

BEING AT HOME IN ONE'S HOUSE:  
DOMESTIC SPACE, MEMORY, AND TRAUMA  
IN THREE AMERICAN NOVELS

By

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Mary Douglas's study "The Idea of a Home: A Kind of Space" discusses the idea of home as a psychological space, one that resonates with those who inhabit this intimate location.

We start very positivistically by thinking of home as a kind of space. Home is "here," or it is "not here." The question is not "How?" nor "Who?" nor "When?" but "Where is your home?" It is always a localizable idea. Home is located in space, but it is not necessarily a fixed space. It does not need bricks and mortar, it can be a wagon, a caravan, a boat, or a tent. It need not be a large space, but space there must be, for home starts by bringing some space under control. (288-289)

Although she suggests that alternative spaces such as wagon, caravan, boat, or tent can be made into a home, the aim is to indicate that "home" provides shelter, security, and meaning. To make a home is an act of creation, one that is identified or marked by the occupant as a distinctive, unique, and discrete space in the universe. To make a home is also to claim dominion surrounding that space. Douglas further adds, "As to those who claim that the home does something stabilizing or deepening or enriching for the personality, there are as many who will claim that it cripples and stifles" (288). The centrality of home as a space of domesticity and meaning is subverted when external experiences disrupt one's desire to establish an ideal "home," thus making the space "unhomely" or rather "haunted," besides being uninhabitable in many senses. In the "unhomely" or "haunted" space, the feeling of intimacy no longer prevails.

Narratives in Anglophone literature on haunted houses have proliferated since Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764), solidifying their foundations over the years

from Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) and Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting or Hill House* (1959) to Stephen King's *The Shining* (1977) and beyond. Various writers in different periods have explored the complicated psychological and social space associated with the house, and domestic narratives frequently reveal that the house is a site fraught with complex relations to the past. Contemporary narratives address this concern with a more psychoanalytical approach. The close relationship between thematic preoccupations such as domestic space, memory, and inheritance render the house an active presence in the lives of its inhabitants, rather than an inert or passive setting in which the more significant events unfold. In its complex set of affective associations, the house represents a distinctive literary space. The "haunted house" in literature and the imagination is so salient in part because of this apparent paradox.

This thesis will analyze domestic space, broadly understood, by exploring themes of haunting, memory and trauma in connection with time and history as these are addressed in three novels, each from a different period in American literary history: Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), William Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury* (1929), and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). I explore the relationship between the house as a place of dwelling and the characters that inhabit it with respect to the domestic tyranny that these "haunted" spaces induces, shaping the people living within them. This study pays particular attention to the issues of memory and trauma that those past experiences entail in relation to the present, as envisioned by each author through "haunted" spaces that are tormented by ghosts, literally or figuratively.

Over the past few decades, owing to what has been called the "spatial turn" in

literary and cultural studies, scholars have paid greater attention to matters of space, place, and mapping in their approaches to criticism. Spatial studies in literature delve into a territory of scholarship that results from an interest in understanding the relationship between place, space, and literature. Place can be considered a physical site, or it can be understood in terms of a personal experience between an individual and a location based on one's experience, significance, and purpose. By definition, place is a fixed and secure point that creates meaning and attachment to a particular environment upon interaction. Space is the physical setting where all human actions take place. Space shares a reciprocal relationship with the real and imagined environment with no immediate contact with humans. Space is dynamic, inconspicuous, and mediating. An embodiment of abstract imagination, space justifies the politics of inclusion or exclusion of action.

A proliferating concern among academics is charting the underlying inquires in which space and place inform aesthetics, culture and politics. As Marilyn Chandler has observed, "In many of our major novels a house stands ... as a unifying symbolic structure that represents and defines the relationships of the central characters to one another, to themselves, and to the world and raises a wide range of questions starting with Thoreau's deceptively simple 'What is a house?'" (1). The house, in addition to being an architectural space in a temporal setting, includes personal components such as attachment, human-bonding, intimacy, ownership, and mobility, among others. As a place of dwelling, the house plays a vital role in expressing a strong affective bond between its occupants and the physical setting. Similarly, depictions of mental mapping within this socio-spatial setting informs, reveals and unravels personal biases of the dwellers to the readers.

Indeed, it is difficult to disregard the importance of “mapping” in literature. Mapping is a useful tool to express the relationship between spaces and places. To explicate why cartography is important, maps enable readers to become aware of the sense of space, place, and location within a narrative having affective dynamics such as experiences, feelings, attitudes, and values as is influenced by that distinct space. In fact, narratives necessitate the formation of exterior spaces that determine how a text functions. With this regard in mind, “mapping” has been particularly valuable to understand the physical and psychological kinetics of a concrete, palpable locale in literature. In my thesis, I will explore how mapping is crucial to presenting a sense of emplacement and individual identity with respect to the treatment of houses explored in these three texts.

A number of scholars, critics, and theorists in recent years have paid greater attention to matters of space, place, and mapping in literature, and this shift in emphasis has produced new ways of looking at both real and imaginary places as these are depicted in literary texts. In the introduction to *Topophrenia*, Robert T. Tally Jr. argues that “At a more basic, existentialist level, mapping might be seen as an inevitable (not to say neutral) activity, for the individual subject cannot help but try to orient itself by imagining its position vis-à-vis that of other subjects and in relation to a broader, objective reality” (1). The house—when contextualized within its historical and social emplacement—produces meaning for the immediate surrounding. Tally further asserts,

The injunction to map makes itself felt most urgently, perhaps, in situations in which one is lost, desperately seeking guideposts or markers that can identify one’s place in relation to other places. To call for a map or to demand that

someone engage in mapping is to recognize one's own disorientation, one's displacement in space, or one's loss of a sense of place, which is undoubtedly alienating if not also terrifying. The spatial anxiety associated with being lost, somewhat like the *Angst* that accompanies the existential condition à la Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre, brings with it a visceral awareness of place and space, which might otherwise be taken for granted or left safely tucked away in the unconscious. (2)

In this study, I endeavor to understand the psychological as well as social experiences within the home by mapping these spaces that shape the psyche of the characters living in these “unhomely” places and also to highlight the diversity of experiences that shape their lives.

Before I move into a thorough study of these texts, it is necessary to consider why I chose these novels, written in three different periods in the historical and literary timeline. Written in the Gothic tradition, *The House of the Seven Gables* was published in the spring of 1851 with considerations surrounding a place of habitation and temporality in mind. The microcosmic world of the house, connecting a time that is bygone with what exists in the present, is tensely occupied at once by traditional and futuristic paradigms, where tradition (also understood as the past) is represented by Hepzibah and Clifford Pyncheon, while the modern or futuristic ideal is represented by Phoebe and Holgrave. Although Hawthorne's novel is expressly intended to be read as a “romance,” the author consistently dispels the romantic or fantastic elements of the plot and supplies the reader with a more realistic explanation. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, the past itself, along with the family curse, is eventually dismissed in favor of the more reality-centered

present and the characters' hopes for the future.

The house is an equally towering symbol in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Beloved*. Atypical of Faulkner's techniques, the stream of consciousness method he employs in *The Sound and the Fury* is essentially self-contradictory, which, in fact, espouses a strong skepticism regarding anything that is absolute in nature. At times resilient, the novel resists reader's attempts to pin down its narrative, instead defining itself within its own unique character. Faulkner's novel allows readers to resolve the conflict related to time and memory situated within the text by examining and reinventing the past so as to try to navigate the future. The works by Faulkner and Morrison—as discussed in this thesis—span multiple temporalities as well as spatialities, as can be seen in the radical shifts in time and space within each narrative. With both novels, readers must piece together a broader map from various fragments. If Hawthorne had oversimplified the problem of the past, making it something to be easily dismissed and moved on from, Faulkner's Compson family is obsessed with the past. They have an unhealthy relationship to it, and the household is consumed with the inescapable past. In contrast to these extremes, Morrison's *Beloved* makes a reasonable settlement of accommodating the past within the present context at the end of the narrative. Rather than dismissing the trauma or dwelling on it, Morrison's main characters come to terms with the past, learning to live with the pain and to move on as well. The matriarch Sethe accepts the present with a bleak attempt to eagerly await the future. Through Sethe's adaptive middle ground, Morrison attempts to subvert the history in order to avoid regression back into the past.

Gaston Bachelard writes about the dichotomy between the Home and the universe, “The dialectics of the house and the universe are too simple, ... especially, [as

the house] reduces the exterior world to nothing rather too easily. It gives a single color to the entire universe which, with one word, ... is both expressed and nullified for those who have found shelter" (40). The house sustains and constrains those who inhabit it. Although there is not too much thematic overlap between *The Sound and the Fury* and *Beloved*, Hawthorne's work made way for both of these modernist writers to explore themes of haunting and past. In "Progress and Providence in *The House of the Seven Gables*," John Gatta raises the question of how progress is implied in Hawthorne's text, and then goes on to explain, "The romance is concerned ... with charting the moral and spiritual progress of the individual human heart, particularly as the heart seeks to move toward a permanent, life-giving conjunction with 'the magnetic chain of humanity'" (38). Gatta adds,

Still, it is not easy to say exactly what sort of progress this movement is supposed to imply. What larger prospects for social and historical amelioration might Hawthorne want us to see in the communal regeneration that finally takes place in Salem in 1850, issuing forth symbolically from Maule's Well in the Pyncheon garden? Should we translate the fortunate progression of the story's plot into a statement about the progress of Jeffersonian democracy in America? Or is Hawthorne tracing instead a moral and material progress dictated by the rational secular temper of the Enlightenment, or the social progress of humanity in proto-Darwinian evolutionary terms? (37)

Hawthorne hints at moral and spiritual progress of the individual at the end of the narrative by giving Clifford and Hepzibah (products of the past) the opportunity to attempt to progress inwardly from isolation and inner desolation to accepting communion

and trust in society.

Faulkner's narrative takes a different approach to the past and the present. As Olga W. Vickery argues in "*The Sound and the Fury: A Study in Perspective*,"

Although there is a progressive revelation or rather clarification of the plot, each of the sections is itself static. The consciousness of a character becomes the actual agent illuminating and being illuminated by the central situation. Everything is immobilized in this pattern; there is no development of either character or plot in the traditional manner. This impression is reinforced not only by the shortness of time directly involved in each section but by the absence of any shifts in style.

(1018)

Written about eighty years after Hawthorne's novel, *The Sound and the Fury* uses a literary style that is much more interiorized than is Hawthorne's, creating a more complex and confusing relation between past and present. This technique, in turn, reveals the dual nature of a novel that is intimate and distant at the same time.

Although *Beloved* is also in some senses a historical novel, it has also been associated with postmodernism, which is sometimes characterized by its resistance to historical thinking. Kimberly Chabot Davis claims that Morrison's novel sheds new light on history in "'Postmodern Blackness': Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and the End of History." Davis observes that "the novel's status as part of the African American tradition of social protest, and Morrison's investments in agency, presence, and the resurrection of authentic history, seem to make the novel incompatible with poststructuralist ideas at the root of postmodernism" (245). Maintaining the more modernist theme of time and memory, Morrison shuns the postmodernist elitism as a quest to keep the past alive in

order to construct a better future. However, unlike in Faulkner's novel, the past does not become an obsession.

In each of the following chapters, I will demonstrate how each author takes a rather different approach to the past, its traumas, and the lingering memories of these events in the present. In short, although Hawthorne invokes the Gothic horror of curses and wizardry, his narrative ultimately dismisses the past altogether, eliminating its power over the present. In Faulkner, the more metaphorical "haunting" of the Compson family home proves much more resistant to historical change, as the sins of the past continue to affect a family that cannot put the past behind them. Then, in her intensely psychological yet historical novel, Morrison finds a way to reconcile the traumatic past with a present need for living by striking a balance between memory and forgetting. In each case, the ultimate question for each family is whether they can "be at home" in the houses in which they dwell. This ambivalence renders the house a subject within narrative; this duality is crucial to understanding the underlying aesthetics of what happens within its space. The house not only shelters but also constrains. I intend to analyze how domestic space encloses such facets as time, trauma, and memory in addition to serving as the locus for nostalgia and yearning for the past.

Chapter 2 considers the house in *The House of the Seven Gables* in terms of its physical place and historical reality. Hawthorne claims in the preface that "the book may be strictly read as a Romance, having a great deal more to do with the clouds overhead, than with any portion of the actual soil in Essex" (3). A psychological study of the novel divulges the position of the house as a self-enclosed product of the human psyche—gloomy and isolated, yet seductively mysterious and fantastic, haunted by ghosts of the

ancient Pyncheons. Hawthorne presents an alternative reality by giving readers an opportunity to explore these ironic aspects of the house in the garb of a romantic dilemma intertwined with the present, “like a giant’s dead body” (167). In Hawthorne’s *House*, the domestic ghosts are exorcised by the magic of romance and rejection of the past, as the novel’s happy ending depends on the main characters’ literally moving out of, and beyond, the titular edifice.

Chapter 3 considers the dysfunction of the Compson family in the early twentieth-century South by examining how they fail to reconcile the past with their present in Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*. The four chapters of the novel are divided with respect to the experiences of an individual character or participant, and this attention to point of view allows Faulkner to disclose the familial trauma and its effects from multiple perspectives. Although Benjy’s disabilities curb his potential for expression, Faulkner explains his rationale: “I had already begun to tell [the story] through the eyes of the idiot child since I felt that it would be more effective as told by someone capable of knowing what happened, but not why” (Meriwether and Millgate, 235). Here, both the house and the haunting are metaphorical, as the house, which serves as a figure of the family itself, embodies the Compsons’ plethora of dysfunctional practices. These details expose the characters’ idiosyncratic dimensions as presented by Benjy, Quentin, and Jason, the three brothers in that generation of the family; the fourth section, told in a third-person narrative but focalized on Dilsey, the housekeeper (notably), in particular, suggests the possibility of maintaining the “house” amid its general downfall. Indeed, the domestic space has a quality of hybridity as a site of memory and transformation that reshapes the existing state of affairs at the end of the novel. The emotional developments of the

characters are prohibited within the house; moreover while they are outside, the house haunts them incessantly. In Faulkner, the expiation of past sins is not so easy as Hawthorne had imagined it to be.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* takes a moderately different approach than *The Sound and the Fury*. *Beloved* is set during the pre-Civil War era during the time when Morrison's protagonist Sethe was born, that is, 1835. Spanning about forty years afterwards, the narrative deals with an ex-slave Sethe and her family, consisting of her daughter, Denver, and ghost daughter, Beloved. Chapter 4 examines Morrison's *Beloved* from the perspective of Sethe, the matriarch and her ghost "daughter" Beloved. The relationship between the characters seems horrible on the surface, but a closer look accounts for its horror by revealing the psychological tyranny of their past. Pamela E. Barnett comments on Morrison's treatment of the psychological repercussion of the characters: "Her insistent manifestation constitutes a challenge for the characters who have survived rapes inflicted while they were enslaved: directly, and finally communally, to confront a past they cannot forget." (419). In the novel, there is also no denying the agency of Sweet Home (the plantation in Kentucky) and 124 (Sethe's house on the outskirts of Cincinnati) as sites that confront, transform and reclaim history. Paul D remarks in this context: "It wasn't sweet, it wasn't home" (14); similarly, 124 fails to stand as a comforting shelter to its inhabitants as they are imprisoned by it. As a space of traumatic memory, it is both literally and figuratively "haunted" in the novel. In *Beloved*, Morrison explores the trauma of these "haunted" spaces and persons, suggesting that people should neither simply reject nor dwell on the past, but rather reconcile with it and make peace.

Each of these novels deals with individuals and families attempts to be at home in their households—domestic spaces “haunted” by the past—and each author takes a distinct approach to the problem. If Hawthorne’s Pyncheon family is far too easily able to dispel the gloom and get over the past, Faulkner’s Compsons are mired in an inescapable past. In Morrison’s *Beloved*, and particularly with the trials undergone by Sethe and Denver, the reader can see an approach to the traumatic past that is neither dismissive nor obsessive. Morrison shows us how to be at home with our past, even if it is painful.

## 2. OVERCOMING THE PAST IN NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S

### *THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES*

In the Preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*, Nathaniel Hawthorne famously distinguishes between the “novel” and the “romance” by asserting that a novel seemingly “is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man’s experience,” whereas a romance can deviate from these requirements, allowing the author “a certain latitude, both as to its [i.e., the work’s] fashion and material” (ix). By announcing himself as the author of a romance, therefore, Hawthorne defends himself against the potential accusations of being unrealistic, while also giving himself the freedom to describe places, characters, and events in ways that suit him. For example, even though the story is set in a well-known location—Salem, Massachusetts—Hawthorne warns the readers not to put too much stock in this fact. As he states,

The Reader may perhaps choose to assign an actual locality to the imaginary events of this narrative. If permitted by the historical connection—which, though slight was essential to his plan—the author would very willingly have avoided anything of this nature. Not to speak of other objections, it exposes the romance to an inflexible and exceedingly dangerous species of criticism, by bringing his fancy-pictures almost into positive contact with the realities of the moment. It has been no part of his object, however, to describe local manners, nor in any way to meddle with the characteristics of a community for whom he cherishes a proper respect and natural regard. . . . He would be glad, therefore, if—especially in the quarter to which he alludes—the book may be read as strictly a Romance, having

a great deal more to do with the clouds overhead, than with any portion of the actual soil of the County of Essex. (x)

Considering the degree to which *The House of the Seven Gables* concerns matters of “real estate,” this warning in the Preface must be considered very ironic.

In Hawthorne’s romance (or novel, as most readers would refer to it today), one can hardly fail to notice the glaring presence of the house both in the plot and as a major theme within the narrative. To the extent that Hawthorne is referring to an existing edifice, in reality, the titular house was actually built in 1668 on the Salem waterfront by John Turner, a sea captain turned successful merchant. However, as Hawthorne had warned in the Preface, the romantic story in *The House of the Seven Gables* has nothing to do with that house’s “real world” history. The premise of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s narrative is largely built on this house, but only insofar as it serves as the site of a fictional narrative. In addition, Hawthorne infuses elements of the grotesque, romance, history, memory, and quaintness in order to establish the grim undertones of the house as it appears in the novel.

The primary setting of Hawthorne’s novel is the house itself and its immediate environs (i.e., its yard, the well, and the street). In the first chapter, Hawthorne offers an insight into the history of the house and the Pyncheon family who own it during the present time. Highborn Colonel Pyncheon schemes to steal a property from the plebeian Matthew Maule (the initial owner of the land) in the 1600s by accusing him of witchcraft during the time of the Salem witch trials in New England. Colonel Pyncheon dies shortly thereafter, apparently fulfilling the curse that Matthew Maule had laid upon him right before being executed. Prior to his death, however, Colonel Pyncheon had built a stately

home on the site of Maule's dispossessed land that is presently inhabited by scowling old maid Hepzibah Pyncheon, her brother Clifford Pyncheon, their distant cousin Phoebe Pyncheon, and the mysterious painter Holgrave. Ironically, perhaps, the house was constructed by Maule's own son, the only capable architect and builder around. On the day of housewarming ceremony, Colonel Pyncheon is found dead in his chamber, fulfilling Maule's imprecation, "God will give him blood to drink" (3). Death thus "stepped across the threshold of the House of the Seven Gables" (8).

In the present time, the Pyncheons inhabiting the house have fallen on fiscal distress; Hepzibah Pyncheon, an old maiden in her sixties, has lived alone in the house for over twenty-five years. She has resorted to opening a penny-shop in her old age to keep from starving: "Poverty, treading closely at her heels for a lifetime, had come up with her at last. She must earn her own food, or starve!" (24). Moreover, "her scowl had done Miss Hepzibah a very ill office, in establishing her character as an ill-tempered old maid" (22) in the neighborhood. Mr. Holgrave, a young man with an air of mystery about him and yet a "kindly tone" (29), presently lives in one of the shabby gables as a tenant. Additionally, the taciturn daguerreotypist Holgrave has "an odd kind of authority" (64) and a "magnetic element," something that baffles and concerns Hepzibah at the same time, further revealed through his conversations with the other occupants of the house. Holgrave mentions to Hepzibah that he takes pride in neither being born a gentleman, nor having lived the life of one. Phoebe, "one little offshoot of the Pyncheon race ... [and] a native of a rural part of New England, where old fashions and feelings of relationship are still partially kept up" (47) comes to the House of the Seven Gables with a "young, blooming, and very cheerful face" with high hopes of being welcomed into the house.

Instead she is greeted by Hepzibah's scowl and a "gloomy old mansion" (46).

In spite of being a Pyncheon, Hepzibah thinks that Phoebe has taken after her mother's side, who are unlike the Pyncheons: "What a nice little body she is! If she could only be a lady, too—but that's impossible! Phoebe is no Pyncheon. She takes everything from her mother" (54). Phoebe is "very pretty; as graceful as a bird, and graceful much in the same way; as pleasant about the house as a gleam of sunshine falling on the floor through a shadow of twinkling leaves, or as a ray of firelight that dances on the wall while evening is drawing nigh" (55). In contrast, Hepzibah, with "her deeply cherished and ridiculous consciousness of long descent, her shadowy claims to princely territory" (55) barely survives within the house in the present. First appearing in Chapter 7, "The Guest," is Hepzibah's brother Clifford Pyncheon, having served thirty years in prison after being wrongly convicted of murdering his uncle. Once an intellectually gifted person and a delicate lover of all that is beautiful, Clifford is reduced to being peevish and childish after serving in prison for so long.

The house, as a physical setting, subjugates its present dwellers, chiefly Hepzibah and Clifford, in many ways although the architecture has doubtlessly transcended time and history, as it is observed by the omniscient narrator near the beginning of the narrative: "We have already hinted that it is not our purpose to trace down the history of the Pyncheon family in its unbroken connection with the House of the Seven Gables; nor to show, as in a magic picture, how the rustiness and infirmity of age gathered over the venerable house itself" (11). Rather, the setting of the novel relies on the interior space of the house in which most of the action takes place. The presence of the house, felt throughout the novel, is something that is much bigger even than other realities, and it

presently weighs heavily on the Pyncheon descendants. If measured meticulously, both the public and private realms of the house equally disturb Hepzibah as well as those who live in the vicinity. As a matter of fact, the questionable circumstances regarding the history of this dwelling place make it not a “homey” shelter for its inhabitants but a place that fails to provide protection to them. At the beginning of the novel, the House of the Seven Gables, essentially devoid of light and life, exhibits an uncongenial aspect which can be linked to the affect with which the dwellers as well as the related entities understand this marked space. The austerity and gloom associated with the house is, in many ways, also felt by its main inhabitant, Hepzibah Pyncheon, who is both proud of her august lineage and equally embarrassed at her present situation. Considering her present position, she is much like the house itself, which has a towering history behind it but a present stature diminished substantially. As the narrator smugly announces, at the beginning of the narrative, the house is “a little withdrawn from the line of the street, but in pride, [and] not modesty” (5). It is clearly noticeable that the dramatic peripeteia of the Pyncheon family has an intimate connection with the house and a rather direct effect on the lives of the present dwellers as a conspectus of the disturbing traditions of the Pyncheons.

Furthermore, the titular house, if viewed historically rather than for its own sake, reflects issues of deep-seated class conflict. The house features a history of class struggle exhibited by several events within Hawthorne’s romance as a consequence of the past transgression by Hepzibah’s ancestors. Nominally, this is part of the legacy of the upper-class Pyncheons and the working-class Maules, but at the beginning of the novel, Hepzibah’s economic circumstances have required her to open a “cent shop,” thus

descending in social class to the level of the petit bourgeoisie. The house itself is a mansion, but, like the family, it has fallen on hard times.

The tragic dynamics within the house resonate with their immediate physical setting, creating a mood of repressed anxiety and having an inescapable impact on the lives of the inhabitants, rendering the site even more complex. The House of the Seven Gables stands apart from others in the vicinity, so much so, that it “might just as well be buried in an eternal fog while all other houses had the sunshine on them; for not a foot would ever cross the threshold, nor a hand so much as try the door” (33). The affective impact of the house on its residents and the surrounding areas is certainly not without consequences; Hepzibah bears the brunt of a sin committed long ago, but it has not yet been absolved. The house holds a thick layer of the past within its walls, and its liminal existence acts as a mediator between presence and absence, past and future, one that negotiates between the living and the dead.

Certainly, *The House of the Seven Gables* is built on the premise of a haunted house, or as a metafiction in which the ghosts of the deceased occupy the house. The overriding theme in this book reveals the perils of inheritance, as manifested in tradition, identity, aristocratic ideals, pride, rumors, and fables, negotiated incessantly through a struggle between past and present. At its core, the novel is also about the loss of self, as demonstrated by Hepzibah and Clifford, who cease to be fully alive in the house. On the other hand, Phoebe and Holgrave—having come to the house from outside—bring light into it. The crisis within the titular house is that it fails to establish a nourishing relationship with the occupants as well as provide an intimate setting to them. As a matter of fact, the questionable nature of this dwelling place rests on the premise that Colonel

Pyncheon appropriated a piece of land, on which the House of the Seven Gables was built, exploiting its deprived owner, Matthew Maule. The confused relationship between the occupants and the house, even in the narrative present, is seemingly an outcome of the inheritance of sin as confirmed by the omniscient narrator. Foreboding of something sinister seems to lurk in the background of this house, which is accompanied by a grotesque shade that has tormented the Pyncheons for generations.

As it turns out, the house with its “large ... accumulation of ancestry” (85), embodies deep-seated class conflict, as exemplified in the relationships among the living Pyncheons. The Pyncheon family in the present is not only represented by the elderly, melancholic Hepzibah and her languid brother Clifford (recently released from jail), who live frugally in the house, but also by their wealthy cousin, Judge Pyncheon and his family. The unctuous Judge Pyncheon is introduced as a reincarnation of Colonel Pyncheon by the narrator, as if “the Colonel Pyncheon of two centuries ago stepped forward as the Judge of the passing moment!” (83). He appears in the House of the Seven Gables “dressed in a black suit” carrying “a gold-headed cane of rare Oriental wood” as well as “conscientious polish[ed] ... boots” revealing “very little evidence of the general benignity of soul” (80) in a countenance accompanied by a “hard, stern, relentless look” (82). When Judge Pyncheon visits the House of the Seven Gables, Hepzibah and Clifford do not offer him a cordial welcome into the house and seem unprepared for his visit. The Judge’s controlling presence in the house and his haughty exchanges with the other family members establishes his position as antagonist in the course of the narrative. By goading Hepzibah and Clifford into an adjacent state of delirium, the Judge verifies his “disturbing influence” in the “trim, orderly, and limit-loving class” of the dwellers. One

can witness a great deal of similarity between the Judge and the Colonel, not only in terms of physical countenance, but also in their motives and intention to procure more wealth than they already possess. Both the Judge and Colonel Pyncheon are driven by a disproportionate aspiration to rise the social ladder as the narrator mentions that “tradition affirmed that the Puritan had been greedy of wealth; the Judge too, with all the show of liberal expenditure, was said to be as close-fisted as if his grip were of iron” (84).

One of the symbols within Hawthorne’s narrative is the elm tree across the front door which typifies vitality, in an oddly incongruous kinship with the Pyncheons. Although planted on a soil that reeks of misconduct and jinx, the tree has a healing effect on the present members of the family; “it gave beauty to the old edifice, and seemed to make it a part of nature” (16). The tree also has its root firmly planted on the foundation of the Pyncheon house, and has continued to absorb the hatred and venom for generations, only to alter them into something noble and precious. Phoebe’s domestic efficacy arises from not only her bucolic upbringing, but also presumably from her innocence and distance from the inherited sin of the house. She does not bear the burden of the past; as a result, she is vivacious and sympathetic. These qualities are further evident when she communicates with the other dwellers, Hepzibah, Clifford, and Holgrave.

The subtle atmospheric occurrences in the house also give it a unique identity. With all the palpable gloom and morbidity within the house, Hepzibah is unhappy, neither capable of escaping her fate nor able to live with it; the house weighs her down eternally and there is no way she can evade her inherited sin. *The House of the Seven Gables* is necessarily a two layered structure; the inside of the house has an idiosyncratic

characteristic like that of the outside of the house. While the mansion is intimidating for its onlookers, the interior space intimidates its dwellers. Undeniably, the architecture of the house is an overwhelming presence in Hawthorne's narrative, constraining the interiority of the residents within. Hawthorne decidedly paints Phoebe in a different light from the other Pyncheons, as she freely moves within the house right after coming to it. Phoebe's effect on her environment is immediate, as demonstrated in this passage:

Phoebe's wasted, cheerless, and dusky chamber, which had been untenanted so long—except by spiders, and mice, and rats and ghosts—that it was all overgrown with the desolation which watches to obliterate every trace of man's happier hours. What was precisely Phoebe's process we find it impossible to say. She appeared to have no design, but gave a touch here and another there; brought some articles of furniture to light and dragged others into the shadow; looped up or let down a window curtain; and in the course of half an hour, had fully succeeded in throwing a kindly and hospitable smile over the apartment. (49)

Devoid of aristocratic pretensions, Phoebe attempts to embrace the character of the jinxed old dwelling soon after she arrives in the House of the Seven Gables. Her "free and virgin spirit" is unaware of any repercussions surrounding the inheritance of past sin that her infamous ancestor possesses for apparently murdering Matthew Maule.

In a real sense, the narrative rests on the question of whether the land on which the titular house of Hawthorne's narrative is built belongs to the Maules or the Pyncheons. Insofar as class struggle is concerned, it is discernible from the onset of the narrative in the author's account of "The Old Pyncheon Family" in the first chapter. Although Matthew Maule initially owned the piece of land, Colonel Pyncheon conspires

to take the property from him, and the fact that he gets away with it confirms the class conflict associated with the house from its inception. It starts from the transfer of ownership and leads to the controversy associated with the house. These elements represent the subjectivity of the house where memory, mediation, and introspection are defined. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator declares, “the venerable mansion has always affected me like a human countenance, bearing the traces not merely of outward storm and sunshine, but expressive, also” (1).

In “Romance and Real Estate,” Walter Benn Michaels asserts that “haunted house stories (like *The House of the Seven Gables*) usually involve some form of anxiety about ownership. Frequently this anxiety concerns actual financial cost” (157). Michaels further examines the nature of the dispute:

Hawthorne does not, however, represent the struggle between Pyncheons and Maules merely as a conflict between the more and less powerful or even in any simple way as a conflict over a piece of land. He presents it instead as a conflict between two different mode of economic activity and ... begins the complicated process of articulating his own defense of property. (159-160)

The architecture of the house as well as the locale manifests this dichotomy; the road on which Matthew Maule built his “hut, shaggy with thatch” (Hawthorne 2) known as Maule’s Lane has been replaced by the House of the Seven Gables and “Pyncheon Street” (5), which has been further “widened about forty years ago” (16). Even the “soft and pleasant water—a rare treasure on the sea-girt peninsula” (2) and “the spring of water” upon which Matthew Maule built his shack “entirely lost the deliciousness of its pristine quality” and “grew hard and brackish.” (4). The proud arrogance and greed of

Colonel Pyncheon devours Matthew Maule prematurely, as well as the subsequent progeny of the Pyncheon clan who lived in the titular house after his death. Similarly, Judge Pyncheon's wolfish attitude towards Clifford "in whose ruin he had so large a share" (152) demonstrates the same vices such as pride and rapacity so as to seize the "fortune" that is believed to be hidden within the house,

... in some low and obscure nook—some narrow closet on the ground floor, shut, locked and bolted, and the key flung away; or beneath the marble pavement, in a stagnant water puddle, with the richest pattern of mosaicwork above—may lie a corpse, half decayed, and still decaying, and diffusing its death scent all through the palace! The inhabitant will not be conscious of it, for it has long been his daily breath! Neither will the visitors, for they smell only the rich odors which the master sedulously scatters through the palace, and the incense which they bring, and delight to burn before him! (159-160)

The "fortune" within the house can be calculated as something that emanates class struggle in *The House of the Seven Gables*, a pattern, as such, can be observed regarding class struggle operating at the core of rapacity. The conflict is not only between the Pyncheons and the Maules, but also manifests in the class division between the well-to-do Jaffrey Pyncheon and his frugal counterparts—Hepzibah and Clifford Pyncheon.

Reflecting on class struggle as an underpinning for their family duel, Harry Levin acknowledges in *The Power of Blackness*,

This coalesced with other hints and memorables: a curse laid on Hawthorne's witch-hanging ancestors, their half-forgotten claims to an estate, the misfortune of inheriting a large fortune, the impact of the dead upon the living, the caprice of a

ray of sunlight falling upon a seated corpse in a darkened room. All these associations find their haven, and Hawthorne's sense of milieu finds its most substantial embodiment, in the rambling and weathered house itself, and in the pattern of years and lives it commemorates. (79-80)

As Bruce Michelson comments on "Hawthorne's House of Three Stories," "There is no question that this is one of the most thoughtfully haunted houses in American literature—but a purely abstract, intellectualized haunting was not at all what Hawthorne was after. The problem was to be not merely symbolic but and genuinely eerie at the same time" (165). These "intellectualized haunting" and "genuinely eerie" qualities shape the house's status as a haunted space; poor, pallid Hepzibah and age-stricken, attenuated Clifford must powerlessly express obeisance to the dark history of the house. Hepzibah is extremely conscious of the Pyncheon aristocratic purity, so much so that, in spite of the dilapidated condition of the house, she is unable to move elsewhere due to her plummeting economic position. However, Michelson argues against this rationale, noting that, "Through Hepzibah and Clifford the popular tradition of the haunted house is linked to Hawthorne's special conception of the revenant and to the moral issue of self loss through status and preservation. [In fact] Hepzibah and Clifford are the two real haunters of the house" (169). While talking with Hepzibah, the self-absorbed Clifford utters, "We are ghosts! We have no right among human beings—no right anywhere but in this old house, which has a curse on it, and which, therefore, we are doomed to haunt" (117), having been deprived of human interaction for a long time.

The interior space of a house typically signifies comfort, consideration, happiness, and gratification, in addition to offering protection of its dwellers. This equation is

thwarted in the house in question, for it fails to provide this sense of security for its inhabitants, particularly Hepzibah and also Clifford, who are made to feel uncomfortable in their ancestral home. Furthermore, the idea of “home” as a metaphor is more psychological than physical. The psychological state of the residents of the house is enmeshed with the curse that the house has obtained from the executed Matthew Maule. The present in *The House of the Seven Gables* is largely a product of the past. The inhabitants of the house, particularly Hepzibah and Clifford, are weighed down by the burden of the past and reduced to merely existing within the dispirited mansion.

I argue that a metaphor for this house is a panopticon. In his chapter on “Panopticism” from *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault describes the layout and effects of the Panopticon, a model prison structure: “This enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised ... in which power is exercised without division, according to a continuous hierarchical figure, in which each individual is constantly located, examined, and distributed” (3). Designed by Jeremy Bentham in the eighteenth century, the prison model becomes for Foucault a paradigm for modern disciplinary societies in general, but we can also see how the earlier House of the Seven Gables functions like a prison for many of its inhabitants. The central conflict between the house as oppressor and the dwellers as oppressed aligns with the model of the panopticon, which constantly puts pressure on the dwellers by restricting their movements and alienating them from the community. It is as if the house exercises a “disciplinary power” (4) in the lives of Hepzibah and Clifford, who are enclosed within the “binary branding” (5) of light and shade, visibility and anonymity within the house.

Much like the Panopticon, the house induces in the occupants “a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power . . . permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action” (6). The detailed description of the house—the seven gables, elm tree, glittering plaster, window lattices, lightning rods, faded carpet, ancient map, and ominous portrait—echo this complex orientation that serve as key elements involving this space. Despite Hepzibah and Clifford’s best efforts to embrace a secure lifestyle, to sever themselves from the dated values and other markers of domination within the house, they are constantly shadowed by its overpowering presence, which haunts their present and recalls the physical and emotional implications of its history. That the “external appearance [of the house] . . . was really an inviting aspect over the venerable edifice, conveying an idea that its history must be a decorous and happy one” (Hawthorne 199) is actually misleading as to the true nature of the house. It is not simply visibility or surveillance that conditions the way the inhabitants behave; the house metaphorically stands as a surrogate for the Colonel Pyncheon and the gaze of the Pyncheon family, observing them at all times.

Another important aspect of the titular house is that it is inextricably tied to past memories. Memory, as is widely understood, is most often a vital force for our living experience. In many ways, the House of the Seven Gables functions as a point of interaction between memory and history. Connecting the readers with the past, Hawthorne’s narrative gives the present a distinctive identity. The history or the past is alive, immediate, and concrete in the scope of Hawthorne’s romance. The mainstream function of history is vicarious, handed down to us through common knowledge and often times reconditioned through popular cultural interpretations. Memories become

history when filtered through others' interpretations, which are often not a product of personal experience. Conceived within a sense of trauma and tragedy, these memories generally do not lead to a happy outcome for the dwellers in this haunted space. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, in spite of living in the mansion for a long time, Hepzibah and Clifford are largely homeless yet entrapped within the house as the burden and unbridled romanticism of the past weigh them down. This excessive sentiment leads to trauma in the lives of Hepzibah and Clifford. The fallacy of associating home with positive memory is revealed through the reality of this house.

When Phoebe leaves the House of the Seven Gables to visit her family back in Western Massachusetts briefly, the house seems to smother Hepzibah and Clifford and transform them into spirits, who—through some uncanny rationale—frighten their neighbors by rattling about the stairs. This disquieting atmosphere deepens in the chapter “Governor Pyncheon,” where Phoebe is absent, as Judge Pyncheon rests on the fatal “oaken chair” (187) and dies in a fashion similar to that of his predecessor Colonel Pyncheon. A foreboding of something sinister ostensibly lurks in the background, and soon enough spirits are summoned from darkness, accompanied by the grotesque laughter that has tormented the Pyncheons for generations.

Here come Pyncheons, the whole tribe, in their half a dozen generations, jostling and elbowing one another, to reach the picture ... There is evidently a mystery about the picture, which perplexes these poor Pyncheons when they ought to be at rest. In a corner, meanwhile, stands the figure of an elderly man, in a leather jerkin and breeches, with a carpenter's rule sticking out of his side pocket; he points his finger at the bearded Colonel and his descendants, nodding, jeering,

mocking, and finally bursting into obstreperous, through inaudible laughter. (194)

However, the narrator forewarns that “Ghost stories are hardly to be taken seriously, any longer” (193) and dismisses the idea shortly thereafter by mentioning that “Indulging our fancy in this freak, we have partly lost the power of restraint and guidance” (194).

Hawthorne’s romanticism is exemplified through this illustration as he introduces the ghosts of the deceased Pyncheons elbowing and jostling each other only to get rid of the idea altogether following that.

In this regard, Jonathan Arac has convincingly shown in *The Emergence of American Literary Narrative, 1820–1860*, Hawthorne was one of the foremost figures in establishing what Arac calls “literary narrative” in the United States. Hawthorne’s earlier short stories could be categorized in Arac’s estimation as “local narratives,” since they focused primarily on fairly limited scenes from New England’s imagined past. But with *The Scarlet Letter* and his other romances, Hawthorne was able to expand upon this limited frame of reference by indulging in more creative or fantastic imagery. In both cases, arguably, the romantic quality of the narrative is related to the narrator, whether it is a named first-person narrator or a more disembodied third person. If the author of the romance has greater artistic freedom, the narrator also seems to be more free to distance himself from the action. Arac argues that

the point of the plot in *The House of the Seven Gables* [is] a drastic transformation of Aristotle ... to erase and undo all action. Just as Holgrave is about to repeat his ancestor’s mesmeric possession of a Pyncheon woman, he holds back; instead, he will be united with Phoebe through the natural course of love. So too, the apparent murder of Jaffrey proves to be death by natural causes, and so likewise the death

thirty years earlier for which Clifford had been imprisoned. (151)

These series of incidents happen “not through any agency,” (151) but the rationale behind them is masterfully explained to the readers, making these events look natural to the onlookers. As Robert T. Tally Jr. asserts in “Giving Shape to Gloom; or, Keeping it Real in *The House of the Seven Gables*,” Hawthorne is acutely conscious of his treatment of real and fantastic as “the primary method seems to be that he will introduce something that could be interpreted as otherworldly, only to offer a rational, altogether ordinary explanation, one that would utterly dispel the fantastic image and reveal it to be almost uninterestingly mundane” (29). Hawthorne “maintains an extremely high proportion of narration to dialogue, while at the same time abandoning most of the materials—that is, the actions—of traditional narration” (Arac 152).

Much like the authoritative narrator, the house demands a committed effort from the dwellers. The old maid Hepzibah is “doubly tortured” within the house with a sense of overwhelming shame that the “strange and unloving eyes” of the house has “the privilege of gazing” (31) at her and partly for dwelling over thirty years “in strict seclusion, taking no part in the business of life, and just as little in its intercourse and pleasures” (19). The duality in the house weaves an intricate mixture of absurd, outlandish, and oxymoronic characteristics—the “external appearance that there was really an inviting aspect over the venerable edifice, conveying an idea that its history must be a decorous and happy one” (199), while in reality, it functions as “the silent and impenetrable mansion” (203) that emanates passive energy and lack of psychological warmth for its occupants. It is chiefly through the cooperation of these occupants that the house attains a manifold personality. Hawthorne’s narrative is not so much about the

growth and development of the characters as about the stagnancy of the house that weighs them down and prevents them from embracing the newness around them. Yet when they effectively break free from their disillusionment, the narrator points out that Hepzibah remains absorbed with the idea of the house: “this one old house was everywhere! It transported it’s great, lumbering bulk, with more than railroad speed, and set itself phlegmatically down on whatever spot she glanced at” (180). When the “old house” that is “everywhere” blends with the world outside, the inner and outer world blend together to become inseparable. The narrator observes that Hepzibah has been a single occupant in the house for such a long time that it has become her universe. “The Flight of Two Owls,” which is neither set within the house nor its garden, sees Hepzibah and Clifford speed away from Salem. It might as well be an account for stepping out into the Pyncheon Street, since all Hepzibah sees out of the train window is her family home. Hepzibah fails to dissociate herself from her ancestral house, which, in a way, has become an extension of her personality. Her fixation with the house is overdrawn, evokes her queer kinship with her familial house, although she opposes the qualities that this house fosters within. The house is a vigorous, spirit-like existence in the psyche of its dwellers and a crude reminder of the Pyncheons' waning prosperity.

In regard to this discussion, in the chapter “Nature Herself Hawthorne’s Self-Representation,” from *A Familiar Strangeness: American Fiction and the Language of Photography*, Stuart Burrows remarks, “The text here explicitly compares itself to the house, which is both a synecdoche for the circular structure of Pyncheon history and the determining fact of that history. Hawthorne’s narrative is like the house that is its subject because it is a synecdochic figure for Pyncheon history” (50-51). Clearly, the titular

house embodies all the qualities that the Pyncheons have seemingly espoused over centuries after building the grand mansion on this disputed piece of land. Of course, the House of the Seven Gables reflects the ethos of the house, its paradoxical history as well as the effects it has on the lives of the Maules and the Pyncheons alike, following the controversy. The unbridgeable gap between these two worlds, although united at the end, is represented in the isolation of the house from its inhabitants and the neighborhood. In fact, the personal identities of the characters in Hawthorne's narrative suffer as a result of the dominance of this dwelling place. On the other hand, having arrived at the house from outside, Holgrave analyzes his surrounding with utmost clarity and Phoebe adds a fresh dimension to the gloomy atmosphere of the house. After having lived so long isolated from the outside world, Hepzibah succumbs to the dark forces of the house by failing to exert her agency, and so does Clifford, who has lived most of his life in prison and has recently started to live in the house. It is not difficult to apprehend that the agency of a house is aided and abetted by encompassing societal relations and individuals. Places of residence are often designed to reify social relations, delimiting the capacity of the dwellers of those places to conceptualize and add something new to those social spaces. The singularity of this place is that it retains agency by subsuming the agency of the occupants.

A mere glance at the House of the Seven Gables reveals that the site is fraught with tension, but the garden behind the house offers an antithesis to the diseased energy of the house, evincing positivity and vitality, perhaps as a result of being in direct contact with nature. Phoebe and Clifford spend time in the garden together lifting Clifford's sullen spirits: "Clifford's enjoyment was accompanied with a perception of life,

character, and individuality that made him love ... [the] blossoms of the garden, as if they were endowed with sentiment and intelligence” (101). Perhaps the lack of direct contact with nature and long dissociation from social spaces dampen Hepzibah and Clifford’s spirits. Phoebe comes to the house from the country; although a Pyncheon, she does not have to carry the burden of history, unlike her cousins. Notwithstanding her reservations, she makes a comfortable place for herself within the house. Hepzibah is a devoted sister to Clifford, yet stoic as the narrator observes: “towards Clifford she was neither ill-tempered nor unkind, nor felt less warmth of heart than always, had it been possible to make it reach him” (155). Right from the beginning of the novel, the utilitarian function of the dwellers is to carry forward the legacy of history with which the house overburdens them. Everything in the house “looked as damp and chill as if the present were their worst experience” (156).

It has been widely seen that it takes time to embrace the newness of a house, and as time passes, one becomes more familiar and thus familial with a house. On the surface, the House of the Seven Gables has “a great human heart, with a life of its own” (16). The facade of the House of the Seven Gables shields its animosity as the exterior space upholds unblemished the grace, honor, and grandeur of the mansion. The house, as a “noble emblem,” exhibits characteristics of splendor on the surface but the interesting paradox about this house is that it always dispenses a misleading illusion *and* a representation of the truth. The energy is noticeable in the Pyncheons’ obsessive search for a missing deed which can legitimize their aristocratic aspirations by giving them the right to a tract of land. The only possible resolution for the Pyncheons in the novel is to deal with the horror and reestablish a sense of home within the mansion by reorganizing

time and space in a homely pattern.

Hebzibah's circulation is limited within the house; her disposition is an embodiment of the mood of the house, mostly restricted to a single dimensional life which is as if inflicted upon her as a retribution for the misdeeds committed by her ancestors in the house. Echoes of the world distant to her comes in the form of Phoebe and Holgrave, but she can hardly reciprocate them either, particularly Holgrave, who, according to Hepzibah is strange and mysterious. Hepzibah's altruism and benevolence is evident towards the other inmates of the house, but her scowling unhappy demeanor at the shop causes her customers to misunderstand her. Appearing as a virgin maiden and a sad woman is usually expected of a woman of her age which results in a tacit expression of her relationships with the other housemates.

Just as Shakespearean comedies often end with the hero and heroine communicating their love for each other in the final act is much like how Hawthorne handles the culmination of *The House of the Seven Gables*. The conventional plots in Shakespeare's plays establish the burgeoning relationship between the two lovers through the first four acts, reinforcing the status of their relationships towards the end of the comedies. The Puritanical attitude that prevail through Hawthorne's narrative dissolve in the end to usher a new beginning for the family of the House of the Seven Gables. Through the forthcoming nuptials between the young lovers, Holgrave and Phoebe, the feud between the two fighting clans, Maules and Pyncheons, dissolves at the end. In the deserted old house, Holgrave avows his love for Phoebe by declaring, "If we love one another, the moment has room for nothing more. Let us pause upon it, and be satisfied. Do you love me Phoebe?" (215). Hawthorne decides to infuse cheerfulness into his tale

by suddenly ending the gloom that pervades his narrative all along, making the culmination of *The House of the Seven Gables* a reassertion of what Hawthorne characterizes as Romance in the Preface to his book. Hawthorne, on a similar note, gives the readers a spell of Shakespearesque comedy by bringing the polarized worlds of the Maules and Pyncheons together at the end. Both the clans are unified through Holgrave's prophetic vision and Phoebe assuming the Maule name after her marriage to Holgrave.

Hawthorne wants them to accept that the past is simply the past, a fantasy to be easily dispelled in the light of the present, with no need to exorcize the ghosts so long as everything is allowed to work out in the end. As Tally comments,

Even more visible is the lack of action in *The House of the Seven Gables*, where the felicitous happy ending is occasioned by mere happenstance, and no action by any character is required to make things right in the end. The putative villain, Judge Pyncheon, dies of seemingly mysterious but wholly natural causes. The fortune that restores our heroes, particularly Hepzibah and Clifford, to wealth and social position falls in their laps by an off-camera stroke of luck, when the rightful heir, Judge Pyncheon's son, who had not been mentioned previously, is revealed to have also died while abroad. (32)

With the eradication of human agency, Hawthorne tames the possibility of complicating the past through any further human action.

Having said that, Hawthorne's narrative ends with the knowledge that the house retains its sense of the mysterious, not simply because the house demolishes the status quo at the end, but also because the titular house provides freedom to the occupants to begin anew in the elegant Judge Pyncheon's mansion. The series of misfortunes that

began in the house with Colonel Pyncheon's death years ago ends in a similar fashion with Jaffrey Pyncheon's death as the narrator observes, "Death is so genuine a fact that it excludes falsehood, or betrays its emptiness; it is a touchstone that proves the gold, and dishonors the baser metal" (218). Nevertheless, the crisis is addressed deftly as Holgrave asserts in his exchange with Phoebe that in spite of the fact that Hepzibah and Clifford are gone, leaving the dead Judge Pyncheon in the House of the Seven Gables, nothing horrendous has happened "through any agency of theirs" (211), thus invalidating the siblings' connection with the death and absolving them of any premeditated charges. The conflict is resolved after a while, as the narrator announces, "Time, the continual vicissitude of circumstances, and the invariable inopportunity of death render it impossible. If, after long lapse of years, the right seems to be in our power, we find no niche to set it in. The better remedy is for the sufferer to pass on, and leave what he once thought his irreparable ruin far behind him" (220).

The Pyncheons and Maules are able to push their desolate past behind and set themselves free of the hauntings of all that is bygone. Hawthorne's happy ending allows the curse to evanesce entirely, explained away by the hidden compartment behind the Colonel Pyncheon's portrait, "A recess in the wall [is] ... brought to light, in which lay an object so covered with a century's dust that it could not immediately be recognized as a folded sheet of parchment," Holgrave having opened it finds "an ancient deed, signed with the hieroglyphics of several Indian sagamores, and conveying to Colonel Pyncheon and his heirs, forever, a vast extent of territory at the eastward" (222) which the Pyncheons have "sought in vain" (222) as it holds no worth in the present. This hidden compartment behind the portrait connects the trauma to the house, which then functions

as the site of Hepzibah and Clifford's being "haunted" by the past. Phoebe and Holgrave represent the present, by the way, so they are not so "haunted" by the past. The discovery of the secret deed, as well as its nullification, in turn allows the past to be put behind the family entirely. For Hawthorne—connecting the Preface with the conclusion—the past is a gloomy "fantasy," and the present offers the light of reality. This rather "unrealistic" approach to past trauma would find its dialectic in later fiction as Faulkner goes on to offer a more nuanced approach to dealing with the past.

### 3. THE INESCAPABLE PAST IN WILLIAM FAULKNER'S

#### *THE SOUND AND THE FURY*

The title of *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), an exemplary modernist novel by William Faulkner, is taken from the final soliloquy by Macbeth in William Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* soon after he learns about Lady Macbeth's suicide:

Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
To the last syllable of recorded time;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more: it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.

(*Macbeth*, Act V, Scene v, lines 18-27)

Faulkner's use of a narrator who is in fact mentally impaired literalizes Macbeth's metaphor of "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." The difficulty in Faulkner's tale, however, is that it is difficult to situate the "sound" and the "fury" conclusively within the ambit of the narrative. The coherent narrative is often difficult to piece together, as Faulkner presents the dysfunctional Compson family to the readers using four distinct narrative voices, one per chapter, offer each of their individual perspectives about the Compson ménage. The story takes place on Easter Weekend of

1927, with a digression in the second chapter taking place in 1910. Since all the chapters involve time and memory, both the chronology and sense of time are rather complicated, a complexity further deepened by the quirky distinctiveness of each character who narrates. In the first section, Benjamin Compson, the youngest of the Compson siblings—an “idiot” man-child whose constrained means of communication is a series of monologues—narrates snippets of memories involving his sister Candace Compson, (known as Caddy in the text), meandering between the past and present interminably. The narrator of the second section is Quentin Compson, eldest of the three Compson brothers and a freshman scholar at Harvard University. During his time at Cambridge, Quentin is tormented by his own helplessness, perversion, and selfishness from his past life at the Compson house in Jefferson, Mississippi. His preoccupation with time and with his sister Caddy’s virginity, create a painful consciousness of a past that colors Quentin’s present world in 1910. An interesting third narrator is the middle brother, Jason Compson, who is commissioned to look after the wellbeing of his loveless family in the novel’s present time. The favorite child of his mother (Caroline Compson), Jason defies Caddy from a young age and shares a peevish outlook about almost everything within the Compson house. Surprisingly, the fourth section is narrated by a third-person omniscient narrator, not a member of the Compson family, in a point of view that also focuses on Dilsey, the family’s stoic housekeeper.

The narrative voices of the brothers in the first three sections of the novel and the omniscient narrator in the fourth serve as the mouthpiece for the decaying aristocratic worldview of the Compson family. Each narrator’s monologue and/or dialogue yields a perspective of a worldview as they detail their struggles through their lived and imagined

discourse. In addition to a mood of loss that permeates Faulkner's novel, the Compson house itself plays a key role as a site that quintessentially embodies the sound and the fury within, even as it controls and manipulates the behavior of the characters who inhabit it. The Compson house is a space that absorbs the fury within itself and eternally captivates those who try to escape it. In fact, the combination of sound and fury is situated in all the characters in the Compson mansion but never takes any conclusive shape. All the characters are displaced from the house in some way or another. It may be argued that Faulkner's narrative is built around a deafening silence, which is powerful and overwhelmingly haunting.

Unfolding the silence without and the rage within, Faulkner's novel represents a powerful heteroglossia that necessitates an acute sense of temporality within the reader. The task of the narrators is to present the threads of their own perspectives through their monologues and weave them into a signifying whole. In the Compson family saga, the house is imagined in the thought processes and motivations of individual characters, rather than through concrete, elaborate illustrations of its landscape. The Compson house may be an objective, physical space, but the concern of the narrators in the first three chapters of the book lies in rendering the realm of the house as a mental topography affecting the inhabitants' understanding of themselves and their positions within the physical space of the house. The physical space of the Compson mansion houses the inebriated Mr. Jason Compson Sr.; his health-obsessed wife, Mrs. Caroline Compson; their four children—the erudite Quentin Compson, petulant Jason Compson, the sexually rebellious Candace Compson and their youngest unfit brother Benjamin Compson (earlier named Maury) in his childhood—as well as Dilsey, the black matriarch who looks after

the Compson children from the early days of their childhood. The present time in Faulkner's novel prefigures the impending doom of the Compson lineage as is observed through the conversations of Mrs. Compson, Jason, Benjy, Caddy's only daughter, Quentin, who lives in the house, Dilsey and her family. A psychological landscape is created in the reader's mind, focused on understanding the workings of the mindset of the occupants, rather than on the physical space of the mansion. However, the domestic space of the Compson mansion is humanized by the narrators, an effect that further problematizes its significance, since the human elements and their interactions both within and outside of the house are so complex. This site enmeshes past and present, thus entrapping time and space within it.

Architecture has always served as a traditional physical and psychological metaphor for language and literary construction. In *The Sound and the Fury*, it can be interpreted that Faulkner's concern lies with the house as the focal point of his narrative because most of the significant events take place on this site. The physical space of the Compson house may lack a sense of temporality, but the mansion transcends its physical barriers as readers witness the soul of this domestic space through the myriad emotions and experiences of its occupants. The dichotomy between temporal and dynamic rather than static and discrete experiences map onto contrasting readings of the novel. As Phillipe Hamon notes in this regard,

It is as if the artifice of literature (an articulated semiotic ensemble that produces meaning) possessed a structural complicity or deep preestablished homology with that very thing whose existence in reality is *already* artificial, namely the building (an articulated semiotic ensemble that produces space). (6)

Faulkner traces connections among the workings of different characters' minds across a historical timeframe; the psychological repercussions of a character's responses in the present may reflect intense effects based on the workings of an incident in the past.

Faulkner places the Compson house in the historically and socially determined system of events and processes, in addition to presenting it as a singular entity. He traces the physical presence of the Compson family of Jefferson in Yoknapatawpha County in Mississippi. Within the problematic context of the narrative, the Compson brothers—who are also the principal narrators of the first three sections of the book—seem to be obsessed with their sister, Caddy, the only female offspring of the house. In a deliberately fragmented novel, the first section of the polyphonic tale, narrated by Benjy, probes into the psyche of the thirty-three year old man-child who is strangely attached to Caddy. Benjy's fondness for his sister can be seen in his recalling her presence (even when she is no longer present in the Compson house) by smelling trees. Benjy's section opens *in medias res* on April Seventh, 1928, taking the readers through his oscillating photographic observations of the past incidents in the present time. The Compson house, in the present, is an inhospitable site for Benjy, who expresses his grief by seeking refuge in Caddy's memories. His intellectual disability has reduced his status to nothing more than an animal in the eyes of his family. Since his childhood, Benjy is a liability to Mrs. Compson, who does not hesitate to communicate her opinions about how Benjy is an impediment to the family. For Benjy, the present is almost nonexistent, and his only solace is a past laden with Caddy's memories. The *leitmotif* in Faulkner's narrative appears in each of the three brothers' take on an obsession with their sister. The Compson family appears in other Faulkner works, such as *Absalom, Absalom!* and "That Evening

Sun,” which recounts the life of Compson family when the children were young.

Reading and pinpointing the text and the place of dwelling are not definitive in the case of *The Sound and the Fury*. The episodic experiences of the Compson family, as is seen here for the most part, are connected by facets of Caddy Compson’s sexual mishaps, as the brothers are singularly occupied with their sister. A cynical, alcoholic father, Mr. Compson and a self-absorbed, valetudinarian mother, Mrs. Compson, see Benjy as a burden in the family; his reactions are not only dismissed by them but so are those of his attendants so as to silence him. Hence, Benjy’s thoughts and expressions are focalized on Caddy, who knew how to take care of him: “You’re not a poor baby. Are you. You’ve got your Caddy. Haven’t you got your Caddy” [sic] (9). Meanwhile, Caddy attempts to give meaning to Benjy’s howls: “What is it. What are you trying to tell Caddy” (6). Here, again, if there are no question marks, leave as is. Since Benjy’s dwelling serves as a constant reminder of his sister, it is not incredible to assume that Benjy’s existence is insulated within the house. On a desperate attempt to escape his house, Benjy wanders off when he finds the gate open. On finding a group of girls returning from school, he goes after them, and in the process, he frightens one of the girls:

They came on. I opened the gate and they stopped, turning. I was trying to say, and I caught her, trying to say, and she screamed and I was trying to say and trying and the bright shapes began to stop and I tried to get out. I tried to get it off of my face, but the bright shapes were going again. They were going up the hill to where it fell away and I tried to cry. But when I breathed in, I couldn’t breathe out again to cry, and I tried to keep from falling off the hill and I fell off the hill into

the bright, whirling shapes. (53)

Benjy is castrated following this incident as he remembers, “*I got undressed and I looked at myself, and I began to cry. Hush, Luster said. Looking for them aint going to do no good. They’re gone*” (73). Benjy’s pernicious obsession with Caddy makes him want to chase the one of the school girls who reminds him of young Caddy. This incident also attests that his familiar house is his respite from the outside world and produces meaning in Benjy’s world. In *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), Freud states that “the complex of melancholia behaves like an open wound, drawing to itself cathectic energies ... and emptying the ego until it is totally impoverished” (253). The Compson house serves as a site that tyrannizes Benjy with memories of Caddy and at the same time provides him security from the outside world. The mute interaction of the characters with their place of dwelling shapes the structure, form, as well as the content of Faulkner’s novel. The notion of “Home” is implicitly placed within the text.

In *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud observes,

The correlation of melancholia and mourning seems justified by the general picture of the two conditions. Moreover, the exciting causes due to environmental influences are, so far as we can discern them at all, the same for both conditions. Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on. In some people the same influences produce melancholia instead of mourning and we consequently suspect them of a pathological disposition. (243)

Benjy, for his part, relates and perceives the world through bouts of melancholia for

Caddy, and with his limited cognitive ability, Benjy associates Caddy with the smelling of trees when they are physically proximate with each other. In “The Sound and the Fury: A Logic of Tragedy,” Warwick Wadlington comments, “To be immersed into Benjy’s perspective, which reduces everything to an unqualified opposition (Caddy and not-Caddy), is our proper introduction to the Compson experience of life. As in the novel’s first scene, the mental landscape is without middle ground or nuance—there is only this side of the fence or that side of the fence” (414).

In *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner decides to withhold information from his audience for a considerable time, which makes it difficult to follow the text; as a result, the reader’s idea of “who’s who” is suspended for a while. Leona Toker examines Faulkner’s treatment in her essay “Diffusion of Information in *The Sound and the Fury*,”

Imitation of the characters’ “stream of consciousness” involves a delay of expositional material. As a result, our filling in of “who’s who” information is slow: the main characters, with the exception of “Father,” “Mother,” and Uncle Maury, are referred to only by their names; for a long time we are not informed about their appearance, family status, place in society, or antecedents. Allusions are made to facts with which we have not been made familiar. For instance, when Jason says to his mother, “Father and Quentin cant hurt you,” we cannot possibly infer that she is going to visit the graves of the father and the eldest son of the family: the only Quentin mentioned so far is the little girl playing in the yard with Luster. Nor is it possible to understand that Mrs. Compson’s carriage has stopped by Jason’s store. On the first reading veiled references of this kind make most of the conversations in Section 1 sound like indistinct background noise. (112)

Similarly, narration in *The Sound and the Fury* unveils the source of Benjy's unintelligible enunciation gradually, impossible for the readers to understand in the initial pages, as marked in the vocabulary of a neurotic child. Rather, Faulkner situates Benjy's howl on the first page revealing its source from the beginning. Benjy's howl sets textual desire into motion, a nonsensical placement of sound that connects him to reality, but it also frames his dialect as well as the other chapters in general. Benjy's attachment to the pasture and his sister takes the shape of an obsessive reaction and a sense of loss of the self in a world and a text that is devoid of intimacy. For Benjy, notions like "before/after" and "past/present" do not exist.

In *Écrits: A Selection*, Lacan defines the metaphorical structure of the symptom: Metaphor's two-stage mechanism is the very mechanism by which symptoms, in the analytic sense, are determined. Between the enigmatic signifier of sexual trauma and the term it comes to replace in a current signifying chain, a spark flies that fixes in a symptom—a metaphor in which flesh or function is taken as a signifying element—the signification, that is inaccessible to the conscious subject, by which the symptom may be dissolved. (*Écrits*, 431)

Benjy's attachment to Caddy can be interpreted as his sexual awakening because even after Caddy leaves the Compson house, he craves the physical intimacy that they both enjoyed in the past. They shared the same bedroom and even had the same toys as children, but he grows antagonistic when he sees Caddy kissing a young man named Charlie. Benjy's fixation towards Caddy is arguably the result of a repressed sexual attachment that he can neither comprehend nor smother within himself. In "Faulkner and the Politics of Incest," Karl F. Zender comments, "Any writer attuned (as Faulkner was)

to the main currents of modernist thought would surely have been aware of these contemporary variations on romantic views about incest” (744). Benjy’s helplessness within the house oscillates between his memory, his howls, and his failure in coming to terms with the present. The recurring images of fire in the first section symbolize the passion that burns within Benjy, but it is unable to emerge. Benjy’s various cries mirror the multiplicity of his experience, which is almost always incomprehensible to others.

For Benjy, Caddy represents home. “Caddy held me and I could hear us all, and the darkness, and something I could smell. And then I could see the windows, where the trees were buzzing. Then the dark began to go in smooth, bright shapes, like it always does, even when Caddy says that I have been asleep” (75). Since words fall short in Benjy’s experience, language loses its meaning too. In Benjy’s case, words practically distort the essential nature of his existence. As a matter of fact, Benjy’s howls communicate a trauma that cannot find expression in speech. Caddy—Benjy’s only sense of home—is very much present in the Compson house through Benjy’s phenomenal memory. In fact, Benjy is only alive in the present when he lives actively in the past through his memories; at other times, the mere mention of Caddy’s name causes him to howl with a sense of loss.

Being the eldest of the siblings, Quentin Compson is expected to be the head of the Compson family line and preserve the Southern tradition which is essential to their experience. The unusual blend of order and chaos in Quentin’s mentation—the illusory, obsessive imagery, and his inability to find meaning in the experience surrounding him—echo the decaying world of his lineage back in Jefferson in Yoknapatawpha County. A reigning symbol in Quentin’s section is the watch he inherits from his father: “It was

Grandfather's and when Father gave it to me he said I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it's rather excruciating-ly apt that you will use it to gain the reducto absurdum of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his or his father's" (76). Quentin recounts past episodes of his home life while walking around Cambridge, Massachusetts, on June 2nd, 1910, the final day of his life. His section is the only one that does not take place on Easter Weekend, 1928. He is torn between his preoccupation with time and his sister, as a result of his divided loyalties to his home and to his emerging identity as scholar at Harvard. Quentin's fixation with the clock—"Because Father said clocks slay time. He said time is dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels; only when the clock stops does time come to life" (85)—prefigures his imminent demise. Quentin's obsession with family ruins his chances of youthful exploration in Boston in the North, causing an insuperable feeling of disconnection. His sense of displacement as the oldest son and his failure to fulfill his obligations reveal his own limitations as well as the failure of his home to provide values by which he can live. The family watch, given to him by Mr. Compson after he graduated from high school, acts as a conduit for Quentin to return to his father, sister, family, home, and memories of his childhood while in Boston.

Quentin returns over and over again to a series of his sister's memories through mundane encounters and interactions in Boston. His alienation from home as well as his failure to fulfill familial obligations as the eldest son of the Compson family elucidates not only his own limitations but also the failure of his heritage. In this section, Faulkner's disparate treatment of time and place allow the readers considerable freedom to read and interpret the events as they see fit. Through the dissociation of time, place, and action, the

narrator unintentionally misleads the reader with events that sometimes contradict one another or are distorted by Quentin's own biases, preoccupations, or imaginings. The reader's understanding of Quentin's engagement with distinct spatial domains is especially crucial to comprehending and establishing the dynamics of the Compson family. *The Sound and the Fury* exhibits a relational domestic space, which, in turn, establishes the house's connection to outside domains.

Quentin lives in the past, which is painful and crippling, with a number of ramifications. In spite of his attempts to reconstruct the past by imaginatively reliving it in the present, he suffers pangs of conscience for leaving his sister behind and forcing his family into debt to pay for his education at Harvard. He seeks salvation in the present by caring for an Italian girl he calls "sister" and fighting with Gerald Bland, in a dual reflection of the most significant aspects of his past. Because time is his enemy and reminds him of his loss of Caddy, he seeks to destroy it by breaking his grandfather's watch and avoiding all instruments that record time. Quentin fears that time is dying for him: "Father said a man is the sum of his misfortunes. One day you'd think misfortune would get tired, but then time is your misfortune Father said" (104). Perhaps an even more significant version of Quentin's quest to alter an unavoidable past and reclaim it in the present appears in his conversation with Caddy:

*On what on your school money the money they sold the pasture for so you could go to Harvard dont you see you've got to finish now if you dont finish he'll have nothing"*

*Sold the pasture* His white shirt was motionless in the fork, in the flickering shade. The wheels were spidery. Beneath the sag of the buggy the

hooves neatly rapid like the motions of a lady doing embroidery, diminishing without progress like a figure on a treadmill being drawn rapidly offstage. The street turned again. I could see the white cupola, the round stupid assertion of the clock. *Sold the pasture* [sic]. (124)

In this excerpt, the frequency of time-shifts underscores how the Compson children are neither able to take their past home out of themselves nor to live with it. Such time-shifts create confusion primarily because Faulkner refuses to provide a clear chronological reference that would help piece together scattered bits of information. For the brothers, Caddy is a metaphor for home, a space that once represented aristocracy. In support of this notion, Mark Spilka observes that “Caddy and her daughter are the last brave Compsons; they have inherited reckless courage, and they seek out caricatures of such courage—blackguard princes like the original Compsons—in their lovers; whereas the Compson brothers have inherited failure. Thus Faulkner speaks, in his Virginia recollections, of Quentin’s failure as ‘transmitted to him through his father’” (453).

Quentin’s overriding quest to be united with Caddy and preserve her honor is directly paradoxically connected to Caddy’s womanhood and sexuality, as Karl F. Zender observes: “Quentin Compson attempts to use fantasies of incest as a way of not experiencing life as subject to time and change and therefore inherently political. But Quentin’s attempt to use incest in this way is shadowed ... by an alternative interpretation, in which incestuous yearnings are associated less with resistance to time than with immersion in it” (747). Faulkner blends the idea of home and domestic space with the world outside in the Quentin section. He achieves a striking resonance in Quentin’s monologue by blending two techniques common in fiction: straightforward

first-person narration and associative stream of consciousness.

An imaginary construct, the Compson mansion, becomes the pivotal transformative point in the narrative that facilitates the plot of *The Sound and the Fury* forward. This site influences the fate of the Compson family members as well as perspectives of the novel's multiple narrators. The site itself enables the novel to continuously oscillate between real historical places and Benjy and Quentin's imagined creation of the past. Since much of the setting of *The Sound and the Fury* involve imaginative mapping of the actual events by the narrators, the domestic space of the Compson house takes precedence over external natural habitats. Caddy's meta-presence in the house, as an unobtrusive participant who never gives us a piece of her mind in the text, looms large in the backdrop. Faulkner's device dismantles compartments of place, space, people and action at the crux of his narrative. Faulkner spares a microcosmic view of the South to his readers through conceptualizing the Compson family. Very much like Faulkner's South, the domestic space of the Compson house is a fluid concept that outdoes its physical constraints of immobility, traveling over to various places through the Quentin's thought process. The myth of the South reverberates in Faulkner's fictional space as Quentin takes readers with him up to the North. Cleanth Brooks calls the dynamics in the Quentin section "so private as to be almost incomprehensible" (326). While reading the Quentin section, one has to perform a double task: analyze the character's extremely complex psyche and process one's own equally complex psychological reaction to it. The temporal tension within Quentin is never resolved, thus leading him to commit suicide.

Jason Compson's section takes place on April Sixth, 1928. Jason, a realist and his

mother's favorite, is the head of the Compson family at the moment. After their father's death and Quentin's suicide in Boston, the family's social and economic conditions plummet so much that Jason becomes obsessed with money. His obsession is ultimately spurred on by the fact that his family is desperately plunging into poverty with no one to help but his uneducated self, causing him to resent the fact that the family spent its money on his deceased brother's education rather than his own. Unlike his brothers, Jason does not focus primarily on Caddy, but the family has to take care of Caddy's only daughter Quentin—named after their eldest brother—who stays in the Compson family without her mother. Jason tries to restore the elite status of their family but fails miserably to do so.

Jason's section echoes the disintegrating Compson family failing to uphold the facade anymore. Jason himself stands as a symptom of decadence, and his anger is a product of his dying family. In "Temporality and the Modern State," David Gross observes,

A great deal of how one's own life is understood, or even how one's everyday experiences are apprehended, both leans on and subsists within what is acquired from the *longue durée*. The long duration not only helps establish the dimensions of the two narrower temporal spheres; it also helps constitute the meanings that are encoded and accentuated within them, and this despite the fact that this mode of temporality is the one least amenable to the personal control of the individual.

(54)

Jason's damaged psyche is apparent in the way he treats women, as he unjustly chastises Quentin mainly for her mother's mistakes. Jason holds Caddy responsible for his present

distress, believing that Caddy's promiscuity cost him his job. He criticizes her for wearing make-up (thus being sexual or hyper-sexual), for not being enough of a lady, and for being lazy. In driving her to school, he tells her that if he catches her out of school one more time, Quentin will have to pay for it. This interaction demonstrates the disintegration of the Compson house, which climaxes when Caddy's daughter robs Jason of all his savings to run off with a pitchman who was only in town for a circus show.

In *The Sound and the Fury*, indirect discourse and stream-of-consciousness display the dynamics of the Compson family, and, in a way, offer enlightenment about the disintegration of the past and the present. Faulkner shows that the past cannot be dismissed as insignificant with respect to the present. The past has its own appeal, which is caught in with the present in a disturbing way. The storytelling, as it has developed up until this point, attests to a sense of continuity between present-day facts and long-buried desires to retrieve what has been left behind. Benjy, with his diminished mental capacity, might wish to have Caddy restored to him, but Quentin has different motives: in particular, he wishes to uphold the chivalric morals of chastity and purity, and he is haunted by the notion that Caddy's sexuality destroyed those values. In the case of Jason, it is not his wish to restore the family to its former glory, but to escape it altogether.

One of the many things in Dilsey's section (the fourth and final chapter) is the quest to fulfill the desire for a mother figure within the Compson house. Perhaps the trauma of Caddy's absence throughout the novel makes the need for a maternal figure even more profound. Dilsey functions as a surrogate for the Compson children throughout the novel by both being a protector and a house keeper to them. Given her strength in trying to take care of the various members of this dysfunctional household, all

while raising her own children and grandchildren, Dilsey stands for the stoic proposition that we must go on, regardless of challenges facing us. While Caddy's inability to fill up the vacuum of the family is predicated on the contradictions within herself, the reasons for Dilsey's failure to serve as the maternal substitute in the Compson house is obviously a result of racial segregation. Cynthia Dobbs offers an insightful theory in "Ruin or Landmark"? Black Bodies as "Lieux de Mémoire" in "The Sound and the Fury,"

Dilsey is the fantasy mother realized: the center of sanity, constancy, and compassion in a house of raging internal and external decline, chaos, and cruelty. She is also the least valued member of the household: her opinions are ignored; her labor is taken for granted at best, denigrated at worst; and her character is reduced to, in the words of Quentin (the niece) and Jason, "a damn old nigger." A source of personal nostalgia for Faulkner, Dilsey's character, as a black woman, also carries the weight of the extreme cultural anxieties about contamination—by "femaleness" and "blackness"—that Faulkner so complexly renders. (39)

Hence, Dilsey is a figure who has endured the past and strives to honor it. Dilsey's powerlessness in subduing the pangs of past further communicates in her desperate desire to try to hold on to whatever remains of the crushing Compson household.

It is also clear that Dilsey is the strongest character in the novel. As the focus of the last chapter, notably set on Easter Sunday and featuring a sermon on the Resurrection preached with fire and brimstone in the "black" church, Dilsey offers a figure of redemption in an otherwise bleak landscape, even if her strength lies more in persistence than in salvation. Amid the disarray of the Compson family over several generations, Dilsey remains the constant, and it is noteworthy that her role is that of the housekeeper.

She literally keeps the house together, even if she cannot make it a “home.” The chaotic ending of *The Sound and the Fury*, with Benjy’s insensible howling and Jason’s cursing, perhaps underscores the noisy and furious meaninglessness of life, but Dilsey’s stoicism might be thought to prefigure the strong women found in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, as I will discuss in the next chapter.

#### 4. DOMESTICATING TRAUMA IN TONI MORRISON'S *BELLOVED*

Toni Morrison has explored the complex psychological and social spaces associated with the home or house in many of her domestic narratives, which frequently reveal this site to be fraught with complex relations to the past. Analysis of 124 Bluestone Road, Sethe's house on the outskirts of Cincinnati in *Beloved*, reveals a repressive architectural presence that affects the relationship between the inhabitants of the house and accounts for a tenor of haunting and trepidation within.

Close relationships between such thematic preoccupations as domestic space, memory, and inheritance render 124 an active presence in the lives of its inhabitants, rather than an inert or passive setting in which more significant events unfold. In its complex set of affective associations, the house represents a distinctive literary space holding intrinsic connections with the psychological tyranny of its dwellers in the past. Once a generous, open hub for community engagement, the house at 124 Bluestone depicted at the beginning of the novel fails to serve as a comforting shelter to its inhabitants, who, on the contrary feel imprisoned by it. As a space of traumatic memory, 124 is both literally and figuratively "haunted" in the novel. Morrison explores the memory and trauma of these "haunted" spaces and persons in *Beloved*, eventually making clear that the occupants should neither simply reject nor obsessively dwell in the past, but rather come to terms and make peace with it.

The house in question, known only by its address, 124 Bluestone Road, is a locus of human interactions with the otherworldly. The novel's famous opening lines establish the house, along with its spirit, as a protagonist in the narrative. "124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children" (1). The

occupants in 124—Sethe, a former fugitive slave, Baby Suggs, her mother-in-law who dies very early in the narrative, and Sethe’s surviving daughter and the only child who has stayed with her in the house, Denver—for the most part, seem unperturbed by the presence of the ghost. However, Sethe’s two sons, Howard and Buglar, run away from the house while they were barely thirteen. As Baby Suggs says at one point to Sethe, “We lucky this ghost is a baby. My husband’s spirit was to come back here? or yours? Don’t talk to me” (6). She knows all too well the ways that everyone in their household and in the black community at large is “haunted.” We are told that Denver has “lived all her life in a house peopled by the living activity of the dead” (35). Inwardly, she desires the company of the baby ghost and steals food for the otherworldly entity that shares the house with Sethe and herself. Sethe and Denver have lived long enough in the house by themselves, without anyone to accompany them, “For twelve years, long before Grandma Baby died, there had been no visitors of any sort and certainly no friends” (14). The inhabitants of 124 are dwarfed within the oppressive domestic space of the house.

For readers, Morrison's depiction of 124 Bluestone engenders strong sentiments through its powerful portrayal of all its tortured inhabitants. The house is, at various times, alive, quiet, loud, screaming, and sometimes—as in the opening lines—spiteful. This has a direct effect on the emotions of the main characters, particularly Baby Suggs, Sethe, and Denver, as well as others who are situated inside the house at different moments in the narrative. The house at 124 has an idiosyncratic personality that embodies the spirit of Sethe’s past as an ex-slave and that of her present, helping her to deal with the monstrous encounters in her past. 124 Bluestone Road is also a site that exposes the meandering psyche or the hidden subjective lives of its dwellers. The house

divulges most vividly the physical and emotional blemishes of Sethe and offers Morrison's protagonist the possibility for transcending the social and psychological categorizations of self, further facilitating value and growth for herself at the end of the book. Morrison conspicuously places 124 Bluestone Road as the focal point of her narrative from the outset.

The introduction further acquaints the readers with the presence of a baby ghost within the "gray and white house on Bluestone Road" (3). The house feels a "lively spite" (3) for those who inhabit it. The sense of customary physical and emotional security of the dwellers are hindered within its physical space. In the physical space of 124, Sethe's subtexts of memory enable readers to understand her history: "I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory ... If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there in the world" (43). Sethe reengages with her past through rememory in order to negotiate with her previous identity as a slave and her present identity as the traumatized inhabitant of 124. In "'Rememory' and a 'Clamor for a Kiss,'" Caroline Rody remarks, "[124] is not a 'place' of the dead but a place where survivors can go to 'summon' and 'recollect,' to look upon the sculpted shape of their own sorrow" (98). Morrison allocates a considerable textual space to presenting 124 as a site that foregrounds Sethe's agonizing personal trauma as she tries dissociate her present from her past. When Paul D, a fellow slave from Sweet Home arrives at 124, Sethe is compelled to confront her repressed past once again, reliving the physical and psychological anguish that her past experiences have inflicted upon her. Rody further comments,

“Rememory” as a trope postulates the interconnectedness of minds, past and present, and thus neatly conjoins the novel’s supernatural vision with its aspiration to communal epic, realizing the “collective memory” of which Morrison speaks ... “[R]ememory” is an active, creative mental function ... to use one’s imaginative power to realize a latent, abiding connection to the past ... a trope for the problem of reimagining one’s heritage. (101-102)

At 124 Bluestone Road, Sethe and Paul D, an ex-slave, recollect their shared experiences at the plantation in Kentucky called Sweet Home. In a memorable phrase, the narrator points out (using an indirect style to suggest Sethe’s own thinking), “Working dough. Working, working dough. Nothing better than that to start the day’s serious work of beating back the past” (86). These “rememories” haunt not only Sethe; their sense of disillusionment also afflicts Paul D. Their shared traumas at the Sweet Home plantation serve to unite and separate them from Denver and others who are not privy to those memories. Denver can only envision the cataclysmic Sweet Home through her mother and Paul D’s recollection of the past as loaded with trauma. Sweet Home represents a landscape that is more psychological than physical, in which relatively independent spheres are almost as much non-existent as independent, individual consciousness. Customarily, the physical space of a house accompanies the prospect of homemaking, but this vital element seems absent in Sweet Home. Although Sethe’s bouts of remembrance consist of the simple joys at Sweet Home, Paul D asserts, when challenged by Denver, “It wasn’t sweet and it sure wasn’t home” confirming that they were enslaved by the plantation with very little scope for self-expression.

Denver has an especially strong emotional response to 124 Bluestone Road, one

worth focusing on in considering this character. Denver's affective responses to her dwelling can most precisely be viewed as kinship. The house on Bluestone Road in *Beloved* has been endowed with emotional capacities that nurse Denver, to the point that Denver almost recognizes the house as a distinctive person. [quote] "Shivering, [she] approached the house, regarding it, as she always did, as a person rather than a structure. A person that wept, sighed, trembled and fell into fits" (35). Early in the novel, before *Beloved's* arrival, Denver is emotionally unstable and boundlessly lonely. She fails to make any connection to Sethe's past as an ex-slave in the Kentucky plantation, and she feels alienated by this past of which she had no part. The house, 124, provides Denver security from the external forces of an outside world that is unknown to her.

Denver exerts her will, although she is alone and friendless in 124. While Sethe's two sons, Howard and Buglar, escape the house before the main narrative gets going, Denver is not intimidated by it. This manifests Denver's comfortable space inside the territory of the house. Although Denver is tolerant of the presence of a ghost in 124, she is suspicious of Paul D's presence in the house once he arrives, and she seems to resent his encroachment into her personal, familial, and domestic space. Nevertheless, Denver shares an intimate bond with the baby ghost (who then appears later in the text as *Beloved*) and is willing to share Sethe's affection with her. She tells Sethe that the unnamed baby ghost looks "just like you. Kneeling next to you while you were praying. Had its arm around your waist" (43). Denver seeks to complete her imagined family with the ghost sister.

Noting this recursive structure, Philip Page remarks that

the novel's plot involves a series of attempted family circles. It starts with the

precarious family of Sethe, Denver, and the inanimate ghost of Beloved. Paul D drives out the ghost, but the potential family of him, Sethe, and Denver is also unstable, primarily because Paul D and Sethe do not yet dare to accept their memories, to acknowledge the horrors of their pasts. Beloved then returns, and their competition for intimacy deepens: Paul D wants Sethe, Beloved wants Sethe, Denver wants Beloved, and Sethe wants her old family. (33)

Philips gets at a key point concerning the way the house at 124 Bluestone Road functions less as a space of familial intimacy—a “home,” in a word—than as a site where the family ideal is contested.

Clearly, Sethe’s memories, trauma, and emotions are caught between two houses, the evocatively named “Sweet Home” in Kentucky where she had been enslaved and her haunted house at 124 Bluestone Road, the locus of her life as a free woman and the scene of her great crime. Her psyche is invested in these two places, and the struggle is which identity takes precedence over the other. At Sweet Home, she has fleetingly fond memories of her husband and friends, but she also experiences horrors, brutalizations, and humiliations.

At the same time, 124 is not very sweet or very homey either. The “home” in which Sethe could build a new life for herself and her children is compromised by the stigma of killing the baby, which is, in turn made worse by the abandonment of the community. Sethe’s house is haunted, and by more than just a baby’s ghost. The past, already weighing heavily on the minds of these characters, “invades” their domestic space. It cannot be forgotten or put behind them, but it must be something they can live with. 124 is humanized by the narrative striation in addition to the dwellers which

complicate its significance; the summation of all these elements enhances the its characters' complexity.

In “The Uncanny,” Freud asserts the relationship between what he articulates as the “uncanny” (in German, *unheimlich*) and spatiality. The beautiful, cozy, familiar, or *heimlich* qualities lose substantiality in an *unheimlich* space because the safe space has been repeatedly seized and altered by invaders. In this *unheimlich* space, the house oscillates between two identities: a location of status, prosperity, and personal attachment and, at the same time, a location that fails to sustain a stable reality in the present, in a way highlighting domestic instability in both positive and negative ways. Along these lines, Morrison’s novel can be said to be marked by absence, specifically the absence of flexibility, homely comfort, maternal love, peace, security, among others. Sweet Home, not unlike 124, enumerates quite a number of different kinds of losses, such as the displacement of the sense of place, space, and time which make the house alienating for its occupants, if not terrifying. Sweet Home serves as a space with a complex spatial setting, and obscures the compartments between physical and imaginative geographies.

Sethe’s sense is enmeshed with the past encounters at Sweet Home as her “brain was not interested in the future. Loaded with the past and hungry for more, it left her no room to imagine, let alone plan for, the next day” (83). Sweet Home’s meta-presence in 124 as an unobtrusive participant looms large in the backdrop. Thus, Morrison dismantles the compartments between place, space, people, and action at the crux of her narrative. In the introduction to his book *Geography and the Political Imaginary in the Novels of Toni Morrison*, Herman Beavers refers to this experience as *tight space* that which

signals a character’s spiritual and emotional estrangement from community and

the way it inhibits their ability to sustain a meaningful relationship to place. Tight space induces strategies that result in vertical forms of place-making which emphasizes individualism, materialism, violence, and abjection as key components of their estrangement. (6)

The terrifying spectacle of “unspeakable thoughts unspoken” in the last part of the novel features Sethe, Denver, and Beloved struggling to co-exist in the space that has become both home and prison to them. The underlying tension is evident in the interactions of the dwellers of the house, revealing their intense emotional responses towards each other. In this circumscribed space, the family reforms itself.

The two-story house on 124 Bluestone Road sustains a transfer of ownership as the Bodwins, who initially owned the house, rents it out to Baby Suggs, Sethe’s mother-in-law who eventually gets the ownership of the house. Taking these factors into consideration, 124 undeniably gives shape to black experience within its realm considering the fact that Baby Suggs and Sethe discover their emotional and humanized expression after moving into the house. In this sense, Sethe has been able to create her own space and sustain it in 124 Bluestone Road just as the narrator observes,

This here Sethe was new. The ghost in her house didn’t bother her for the very same reason a room-and-board witch with new shoes was welcome. This here Sethe talked about love like any other woman ... This here new Sethe didn’t know where the world stopped and she began. (193)

As it can be deduced, the house is historically enriched and diverse exhibiting both negative as well as positive characteristics. 124 is able to sustain both white and black occupants at various time periods. Beavers suggests that the physical setting of 124 gives

Baby Suggs and Sethe the “ability to experience a full range of emotional and sensory stimuli” (15). Whether or not Morrison intends to create an all-feminine space is, of course, debatable to the readers, but Sethe’s indomitable strength as the matriarch (after Baby Suggs’s death) of the house is “Almost. Mixed in with the voices surrounding the house, recognizable but undecipherable” (235). The inhabitants of 124 are subsumed within the domestic space of the house, so much so, that the powerful supernatural forces fail to destroy them. Accordingly, it can be inferred that 124 becomes a site of confluence of race and class, as much as one of paranormal activities.

In this sense, it is perhaps not surprising that Morrison chooses to begin each part of the novel by invoking what we might call the “mood” of the house itself. “124 was spiteful.” “124 was loud.” “124 was quiet.” The domestic space represented by this address sets the tone for each of the three “acts” of the drama, and the eventual silence might be said to represent the novel’s ultimate compromise between the past and the present.

Notably, and quite unlike the Sweet Home farm, the “grey and white house on Bluestone Road” (1) is signified not by a name, but by its number. 124 serves as an anchor of memory, and it designates a site that confronts, transforms, and reclaims history, even as it becomes a site of futurity. 124 is more than its socio-geographic emplacement in terms of its postal, neighborhood, and geographical location. The absence of number “3” from the numerical series of the house’s address is conspicuous, and perhaps the three emerges from within the house. The companionship of Sethe, Denver, and Beloved makes the house into a whole, although it appears to be a toxic formation, at least for Sethe. The alternative family unit of Sethe, Paul D, and Denver

also has its problems. The temporal trinity of past, present, and future, maybe, offers another figure. By the novel's end, the haunted house is not so much exorcised as accommodated. It becomes a space in which the traumatic past, the anxious present, and the hope for a better tomorrow can coexist on their own terms. As such, Morrison's novel accentuates the degree to which a true "home," beyond the simplistic visions of "happy endings" or tragic "falls," must be a space in which we deal with all of these issues, making it a proper "lived space" and a space for living.

In fact, when Sethe and Denver have nothing left to eat in 124, Denver takes charge of the situation and moves out of the domain of the house to seek help from the community. 124 is a domestic space that grants Sethe and Denver absolution from the black community as they are reunited with their black "Society" at the end,

For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves ... the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it ... It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash. (308)

124 transcends the typical notions of a haunted house in that Baby Suggs and Sethe find shelter within its physical space. Furthermore, Paul D is welcomed into the house without hesitation or restraint. For the first time in eighteen years since escaping Sweet Home, Paul D does not drift anymore and finds home in Bluestone Road. 124 is also a site that accommodates Sethe and Paul D's burgeoning romance. As the readers are informed, Paul D is "the kind of man who could walk into a house and make the women cry. Because with him, in his presence, they could... Strong women and wise saw him and told him things they only told each other" (20). Paul D's kindness and warmth

towards Sethe facilitate their relationship and justifies his intervention in the workings of Sethe's domestic space. Sethe and Paul D's relationship blossoms in 124 because of their shared experience of subjugation and tribulation eighteen years ago in Sweet Home. Although they try to avoid having explicit conversations about Sweet Home, the suppressed past still haunt them incessantly. Sethe and Paul D aspire to "Move. Walk. Run. Hide. Steal and move on" (78) with each other. As a matter of fact, Baby Suggs and Sethe revel in the fact that 124 has "given too much, offended them by excess" (163). For its dwellers, 124 is an agency that underlines emotion, relatability, and warmth, if not more. The realm of 124 makes it possible for its dwellers such as Baby Suggs, Sethe, and Denver to be able to exhume their individualities.

The house is also an emblem of slavery for Paul D, who is removed from the inner quarters of the house to outside. Paul D fails to exert his agency within the realm of the house, as he is forced out of Sethe's room at first to downstairs, then to the shed behind the house. Paul D asks Sethe if she wants to have a child with him; thus reinforcing his potent manhood on the members of the house. The exclusive feminine space of the house refuses Paul D's authority, and, in turn, he is compelled to move out of the house. Paul D repudiates Beloved's presence in the house "Beloved was shining and Paul D didn't like it" (76). Beloved seduces Paul D, crushes and insults his manhood and in the end banishes him from the house. Paul D fails to confess his sexual relationship with Beloved to Sethe, jeopardizing their prospective relationship.

Morrison's intention to create an all-feminine space in the domestic sphere of the house is not lost on the readers. Motherhood takes a controversial stance in the physical locale of 124, in that, Morrison twists and turns the motherhood trope. With an eclectic

experience of being an ex-slave and a fairly tough life post slavery, Sethe has become a fierce and protective mother. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that Sethe's present identity in 124 revolves around being a mother to Denver. Barely a month or so after coming to 124, Sethe kills her infant daughter. This act of destruction can be read as Sethe's love and responsibility towards her child in order to relieve the murdered child of an impending life of enslavement. Sethe seeks comfort in the inner space of 124, a sanctuary compared to her otherwise distraught experiences outside its domain. At other times, 124 vehemently denies Sethe the luxury of motherhood by separating most of her children from her. Thus 124 has a fluid personality—a provider and a captor, or more accurately, the house is an extension of Sweet Home for Sethe. Jewell Parker Rhodes describes Sweet Home as a space that

trigger[s] the cathartic reaction, something presumably more sweet, something which does not encourage the defensive reaction, something that engages the self on a myriad of psychological and emotional layers—the sexual, familial, and sense of belonging to a community is what is needed to slip through the defenses against horrifying memory (78).

At Sweet Home, Schoolteacher asks his “pupils” to compartmentalize Sethe's human and animal characteristics depending on where she is “No, no. That's not the way. I told you to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don't forget to line them up” (228). Sweet Home has issue with accessibility, exhibiting a hierarchical ordering with respect to class and race, 124's dominant authority oscillates between benevolence, manipulation and exploitation. The silencing effects of Sethe's traumatic past affect her relationship with the existing dwellers in the household, her

communication with Denver is very limited as seen in the scope of the narrative. The interactions of the inhabitants within the house sets the premise for the readers to study the trauma that lurks in the background. 124 is the locus of several contrasting elements infused into one such as the past and present, black and white, as well as the interactions of humans with otherworldly entities.

The stain of being relinquished by the community for killing the baby in 124 gives Sethe's house the haunted status. In fact, it is difficult for Morrison's readers to reduce her protagonist's past and present experiences to a timeline. Herman Beaver notes, placemaking for Morrison's characters often emerges amidst turmoil, they often face the difficulty of ascertaining the exact source of the turbulence that enshrouds them. They are required in turn to cast their figurative gaze backward to think about trauma which is located within the form of power relations growing out of systems of scale. (7)

Due to her ignorance about Sethe's past, Denver sees her mother as a secretive existence inside the house with hardly any scope for emancipation. They share the household chores together, and yet Denver is scared of Sethe as she is conscious of the fact that Sethe killed one of her children. Sethe's murdered child returns to 124 as Beloved, "a fully dressed woman [who] walked out of the water" (60) to claim mother's love. Beloved's longing for maternal love finds expression in a swelling attachment and possessiveness towards Sethe, so much so, that the latter gives all her attention to Beloved, to the point of forsaking Denver. Beloved strangles Sethe in Denver's presence in her sheer despise for her. The underlying tension is evident in the interactions of the dwellers of the house revealing their personal prejudices as well as intense emotional

responses towards each other. Sethe's existence is caught between two houses—her past in Sweet Home and her present in 124 Bluestone Road. Sethe's psyche is invested within the inner space of the house and a struggle ensues for which identity takes precedence over the other. Instances of the emotional capacity of the house provide embodied information to readers in addition to offering psychological motivation for how characters perceive their immediate physical space.

124 serves as an anchor of memory and relationships, and as a site that confronts, transforms and reclaim history. 124 is more than its socio-geographic emplacement in terms of its neighborhood and geographical location. Readers can imagine the fictional 124 Bluestone Road located on the outskirts of Cincinnati, Ohio. Sethe, Denver, and Beloved seem to be at their best when they live together for the first time after Paul D's departure from the house. Sethe reflects that "the hand-holding shadows she had seen on the road were not Paul D, Denver and herself, but "us three"" (214) and also "the world is in this room. This here's all there is and all there needs to be" (215). There is a sense of liminality within the house as it is both the nurturer for its occupants as well as a site that takes away from its dwellers, thus dismantling the compartments between a "home" and a "house".

In the physical space of 124, Sethe gradually becomes overtly engrossed with Beloved and her memory of her other children begins to dwindle: "Now all I see is their backs walking down the railroad tracks. Away from me. Always away from me. But that day they was happy, running up and rolling down" (226). Sethe's home as a safe haven begins to wane the more she and Beloved spend time with each other They keep Denver away from their shared space, and in turn, Denver is compelled to move out of the safe

space of house and explore the space outside to procure food for the three of them. Denver is plagued by monomania and tries to save Beloved from Sethe. Denver's growing distance with Sethe is evident when she says,

I love my mother but I know she killed one of her own daughters, and tender as she is with me, I'm scared of her because of it. She missed killing my brothers and they knew it. (242)

The psychological digression of the dwellers within the house become even more evident as Sethe's fixation with Beloved increases. Sethe's trauma takes a new shape and her domestic space begins to turn malevolent, "We smell them together, Beloved. Beloved. Because you mine and I have to show you these things, and teach you what a mother should. Funny how you lose sight of some things and memory others" (237). The basic plot of the story is identifying and dealing with the different kinds of trauma that dwell in the house along with its occupants. As Sethe is compelled to confront her past in her present, and her past turns hostile in the sense that Beloved (presumably Sethe's murdered daughter) takes over Sethe and begins to manipulate her. Sethe relives the trauma that was veiled in her psyche for so long, hovering on the backdrop of 124 Bluestone Road. Initially, Sethe, Denver, and Beloved enjoy each other's companionship and play in the cold, although things take a drastic turn after Sethe loses her job. Gradually, Denver's opinion of Beloved begins to change when she realizes, "I just had to watch out for it because it was a greedy ghost and needed a lot of love" (247).

In "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History," Cathy Caruth argues that "trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs, or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped

only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence” (187). Denver realizes the intensity of the damage for the very first time after having been largely ignorant about it, a condition that rendered it impossible to come to terms with the past. The return of the trauma was inevitable at 124 Bluestone Road. At this point, 124 and Beloved act as foils to each other in terms of controlling the emotions and actions Sethe and Denver. Caruth further adds, “The historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after is forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all” (187). Beloved’s relationship with 124 is organic in nature as they are both successful in inducing a degree of trauma to the dwellers, trauma that cannot be eliminated from within the house, but only perhaps resituated in a different context. In this sense, the house becomes a passive site that facilitates Beloved’s haunting within its space. It is by no means a far-fetched notion that the novel is Morrison’s approach to engaging with the question of how imagination establishes and reestablishes limits of identity. Sethe’s overriding concern is that her past remain in the past. As Morrison puts it, Sethe’s

crime was staggering and her pride outstripped even that; but she could not countenance the possibility of sin moving on in the house, unleashed and sassy ...

The future was sunset; the past something to leave behind. And if it didn’t stay behind, well, you might have to stomp it out. (302)

This makes 124 a space for personal haunting. When the community drives Beloved away from the house, it looks, “Unloaded, 124 is just another weathered house needing repair” (311).

Inevitably, the house lacks a mysterious aura without Beloved: “Something is

missing from 124. Something larger than the people who lived there" (319). By the end of the narrative, Sethe has learned the need to become accustomed to her past and atone for what is gone:

There is a loneliness that can be rocked. Arms crossed, knees drawn up; holding, holding on, this motion, unlike a ship's smooths and contains the rocker. It's an inside kind—wrapped tight like skin. Then there is a loneliness that roams. No rocking can hold it down. It is alive, on its own. A dry and spreading thing that makes the sound of one's own feet going seem to come from a far-off place. (323)

Even though bruises of Sethe's past cannot be taken away from her, she does not need to beat back the haunting of her past anymore. Like the prevailing loneliness within the house, the past, too is alive, but very much on its own, without exerting influence on Sethe any longer. By proclaiming in the last chapter that "It was not a story to pass on" (323), the narrative voice reinforces that the past is not an everlasting existence. Of course, Sethe has to learn how to accept everything that is in relation to the present, but the past is not eternal, nor is it timeless or immutable for her.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The place of dwelling or “house” in each of these three novels is infused with a psychological meaning as much as by a language of duality. The past memories and trauma attached to these houses exert a compelling force on the occupants’ emotional and psychological states, thus denying the dwellers a stable identity in the present.

Hawthorne, in *The House of the Seven Gables*, gains readers confidence to explore the realm between what is real and fantastic by presenting the titular house as the essential point or problem. Faulkner offers the Compson house as a metaphor in *The Sound and the Fury* that encases the relational psychoanalysis of the family, the three Compson brothers in particular, who are obsessed about their only sister in their own ways. For Benjy and Quentin, Caddy is “home” while for Jason, Caddy is the reason for his present condition of distress in the Compson mansion. In *Beloved*, Morrison designs Sethe’s house 124 as both haven and hazard to her protagonist. The house provides shelter to Sethe and her youngest daughter Denver, yet translates into the notion that it is haunted by the ghost of Sethe’s murdered child thus making it an “unhomely” space.

Because the houses in each of these novels are such towering figures, it is essential to consider the underlying aesthetics associated with these domestic spaces that make them so complex. The idea of past memory and trauma is permanent in the psyche of the dwellers inhabiting these spaces having paradoxical effects for the space of living as well as those who live in these spaces. Still, Hawthorne’s characters are able to dispel their dark past and move on to a better future outside the cursed house. But Faulkner’s characters are clueless about how to deal with past trauma; Benjy’s trauma manifests in being entrapped by the house perpetually while Quentin internalizes his personal trauma

and tries to escape it by committing suicide, and Jason has no scope for emancipation within the house. Yet, Faulkner is somewhat more nuanced in his take on past trauma, while Morrison's characters understand that past is something cannot be held on to for a long time. Even though the present does not offer a great deal of promise for them, they realize that the past is past, and has no power over the present. Each author takes a different approach to past memory and trauma by reflecting on the dominant social discourses of their time. In these novels, the idea of "home" is more like a confinement for the dwellers smothering their expectations for a better future. While Hawthorne handles it by killing Jaffrey Pyncheon and his son (who never appears as a character in the narrative), Faulkner does so by allowing his characters to resign to the ordinariness of their existence. And Morrison's characters, of course, realize that the past has deep repercussions in their internal world is actually a bondage that prevents them from experiencing freedom.

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