

Re-examining the Past: Elements of Postmodern Memory in Toni Morrison's *Love*

Grzegorz Kotecki

Institute of English Studies, University of Wrocław, Wrocław, Poland

Toni Morrison's fiction may arguably be characterized as postmodern discourse on memory, history and culture. In her novels, the Nobel laureate frequently returns to the past to search for answers to the questions she poses about African American realities in the contemporary United States. In doing so, Morrison often creates alternative histories or, more specifically, a usable past—one that allows her to engage in a literary (re-)construction of the Black historical and cultural material which traditional histories have chosen to ignore or disremember. Therefore, as a present-day writer of African American descent, Morrison attempts to reassemble all the fragmentary historical and cultural accounts available to her as a novelist and narrate them in the form of a convincing story. With regard to the above considerations, this article seeks to discuss some of the mechanisms employed by Morrison for weaving her postmodern, memory-filled narrative on the example of her eighth novel, *Love* (2003). In particular, the analysis focuses on the book's central figure, Bill Cooney, and his Southern ocean-side resort—both seen against the backdrop of the pre- and post-World War II racist America, followed by the 1960s decade of the Civil Rights Movement. Finally, it is also demonstrated how the author's use of split narrative as well as the "I" narrator-cum-character technique contribute to recounting in retrospect *Love*'s main, historicized story—one viewed and judged from a present-time perspective.

Keywords: history, *Love*, memory, (the) past, Toni Morrison

Introduction

The article begins with an introduction of *Love* by outlining its thematic, compositional structure and mode of narration. Although not very long, the novel is one of Morrison's structurally most complex and challenging works. Generally, the book, one of the two that the novelist herself describes as "perfect" (the other being *Jazz* [1992])¹, is a study on the theme of love and its multi-dimensional nature; however, it may also be seen as an attempt at exploring how alive and meaningful the past can be in the present. In essence, written predominantly in a non-linear fashion, *Love* recounts in a series of personal flashback memories the lives of several women (Christine, Heed, May, Vida, L, and Junior/Viviane) and their relationships to the late Bill Cooney. The novel is both the story of Mr. Cooney, a then much-talked about but presently deceased hotel owner, and of the people surrounding him, all affected by his life—even long after his death. In fact, each of the female characters portrayed in the book shows some unique and complicated relation to this, as it turns out later,

Grzegorz Kotecki, MA, Ph.D. candidate, Institute of English Studies, University of Wrocław. Research fields: African American literature, culture and history, African folklore, religions and philosophy.

¹ Morrison makes this interesting remark in a conversation with journalist Adam Langer in *Star Power*, Adam Langer, 2003 [in:] *Toni Morrison: Conversations*, ed. Carolyn C. Denard, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2008.

infamous black entrepreneur and the novel's axis. Since in private Mr. Cosey was a promiscuous man, his relationships with the group of women that surrounded him during his life are the guiding points of the novel. All that time those females rivaled for his attention, but following his death, their antagonisms only strengthened, as externalized by arguments and speculations over the legacy of his enigmatic (last) will. Nonetheless, all the women, with the exception of L, continue to worship Cosey's memory years after his demise and idealize him as their own "perfect man." In doing so, however, they remain blind to his duality, hidden secrets and a troubled past.

Historical Background and the Narrative Voice(s) in *Love*

It is important to note here that Morrison historicizes *Love*, as she does her other novels—be it *Beloved* (1987), *Paradise* (1997) or, more recently, *A Mercy* (2008), in an effort to (re-)construct through fiction the often fragmented and incomplete records of African American past. This time the Nobel laureate reaches for one of the crucial and most formative periods in modern Black American history, namely the (African-American) Civil Rights Movement (1955-1968), making it her eighth novel's historical backdrop. More specifically, *Love* presents in retrospect the saga of a well-off, pre- and post-World War II black American family, the Coseys. Making temporal shifts, *Love*'s multi-layered narrative roughly spans the period from the 1930s to the 1990s (with a particular focus on the 1960s), albeit at times circling back in brief flashbacks as far back as to the 1920s. As the readers learn from *Love*'s leading story, for nearly four decades (i.e. from the 1930s through the 1960s) Cosey's Hotel and Resort enjoyed its heyday period as an ocean-side vacation spot in Up Beach, near Silk, at Sooker Bay, being the perfect escape for affluent, upscale black inhabitants of the East Coast in the murky days of segregation.² Not only did Cosey's resort offer his guests first-rate entertainment, combined with a sense freedom and untroubled belonging, but it also employed and paid some of the poorly-living local blacks, making the whole community proud of the economic success of one of their own race. In result, Mr. Cosey's nonchalant behavior and his philanthropic attitude toward the Up Beach population had earned the wealthy proprietor respect and reverence in the entire neighborhood.

Love's narrative present is mid-1990s on the American East Coast; however, making frequent non-linear rotations in the plot's timeline, this nine-chapter novel narrates, in fact, two parallel stories (parallel narration). The book's present action (the main text), in which bygone mysteries are gradually revealed, is subordinated to the eventful and vibrant past (the subtext), whose joys and traumas are slowly unraveled in a series of lyrical flashbacks. Most importantly, though, in her eighth installment, Morrison uses split narrative, which enables her to move back and forth throughout the story, not fully unfolding the events until the very end. Only then does she resolve the conflicts and debunk the enigmas, thereby bringing the past and the present together. As such, this particular type of storytelling technique foreshadows a late trend in Morrison's literature, one that consists in dividing the plot among different time periods. Another characteristic feature of *Love*'s narrative mode, one that puts it among postmodern works of fiction, is that the novel's leading story is told in a sequence

² Morrison mentions the existence of such historically-documented prosperous black-owned businesses/enterprises as her fictional Cosey's Hotel and Resort in pre-civil rights America in conversations with several journalists, for example in *Star Power*, Adam Langer, 2003 [in:] *Toni Morrison: Conversations*, ed. Carolyn C. Denard, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2008; in *I Want to Write like a Good Jazz Musician: Interview with Toni Morrison*, Michael Saur, 2004 [in:] *Toni Morrison: Conversations*, ed. Carolyn C. Denard, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2008; or in *Pam Houston Talks with Toni Morrison*, Pam Houston, 2005 [in:] *Toni Morrison: Conversations*, ed. Carolyn C. Denard, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2008.

of contrapuntal voices, its component parts being disclosed through the prism of kaleidoscopic viewpoints of the main characters.

Nevertheless, the overarching narrative voice in *Love*, one of the lyrical subtext, belongs to a woman named L, who is narrator and character at the same time (the "I" narrator-cum-character). As the narrative conduit, she gives her version of the tale of the ocean-side community of Up Beach, with a once popular, black-owned holiday resort at its heart. It is through L's voice that Morrison introduces the reader to a microcosm of people who react to one man, Bill Cosey, and to one another as the businessman casts his shadow over generations of individuals populating this Sooker Bay locality. In fact, L is the wise and quiet former first-class chef of Cosey's hotel and family arbitrator, whose first-person narration weaves and reweaves through the novel, summarizing and judging other characters' minds and actions.

Since L is an insider-narrator, she provides her personal story of the novel's events that took place over the span of more than forty years. She specifically expresses her judgments of the women enamored with Bill Cosey through a series of personal recollections, all the while unfolding her own infatuation with this intriguing man. The strong and quiet type, L silently watches everyone and everything, thus witnessing firsthand the dynamic tensions between Mr. Cosey and his women. Her narration, therefore, is both the bridge to the narrations led by *Love*'s other characters and the link that binds the multiple story layers together. Moreover, while the book's main narrative is mostly written in the third person, L's segments are given in the first person and italics. Finally, even though she never uses her real name, it can be inferred from the context of her biblical references that L actually stands for Love, and that the novel has been, *de facto*, written in her name.

As Hans-Wolfgang Schaller observes in his article *Toni Morrison's Love: Narrating a World of One's Own Making*, *Love* begins with an eight-page-long, untitled section in italics in which an unnamed narrator presents herself as reticent, detached and almost wordless. Unwilling to speak, she takes to quiet humming over the life-changing, morally questionable social habits characterizing modern days. Not until later do the readers learn that the narrative voice belongs to L, the erstwhile hotel cook, who watches and comments on the proceedings in the Coseys' household. Quite self-contradictorily, reluctant to talk but wishing only to croon, this narrator's voice introduces itself in these words:

The women's legs are spread wide open, so I hum [...] Standing by, unable to do anything but watch, is a trial, but I don't say a word. My nature is a quiet one, anyway [...] Nowadays silence is looked on as odd and most of my race has forgotten the beauty of meaning much by saying little. Now tongues work all by themselves with no help from the mind. Still, I used to be able to have normal conversations, [...]. Not anymore, [...]. Now? No. Barefaced being the order of the day, I hum. The words dance in my head to the music in my mouth. [...] My hum is mostly below range, private; suitable for an old woman embarrassed by the world; her way of objecting to how the century is turning out. Where all is known and nothing understood. Maybe it was always so, [...]. (Morrison, 2003, pp. 3-4)

Furthermore, Schaller (2007) points out that since the whole opening section as well as the other four lyrical passages scattered throughout the novel are printed in italics, there seems to be an indication of a controlling narrative voice in *Love*. This voice may be incapable of words, yet it is one knowing and expressing grief about the current moral life ills. Therefore, L might be identified as the novel's central narrative intelligence, which puts her into a narratological dominant position. Given the fact that she is granted the authorial voice (the italics are indicative of her authorial position throughout the narrative), it might be further suggested that L serves as the spokeswoman for the implied author, and that it is actually Morrison herself who acts as *Love*'s dramatized narrator and the main story-teller (Schaller, 2007).

Bearing this in mind, it could be useful in this context to recall the reasons that Morrison gave while explaining her motivation for choosing this apparently innovative, postmodern type of a narrative force in *Love*, especially when she likened the novel's narrating strategy to the experimental method of narration she had applied in *Jazz*. Thus, in the "Foreword" to the new, 2005 edition³ of her 2003 book, Morrison wrote:

I liked so much the challenge that writing *Jazz* gave me: breaking or dismissing conventional rules of composition to replace them with other, stricter rules. In that work, the narrative voice was the book itself, its physical and spatial confinement made irrelevant by its ability to imagine, invent, interpret, err, and change. In *Love*, the material [...] struck me as longing for a similar freedom—but this time with an embodied, participating voice. The interior narrative of the characters, so full of secrets and partial insights, would be interrupted and observed by an "I" not restricted by chronology or space—or the frontier between life and not-life. (Morrison, 2005, pp. x-xi)

In her illuminating essay "I'll Tell"—*The Function and Meaning of L in Toni Morrison's Love*, Wen-ching Ho discusses at length the employment of these two distinct, parallel narrators in Morrison's eighth novel. Ho (2006) observes, among others, that the stream-of-consciousness, non-linear, third-person limited narrations of the nine roman-type chapters are supplemented with the five first-person italicized soliloquies before Chapter 1 and at the end of Chapters 3, 4, 6 and 9, respectively. More specifically, the point-of-view, interior monologues of May, Christine, Heed, Vida, Sandler, and Junior provided by the third-person, anonymous narrator are indeed "interrupted and observed" by the alternating, first-person narrator and agent—L. By this token, it can be argued that apart from being an important character and narrator in her own right, the "nameless woman" helps drive the novel's narrative structure as well as the plot development (Ho, 2006).

With reference to the above findings, it needs reiterating that L the character plays a pivotal role in the stormy Cosey saga, while L the narrator performs several vital functions in the process of telling the story. First of all, her unique narratological construction gives the fictional L the upper-hand at having the full knowledge of the family secrets. Besides, as character-cum-narrator, L is granted an almost unlimited access to internal and external knowledge of the novel's events, which provides her with a relatively panoramic, inside and outside, view of the narrative. Ultimately, she is even allowed to transcend the ravages of time and, in consequence, her mortal physicality. Serving as Morrison's narrative framing device (she begins and ends the story), this ageless cook who dies as a character in 1975, yet still lives in her ghostly form as narrator in the novel's fictional present of mid-1990s, being "not restricted by chronology or space," recounts in lyrical episodes the whole history of the Coseys' and brings to light several key questions about *Love*, all the while speaking from the perspective of "the frontier between life and not-life."

***Love's* Main, Historicized Story**

From L's opening, italicized segment at the start of *Love* the readers learn that she has been silent for the past twenty years (from the fictional 1970s to the 1990s). In this part, L expresses in a lyrical voice her personal memories about her race's past and shares a series of observations about its present. She puts in a stark contrast the moderate and meaningful life before the 1970s with the roaring and sex-orientated 1990s. After that, L comments on the differences between the black women of previous decades and those of now. In her view, the women of the past were less talkative but much wiser, while today's females have a different mindset: they

³ Toni Morrison, *Love* (First Vintage International Edition), 2005, Alfred A. Knopf, Random House, New York.

speak loud nonsense, they expose themselves to male promiscuity and, prone to material gains, they worship consumerism. Finally, L describes herself as being only the background of the story that the modern world has been making since it decided to take on new, bold directions. Therefore, over time, L has become life's mute observer and commentator; she remains almost speechless in her detachment from the altered, meaningless reality, and so she can only hum to that.

After this introductory fragment in which she compares the past and the present of her race, thus setting *Love's* mood, L weaves in retrospect her private story of the original success and ultimate failure of Cosey's Hotel and Resort. She tells her tale of this segregation-time, black-run business against the backdrop of the crucial political and social changes taking place in 1960s America, ones which are mirrored and retained in the history of the local Up Beach community. It is in this intimate past story told in non-linear flashbacks from the present perspective that L reconstructs from her personal memories the living image of this once-flourishing, ocean-side Southern resort, one that would promise its guests for several decades "[t]he best good time this side of the law" (Morrison, 2003, p. 33).

Speaking from the present, beyond-the-grave, perspective, L stands at the crossroads of the world of the living and the world of the dead.⁴ Having this privileged "life and not-life" narratological position, her ontological world becomes a fusion of past and present. Subsequently, not being subject to the limitations of time, L is capable of producing a blended, circular account in which the past and the present events, escaping a traditional temporal trajectory, are free to occur in a "present past" *temporum*. Therefore, after her death as one of the novel's characters, she assumes the form of a ghostly figure inhabiting her mother's old, wooden cabin in Up Beach (now submerged under water), at times visiting the presently decrepit hotel and resort. Upon one of such visits, gazing nostalgically at the remnants of the once vibrant holiday venue, L describes its decaying condition in the following words:

[...] with no more big bands or honeymooners, with the boats and picnics and swimmers gone, [...] Sooker Bay became a treasury of sea junk and Up Beach itself drowned [...] But it's forty years on, now; [...] Except for me and a few fish shacks, Up Beach is twenty feet underwater; but the hotel part of Cosey's Resort is still standing. Sort of standing. Looks more like it's rearing backwards—away from hurricanes and a steady blow of sand. Odd what oceanfront can do to empty buildings. (Morrison, 2003, pp. 6-7)

However, a little later in this fragment of her soliloquy, looking around the empty spaces and premises inside and outside of this wind-bitten, half-fallen building, L still cherishes her vivid memories of the resort's life-throbbing past; she recalls the long-gone days when she championed in the hotel kitchen, while Cosey's guests crowded the dance floor, listening cheek-to-cheek to the band's "Harbor Lights" under the star-studded, evening sky. Therefore, after a while, she lets on:

No matter the outside loneliness, if you look inside, the hotel seems to promise you ecstasy and the company of all your best friends. And music. The shift of a shutter hinge sounds like the cough of a trumpet; piano keys weaver a quarter note above the wind so you might miss the hurt jamming those halls and closed-up rooms. [...] There used to be white wicker chairs out here where pretty women drank iced tea with a drop of Jack Daniel's or Cutty Sark in it. Nothing left now, so I sit on the steps or lean my elbows on the railings. If I'm real still and listening carefully I can hear his [the ocean's or, in fact, Bill Cosey's] voice. (Morrison, 2003, pp. 7, 106)

⁴ The problem of frequent (and natural) interconnectedness and interpenetration between the world of the living and the world of the dead, as seen from the traditional (African) perspective, is discussed in detail in *African Religions and Philosophy*, John S. Mbiti, Heinemann, Oxford, [1969, 1989], 2006.

In another part of her lyrical subtext, L takes a further leap into the past and starts reminiscing about the cleverness of Bill Cosey and the beginnings of his oceanfront. She informs the readers that in 1930 Cosey wanted the impossible: when the whole country began to live on Relief (and so did the Up Beach community), and when the local blacks killed themselves or took to the road, he took advantage. Having inherited his infamous father's "114,000 resentful dollars" (Morrison, 2003, p. 68) [Daniel Robert Cosey—nicknamed Dark—was a Court-house informer who sold himself to the local white police], Bill Cosey bought a broke-down "whites only" club at Sooker Bay from a white man who, having sworn "never sell to 'niggers'" (Morrison, 2003, p. 102), nevertheless broke his vow and retreated with his family away from "that bird-infested sidewalk for hurricanes" (Morrison, 2003, p. 102). In this case, Mr. Cosey acted boldly because in the peak time of the (Great) Depression (1929-1932) people in America, and especially those of color, had neither mind nor money for play or entertainment. However, the Up Beach businessman "knew what a harmonica player on a street corner knew: where there was music there was money" (Morrison, 2003, p. 102). He also believed that if black musicians were treated well, paid well and their music appreciated, they would come to "a place where their instruments were safe, their drinks unwatered, their talent honored so they didn't have to go to Copenhagen or Paris for praise" (Morrison, 2003, p. 102). Finally, Cosey too imagined that "[f]locks of colored people would pay to be in that atmosphere" (Morrison, 2003, p. 102), and so make his business thrive.

Then L comments on Cosey's extravagant idea by comparing it to one of a playground for people like himself; for people who, like him, were willing to crave "the best good time" in the time that was hard for his race, and who, like him, "studied ways to contradict history" (Morrison, 2003, p. 103). Therefore, the black businessman took all care to make his place excel in private, undisturbed comfort, elegance and etiquette, while his generosity to the clients matched his generosity to the community. L recalls vividly those moments of Cosey's 1930s entrepreneurial glory and the joys of his heart, when she keeps narrating:

Mr. Cosey was in heaven, then. He liked George Raft clothes and gangster cars, but he used his heart like Santa Claus. If a family couldn't pay for a burial, he had a quiet talk with the undertaker. His friendship with the sheriff got many a son out of handcuffs. For years and without a word, he took care of a stroke victim's doctor bills and her granddaughter's college fees. In those days, the devoted outweighed the jealous and the hotel basked in his glow. (Morrison, 2003, p. 103)

From L's further recollections the readers are also informed that as the decades of racial segregation in America continued throughout the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, Cosey's Hotel and Resort became over time the best vacation spot on the East Coast for the black social elite. Many a well-situated, respectable guest came down to this Up Beach beachfront for excellent food, dance and music performed by a sparkling of the most popular black bands and singers of the day. Above all, however, they all came, guests and musicians alike, for the best this place could offer: a spirit of freedom and untroubled belonging. That was the time when Sooker Bay thrived on the money of the black bourgeoisie and intelligentsia, from the North and the South alike. The excerpt below illustrates how enthusiastically L remembers the old, good days of the hotel's fame and prosperity, as well as summarizes Cosey's years of bonanza before the upcoming changes of the 1960s:

Those were the days when Cosey's Hotel and Resort was the best and best-known vacation spot for colored folk on the East Coast. Everybody came: Lil Green, Fatha Hines, T-Bone Walker, Jimmy Lunceford, the Drops of Joy, and guests from as far away as Michigan and New York couldn't wait to get down here. Sooker Bay swirled with first lieutenants and brand-new mothers; with young schoolteachers, landlords, doctors, businessmen. [...] Cosey's Resort had more handsome single men per square foot than anyplace outside Atlanta or even Chicago. They came partly for the music but mostly to dance by the sea with pretty women. (Morrison, 2003, p. 6)

Love and the Civil Rights Movement

Nevertheless, as the readers learn from a later part of L's story, even in the turbulent 1960s Cosy's resort was still making money, although with a different clientele. At that time Cosey moved himself and his family out of the hotel to a grand mansion house he had built on Monarch Street (in the nearby Silk), due to the bad smell from the fish and crab cannery in Up Beach, which became a problem and reason for complaints of a new generation of the 1960s guests. Thus, Cosey blamed the ultimate ruination of his business, which, over time, had shown signals of a gradual decline, on the fish odor. As a matter of fact, he had grown a conviction that he was actually tricked by the whites who had let him purchase all the oceanfront because of the vicinity of the local cannery, which, in consequence, must have made his enterprise turn unprofitable in the end.

After all, however, L speculates about several possible reasons for the final failure of Cosey's hotel and enumerates a series of factors that could have led to it: fish odor, natural disasters, economic trouble and politics. Along with these, she mentions the socio-cultural changes which, in the outcome, turned the old Up Beach community into the present-day Oceanside neighborhood. Indeed, before the droughts and hurricanes hit Sooker Bay, drowning Up Beach, Cosey's beachfront had been closed and his acres sold to a national developer, after which the land was plotted for the building of government houses. Over time, after the new properties were sold out to outside buyers, urban sprawl came to town, making jobs available across the area. In result, all those inevitable changes sealed forever the erstwhile community's fate, marking the place's new present and signaling the coming of a modern future.

Gazing back into the past, L explains that Cosey was a clever man who helped a lot the local folk—more than forty years of government programs, and that he would never shut down his hotel and sell away his land willingly. Thus, the readers learn that it was not actually natural calamities or community unemployment that ruined Cosey's hotel business, but that it was wrecked because of the civil rights and desegregation⁵. Indeed, in 1960s, many African Americans, especially in the South, became revolutionary on the wave of protests and riots against the white apartheid politics, and so “were more interested in blowing up cities than dancing by the seashore” (Morrison, 2003, p. 8). Additionally, and even more detrimentally, the integration of blacks in the United States, an undeniable socio-political success of the Civil Rights Movement, made it possible in the late 1960 and early 1970s for the rich black families “who bragged about Cosey vacations in the forties [to boast] in the sixties about Hyatts, Hiltons, cruises to the Bahamas and Ocho Rios” (Morrison, 2003, p. 8). In consequence, by choosing to mingle in holiday destinations with the affluent whites, the former were inevitably putting Cosey's Sooker Bay enterprise into economic trouble.

It is important to note here that, apart from being subject to other interpretations, *Love* can be seen as Morrison's critique of the political, social and cultural gains and losses of the Civil Rights Movement. For instance, in an essay entitled *Toni Morrison's Quarrel with the Civil Rights Ideology in Love*, Gopalan

⁵ Morrison talks about the advantages and disadvantages of the Civil Rights Movement, naming the integration of Americans blacks as one of the major drawbacks ensuing in the aftermath of the Movement, in several interviews, for example in *Star Power*, Adam Langer, 2003 [in:] *Toni Morrison: Conversations*, ed. Carolyn C. Denard, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2008; in *I Want to Write like a Good Jazz Musician: Interview with Toni Morrison*, Michael Saur, 2004 [in:] *Toni Morrison: Conversations*, ed. Carolyn C. Denard, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2008; or in *Pam Houston Talks with Toni Morrison*, Pam Houston, 2005 [in:] *Toni Morrison: Conversations*, ed. Carolyn C. Denard, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2008; she also writes about this issue in her essay *Rediscovering Black History*, 1974, Toni Morrison [in:] *Toni Morrison: What Moves at the Margin*, (Selected Nonfiction), ed. Carolyn C. Denard, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2008.

Neelakantan and Sathyaraj Venkatesan describe the novel as a “critique of the American Civil Rights Movement that had a devastating impact on the successful pre-World War II black community” (2007, p. 139). Moreover, the scholars underscore *Love*'s significant role in problematizing African American history (in this case the civil rights era of the 1960), as well as in re-evaluating the Civil Rights Movement, when they argue the following:

Toni Morrison's *Love*, in critiquing the American Civil Rights Movement, problematizes both American and African-American history [...] *Love* reexamines critically the traumatic history of Africans-Americans; it is also stridently political in articulating certain harsh truths about the Civil Rights Movement. *Love* not only reformulates some of the crucial issues that impinge on African-American interests within American politics, but also departs significantly from the normative triumphalist discourses of the Civil Rights Movement. (Neelakantan & Venkatesan, 2007, p. 139)

While it is true to say that the most significant achievement of the civil rights period, i.e. racial desegregation, gave many African Americans a long-overdue possibility to integrate with American whites, Morrison sees that success as bringing certain negative consequences as well. One of such unfavorable impacts would be the breakdown of the former black integrity and social values. This point is clearly reflected in *Love*'s narrative by the fact that Cosey's business could prosper only as long as the blacks worked together and stuck together during the times of the pre-civil rights era, organizing their lives and activities in compliance with the rules of collective solidarity (for example, many wealthy African Americans of the day had chosen Cosey's East Coast hotel for their vacation escapades over traveling to European, or other continents', non-segregated resorts), while the desegregation and the civil rights brought on more individualistic and nationalistic attitudes among the American blacks of the late 1960s and early 1970s, agitated by the emergence of such political and racial slogans as “Black Is Beautiful” and “Black Power.”⁶ In consequence of those inescapable socio-cultural changes, most of the earlier familial bonds and communal values were abandoned in favor of the middle-class consumptionist allures (in the early 1970s the affluent, now desegregated, blacks opted for other, more exotic holiday destinations, thereby making Cosey's enterprise go bankrupt).

Already in her 1974 essay entitled *Rediscovering Black History*, Morrison tackled the problem of re-examining the civil rights decade and commented on what was compromised and what was lost during the Civil Rights Movement. Ultimately, the fragment quoted below may thus be seen as depicting Morrison's concluding thoughts on the Movement's ensuing success(es) and failure(s):

During those intense years, one felt both excitement and a sense of loss [...] In the legitimate and necessary drive for better jobs and housing, we abandoned the past and a lot of the truth and sustenance that went with it. And when Civil Rights became Black Power, we frequently chose exoticism over reality. The old verities that made being black and alive in this country the most dynamite existence imaginable [...] were driven underground—by blacks [...] In trying to cure the cancer of slavery and its consequences, some healthy as well as malignant cells were destroyed. (Morrison, [1974] 2008, p. 41)

Conclusion

Therefore, on a final reflection, it may be concluded that together with the collapse of Cosey's famous

⁶ Morrison critiques the (over)exploitation of such political and racial proclamations/phrases as “Black Is Beautiful” or “Black Power,” ones put forward by politically-agitated African Americans—members or supporters of such organizations as The Black Panther Party (1966-1982)—during the revolutionary 1960s and 1970s in *Rediscovering Black History*, 1974, Toni Morrison [in:] *Toni Morrison: What Moves at the Margin*, (Selected Nonfiction), ed. Carolyn C. Denard, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2008.

oceanfront and the parallel disappearance of the Up Beach community, there came an end to the black world of the pre-civil rights era, whereas the olden, communal values and group bonds became irretrievably lost. This truth emerges self-evident from L's words in which she summarizes her personal story of Bill Cosey and his Hotel and Resort, informing the readers that since the shiny Oceanside grew in the place of Up Beach, the modern neighborhood has been teeming with inhabitants commuting to offices and hospitals over 20 miles north, and that living in their nice, cheap houses and traveling to the malls and movieplexes, this new, happy generation of residents has been free from the (cloudy) thoughts or memories of the past (Morrison, 2003, p. 9).

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