear, love or loathing. (19)

Gilbert and Gubar’s premise is that the objectification of women creates a literary muteness that ironically only representation in literature and by writing literature can women remedy.

Not only are *The Slum*, *Sab*, and *Beloved* polyphonic novels populated with women's voices, many of those characters in the narratives are unique individuals with powerful messages that go against the status quo of their nineteenth century setting. Gilbert and Gubar examine non-conformist characters in Victorian literature, also in a nineteenth century setting. While the race, class and even country of some of the characters in the three books analyzed in this thesis differ from the characters analyzed in *Madwoman in the Attic*, as women all these characters are restricted by many of the laws and the prevailing social norms of their society. *The Slum*, *Sab*, and *Beloved* are populated by a myriad of defiant women characters. Gilbert and Gubar examine the importance of these kinds of narratives. By describing how some female characters display a trait that Jane Austen calls "inconstancy," that is "a refusal to be fixed or killed by an author/owner, her stubborn insistence of her own way" (16). Gilbert and Gubar propose that this act of defiance from literary and societal norms is an act of agency and free will. In all three of the novels examined in this thesis unconventional women characters that display agency take center stage. In *Madwoman in the Attic*, there is a theory that a female character that displays "inconstancy" makes a statement to the reader, "From a female perspective, however, such 'inconstancy' can only be encouraging, for implying –duplicity-it suggests that women themselves have the power to create themselves as characters" (16). In other words, Gilbert and Gubar examine nonconformist female narratives that they believe will inspire women to live authentically rather than trapped within societal expectations.

While Gilbert and Gubar examine the underlying beliefs that continued patriarchal narratives in *The Mad Woman in the Attic*, Edward Said examines why the existing power structure is kept in place in Western literature. Said's book of literary theory titled *Orientalism*, published in 1978, intellectually dismantles the Eurocentric patriarchy in literature by studying

the Western literary world's perceptions of the Middle East, North Africa and Asia. While *Orientalism* is the title of the book it is also the phrase that Said coined to describe and explore paradigms established in the West that have historically placed those from the East as an "other" that is seen in a variety of ways that is to be dominated. In both *The Slum* and *Sab*, while the characters of color are not Middle Eastern or Asian, the manner in which people of color are treated as an "Other" and even dehumanized and objectified matches up with what Said identifies as Orientalization in literature. Particularly the characterization of women of color in *Sab* and *The Slum* criticize, and sometimes unwittingly portray, Orientalization.

While *Orientalism* focuses on ethnic and racial objectification in literature, Said does address the objectification and "othering" of women, as well. In the introduction to *Orientalism*, Said aptly describes the power relationship between the West and the East: "the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of complex hegemony" (5). Any kind of relationship based in subjugation is for power at its very core, if not for varying degrees and purposes. Of course, this power dynamic can be used to describe the historical relationship of the patriarchal literary canon of the West in regards to the characterization of women. The majority of the literary canon of the West consists of literature about men with the female characters in the periphery. These female characters lack depth and complexity and are often written off as insane, weak, or victimized. In addition, women writers are also rare in the Western literary canon before the twentieth century. These examples parallel the role of the subjugated voices of people of color, the East, in the literary canon of the West where stereotypes are common for these writers and characters that were rarely heard.

While not the focus in *Orientalism*, Said does confront the intersectional gendered aspects of dehumanization in Western literature. Said writes, "The Oriental was linked thus to

elements in Western society (delinquents, the insane, women, the poor) having in common an identity best described as lamentably alien” (207). Said expresses the convergence of bigotry and the intersectional aspects of dehumanization and marginalization as expressed in the literature of the West when characterizing people of color, Muslims, Jews, and women. He goes on to extrapolate on this dehumanization: “This is especially evident in the writing of travelers and novelists: women are usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy. They explore unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all are willing” (207). In *The Slum* the female characters are highlighted by the author Azevedo to criticize the objectification of women of color in Brazil. While Said mostly addresses nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British and French literature, this same assertion of the “male power-fantasy” applies to literature of the Americas of the nineteenth century.

Many of the scholars writing and analyzing the aforementioned literature leave out important elements of the narratives examined, like gender and racial discrimination converge. The theories of Christine Sharpe fill in the gaps the scholars who analyze *The Slum*, *Sab* and *Beloved* leave in their analysis of the novels. In her text *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016), Sharpe discusses life for African Americans in the aftermath of slavery under the specter of violence as it has been portrayed in literature and film. The main thesis of *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* is the theory that life in the United States post-slavery is metaphorically parallel to living in the tracks on the water created by a slave ship for African Americans and what is called the “wake work” to strive for agency and autonomy in the shadow of such historical horrors. Sharpe defines the wake as “the track left on the water’s surface, the disturbance caused by a body swimming or moved, in water; it is the air currents behind a body in flight; a region of disturbed flow” (3). For African-Americans to live in the “wake” means to

try to find one's own path while still marked by the tracks of the slave ship before. Sharpe allows the term "wake" to have multiple metaphorical meanings and another powerful definition of it is "To be in the wake is to live in the no's, to live in the no space that the law is not bound to respect, to live in no citizenship"(16). Here the "wake theory" (18) of Sharpe is equated to living with inequality and inhumanity. Sharpe also explains living in the "wake" as living in a mournful state post-slavery, "through them we think about the dead and our relations to them; they are the rituals through which to enact grief and memory" (21). This last definition for living in the "wake" fits extremely well with *Beloved* as the story is centered around and named after the dead baby who returns to her family and the situations that ensue sparked by the infanticide and slaveries aftermaths. Furthermore, the matriarchal narratives in *Beloved* are focus on living in the "wake" and healing one's self post-slavery. Sharpe calls living in the wake consciously and with a sense of agency "wake work". Sharpe writes, "We might make the wake and wake work our analytic, we might continue to imagine new ways to live in the wake of slavery, in slavery's afterlives, to survive (and more) the afterlife of property" (18). For Sharpe to know the wake exists, to acknowledge it , goes hand in hand with the "wake work" because for Sharpe understanding history is a key to understanding our current world and the wake work helps one not only "survive" but do the "more" that may even be unanticipated by the author. This is due to individual's potentialities being freed from past patterns, including the "track marks" left by slave ships on the African American communities' mind and soul metaphorically.

In *Monstrous Intimacies* (2010), Sharpe illustrates the relationship between gender and race in various novels and films in regards to the historic abuses against African-American women, including sexual abuse. She elaborates on how white males have used the power dynamic in sexuality to historically dehumanize African-American women through sexual

violence, like rape and coercion with violence. The introduction to *Monstrous Intimacies* begins with the analysis of Frederick Douglass' narrative's discussion of "Aunt Hester" which demonstrates the violence involved with the sexual abuse African-American women faced during slavery. Sharpe illustrates how Douglass parallels his aunt's behavior in this struggle to a Biblical Queen Ester and elaborates on a "stereotype":

So I begin with Douglass and the "bloody transaction" [...] that is Captain Anthony's sadistic and unexceptional in the world of slaveholders made, stripping, manacled, whipping and presumably raping Aunt Hester. It is one of the earliest scenes in the written narratives of the New World blacks that introduces and locates the conditions of the production of a fundamental familiar violence. (2)

Though this narrative of Aunt Hester the subjugated African-American enslaved woman becomes a symbol of the Biblical Queen Ester who survived incredible adversity during a time when her ethnic group, the Jewish people, were oppressed, lives within the home of the oppressor and eventually helps her ethnic group. Douglass equates his own Aunt Hester to a similar "type" of woman through his descriptions of her suffering, over many years of his writings, changes her name from "Hester" to "Esther". Sharpe states that "Douglass removes the reference to the blood-stained gate, changes Hester's name to Esther, gives her speech in addition to her "heart rendering" shrieks, and elaborates the closet from which he watches" (7). Much like Queen Esther is the Biblical story of the virtuous woman who helps her oppressed group from within the king's castle, Hester/Esther becomes a symbolic representative for the African-American women, who were tormented during slavery, within the homes of slave holders. The good works and competency of African-American women within these homes made these women representatives for other African-Americans. This "Esther type" is represented in literature of the Americas, for example, in *The Slum* the Queen Ester type is also depicted.

Furthermore, Sharpe continues to elaborate on how this control and violence used against

women of color is not limited to one country, but is an all-pervading theme in the life of the Americas for African-Americans. Sharpe elaborates on the subjugation on African-Americans post slavery, “That is, while all modern subjects are post-slavery subjects fully constituted by the discursive codes of slavery and post-slavery, post-slavery subjectivity is largely borne by and readable on (New World) black subject” (3). Sharpe identifies the Americas as the location for the most apparent and severe post slavery consequences that live on in the societies and minds of the decedents of Africans. This comment fits perfectly with the themes of *Beloved*.

She asserts that this objectification of African-American women’s bodies is prevalent all over the world but most obviously unhealed and seen in the Americas or “New World”:

Whether the body is in the Caribbean, the Americas, England, or post-independence Africa. That is, while all modern subjects are post-slavery subjects fully constituted by the discursive codes of slavery and post-slavery, post-slavery subjectivity is largely borne by and readable on the (New World) black subject (3).

Sharpe’s ideas contend that the psychological states of African-American s post-slavery, particularly women, live with history not as a part of the past, but an active part of the present. Sharpe confronts historical stereotypes of African-American women in American society and subverts the negative connotation of “stereotype” by using these “stereotypes” to demonstrate historical truths that literature expresses.

After the “Queen Ester stereotype,” Sharpe addresses another “stereotype” that brings together the specific realities of African-American women together in literature, the “mammy” type. When writing about the Republican Senator Strom Thurmond’s daughter, Essie Mae Washington Williams, she describes the memoir the illegitimate half black daughter wrote about the tragic relationship between her father and mother, Carrie Butler. Through this example, Sharpe illustrates a real life “mammy” stereotype. Sharpe articulates that this type is one that repeats in history and literature:

What remains hidden in this figure of the black woman in the kitchen (the mammy as stereotype) and in this familiar narrative are the nature of Butler's labors, the kind of sexual violation in which all the white men in the family, young and old have access to her body, and her role as the one who secures everyone in their place. (21)

Sharpe illustrates several "stereotypes" in *Monstrous Intimacies*, supporting the argument for analyzing racial inequality, as doing so is vital to telling the complete narrative to include that of women of color. In her books Sharpe addresses converging issues of racism and sexism for African-American females: enslaved women in the nineteenth century, to the children of enslaved individuals to mixed race females of the twentieth century.

Furthermore, this vindication of human rights by Sharpe includes diverse voices from within the African-American community to tell a more complete and fair narrative and not a narrow or dogmatic one. Similarly, *The Slum* and *Beloved* express a multiplicity of African-American female voices resulting in a myriad of women's narratives that provide a wider view of slavery and its horrors. Yet, it would be the themes in the narratives of *Beloved* that most closely represent the African-American community in the "wake" and doing "wake work."

An All-Inclusive Literary Theory:

A Multiplicity of Worldviews and Lexicons Expressed in Narratives

Mikhail Bakhtin's 1934 essay "Discourse in the Novel" examines the power of language, which is at the heart of any novel. The power and the message may vary, but the potentiality in the written word comes from the specific words used connotatively expressing a multitude of types of people and situations. According to Bakhtin, all language has a "taste" of a profession, a genre, or people, among a multitude of other subjectivities (293). This variety of characters and lexicons creates the stratification of language. While these ways of speaking and writing may overlap or coincide showing the commonality in some language used, more often, language has

nuances that uniquely express specific occupations and race, gender, ethnicity, and class in an overlapping manner. A narrative with diverse voices expressed will naturally have stratification of language like in *The Slum*, *Sab* and *Beloved* where a multiplicity of voices, both in the individual novels and all together, creates a heteroglossia for literature about the nineteenth century intersectional issues of race and gender, Bakhtin writes about the professional stratification that would logically include the language of the writers, including the characters they chose to highlight.

When authors themselves include the subjective narratives of historically subjugated people, they give voice to the voiceless. Bakhtin writes, “And even the very language of the writer (the poet or the novelist) can be taken as a professional jargon on par with professional jargons” (289). Naturally, the professional lexicons are given a high ranking in the hierarchy of language; subsequently, the more varied the professional writers are, the more legitimacy and respect are given to those narratives expressed and the language that comes with them specifically. In novels populated with subjugated characters, like *The Slum*, *Sab* and *Beloved*, the stratification of language creates a heteroglossia that is established in literature. Azevedo, Avelleneda, and Morrison show the progression of diversified author’s voices and the characters they give expression to through their narratives.

In addition to being a well-respected author, Morrison and her multitude of marginalized matriarchal narratives add to the cannon of African American writers, specifically slave narratives that are widely published and read. Morrison won the Pulitzer Prize for *Beloved* in 1988 and the Nobel Prize in 1993 further establishing African American writers and narratives. In fact, Toni Morrison was the first African American to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. Hence, writers who use diverse lexicons of marginalized people in their narratives, create

culturally diverse representation in literature that can gain legitimacy and respect for a wide range of writers and characters.

Diverse lexicons used in a story can be a result of a polyphony of voices. Bakhtin found the logical end of stratification and heteroglossia in the idea of a polyphonic dialogic and he found the exemplification of a polyphonic novel in the writing of Dostoevsky. In literature, the term polyphony itself was coined by Bakhtin for when authors include various voices simultaneously in narratives. In his book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984), Bakhtin refers to the idea of a polyphony, or many voices, novels that a multiplicity of narrators with varying perspectives. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, he defines and elaborates on a polyphony in a narrative:

A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness's, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels. What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousness's, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event. (51)

Narratives that gives representation to a multitude of characters, consequently, express a metaphorical multiverse of thought that can empower the voiceless, and those voices significantly alter the traditional narrative as well as views on slavery, sexism and racism in the nineteenth century. *The Slum, Sab* and *Beloved* each have a polyphony of narratives within complex stories about slavery, post slavery and intersectional struggles in the Americas; all these stories together provide a heteroglossia and polyphony of nineteenth century American narratives on slavery, racism and sexism.

Empowering Narratives

Another text that highlights the importance of narratives is *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative*, written in 1987 by Valerie Smith. While she may not be specifically

advocating for multiple perspectives in a single narrative creating a polyphony, she is proliferating the importance of marginalized voices expressed in literature, both fictional narratives and non-fiction narratives. In addition, one of Smith's theories is that writing one's own narrative is agency creating for the individual, especially for "Afro-Americans". When coupled with Bakhtin's ideas of polyphony in narratives, a multiplicity of marginalized narratives can emerge such as the polyphonic narratives expressed in the novels examined in these pages.

In *Sab* and *Beloved* several characters exemplify the powerful agency that comes from expressing one's narrative and how that can empower others as well. In *Sab* and *Beloved* the enslaved and formerly enslaved characters express their narratives to varying degrees and to different ends. The polyphony of narratives between the two provide the reader with a variety of forms of revolt against their enslaved status. In regards to this Smith wrote:

As we have seen the slave narrators illuminate the relationship between narrative authority and personal autonomy in the places which they transform received literary and ideological conventions. By seizing control of the narrative representations of their lives, they provide a figure for their earlier escape from their masters' domination. (44)

The self-definition and agency provided by creating and expressing narratives is multiplied when an enslaved, or formerly enslaved, individual chooses to defy the slave master and slave master's paradigms by defining one's self through narratives.

Furthermore, both the authors of *Sab* and *Beloved*, Avellaneda and Morrison, are women and of course Morrison, an African American woman, illuminates themes in their narratives that effect their lives. Considering the themes in both novels, it is easy to see the authors fictionalizing their own plights in these narratives. Smith expresses how fictionalizing one's life is empowering because it is a unique expression of one's existence. Smith argues that "slave

narrators and the protagonist-narrators of certain Afro-American writers affirm and legitimize their psychological autonomy by telling the stories of their own lives. My work centers on the paradox that by fictionalizing one's own life, one bestows a quality of authenticity to it" (2). In *Beloved* when Morrison explores the scars of slavery in women and matrilineal relationships, this fictionalized story can be one she sublimates her own healing through narrative writing. By fictionalizing the healing from the pain of slavery in one family, Morrison vicariously lives through these characters and their processes of healing and self-discovery, and so can the reader.

In addition to the concepts of agency that African Americans can gain from narrative writing, Smith also addresses Morrison's work specifically. Rather than just characters living in a white world, Morrison's characters often aim to heal their community, not just individually.

Smith comments on Morrison's earlier novels, yet this quote describes *Beloved*:

Morrison's black characters are especially vulnerable to the defeat that accompanies isolation; in both of these early novels she examines the complex economic, historical, cultural, and geographic factors that shape their problematic relations within the black community and the world beyond. (123)

In the narrative of *Beloved*, the main protagonists Sethe and her daughter Denver, are completely isolated from the world for a complex web of reasons including historical, familial, and economic. It is the help of the African American community that in the end helps the two protagonists be enabled to escape the clutches of their past.

While Smith examines the significant narratives expressed and truths exposed by Toni Morrison, she elaborates on how slave narratives are one way to enter the literary dialogue. In fictionalized stories like *Sab* and *Beloved*, the authors allow the characters to tell their own narratives, claiming their identity and agency in the narratives in various self-defining ways.

An Inclusive Theory of Literature

With Said's view on literature's history of dehumanizing and "Orientalizing" groups of

people, Bakhtin's theory of the variety and depth of language that gives voice to a polyphony of characters, and Gilbert and Gubar's insights into the patriarchal nature of literature and the need for female narratives, a more inclusive theory of literature is created. Coupled with two leading African American theorists, Sharpe's intersectional views of race and gender and Smith's consideration of the power of legitimacy through narratives, this literary theory becomes relevant and applicable to the three novels (*The Slum*, *Sab*, and *Beloved*). The inclusive lens of these literary thinkers achieves a sense of the vital importance of representation in literature.

CHAPTER III

THE SLUM

Too often literature and culture are presumed to be politically, even historically innocent, it has regularly seemed otherwise to me, and certainly my study of Orientalism has convinced me that (and I hope will convince my literary colleagues) that society and literary culture can only be understood and studied together.

Edward Said, *Orientalism*

Introduction to the Novel with a Prevalent Theme

The novel *The Slum*, written in 1890, by Aluísio Azevedo is primarily analyzed by scholars for the economic inequality in nineteenth-century Brazil. The title of the text, *The Slum*, or in Portuguese, *O Cortico*, elicits images of inner-city poverty. While commentary on class, and some on race, is highlighted in the scholarship on this narrative, the gender inequality that perpetuates the social, economic, and racial inequality in this society is largely ignored by the existing scholarship. Contrary to this lack of attention to the narrative's women's characters fails to see that the female characters, of all ethnicities, in this narrative illustrate the subjugation of women in nineteenth-century Brazil.

This narrative highlights a polyphony of voices from various characters, particularly women, leaving the reader to witness and decide what the story means when all the parts are put together. In fact, the majority of the characters of color in the narrative are women. One of those characters highlighted is that of a woman who is of mixed races, called a "mulatta" in the novel, by the name of Rita Bahiana. While Rita may not be Middle Eastern or fully African, like the female characters depicted in Said's examples, her objectification that is characterization exemplifies Orientalization in the narrative. While Said's examples are European literary examples in *Orientalism*, in *The Slum* Azevedo comments on the dehumanization and objectification women, specifically those of color, in Brazil in a manner that comments on their objectification and subsequent subjugation.

When Said is describing how the writer Flaubert depicts women, he illustrates a picture that could also describe the character of Rita. In the passage he writes, “Less a woman than a display of impressive but a verbally inexpressive femininity, Kuchuk is the prototype for Flaubert’s Salambo and Salome, as well as the version of carnal female temptation” (187). In *The Slum*, Rita (along with other female characters in the narrative to lesser extents) is depicted as “carnal female temptation” in parallel phrases within the novel. One example is when she is described as, “She was poison and sugar” (61). This brief description of Rita by the Portuguese immigrant character infatuated with her illustrates how she is something to be craved but not beneficial in his perspective, with the operative word here being “thing.” In fact, Rita is described often in a manner that illustrates how objectified she was by the European immigrants. One of the central ideas in the narrative is the systemic and sociological oppression of women of color in nineteenth-century Brazil, this subjugation of African-American women can be found all over the Americas, in the nineteenth century and beyond.

Yet, in spite of the wide spread oppression of women in 19th century Brazilian society, it is unmistakable that the hard work and sacrifices of the female characters are highlighted to juxtapose the treatment of women versus what they actually do. The women characters are under-appreciated and taken for granted, in spite of their integral roles in the narrative and society. Azevedo makes purposeful commentary through the female characters on women’s contributions in nineteenth-century Brazilian society that highlights this subjugated status. This is done by featuring a polyphony of women’s voices that are illustrated within this narrative resulting in a novel that creates a realistic portrayal of the second-class citizen (and worse) status of various women, particularly of African-American women.

An Unusual Voice in the Matriarchal Polyphony: Leonie

The polyphonic nature of the expression of women’s voices in *The Slum* creates a proto-

feminist stance in the novel, as various women's struggles and oppression are highlighted yet there is no agenda to prescribe a remedy for the societal ill. One of the most strikingly different characters of the female voices is illustrated by the character of Leonie, a prostitute who is financially well-off and loved in her community. Leonie is one of the few female characters in the novel not characterized as a victim of her circumstances. However, her only means to go beyond subjugation is depicted as selling her body highlighting the objectification of women to being portrayed as still objectified and used for her sexuality. In the "Afterword" by Alfonso Romano de Sant'Anna, Leonie is in one of its sub-chapters titled "Women-subject," meaning the women in the novel whom are not objectified or in an objectifying exchange; rather, these women have agency in their lives. This is illustrated when Romano de Sant'Anna writes that these female characters are depicted as "Women-subject" because they are women who are perceived in their society as someone rather than something. He describes this as they, "assert themselves as individuals" (215). While Leonie has autonomy compared to the other female characters in the narrative, she has no other means to power than through her very own dehumanization, as "female temptation," being her only social currency. In addition, she misuses her power to objectify other women. Sadly, with this particular sense of agency and financial independence comes a predatory behavior on a younger woman. Such behavior on the part of Leonie demonstrates that women are not inherently weak or innocent, but like men, may take on certain attributes when in positions of power. It is in this sense that Leonie's character is used as a proto-feminist character that illustrates that women can be as powerful and can abuse that power as criminally.

To further provide evidence that Leonie is unlike the majority of female characters in the novel, she has financial independence that provides her with self-autonomy. In the "Afterword"

Romano de Sant'Anna states women like Leonie “move away from the constant dependence on the male and begin to wield power by means of sex” (215). While various male characters exert their power through economics and violence, the females in this narrative that gain power do so through exploiting their sexuality. This power is economic even within her interpersonal relationships. In the narrative, this is exemplified through Leonie’s character with her profession of a high-class prostitute, and how she brandishes her will over others in her personal relationships.

For example, Leonie is depicted as being regarded highly by other women and seen as someone with authority. When Leonie first appears in the novel, she goes to visit close friends in the favela and is admired by many in the community: “Leonie sat in Augusta’s house, surrounded by a circle of washerwomen and children. There she held forth on serious topics, speaking calmly, in tones that showed she was a woman of experience and sound judgment, condemning wickedness and folly and applauding virtue and morality” (86). She is respected within the slum’s community, and the articulation of her worldview is encouraged. In spite of being a prostitute, because she is respected for having found a way to become wealthy through her vocation, Leonie’s ideas are accepted as correct and the obvious questions of her morality are overlooked.

One of the main characters in the narrative, Rita, who is also shown as a woman who uses her sexuality to empower herself and provide social mobility, comments about Leonie, “She’s her own mistress, as free as love itself. She doesn’t have to let anyone touch her unless she is in the mood!” (87). Rita admires Leonie for her autonomy, revealing that she is amazed at how the prostitute has freedom to love whom and when she wants. This amazement of Rita’s denotes that Rita herself does not always feel she has this same freedom or agency.

Leonie, and sometimes Rita, are the type of woman who rules over men or the masculine with their sexuality according to Romano de Sant'Anna. He writes, "The feminine rules when the masculine submits" (217). In this narrative the women's power over men is always when the masculine allows or concedes to a woman's sexual advances. This means that this power is still in the hands of men, so males have the metaphorical "upper hand," therefore does the feminine ever really rule?

As mentioned previously, there is a manipulative side to Leonie, showing that women can be victimizers, too. For example, the prostitute is the godmother to a young woman named Pombinha on whom Leonie dotes before escalating her behavior to sexual predation. In regards to the event that traumatized the young women in the narrative, the text states, "An excursion to Leonie's did her much harm. She brought with her an expression of intimate vexations that were never erased for the rest of her life" (110). This predatory behavior of Leonie illustrates that in Azevedo's world view, people in positions of power abuse and prey often upon others. This exemplifies the slum itself as a metaphor for the jungle with a survival-of-the-fittest worldview exposed.

Azevedo is a proto-feminist for giving a prostitute such an empowered role in the novel rather than the stereotypical disempowered view. However, he only depicts women in empowered positions because of the exploitation of their exploitation of their sexuality. Ironically, the very same means by which women are often objectified is the same through which women gain power. This accurate social commentary has an element of propagation of a stereotype. Another view of Azevedo could be that he is the very opposite of feminist as he sees women as having a very limited role in society. Romano de Sant'Anna states, "As typical of Realist-Naturalist fiction, women appear primarily as females who mate with the male for

biological and material motives” (214). While this statement is true, some of the female characters have a certain dependency on men that lends itself to ulterior motives, as evidenced by characters like Leonie and later Pombinha. The question that comes to mind is, is Azevedo illustrating societal ills or exposing his own view points?

Azevedo portrays characters through a complex lens. For example, Leonie’s lack of dependency on men, which affords her agency and respect, yet she is completely virtuous. While an anomaly in her society, in nineteenth American society in general, her power corrupts her. Rather than this character being depicted in a positive light, one should consider her illustration more as a powerful being whom misuses that power. Both Leonie’s positive and negative traits place her as an unusually powerful woman who is just as capable to be as successful, and as immorally predatory, as a man. This moral equivalence to men found in Leonie’s character is what makes her a proto-feminist character; while not an outright feminist character aware of the precedent she sets in society, she does demonstrate the equal potential power of women compared to men.

Predatory Relationships: Joao and Bertoleza

While Leonie is an example of a woman who uses her power in a predatory manner, the primary predator of the novel is one of the story's main protagonists and a male character named Joao Romao. In fact, the narrative begins with Romao, a Portuguese immigrant who is the founder and landlord of the slum. However, his role in the story cannot be told fully without Bertoleza, a black enslaved woman with whom he becomes involved romantically. Soon, Bertoleza entrusts Joao as her adviser, banker, and lawyer. Not long after he becomes her lover, he uses her savings, as stated by the narrative: “He purchased a small plot next to his tavern and store” (2). While Romao is obviously predatory in his relationship with his dishonest and manipulative behavior that benefits only himself, Bertoleza is a willing participant. Bertoleza is

portrayed as on the naïve side, she feels she profits from this union, as corroborated by the novel: “Like all colored women, she wanted to keep away from blacks and instinctively sought a mate of a superior race” (2). However, the tragic irony of this statement reflects the internalized racial paradigms that exist in Bertoleza’s worldview. To add to the illusion of beneficence, Joao even falsified documents saying she is now free from her former masters, but in reality, “The document was purely Joao’s handiwork” (3). This frees Bertoleza’s time up to work in Joao’s businesses that he supplements with her savings: “Bertoleza now played a triple role: vendor, maid and lover” (3). With the European entrepreneur Joao tricking and manipulating the hardworking Bertoleza, an illustration of the social hierarchy in nineteenth century Brazil emerges. A portrayal of European patriarchs parasitically preying on African American women of color, a portrayal that mirrors many aspects of the social hierarchy in other parts of the Americas, as well.

An Orientalist Relationship: Jeronimo and Rita

The Slum portrays various relationship dynamics in its narrative. Two strands in the tapestry that makes up *The Slum* are Joao’s response to Bertoleza and another European immigrant named Jeronimo’s relationship to Rita, the woman who was mentioned earlier as being envious of Leonie. The Rita-Jeronimo relationship symbolizes an exchange of women characters that results in a change of identities for the male character. Jeronimo is a Portuguese immigrant described as extremely hard working. In the narrative he is depicted as, “His honesty was proof against all temptations, while his way of life was primitive and simple” (40). In addition, his wife, Piedade, also a Portuguese immigrant is described as, hardworking, honest, and strong” (40). They have a daughter, Mariana, they are both devoted to and send away to a boarding school. One night everything changes when Jeronimo listens to some music played outside their home. When he sees Rita he is described as, “bewitched by a seductive song” (60).

Almost as if by magic all Jeronimo can think about is Rita from that moment on. He is described as feeling uplifted from the sight of her. The novel describes it as, “Jeronimo looked and listened, feeling his soul take flight through his enamored eyes” and that he “only has eyes for Rita” (61). Jeronimo’s obsession with Rita is heightened in the narrative and their relationship is depicted as one based in lust and not love. Their relationship progresses quickly and after several interactions, and fights with Rita’s paramour Firmo, the two move-in with each other. However, their relationship is not described as something spiritually beneficial but instead, at least for Jeronimo, it is described as something animalistic. For example, in one passage Jeronimo’s feelings toward Rita are described as, “the mulatta was pleasure, was voluptuousness, was the tart, golden fruit of the Americas, and his soul had learned to imitate the monkey’s lasciviousness” (147). Azevedo illustrates a parallel dehumanizing paradigm between Rita and Jeronimo to what is described by Said in his book. In *Orientalism*, Said describes this as a reoccurring structure of relationships to the world between the European male as such:

The oriental was linked thus to elements in Western society (delinquents, the insane, women, the poor) having in common an identity best described as lamentably alien. Orientals were rarely seen or looked at: they were seen through, analyzed not as citizens, or even as people but as problems to be solved or confined –as the colonial openly coveted their territory –taken over.” (207)

Similarly, Jeronimo sees Rita as something to take over or to eat like that “tart golden fruit of the Americas” she is described as. That is, be it on American soil or European that attitudes that fetishize and objectify of women of color continues to take place by European men.

While the Portuguese immigrant is described as descending downward from human to animal in spirit, Rita sees herself as improving her lot in life and raising her social hierarchy. With these character’s relationship Azevedo exposes the racist paradigms existent in 19th century Brazilian culture. In one scene, Rita describes her relationship with Jeronimo as “purification by

a male of a nobler race” (147). This reflects Rita’s own colonized mind and subsequent self-loathing as a woman of color. Both characters objectify the other through their own racist paradigms. Jeronimo compartmentalizes his feelings for Rita in a place for the basest of emotions and Rita perceives Jeronimo as someone innately “nobler” than she. Both perceptions are placed in the narrative by Azevedo in such a manner to expose the lack of true human connection between the two as Rita perceives the Jeronimo as higher than herself and Jeronimo sees Rita as something and not someone.

Both Piedade and Rita’s fates are hinged upon Jeronimo’s choices in the novel representing how women in the nineteenth century were dependent on men. However, Jeronimo does not make his choices out of anything virtuous but out of his basest desires. He chooses Rita to fulfill his own infatuation with the exoticness of Rita that he feels symbolizes the sensual pleasures he finds living in tropical South America. In addition, there is an interaction or transaction where both Rita and Jeronimo both feel they have gained something they didn’t have before from this relationship. This is also an attraction for both Jeronimo and Rita based in attraction to the “other” race. However, the two are not on an equal plane as Jeronimo has more earning power and is seen “nobler” than Rita, even by herself.

The Criticism of Societal Objectification of Women in *The Slum*

In *The Slum*, the expansion and development of Brazil under Portuguese settlers and the oppression of black and mixed race women depict the harsh reality of Brazil in the late nineteenth century exemplifying the social hierarchy based on race and gender. Moreover, in spite of being central to the novel, the women of color in *The Slum* are glossed over in the scholarship surrounding it. For example, in the Afterword by Romano de Sant’Anna for the novel, he states, “What stands out on *The Slum* is the social struggle and the description of the economics of the social trajectory of three types of Portuguese immigrant” (211). And while this

is part of the narrative there are very specific depictions of the women characters that express their individual struggles. While later in the “Afterword,” he analyzes the role of women in the novel, the analysis is brief. He comments on the objectification of some female characters when he writes: “The women are interchangeable elements, exchange currency” (215). Sant’Anna briefly addresses the dehumanization of women in the novel. However, a deeper analysis with textual evidence and details of the subjugation of women is missing. In a few, brief paragraphs, Romano de Sant’Anna writes a sub-chapter called “The Role of Women in the System” that is divided by a brief analysis of three types of women in the novel: “women object,” “woman subject object,” and “woman subject” (215). For the sub-chapter titled “woman-object” Romano de Sant’Anna explains that “the woman-object relationship is exemplified by Bertoleza, the feminine element which associates itself with the masculine (Romao) for the creation of the slum” (215). While this is briefly discussed, this paragraph does not examine the role race plays in the subjugation of women.

In the sub-chapter titled “Woman subject object” Rita is mentioned for her relationship with Jeronimo and the racially positivistic issues are evoked in one quote from the narrative. Sant’Anna describes this relationship as, “Rita is the metonymy of the tropical nature While the analysis of intersectionality in *The Slum* remains while Jeronimo is the symbol of the author calls the “superior race” (215). This is parallel to Said’s Orientalized woman who is treated in a dehumanized matter as he illustrates is exemplified in Flaubert’s writing, as well as in other European literature. This is illustrated when Said writes, “Kuchuk is a disturbing symbol of fecundity, peculiarity Oriental in her luxuriant and seemingly unbound sexuality” (187). Rita is described in a similar sexualized manner when Azevedo expresses Jeronimo’s perception of Rita as, “He understood that the mulatta’s head of glossy, sweet smelling hair concealed a nest of

black and poisonous vipers that would soon devour his heart” (62). In both passages the non-white women are described as sexual beings who are dangerous to the European males who they come in contact with. Rita’s sexuality is paralleled to the temptations offered by the snake in the Garden of Eden and all the other dark and evil meanings snakes have symbolically. Rita is depicted in a dehumanized form, as a Medusa-like threat, for both her race and her gender, to the Portuguese immigrant Jeronimo. By attributing a supernatural power to Rita, Jeronimo is no longer responsible for his treatment of her or his subsequent actions of abandoning his wife and child. Rita exemplifies Said’s “Orientalized” woman whose “female carnal temptations” metaphorically are the European man’s fall from grace.

To focus on a stereotype of over-sexualization and physicality is to animalize a subject and is easier to objectify the individual that has less worth that is an “other” to the hard-working European immigrants. This paradigm of thought entails what Christine Sharpe calls living in “the wake of slavery.” Sharpe explains that, “Living in the wake means living the history and present of terror, from slavery to the present, as the ground of our everyday black existence; living the historically and geographically dis/continuous but always present and endless brutality in our bodies” (*In the Wake of Blackness and Being* 15). When Jeronimo subsequently attacks Firmo with a gang of his Portuguese immigrant friends, he kills him like an animal in the streets. Firmo’s death is described in detail as, “He looked like a mouse being beaten to death with a stick” (146). Also, like an animal he is not given a burial but is “dragged to the edge of the water and they threw him in” (146). Rita’s ex-paramour lives in that wake of violence, live in a world of violence in the tracks of the slave ship like Sharpe had described, “the wake of slavery”.

When *The Slum* was written, in 1880, slavery was still legal in Brazil and while Firmo was not

enslaved, a person who had some African American lineage, he was subject to brutality at the hands of European immigrants.

As the only prominent character of color in *The Slum*, Firmo is also illustrated as an Orientalized person in his society not seen as a man but treated as an animal to use and dispose of as one pleases. Not only does Joao perceive Firmo this way, the mixed race man is also dehumanized by others of his community. His former paramour, Rita, reveals internalized racism in regards to Firmo, who is bi-racial like her. By feeling no remorse for Firmo's murder; rather, she feels her being with Jeronimo "purifies her blood" and as stated earlier in the novel, when asked if she would ever marry Firmo, says, "I'm not dumb! God forbid!" (46). While Azevedo critically exposes the many faces of colonized, racist social hierarchy with his characters, many of his characters also are stereotypically the types depicted in racist paradigms of his era.

The Positivist Paradigms in *The Slum*

In *The Slum*, written in 1880, Azevedo describes a social hierarchy in nineteenth century Brazil that is reflective of a dominant social theory called positivism. In *The Penguin History of Latin America*, Edwin Williamson explains that "Latin American positivism also absorbed the ideas of social Darwinism which posited a racial hierarchy in which whites were deemed superior to other races" (283). This anti-positivist sentiment primarily is expressed in the abolitionist movement of the late nineteenth century in Brazil, which Azevedo was part of, and the abolition of slavery there was in 1888. Early in the novel, this ongoing social dialogue is established when "There were some heated arguments around Miranda's dinner table whenever discussion turned to the abolitionist movement taking shape around the Rio Branco law" (Azevedo 17). The Rio Branco law of 1871 is also known as the Free Birth law, as it meant that children of the enslaved would be born free. While positivism was a dominant theory in Latin American thought, abolitionism was on the rise in Brazil, as well, and Azevedo was a part of that

movement as documented in *The Slum* and other works of Azevedo like *O Mullato*. Azevedo confronted the Positivistic racist paradigms of Brazilian society consequently exposing the social injustice in *The Slum*.

For example, one illustration of the social hierarchy is when after Jeronimo becomes infatuated with Rita and murders her lover, Firmo. They both rationalize the killing by projecting Positivistic racist stereotypes onto the gruesome even. The narrative states, “Firmo’s death cast no shadow upon their joy; both of them deemed it right and proper. The thug had killed so many people, he had done so much harm, that he deserved to die! It was only fair! If Jeronimo hadn’t done it someone else would!” (174). Firmo was murdered by Jeronimo because the Portuguese immigrant wanted to make sure that Rita did not go back to her on again off again lover, not for any altruistic reason. Furthermore, there is no evidence that Firmo killed anyone in the novel. There is obvious evidence of Rita and Jeronimo having an affair. This scene in the novel illustrates how indoctrinated into racist paradigms Rita’s character is by how she rationalizes Firmo’s murder with racist stereotypes so she can continue a relationship with Jeronimo. Rita perpetuates the popular positivist paradigm of thought by condoning her ex-lover Firmo’s murder by her current paramour Jeronimo.

Race is an issue explored by some scholars of the narrative of *The Slum*. To further illustrate, in “Race and Modernity in O Cortico by Aluisio de Azevedo” by May Bletz, the main idea analyzed is how the narrative confronts racist social constructs of the time and the positivist ideologies behind them. The article states in regards to the novels contribution to the 19th century abolitionist dialogue: “I examine in what way Azevedo in O Cortico participates in these debates, partly rejecting positivist racial theories of his time, but at the same time reinforcing others” (1). While the theme of racist positivist paradigms is a vital part of the subjugation of

people of color in the Americas, the article does not analyze the dehumanization of women of color in the narrative. Azevedo does confront positivist paradigms on race while perpetuating them. He obviously criticizes and also ironically perpetuates both racist and misogynistic paradigms.

Positivistic paradigms are also notably addressed in the novel with the tragic yet hard-working character of Bertoleza. In fact, one example of a positivistic stereotype in the narrative is characterized by the character Firmo as he is described as, “dapper, supple Mulatto, agile as a young goat. He was a first-class bully and braggart, arrogant, quick tempered, and fast as a whip in his capoeira movements” (50). Firmo is described much like Rita, with a focus on the sensual and physical and comparisons to animals and objects. Both are described in an objectified manner. Rita is described as a stereotype of the over sexualized black or mixed-race women when it states, “fickle as all half breed women...she had affairs with other men” (51). Both of the mixed-race characters in the novel are described as dehumanized and fetishized beings.

Meanwhile, both Jeronimo and his wife Piedade, Portuguese immigrants to Brazil, are described as hardworking, practical, and industrious. To further illustrate, Jeronimo is described as “determined and quick-witted. Within a few months he had learned a new trade” (40). His wife is described similarly: “Piedade was worthy of her husband. She was hard-working, good-natured, honest, and strong. She got along well with everything and everybody, laboring from sunup to sundown” (40). These same stereotypes reinforced in *The Slum* are the common tropes about people of color used to rationalize slavery and institutionalized racism in both North America and all over Latin America. While Azevedo sets out to depict the injustice in systemic racism thus exposing it, he also seems to be in danger of perpetuating some marginalizing narratives.

However, while Piedade is described in the positivistic stereotype of European immigrants she is also depicted as a marginalized individual as a woman. For example, she is illustrated as being “forsaken” after Jeronimo leaves her and their daughter, as evidenced becoming a drunk and a prostitute. Others in her community perceive her as a pathetic person. The following describes what Piedade is perceived like by others, “Poor woman! She finally hit bottom. She no longer caused but disgust and irritation” (200). Both Piedade and Rita’s fates are hinged upon Jeronimo’s choices in the novel representing how women in the nineteenth century were dependent on men regardless of race.

While Azevedo combats the racist beliefs of positivist and socially Darwinist thought, many of the characters in the narrative do continue positivist racial ideologies, including the women of color that are combatting it. All the male Portuguese characters are described as the hard workers while the female, black and racially mixed characters see the white males this way and perpetuate subservient paradigms for themselves. Racism is exposed by Azevedo as not only paradigm of thought perpetuated by those on the top of the hierarchy but also those on the bottom. With the plot of the story itself, one sees the tragic outcomes of the perpetuation of these archetypes in society. David Rosenthal, the novel’s translator, describes the text as “a powerful cry of outrage against bigotry, comparable only to *Huckleberry Finn* in North America” (Prologue xiii). Unflinching in its realist-naturalist description of the inhumane objectification, as well as deep nobility, of the characters in the novel, *The Slum* describes many issues of race and gender intersectionally that speak to the history of slavery and its aftermath that apply to Brazilian society, as well to other parts of the Americas.

Another example of an intersectional issue in North and South American society is the subjugation of enslaved black women domestically. This stereotype described is what Christine

Sharpe calls “the mammy as stereotype” (25) that is the familiar narrative of the enslaved woman who is one part domestic servant and one part wife/whore/mother. As the years go by, Joao becomes exceedingly successful off Bertoleza’s hard work. He also sleeps in the same bed with her at night. However, he decides to marry a woman from a rich Portuguese family, Zulmira, once he becomes wealthy and to search for a way to abandon her. By allowing the family she was enslaved with come for her, Joao has a way to get Bertoleza out of his life. Joao has the ex-slave master’s son come for Bertoleza:

She recognized her former master’s eldest son, and a shudder ran through her. In one horrible flash, she grasped the entire situation: She understood with the lucidity granted the condemned that she had been tricked, that the piece of paper Joao had shown her had been a fake, and that her lover, lacking the courage to kill her ,was returning her to slavery. (207)

Just as the narrative opens with Joao and Bertoleza, it ends with them, and with Bertoleza’s literal end. She is the symbol for the black runaway slave who seeks out a better life. She realizes that she never escaped slavery but finds that she only exchanged masters. That the man, the home, the kitchen that she believed to be hers were as fake as the falsified papers granting her freedom from slavery. Bertoleza also symbolizes those who have been dually objectified: for being female and for being of the African diaspora. She seeks to flee slavery again yet sees that she in the end has no escape. With a kitchen knife that is the tool of her trade and enslavement, she rips open her own belly and dies there in the kitchen. As the narrative describes, “Bertoleza leapt back as swiftly as a startled tapir and before anyone could stop her, ripped open her belly with one swift slash” (208). In this tragic scene the despair of the enslaved is depicted as the individual who would rather die than be enslaved. Concomitantly, the folly and hypocrisy of the abolitionist movement is also expressed when ironically a group of abolitionists arrive at Joao’s house to certify him as one of their own. The scene is depicted as such: “At the same moment, a

carriage pulled up outside. It was a committee of abolitionists in dress suits, who had come respectfully to deliver a certificate declaring him an honored member and patron” (208).

While Bertoleza at the onset fits the “mammy” stereotype, more accurately she fits in with the Queen Ester archetype, as she is the “other” who lives among the oppressor and teaches those in the African diaspora how to live and die with dignity much like the queen. In Christine Sharpe’s *Monstrous Intimacies*, she cites Frederick Douglass’s eyewitness account of the beating of his own Aunt Hester, later to be called Ester, in another analysis of this violent abuse:

Commemorated as the savior of the Jewish people, Esther is a racially passing woman whose proximity to power through the fact of sex secures the possibility and the right of survival of her people. It is the story of a woman’s intervention in the fate of her people by being positioned to be fucked and thereby get the king to act on behalf of the Jews. A story of resistance and a story of assimilation, Esther teaches Jews strategies for living in the Diaspora (11).

Bertoleza’s assimilation does not work out as well as hoped for. However, it is her money, hard work and diligence that helped create the successful businesses and the favela that Joao founded. This attempt at assimilation on Bertoleza makes one wonder how many other “Bertolezas” go unnamed in the foundations of American society hemespherically.

This Esther archetype comparison fits both aspects of Bertoleza and Rita in *The Slum*. Both characters are engaging in relationships with European colonists and assimilating into a new society, yet, for Rita it would be seducing Jeronimo with her “exotic” looks, securing her future in Portuguese-Brazil and for Bertoleza, she attempts to model an “escape” from slavery through her hard work. There is no doubt that Rita being the character with a less dire future is to be attributed to her race, being Mulatta is more favorable in her society.

In addition, Bertoleza can be analyzed as illustrating the “mammy stereotype,” as “the other” whom lives among the oppressor to show her society how competent and good “the other” is by being proficient in domestic activities, yet never good enough to be truly equal. The

mammy archetype is exemplified through Bertoleza's hard work and labor in the kitchen, business and home of Joao Romao and it is defined as "mammy" when it includes her sharing his bed while concomitantly working for him like a horse. Christine Sharpe states, in regards to another narrative that fits here, "What remains hidden is the kitchen (the mammy as stereotype) and in this familiar narrative are the nature of Butler's labors, the kind of sexual violation in which all the white men in the family, young and old, have access to her body, and her role as the one who secures everyone in their place" (*Monstrous Intimacies* 21). Similarly, Bertoleza is in the kitchen working all day for her partner, Romao, business's which she sees no monetary gain from and shares a bed with him at night while he secretly contemplates killing her, all of this happens in a manner that secures her place in his life and in society. While Bertoleza believed she was Romao's partner, she learns that her intimate relationship to him only secured her position as mammy, sans children. When Romao becomes financially successful, he trades her in for a daughter of a wealthy Portuguese immigrant. In *The Slum*, regardless of race, women are illustrated as interchangeable in nineteenth Brazilian society subsequently placing women low in the social hierarchy of that community.

Women's Inequality as Expressed in *The Slum*

This oversight of the women's rights issues in *The Slum* is typical in the scholarly and popular views of the narrative. For example, in the 2000 *New York Times* book review of *The Slum* by Scott Malcolmson, there is no mention of the subjugation of women, particularly women of color that the novel depicts. Malcolmson states, "*The Slum...a Great American Novel with great American themes, notably greed and race*" (1). While greed and race do play prominent roles in the narrative, they are not the only motifs in the narrative, as the different women in the story experience subjugation in a variety of ways. In "Experiencing the Modern American City and Addressing the Slum in the United States and Brazil" *The Slum* is referred to

as, “a trenchant analysis of Belle Époque capitalism” (59). While *The Slum* depicts the formation of the slum as being rooted in predatory Capitalism in the 19th century, the effects on different groups is also examined. May Bletz, in “Race and Modernity in *O Cortico*,” honestly depicts the novel within its historical context of racially-based subjugation. Bletz argues that the narrative is a confrontation of racism by identifying and exposing who the victims and the executioners are. In the article, she states, “*O Cortico* is a deeply pessimistic reflection of the social ills that plagued the Carioca society of the period right before Abolition, the 1870’s” (2). The article discusses race and class, and specifically racial inequality, the more specific features of this pre-abolition society are not analyzed; specifically the subjective experiences that women of color experience daily.

The narrative of *The Slum* centers on the birth of the slum, or favela as it is in the Brazilian Portuguese. It details how society results from the social conflict just as it creates it. Yet, much of the scholarship on *The Slum* bypasses that social conflict in regards to half of its population, women. Furthermore, women of color are an important contributing force of the novel with their polyphony of various narratives as there are for more prominent women of color in the story than men of color.

While the novel exemplifies the intersectional nature of the subjugation of black and racially mixed women reflected in the Americas hemispherically in the nineteenth century examination of these matriarchal characters is marginal. Another critic, David Rosenthal, who translated and wrote the forward for *The Slum*, analyzes the character’s narratives as a microcosm of the story of the Americas as many of the themes in the narrative of *The Slum* are parallel issues in Brazil and other North and South American countries. Rosenthal states, “For North Americans, hitherto unaware of *The Slum*, the picture it paints of a society so similar to

ours and yet so different should be fascinating” (xv). As the racial inequality depicted in Brazil in the 19th century mirrors ours in many aspects in the United States, so do the class structures in 19th century North and South America. While most scholarship on *The Slum* misses the mark when it comes to discussing gender inequality, the narrative addresses the social inequality of women of color in the Americas hemespherically.

Latin American Positivism as Expressed in *The Slum*

The ideology that keeps the social hierarchy, oppression and objectification perpetuated in Brazil in the nineteenth century is the positivist paradigm that perpetuated pseudo-scientific ideas about race in Latin America. As stated in *The Penguin History of Latin American History*, “The attitude of Latin American positivists towards the question of racial difference was conditioned by Herbert Spencer’s evolutionary theories of social development and racial determinism” (Williamson 299). Latin American Positivism that results in racism is expressed in the narrative through both the treatment of the characters of color and in the characters own thoughts and behaviors. When Rita longs to “purify her blood” (47) with the cheating and objectifying Portuguese Jeronimo, or when Bertoleza “stays away from blacks” (2) and gets romantically involved with the Machiavellian Joao Romao, the positivist mentality of the black female characters also perpetuate systemic racism. This is not to say that the white characters themselves, or the narration of the story, do not propagate racist ideologies and its socially Darwinist views; they do. Positivist attitudes and beliefs towards race are accurately depicted and reflect some of the attitudes perpetuated in *The Slum* as Williamson explains:

Certain races were better adapted to the struggle for survival than others. The Nordic races were the fittest; Latins were less capable; further down the line came colored people such as the Amerindians; last of all came the blacks. People of mixed blood, of which there where huge numbers were woefully degenerate. (299)

The depiction and characterization of Rita and her lover, Firmo, is a stereotype of the person of color who is not as industrious as the European characters per the popular positivistic belief in the 19th century.

Azevedo is concomitantly anti-positivist, as he obviously criticizes the positivist paradigms of his time and makes a heart-breaking plea for abolition with the character of Bertoleza. However, his support for racial equality, while still preserving some of the same positivist stereotypes that perpetuates racial inequality, results in the narrative's message becoming subverted at times. However, the various women's narratives in *The Slum*, while at times perpetuating stereotypes, provide a deeper analysis that exposes the pain and power behind these female characters. Even Geronimo's slighted Portuguese ex-wife Piedade becomes a drunken, bitter prostitute upon the dissolution of her marriage spiraling downward with her daughter Senhorinha:

It was only because of Pombinha's charity that there was food on Piedade's table, since no one else would entrust clothes to her or give her any work. Poor woman! She had finally hit bottom. She no longer caused pity but disgust and irritation. Her last vestiges of self-respect had been stamped out: she was about in rags, indifferent to her appearance and always drunken with a gloomy, morbid drunkenness that never dissipated. (201)

By a polyphony of women's voices, Azevedo provides an opportunity for the reader to examine the power structures that subjugate women in nineteenth century Brazil regardless of race.

Women's Inequality as Expressed in *The Slum*

At the bottom of the social hierarchy in *The Slum* are women, especially females of color who are subjugated and dehumanized the most. However, this issue is seldom written about in the examination of the novel. This oversight of the women's rights issues in *The Slum* is typical in both the scholarly and popular views of the narrative. In "Experiencing the Modern American City and Addressing the Slum in the United States and Brazil", *The Slum* is referred to as, "a

trenchant analysis of Belle Époque capitalism” (59). Most of the scholarship on *The Slum* examines the narrative as a critique of capitalism. Another example is in Malcolmson’s book review of *The Slum*, there is no mention of the subjugation of women, particularly women of color that the novel depicts. Malcolmson states, “*The Slum*...a Great American Novel with great American themes, notably greed and race” (1). While greed and race do play prominent roles in the narrative’s explanation of the slum’s inception, this is not the only motifs in the story, as the different women’s experiences are integral to the plot and thematically.

While *The Slum* depicts the formation of the slum as being rooted in the predatory Capitalism of the 19th century, the effects on different groups is also examined. May Bletz, in “Race and Modernity in *O Cortico*,” honestly depicts the novel within its historical context of racially-based subjugation. Bletz states that the narrative is a confrontation of racism by identifying and exposing who the victims and the executioners are. In the article, she states, “*O Cortico* is a deeply pessimistic reflection of the social ills that plagued the Carioca society of the period right before Abolition, the 1870’s” (2). The article discusses race and class, and specifically racial inequality, the more specific features of this pre-abolition society are not analyzed, specifically the subjective experiences that women of color experience daily.

In the article “Zola in Rio de Janeiro” by Lucia Sa, the themes of the novel are illuminated in various aspects. Discussion of gender is nowhere to be seen, as the novel is defined as “generally considered to be the most important novel of Brazilian Naturalism. For Azevedo’s novel does not fit the ‘bedroom’ model, as it discusses social relations between different classes, and even slavery and abolition” (4). Sa, like many others who analyze *The Slum*, overlooks the gender inequality depicted. Sa goes on to analyze the social inequality due to class and the resulting formation of the Brazilian slums. The article states, “It is not Azevedo’s

depiction of social conflict, however, that receives most praise from critics: the overwhelming majority of them list as the most definitive quality of the novel its capacity to portray the movement of the crowds and collective forces” (4). This narrative illustrates the birth of the slum, or favela as it is in the Brazilian Portuguese. It details how society expands financially from the social conflict just as it creates and perpetuates more chaos. Yet, to bypass what that social conflict is by half of its population, women, is still to not give voice to a subjugated group that is an important contributing force of the narrative.

Furthermore, David Rosenthal who translated and wrote the foreword for *The Slum*, analyzes the character’s narratives as a microcosm of the story of the Americas as many of the themes in the narrative of *The Slum* are parallel issues in Brazil and other North and South American countries. Rosenthal states, “For North Americans, hitherto unaware of *The Slum*, the picture it paints of a society so similar to ours and yet so different should be fascinating” (xv). As the racial inequality depicted in Brazil in the 19th century mirrors ours in many aspects in the United States, so do the class structures in 19th century North and South America. While most scholarship on *The Slum* misses the mark when it comes to discussing gender inequality, the narrative addresses the social inequality of women of color in the Americas. The novel exemplifies the intersectional nature of the subjugation of black and racially mixed women through Bertoleza and Rita that is reflected in the Americas in the nineteenth century.

Azevedo’s Social Criticism of Nineteenth Century Brazil

Azevedo is anti-positivist as he obviously criticizes the Social Darwinist and Positivist paradigms of the nineteenth century making a heartbreaking plea for abolition and racial equality. Yet there still is perpetuation of some positivist stereotypes in the novel. For example, one of *The Slum*’s main characters is Joao Romao who is depicted as hardworking and industrious. In fact, he is the landlord of the “slum” the characters of the novel live in. He is

among a few other Portuguese immigrants that are described as hard-working. However, it is stated, “Bertoleza worked as hard as her lover” (2). This illustrates how the novel highlights the inequality in Brazilian society for black women who work just as hard as white men.

For example, Bertoleza’s character embodies more than just an individual character, but the archetype of the martyred, hardworking figure who is subjected to abuse and neglect in spite of giving her best efforts and building up of society and other individuals. Bertoleza represents both the plight of African-American individuals in the Americas, as well as the plight of women’s objectification and abuse.

Rita is character also objectified by a European immigrant in *The Slum*. One of the main male Portuguese characters, Jeronimo, who is her paramour objectifies her. This objectification is based through his male, European lens as he represents another archetype of the European settlers. Edward Said wrote about the "Orientalization" of Middle Eastern women and one can see a parallel objectification of black and mixed ethnicity women by Europeans in the Americas. This “Orientalization” is precisely how Jeronimo behaves regarding Rita. This “Orientalization” of Rita begins with her dancing being paralleled to “a green snake” (61). Rita is compared to a serpent which has a connotation of evil, much like the snake in the Biblical Garden of Eden that caused the fall from Paradise for Adam and Eve. This objectification is told through the perspective of the narrator and Jeronimo when he first sees her. Earlier in the narrative he sees her hair as full of snakes, so this serpent motif repeats to enforce this dehumanized and demonized perception of women of color. Although the tone of how Jeronimo is illustrated exudes his objectification of the “other,” there seems to be a fine line where this perspective of the antagonist begins and ends with the narration, which is demonstrated in the scene when Jeronimo first views Rita:

The Mulatta embodied the mystery, the synthesis of everything he had experienced since his arrival in Brazil. She was the blazing light of midday; the fierce heat of the farm where he had toiled; the pungent scent of clover and vanilla that had made his head spin in the jungle; the palm tree, proud and virginal, unbending before its fellow plants. She was poison and sugar. (Azevedo 61)

This illustrates how Jeronimo's objectifying perception of Rita, where there is no desire to know her or perceive her as a person, as much as to dominate her. She is seen through only a sexual lens by Jeronimo. This is illustrated by the animalistic and sensual ways he perceives Rita.

In *The Slum*, the tendency to fetishize African-American and mixed ethnicity female bodies in Western literature is exemplified by the author's depiction of Jeronimo's obsession with Rita's dancing and physical demeanor. This obsession of Jeronimo's is ruinous for his wife and daughter. Jeronimo's narcissism is portrayed in the character's objectification of the women in his life and lack of concern for anything other than himself. Furthermore, Jeronimo conquers Rita which symbolically can be related to the way the land was taken selfishly by settlers, without much care or consideration for its consequences on others and without respect for the land itself. Though both of the female protagonists of *The Slum*, Rita and Bertoleza, illustrate the despair and lack of agency at times, they also exemplify the strength and influence of black and mixed-race women in nineteenth century American society. Rita and Bertoleza, exemplify strength despite the hardships in their lives due to racial prejudice, misogyny, and economic status.

A Polyphony of Narratives: Objectified Women in Nineteenth Century Brazil

Azevedo portrays the subjugated status of women in nineteenth century Brazil. Even the daughter of a wealthy Portuguese aristocrat, named Zulmira, is objectified as she is part of an arranged marriage to marry Joao Romao later in the narrative, she is treated like a pawn in a rich man's game. As stated in the "Afterword" about Zulmira, "She will also act as a steppingstone for Romao, in this case no longer within the simple group, but the complex one. The passage

from one group to another requires the presence of a female who functions as a mediating element” (215). This explains that marriage in nineteenth century Brazil often moved families from one social status to another by using the daughters as the “pawns” in a metaphorical chess match. Although not explicitly expressing it, Azevedo draws a parallel between enslaved people and women by illustrating how females, black and white, are dehumanized in nineteenth century society (particularly in marriage) and other domestic partnerships.

The most tragically subjugated character in the narrative is Bertoleza as a hard-working woman who in addition to being enslaved had a business on the side so to buy her freedom. While someone could mistake Azevedo’s characterization of Bertoleza as demeaning and affirming racist ideas her actual portrayal says otherwise. In spite of the wide spread oppression of women in 19th century Brazilian society, it is unmistakable that the hard work and sacrifices of the female characters, like Bertoleza, are highlighted to juxtapose the treatment of and perception of these women versus what they actually do. From Bertoleza working tirelessly in Romao’s businesses and at home to Piedade who is described as hard working as Jeronimo, women characters are under-appreciated and taken for granted, in spite of their integral roles in society. While Bertoleza’s character is the most tragic the objectified and subjugated status of the other women in the narrative reveals a cruelly unequal social system.

Azevedo makes purposeful commentary through the female characters on women’s contributions in nineteenth-century Brazilian society that highlights this subjugated status. The multiple female characters in the narrative illustrate that there is not just one story of subjugated women but various and of many races and ethnicities. This is done by featuring a polyphony of women’s voices that are illustrated within this narrative resulting in a novel that creates a realistic portrayal of the second-class citizen (and worse) status of various women, particularly of

African-American women. The enormity of the subjugation and objectification of women in nineteenth century Brazilian society is highlighted by Azevedo in the novel. Yet, the complexity of the characters' lives all intertwined expresses a polyphony of voices that point to a larger truth, inequality, with no clear-cut answers or recommendations.

CHAPTER IV

SAB

Men will say it is my own fault that I have been unhappy; because I have dreamed of things beyond my reach, because I have longed to gaze on the sun, like an eagle. Is it my fault if God has given me a heart and soul?

Gertrudis Avellaneda, *Sab*

An Introduction to the Novel and the Author

Much like *The Slum*, *Sab* by Gertrudis Avellaneda is a Latin American novel of the nineteenth century that analyzes race and gender inequality, and is lesser known in North America. In fact, *Sab* is the oldest of the three novels discussed in this thesis. However, it confronts sexism much more directly than *The Slum* and is more straightforward in its condemnation of slavery. Set in pre-abolition Cuba, the narrative was published in Spain in 1841, it was highly controversial for its time. The narrative confronts both racism and sexism in a direct manner and Avellaneda is very straightforward in expressing her convictions through the characters.

Sab is a novel ahead of its time as it is both abolitionist and feminist. Not only is the novel progressive for nineteenth century Latin America, it was published eleven years before *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, making it an early piece of abolitionist literature for the Americas. Furthermore, Cuba did not abolish slavery until 1886, one of the last countries in the American continent to do so. *Sab's* place as an important piece of abolitionist literature yet lesser known status in North America is discussed by the novel's translator and author of the introduction Nina M. Scott:

In past discussions of *Sab* with scholars of abolitionist literature of the United States, I noticed that few of them knew that a contemporary school of antislavery literature existed in Cuba; they were also unaware that Avellaneda published *Sab* eleven years prior to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or Life among the Lowly* (1852). (xvii)

When this novel is examined within its historical context, it becomes even more profound as the feminist, abolitionist masterpiece it is. When *Sab* is examined within the context of the Americas the narrative becomes a ground-breaking work that connects to future slave narratives of the Americas. Furthermore, both novels are matriarchal narratives with female authors with radical abolitionist messages and a narrative structure unlike most male authors, giving legitimacy to the idea that literature by women breaks up the power structure created and held in place by men.

The life of Avellaneda herself provides insight into the novel and its profundity within a historical context as she was as revolutionary as her writing. In *Mad Woman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar describe the legacy and debt owed to nineteenth century women writers as, “contemporary women now attempt the pen with energy and authority, they are able to do so only because their eighteenth and nineteenth century foremothers struggled in isolation that felt like illness, alienation that felt like madness” (51). Avellaneda herself “struggled in isolation” (51) to get her revolutionary message across in the nineteenth century. While in Spain, she did make a living as a writer, though unusual for her time. However, when she aggressively tried to get acceptance into the Royal Spanish Academy she was denied. In the introduction to *Sab* it states that, “apart from the generally conservative attitude many academicians held on the gender issue, her defiant independence and flaunting of social convention very likely also influenced the vote” (XVI). Avellaneda lived a nonconventional life with many trials and her writing reflects that.

Details of Avellaneda’s life provide insight into her novel and the characters, as well as, the debt owed to the nineteenth century “foremothers” of literature. The ideas of Gilbert and Gubar on both the necessity of women writers as well as characters that go beyond common female tropes are exemplified within this narrative. In many aspects one can see Avellaneda write herself into the central female characters of her novel, Carlotta and Teresa, to express her

beliefs about racism and sexism. The central ideas in *Sab* are the commonality in struggle both people of color and women have in the struggle for equal rights.

Gertrudis Avellaneda was born in Camaguey, Cuba to an aristocratic Spanish father and wealthy Creole mother in 1814. When she was a child, her father died, and her mother remarried within a year to another wealthy Spanish military man. As stated in the Introduction of *Sab*, Avellaneda did not like her stepfather: “Whether because of his personality or the emotional shock of losing a dearly loved parent, Gertrudis disliked Escalada from the beginning” (xii). Another perspective to take is that Avellaneda perceived problems in her mother’s remarriage that affected her perspective about her step-father. Overall, it does seem that many issues that Avellaneda perceived her mother wrestle inspired the themes in *Sab*. For example, Avellaneda may have perceived inequality and dependency in the relationship. This includes her mother may have had financial dependency on her husband, Escalada. It has been documented that Avellaneda particularly hated being financially dependent upon her step-father and the issue of females financial dependency on males is an issue discussed in *Sab* (xii). Avellaneda moved to Galicia, Spain with her mother, step-father and brother but quickly relocated to Sevilla and Madrid where she had paternal relatives. In the South of Spain, Avellaneda wrote and published many poems, plays and the novel *Sab*. Ironically, Avellaneda’s writing was banned in her native Cuba. In the introduction, the text states that “the Cuban National archives classifies the first (*Sab*) as containing ‘doctrines subversive to the system of slavery on this Island and contrary to moral good habits; and the second (*Dos mujeres*) for being plagued with doctrines prejudiced to Our Holy Religion and attacking therein conjugal Society and canonizing adultery” (“Documents” 350) (xv). Avellaneda’s writing was controversial for the conservative, slave holding society in Cuba in the first half of the 19th century. However, with her husband,

Avellaneda returned to Cuba in 1859. It is said that these were productive years for Avellaneda: “Avellaneda wrote actively during these years in Cuba, turning out a number of novels, plays, and folk legends. In 1860, she founded a short-lived women’s magazine. The *Album Cubano de lo Bueno y lo Bello*” (xvii). Her women’s magazine was the first of its kind in Cuba. After this triumph, Avellaneda eventually returned to Spain to write more and was laid to rest in Seville in 1873 (51). Details of Avellaneda’s life provide insight into her novel and the characters, as well as the debt owed to the nineteenth century “foremothers” of literature.

Furthermore, the narrative itself is heavily matriarchal even with the main protagonist being a male as there are various strong and influential female voices in the narrative. In this novel, the protagonist, also named Sab, is half African-American and half European, and his love interest is an aristocratic woman of European decent, Carlota. The plot and action largely center on Carlota. By making Sab and Carlota the main characters in the narrative, Avellaneda places race and gender front and center by illustrating the parallel between racial and gender subjugation. In fact, Sab’s enslavement and Carlota’s oppression as a woman are paralleled in the novel by having both characters share the protagonist role, illustrated in the introduction: “Another aspect unique to her text is the parallel which Avellaneda draws between women and slaves, as is the interplay between issues of gender, race and types of social marginalization” (xxiv). Both characters exemplify how marginalization can limit the life choices and hurt individuals despite their having many virtues. Both protagonists, Sab and Carlota, parallel each other and symbolize the corresponding oppression between women and people of color in not only Cuba but most societies at that time. Both groups, people of color and women were treated as possessions that could not choose their own fate. For women in the nineteenth century, that subjugation was through arranged marriages and for African-Americans and people of mixed

race, that subjugation was primarily through slavery. The author manages to not compare the two forms of oppression, or find an equivalency, by giving Sab a voice in the narrative that expresses the infinitely deep sorrow of his existence while concomitantly empathizing with Carlotta's unfortunate societal obligations.

The Angelic Female Protagonist

Carlota, as a lead character, is a typical romantic lead female in a narrative in many ways being a fragile, beautiful woman who is seen as "angelic" due to her appearance and idealism. She is also a strong, revolutionary female figure for nineteenth-century literature. First of all, she is physically described to resemble an angel in the novel, "The white veil which descended from her hat and fluttered about her slender figure, made her look like one of the mysterious sylphs, daughters of the air and sovereigns of the earth" (71). While described to look like a magical air spirit she is also illustrated to be a fragile character as well. Gilbert and Gubar write that "the ideal woman that male authors dream of generating is always an angel" (20). Carlotta, similarly, is characterized by Avellaneda with an angelic appearance and a loving soul; she is perceived as the ideal woman by all the characters in the novel. In the novel early on she is described as a "superior soul" (57) and Sab describes her as an "angel of heaven" (58). However, there is much more to Carlotta's character than meets the eye. In *Sab*, Carlotta is used to subvert the stereotypical virginal and angelic female lead by becoming an outspoken abolitionist through the course of the novel.

Carlotta is introduced in the narrative as a beautiful fragile young woman, soon the story develops to express that she is also a tragic character. Early on in the narrative, she states: "It is true I am fortunate my friend but how could I return to this place which holds for me so many memories and not feel profound melancholy? The last time that we lived on this plantation I had the company of the tenderest of mothers" (34). Carlota is introduced here as a melancholic figure

due to the loss of her mother at a young age. This too fits with popular 19th century stereotypes of the angelic female protagonist. Gilbert and Gubar when writing the plight of female characters depict what Carlotta, too, resembles this when they write, “Given the socially conditioned epidemic of female illness, it is not surprising to find the angel in the house of literature frequently suffered not just from fear and trembling but from literal and figurative sickness” (55). While Carlotta’s character is marred by emotional and physical sickness, it increases her likeness to the common female stereotype in 19th century literature.

Carlotta is also unfortunate because of her arranged marriage to a man who does not truly love her. Sab ponders in the novel, “Why can’t your innocent and fervent dreams come true, angel of Heaven” (58). Sab thinks this when he realizes Carlotta is betrothed to a man who does not truly love her but is marrying her for her money and upper-class stature in society. While Carlotta is illustrated as the so called “angel of the house” and also has many ailments, physical and emotional, in the novel she is also a character that carries contradictions to that within her own depiction.

In spite of having a tragic life, Carlota manages to stand up for marginalized people in spite of these being unpopular views for her race and class. To begin with examples of Carlota’s brave nature, she tries to free Sab based on the virtue of his character. Early on in the narrative, she tells her fiancé, “I think my father is only waiting until he is twenty-one to order him free” (45). While she advocates for and supports Sab’s freedom, she also is an abolitionist within her own right. For example, when Sab returns from a trip where he saves the life of Carlota’s fiancé she exclaims, “May Heaven bless you! [. . .] You are free now, I wish it so!” (53). In the narrative, Carlota supports Sab’s freedom from slavery in a consistent manner. Not only that, she has genuine empathy for all enslaved people. When visiting a countryside estate Carlota treats all

the enslaved people there with kindness as the novel states, “She called to them, asking their names one by one and inquiring and enchanting kindness about each one's particular situation, and state of being. Delighted, the blacks responded by showering her with blessings” (57).

Carlota is depicted here as an intelligent and empathetic woman who transcends her race, can even be seen as a traitor to her race, as her supposed place as an aristocratic woman in society by connecting with the enslaved people on the plantation.

The novel throughout the first half of the narrative focuses on the angelic Carlota. Carlota defends the oppressed and behaves with the utmost integrity at all times. The archetype that Carlota symbolizes in *Sab* is one of innocence, purity and valor. Her integrity is never marred as she always is described in the narrative as an “angel” (58). While Carlota is a protagonist in the novel, her levels of agency are limited. In *The Mad Woman in the Attic* by Gilbert and Gubar they state, “It is debilitating to be any woman in a society where women are warned if they do not behave like angels they must be monsters” (53). And so it is with Carlota who always is an “angel” even as she witnesses crimes against humanity such as slavery and hears dialogue that perpetuates racism and in the most of extreme of all, when she cannot even step out of the role of “angel” to oppose her own unwanted arranged marriage. Furthermore, Carlota fits the bill of the early to mid-nineteenth century Romantic era heroine that is “debilitated” by ending up chronically ill after her ill-fated arranged marriage and the death of her dear companion Sab. Gilbert and Gubar state, “Given this socially conditioned epidemic of female illness, it is not surprising to find that the angel in the house of literature frequently suffered sickness unto death” (55). Toward the end of the novel Carlotta is no longer even described as herself but as Senora Otway, the name of her husband, showing even her identity is gone. The narrative states, “Senora Otway’ strange affliction which no one, not even her favorite woman slave, was able to

diagnose, and there was gossip about the indifference of her husband, who left her in such a difficult situation” (146). Carlotta suffers that “sickness unto death” that Gilbert and Gubar illustrated is so common in literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Ironically, while Avellaneda expresses through Sab the parallel oppression of blacks and women in the Americas and the need for a single, unifying matriarchal narrative, she concomitantly perpetuates marginalizing tropes in regards to women’s agency while also demonstrating profound insights and integrity, especially as a feminist abolitionist.

Supporting Character as Heroine

Teresa is introduced as a supporting female character in *Sab* whose narrative evolves through the course of the novel revealing herself to be the heroine. Introduced in the story as Carlota’s stoic, orphaned distant relation (36) who really is rather “dry and reserved” (36). Yet, Carlota is said to “love her like a sister” (36). However, Teresa’s narrative weaves into the dialogue a powerful feminine voice as her story unfolds. While Teresa stays on the sidelines of the story at first, later she consoles Carlota in regards to her fears and doubts about her fiancé Enrique Otway. In fact, she does it so effectively that the narrator states that “the ardent girl needed no more than Teresa’s few words to dispel all her anxieties” (92). In this the first scene of the narrative where Teresa’s true nature is revealed, and a wise and compassionate individual emerges. A foil to Carlota, Teresa is the opposite of the stereotypical female lead analyzed by Gilbert and Gubar. Teresa gives Carlota not the adoration she is used to but compassionate advice when she has her fears and doubts about her fiancé are exposed. She states, “The slightest mishap, finding your heart unprotected, can enter and trouble it. Oh, Carlota! Even supposing the tragedy which you have unreasonably feared to happen, should you surrender to pain in this cowardly fashion” (93). The reader now learns that behind Teresa’s dry persona, there is emotional strength that betrays her age and even stereotypes for females at the time.

A story within the story, a meta-story, evolves from the character Teresa. In fact, Teresa then further consoles her “cousin” (94) when she “bent over and held her in her arms with unusual tenderness” (94). While both characters are motherless, Teresa takes on the matriarchal role from this point on consoling and offering wisdom to Carlota. Shortly after the scene with her dear cousin and friend, Teresa meets with Sab in secret. Here, the desperate man proposes that Teresa marry Carlota’s fiancé, Otway, whom she is secretly in love with and Sab will just be happy “as long as he does not marry Carlota” (95). Teresa is aware of the improbable nature of her marrying someone as wealthy and aristocratic as Otway due to her own social standing. Yet, she is equally aware of Sab’s longing for a woman he could never have due to racism. Her deep empathy for Sab is illustrated when she exclaims, “How worthy of a better fate is a heart that has known how to love as yours has!” (99) The courage and awareness Carlota lacks due to her innocence and situational inexperience as an aristocratic, plantation owner's daughter is at this moment deeply contrasted by Teresa’s ability to commiserate with Sab. Avellaneda illustrates the empathy between both marginalized characters when she writes, “A large burning tear dropped from Sab’s eyes and fell on Teresa’s hand, which he still retained between his own. Simultaneously another tear fell and ran down the mulatto’s face: this was Teresa’s tear, who, leaning toward him, fixed on him a look of affection and pity” (98). In this same scene, their tears seem to intermingle and the pain of marginalization and unrequited love becomes one. Both characters empathize with each other. Both the enslaved man and the poor orphaned white woman express their deep sorrow and disadvantage in a patriarchal, Eurocentric society.

While Teresa is at a disadvantage in society and unhappy with her lot in life, she is the only character in the narrative who attempts to escape the clutches of a miserable fate and whose attempt to find peace is successful. One night, Teresa leaves the plantation unannounced with a

“black dress and mantilla on her head” (130) and heads for the church. Carlota finds a letter from Teresa that illustrates that she is the only character in the novel who through her own strength of will decides the trajectory of her life. To further substantiate the letter states: “today an irresistible impulse of the heart impels me toward this holy sanctuary” (131). In matriarchal fashion she continues to explain that now that Carlota is wed to Otway, she has someone to love who will take care of her. She continues that she is committing herself to the Ursuline convent to be a nun for the rest of her life. Strikingly, in this letter, Teresa states, “Your destiny has been decided, and I wish to decide mine” (131). Teresa expresses herself and defines herself through this letter to Carlota, illustrating her own agency. Through a deeper analysis of the novel, the true heroine of the narrative emerges, Teresa, as she is the feminist figure who is the master of her own destiny and also the character with an immense amount of empathy for others. She truly excels beyond the stereotypical female lead and is the exemplification of a woman of self-determination, kindness, and intelligence.

Matriarchal Narrative

While Teresa may be the true heroine of the novel, Martina is the strongest matriarchal figure with her deep influence over Sab’s historical narrative. In the article titled “Gomez de Avellaneda’s *Sab*: A Modernizing Project” by Rogelia Lily Ibarra, the idea of an unusual narrative passed on by the central Matriarchal figure in the story is examined. This mother figure is a character who is a native woman by the name of “Martina,” who gives voice to the subjugated and their historical perspectives. Sab’s intellectual and metaphorical emotional mother is Martina, and with reason. Ibarra writes, “The centralization of a matriarchal order in the novel can be understood as an attempt to highlight the existence of female precursors” (392). In this narrative women’s contributions to paradigms of thought are recognized as important contributions to society, alongside male contributions. Avellaneda empowers marginalized

people by using Martina's character to symbolize a kind of matriarch for "motherless" subjugated peoples, including the narrative protagonists. Martina is by no mistake assigned the role of matriarch who creates a historical narrative for Sab that then spreads its influence over Carlota and Teresa. Ibarra states, "This feminization of history continues throughout the novel with the representation of Martina as a surrogate mother, taking the place of the absent biological mothers" (391). Sab quotes Martina when speaking with the plantation owner, Carlota's father, and Carlota's fiancé, Otway (73). In fact, by orally transmitting her narrative on to Sab, Martina fuels revolutionary thought that stands against the oppression of people of color. These ideas that are passed on to others and are a form of resistance against oppression.

In *The Mad Woman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar state that the female writer, "proves by example that a revolt against patriarchal literary authority is possible" (49). Avellaneda "proves" this by illustrating strong female characters and within the novel itself creates an instance of art imitating life. In this case, women abolitionists like Carlota, Teresa and Martina that are feminists in their own way. Most revolutionary of all is that Avellaneda addresses this fear of abolitionist discourse as well in the novel when Sab quotes Martina (73). Then, Carlota's father, Don Carlos, the Spanish plantation owner, states, "The Cubans, are always in a state of alarm after the frightful and recent example of a neighboring island, could never hear without fear any words in the mouth of a man of unfortunate color which made patent the feeling of his abused rights and the possibility of recapturing them" (73). Of course, the nearby island mentioned by Don Carlos is Haiti which had its revolution from 1791 to 1804. The Haitian Revolution is the largest and most successful slave rebellion in the Americas. The black Haitians that were enslaved not only had succeeded in ending not slavery but in ending the French control over their colony. While Don Carlos is describing what may be depicted as living in the wake

for Haitians, he also reflects what living in the wake means for the Cubans or others who fear to live in a post-slavery society.

While the protagonist Sab may not have led a rebellion, his transmission of Marina's oral history is powerful and inspires others to put such an emphasis on matriarchal narratives and to have the hero be of African descent is revolutionary.

Sab as the Main Protagonist

The narrative of *Sab* addresses racial integration as the main protagonist Sab is of mixed-race decent (an African mother and European father), and his love interest is a white woman he grew up besides, Carlotta. The interactions and narratives illustrate the parallels between the two characters. In her article "Subversion in Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda's *Sab*," Reina Barreto states, "This novel represents Avellaneda's literary struggle against the injustices of slavery and the oppressive treatment of women within the Patriarchal framework of the Romantic early 1800's" (1). Not only is this novel abolitionist, as well as sympathetic to racial integration, but the text equates the deplorable condition of slavery to the societal oppression of women.

Three of the main characters in the novel are women (Carlota, Teresa, and Martina), symbolizing the female archetypes in a patriarchal nineteenth-century society: the wife (Carlotta), the nun (Teresa), and the witch/shaman (Martina). In fact, in the introduction to *Sab* by Nina M. Scott, she states that critics have rightly noted that in *Sab*, feminism consistently overshadows the denunciation of slavery (Kirkpatrick)" (xxiv). While that may be arguable, the issue of feminism is at the least as prominent as the antislavery and anti-racism themes. By both protagonists, Sab and Carlota, symbolizing the oppression of women and people of color in not only Cuba but most societies at that time, the novel becomes both abolitionist and feminist. Both groups, people of color and women were treated as possessions that could not choose their own fate. One fate for women was through arranged marriages, and for African-Americans, it was

through slavery. The author manages to not compare what is worse by giving Sab a voice in the narrative that expresses the infinitely deep sorrow of his existence while simultaneously illustrating how both people of color and women are denied agency in this patriarchal society.

Much like Bakhtin writes in regards to heteroglossia and polyphony, the narratives in the language and wording of the underrepresented and often voiceless becomes parallel and told alongside that of the patriarchal, Eurocentric narratives more dominant in society, and retold in schools. In *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances in Latin America*, Doris Sommers states that in Sab this highlights the narrative of the subjugated demonstrating that, “Authority can pass on to new hands, feminine and/or Mullaato hands” (119). The authority and power of words, particularly narratives, gives voice to the formerly voiceless in Sab. Stacy Schlauf, in her article “Stranger in a Strange Land: The Discourse of Alienation in Gertrudis Avellaneda’s *Sab*,” writes “Here tied to an eighteenth-century view of mortality, it allows virtue, liberty, and equality to mesh into a vision of humanity inclusive of all races and both sexes” (497). Using the narrative itself, and the telling of historical narratives within the novel, Avellaneda illustrates that racial and gendered inequality is interconnected and the effects on the individual are parallel in their dehumanization.

***Sab* as an Alternative Slave Rebellion**

Many criticize the protagonist, Sab, for being antithetical to the novel’s purpose. In the introduction to *Sab* by its translator Nina M. Scott states, “The topic of Sab’s rage is an important one. European-authored *Oroonoko* and *Bug-Jargal* present black characters who led bloody slave uprisings and did not hesitate to use violence to fight the enslavement of their minds and bodies, but in America, Sab—like Uncle Tom—refuses this course of action” (xxv). And in fact, Cuba’s fear of slave uprisings, similar to the one in Haiti, did make abolitionism a feared and censored topic, so much so that *Sab* was not published in Cuba until the twentieth century.

Avellaneda addresses this fear of abolitionist discourse as well in the novel, Sab quotes Martina, saying that “black men will be the avengers of those of copper color” (73). Carlota’s father, Don Carlos, states, “The Cubans are always in a state of alarm after the frightful and recent example of a neighboring island, could never hear without fear any words in the mouth of a man of unfortunate color which made patent the feeling of his abused rights and the possibility of recapturing them” (73). Of course, the nearby island mentioned by Don Carlos is Haiti which had its revolution from 1791 to 1804, and the Haitian Revolution is the largest and most successful slave rebellion in the Americas. However, even if Sab repeats Martina’s narrative, Sab himself is not one to be part of a slave rebellion. When Sab one night speaks to Teresa, he tells her, “Calm yourself Teresa, you are not threatened by any danger the slaves patiently drag their chains: in order to break them they might only need to hear one voice which cries out to them ‘You are men’!, but I assure you that voice will not be mine” (97). Here Sab acknowledges that he will not be part of a revolution, the kind of revolution so feared in Cuba since there was one in Haiti not very far way.

An Intellectual Revolution as Expressed through *Sab*

While the protagonist Sab may not have led a rebellion, his own words and tragic death make his very existence a strong statement against slavery. When Sab eloquently shares his world view to Teresa in the second half of the narrative that awaken her to the plight of the enslaved and to Sab’s unrequited love due to racial discrimination a strong impression is left on Teresa and transferred to the reader. Sab tells Teresa that, “Above my station because of my nature, below all men because of my fate” (107). Because Sab is so eloquently able to communicate how he feels about his place in society, Teresa can understand his plight; she says, “Leave this place, and leave it! (107). Later, after Sab dies alone of a broken heart due to his unrequited love for Carlotta, he has a letter delivered to Teresa. Again, he communicates to her

the paradox he feels this world provides him between Sab further explains his feelings about his place in the social hierarchy versus what he feels is true to who he is. Sab states many things in his letter, including reiterating how the reaction his society has to him is very different than who he truly is within. Sab states, “I suffer the terrible conflict between my nature and my destiny” (142). Sab’s letters to Teresa that help her understand his plight and have empathy for him and those enslaved like him. Sab eloquently writes about his situation in life and finds inspiration in Shakespeare’s play *Othello*:

But what could the slave do, to whom destiny opened no path, to whom the world conceded no rights? His color was the mark of an eternal fate, a sentence of moral death. One day Carlota read a play in which at last I found a noble maiden who loved an African, and I felt transported with pleasure and pride when I heard that man say: “*Being an African is no blemish, and the color of my face does not paralyze my arm.*” (142)

Sab’s awareness of racial inequality and his understanding of *Othello* exemplifies the painful juxtaposition between what is reality and what Sab desires to be. It also illustrates the power of literature to uplift and inform through the ages. At once, Azevedo expresses Sab’s frustration and realization of the deep seeded roots of this social injustice that have been discussed hundreds of years earlier in Shakespeare’s classic play.

With Sab expressing himself in a letter and illuminating how *Othello* comforted him, Avellaneda illustrates the power of literature especially the poignant realizations that come from tragic heroes like Sab and *Othello*. Valerie Smith in *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative* explains how expressing narratives provides a sense of dignity for the speakers and writers of them, “By seizing control of narrative representation of their lives, they provide a figure for their earlier escape from their master’s domination” (44). Smith expresses what both Shakespeare and Avellaneda portray with their characters, tragic victims of society’s racism. *Othello* is the enduring tale of Shakespeare’s that warns of racism’s tragic outcomes.

This play was published in 1603, about two hundred and twenty years before *Sab* was written. Furthermore, this novel illustrates the power of sharing narratives in two ways, through the letter he composes for Teresa and in the significance, he finds in Othello's narrative that he mentions in the letter.

The letter written by Sab on his death bed is shared by Teresa on her death bed with Carlotta. Right before she passes away, Teresa tells Carlotta that Sab did a truly altruistic act to help Carlotta that she never knew about. That being that Sab gave the money for Carlotta's dowry to Carlotta's fiancé, now husband, Enrique Otway. Teresa states, "He gave you the gold" she told her, "which convinced Enrique make you his wife" (138). Upon sharing this knowledge with Carlotta Teresa imparts wisdom before sharing the letter, as well. She says, "Whenever you read this paper you will believe, as I do, in love and virtue, and when the clamor of the living tires your soul, take refuge in the memory of the dead" (139). Immediately after, Carlotta kisses her dear cousin, who is also her friend, on the head to find that she is dead. This makes the importance of the letter even more poignant, as it is the last words from both Sab and Teresa for Carlotta. The narrative states that the contents of the letter are "firmly committed to memory" (149). This shows that the letter has meaning that will live on with the characters and can do the same with the readers. Sab's letter was a way to be remembered and understood, as well as an act of autonomy for Sab himself.

Sab's communication in the letter is much like what Valerie Smith writes about when she states in *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative*; "I would suggest that they as much as, if not more than, blacks who wrote accounts of their bondage and escape demonstrate the link between language and power" (4). With Avellaneda characterizing Sab as a man who can write and express himself emotionally through his writing demonstrates the author's

awareness of slave narratives and the power they hold. Furthermore, she not only empowers Sab to express himself and to communicate with others (Teresa and later through her, Carlotta) but he demonstrates the power to create his own narrative that can be immortalized in those letters. Sab's ability to communicate with Teresa so powerfully symbolizes another kind of revolution of the heart and mind. Sab's revolution in the narrative may not be a physical one but his characters represents the power of the slave narrative as his story is expressed by Avellaneda as a plea for abolition. In the letter written from Sab to Teresa it insightfully states, "But it is not God ,Teresa, it is men who have shaped my destiny , it is they who have clipped the wings with which God endowed my soul, they who have constructed a wall of misconceptions and prejudices between me and the destiny Providence has chosen for me" (144). Avellaneda uses Sab's character to express how slavery and racial discrimination is not God's teaching but an aberration of man. She also uses the character to illustrate that and enslaved indivial of color can have the intelligence to express these sentiments. Sab becomes a symbol for the victim of racial dehumanization who uses the power of language to rebel against the status quo and develop a sense of self-authority or autonomy.

In addition, Avellaneda further argues against slavery and racial discrimination by making Sab express his belief in God having made men equal. In the narrative Avellaneda makes it clear that it is man's laws and not God's that is to blame for social injustice. In the narrative, Sab states, "Men will say it is my own fault that I have been unhappy; because I have dreamed of things beyond my reach, because I have longed to gaze on the sun, like an eagle. Is it my fault if God has given me a heart and soul?" Through this quote, not only does Sab express that slavery is not God made, but man made, but that God has given him a "heart and soul" to long for something much more elevated in life. With the male protagonist longing for a better life and

bemoaning his contrasting dehumanized status, the author uses *pathos* to create a character with whom one can empathize with since longing for a meaningful life with possibilities to pursue our dreams is a universal feeling. It is illustrated that the idea of racial inferiority is not one shared by all and is not divine. In his letter to Teresa, Sab writes, “But it is not God, Teresa, it is men who have shaped my destiny, it is they who have clipped my wings in with which God has endowed my soul” (144). In Sab’s letter to Teresa one can witness Sab’s perception that while God gave him a soul that could attain joy and other elevated states of being associated with “wings”, the injustice of slavery has taken from Sab which was God given. Sab becomes the symbol for injustice and is not weakened by his virtues spirit in spite of this. By being remembered as a heroic character terribly oppressed by such grave injustice such as slavery and racial discrimination that status is open to the reader to adopt as well, even if Sab is a fictional character.

Racial Integration and the Subverted Hero

While some scholars think Sab is a debased hero and he does not end segregation or even make advancement in regards to inter relationships the characters strength can be seen in his reaction to subjugation. The article by Barreto adds, “According to William Luis, the fear of slave uprisings, such as the successful 1791 revolt in nearby Haiti, influenced how black characters in Cuban literature were portrayed: ‘non-threatening and acceptable to white readers’ (53)” (2). While Sab is a character who may seem to be outside the stereotypical box or even threatening to readers with his love for Carlota and hatred of slavery expressed at the onset of the novel, his downfall and demise render his character impotent in the eyes of many because he never had a physical revolt or uprising against slavery. In fact, the type of revolution Sab represents in the novel is one of the mind and spirit, as seen through his effect on Carlota and Teresa.

Sab is illustrated in such an empathetic manner that one can see the valor of this character, portraying him as a tragic hero so often portrayed in Romantic novels. In the last moments of his life, Sab's character realizes as he is dying that the woman he loves, Carlotta, is literally marrying Enrique at that very moment. Upon this realization he thinks, "A multitude of ideas and sorrows flashed through his mind. He realized that he was going to die too and that at the same instance that he was suffering and agonizing end Enrique and Carlota would exchange their vow of love" (139). While the reasons Sab and Carlota cannot be together are due racial bigotry in their society there is also a Romantic element, in the sense that Sab is the tragic hero that suffers greatly. His suffering adds to the nobility of the character as he does so for love and due to social injustice. Some scholars perceive Sab as defeated or an ineffective hero in the novel due to his tragic death.

Sab dies in the shack of the poor native Matriarch Martina, next to her grandson, of a broken heart. This is a kin to dying at home as he considers himself the adopted son of Martina. He states earlier in the novel, "I too, am a poor orphan: I never gave any man the sweet and holy name of father, and my unfortunate mother died in my arms; I ,too, am an orphan like Luis; be my mother, take me for your son" (81). A powerful message of unity between people of color comes from the biracial, enslaved Sab feels so close to a woman of Native Cuban decent. Some perceive Sab's way of dying of heart break in Martina's shack as an utter defeat that loses the message of racial equality, abolition and even feminism. Barreto states:

These norms prevent Sab's characters from delivering a powerful message against the oppression of marginalized people. Despite their attempts at subversion and their aspirations for a better life, *Sab's* protagonists are subdued and defeated by the societal limitations and conventions they seek to overcome, as well as by the Romantic roles assigned to them in the text. (3)

While Barreto believes that Sab is subdued due to the social constraints of nineteenth century Cuba, one can also argue Sab is a subverted hero. Sab gains strength as a character from this narrative due to the great injustice the audience perceives the argument against slavery and racial bigotry is made. By dying an early death, Sab represents not only the injustice of his society, but also the loss of a truly virtuous soul that defies the stereotypes. This hero's unjust treatment in this world speaks volumes as a call to all who are moved to feel empathy for Sab and internalize this plea for social justice.

The Narrative Parallels between Racial and Gendered Oppression

In the narrative, the enslaved character of Sab has empathy for Teresa and Carlota, women who are also subjugated in their society. Within the story the message of equality and justice for all people regardless of race or gender is composed as one story with many parts or voices. The interconnectedness of the plight of racial oppression is illuminated with these characters varied voices. The female protagonists of the story can relate to Sab in their own situation of gendered oppression. Sab expresses awareness and sorrow for both Carlotta's plight and Teresa's situation. In regards to Carlota being promised in marriage to a man, Enrique Otway, who wants to marry her for her family's wealth he comments that the fiancé is "Unworthy of her!"(103). Sab continues to explain to Teresa his idea to give her the lottery ticket for money he will win as a dowry so Enrique marries her, and not Carlota, since the lottery prize is worth more than Carlotta's family estate. Sab tells Teresa, "Take this ticket and tear yours up. When I return from Puerto Principe in a few hours, Senior B will receive the list of winning numbers, and Enrique will know you are richer than Carlotta" (105). Here Sab is used in the story to both state that in this situation is Enrique marrying Carlotta for material gain and subsequently make a social commentary on arranged marriages. The criticism of arranged marriages among the upper classes boils down to one where love is not in the equation. Sab

speaks of this as he states, “Enrique Otway does not love Carlota” (104). There is no pretense that there is anything but a transaction in this marriage, much like slavery, and the individual is not taken into consideration but instead is objectified. However, Sab later says in the conversation he would not wish Teresa in such a situation of a marriage for financial gain either. He states, “Enrique is as unworthy of you as her; I acknowledge that” (105). He goes on to explain his plan to have Teresa just pretend for a few days to be interested in marriage with Enrique long enough for Carlota to see the true “baseness of the man” (105) so that Carlotta would call off the marital union and also see who Enrique really is. However, Teresa tells Sab that to do this would break Carlotta’s heart and that they cannot hurt the young woman that way. In this scene the arranged marriages of the nineteenth century, which are portrayed as unjust in the novel, are acknowledged by an enslaved man himself as a completely undesirable situation to be in. Sab expresses that forced marriages or arranged marriages are an injustice that is a concern to all of humanity and not just women just as Carlotta expresses that slavery and racial bigotry is an issue all of humanity should be appalled by, as well.

With *Sab*, Avellaneda makes a bold abolitionist and feminist statement at a time when there were few making either statement in literature. *Sab* is an inspiring and trailblazing novel. In her book about Avellaneda’s life and work titled *The Lightning Dreamer: Cuba’s Greatest Abolitionist*, Margarita Engle states that “*Sab* became influential throughout Europe and the Americas, inspiring compassion for slaves and for young girls forced to marry strangers” (172). Published in 1841, the racial and gender oppression Avellaneda criticizes and exposes for its cruelty was decades ahead of abolition and suffrage in Cuba, and in the United States, surely influencing countless readers and writers. Both by writing this novel and through the characters

expressing their polyphonic narrative, the empowering, self-defining, and inspiring qualities of narrative writing and telling.

Furthermore, while Sab sees himself as a man with a terrible fate in this world due to his color, he does have the agency to express his feelings and world view. Valerie Smith explains in *Self Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narratives* how stories written about the enslaved often provided support for bigoted paradigms, “the early narratives portray the slave as either an outlaw or a wayfarer in need the protection that only white paternal authority could provide” (9). Smith expresses the necessity to counteract these narratives with stories written by African-Americans. The novel *Sab* counteracts the idea that the enslaved need a white savior by portraying Sab as a man who is neither “outlaw” nor “wayfarer,” but instead a very moral and articulate individual who needs social justice. While Avellaneda was not a woman of color, or ever enslaved, she was an abolitionist and a feminist that created characters that expressed their own sense of agency and world views with dignity without the need of a “white paternal authority” to help them or save them.

CHAPTER V

BELOVED

We got more yesterdays than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow.
Paul D., *Beloved*

Beloved by Toni Morrison the voices of a variety of African-American men and women post-slavery who tell their own narratives. Written in 1987, the evolution of narratives of people of color in the literature of the Americas can be seen in *Beloved*'s matriarchal polyphonic narratives. A high level of subjectivity of multiple characters unlike the other two narratives, *The Slum* or *Sab*, and with much more subjectivity. Yet, many of the themes in *The Slum* and *Sab* are also in *Beloved*; slave narratives, matriarchal narratives, and feminist perspectives to name a few. However, by expressing the varied responses to slavery and the post slavery world through a multitude of African-American characters a deeply emotional and complex story emerges. Yet many of the characters in *Beloved* share their narratives and grow in their sense of self and agency.

Adding to the importance of these matriarchal narratives is the trauma of slavery is portrayed in *Beloved* not as a singular story but with many narratives that embrace their subjectivity. The narrative's main Matriarch, Baby Suggs, comments "Not a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead negro's grief" (5). The multitude of trauma from slavery and racial injustice is acknowledged early on in the novel, that the whole United States is inhabited by the pain of African-Americans. This is akin to Christine Sharpe's idea of living in the "wake" in *In the Wake of Blackness and Being* where she states, "In the wake, the past that is not past reappears, always to rupture the present" (9). Similarly, Baby Suggs may believe that

ghosts from the past come back to remind African-Americans of their pain from slavery in their present homes.

While the narrative is set in 1873, much of the story revolves around the characters examining their pasts when they were enslaved, to live in a dignified self-defined manner in the aftermath of slavery. With a polyphony of matriarchal narratives, a variety of women's slavery and post slavery narratives are examined. The novel *Beloved* contends with what happens when individuals must confront this "rupturing" of the past. Furthermore, Morrison expresses the importance of the telling of a variety of African-American narratives post-slavery after the past does explode into their present world by centering the narrative on the characters whom are rebuilding their lives (inner and outer).

The four main narratives of the post-slavery African-American women are those of Sethe, Beloved, Baby Suggs, and Denver; each character is a different age and symbolizes different themes. By centering the narrative on stories of the characters in the novel the individuals in the narrative are claiming their own agency and redefining who they are word by word. Going back to Smith's ideas in *Self Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narratives* also illuminates the necessity for narratives that depict the agency of enslaved individuals, "the early narratives portray the slave as either an outlaw or a wayfarer in need the protection that only white paternal authority could provide" (9). Smith confronts racist paradigms repeated in literature and suggests to examine and support structures that belong to people of color. Smith expresses the necessity to counteract Eurocentric patriarchal paradigms with narratives of African-Americans when she writes, "I argue here that slave narrators and the protagonist-narrators of certain twentieth century novels by Afro-American writers affirm and legitimize their psychological autonomy by telling the stories of their own lives"(2). While Morrison may

be telling a fictionalized story about other women, by centering her novel on the healing of the African-American community from the aftermath of slavery, she is writing in a cathartic manner about her own process to liberate herself from living in the “wake” (*In the Wake of Blackness and Being* 15) of slavery as an African-American. Furthermore, the characters in *Beloved* exemplify one gaining the “psychological autonomy” of their own lives by sharing and even developing their narratives in the novel.

The Story Behind the Story: Margaret Garner’s Narrative

While *Beloved* is a fictional work, a historical narrative inspires the storyline for the main protagonist, Sethe. Sethe *is* based on the true story of an African-American woman who lived in the nineteenth century named Margaret Garner. An article published by NPR titled “A Mother’s Desperate Act: ‘Margaret Garner’” states, “Morrison already told a version of the Margaret Garner story in her best-selling novel *Beloved*” (B. Scott 2). The story in *Beloved* offers a version of Garner’s life and shares many of the same facts, yet, Morrison adds subjectivity that may be fictionalized in addition to other stories of African-Americans post-slavery to the narrative. The basic biography of Garner is parallel with Sethe’s:

She and her family were owned by a Kentucky plantation farmer, but one night they escaped to Ohio with another group of slaves. Their hiding place was discovered, and Margaret's family was surrounded. She swore she would kill her children and herself rather than return to slavery. As her husband was dragged off, Margaret plunged a knife into her daughter. She was preparing to kill her other daughter and herself when she was seized and jailed. (B. Scott 1)

Sethe also escapes a plantation where she was enslaved with her children, and due to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1855, is pursued to Ohio. Sethe does not have her husband, Halle, which highlights her independence. Rather than her four children to suffer the horrors of slavery, Sethe attempts to murder them. She only succeeds in infanticide of her toddler daughter, Beloved. Morrison ends the similarities between the two women here and focuses the narrative on the interior subjective

life of Sethe. How she feels and heals is focused on, along with the inner lives of several other characters, with a focus on generational trauma, identity, interpersonal relationships and self-worth. In the article “A Mother’s Desperate Act: ‘Margaret Garner,’” Morrison states, “The interest is not the fact of slavery, but of what happens internally, emotionally, psychologically, when you are in fact enslaved and what you do to try to transcend that circumstance” (5) The focus that makes the narratives in *Beloved* profound are not the simple facts of race or gender alone, or of being formerly enslaved, but the internal monologues expressed attempting to transcend the scars of slavery. Furthermore, several characters in *Beloved*, in addition to Sethe, are chronicled as attempting to find agency and transcend the pain of their past.

A Polyphonic Narrative of African-American Women’s Voices in the “Wake”

Sharpe examines *Beloved* specifically when discussing what living in the wake means and how that effects the individual. Sharpe states:

In *Beloved*, (Morrison 1987, 61) Sethe asks her mother “Mark me, too. Mark the mark on me, too” (the mark being the brand under her breast she shows Sethe so her daughter might identify her. If her face destroyed in the event that their revolt is unsuccessful). The mark was burned into Sethe’s mother flesh on the littoral before she was stowed in the hold of the ship. But it is more than that. It is a mark consistent a branding that would turn those Africans into property.” (48)

The mark that symbolizes “mother” for young Sethe, and also links her to slavery with an identity linked to it even after its abolition. A life connected to pain and trauma of slavery and slavery effected relationships is what she is working on within herself. Consequently, that is the true journey in *Beloved*. Living with the “mark” and in a world that sees one as “marked” is what living in “the wake” is all about. Sharpe goes on to comment that “the mark in *Beloved* is connected to the ship which Sethe’s mother is forced to cross into slavery and what comes to before and what comes in its wake” (49). By being connected to the slave ship, Sethe is living in its wake that Sharpe is defining. In fact, Sharpe defines African-American existence to this day

by living in the wake. Sharpe states about living in that state of being, “We live in the knowledge that wake has positioned us as no citizen. If we are lucky, the knowledge of this positioning avails particular ways of re/seeing, re/inhabiting and re/imagining the world” (22). Sethe exemplifies the African-American woman living in this world and healing from the past to living in a present with more agency and happiness. In fact, Baby Suggs and Denver, the mother in law and the daughter, are also examples of women living in the wake and striving for better lives than their previous ones.

Sethe’s voice is but one voice in this polyphonic novel of African-American women’s narratives. While *Beloved* is often examined for its expression of the pain in slave narratives and African-American feminism, it is discussed less often as a literary example of an empowering polyphony of marginalized women’s narratives of the Americas. This multiplicity of voices is significant as forming and expressing narratives is empowering. Valerie Smith expresses this as the central thesis of her book *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative*. She states, “By seizing control of the narrative representation of their lives, they provide a figure for their earlier escape from their master’s domination” (44). In *Beloved*, this empowering process of narrative creation, and sharing, is expressed through a multiplicity of African-American post-slavery voices highlighting matriarchal narratives. Morrison illustrates through the characters and relationships in *Beloved* many themes to be examined: familial, romantic, and personal.

Narrative-building is an essential aspect in the aforementioned process of identity-building and the subsequent agency that comes from that. Smith reflects on this when she writes, “By calling itself an autobiography either explicitly or implicitly (as do, for example, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Invisible Man* and *Lolita*), a novel directs the reader’s attention to the narrator and the act of telling” (45). Morrison expresses the importance of the telling of a

variety of African-American narratives post-slavery by centering the narrative on the characters whom are rebuilding their lives (inner and outer) post-slavery. This process of intense (inner and outer) rebuilding during the Reconstruction period in *Beloved* is depicted in the narrative with the main female characters: Sethe, Denver, Baby Suggs and (to an extent) Beloved and with Paul D.

As mentioned early, the subsequent polyphony in *Beloved* is a key element in illustrating the idea of subjectivity. In the article “From the Seen to the Told: The Construction of Subjectivity in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” Jeanne Fuston-White continues to expand on ideas of black subjectivity, that the inner lives of the characters and their personal narratives create a polyphony of narratives, including historical narratives. Fuston-White states, “Morrison’s characters who might have been rendered voiceless and helpless by their society, speak, command, and demonstrate agency” (462). *Beloved* exemplifies the far-reaching implications of the power of narratives by celebrating and empowering black subjectivity with characters whom have historically been rarely heard or not heard at all, characters who may have been told their own stories, but never had the opportunity to tell those stories themselves. To live in the “wake” and take control over one’s life and perspective of the world, one must have a narrative that supports that process.

Sethe: A Protagonist Living in the “Wake”

Sethe is living in the “wake” of slavery with a “ruptured” past bleeding into her present and manifesting itself into the ghost and then actual physical being in her mind of her daughter, who she killed, Beloved. However, Sethe’s perception of Beloved is the manifestation of Sethe’s past pain. In fact, she is living in the “wake” and learning to be more conscious of it as she goes through the journey in the novel.

First of all, the idea of self-discovery and identity-building is central to Sethe's journey while she heals from her past. The novel begins with the sentence, "124 was spiteful. Full of bay's venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children. For years each put up with the spite in his own way, but by 1873 Sethe and her daughter Denver were its only victims" (1). As the novel unfolds the narratives one comes to realize that the "spite" was within Sethe and Denver to release as they create a new life for themselves. In the novel, she is described as irritable while lacking self-awareness, "As grown up woman Sethe was angry but not certain at what" (62). By confronting issues in her life Sethe, by the end of the narrative, can be ready to receive love and maybe give love. The narrative centers on Sethe's process of freeing herself from the pain and trauma of slavery and the events due to slavery that ensued, like her infanticide of her daughter to avoid recapture into slavery. To illustrate that Sethe has not progressed in healing from this event Morrison writes, "It was as though one day she saw red baby blood, another day the pink gravestone chips, and that was the last of it" (39). She has processed that the event has happened but not come to an acceptance of how to live with this knowledge. Instead she lives in seclusion from the community with a feeling of a ghost of a "spiteful baby" in her home. When Sethe comes across the woman she believes to be Beloved manifest into flesh then she begins to confront the issues she has suppressed for so many years. When Beloved asks Sethe questions about her past, she realizes that "It amazed Sethe (as much as it pleased Beloved) because of every mention of her past life hurt. Everything in it was painful for lost" (58). By facing her past that she had stopped mentioning, Sethe begins to see the repressed pain and find parts of herself that were "lost." In fact, this is one of the initial ways Sethe frees herself from the past so as to be able to create a new future for herself.

Sethe continues to attempt to create a new life for herself and to have subsequent epiphanies. First of all, she did not have a strong relationship to her mother due to slavery, but by attempting to create closer bonds with Denver and Beloved, she begins to heal those past wounds. When Sethe discusses the manner which she lost her mother with Denver, Sethe continues to create a bond with her daughter which could heal and help her to move forward. The novel illustrates this in one passage, after Denver asks what happened to her maternal grandmother whom she never met: “‘Hung. By the time they cut her down nobody could tell whether she had a circle or a cross or not, least of all me and I did look.’ Sethe gathered her hair from the comb and leaning back tossed it into the fire” (97). Not having much of a relationship with her own mother leaves Sethe with pain as her identity, particularly since she lost her mother when the woman tried to escape without her. Her extremes in relationships and emotions can be linked back to this lack of strong connection with her own mother due to slavery. However, Sethe attempts to free herself from the pain of the past by creating loving bonds with her daughters.

Secondly, Sethe frees herself by confronting her co-dependence on the memory of Baby Suggs. In the narrative, Sethe thinks, “Baby Suggs’ long-distance love was equal to any skin-close love she had known” (95). This is because although Sethe did not have a close relationship with her mother, her mother-in-law Baby Suggs was a surrogate mother to her. Baby Suggs, became both a mother figure to her and a model for a woman with a strong character.

However, as powerfully healing and inspiring as Baby Suggs’s memory is to Sethe, that same memory can also be emotionally stunting when held too tightly. This is depicted when Sethe takes both Denver and Beloved back to the clearing as a kind of spiritual pilgrimage. While Sethe is remembering how Baby Suggs would rub her neck, the experience becomes

something quite different: “In any case Baby Suggs fingers had a grip on her and would not let her breathe. Tumbling forward from her seat on the rock, she clawed at the hands that were not there” (96). This happens in front of Denver, who stops this. This event is also metaphorical as Sethe must let go of the past, even the good memories, just as Denver must also acknowledge this to move forward, as well. This does not mean to forget the past, but to not live in it, as Sethe often reverts to doing. This scene in the novel is where Sethe begins to let go of some dependency upon the past and to nurture her own inner strength spiritually and psychologically. By highlighting the process of Sethe’s healing, Morrison highlights the importance of sharing and analyzing these stories as well as the deep inner subjective work one must do to heal from emotional trauma.

Sethe and Paul D.: A Healing Relationship

In addition to her familial relationships, romantic relationships are integral to the narrative’s development and facilitates Sethe’s healing as a character. This is illustrated with her relationship with Paul D. Sethe and Paul D have a mutually beneficial relationship where they both help each other grow, heal, and have hope for a better future for themselves. The painful experiences of slavery create a common bond for Sethe and Paul. Early on in the narrative, Paul D. walks back into Sethe’s life. The novel depicts it as “sitting on the porch not forty feet away was Paul D., the last of the Sweet Home men. And although she could never mistake his face for another’s she asked, ‘Is that you?’” (6). Sweet Home is the plantation in Kentucky where both Sethe and Paul D. were enslaved. Slavery serves as a common ground for them in the narrative from which they can drown in the sorrow of the past or catapult themselves into a better future.

Paul D. is also an ex-slave during the Reconstruction era. However, although the painful physical and emotional experiences of slavery bond them, the healing process and courage required to move forward are what make their relationship something of enduring depth. Paul D.

comes back into Sethe's life shortly before the woman who Sethe believes is Beloved comes back. He is the male counterpart to Sethe in many ways, as he is dealing with many similar issues but he is the opposite of Sethe in many ways, too. Paul D. is part of Sethe's past, they were enslaved on the same plantation, Sweet Home. This is symbolic as both Sethe and Paul D. represent the African-American individual healing from the past trauma of slavery. Valarie Smith discusses this structure in Morrison's writing: "Not only do her protagonists find their histories into her plots, but the past lives of her minor characters return to haunt as well" (123). Sethe not only is haunted, literally, by the ghost of her dead daughter, Beloved, but Paul D. is from her past, and he becomes an important part of her present. In fact, Paul is aware they both have a heavy burden from their past but also a chance to create a better life in the future. In the close of the novel Paul D. says "me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow" (273). Paul is expressing to Sethe that they can move forward and create a new chapter in their lives. Paul thinks to himself, "He wants to put his story next to hers" (273). Not only is Paul being characterized as wanting to create a new story for them both but also that he is seeking equality in the relationship not a kind of hierarchy. Paul D. plays a significant part of Sethe's life as someone who understands the pain of slavery and the challenges they both face to create a new life post-slavery, one that lets go of racial and gender inequality.

Paul D. is characterized as being extremely empathetic and this is key to what marks him as different as the other men in the novel. For example, when Paul D. sees the scars from whippings on Sethe's back, he states, "'Aw, Lord, girl.' And he would tolerate no peace until he had touched every ridge and leaf on it with his mouth" (18). Paul is an empathetic and wise man in general; he empathizes with Sethe's pain and puts effort in helping her heal. This is further

illustrated by the novel: “There was something blessed in his manner. Women saw him and wanted to weep—to tell him that their chest hurt and their knees did too. Strong women and wise saw him and told him things they told each other” (17). As one can infer here, Paul has empathy for African-American women, especially Sethe, and so elicits admiration and respect from African-American women in his community (including Sethe).

As empathetic and understanding as Paul D is with Sethe, as a male, there comes a point where he cannot understand her experience as a mother. While both Sethe and Paul D. have many issues from the trauma of slavery to heal, as the narrative unfolds their subjective differences are highlighted, too. When Sethe reveals to Paul how she murdered her baby so that the child could escape slavery, he gets very upset. He does not see her intent, but only the sheer horror of the monstrous action. He even tells her that her love is “too thick” (165), and Sethe responds, “Love is or it ain't. Thin love ain't love at all” (165). The difference between the two characters' paradigms of love are very different and seemingly irreconcilable. Paul tells Sethe, “You got two feet, Sethe, not four” (165). While he is calling her an animal, he does not understand the urgency or practicality of her love for her children and the necessity to protect them from the horrors of slavery at that moment. After this statement, he realizes he has crossed the line and their close relationship has taken a detour, so he leaves Sethe. Their separation is depicted in the novel with the line immediately after the interaction: “The forest was locking the distance between them, giving it shape and heft” (163). However, Paul D chooses to grow his understanding of Sethe and those in situations like hers after some time: “Trying to get to 124 for the second time now, he regretted that conversation: the high tone he took, his refusal to see the marrow weariness in a woman he had believed was a mountain. Now too late he understood her. The heart had pumped out love, the mouth that spoke the Word, didn't count” (180). Paul, who

represents African-American men post-slavery, must attempt to understand the very specific pain of African-American women to bridge a gap and bring a deeper bond through understanding.

Sethe and Paul D's relationship examines male-female relationships post-slavery and depicts the mutually beneficial results of a relationship when men attempt to better understand women.

Furthermore, Morrison uses each character to symbolize a part of the African-American community and illustrate the misunderstandings, differences, and ideal resolution of personal growth between the two in a healthy relationship. The emotional and psychological toll of slavery has left scars on both characters, yet they are also able to heal and transcend the trauma with each other's help. When Paul begins to understand Sethe, this symbolizes African-American men beginning to have a deeper understanding and respect for African-American women. For Sethe to choose to be in a relationship with a man who attempts to bridge this gap also symbolizes Sethe's agency to choose a partner who helps her heal and to whom she can be an equal through mutual respect.

The past is not ever in the past according to the premise of this narrative; the past is part of one's consciousness that must be fought or to learn from. Sethe contends with her past and her memories on a visceral level. This characterization of Sethe is illustrated by Morrison when, as she is working the dough to bake at her job, she thinks to herself, "Nothing better than to start the day's serious work of beating back the past" (73). Both Paul and Sethe push "back the past" to deal with their day-to-day lives till they come to some confrontations later in the narrative. However, Sethe represents the female memory of the past and Paul the male memory of the past; both are very different things. This is depicted when Paul cannot understand Sethe's love and protectiveness as a mother attempting to save her children from slavery's horrors, even if such salvation means death.

By the end of the narrative, there is a sense that Sethe is ready finally to embark on a new life with Paul D, one in which she values herself. But Paul D is not the only one who helps Sethe; Denver also plays an important role in Sethe's personal development. Denver is the one who goes out to the community for help and then later for work when Sethe is too ill from her entanglement with Beloved. This is illustrated in the novel: "Denver knew it was on her. She would have to leave the yard, step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help" (243). With this realization, Denver begins to reach out to the community that eventually saves Sethe's life by helping her escape Beloved. This is illustrated in the story when Sethe runs away from her daughter and joins the African-American women that Denver had help mobilize: "Standing alone on the porch, Beloved is smiling. Now her hand is empty. Sethe is running away from her. [. . .] Away from her to the pile of people out there" (262). Sethe has to first leave Beloved behind, literally and metaphorically, before she can even get back together with Paul D as the novel illustrates. However, this escape is made possible because of her daughter Denver's actions.

Once Sethe leaves her past behind her in the form of walking away from Beloved, Paul D is able to come back to her. The events that detangle her from Beloved and her past must transpire before she can move forward with Paul. This is illustrated in the final scene of the narrative when Paul D states, "We need some kind of tomorrow" (273). And then Paul D tells Sethe, "You are your best thing, Sethe. You are" (273), and the scene ends with Sethe replying, "Me? Me?" For Sethe to end up in a relationship with a man whom not only values her, but also wants her to value herself and her future indicates that Sethe is being offered a chance at redemption in life. Furthermore, Sethe is ready to receive this love from Paul D and to contemplate how to value herself when she responds "Me?" By beginning to even consider

herself her most valuable possession, Sethe marks the beginning of a new kind of being and becoming for herself. This is the point where Sethe can begin to live in the “wake” rather than just “survive” in it.

Beloved: Confused Identities

The topics of identity and confused identities are at the center of the narrative, as symbolized with the character after whom the novel is named, Beloved. First of all, the idea of confused identities alludes to the literal repercussions of family separations due to slavery. Secondly, this idea of confused identities can be taken metaphorically as a symbol of black women confronting personal and interpersonal feelings of alienation. In the narrative, this results in the creation of a renewed self after the indignities of slavery. Furthermore, the titular character is a woman whom the protagonist thinks is her child, killed in an attempt to help her escape slavery.

Rather than the ghost of Sethe’s deceased baby, this character exposes another ex-enslaved woman with a nightmarish past of her own to overcome who is a “ghost” in a metaphorical sense. One piece of scholarship analyzing *Beloved* is “Toni Morrison’s Ghost: The Beloved is Not Beloved” by Elizabeth B. House, who contends the “ghost” of Beloved is really another young woman who is also a victim of the horrors of slavery. House highlights in the article that the narrative of the character that many mistake for the dead daughter of Sethe is actually another ex-slave with a mistaken identity. House writes, “From Beloved’s disjointed thoughts, her stream-of-conscious remembering set down in these chapters, a story can be pieced together that describes how white slave traders, ‘men without skin,’ captured the girl and her mother” (18). Beloved remembers being forced on a slave ship and her mother “abandoning” her (18). She also remembers being sexually abused by a slave trader she calls a “skinless man” due

to his pink color (19). House makes a compelling argument with textual evidence from *Beloved* that the only ghost in the narrative is in Sethe and Denver's minds.

In addition to House's ideas about *Beloved*, there is a double meaning to what the character of *Beloved* represents in the narrative. First, in the literal sense, as a survivor of slavery, *Beloved* is trying to find her true identity post-slavery. While Sethe is attempting to gain a sense of peace and wholeness in her life, *Beloved* is searching for a lost mother figure and the sense of self that goes along with that. Valarie Smith addresses this issue of displacement of families when examining Fredrick Douglass' writing. She states that, "Douglass is, therefore to his master -father nothing more than 'chattel personal,' with no particular right of either a birth date or parental affection" (22). *Beloved*'s separation from her biological mother and search for a mother is a natural consequence of the common trend of separating enslaved families and taking away individuals' sense of being part of a family unit that loved or valued them. Instead, the enslaved individuals are made to feel like chattel that has only an owner but no parent. In fact, *Beloved* lost her mother at a young age as well, illustrating the point.

Second, *Beloved* is not only a character literally torn from her mother but symbolic of the broken relationships and sense of being "lost" for African-American women post-slavery. During the times of slavery families were broken apart, and the character called *Beloved* portrays one example of the alienation and confusion that could result from being torn away from parents at a young age. Valarie Smith explains the effects of such isolation as "Morrison's black characters are especially vulnerable to the defeat that accompanies isolation" (123). Before finding each other, both Sethe and *Beloved* are isolated, though *Beloved* has her daughter and Paul D., she is separate from the African-American community. *Beloved* seems especially alone and vulnerable when she is first found by Sethe. She is described as sounding like she has the

“croup” or even “cholera” (53). Sethe decides to take care of Beloved when Paul D. asks her if she will “feed her” (56). Sethe’s response—“I thought we would wait till her breath was better. She sounds a little lumbar to me” (56)—illustrates that Sethe wants to help Beloved who seems very sick and alone without family. This isolation that leads to vulnerability is sensed by Sethe, who chooses to help Beloved.

However, as much as Sethe tries to help Beloved, eventually Denver notices that she must start “protecting her mother from Beloved” (143). This sense of danger that Denver perceives is also described as the two women “being locked in a love that wore everybody out” (243). With the clues that point to Beloved being a woman with a past separate from Sethe’s family and Beloved’s negative relationship with Sethe that develops a sense of the unhealthiness of the relationship comes into play. Another clue to Beloved’s true identity is in the beginning of the novel; in the preface Morrison uses a quote from the Bible that sets an ominous tone to the whole narrative; “I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved” (Romans 9:25). In fact, upon close reading, the woman called Beloved is not the baby that once was called Beloved. The woman that Sethe and her family call Beloved is actually another soul traumatized by slavery. The woman’s identity is so scant she is a “ghost” without substantial self-esteem of her own. Beloved is both a haunted and haunting being in a metaphorical sense. She is herself haunted by horrible memories of slavery, and she haunts Sethe, who believes her to be the “ghost” of her daughter.

Baby Suggs: The Power of the Matriarch

The main matriarch in *Beloved*, Baby Suggs, is a mother figure and a religious leader to the post-slavery Cleveland-based African-American community depicted in the novel. Furthermore, Suggs is mentioned in the first paragraph of the narrative; her death is that impactful to Sethe’s household. The novel suggests that the household is full of “spiteful baby

venom” (1) because, at least in part, “the grandmother, Baby Suggs, was dead” (1). Even in her absence, Baby Suggs is an influential character in the novel, especially in Sethe’s house. And as a novel with African-American women’s relationships and narratives at the forefront, Baby Suggs’s prominence makes sense. She is a “mother” figure on many literal and metaphorical levels. Baby Suggs illustrates how powerful a matriarch can be. In “The Ghosts of Slavery: Historical Recovery in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*” by Linda Krumholz, the influence of the main matriarch in the narrative, Baby Suggs, is revealed. This article’s analysis of Baby Suggs’s importance and influence in the novel illuminates the regenerative spiritual vitality of feminine voices. This analysis substantiates the claim of Baby Suggs being the primary matriarchal voice in the narrative and the “glue” that holds the polyphonic collection of narratives together. Krumholz writes, “Baby Suggs is the moral and spiritual backbone of *Beloved*” (97). Baby Suggs represents the power of the matriarchal archetype to bring communities together, not only through cooking and taking care of children, but through spiritual reunification. After Suggs is bought out of slavery by her son, Halle, she decides to live a life of purpose and service to the African-American community, as illustrated in the novel: “The good news however was that Halle got married and had a baby coming. She fixed on that and her own brand of preaching, having made up her mind about what to do with the heart that started beating the minute she crossed the Ohio river” (147). Gaining a new sense of being alive, Suggs focuses her energies both on her son’s family, Sethe and her children, and her own purpose of giving back spiritually to the post-slavery African-American community.

From a slave to a preacher, she helps the African-American community heal and transcend their painful pasts in the narrative. This role as a spiritual leader for the post-slavery African-American community is illustrated further in the novel:

Accepting no title of honor before her name, but allowing a small caress after it, she became an unchurched preacher, one who had visited pulpits and opened her great heart to those who could use it. In the winter and fall she carried in to the AME's and Baptists, Holiness and Sanctified, the Church of the Redeemer and the Redeemed. Uncalled, unrobed, unanointed, she let her great heartbeat in their presence. When warm weather came Baby Suggs, holy, followed by every black man, woman, and child who could make it through, took her great heart to the Clearing—a wide open place cut deep in the woods nobody knew for what at the end of the path known only to deer and whoever cleared the land in the first place. (87)

Truly a spiritual leader rather than a religious leader, Baby Suggs is free of labels and dogma while she possesses the ability to guide others and uplift them spiritually. In addition, she brings the community together to experience the healing effects of nature. Suggs tell those in the clearing, “Let your mothers hear you laugh,” and “Let your wives and your children see you dance” (87). She breathes life and hope back into a community that was physically and psychologically stolen, abused, and degraded by slavery.

Suggs is an example for those who desire to transmute pain into wisdom. However, Suggs is not superhuman. In a passage where Denver remembers her paternal grandmother, she states, “She got low not seeing anybody or going anywhere—just grieving and thinking about colors and how she made a mistake” (209). This passage depicts how Suggs lost all hope and could not get beyond her grieving after the loss of her grandchild she could not stop Sethe from killing. Stamp Paid, an ex-slave from Kentucky where Baby Suggs once lived, perceives Suggs this way as well. This is depicted when the novel states, “Baby Suggs refused to go to the clearing because she had believed *they* had won” (185).

Suggs is depicted as feeling a sense of hopelessness in regards to the oppression and subjugation of black people in America. Nonetheless, there is immense strength in how for many years in spite of this deep trauma, Suggs helps Sethe and Denver remain together as a family after the infanticide while she sacrifices her own work as a spiritual leader due to her deep

grieving.

Denver: Transcendent Descendent

The character of Denver, Sethe's daughter and youngest child, is the only character in the narrative who transcends the world of her family and that of her past pain to create a positive future for herself. Denver represents the future in *Beloved* because of the hope and empowerment expressed through her character's words and actions. As the most dynamic character in the novel, she is intelligent, introspective, and sensitive.

First of all, Denver has more education than her mother and matured at a very young age. This combination makes her markedly different from her mother. She is not only different for the education she received, but also for having to mature quickly and halt her education due to the trauma. The narrative states, "She had almost a year in the company of her peers and along with them learning to spell and count. She was seven and those two hours a day were precious to her" (102). Lady Jones's education of Denver is nourishing for the girl, but the education comes to a stop when one of Denver's peers brings to her attention complex and difficult emotions about Sethe. The narrative states, "It was Nelson Lord—the boy as smart as she was—who put a stop to it; who asked her the question about her mother that put chalk, the little *I* and all the rest that those afternoons held, out of reach forever" (102). The traumatic thing that Nelson Lord said was, "Didn't your mother get locked away for murder? Wasn't you in there with her when she went?" (104). Denver goes into a trauma-induced deafness rather than hear the answer to these questions: "For two years she walked in a silence too solid for penetration but which gave her eyes a power even she found hard to believe" (105). That sight gives Denver the ability to see her baby sister's ghost haunt her home. Denver is a changed person from that point on. In a sense, her innocence is lost. Denver has no choice but to accept the truth about her mother's murder of her sister and endure the haunting of the baby's ghost. Although traumatic in its

development, this early maturity allows for Denver to become the strong individual later in the novel capable of saving her mother and herself from the woman they believe to be Beloved's ghost.

In addition, and most powerfully, a sense of connection to her family, maternal and paternal, gives Denver a strong sense of self and purpose. For example, Denver's grandmother was not only a role model for her, but also an important identity-forming link to her absent father, Halle. Denver states, "She told me my daddy's things. How hard he worked to buy her. After the cake was ruined and the ironed clothes all messed up, after I heard my sister crawling up the stair to get back to her bed, she told me things, too. That I was charmed. My birth was and I got saved all the time. And that I shouldn't be afraid of the ghost" (209). The strong relationship and positive memories Denver has of Baby Suggs and her father, Halle, illustrate in the novel how vital strong family ties are in instilling agency in an individual. The positive feelings she has towards her father and grandmother, in addition to the words of encouragement from her grandmother, create a sense of agency and self-fulfilling prophecy within Denver.

However, before Denver can realize her potential, she has to contend with her complicated relationship with her mother as well as her relationship with her sister, Beloved. While Beloved and Denver are sisters and share many of the same issues in the narrative, ultimately, they are each other's foil in the story. Although Denver shares a mother with Beloved and even drank some of Beloved's blood, which is symbolic on many levels, the young women possess opposing characters, and their effects on their mother, Sethe, are also dual in nature. The strong bond Denver feels toward the woman she believes is Beloved and the division between the two are depicted by Morrison, illustrating the different ideologies each woman portrays or symbolizes in the narrative. Denver represents hope for the future while Beloved represents an

unhealthy clinging to the past. This paradoxical relationship is depicted in the lines, “Beloved is my sister. I swallowed her blood right along with my mother’s milk. The first thing I heard after not hearing anything was the sound of her crawling up the stairs. She was my secret company” (205). While these lines reflect the closeness Denver feels toward Beloved, Denver also reveals how this relationship has changed: “This time I have to keep my mother away from her. That’s hard but I have to” (206). With Denver’s realization of Beloved’s danger to their mother, the fates of the women are separated forever. Denver chooses a future-oriented path for Sethe and herself away from Beloved and all she represents.

Denver, who at first felt a sense of responsibility towards her sister, after realizing it is her mother who is in danger, becomes serious about helping Sethe. This is illustrated in the narrative when after Sethe is extricated from Beloved’s clutches, Denver realizes, “The job she started out with, protecting Beloved from Sethe, changed to protecting her mother from Beloved. Now it was obvious her mother could die and leave them both” (243). Denver takes action and goes into town for help from Lady Jones, her ex-teacher, and soon the whole town comes together and helps both women literally run away from Beloved.

Shortly after Denver helps rescue her mother, Paul D sees Denver on the way home from work. Denver is perceived differently by Paul, showcasing how Denver is becoming more like her father. The novel states, “Paul D saw her when he was on the way to work and he was leaving hers. Thinner, steady in the eyes, she looked more like Halle than ever” (266). The connection that Denver has to her father, Halle, helps her form a strong identity, and that inward strength can be seen outwardly. Much like Halle, who bought his mother Baby Suggs out of slavery, Denver, too, frees her mother from Beloved’s bondage and elevates both their lives from just surviving to something more. Halle provided the woman who gave him life a future, and

similarly, Denver continues that lineage by playing a significant role in freeing her mother from the destructive energy of the past.

In addition, the most powerful way that Denver helps herself and her mother is how she reaches out to the African-American community in Cleveland. Denver had been stunted in her emotional growth by years of relative isolation in 124 alone with Sethe, but within the narrative's plot, Denver develops into a woman with the strength to reach out for help, unlike her mother. Beloved's increasing malevolence and declining condition forces Denver to overcome her fear of the world beyond 124 and seek help. At one point in the narrative, she bravely decides, "So it was her who had to step off the edge of the world and die because if she didn't, they all would" (139). Denver, risking a kind of emotional death and possible physical death, finds the strength deep within herself to help her family. By doing this brave act and taking this leap of faith, she also finds her own sense of agency. The moment this is truly initiated is when Denver decides to go to Lady Jones for work. One thing that seems to hold Denver back is the sense that she is ashamed of her mother, which is illustrated in the novel: "there was no way to tell her how her family was, so she said what was at the top of her mind. 'I want work, Miss Lady'" (248). Stepping out into town and into Lady Jones's home symbolizes Denver entering the world as her own person: "Denver looked up at her. She did not know it then, but it was the word 'baby,' said softly and with such kindness, that inaugurated her life in the world as a woman" (248). After this experience, Denver continues to work and communicate with other African-American women in her community. After speaking with a woman named Janey, Denver's story of Sethe's poor condition spreads. The narrative reads, "The news that Janey got hold of she spread among the other colored women. Sethe's daughter, the one whose throat she cut, had come back to fix her. [. . .] It took them days to get the story properly blown out and themselves agitated and then

to calm down and assess the situation” (255). This illustrates how Denver’s conversations with women in her community sets the inertia into action that eventually saves Sethe from Beloved’s vengeance. When the African-American women of the community surround Sethe’s house, Beloved’s grip on Sethe that holds her in a tortuous past loses all power:

Standing alone on the porch, Beloved is smiling. But now her hand is empty. Sethe is running away from her, running, and she feels the emptiness in the hand Sethe has been holding. Now she is running into the faces of the people out there, joining them and leaving Beloved behind. Alone. Again. Then Denver, running too. Away from her to the pile of people there. They make a hill. (262)

By leaving Beloved behind and joining the African-American community, both Denver and Sethe leave the past behind and enter the present with all the struggles the community faces. Much like Sharpe’s idea that African-Americans are living in the “wake” of slavery, the characters in *Beloved* are doing so literally. Of course, the community is stronger together than isolated. In the end, Denver’s power to help herself and her mother while bringing the African-American community together reveals her as the true heroine of the novel.

A Polyphony of Voices Exposes Many Truths

The various narratives in *Beloved* create a polyphony of voices that communicate a larger truth than that of one narrative dominating a novel. By placing narratives side by side rather than creating a hierarchy, the emphasis is on the subjective narratives of the characters woven into a modern polyphony of African-American voices post-slavery. In this respect, the structure of *Beloved* is parallel with Bakhtin’s ideas of polyphonies in the novels of Dostoevsky and Dante, as explored in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*:

Thus Dostoevsky’s world is the artistically organized coexistence and interaction of spiritual diversity, not stages in evolution of a unified spirit. And thus, despite their different hierarchical emphasis, the worlds of the heroes and the planes of the novel, by virtue of the novel’s very structure, lie side by side on a plane of coexistence (as do Dante’s worlds) and of interaction. (31)

By creating a narrative that gives equal credence to the subjectivities of a multiplicity of characters, highlighting those of women, Morrison constructs a polyphonic narrative of specifically African-American matriarchal voices that offers a complex and nuanced depiction of post-slavery life during the Reconstruction era.

To further support the significance of *Beloved* in the contexts of literary and historical narratives, one must consider the subjective voices given power simply by allowing them to be heard in the story. For example, Jeanne Fuston-White continues to expand on ideas of black subjectivity that are expressed in the inner lives of the characters and their personal narratives, which creates a polyphony of narratives, including historical narratives:

Morrison's characters who might have been rendered voiceless and helpless by their society, speak, command, and demonstrate agency. While Morrison uses a narrative, *Beloved* has far-reaching implications. By refiguring knowledge and subjectivity, Morrison reconstitutes blackness outside of essentialist traditions which have defined it superficially and secondarily. (462)

By expressing the narratives and the subjective inner thoughts of characters who have been historically marginalized, Morrison adds the voices of black women to a wider literary canon and historical narrative in a profound way. These strands of narrative brought together create a larger, intersectional "Americanist" narrative, not of just one formerly enslaved African-American woman, but of many, all with many gifts and many struggles. This polyphony of voices creates a deeper understanding of the experience of African-American women post-slavery, one that respects the individual subjectivities of each woman while also acknowledging greater themes like slavery's and post-slavery's effects on family, self-worth, and identity.

CHAPTER VI

COMPARISON OF *THE SLUM*, *SAB*, AND *BELOVED*

It seems that each person who enters the labyrinth of the polyphonic novel somehow loses his way and fails to hear the whole behind the individual voices.

Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*

The Slum, *Sab*, and *Beloved* are narratives that give voice to the historically voiceless through the telling of their stories that provide insight into the individual characters. Consequently, these narratives, and those like them, alter the traditional narratives by giving voices to unknown narratives and their perceptions. These narratives (*The Slum*, *Sab*, and *Beloved*) are not the only novels in the Americas that reflect this type of narrative; however, they do illustrate the progression of literature in the Americas to more polyphonic narratives of women and people of color. This is significant because of the precedent set of representation of marginalized women but also for the polyphonic nature of these novels that depicts the variety of subjectivity in the experiences of subjugated people. Furthermore, these novels empower through the telling of narratives while also expressing the commonality of the human condition.

The literary representation of a variety of marginalized characters naturally gives voice to ideologies of racial and gender equality in the nineteenth and twentieth century and illustrates how the struggle for equality is tied to expression. The novels, though from different countries and even time periods, highlight the ongoing, intersectional struggle for equality that continues in the twenty-first century.

All three of the texts illustrate the authors' attempts to confront false racist and misogynistic paradigms in the American context. These novels' examples set forth a precedent that the movement of giving voice to the voiceless, particularly African-Americans and women, have a multitude of commonalities while simultaneously allowing for the vitally important

expression of subjective realities. All three novels examined in this thesis involve illuminating slave narratives central to the stories at hand. Through the telling of these stories, the voices themselves are transformed to more than “slave” narratives, but rather stories of a variety of individuals in their struggle for agency, meaning and the pursuit of happiness. By simply expressing these narratives within a novel, the very humanity of these characters is expressed. In her book *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative*, Valerie Smith illustrates this idea:

As we have seen, the slave narrators illuminate the relationship between narrative authority and personal autonomy in the places in which they transform received literary and ideological conventions. By seizing control of the narrative representation of their lives, they provide a figure for their earlier escape from their master’s domination. (XXX)

To elaborate on Smith’s ideas, this philosophy of the agency can be extended to provide autonomy in the lives of subjugated women. Furthermore, this idea applies not just in non-fiction narratives, but in fictional characters who find agency by communicating their stories. In fact, while each of the aforementioned novels are historically based in the nineteenth century the characters in those novels have relevancy in the twenty-first century. As the characters in *The Slum*, *Sab*, and *Beloved* depict subjugated people who find a way to defy oppression and are “seizing control of the narrative representation of their lives,” the reader can do so as well.

The Intersectionality of the Three Novels

The intersectional reality of different kinds of discrimination is important to see along with the idea that at the core of subjugation are philosophies of hierarchy and power. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar address the parallel and often intersectional nature of patriarchal narratives that are oppressive to both people of color and women. In the novels analyzed (*Slum*, *Sab*, and *Beloved*), the controlling patriarchal narratives are confronted and

replaced by matriarchal and African-American voices. Indeed, abolitionist ideology, antiracist ideology, and feminist ideology all share commonalities:

Moreover, just as blacks did in the master slave relationship of the American South, women in patriarchy have traditionally cultivated accents of acquiescence in order to gain freedom to live their lives on their own terms, if only in the privacy of their own thoughts. Interestingly, indeed several feminist critics have recently used Frantz Fanon's model of colonialism to describe the relationship between male (parent) culture and female (colonized) literature. (74)

Several of the characters in *The Slum*, *Sab* and *Beloved* do not acquiesce, sometimes to their own downfall, and by breaking these social norms in the character's lives, the authors use the characters in the narratives to illustrate how women, particularly women of color, and African-American men can extricate themselves from a colonized mindset. These narratives in this study focus on the narratives of individuals who attempt to escape patriarchal Eurocentric control and replace them with matriarchal narratives that are empowering. Due to the narratives being inclusive and empowering to females and people of color, the three novels are both feminist and abolitionist, if not proto-feminist as in the case of *The Slum* to say the least.

Cohesive Unifying Matriarchal Narratives: Martina and Baby Suggs

The narratives of both Martina in *Sab* and Baby Suggs in *Beloved* provides a unifying, cohesive narrative that unites some of the characters in the stories. Both women exemplify how a Matriarch can bring provide a narrative that brings people together and helps them survive and heal to alternative, matriarchal narratives for their communities to survive and heal. Martina is a destitute native woman who is raising her grandchild alone and adoptive mother to Sab. When the white plantation owner that enslaves Sab, Don Pablo, tries to discredit Martina and asks him if she is the woman who "pretends to be native" and seems a "bit mad" (72), Sab replies to him:

She has inspired a certain defense among the farmers of the Cubitas, in part because they really believe to be a decedent of that unfortunate race, now almost extinct to the island, and in part because of her immense wisdom, her knowledge of medicine from which they derive great benefit and the pleasure they feel when

listening to her incessant stories about vampires and ghosts-all this gives her importance among the local people. (74)

Martina is a matriarch among the poor farmers of Cuban society for her knowledge of the natural plant-based healing arts, Native American myth and history. Her knowledge of folk stories and myth depicted through her stories of “vampires” and “ghosts,” though only mentioned once in the narrative, illustrates her vital role in continuing folk culture and bringing people together. Furthermore, her historical narrative unifies poor subjugated people of color (Native American, African, and Mulatto) by providing an alternative historical and sociological perspective. This element of historical narrative and vengeance is depicted when Sab states in the same aforementioned scene:

I have often heard refer –in a mysterious manner and interrupting herself from time to time with exclamation of sorrow and dire prophesies of vengeance –to the savage and horrible which, according to her the Spaniards metted out to chief Camaguey, the ruler of this province and the one our poor Martina claims to descend. (72)

Martina is described as a traditional Indigenous Matriarch (knowledge of medicine, living in the woods, re-telling mythological stories) but she also propagates a historical narrative that empowers people of color and unifies them. Sab distills this fact when telling the European plantation owner and Carlota’s father, Don Carlos, about Martina and her role with the poor farmers of the Cubitas. When Carlota argues against her father’s trivialization of Martina’s narrative, the reader gets to witness how Martina’s narrative is both unifying and inspiring. Carlota replies to her father, “I have never been able to calmly read the bloody history of the conquest of America. My God, how many horrors!” (73) This dialogue depicts how the old world may see narratives of subjugated people one way and how the younger generation (at least of women), even white, can change the narrative with their own conscience. This scene in the novel illustrates how Martina’s narrative unifies both Sab and Carlota in their sympathy for the

subjugated African and indigenous of the Americas and this paradigm of thought can naturally extend from the past to the present and to any marginalized group. Furthermore, this scene illuminates that while Sab and Carlota are both motherless, Martina is the mother symbolically and intellectually for Sab in the novel, illustrating the power of the inspiration and support of this indigenous matriarch.

Baby Suggs from *Beloved* is a symbol for matriarchal narratives and power parallel to Martina in regards to being a unifying, motherly figure to many individuals in her community. Baby Suggs is the mother, grandmother, and spiritual leader to the whole African-American community post-slavery in the narrative of *Beloved*. To further illustrate the importance of what Baby Suggs symbolizes in *Beloved*, Beloved the character is the only African-American in the novel who does not know who Baby Suggs, and she is the most forsaken individual in the novel. Both Martina and Baby Suggs provide alternative, matriarchal narratives for their communities though those narratives may have different purposes.

First of all, Martina's narrative focuses on a story that provides hope for a better future for both Africans and indigenous people. By propagating the myths and legends of the land, Martina provides a sense of identity that is alternative to the perspective of being subjugated. By retelling Martina's "prophesies of vengeance," Sab provides a sense of hope for marginalized people and a sense of justice for empathetic people like Carlota. Furthermore, by invoking the name of the Native American Chief Camaguey, who was betrayed by the Spaniards, and claiming that not only will he come back to enact vengeance but that Martina is his descendant (72), a tangible sense of future redemption, or hope, for the marginalized communities that embrace the narrative is provided.

Conversely, Baby Suggs's narrative provides a more inward spiritual and emotional

healing in the present world for the characters. While Suggs may not communicate an actual myth or story, her narrative exists through the type of preaching she does in the pulpits and clearings of the novel, illustrating that one can take control of his or her own life's narrative through a healing spirituality, as illustrated in *Beloved*:

Accepting no title of honor before her name, but allowing a small caress after it, she became an unchurched preacher, one who visited pulpits and opened her great heart to those who could use it. In the winter and the fall she carried it to the AME's and Black Baptists, Holinesses and Sanctifieds, the Church of the Redeemer and the Redeemed." (87)

This passage explains how Suggs transcended any religious dogma or definition offering spiritual and emotional healing to the post-slavery African-American community. The aforementioned churches are all African-American places of worship and by stating how Suggs "opened her great heart to all who could use it," a sense of inclusiveness is inferred. Both the characters of Martina and Suggs bring oppressed characters together in their narratives to gain or reclaim a positive identity and agency. The narratives and subsequent perspectives expressed through these characters illustrates the power that Matriarchs have to aid in rebuilding one's identity from an oppressed sense of identity to one self-defined with agency.

Matriarchal narratives are not only important for the agency they provide for those who communicate them, but for the characters inspired by them. This is illustrated through the characters of Sab in *Sab* and *Sethe* in *Beloved*. For example, in *Sab*, the eponymous protagonist continues Martina's matriarchal narrative and states to Don Carlos whom enslaves him: "In her moments of exaltation, sir, I have heard the old Indian woman shout: 'the earth which was drenched in blood will be so again: the descendants of the oppressors will be themselves oppressed'" (72). By Sab echoing Martina's ideas, the narrative takes on an added dimension of intersectionality, adding the African-American voice to it. Sab finds redemptive hope in

Martina's narrative that he does not find in the patriarchal European worldview. While he would not exact vengeance himself, this prophesy provides emotional support and vindication in spite of the absence of physical help. Sethe also finds a sense of possibility and healing in Baby Suggs's worldview and in her simple existence. Though Sethe's mother was hung when Sethe was a child and largely absent due to slavery before that, Sethe finds in Suggs a mother figure. Sethe tells Denver what happened to her mother when she states she was hung and that her brand was indistinguishable due to the abuse she endured (61). This illustrates not only the brutality of Sethe's mother's murder, but that there is even a sense that this may not be her mother—maybe her mother did run away without her, further illustrating the broken familial bonds due to slavery. Sethe latches on to the mother figure she finds in Suggs and her memory. It is illustrated when expressed in *Beloved* that Baby Suggs's "long distance love was equal to any skin close love she had known. The desire, let alone the gesture, to meet her needs was good enough to lift her spirits to the place she could take the next step" (95). Baby Suggs's example and love help Sethe find the strength to move forward, even after Suggs passes away. Much like Sab, who also does not have a mother who is alive, Sethe adopts a strong woman and her worldview as her role models. Both narratives, *Sab* and *Beloved*, illustrate that a strong and beneficial Matriarchal influence need not be biological. Matriarchal narratives are exemplified as powerful and empowering in both novels.

A Decolonization of the Mind in the Characters of *The Slum*, *Sab*, and *Beloved*

All the characters mentioned above are involved in extricating themselves from the status quo of their society that brings them pain and suffering though in different manners. Yet, in *Beloved*, the various female characters express intersectionality, degrees of agency, and (maybe most importantly) subjectivity, thereby creating a polyphonic narrative that provides wider representation of African-American women. By the narrative *centering* on the subjectivities of

four women's narratives (Sethe, Beloved, Denver, and Baby Suggs), placing them side by side, for the reader to hear many African-American female voices post-slavery.

While matriarchal narratives woven into the three texts constitute one way to combat the disproportionate hierarchy of patriarchal narratives in society another way is to confront the ways women are dehumanized. The dehumanization of African-American women's bodies can be found all over the Americas, as the literature analyzed and compared in this thesis illustrate. Sharpe's analysis concurs:

Whether the body is in the Caribbean, the Americas, England, or post-independence Africa. That is, while all modern subjects are post-slavery subjects fully constituted by the discursive codes of slavery and post slavery, post slavery subjectivity is largely borne by and readable on the (New World) black subject.
(3)

The narratives in all three case studies in this thesis illustrate the effects of slavery on its subjects, whether during the atrocity or after it. As illuminated in *The Slum* with the character Bertoleza, who as an ex-slave is facing to become a slave again, kills herself in the kitchen she has toiled in and metaphorically helped nourish the same society that ultimately gives her no choice but tortuous slavery or suicide. Sharpe's arguments in *Monstrous Intimacies* illuminate why when analyzing racial inequality, it is vital in telling the complete narrative to include that of women of color and include a polyphony of voices from that group. All three narratives, to varying extents, show the power of matriarchal narratives in the emancipation of subjugated peoples. These narratives vindicate women and people of color's suffering and oppression. The matriarchal stories prevalent in all three novels provide intersectional perspectives on subjugation.

Runaway Slave Narratives of African-American Women: Sethe ad Bertoleza

In regards to the history of racism in North and South America, both *The Slum* and *Beloved* depict the painful individual issues of women who have the strength of will to escape

slavery. This theme is encapsulated by the characters Sethe of *Beloved* and Bertoleza of *The Slum*. Both Bertoleza and Sethe have life situations, responses to slavery, and characteristics parallel to those of the other. Both women are runaway slaves, although Sethe is set in the United States, and Bertoleza's character is Brazilian. Both characters are strong women who attempt to escape the horrors of slavery, and ultimately, take a life as a result. Bertoleza, when seeing she will be forced back into slavery, take her own life when she "[leaps] back as swiftly as a startled tapir and before anyone [can] stop her, [opens] her belly with one quick swift slash" (208).

Bertoleza chooses death over the fate of being enslaved again. In this depiction of the horrors of slavery, the reader sees that Bertoleza would rather die than experience slavery again. For Sethe, there is a similar and parallel reaction to slavery as she states to Paul D, "It's my job to what is and to keep them away from what I know is terrible. I did that" (165). For Sethe, when recaptured into slavery, she would rather save her children from slavery first as an act of love. While on the outside, the violence seems brutal and horrific, the murder of her children is an urgent, practical, and even preferable alternative to the horrors of slavery. Both characters illuminate the nightmare of slavery by depicting death as a better alternative to a life enslaved.

Uplifting Sisterly Bonds and Independent Women: Teresa and Denver

Two other characters that share parallel issues and roles from the narratives examined are Teresa of *Sab* and Denver of *Beloved*. These characters both exemplify women with agency and autonomy as women helping other women. Furthermore, these characters parallel each other in a variety of ways and function similarly in the structure of the each of their narratives, creating an unexpected heroine in each. Most powerfully, both characters symbolize the importance of "sisterly" bonds and the power of oppressed women when they become determined to create a better life for themselves.

First of all, Teresa is the orphaned cousin of Carlota, and the two young women grew up as adopted sisters. Early in the narrative, it is established that Teresa cares deeply for Carlota, and the two young women have a sisterly bond. When Carlota speaks of her deceased mother, Teresa illustrates her empathy and loyalty to her cousin by saying, “You are right, Carlota, you and I shall forever mourn the loss which deprived us both, you of the best of mothers and me, poor and destitute orphan, of my sole benefactress” (35). With this statement, Teresa also expresses how though an orphan, she did have a mother-figure in her aunt, Carlota’s mother. Unlike Denver, Teresa does not have a biological mother, but she does have a bond to a mother figure that she shares with Carlota.

Much like Denver, Teresa is used in the novel to examine the power of sisterly relationships. While not a biological sister like Denver and Beloved, Carlota is still a sisterly figure to Teresa, maybe even more so than Denver is to Beloved. It is tenuous if Denver believes that the woman living with her and her mother is her sister; she states in one passage that she believes this woman actually to be someone who was locked up and abused by a white man. She says Beloved, her baby sister, was the ghost who kept her company until her mother acquired a paramour and states, “She was my secret company until Paul D came. He threw her out” (205). This causes resentment in Denver towards Paul D. When the “new” Beloved, the mistaken Beloved, comes into their home, Denver does begin to form a sisterly bond. The narrative states, “Denver and she liked each other’s company. Now she thought she knew why. They spent up or held on to their feelings in harmonious ways” (99). Denver finds ways to bond with Beloved and finds similarities that link them. Later, Denver decides that she must extricate her declining mother from the woman they call “Beloved.” Denver goes as far as to think, “The job she started with, protecting Beloved from Sethe, changed to protecting her mother from Beloved. Now it

was obvious her mother could die” (243). The bond between the two young women is broken when the bond to Sethe is no longer a positive one for Beloved.

Conversely, the relationship between Carlota and Teresa is mutually beneficial; both women enjoy each other’s company and comfort each other in a lifelong bond. Carlota often visited Teresa at the monastery, and the narrative states, “The last two years the nuns had secretly criticized Carlota’s visits with her cousin, perhaps because they felt annoyed at being unable to satisfy their curiosity and hear what the two friends discussed in their talks” (135). This depicts how the two women sustained their friendship over the years. The nuns send for Carlota hours before Teresa’s death from “consumption” (134), to further illustrate the importance of the two women to each other. The prose to follow in the narrative illuminates the state of grace Teresa attained in life that escaped both Sab and Carlota. Shortly before Teresa’s death, the novel states, “Teresa had indeed reached that calm and grave happiness which virtue bestows. Her proud, strong spirit had mastered her destiny” (135). With these few lines, it becomes clear that Teresa is the true heroine of the narrative as she has found peace within, not from temporary material possessions or relationships, but spiritual enlightenment and peace in spite of her sad lot in life. While Denver does not rise above her situation in life through spiritual enlightenment, she rescues her mother from the past and Beloved’s clutches and thereby empowers herself. In the final scenes of *Beloved*, during which Denver meets with Paul D, she says, “It don’t pay to complain” (266). This comment illustrates that Denver has found some level of peace in life and the determination to move forward on her path. Both Teresa and Denver exemplify determination to create their own destinies rather than be victims of unfortunate circumstances.

In *Sab*, a sisterly bond is depicted as a kind of sorority that creates lifelong companionship and love. While *Sab* depicts the kind of sisterly bond that provides lifelong

friendship and emotional support, *Beloved* illustrates sisterly bonds torn apart by slavery, never to be recovered. However, Denver does create bonds within the African-American community in Cincinnati that eventually help her rescue her mother from the painful abyss represented by *Beloved*. Morrison uses the African-American community in *Beloved* to symbolize the kind of familial bonds needed to help Sethe, or anyone like her, rise up out of living in the past.

In addition, both Denver and Teresa share a few vital personality traits; both are very stoic characters who provide strength and a grounding influence to the other characters in the narratives. Teresa is characterized as a very stoic woman who is loyal and attentive to Carlota. Similarly, Denver also displays a stoic character with a grounding influence in how she rescues her mother. Later in the novel, Teresa models her heroic virtues when she, unknown to her family, commits herself to a monastery rather than meet the status quo and get married. At the monastery, she finds true happiness for the first time in her life. Unlike the two protagonists, Sab and Carlota, who both live miserable due to oppression and unrequited love, Teresa finds peace and purpose in the monastery. In the moments before she dies, Teresa states she has found a sense of peace in life, and much of that is due to a letter Sab wrote her before he died. Teresa states, "I die believing in love and virtue, and to this paper I owe the sweet faith that has kept me from the cruelest of ills: discouragement" (138). This quote illustrates how Teresa lived with a belief in love and also did not have an unpleasant life to distract her from loftier ideas. Furthermore, she is the only character in the novel who finds herself with an elevated state of being at the end of her life, as opposed to Sab and Carlota who die in misery. The life that Teresa makes for herself models agency and autonomy and parallels those virtues modeled by Denver in *Beloved*. While Teresa is not the center of the action in the novel, she does emerge by the novel's end as an unlikely heroine transcending her family's and society's expectations of her. Both

Teresa and Denver, although supporting characters, outshine the protagonists by the illumination of their hard-earned heroism.

Denver is also a woman who transcends the negative patterns of her family and her society by finding her own path in life. This is illustrated when Denver thinks, “She would have to leave the yard, step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and ask somebody for help” (243). Rather than stay in 124 with Beloved and her mother, Denver goes to town to work and find help for her family. She does not search for romance or a husband, but rather focuses on her own autonomy, much like Teresa. Furthermore, while seeking help for her mother, Sethe, she is actually helping herself, as well.

Both Denver and Teresa also play similar roles in the plot of their narratives by becoming foils to the protagonists of their novels, eventually surpassing the respective “expected” heroines of each story, and becoming women who transcend familial and societal expectations. While also an unexpected heroine of *Beloved*, Denver’s exceptional altruism illustrates the power of the female underdog. Teresa and Denver exemplify the unlikely heroine in their respective novels by providing models of self-determined and strong young women in the nineteenth century.

Through Our Multitude of Subjectivities, We Find Our Commonality

These anti-slavery, feminist (or proto-feminist) narratives give voice to a metaphorical multiverse of thought in literature. There is a commonality among historically marginalized people of being voiceless, or if represented being misrepresented in literature. Yet, narratives that express the stories of a variety of marginalized in fictional characters provide representation and the consequently are empowering, inspiring all people to develop and share their narratives. To varying degrees the three novels analyzed express the struggle and power of African-American and Matriarchal narratives in the Americas. These narratives communicate lesser known historical truths and subjectivities of women, particularly women of color. Smith illuminates the

significance of narratives of those formerly enslaved by writing, “It is not surprising that a scholarly tradition that values the achievements of the classically educated, middle class white male has dismissed the transcriptions of former slaves’ oral accounts” (10). While Smith is analyzing the narratives of formerly enslaved African-Americans, to add being a woman to the issue creates intersectionality and makes the oppression more complex. To analyze *The Slum*, *Sab*, and *Beloved* for their narratives is to on a larger level advocate for, and celebrate, the voices of the voiceless and highlight their subjectivity, as well, as the commonality of feeling that human beings share. Novels about any race or gender of people should be read and analyzed by all people; to garner greater empathy for others to and also find the greater humanity that exists between us all through our similarities. Or as written in the poem “The Human Family” by Maya Angelou, “I note the obvious differences between every sort and type, but we are more alike my friends than we are unlike.” Through the polyphony of narratives in the three novels, I hope each of you can see that through our multitude of subjectivities, we find our commonality.

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