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Wild Words

Jazzing the Text of Desire: Subversive Language in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*

"My mother sang opera, she sang sentimental Victorian songs, she sang arias from *Carmen*, she sang jazz, and she sang blues, she sang what Ella Fitzgerald sang, and she sang 'Ave Maria.' Music is what Morrison's novels are about 'because music was everywhere and all around.'"¹

1 WRITING SUBVERSION, DESIRE AND JAZZ: AN INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison's *Jazz*² (1992) is set in the Roaring Twenties, in Harlem, in the legendary and hypnotically luring City, target of the mass migration of hundred thousands of Afro-Americans, fleeing poverty, segregation and violence, seeking northwards jobs, possibilities, excitements and a better life. It is the Jazz Age, the era of the Harlem Renaissance, a golden age of black culture, race music, blues, jazz, nightclubbing, lovemaking and ecstasy.³ While jazz music vibrates the City

1 Betty Fussell, "All That Jazz," *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danille Taylor-Guthrie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 280–289, p. 284.

2 All parenthesized references are to this edition: Toni Morrison, *Jazz* (London and Basingstoke: Pan Books Limited. Picador, 1993).

3 On the ecstasy of the Jazz Age see Marilyn Sanders Mobley, "Jazz," *The Southern Review* 3 (Summer 1993) 614–629, p. 621.

and leads the black community into a collective ecstasy, individual passion is lived in a tale of desire, jealousy, and murder. *Jazz* is the second volume in Morrison's trilogy on impossibly excessive, "awry,"⁴ "horrific"⁵ loves. While *Beloved*⁶ is about a mother's murderous, "too thick" love for her child, and *Paradise*⁷ reflects on a community's unlimited and incomprehensible love for God, *Jazz* tells the story of a conventional love triangle, where middle-aged, married Joe Trace, tormented by his neurotic and silent wife, Violet, falls in love with eighteen-year-old Dorcas, and murders her so as not to lose her. Using an unusual narrative strategy, or in a postmodern gesture, Morrison summarizes the story in the very first sentences of the novel.

Sth, I know that woman. She used to live with a flock of birds on Lenox Avenue. Know her husband, too. He fell for an eighteen-year-old girl with one of those deepdown, spooky loves that made him so sad and happy he shot her just to keep the feeling going. When the woman, her name is Violet, went to the funeral to see the girl and to cut her dead face they threw her to the floor and out of the church. She ran, then, through all that snow, and when she got back to her apartment she took the birds from their cages and set them out the windows to freeze or fly, including the parrot that said, "I love you." (3)

There it is clear and simple, the story presented in a seemingly omniscient narrator's words: the reader is not likely to look forward to unexpected turns, to tensions, mysteries or final surprises. The remaining two hundred pages of the novel repeat, reformulate, amplify this basic story, present variations on the same plot again and again from different perspectives. However, it is exactly this repetitive, improvisatory, variable nature of the text, together with an unusually poetic, musical, violent, erotic and overall subversive language that makes *Jazz* surpass the banal love-story of a traditional blues-song and become a masterwork. Other stories, painful pasts, troubled psyches, untold longings are revealed beyond the surface story of Joe and Dorcas's tragic love. Moreover, the psychology of human desiring, the role of the eternally impossible desire and of loss in the constitution of the autonomous (writing) subject can be traced on a

4 S. Judylyn Ryan and Estella Conwill Majozo, "Jazz... On the Site of Memory," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 2 (Fall 1998) 125–153, p. 143.

5 On horrific love in Toni Morrison see Terry Otten, "Horrific Love in Toni Morrison's Fiction," *Modern Fiction Studies* 3/4 (Fall/ Winter 1993) 651–667, p. 652.

6 Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (London: Pan Books Limited, Picador, 1987).

7 Toni Morrison, *Paradise* (New York: Knopf, Bono Books, 1998).

more general level. The language of desire and the rhythm of jazz and blues music vibrate and weave the open-ended, multi-layered narrative, where the reader is invited to take part in the reconstruction of love, in the composition of jazz, of *Jazz*.

The aim of my paper is to examine the various subversive aspects of Morrison's writing style, and more specifically, the transgressive characteristics and potentials of the language of *Jazz*. My interpretation will be manifold: I intend to study language, style and structure relying on literary interpretations of Morrison's, interviews with the author, articles by jazz critics, and using poststructuralist and French psychoanalytical feminist theoretical works. I analyze the language from the point of view of the "jazzing of the text," that is the influence of jazz, blues, spirituals and race music on the writing style. I concentrate on the potential inspiration originating from Afro-American tradition in the broader sense of the word: the effect of African folk tradition, orality, sermons on Morrison's text. In a second chapter I will analyze the workings of the language of desire in the text, commenting on the stream of consciousness writing technique and "écriture féminine" in Toni Morrison, as well as on Wild words, that is the language of the lost mother, the language of mourning (both personal and cultural-communal) in the text. I examine the revolutionary poetic language, the language of the City, the language of Madness and the language of corporeality in *Jazz*, concluding that the language of the novel is the language of postmodern as well, allowing the Book itself to speak up, to interact and to make love and jazz with its reader. These various revolutionary aspects of Toni Morrison's writing style in *Jazz* introduce a language that is multiply transgressive and, therefore, is capable of surpassing, subverting and jazzing our everyday, Symbolic, phallogocentric language, turning the text into a melody of love.

2 JAZZING THE TEXT, HAVING THE TRUE BLUES

Jazz is set in the era of the Harlem Renaissance, in the Jazz Age of the Roaring Twenties, when Harlem became a black capital, a City within the City, providing ground for the first time for black group expression and self definition via the instruments of the newly (re)discovered Afro-American musical forms as blues, jazz, spirituals, ragtime, swing, boogie-woogie and be-bop. *Jazz* is unlike traditional jazz literature in the sense that it is not about jazz musicians, jazz instruments or jazz musicology. As Nicholas F. Pici underlines, the word "jazz"

itself never appears in the novel beside the title.⁸ However, jazz penetrates the entire City, fills streets, hearts and souls alike. Dorcas and her friend, Felice go to clubs to become women, to be seduced by jazz music, this sensual “lowdown stuff,” by “songs that used to start in the head and fill the heart [dropping] on down, down to places below the sash and the buckled belts” (56). Alice Manfred is afraid of this “dirty, get-on-down music the women sang and the men played and both danced to, close and shameless or apart and wild” (58). Riots and marches are accompanied by drums expressing rage. Dorcas dances to jazz music when she is shot by the jealous Joe, while “the music bends, falls to its knees to embrace them all, encourage them all to live a little, why don’t you? since this is the it you’ve been looking for” (188). The young men on the Harlem rooftops never stop playing their music. On the street or in clubs, jazz music is associated with sensuality, desire, yearning, and rage, violence, “appetite,” a “careless hunger” (59), provocation, excitement, risk, excess and fever. Jazz as a violent and erotic disruptive element appears on the structural and linguistic level of the text as well, perhaps even more predominantly than on the thematic level.

In an interview with a telling title, “I come from people who sang all the time,” Morrison describes the major characteristics of jazz music as having an improvisational, unanticipated nature, as egalitarian, as a coherent melody constructed with dissolves, returns and repetitions, as music located in a historical framework, and as related to love.⁹ These features of jazz music can be revealed in Morrison’s textual strategies as well. The text is not linear, chronological or teleological: in a multi-layered narrative, jumping in time, space and from consciousness to consciousness, multiple narrative voices give their improvisatory, open-ended versions of the original melody, which is the summary of the plot. The solos of Violet, Dorcas and Joe repeat, reformulate and complement each other with their songs of love, or rather their versions, their varying perspectives of the same song of love, adding up to the tune of the ethos of the 1920s black City experience, the quest for “stronger, riskier selves” (33) and for love. Both in jazz and in *Jazz* the reader has to take an active part in the construction and interpretation of the experience. Critics of jazz in *Jazz* – as Nicholas F. Pici, Eusebio L. Rodrigues and Roberta Rubenstein – underline the importance of

8 Nicholas F. Pici, “Trading Meanings, the Breath of Music in Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*,” *Connotations* 3 (1997–98) 372–398, p. 375.

9 Toni Morrison, “I Come from People who Sang All the Time”: A Conversation with Toni Morrison,” *Humanities* 1 (Mar/ Apr 1996) 4–13.

group experience, of the relationship with the audience, of audience participation and interplay as mutual provocation, inspiration and energization in jazz.¹⁰ Toni Morrison, as if following this line of thought, in an interview with Claudia Tate claims that

My writing expects, demands participatory reading, and that I think is what literature is supposed to do. It's not just about telling the story, it's about involving the reader. The reader supplies the emotions. The reader supplies even some of the solo, some of the sound. My language has to have holes and spaces so the reader can come into it.¹¹

Enigmas, holes, uncertainties are left open in the text so as to leave the recipient her/his imaginative freedom and to encourage creativity, "interpretative agency"¹² as well as the pleasure of a shared music, a communal experience. While jazz music always lacks a final chord, the fragments of the text are left unfinished, as if echoing Morrison's definition of jazz: "it doesn't wholly satisfy, it kind of leaves you a little bit on the edge at the end, a little hungry."¹³ As Pici describes, the multi-instrumental, polyrhythmic nature of jazz music may refer to the multivocal, polyphonic characteristic of the narrative. The "head and riffs method" of jazz (main distinctive melody and repetition of brief patterns) is inscribed in the text by repetitions.¹⁴ These are renarrations of the same scene from different perspectives (the death of Dorcas), corrected renarrations of the same scene by the same narrator (Golden Gray's arrival), descriptions of persons from different viewpoints (Dorcas is mother and lover for Joe, never-had child for Violet and fake friend for Felice), contradicting definitions of the same concept (jazz is threatening for Alice, seducing for Dorcas, maddening for Violet) – all related to and reframing the main plot, the base melody. As critics agree, the "call and response strategy" of jazz (question and answer of instruments, of musician and audience) appears on a structural level: a leitmotif, symbolic key word at the

10 On jazz music in *Jazz* see Pici, pp. 372–398, Eusebio L. Rodrigues, "Experiencing Jazz," *Modern Fiction Studies* 3/4 (Fall/ Winter 1993) 733–754, Roberta Rubenstein, "Singing the Blues, Reclaiming Jazz: Toni Morrison and Cultural Mourning," *Mosaic* (June 1998) 147–164. I use the jazz-terminology and some ideas on jazz introduced by them as starting points of my analysis.

11 Claudia Tate, "Toni Morrison," *Black Women Writers at Work* (Oldcastle Books, 1989), 117–131, p.125.

12 Ryan and Majozo, p. 146.

13 Morrison, "I Come," p. 4.

14 Pici, p. 375.

end of one chapter (love, music, the City) is repeated, taken up in the opening sentence of the succeeding chapter, or an idea dropped, left unended at the end of one chapter is continued, elaborated on in the next part. "The effusive legato-like flow of a liquid syntax" and "the staccato of non-standard comma use,"¹⁵ as the lack of punctuation marks, and the overabundance of repetitions, variations, internal rhymes, alliterations, all contribute to the exceptional musicality and to the "jazzing" of the text, reinforcing and echoing the rhythm of the City, birthplace of jazz and of passion, and in the long run creating a piece of writing that transforms jazz music into written language, or language to jazz music, to tell a crooked love in the Jazz Age in a jazzy style and language, as in the following passage.

The City is smart at this: smelling and good and looking raunchy, sending secret messages disguised as public signs: this way, open here, danger to let colored only single men on sale woman wanted private room stop dog on premises absolutely no money down fresh chicken free delivery fast. And good at opening locks, dimming stairways. Covering your moans with its own. (64)

As Nicholas F. Pici underlines, jazz is a hybrid, Creole genre, a fusion of heterogeneous dialogues and folk traditions¹⁶ – no wonder there are traces of blues embedded in jazz and in *Jazz*. The blues originated in songs of lament in the days of slavery to keep alive, repeat, perform dynamically and melancholically, brutal experiences and lost loves so as to transcend their pain by lyricism.¹⁷ Morrison's text performs the blues by singing of impossible love (Dorcas-Joe), lost mothers, dead lovers (of almost every character), melancholic moods (Violet drinking). Being blue (or having the blues) at the etymological root of the word signifies being sorrowful, sad. Joe with a symbolically significant, unconscious longing wants a blanket of the color blue on the bed he shares with Violet: hence their reconciliation is not without small sorrows. In Morrison's novel black love is always blue, longing for a heart that you can neither live with nor without, as it is sung both in jazz and in the blues.

Blues man. Black and bluesman. Blacktherefore blue man.
Everybody knows your name.
Where-did-she-go-and-why man. So lonesome-I-could-die man.
Everybody knows your name. (119)

15 Pici, p. 380.

16 Pici, p. 398.

17 On blues music and black literature see Michael G. Cooke, *Afro-American Literature in the 20th Century. The Achievement of Intimacy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984).

Like *Beloved*, *Jazz* has been inspired by a heartbreaking real story. In the Harlem of the 1920s a young black girl was shot by her sweetheart at a party, and bleeding to death she refused to reveal the identity of her murderer, trying to give him a chance to get away. James Van Der Zee's album of photos, *The Harlem Book of the Dead* features a picture of a dead girl lying in a casket, accompanied by an Owen Dodson poem.¹⁸ Morrison wrote *Jazz* incited by this tragic, faithlessly faithful, wild and blue love.¹⁹ The novel can be interpreted as a funeral song in memory of dead Dorcas, the story being a recollection of events leading to Dorcas's murder, with musical fragments remembering and mourning Dorcas. In traditional blues songs, grieving leads to spiritual healing, to settling accounts with the past, however, in *Jazz* yearning never stops. As I will demonstrate in the following chapter, *Jazz* also sings the blues mourning the irremediable loss of the primary object of love, that is, of the Mother. According to Roberta Rubenstein, *Jazz*, like the traditional original blues music, performs out both private pain and a "cultural mourning" as well: a grief for lost lives and possibilities, inherent in the cultural memory of Afro-American experience, and at the same time a soothing reappropriation of lost cultural creations by the blue lamentation itself²⁰ – even if this final soothing remains questionable in Morrison's jazzy blue text.

The characteristic vocal content of blues (versus instrumental jazz), the verbalization of melancholy in a lively, spoken language can be traced back to the oral nature of the Afro-American tradition. As Morrison herself claims, her work is "faithfully to reflect the aesthetic tradition of Afro-American culture [and] make conscious use of its art forms and translate them into print."²¹ Furthermore, she emphasizes orality: "I have to rewrite, discard, and remove the print quality of language to put back the oral quality, where intonation, volume, gesture are all there," "writing is [...] talking deep within myself," or "deep talking."²² As Ryan

18 James Van Der Zee, Owen Dodson, and Camille Billops, *The Harlem Book of the Dead*, foreword by Toni Morrison (Dobbs Ferry: Morgan and Morgan, 1978). The poem reads: "They lean over me and say: / Who deathed you, who, / who, who, who... / I whisper 'Tell you presently / Shortly... this evening... / Tomorrow...' / Tomorrow is here / And you out there safe. / I'm safe in here, Tootsie."

19 On Morrison's thoughts on this murder and on Van Der Zee's photos see Gloria Naylor, "A Conversation: Gloria Naylor and Toni Morrison," *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danille Taylor-Guthrie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 188–218, p. 207.

20 Rubenstein, p. 147.

21 Ryan and Majozo, p. 125.

22 Tate, p. 126, p. 130.

and Conwill highlight, the call and response structure, the active participation expected from the listener-reader both in jazz music and in *Jazz* may be related on a historical level to the "collective authorship" underlying traditional Afro-American folk literature, black sermons and spirituals with the aim of establishing a communal experience, a spiritual community so as to reinforce the unity and solidarity of the black community. Jazz becomes a "site of memory," permitting the reconstruction of an enabling identity, of a home and a community.²³

The long list of parallels between Morrison's writing style and traditional black art forms of expression may be continued. The rhythm of *Jazz* recalls the tam-tam drums of African tribes and slave work songs, black sermons or contemporary rap music. The other stories behind the base plot, the (inter)play of multiple meanings, and frequent Biblical allusions (apple, Eve, Adam, Paradise) remind us of the coded language of slaves, of gospels and spirituals. The performative, repetitive, interactive and open-ended nature of spirituals is echoed throughout the novel's stylistic and textual composition. The violence in the language of *Jazz* recalls toasts, ritual insults and "the signifying monkey" tradition. As Eusebio L. Rodrigues stresses, Morrison in *Jazz* combines black vernacular with standard English, jazz jargon, purified tribe dialect, and the language of women between each other to invent a new language of her own, a dynamic, audible text with an oral quality.²⁴ Barbara T. Christian calls Morrison's textual strategy combining personal voice with that of the folk "creating layered rhythms."²⁵ Most importantly, Morrison succeeds in impregnating her text with jazz not only as with a musical form but as with a fundamental black experience as well. *Jazz* reverberates Nina Simone's assertion:

Jazz is not just music, it's a way of life, it's a way of being, a way of thinking. I think that the Negro in America is jazz. Everything he does—the slang he uses, the way he talks, his jargon, the new inventive phrases we make up to describe things—all that to me is jazz as much as the music we play. Jazz is not just music. It's the definition of the Afro-American black.²⁶

23 Ryan and Majozo, p.132.

24 Rodrigues, pp. 726–737.

25 Barbara T. Christian, "Layered Rhythms: Virginia Woolf and Toni Morrison," *Modern Fiction Studies* 3/4 (Fall/ Winter 1993) 483–500, p. 484.

26 Ryan and Majozo, p. 130.

Jazz is not just music. It is a definition of Morrison's subversive language as well, being open, complicated, experimental, provocative, playful and passionate.²⁷

3 THE LANGUAGE OF DESIRE IN JAZZ

For Toni Morrison jazz symbolizes unfulfilled longing, hunger, desire, incited by its own impossibility.²⁸ Her writing "all the time writing about love or its absence"²⁹ appears as a corpus of jazz masterpieces composed in the language of desire. In *Jazz* too, the crucial question is "Who is the Beloved?"³⁰ and wondering about this question, longing itself seems to predominate over the potential fulfillment. Characters are yearning for the True Love depicted in the romantic movies and love-songs of the 1920s. Desiring infiltrates the City and becomes a veritable symptom of the spirit of the Jazz Age. People long to find empowerment, their stronger, riskier, wild selves, and also their happiness, freedom, home and rest in the City. This paradoxical search for wildness and peace, the never-ending quest of something lost, the melancholic memory of the missing beloved becomes a leitmotif of the novel, haunted by hunger, and hunting for love in the wild words of a language combining yearning and corporeality, poetry and madness, mourning and jouissance, a language moved by the desire of the (m)other.

3.1 Tracing Fugitive Desires: A Hunt for Love...

According to Philip Page, the story's principal metaphor is hunting, thus the novel's archetypal father figure is called both "Hunter's Hunter" and Henry LeStory.³¹ The Story is associated with Hunting, Tracking, Desiring. Henry LeStory, the lonely black hunter in the forest (in the historical past) "fathers"

27 On Morrison's language use see Thomas LeClair, "The Language Must Not Sweat: A Conversation with Toni Morrison," *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danille Taylor-Guthrie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), pp. 119-129.

28 Morrison, "I Come," p. 4.

29 Jane Bakerman, "The Seams Can't Show: An Interview with Toni Morrison," *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danille Taylor-Guthrie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 30-43, p. 40.

30 Naylor, pp. 208-209.

31 Philip Page, "Traces of Derrida in Jazz," *African American Review* 1 (Spring 1995) 55-67, pp. 57-58.

both Wild, Joe's lost mother, whom Joe looks for in all his loves and Golden Gray, Violet's ultimate emblem of love, sprung from her grandmother's stories of a golden haired boy. (LeStory helps Wild in labor with Joe in his cottage, and he is the biological father of Golden Gray.) Hence LeStory is linked to both Joe's and Violet's missing primary objects of love, the story being about the impossibility of desire, never-ending longing – echoed in jazz music. Characters of *Jazz* are tracking in an infinite hunt the appropriate object of love apt to satisfy their hunger, yet they never seem to find it. The beloved always proves to be a displacement of the original object of love, love turns impossible, ending in murder, disillusion, loss or a bittersweet nostalgic melancholy at best.

Joe is hunting for Dorcas in the same way as he tracked Wild, the uncivilized, naked madwoman sneaking in forests, his never-seen mother who abandoned him, and left without a trace (allowing Joe to name himself in memory of her Joe Trace reinforcing the motif of tracking, tracing and desiring in the novel). Joe loves Dorcas because he associates her with his lost mother. The girl fills the "empty nothing" (37) in Joe's heart left behind by his mother. The hoofmarks on Dorcas's face substitute Wild's tracks, the honey of Dorcas's body and the candies she eats correspond to Wild's honeycomb, Dorcas's bleeding shoulder displaces the birds with red wings accompanying and signifying Wild, moreover Dorcas (as Violet) is referred to as "wild" (153, p.182). Dorcas and Wild fuse in Joe's imagination as the same personal pronoun indicates the two women: "But where is she?" refers to Wild, while in the next sentence "There she is" designates Dorcas (184, 187). The dying Dorcas utters the sentence: "I know his name but Mama won't tell" (193), and hence becomes completely one with Wild, the lost primary object of Joe's desire, by her death repeating his primary loss, and revealing the impossibility of desire: when desire is fulfilled, it must die. In a crooked kind of love Joe can only touch his beloved, his mother-substitute by killing her, his gun is the caressing hand of the Freudian "double bind" when his arm reaches her. In the Bible Dorcas is an early Christian seamstress who dies suddenly and is resurrected by the apostle Peter;³² hence Dorcas could symbolize the resurrected mother, lost again.

Violet in an inner monologue thinks that Joe searches in Dorcas for somebody else, her (Violet's) younger self or "somebody golden, like my own golden boy" (97), for the target of Violet's longing is Golden Gray, "who I never saw but who tore up my girlhood as surely as if we'd been the best of lovers" (97).

32 Ryan and Majozo, p. 137.

Violet was “made crazy about” the golden boy by her grandmother’s, True Belle’s stories of the illegitimate mulatto child with the golden hair, an eternal child, an imaginary lover who is held on to when Violet embraces Joe. Violet recognizes the fugitive, displaced, impossible nature of desire saying “Standing in the cane, he [Joe] was trying to catch a girl he was yet to see, but his heart knew all about [Dorcas, Wild?], and me, holding on to him but wishing he was the golden boy I never saw either. Which means from the very beginning I was a substitute and so was he” (97). However, as the chain of substitutions does not end with Dorcas substituting Violet, but from Dorcas leads to Wild, the primary object of Violet’s desire is beyond Golden Gray displaced by Joe.

A central passage of the text, repeated and reformulated twice by the narrative voice is that of Golden Gray arriving at Hunter’s Hunter LeStory’s house carrying the pregnant unconscious Wild on his horse. Allegorical figures of desire are juxtaposed in this highly symbolic scene, bearing considerable significance on a metatextual level as well, hiding the emblematic coming to text, the birth of the text as ultimate object of desire. Golden Gray is imagined standing next to a well that appears as the enigmatic source and target of the text, the Omphalos, the center of the labyrinth, the bull’s eye of all tracking and desiring:

I want him to stand next to a well dug quite clear from trees so twigs and leaves will not fall into the deep water, and while standing there in shapely light, his fingertips on the rim of the stone, his gaze at no one thing, his mind soaked and sudden with sorrow, or dry and brittle with the hopelessness that comes from knowing too little and feeling too much (so brittle, so dry he is in danger of the reverse: feeling nothing and knowing everything). (161)

This sorrowful and hopeless well, mirroring Golden Gray and Wild, may be interpreted as the very same one into which Violet’s mother, Rose Dear plunged when she committed suicide (102). Thus, the recurring motif of the well can serve as a clue that leads (also) to Violet’s primary object of desire, to *her* lost mother. Violet herself feels the mother-hunger when (after several miscarriages and sleeping with dolls) she begins to fall in love with the dead Dorcas, associating her with Golden Gray, a child she has never had. Thus Dorcas’s death signifies simultaneously matricide, as Joe kills and touches his beloved mother in Dorcas, and infanticide (coupled with matricide) as well, as Violet cuts the face of dead Dorcas at the funeral as that of her never-had child, associated with the Ur-Child, Golden Gray (who is also a substitute of the mother, Rose Dear, via the shared

enigma of the well). Violet's aggressive cut, earning her the name Violent, is a result of her excessive urge to touch, to relate, to love.

Dorcas's name can be considered as an anagram of the word "sacred," evoking the archaic meaning of "sacer," sacred and profane at the same time, like the maternal body, like the dead. Ryan and Conwill note that according to the Egyptian Book of the Dead, ancient Egyptians cut the corpse ritually for spiritual release and for the beginning of a new life.³³ Unlike most of the critics, I argue that Violet's cutting of Dorcas's face, and then her "rebirth" as a new Violet, and her reunion with Joe after Dorcas's death is not a renewal, a reassuring reunion, a reconciliation and a "release," as Ryan and Conwill think,³⁴ nor is it the celebration of the power of subjectivity and of a new possibility of grown-up love as Elizabeth M. Cannon claims.³⁵ Neither do I agree with Terry Otten's argument on horrific love bringing a final, regenerative and soothing release.³⁶ A close reading of one of the final seemingly idyllic and happy-end-like passages proves that longing does not stop, desire cannot be satisfied or pacified, and that Joe and Violet keep on yearning for the impossible, for the lost object of love or for desiring itself. "Lying next to her, his head turned toward the window, he sees through the glass darkness taking the shape of a shoulder with a thin line of blood. Slowly, slowly it forms itself into a bird with a blade of red on the wing. Meanwhile Violet rests her hand on his chest as though it were the sunlit rim of a well..." (224–225). Joe and Violet are lying side by side in their bed under the symbolically blue blanket and instead of thinking of each other in the "adult way" put forward by Deyris Paquet³⁷ and Cannon,³⁸ the blues of desire recalls in Joe the bleeding shoulder of Dorcas associated with the red-winged birds signifying Wild, while Violet yearns for the sunshine of a golden boy's hair and for the well, a symbol shared by Rose Dear and Golden Gray. The signified of desire keep fleeing yet seducing, and it is only the substitutive displacement that one can hold in her/his arms. Desire is like Violet's parrot saying "I love you": first it is nurtured, then when released it either freezes to death or flies free, only to be

33 Ryan and Majozo, p. 137.

34 Ryan and Majozo, p. 138.

35 Elizabeth M. Cannon, "Following the Traces of Female Desire in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*," *African American Review* 2 (Summer 1997) 235–248, p. 246.

36 Otten, p. 664.

37 Marie Anne Deyris Paquet, "Toni Morrison's *Jazz* and the City," *African American Review* 2 (Summer 2001) 219–232, p. 227.

38 Cannon, p. 246.

replaced by another parrot taught to say "I love you": it is forever displaced. I reject Linden Peach's interpretation of the conclusion of the novel, namely that a monogamous, faithful, mature love is reached by Joe and Violet as a counterpoint to the new (a)morality of Jazz Age.³⁹ In my reading the fugitive nature, the constant displacement of the couple's desires and the impossibility of a final fulfillment (that would put an end to desire) echoes the quest for happiness in the artificial, imaginary Paradise of the City, and the vibrating instability of the Era, as well as the infinite longing of jazz music, and the functioning of the literary text itself.

3.2 *Father's Language, Mother Tongue: Words for Wild*

This fugitive characteristic of desire evokes the functioning of language: floating signifiers never succeed in touching the sliding signified. Feelings, thoughts, ideas can never be formulated precisely via the representational system, in the jailhouse of language. Communication, as love, becomes problematic. According to poststructuralist psychoanalytical theory (marked by the names of Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva among others) the speaking subject is constituted via a primary loss: during the process of socialization, entering the realm of language, Symbolization and representation (faced with traumas of the Mirror Stage and of Oedipalization) the subject has to renounce the preverbal Semiotic bliss, the primary perfect union with the mother, as (s)he exchanges mother's body for the Language of the Father.⁴⁰ Thus the constitution of the speaking and writing subject, of the autonomous individual is accompanied by the loss of the primary object of love, by a symbolic matricide. The entry into language separates from the pre-Oedipal, pre-verbal harmonic symbiosis with the maternal body. Yet, paradoxically, language use, writing is a compensatory activity, an impossible attempt trying to recuperate the lost beloved, the good vibration of the maternal body by the pleasure of the text, the rhythm, repetition, musicality and poeticity of the literary language.⁴¹ Thus the literary text is at the same time a "rape-text" and a "mother-text,"⁴² "matricide" and "incest,"⁴³ intertwining the "Symbolic"

39 Linden Peach, *Toni Morrison* (London: Macmillan Modern Novelists, 1995), p. 127.

40 Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," *Modern Literary Theory: A reader*, ed. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (Edward Arnold, 1992), pp. 122-127.

41 Julia Kristeva, *La révolution du langage poétique* (Paris: Seuil, Essays, 1985).

42 Hélène Cixous, *La Jeune Née* (Paris: UGE. 10/18, 1975).

language of the Father with (the longing for) the maternal body's blissful, preverbal, "Semiotic" realm.⁴⁴

This ambiguity of the literary text, the melancholic longing for the lost maternal is voiced in Morrison's text as well: "Violet had the same thought: *Mama. Mama?* Is this where you got to and couldn't do it no more? The place of shade without trees where you know *you are not and never again will be loved by anybody who can choose to do it? Where everything is over but the talking?*" (110) (my emphasis). According to poststructuralist theory, desire vibrates every literary text, the nostalgia of the maternal body and of the missed primary jouissance become engines of the text. By the end of the novel the narrative voice confesses to have believed that desiring flesh "hangs on to wells and a boy's golden hair, would just as soon inhale sweet fire caused by a burning girl as hold a maybe-yes maybe-no hand." The voice continues by saying "I don't believe that anymore," hence playing down the validity of the substitutive objects of desire. According to the voice, "Something is missing there. Something rogue. Something else you have to figure in before you can figure it out" (228). This missing part, desired, never successfully displaced, never reached can be interpreted as the "nowhere-everywhere" mother, the desire of the mother that is experienced ("figure in") preverbally ("before figure it out"), to become in language a rogue absence blasting and blessing the text, vibrating wild words. In my opinion, in Toni Morrison's *Jazz* a poetic, musical, jazzed text is woven and waved by a desire that turns out to be the desire of the lost mother, giving birth to the rhythmically pulsating, dynamically repetitive, erotically open text. Thus the passage of Joe and Violet, lying (in both senses of the word) in each others arms, thinking of lost beloved mothers, ends with the phrase: "... and down there somebody is gathering *gifts (lead pencils, Bull Durham, Jap Rose Soap)* to distribute to them all" (225) (my emphasis). The phrase by recalling the expression "to put lead in one's pencil," that is a male slang for a full erection, suggests that mother's body is not only exchanged for the Language of the Father, but that symbolic discourse and corporeal energies fuse in the vibrating text of desire. The melancholy of desiring and missing Mother is compensated for by gifts of pencil, that is by the coming to text, by the birth of the literary text itself. Nevertheless, the noun "das Gift" means

43 Melanie Klein, "Réflexions sur l'Orestie," *Envie et gratitude et autres essais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), pp. 188-219.

44 Kristeva, pp. 17-100.

"poison" in German, while pencils are made of poisonous lead: they can only lead to a text that is bittersweet substitution, forever painful-pleasurable displacement, never ending desire.⁴⁵

3.3 *Writing Wild from Desiring Bodies (Mother, Madness, Melancholy: Melody)*

French psychoanalytical feminist theory (the prominent thinkers are Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva) introduces the term "écriture féminine," denoting a specifically feminine mode of writing, defined as a "volcanic," "heterogeneous" writing from an endless body without end, "writing in [the] white ink" of mother's milk,⁴⁶ introducing corporeality, libidinal energies, drives and desires of the preverbal, maternal Semiotic realm into the text so as to disrupt symbolic, phallogocentric language from within. Kristeva uses the expression "revolutionary poetic language" referring to discourse vibrated by the repetition, rhythm, alliteration, the transformation of language, transverbal practices and the breaking loose of passions, and claiming that men can also perform this subversive feminine writing.⁴⁷

All these strategies of *écriture féminine* can be traced in *Jazz*: the base melody, the main plot of love and murder is retold, repeated several times in the rhythmic, musical and poetic language incited by jazz music, and vibrated by desire and longing for the mother. In *Jazz* "jazzing the text," writing in the language of desire and *écriture féminine* intertwine. Morrison when writing compares herself to a dancer beyond gravity, for her writing is "energetic, balanced, fluid and in repose." And as she claims, "there is always the possibility of growth, I could never hit the highest note so I'd never have to stop"⁴⁸ – this is Cixous's writing from an endless body without end. Morrison wrote her thesis on, and has been certainly influenced by Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner,⁴⁹ both characterized by the experimental stream of consciousness technique, uncannily recalling *écriture féminine*, jazzy text, and Morrison's dramatic inner monologues written from/ on loving bodies, inspired by the unspeakable

45 I would like to thank Nóra Séllei for calling my attention to the lead-poison, "Gift"-poison parallels, as well as Peter Doherty for highlighting the meaning of the male slang expression.

46 Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of Medusa," *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol, Diane Price Herndl (Rutgers University Press, 1991), 334–350.

47 Kristeva, pp. 70–100.

48 LeClair, p. 120.

49 Christian, pp. 483–500.

maternal entity haunting every text of desire. Longing for and writing in "white mother's milk" can be revealed as a motor vibrating the text in *Jazz*.

The narrative voice thinking of the beloved Golden Gray reflects on the language of the text of desire:

I want to dream a nice dream for him, and another of him. Lie down next to him, a wrinkle in the sheet, and contemplate his pain and by doing so ease it, diminish it. I want to be the language that wishes him well, speaks his name, wakes him when his eyes need to be open. I want him to stand next to a well... (161)

A "language wishing well," calming and soothing is associated with the "well," the maternal metaphor of the text: the pleasure of the literary text signifies a momentary return to mother. This hypothesis is reinforced by a close reading revealing that the "language wishing him," the narrative voice "want[ing] him" desires the lost mother in Golden Gray. Similarly, lying down next to him, contemplating his pain and diminishing it by doing so is an allegory of "incest and matricide" in the literary text, trying to heal symbolically in vain the primary loss, implanting never-ending desire into the text.

The narrative voice musing over the incompetences of her writerly strategy, realizing the impossibility of her project aiming to name unspeakable desires of Joe, Violet, Dorcas and herself, invites the wild mother in her text: "She has seen me and is not afraid of me. She hugs me. Understands me. Has given me her hand. *I am touched by her*. Released in secret. / Now I know" (221) (my emphasis). Touched by the Wild Mother, the text is infected by Wild Words: the preverbal "language," the song, the laughter, the moan and the cry of Wild invade the text, disseminating meanings and "jazzing," maddening the text, turning it into a rhythmic, repetitive, musical flow, a new, "other" discourse, the language of the (m)other. On its very first page, *Jazz* begins with the preverbal sound "Sth" instead of a word, associated with the word "woman" ("Sth, I know that woman" [3]). In the epigraph the Goddess of Thunder speaks up, identifying herself as the "name of the sound" and "the sound of the name," "the sign of the letter" and the "designation of the division," suggesting that the text is disseminated, shattered, exploded from within via a female voice – perhaps that of a mother, a goddess, a dead girl or a jazz disease...

According to Andrea O'Reilly, Wild is the physical embodiment of the unrepresentable repressed maternal Semiotic realm disrupting the Symbolic language with the uncontrollable excess and the polymorphously perverse desires

of the primary feminine space returning to haunt, to destabilize the conventional language use and the traditional narrative.⁵⁰ Wild writes from her body, communicating via corporeal traces, touching, laughter and song resembling a "combination of running water and wind in high trees" (176). Illogically, O'Reilly concludes that for *Jazz's* characters "finding their mothers' gardens" signifies not only a return to their original selves and the discovery of whole, complete selfhoods (a paradox in itself), but also a happy reconciliation with the mother.⁵¹ O'Reilly fails to realize that touching the mother via the substitutive hand (or gun?) of symbolic language is an impossible project, a Sisyphean effort that can only bring momentary soothing, unable to satisfy desire for good. Tracing the mother (Wild) there is only "a river called Treason to rely on" (221), for she is "everywhere and nowhere" (179). "Aching words [of the symbolic language can only] set, then miss the mark" (219). In my reading, the text is not so much a joyous celebration of mothering, but a more blues-like melancholic nostalgia felt for the mother, the revelation of her never-ending desire in the text, and of the momentary bliss when the "fort-und-da"-like repetitive rhythm of the text touches the mother. It is the musicality of *Jazz* that remembers, echoes the never-ending song of Morrison's mother.⁵² However, the recuperation of the preverbal good vibration is only momentary, it is longing, desiring and melancholy that predominate the text, turning the tale of cultural mourning of lost possibilities, and of the mourning of the dead beloved Dorcas into a mourning of the mother as well. Passion is sublimated into text, melancholy and loss become engines of creative writerly energy.⁵³ Morrison herself claims to have recognized herself as a writer after a period of melancholic mourning, when she felt herself as a "vessel" (a maternal entity), and realized she "could hear things."⁵⁴ Thus, having the blues may allow the verbalization of melancholy's melodic yearning.

The "desire of the mother" works as a polysemic concept in *Jazz*. The mother is desired by the writing subject, infecting her text with the primary yearning for the Semiotic ("mother text"), and, on the other hand, the mother

50 Andrea O'Reilly, "In Search of My Mother's Garden, I Found My Own: Mother-Love, Healing, and Identity in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*," *African American Review* 3 (Fall 1996) 367-380, p. 375.

51 O'Reilly, p. 377.

52 On Morrison's memories of her singing mother see Fussell, pp. 280-287, and Morrison, "I Come," pp. 4-13.

53 On the psychological and literary analysis of melancholy see Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

54 Tate, p. 128.

appears as a desiring woman herself, contaminating with her wild passion (the passion of Wild) all the other female figures. As Doreatha Drummond Mbalia remarks, traces of Wild are disseminated everywhere throughout the novel, Wild is present in all women, in the City, in jazz music. Mbalia associates wildness with the rage of Afro-American women resulting from their oppression.⁵⁵ Elaborating on Mbalia's argument, it is worth noting another aspect that contributes to Morrison's characteristic style just as her being an Afro-American woman: all women in *Jazz* share the wildness of sexual desire, turning the novel into an eroticized text. Women's desire falls beyond the ideologically prescribed passive feminine sexuality or the monogamous reproductive economy of the heteronormative scenario governed by hierarchical gender oppositions. Female desire in *Jazz* is polymorphously perverse, excessive, wild. "Excessive, generous, wide spirited loves"⁵⁶ are beyond the traditional femininity. Violet seeks her beloved in Joe, in a boyfriend, in Dorcas, in Golden Gray, in Dear Rose, and in Felice. Dorcas desires Joe, Acton and the brothers alike. Wild roams the forest touching Hunter's Hunter, Golden Gray, and as a symbol of threatening yet tempting female sexuality haunts all men around her. Female desire is uncentered, unlimited, dispersed, characterized by risk, excess and what Cixous calls a "libidinal economy of gift."⁵⁷ Dorcas, faithlessly faithful, bleeding to death without revealing the name of her murderer-lover is a par excellence example of excess in love, of nonproductive expenditure. Violet's love is violent, she can only touch the beloved Dorcas by cutting her face with a knife (thus penetrating her with a phallic symbol). Wild bites Hunter's Hunter face instead of kissing him. Sexual hunger, excess and jouissance lie at the heart of jazz music, and consequently at the heart of Morrison's jazzed and eroticized text.

According to its definition, *écriture féminine* is fueled by female jouissance, by the volcanic pleasures of the female body, constituting a rhythmic, cyclic, open text of desire written from the body providing the pleasure of the text to its reader. According to Cannon, the function of jazz music is to awaken the listeners' sexual desires.⁵⁸ Consequently, I think, Morrison's jazz writing returns

55 Doreatha Drummond Mbalia, "Women Who Run With Wild: The Need for Sisterhood in *Jazz*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 3/4 (Fall/ Winter 1993) 623-646, p. 625.

56 Naylor, p. 208.

57 Cixous, *La Jeune Née*, pp.155-63.

58 Cannon, p. 237.

to the original sexually charged meaning of jazz, of “jazz me, baby.”⁵⁹ An erotic text full of sexual metaphors and allusions is produced – as in this sentence: “[...] licking his licorice stick, tickling the ivories, beating his skins, blowing off his horn while a knowing woman sang ain’t nobody going to keep me down you got the right key baby but the wrong keyhole you got to get it bring it and put it right here [...]” (60). Yearning, jealousy, sexual excitement and hunger are equally incorporated in a jazzy and erotic text resounding (and becoming itself) the flow of desire:

Take her to Indigo on Saturday and sit way back so they could hear the music wide and be in the dark at the same time, at one of those round tables with a slick black top and a tablecloth of pure white on it, drinking rough gin with that sweet red stuff in it so it looked like soda pop, which a girl like her ought to have ordered instead of liquor she could sip from the edge of a glass wider at the mouth than at its base, with a tiny stem like a flower in between while her hand, the one that wasn’t holding the glass shaped like a flower, was under the table drumming out the rhythm on the inside of his thigh, his thigh, his thigh, thigh, thigh, and he bought her underwear with stitching done to look like rosebuds and violets, VIOLETS, don’t you know, and she wore it for him thin as it was and too cold for a room that couldn’t count on a radiator to work through the afternoon while I was where? (95)

The desiring body in its corporeality is a crucial leitmotif of *Jazz* on a thematic level, yet it also directs the structure, organizes the plot and destabilizes, infects language by the subversive potentials of the unspeakable materiality of the body. The body in the text and the text on the body are equally transgressive, excited by desire. Bodies, from the very first “train-dance” to the City, in clubs, in streets, on rooftops alike, are moving sensually to the sexually stimulating rhythm of jazz. In fact, the entire body is marked by the longing of jazz: “knees in full view, lip rouge red as hellfire, burnt matchsticks rubbed on eyebrows, fingernails tipped with blood” (56). Jazz turns (people) hungry for love, the dancer cannot be separated from the dance. Jazz is the voice of the flesh, in the dance the body is everything, “a badly dressed body is nobody at all” (65). In the “society of spectacle” of the Jazz Age, persons are identified with their bodies as targets of desire: “The girls have red lips and their legs whisper to each other through silk stockings. The red lips and the silk flash power. A power they will exchange for the right to be overcome, penetrated” (182). The new, jazzy women, the flappers

⁵⁹ On the etymology of “jazz me, baby” see Rodrigues, p. 735.

of the 1920s open their bodies, live the sexual liberation celebrated by jazz, and cannot be described but in an eroticized language: "she is clipping quickly down the big city street in heels, swinging her purse, or sitting on a stoop with a cool beer in her hand, dangling her shoe from the toes of her foot, the man, reacting to her posture, to soft skin on stone, the weight of the building stressing the delicate, dangling shoe, is captured" (34). Dancers seem to become one body, "sharing a partner's pulse like a second jugular" (65). Taking up the rhythm of jazz is like making love, the text is pervaded by the language of corporeality, of the desiring body. The writing on the body intertwines with the *écriture féminine*-like, jazzy and erotic writing from the body.

Pains and pleasures are written on bodies marked by desire. Neola's "clutch of arm to breast" seems to wish to "hold the pieces of her heart in her hand" (63), paralyzed when left by her treacherous lover. According to Marie Anne Deyris Paquet, the traces on Dorcas's bad skin indirectly testify to the traumas of her childhood, that is the loss of her parents.⁶⁰ However, in my opinion, the hoofmarks on Dorcas's cheeks can also be the tracks of Wild, traces of Joe's desire. Violet's violent expression of love, the cut on dead Dorcas's face opens the way to remembering, that is the re-membering of the beloved's body in the reconstruction of the narrative. Joe's two color eyes and Violet's "wayward mouth" and "renegade tongue" (24) signify their heterogeneous, decentered, neurotic identities, destabilized by desire. As Vikki Bell highlights, the performance of the racialized body can be revealed in the light-skinned Golden Gray's quest for his "nigger" father, "the blackest man in the world" (157, 172), as in the nauseatingly black and naked Wild's absence-presence, while Dorcas's light skin and straightened hair signify the stylization of the black body.⁶¹ The search for light bodies (that of Dorcas and of Golden Gray) by black characters may mark the impossibility of desire. Desire is written on the body and the desiring body, the language of corporeality writes the text.

The language of corporeality speaks in the tongue of the mad body as well. Violet is the madwoman in the text. By her violent, abnormal, neurotic acts – as throwing her favorite parrot saying "I love you" out into the street, stealing a baby, sitting down in the middle of the street, imitating her husband's dead lover, cutting Dorcas's corpse at the funeral – she repeats Wild's, the mother trope's wild desires

60 Paquet, p. 226.

61 Bell, "Passing and Narrative in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*," *Social Identities* 2 (June 1996) 221–237, pp. 225–226.

and unlimited, heterogeneous self. Her madness is reflected in her language as well, tainting the text of *Jazz*. She has a "renegade tongue," a "wayward mouth," responsible for her verbal "collapses" (24), letting her unconscious speak up, disturbing language and mind alike. The uncontrollable slips of her tongue, her wild, delirious monologues are varied by her incomprehensible, melancholic silences. The narrative voice is often infected by Violet's linguistic madness. It claims to be omnipresent and objective, knowing everything *and* unreliable, influenced by personal feelings. The narrative is full of gaps, silences and uncertainties *and* it is repetitive, loquacious, full of maniac, endlessly flowing monologues. Trying to remember Joe's and Violet's going to the City "nothing comes to mind," nevertheless the forgetful voice immediately after this statement recalls seven pages of memories of this journey (29–36). In the City language is treated "like the same intricate, malleable toy designed for their play" (33), this language lies, heats your blood, then disappears (37). The language of the City, that is the language of desire, jazz and madness is spoken by Violet and the *other* Violet as well, for Violet's identity is that of a schizophrenic split-personality, a borderline case stumbling through cracks and gaps, splitting Violet's life, self and language alike. "That Violet is not somebody walking round town, up and down the streets wearing my skin and using my eyes shit no *that* Violet is me" (96). That Violet is Violet's violent self, a neurotic "other," cutting a girl's dead face, embodying unconscious repressed drives and desires, a Woolfian Septimus in Violet speaking with trees (216) in the revolutionary poetic language of the crazy female body, a madwoman in the text jazzing and maddening the narrative. Morrison's aim is to project the self into language with "space between words, as though the self were really a twin or a thirst or a friend or something that sits right next to you and watches you."⁶² The other is embraced in the uncanny language of the lunatic, Violet's and Morrison's own.

Toni Morrison in the preface of her *Playing in the Dark*, analyzing Marie Cardinal's novel, unveils the "nerve-wracking," "visceral," "emotional and intellectual" jazz music of Armstrong as a trope of nervous breakdown and mental disorder.⁶³ Jazz music seems to fulfill the same symbolic function in Violet's mind, reflecting her emotional disturbance and fluid identity, her melancholic silences and hysteric

⁶² Naylor, p. 208.

⁶³ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark. Whiteness and Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 1992).

outbursts, the “innarrable cracks”⁶⁴ of her mind, just as the impossible desires of her split self. Cannon and O’Reilly claim that Violet by the end of the novel succeeds in uniting her two selves reaching a full, complete and coherent identity.⁶⁵ In my reading Violet’s personality is not that unproblematic, for the decisive passage, a conversation between the Dorcas-substitute Felice and Violet on Violet’s *other* and her split self may be interpreted in a way different from that of the above-mentioned critics. „How did you get rid of her?/ ‘Killed her. Then I killed the me that killed her.’/ ‘Who’s left?/ ‘Me” (209). It is not self evident that the *other*, violent Violet becomes suppressed, leaving a coherent me behind, since the question “Who’s left?” can be read both as “Who is left?,” meaning “Who remains behind?” and as “Who has left?,” meaning “Who departed?” In the second reading the killing of the other Violet seems either impossible (finally it is the me leaving and not the *other*) or resulting in the denial of one’s own personality (if one denies the stranger, the other, the unconscious in herself she denies her being a heterogeneous subject). The other Violet can stay behind in the form of an unspeakable limitless desire exciting self and text, revealing a “subject and meaning in process/on trial,”⁶⁶ vibrated by the rhythm of jazz. Carolyn M. Jones argues that the jazz writing used by Morrison is a form demonstrating a performative, improvisational and fluid identity.⁶⁷ In my view, this postmodern concept of identity is shared by the contemporary reader, thus a bond is established, and the delirious, erotic, desiring voice of the jazz-text touches the reader where it hurts and soothes the most.

4 IN PLACE OF CONCLUSION. THE VOICE OF THE BOOK

“You can start anywhere – Jazz as Communication – since it’s a circle and you yourself are the dot in the middle. You, me. [...] with you in the middle – jazz is only what you yourself get out of it.”
(Langston Hughes)⁶⁸

Toni Morrison’s *Jazz* challenges its reader to participate actively in the composition of the jazz story and text, filling in gaps, musing over mysteries,

64 Carolyn M. Jones, “Traces and Cracks: Identity and Narrative in Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*,” *African American Review* 3 (Fall 1997) 481–496, p. 486.

65 Cannon, p. 246, O’Reilly, p. 373.

66 Kristeva, *La révolution*, p. 37.

67 Jones, p. 481.

68 Ryan and Majozo, p. 130.

tracking disseminated meanings, tracing floating signifiers, playing with open possibilities at the numerous entrances and exits of the self-deconstructive text, vibrating sensitive chords, voicing written melodies. Roland Barthes would call *Jazz* a "writerly text of jouissance," inciting the reader's cooperation and providing the "pleasure of a text,"⁶⁹ not simply that of real literature but also of true love. The reader is involved in the text (s)he cannot help being ravished, excited or deranged, feeling touched and marked by a unique language that is at the same time yearning and violent, a language tainted by desire and sensual corporeality, by melancholy and mourning, by silence, madness and music. Morrison's text, as a genuine *écriture féminine* "steals words and makes them fly,"⁷⁰ cheating words with words it transgresses symbolic language, shows ways of flight from the jailhouse of language, and provides heterogeneous, alternative identifications (with the desiring subject-in-process or the polyphonic, choral narrative voices) beyond the ideologically prescribed subject position. The reader of *Jazz*, liberated, can embrace – beyond (yet within) the Language of the Father – subversive languages of the "other." A Semiotic, renegade mother-tongue, body talk, languages of madness, revolutionary, rhythmic poetry and melodious music weave the text functioning as a "desire machine," narrating (on the thematic level), echoing (on the stylistic, linguistic level), exciting (on the receptive level) and operated by (on the level of the plot and of the deeper motor of text) yearning. Talking about love is a verbalized displacement of lovemaking. Reading about love can be very close to an amorous, affectionate encounter. Morrison, by an ingenious twist, ends (or rather leaves open-ended) her novel on desire by an unusual vow of love, that of the Book to its Reader. The erotic Text in love is sexually attracted to the Reader, offering her/him the love in the text and the love of the text, the pleasure of the Barthesian writerly reader cooperation. Reading, making the text, making (and disseminating) meanings equals making love with the text, in a dangerous liaison infected by desire, madness, mourning, sex and wild jazz. The reader's touch can remake the text, interpreting its embrace varying according to fugitives desires, past loves and intertextual background, and can produce a new jazzing text of desire, a fruit, a memento of this love between Book and Reader, a new r(ead)ing in the endless chain of interpretations, an answer to

69 On the pleasure of the "texte scriptible" see Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du Texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1973).

70 Cixous, "The Laugh," pp. 343–344.

the invitation to dance, a playful performance to the rhythm of free jazz. Morrison's text speaks up in a melodic and metatextual, lovingly inviting "deep voice."

That I have loved only you, surrendered my whole self reckless to you and nobody else. That I want you to love me back and show it to me. That I love the way you hold me, how close you let me be to you. I like your fingers on and on, lifting, turning. I have watched your face for a long time now, and missed your eyes when you went away from me. Talking to you and hearing you answer – that's the kick.

But I can't say that aloud, I can't tell anyone that I have been waiting for this all my life and that being chosen to wait is the reason I can. If I were able I'd say it. Say make me, remake me. You are free to do it and I am free to let you, because look, look. Look where your hands are. Now. (229)

And the reader must respond. The present paper is a work of love, my Reader self and the Book dancing "close and shameless or apart and wild" (58) to the tune of jazz, of *Jazz*.