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## The Impossibility of *Home*

“A person who longs to leave the place where he lives is an unhappy person.”  
—Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

**M**y husband’s grandfather served in World War II. He drank. He also lost his first child when she was only 18 months old to pneumonia. Everyone assumed his alcoholism stemmed from that. He mentioned—every once in a while—his time at war, but no one took it seriously. Not until they found his medals in a box after he died. Two bronze stars. He fought at Normandy. One of the few Black soldiers to be commended. He survived, but his infant daughter did not, and he grieved both of these facts until his death.

During World War II, black civil rights activists coined the term “Double V,” urging black soldiers to win victory over both the foreign enemy and the enemy at “home.” Du Bois argued against this type of militarism based on the ideology that “nothing else [makes] Negro citizenship conceivable, but the record of the Negro soldier as fighter” (Phillips 9). Ultimately, the campaign failed, not because of any lack of bravery of black American soldiers, but because of a social system hell-bent on maintaining the status quo. As Langston Hughes described it, “war made [blacks] ‘expendable’ in their communities and on the battlefield” (qtd in Phillips 9). The reality for black soldiers returning from World War II was a Jim Crow, segregated society, which still allowed public lynchings of black people. James Baldwin commented after World War II that “a certain hope died, a certain

respect for White Americans faded” (qtd in Phillips 10). The questions, then, that Kimberley L. Phillips in her book, *War! What is it Good For?: Black Freedom Struggles and the U.S. Military*, poses are, “How did killing and dying in war make them citizens?” and “How did killing in war bring them freedom?” (1). The answers, of course, are that the killing did not make African Americans citizens, nor did it bring them freedom. Even with the success of the Tuskegee Airmen, the oppression of black American citizens not only continued, but was systemically supported. The “Negro Policy” became the U.S. military’s way of ensuring segregation, an effort not to just maintain the status quo, “but a far more elaborate part of the Institution’s establishment of racial hierarchies to maintain order and discipline of all troops, a tactic used since the nineteenth century” (Phillips 69). The untold story is that even as black soldiers were fighting for the United States of America, for democracy, for their own respect and dignity, for their humanity, the roots of institutionalized racism were being dug in even deeper.

Already complicated, then, is this idea of “home.” If home is belonging and safety and security, then African Americans are, by definition, always not at home. One black soldier articulates the dilemma best; “the uniform itself says [they belong to America] and that’s why they feel hope when they wear it. At the same time, though, the uniform highlights all the irony of our position; we are asked to die for a country that literally doesn’t let us live” (Phillips 57). Incidents abound. Months before his unit was to forward deploy to Europe, Lieutenant Jackie Robinson was court martialed after refusing to give up his seat on a bus and daring to take issue with lower ranking white military police calling him “nigger,” at Camp Hood, Texas in August of 1944. On April 11, 1945, 101 Tuskegee Airmen were arrested for refusing to sign Base Regulation 85-2, which effectively maintained the separate but equal policy of the base. All were released, except the three Tuskegee Airmen who were court martialed for their attempts to integrate the all-white Officer’s Club at Freeman Army Airfield. One officer, Lt Terry was convicted. Robert Edgerton in his book, *Hidden Heroes: Black Soldiers in America’s Wars*, tells the story of one black World War II veteran’s homecoming; “When Sergeant Isaac Woodward apparently took too long to use the “colored only” toilet facilities at a stop on the way north, the bus driver called the local sheriff, who not only beat the sergeant but struck him in the eyes with his nightstick so often and violently that Woodward was permanently blinded” (161-162). Sergeant Woodward stands as a metaphor for the black soldier, at once segregated, beaten, and blinded by the Army’s “Negro Policy.” With African American’s fighting spirit dwindling with the ever present abuses of institutionalized racism and with another war looming

on the horizon, President Truman issued Executive Order 9981 on July 26, 1948, which called for “equality of opportunity” in the armed forces. The Order did not explicitly state that the branches of the armed forces must integrate, it used language that could be read as another “separate but equal” doctrine, but it was sold as an integrationist agenda. So intently needing hope, the black community bought into the propaganda and chose to view the quota-free draft as an opportunity for training and income (Phillips 117). As Kimberley Phillips details, “the surge in murders, beatings, burnings, rapes, and false imprisonments of African Americans between 1945 and 1950 correlated almost in direct ratio to the surge towards war” (10). The newly “integrated” military offered a new chance for black Americans to prove their capability and worth. As one Korean War veteran put it, “the war was a better option than ‘home’” (Phillips 114). In this historical context, the novel *Home* is born.

*Home* is the story of a black Korean War veteran, Frank Money, and his sister Ycidra “Cee” Money. Frank enlists with his two best friends from a small town in Georgia looking for something to do, some adventure, and some cash. He watches both of his friends die during the war and commits his own horrible crime while on the front lines by killing a young Korean girl offering sexual favors for rotten food. A year after returning to the United States, Frank continues to struggle with what we now know is Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). He is unable to return “home,” understanding that “home” no longer exists and is forced to fight a war within himself to reestablish order. He is forever affected by the loss of his best friends and his own changed self. Ycidra becomes a young teenage girl left without the protection of her brother. She runs off with a young man who abandons her for a car. She finds work in a white doctor’s office, but ends up being the victim of his experimentation and is near death when her brother finds her. Frank takes her home. The community of black women rallies around Ycidra. They heal her physical wounds and they arm her with the strength to tackle the emotional ones. Frank, having no male support and existing outside of this women-centered community of healing, is forced to deal with his trauma alone. Ultimately, Frank finds himself on a heroic quest: for self-identity, for restoration, for love. He is a warrior-hero, a modern warrior-hero that Morrison tries to demythologize even as she makes him a modern Odysseus struggling to return “home” from war only to find his home in disarray. Significantly, Morrison chooses the Korean War, America’s first “integrated” war, to signify the wars black soldiers have had to fight on two fronts, and documents how futile this double warfare has been.

Even as the novel quietly celebrates the legacy of African American fighting men, its distance from this specific war allows Morrison to escape the African American

protest novel of the 1940s and 1950s and, instead, tell an honest story of the layers of war. In *The Things They Carried*, Tim O'Brien best tells us what it means to be honest, to tell a true war story. O'Brien suggests that a war novel creates a moral universe that encompasses morality, immorality and amorality as coexisting force fields without subjective value judgments. Morrison attempts to embed the combat story and its psychological effects into the cosmopolitan narrative that ultimately embarrasses, but is, perhaps, too moral for O'Brien's taste. After all, O'Brien does not fully conceive of the unique dynamic experienced by black soldiers still suffering the effects of war when "home" is itself war.

Junius Edwards first considered this dilemma in his 1963 novel, *If We Must Die*. Existing as another reintegration novel, Will Harris, a black Korean War veteran, returns home to a small southern town after spending time in an American Army hospital healing from a gunshot wound. The novel captures a day in Will's life in which he attempts unsuccessfully to register to vote and ultimately dies after a botched, yet efficacious lynching. Edwards titles his novel after Claude McKay's poem, "If We Must Die," and begins with this epigraph, the poem's first line: "If we must die, let it not be like hogs," leaving off the second line, "Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot." Will's passive and at times apathetic behavior mirrors the mindlessness of hogs even as his resistance to the status quo scandalizes his community. The question that the novel and its epigraph prompts, then, is, "Is it somehow more honorable to be led and slaughtered like hogs in the cold mountains of Korea than to be strung up and lynched like a hog at 'home'?"

Will's mother wants desperately to believe in home. She wants to believe that claiming home is itself an act of resistance, a "victory" against the systemic racism that would prevent any such declaration, and views denying home and moving on as an act of cowardice, a running away. She begs her son not to run. Ironically, Will blames his mother and her idealism and not his white male attackers for his injury, "See what you done, Mom? See what you done to me? You did it, Mom, he thought....You did it" (129). Edwards suggests the danger in this kind of idealism, that the belief that "home" is possible, that safety and security are achievable, that belonging is within reach, can open oneself to severe harm, to death.

All of this is context, but Morrison suggests "home" is more complicated. In many ways, we can read *Home* as a revision, a re-writing, of Edwards' novel. Morrison's novel revises and complicates Edwards' Korean War novel and takes issue with the idea of home. While Edwards offers the possibility of home, Morrison, like Hughes, never does. The novel opens with Frank and his sister as children hiding in

the long grass gazing in wonderment at the horses that “stood like men” (3)<sup>1</sup>. Their innocent observation is interrupted as men begin to bury a body out in the open field. Frank remembers how, “one foot stuck up over the edge...quivered, as though it could get out, as though with a little effort it could break through the dirt being shoveled in” (4). Frank recalls this memory and how, much like Sethe (in *Beloved*) at first only remembers the beautiful sycamore trees, Frank “only remembered the horses...so beautiful. So brutal. And [how] they stood like men” (5). The burial demonstrates the reality of the Jim Crow governed South. Like the rooster, Mister, the horses were more like men than black men were like men. Too often, black men, even returned black soldiers, found themselves laying down like hogs in unmarked graves, more like animals than men. As the reverend friend of Frank articulates, “You all fight, come back, they treat you like dogs. Change that. They treat dogs better” (18). Morrison is careful not to just highlight the most outwardly racist incidents, but also points to the more subtle injustices that prevent the possibility of home for black Americans. She mentions the laws that allow for the continued control of blacks, for instance, vagrancy: “vagrancy, meaning the standing outside or walking without clear purpose anywhere,” a law which allowed for blacks to be arrested in just about any circumstance, i.e. the Black Codes. Frank and his friend are racially profiled, frisked and manhandled on the streets of Chicago, forced to hide their money from policemen in their shoes, an incident so routine it “was not worth comment” (37). She makes clear these laws explicitly contradicted the possibility of “home.” After all, a black family’s “home” could be taken and whole communities displaced as Frank describes: “You could be inside, living in your own house for years, and still, men with or without badges but always with guns could force you, your family, your neighbors to pack up and move—with or without shoes” (9). Frank experiences this displacement at four years-old and is, then, made homeless, put “outdoors,” the horror of which is best captured by Claudia in *The Bluest Eye* when she says, “outdoors, we knew, was the real terror of life...if you are outdoors, there is no place to go” (17).

Even if we allow the black community to offer the illusion of home in place of a physical or a familial home, what does this home offer? Morrison argues a vicious cycle of hog-like deaths. For Frank Money, “home,” Lotus, Georgia, offers only death. He describes Lotus as “the worst place in the world, worse than any battlefield” and adds that death was certain in Lotus, slow but certain; “In Lotus

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1 Here Morrison signifies to McKay’s “If We Must Die” as well. The poem ends, “Like men we’ll face the murderous, cowardly pack,/ Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!” Significantly, Morrison assigns the “like men” to the horses and suggests the futility and even absurdity in the necessity of such resistance.

you did know in advance since there was no future, just long stretches of killing time. There was no goal other than breathing, nothing to win and, for somebody else's quiet death, nothing to survive or worth surviving for" (83). The Army offers opportunity, a way out of this slow death. Frank and his friends run from Lotus exclaiming, "Thank the Lord for the army," where at least the death is coupled with "excitement, daring, and some change of winning along with many chances of losing. Death is a sure thing but life is just as certain" (84, 83). Sebastian Junger in his journalistic account of the Battle Company in the remote and extremely dangerous Korengal Valley of Afghanistan explains this phenomenon, "In some way twenty minutes of combat is more life than you can scrape together in a lifetime of doing something else. Combat isn't where you might die—though that does happen—it's where you find out whether you get to keep on living" (144). Even as war takes life, it gives it. Frank understands that, "battle is scary, yeah, but it's alive" (93). What he also comes to understand is that once the excitement of the battle is over, once the life-giving adrenaline wanes and war ends, it is the death that sticks with you and the vicious cycle continues. After all, there is no opportunity "to keep on living" as a black man in a small Georgia town, just the imminent slow death.

Frank loses his two best friends in the war. They suffer a more exciting death than home offers, but they end up dead, slaughtered, all the same. Frank describes his friend Mike's death, and the "thrashing, jerking" that accompanies his last moments. Weeks later, Stuff, his other childhood friend, has his arm blown off; "Frank helped Stuff locate the arm twenty feet away half buried in the snow" (98-99). Stuff doesn't make it through the medevac ride and, also, dies—"now they were meat" (99). Morrison articulates how these soldiers' deaths served as "meat," food for the fight—"the more killed, the braver the warriors, not the stupider the commanders" (136). Death supports more death, and we go round and round.

Ironically, then, this vicious cycle is perpetuated by the necessity of the violence required to make oneself visible, to make oneself a citizen, to make oneself American—the violence of trying, the violence Ellison's invisible man understands of staying in the light. Adding to this inability to see oneself—in what Du Bois calls the state of double consciousness—is the further complication of the specific dilemma of the black American soldier. If it is as Fanon suggests, that the "Negro is forever in combat with his own image," then the war exists on three fronts, not just two—the war at "home," the war abroad, and the war with one's self (194). Fanon argues that "in a world in which things do evil: in a world in which [the black man] is summoned into battle; in a world in which it is always a question of annihilation or triumph," then "there is only one solution: to fight" (228, 224). In this realm

acts are amoral, fight or die. Frank does this very literally when confronted with the reality of his own mortality with the death of his two friends. In this moment, he becomes “brave, whatever that meant. There were not enough dead gooks or Chinks in the world to satisfy him” (98). Frank fights, motivated in part by revenge, but also by the promise of citizenship—the idea that helping the white man kill the yellow man might make visible the black man. These are moral justifications for his amoral war behavior. They are also seeds for conflict.

What Frank fails to realize is that while his fighting is systemically allowed in his role as soldier, in his “collaborat[ion] in [America’s] new colonialism,” his fighting is systemically oppressed in his position as a black man in America (Phillips 155). A year after his return “home,” Frank finds himself in a “nuthouse,” a home, after police picked him up with blood streaming down his face. Frank doesn’t quite remember how the blood got there, but remembers how he felt, “the free-floating rage, the self-loathing disguised as somebody else’s fault,” mirroring the pathology of the black man Fanon describes (15). He thinks it must have been a fight, “I must have been acting up” (15). Frank’s “acting up” can be understood as an attempt to establish his humanity, as an attempt to make himself visible. As Fanon asserts, “human reality in-itself-for-itself can be achieved only through conflict and through the risk that conflict implies” (218). And the risk is great. Whereas Frank’s amoral fighting is rewarded in the combat of the Korean War, his moral fighting against the anger inherent to his position as a black man in America is systematically punished by his imprisonment in a mental hospital and systematically oppressed by the medication given with the intent to subdue him.

Frank escapes the hospital, an act of resistance of its own, and begins to understand violence as a method of release, as healing, even life-giving much like in the war; “Frank leaped on the prone body and began to punch his face, eager to ram that toothpick into his throat. The thrill that came with each blow was wonderfully familiar...Frank wondered at the excitement, the wild joy the fight had given him” (Morrison 101-102). Frank, significantly, acknowledges the difference in this kind of violence; “it was unlike the rage that had accompanied killing in Korea. Those sprees were fierce but mindless, anonymous. This violence was personal it its delight” (102). The implication is not only that the enactment of violence has the power to give life (“joy,” “delight”), but that it takes away his anonymity. Like the Invisible Man, “you strike out with your fists, you curse and you swear to make them recognize you” and you allow the act of violence compel your visibility. So it is fitting, then, that after Frank Money is mugged on his way to rescue his dying sister he is told to “Stay in the light” (107). As Ellison’s narrator understands, the

staying in the light is necessary to maintaining visibility. He explains, "I love light. Perhaps you'll think it strange that an invisible man should need light, desire light, love light. But maybe it is exactly because I *am* invisible. Light confirms my reality, gives birth to my form" (Ellison 6). Frank Money understands that violence can act as his light.

Morrison, however, adds an additional layer of complexity to the double consciousness of the black man, to the triple battleground of the black male soldier, to his invisibility, and offers that if violence is the solution, there is a consequence to this violence that is often overlooked and/or misunderstood. This consequence is post-traumatic stress disorder, the effect the violence, whether experienced by the black man-soldier as victim or enacted by the black man-soldier as perpetrator, has on his mental state. Morrison makes PTSD possible for the black soldier and confirms his susceptibility to trauma. The effect of worlds colliding—amoral acts upon reflection unable to be explained by moral consciousness, immoral acts like racism being the unpromised reality of life after you killed and your friends died in a foreign war, things you cannot reconcile—creates psychic dissonance.

I have already discussed the disreception blacks suffered when returning from war—the idea that "an integrated army is integrated misery," a notion even more true upon return "home" (Morrison 18). Frank's experience is no different. The government answer to PTSD is to send those with extreme symptoms to homes, to the "nuthouse," and the doctors "thoughtful and kind, [tell Frank] the craziness would leave in time" (Morrison 11, 18). But, "blood red took center stage. They never went away these pictures" and Frank is left to navigate a hostile Jim Crow-governed "home" with the added disability of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (because that is what Jim Crow laws in effect did, they dis-abled able black persons based solely on a racial classification). What Morrison shows through her characterization of Frank is that black vets were, to use the language of war, airborne unpinned grenades always expecting the contact that would make them explode.

Frank's PTSD is manifested in several ways. There is the "unmanageable anxiety," the "free-floating rage," the "self-loathing," and of course the numbness where he "sat on occasion for hours in the quiet—numb, unwilling to talk," sometimes just "sitting on the sofa staring at the floor" (15, 21, 75). The numbness transforms into "indifference...and irresponsibility" (79). But most destructive are the flashbacks and nightmares which serve as the framework for his seemingly violent black-out episodes, the last of which lands him in a mental hospital where we find him at the beginning of the novel. The flashbacks are constant and unwanted brought on by sleep or triggers like the sound of a car backfiring or other loud noises reminding

him of B-29 flying over. In his daydreams and nightmares he sees “a boy pushing his entrails back in, holding them in his palms like a fortune-teller’s globe shattering with bad news; or he hear[s] a boy with only the bottom half of his face intact, the lips calling mama,” “dogs and birds eating the remains of his comrades” (20, 34). While listening to his new friend Billy narrate his own trauma, the memory of his old friend Mike dying and crying out “Jesus, God Almighty, I’m fucked, Frank, Jesus, help me” seeps in to his consciousness (31). These flashbacks are described as “abrupt, unregulated memories [that] put a watery shine in [Frank’s] eyes,” and Frank initially deals with them, as many veterans do, through self-medicating with alcohol. These flashbacks, these nightmares, these memories work to splinter Frank’s self. Frank even describes his unremembered, but seemingly violent episodes as “a break.” This break is precisely what Judith Herman describes in her description of the effect of trauma. She articulates how traumatic events “shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others,” and details how these events “violate the victims faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis” (51). As Frank continues to relive these traumatic moments and, perhaps, even attempts to reenact these moments during his episodes, his self is being torn in two and he is forced to live (or attempt to live) both the past trauma and his present reality.

But there’s a twist. What we come to understand is that these memories, the ones which haunt him in his daydreams and his nightmares are not the root of Frank’s trauma. The root is a moment that Frank is unable to fully recover for most of the novel, and we walk with him as he processes the truth of this moment. We realize it is not a moment of coming to terms with amoral acts, rather it is coming to terms with a truly immoral one. It is a moment beyond the pale and it is indeed difficult to return home from there. The first mention of this moment is on page 22 with an “unasked question;” “And the girl. What did she ever do to deserve what happened to her?” (Morrison). It’s not until page 95 that we get more detail about this story. Significantly, Morrison switches to a first person narration so that we get Frank’s memory of this moment with no filter. The story Frank tells is of a young Korean girl who would crawl blindly up the hill he and his unit sat guard on and quietly reach her hand, patting around for any kind of edible garbage she could find; “K-ration refuse, scraps from packages sent with love from Mom full of crumbling brownies, cookies, fruit. An orange, soft now and blackened with rot” is just out of her reach. Frank continues his narration:

She fumbles for it. My relief guard comes over, sees her hand and shakes his head smiling. As he approaches her she raises up and in what looks like a hurried, even automatic, gesture she says something in Korean. Sounds like “Yum-yum.”

She smiles, reaches for the soldier’s crotch, touches it. It surprises him. Yum-yum? As soon I look away from her hand to her face, see the two missing teeth, the fall of black hair above eager eyes, he blows her away. Only the hand remains in the trash, clutching its treasure, a spotted, rotting orange. (96)

Frank analyzes this scene in his mind and concludes, “I think the guard felt more than disgust. I think he felt tempted and that is what he had to kill. Yum-yum” (96). In this imagining, Frank is witness, innocently peering through a bystander’s lens. It is not until his sister—healing from her own horrible trauma, sterilized, barren, “guttled”—tells him her personal prescription for healing that he is able to recover the truth about this moment. She tells him, “It’s just as sad as it ought to be and I’m not going to hide from what’s true just because it hurts” (131). Morrison again focuses the narration through Frank and he remembers “the whole truth,” and he admits that he “lied...lied to you and lied to me”... “I shot the Korean girl in the face. I am the one she touched. I am the one who saw her smile. I am the one she said ‘Yum-yum’ to. I am the one she aroused. A child. A wee little girl. I didn’t think. I didn’t have to. Better she should die” (133). Frank moves from innocent witness to war criminal and we are left to reconcile what he is left to reconcile—how do we forgive him?

In the end, what Morrison suggests is even more detrimental to the war-torn psyche than the addition of disreception to a damaged, splintered self is the shame and guilt that comes with the remembering of “the whole truth.” The whole truth is most times startling because, as Caruth explains, traumatic experience is in part defined by an “inability fully to witness the event as it occurs or the ability to witness the event fully only at the cost of witnessing oneself” (Trauma 7). This point is significant, because what Caruth argues and what Frank begins to understand is that the “break” exists not just at the moment of the traumatic experience, but also at the moment the traumatic experience is fully remembered—the moment the truth is first realized, the moment the trauma is fully witnessed for the first time. For Frank, the trauma exists not only in the realization that he lusted after and murdered the child, but that this realization transforms how he sees himself. He no longer can simply perceive himself as a victim, but must acknowledge his

role as victimizer, as perpetrator. He admits to “cover[ing] his guilt and shame with big-time mourning for his dead buddies” and using the horror of their deaths to explain his trauma (135). We are told how “day and night he had held on to that suffering because it let him off the hook, kept the Korean girl hidden. Now the hook was deep inside his chest and nothing would dislodge it” (135). Up until the point of his reckoning, Frank was invisible to himself. Frank’s crisis of death as a soldier fighting in war and experiencing the horrors of war has become a crisis of life, a crisis of survival and one that is not easily resolved. As John Stuart Mill famously said, “war is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things.” Perhaps the ugliest of things is that the narrative implies that this truth may not be the “whole truth.” The ugliest thing is that the little girl may have just accidentally brushed up against Frank’s manhood in an effort to secure the rotted orange and in her innocent, child way attempted to connect to this soldier who had, up until this point, afforded her a bit of humanity; who had, up until this point, allowed her survival, by speaking all she knew of the English language, “Yum, yum.” The ugliest thing is that his arousal may very well have been all his doing.

Regardless, we must acknowledge the severity of Frank’s crisis of survival, of his becoming visible to himself in all his newly realized truth. Patience Mason offers that by 1971, 49,000 Vietnam War veterans had died since returning “home” and Vietnam War veterans were 65 percent more likely to die from suicide” (302). In 2013, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs submitted that suicides were happening at the rate of 22 a day, or 8000 a year. In Mason’s words, “the war was/[is] still going on!”—an internal war that is actually more life-threatening than war itself (Mason 302)). So, even as Frank’s war within himself rages on, Morrison takes us back to the beginning and reveals the whole truth of the Frank’s first trauma, the burial he and his sister witness as children. The story goes that the whites were holding man fights or “more like men-treated-like-dogs fights” in the barn out by where the horses that “stood like men” roamed (138, 1). The day of the burial, a father and son were made to fight each other, to the death. The father begs the son to kill him, “Obey me son, this one last time. Do it. ... This ain’t life” (139). The son kills his father and saves his own life. His father is the man Frank and Cee see buried. The son is helped by the townsfolk in much the same manner that Frank is helped by the Pastor after escaping the mental hospital, and sent out on his own, led “out on a mule,” to live through his own survival crisis. Morrison’s positioning of this truth right after we learn Frank’s is both significant and problematic. In one way it solidifies the truth of the black soldier’s triple battlefield. This story is told to Frank by war veterans—“the two oldest fought in the First World War, the rest battled

in the Second” (136). These men sit in each other’s company telling war stories, processing their own war trauma through the witnessing the do with each other on a daily basis and staying out of the way of the war within the black community that continues on. Problematically, Morrison suggests there are worse things, uglier things than killing a could-be enemy child in the midst of a war environment—you could be forced to kill your own dad. In this sense, Frank’s war crime is minimized, if not contextualized in a way that, to use Frank’s words, lets him “off the hook.”

This notion; however, of returned veterans witnessing to one another is important, especially when we consider Frank’s chances of ever recovering from his PTSD. La Capra suggests there must be a “working through” of the trauma. Herman, Caruth and others offer that this working through is best accomplished through witnessing, through oral and/or written testimony. Herman goes so far as to say that “sharing the traumatic experience with others is a precondition for the restitution of a sense of a meaningful world” and continues explaining that ultimately, “recovery is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections” (70, 133). While Morrison allows Cee the opportunity to witness to a community of black women-healers in the kind of womanist ending common in African American women’s literature, she does not offer this to Frank. Instead, Frank takes Cee’s first quilt<sup>2</sup> (a product of her healing and growth after being centered in her community of women) and buries the bones of the slain father under his favorite tree. The quilt transforms from a “shroud” to a “coffin” and the implication is that Frank is able to use the quilt, the symbol of Cee’s recovery, to very literally bury his own past by amending another horrific war crime. The novel ends with Frank and Cee examining the tree, a tree “hurt down the middle/ But alive and well” before the two go “home” (146). Perhaps Morrison, in a meta-narrative moment, recognizes this too easy ending with the words “wishful thinking, perhaps” just a page earlier (145). Or perhaps the three interior monologue chapters are intended not only to be Frank’s confession, but his witnessing, and we are his community of healers. Either way, the ending fails to ultimately understand Frank’s need, and Cee’s prescription to not “hide from what’s true just because it hurts” is left unheeded (131). Morrison, too, is witnessing to the suffering of African American

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2 Alice Walker’s short story, “Everyday Use” (1973) uses the quilt as a trope of the past, an embodiment of history, a symbol of hard work. Walker complicates the notion of knowing your true or real history with the new-wave cultural educations promoted by colleges and black power organizations. In a way, Cee is Walker’s Maggie—she has an appreciation for her collective history and her individual suffering, while Frank is Walker’s Dee and thinks too simply that hanging the quilt honors the past; that burying the bones fixes it.

veterans, hoping to make this truth visible even as its layered reality of cruelty hurts and we have the choice to hide or enter the light.

We also cannot lose sight of the fact that Morrison chose to write *this* novel in 2012, with the United States still fighting two wars. Morrison reminds us with this cautionary tale that we must value each returning son. As Judith Herman explains, “the person with unrecognized post-traumatic stress disorder is condemned to a diminished life, tormented by memory and bonded by helplessness and fear” (49). Frank Money lived in a society that did not value him, and did not provide him with support. He resisted overt racism in a society that never—not before or after the war—allowed him to participate in or own the system. He was segregated against and cast out. Morrison suggests that the elephant in the room is that although racism is more covert now, the devaluation of men based on race or poverty or lack of opportunity still creates outcast, traumatized sons. Tens of thousands of young men and women are walking around our country, having served our nation, with post-traumatic stress disorder. These tormented men and women are committing suicide in alarming numbers. They are all impossibly home.

My husband’s grandfather was not just a WWII veteran and a survivor of Normandy, but an African American man. The All-Black Battalion at Normandy was not honored until 2009. Like Frank Money, my husband’s grandfather hoped to find “home” by going to war, hoped to return “home” after experiencing war, after having earned it, but found himself excluded. He could not fight for a home in a segregated society, he had no home to defend, and he could not forgive himself for his failed moral deeds. These are realities. Realities of race, of traumatic stress, of guilt and shame, of segregation and disreception, of invisibility—realities Langston Hughes laments when he says, “America never was America to me.”

Even as we read the ending we know Frank’s going “home” is an impossibility. The epigraph to the novel tells us as much. Reminiscent of the song from the musical *Les Misérables* “I dreamed a dream,” Morrison’s epigraph is a poem she wrote for the operatic piece, “Honey and Rue,” with music composed by Andre Previn. The music is described in a *New York Times* review as emoting “horror and unpleasantness and disorder,” as full of “dissonance,” music reflective of the juxtaposition between sweetness and bitterness, impenitence and regret the title suggests. The dissonance of the music reflects the conflict at the heart of Morrison’s poem, the difference between house and “home.” At the end of the novel, Frank does not return home to the “sweeter, brighter” ideal, but to his unfamiliar house whose “shadows lie.” Fittingly, Harvard University chose to perform this poem as a part of its “The Art of Survival” 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Observance of 9/11. Because what

Morrison's poem asks is what do you do when there is no going "home?" What do you do when the imagined dream of your life is "so different from this hell you're living?" How does one survive the self being made visible in all its horrible truth? How do you "pay the price of that orange?" (134). Maybe the answer is just to click our heels and repeat, there is no place like home, there is no place like home, there is no place...

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