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## **There’s no place like *Home* – homelessness, shame and guilt in Toni Morrison’s latest novel**

But he who easily his threshold’s holy beam  
With hasty feet strides over guiltily,  
When he returns he finds again the ancient place;  
Yet all around is changed, if not quite overthrown.

*Faust*, Goethe<sup>1</sup>

One should not let remorse dwell under the roof of one’s home. The feeling of regret is a force so potent that even the person who owns the finest dwelling may feel estranged from it. In other words, negative emotions possess the power to make people feel lonely and homeless despite being surrounded by others. Homes are transformed into houses and relatives into strangers. Positive feelings escape the only place capable of healing the deepest wounds and providing refuge. People, no matter what race or religion, most often perceive ‘home’ as a place where nothing bad can happen. At a collective level houses enabled humanity to acquire its final form. According to Hans Biederman, houses have been: “Since the end of hunter-nomadism of the Ice Age, the symbol of the center of existence for the human race as it settled; usually laid out (as were cities) using cosmic principles as guidelines, also to determine its location”<sup>2</sup>. We always seek home in times of danger. Every person needs an anchor like this. The walls responsible for the visible and material shape of a house are also an impenetrable boundary capable of protecting us from any

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<sup>1</sup> J. W. Goethe, *Faust* Part II, London 1839, p. 112.

<sup>2</sup> H. Biederman, *Dictionary of Symbolism: Cultural Icons and the Meanings Behind Them*, New York 1992, p. 179.

external perils. But what if misery is of an inner nature? The internal character of the threat is devastating as it leaves no other safe haven. One's home becomes completely demolished and deprived of its properties. The place called by people 'my home' does not necessarily have to be a building. It can as well be a town or a city which over the years has acquired familial character. Nevertheless, a thorny problem arises when our home is situated on somebody else's land. The existence centered around lease is highly damaging for the tenant and quite profitable for the landlord. Painful and shameful memories multiplied by the sense of permanent tenure denudation equal the conviction of homelessness so harmful to mental prosperity.

*Home* published in 2012 is Toni Morrison's latest novel. The book is a unique specimen of the author's creativity and thanks to its ambiguous character it can be clearly differentiated from the previous works by the American Nobel laureate. Its ambiguity is rooted in the presented story. On the one hand, it is similar to Morrison's previous novels, but on the other hand it adds a new perspective to the plots once revealed. *Home*, like the author's earlier works, investigates the difficult situation of African Americans who struggle with the oppressive white domination visible in every aspect of the social domain. This factor is nothing new in comparison with Morrison's books the readers are familiar with. It would not have been an exaggeration to qualify this particular topic as the most distinguishable, and at the same time the most common, in the author's literary output. The tribulation of race and humiliation repeatedly brought up by the novelist have always been dramatized in a new and original way. In each and every novel preceding *Home* this topic has never been shown in the same manner, which causes the evergreen effect. The case is not different when it comes to analyzing the newest work of the author. *Home* raises the omnipresent theme of trials connected with racial inequality which are similar to other novels, but this time it does so with a dash of wartime reality.

The book opens with a quote taken from a song "Whose House Is This?", a part of the cycle *Four Songs after Poems by Toni Morrison, for Soprano, Cello and Piano* composed by Andre Previn. These musical pieces have been described by C. Gillespie in *Critical Companion to Toni Morrison: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work*. Toni Morrison's *Home* begins with the following insight into the actions to come:

Whose house is this?  
 Whose night keeps out of the light?  
 In here?  
 Say, who owns this house?  
 It's not mine.  
 I dreamed another, sweeter, brighter

With a view of lakes crossed in painted boats;  
Of fields wide as arms open for me.  
This house is strange.  
Its shadows lie.  
Say, tell me, why does its lock fit my key?

The question of ownership stated in the initial line is of fundamental meaning for the further analysis of the novel. The quoted text has the form of a dialogue – questions are asked but it is not clear who answers them. Nevertheless, the supposed interlocutor is not significant at this stage of the analysis. Dispossession, as a problem of immense importance, is propounded at the opening of *Home*. Disappointment follows dispossession in the hierarchical order of the themes to be brought up in the plot of the book. The person speaking is clearly disappointed with the house in front of his/her eyes. It is not the desired object, nor the awaited fulfillment of a dream or a need met. Moreover, it causes uncertainty and evokes a sense of strangeness. In other words, the house is not the one that was dreamt of, it is not the needed object, but strangely in a certain sense it matches the speaker. The awareness of the mentioned connection arouses the feeling of oddness. The speaker asks why “does its lock fit my key?”, which is clearly a sign of astonishment because the described house is entirely different from the ideal one. The relation between the speaker and the mentioned house is also atypical. Why then is it seemingly appropriate? It is a house and not a home. The knowledge of this uncanny relation is disturbing. Its strangeness is increased once more. Most often the key fits the lock, not the other way around. It causes the recognition that the house, which represents the surrounding world, matches the speaker, or to put it simpler that the reality is built upon, or even by the individual, not the opposite. The “house/home antagonism” described by Toni Morrison in the essay *Home* delivers a basis for the further analysis of her latest novel. The author writes:

How to be both free and situated; how to convert a racist house into a race-specific yet nonracist home. How to enunciate race while depriving it of its lethal cling? They are questions of concept, of language, of trajectory, of habitation, of occupation, and, although my engagement with them has been fierce, fitful, and constantly (I think) evolving, they remain in my thoughts as aesthetically and politically unresolved.<sup>3</sup>

The theoretical distinction between ‘a house’ and ‘a home’ is now evident. The novel is entitled *Home* as it is a symbol of safety and well-being which denotes the ideal and the utopian as one might say. The ‘house’ reconstructed in

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<sup>3</sup> T. Morrison, *Home*, [in:] *The House that Race Built*, W. Lubiano ed., New York 1997, p. 5.

the introduction signifies the real condition of the affairs or the down-to-earth representation of matters.

Frank Money, the main protagonist of the novel, is a Korean War veteran who comes back home only to discover that in his homeland there is not much hospitality left for him. The war has scarred him. His childhood friends, who enlisted with him, are dead, which only magnifies the feeling of despair. Frank has problems with finding his place in the apparently peaceful reality. The adaptation issues are combined with anger management problems. Frank is an impulsive man capable of violence. His introverted nature is an insuperable obstacle in his relationship with a woman called Lilly. His main purpose in life is to find his younger sister and help her as she is in danger. Each chapter of the novel begins with a preliminary text written in italics and told by the main protagonist who describes his feelings, emotions and most important memories. The passages which begin each chapter are similar in their function to the introduction of the novel. It is now transparent that Frank Money speaks the same language as the mysterious speaker because a similar voice is used in the later parts of the novel. Frank was to a certain degree branded with homelessness. His memories inform the reader about his past. The Money family was forced to leave Texas and had to flee to Lotus in Georgia. Ycidra, Frank's sister, was born during the journey. The family were not welcomed in the house where his grandfather lived with his third wife, a woman called Lenore. She was not fond of the idea of living together with her husband's kinsfolk. The reason for this attitude was quite obvious. The woman did not like the fact that the newly arrived relatives were literally homeless. Due to this fact she perceived them as inferior in the social hierarchy. They were people who had no home and therefore no roots. The vagabonds were a threat to the well-established woman. Ycidra, or Cee, was born in the street, which was not a thing that happened to respectable people. That brought shame and threatened the family's social rank.

Lenore took it for a very bad sign for Cee's future that she was born on the road. Decent women, she said, delivered babies at home, in a bed attended to by good Christian women who knew what to do. Although only street women, prostitutes, went to hospitals when they got pregnant, at least they had a roof overhead when their baby came. Being born in the street – or the gutter, as she usually put it – was prelude to a sinful, worthless life.<sup>4</sup>

The quote above proves above all doubt that having no home was the worst possible abomination. It brought shame not only to the homeless but also to their families. This aspect is a recurring motif throughout Toni Morrison's

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<sup>4</sup> T. Morrison, *Home*, Toronto 2012, p. 44.

works. Even if homelessness is forced upon the people, as it was in the case of the Money family, it does not excuse those who need a shelter. As a matter of fact, the need of owning and possessing is evident in Morrison's protagonists as they know it is the only thing that might enable advancement in the society ruled by whites. The history of black people in the USA was built on expropriation and denial of basic human rights, which partially explains the desperate need to own and not to be owned. Belonging acquires a special status in the hierarchy of necessities and rises to the rank of a deity. In *Song of Solomon* Macon Dead II verbalizes the cult of possession in the following words: "Let me tell you right now the one important thing you'll ever need to know: Own things. And let the things you own own other things. Then you'll own yourself and other people too"<sup>5</sup>. It is not only a want constructed around the natural human desire to move up the society ladder in order to be better situated. In this case people need to own something to prove the human nature inside of them. Macon Dead II owned several houses, but he did not really have a home. This factor can be referred to as the home related paradox. The drive that motivates the protagonists to climb up the social hierarchy and acquire a secure position in the community is at the same time the main obstacle that prevents building a safe home. Lenore embodies these negative emotions in the attitude towards her husband's relatives. For the woman every person such as Cee is a step back on the way to the set goal. A black person who despises his or her people is also a characteristic element of Morrison's novels. The lack of understanding in relation to other members of the same ethnic group is unreasonable but nevertheless true.

The postwar life is very complicated for Frank Money. He runs away from a hospital and wants to go South to Georgia. The man is perfectly acquainted with his situation. On his escape Frank has no shoes. The motif of journey reveals itself in this part of the novel as shoes denote a traveling man. He is aware that without shoes he cannot continue his journey. Footwear in this case is a symbol of a twofold meaning. It represents the travel which needs to be started but the fact that Frank Money has got no shoes makes it at the same time impossible for him to move forward. Journey can be interpreted literally, but it also symbolizes the mental distance which Frank needs to cover in order to feel at home in a country where he is still perceived as a stranger. Standing in one place causes stagnation and therefore the permanent communion with trauma. Frank needs to move on. Desolation is nothing new for him as over the years he got accustomed to the feeling that home is in reality only a concept unattainable for people of his race:

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<sup>5</sup> T. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, New York 1987, p. 55.

Better than most, he knew that being outside wasn't necessary for legal or illegal disruption. You could be inside, living in your own house for years, and still, men with or without badges but always with guns could force you, your family, your neighbors to pack up and move – with or without shoes. Twenty years ago, as a four-year-old, he had a pair, though the sole of one flapped with every step. Residents of fifteen houses had been ordered to leave their little neighborhood on the edge of town. Twenty-four hours, they were told, or else. "Else" meaning "die".<sup>6</sup>

The lack of security experienced by the Moneys is clear evidence that for the members of the black community the war has started a long time before. Frank and his friends want to run away from their hometown. A person who chooses war as a way to flee from everyday reality must be despaired to the limits. Escape, as the protagonists' way to avoid negative emotions caused by the heritage of slavery, is also not an innovative feature of Toni Morrison's art. It might have been peripheral or crucial for the plot, nevertheless, the usage of 'escape' for the purpose of showing an attempt made by the protagonist to reduce his/her racially imposed trauma is nothing new in Morrison's books. However, the author's ability to represent this issue in a novel way exposes itself once again as the familiar topic of complex race relations which is being innovatively enriched by the burden of combat atrocities. The component of 'war' helps to develop the protagonist's character and make it even more complex in a way yet to be analyzed.

Racism and humiliation are present throughout the whole novel. The two elements obtain a status deeply rooted in the process of identity creation. To a certain degree for Frank Money and people of his race they are an element of the day-to-day life. It is omnipresent and therefore quite indiscernible because it runs in their blood. This part of life is natural like breathing. It is a reason for outrage, but simply it is also a natural constituent of the reality and a thing one should get used to. On the way to find his sister Frank is a witness to many intolerant behaviors which show the nature and the level of familiarity with racial hatred against African Americans. The Reverend Locke who provides Frank with help at the beginning of his journey warns the man about the things to come. The veteran is instructed: "Listen here, you from Georgia and you been in a desegregated army and maybe you think up North is way different from South. Don't believe it and don't count on it. Custom is just as real as law and can be just as dangerous"<sup>7</sup>. The reverend's remark means two things for the whole black community. Firstly, it does not matter whether a black person goes South or North – everywhere it is just the same for Afro-Americans as their skin

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<sup>6</sup> T. Morrison, *Home*, Toronto 2012, pp. 9-10.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 19.

color travels with them and always makes them unwelcomed. Secondly, everything that concerns desegregation is pure fiction. The customs rule and make the law, not the other way around. In reality nothing has changed for the Blacks. They still stand barefoot in the middle of nowhere with no place to go just as Frank Money did after escaping from the hospital. During his journey by train Frank encounters a married couple who have just been exposed to violence on racial grounds. Having asked a waiter on the train about the incident he gets the following response:

That there is the husband. He got off at Elko to buy some coffee or something back there. [...] The owner or customers or both kicked him out. Actually. Put their feet in his butt and knocked him down, kicked some more, and when his lady came to help, she got a rock thrown in her face. We got them back in the car, but the crowd kept yelling up till we pulled away.<sup>8</sup>

After hearing the story Frank asked the waiter if the attack had been reported to the conductor. The answer was simple and meaningful: "You crazy?"<sup>9</sup>. The response may be considered shocking but at the same time real. What was the point in reporting an event like this? Nothing would have been done to save the oppressed.

After the train ride Frank reaches Chicago. Being instructed by the waiter he goes to Booker's diner to have some food. In the place he meets Billy Watson, a man who gives him help and shelter on his way. In a friendly atmosphere the customers start sharing stories of "their own deprived life in the thirties"<sup>10</sup>. This part of the novel defines black homelessness and gives examples to portray the specific character of this phenomenon amongst African Americans. The symbolic meaning of home is central for Toni Morrison's works. Anissa Wardi in *The Toni Morrison Encyclopedia* defines the term as follows:

Home occupies both a literal and a conceptual space in Toni Morrison's fiction. Morrison's interest in home can be understood through the prism of American history\*. As a result, home is rarely an uncomplicated space of sanctuary. Rather, Morrison probes in her literary imagination the idea of America (and often the American South\*) as a dislocated home place for African Americans.<sup>11</sup>

In general the interpretation informs the reader about the way 'home' is constructed in Morrison's novels. The symbol is based on its antithesis as Wardi reveals that for the majority of African Americans home is the total opposite of

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<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, p. 28.

<sup>11</sup> A. Wardi, *Home*, [in:] *The Toni Morrison Encyclopedia*, E. Beaulieu ed., Westport 2003, p. 159.



what it should be. This recognition of not being at home is collective and common because of the racial stereotypes which are still predominant in the American society.

For the purpose of a more thorough analysis of Frank Money's mental condition the fact of his war past needs to be taken into consideration. It is obvious that all wars have a destructive effect not only on their victims but also on those who managed to survive. Although for Frank war is a thing of the past, the imprint of armed conflict is still visible in his behavior. Lilly, the woman with whom he tries to maintain a relationship, finds herself incapable of sustaining a feeling for the person so distant. The mental absence of her partner is what ruins their relationship as even everyday routines become too hard for Frank to handle. The man just disconnects from reality and sets himself on the margin of life. The protagonist's psyche is more complex than it originally seems. In fact, his personality is a sum of two coexisting negative emotions that equal a trauma-based identity. The first element is racial inferiority, the other PTSD. It is therefore necessary to investigate the relation between race and war imposed trauma. Is it possible that racial discrimination paves the way for acquiring trauma absorbed on the battlefield?

Nnamdi Pole et al. in *Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Among Ethnoracial Minorities in the United States* carefully monitor the interconnections amongst ethnical background and trauma. The authors cite numerous research which illustrates that the link between race and PTSD might not be that significant. Nevertheless, further in their work the scholars state the following: "However, a few studies have found higher rates of PTSD or PTSD symptoms among African Americans than their European American counterparts"<sup>12</sup>. This clearly implies that African Americans due to a long-lasting exposure may be more vulnerable to PTSD. The authors suggest that the effect discrimination takes on acquiring posttraumatic experiences needs longitudinal studies to be fully examined, nonetheless some conclusions may be drawn:

In addition to being at greater risk for exposure to traumatic stress, African Americans report greater exposure to racial discrimination (Kessler, Mickelson, & Williams, 1999). It has long been speculated that chronic exposure to discriminatory experiences may make African Americans more vulnerable to psychopathology (e.g., Cannon & Locke, 1977). In the case of PTSD, discriminatory practices can lead to greater exposure to traumatic stress (e.g., assignment to more hazardous combat duties) or may be interwoven into the traumatic event itself (e.g., racial slurs being used during physical assault; Jones, Brazel, Peskind, Morelli & Raskind, 2000).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> N. Pole et al., *Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Among Ethnoracial Minorities in the United States*, "Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice" 2008, V15 N1, p. 36.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, p. 37.



The evidence provided by medical research leaves no doubt that the pre-war past is a decisive factor in creating the protagonist's post-war reality. Everything before the war was harmful so even the Korean War seemed to be an alternative. In one of his memories that precede each chapter Frank Money seems thankful for the chance of serving in the military. The problem with his hometown was quite obvious – Lotus was not a home, at least not for him. It was merely a 'house', not a location one could be attached to. The veteran describes his former place of residence in the following words: "*Maybe a hundred or so people living in some fifty spread-out rickety houses. Nothing to do but mindless work in the fields you didn't own, couldn't own, and wouldn't own if you had any other choice*"<sup>14</sup>. The only possibility to get away from the devastating place was to escape. For Frank escape meant the army, for his sister it was reached by entering the holy matrimony. Both choices proved to be incorrect in the long run. Cee, who now works as a servant at a white people's home, needs her brother's help as she has become an object for medical experiments conducted by a doctor who is also her employer. Frank's body is not threatened in any way, but his psyche is not in a good condition although he is not fully aware of it. Even after the conscription Frank perceives his service as positive in this respect that it got him out of Lotus: "*Mike, Stuff, and me couldn't wait to get out and away, far away. Thank the Lord for the army*"<sup>15</sup>. War leaves no one untouched and Frank Money is not an exception. Racial discrimination experienced in the times of illusory peace has only made him more vulnerable to war trauma.

War is now an integral part of Frank. The memories of his dead friends are still fresh in his mind. He is more prone to violence which was implemented into his system. Frank was not a brave man. Boldness had to be created. The death of one of his companions was all that was required. Unfortunately, the side effect that arose from the formation of courage was blood lust: "Now, with Mike gone, he was brave, whatever that meant. There were not enough dead gooks or Chinks in the world to satisfy him. The cooper smell of blood no longer sickened him; it gave him appetite"<sup>16</sup>. That part of Frank's past calls attention to a very important issue which should be taken under consideration. It is worth noting what register is used for the purpose of describing the Asian enemies. The terms "Chinks" or "gooks" are words which are classified as offensive units of language and they are used to describe people of Asian descent. Being himself a victim of racism and racial stereotypes Frank in a

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<sup>14</sup> T. Morrison, *Home*, Toronto 2012, pp. 83-84, italics in the original.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 84, italics in the original.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 98.

certain way multiplies the harmful discriminatory practices in the perception of his rivals. Of course, it is possible to explain this derogatory usage of language as a result of despise towards people who want to kill him and have killed some of his friends. They are enemies, therefore it is acceptable, maybe even desired to use the language of hatred towards them. The fact is that the English lexicon does not lack offensive terms that can be used in reference to other people. Nevertheless, Frank's view of his enemies is humiliating in the racial context. This proves that at a different time and in a different place the victim can easily change his/her status and become an oppressor. Frank recalls a little Asian girl who sneaked in their camp in order to steal leftovers thrown away by the soldiers. The girl rummaged through the garbage to find some food. Once, Frank's relief guard saw her looking for food and then something odd happened:

*She smiles, reaches for the soldier's crotch, touches it. It surprises him. Yum-yum? As soon as I look away from her hand to her face, see the two missing teeth, the fall of black hair above eager eyes, he blows her away. Only the hand remains in the trash, clutching its treasure, a spotted, rotting orange.*<sup>17</sup>

Why did the guard kill the girl? Frank gives an explanation to this question: *"Thinking back on it now, I think the guard felt more than disgust. I think he felt tempted and that is what he had to kill"*<sup>18</sup>. The most detrimental aspect of war is remembering the awful things it made us do and feel. That is why the guard had to kill the little girl. He wanted to destroy the evidence of his weakness. This line of thought delivers another perspective by which war should be perceived – the prism of shameful desires that bring everlasting embarrassment and a sense of guilt because they were buried deep inside the unconscious.

Mental defects caused by the war are far more damaging than wounded body as they are almost impossible to heal. The rent flesh revives quickly. The situation is different with injured mind because in this case the passing time does not support recovery. The experiences gathered in the time of war cause shame and guilt. These two terms overlap in the common understanding so it is advisable to clearly distinguish between them. Giving a precise definition that would state the differences that both words convey is not an easy task. Richard A. Shweder in an essay *Toward a Deep Cultural Psychology of Shame* defines shame in the following way:

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 95, italics in the original.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 96, italics in the original.

If one tries to summarize or synthesize these various views so as to form an abstract idea of shame or (what amounts to the same things) so as to describe the underlying concept that sets a mandatory limit on all conceivable definitions of shame, one might say that *shame is the deeply felt and highly motivating experience of the fear of being judged defective*. It is the anxious experience of either the real or anticipated loss of status, affection or self-regard that results from knowing that one is vulnerable to the disapproving gaze or negative judgment of others.<sup>19</sup>

The fear of being deprived of “status” cannot be the cause of shame as African Americans in the novels by Toni Morrison have most often no social status to lose. Therefore the two reasons that might be responsible for the ill post-war perception of oneself are “affection” and “self-regard”. The latter motivation seems the most adequate. The judgment of others is not so petrifying when a person is convinced of his or her own value. To a certain extent shame betokens human nature. Thomas Fuchs in *The Phenomenology of Shame, Guilt and the Body in Body Dysmorphic Disorder and Depression* states that: “Shame and guilt belong to the self-related and self-evaluating emotions which constitute a peculiarity of human development: to the best of our knowledge, even higher developed animals know neither shame nor guilt”<sup>20</sup>. The author’s research provides other causes that initiate shame:

Shame thus arises from acting awkwardly or improperly: from the inadequacy of one’s spontaneous behavior to expectations of others or the norms of decency; from clumsiness or lack of body control (e.g. in the stutterer); from a mishap of the body, revealing its mere corporeality (as in the limping or the hunchback).<sup>21</sup>

This explanation justifies the logic used before: the war leaves people ashamed of their actions not only because their deeds were cruel but first and foremost because the awareness of “acting awkwardly or improperly” that they proved capable of is devastating to the self-conception. In extreme conditions people allow themselves to commit acts of extremity and have to live with this burden in the time of peace. Are shame and guilt synonyms and can they be used interchangeably? Despite being similar, there is a vast difference between these terms. Ying Wong and Jeanne Tsai in *Cultural Models of Shame and Guilt* claim that the difference is based on the nature of the immoral act. Both feelings are based on the intuitive knowledge that certain lines have been

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<sup>19</sup> R. A. Shweder, *Toward a Deep Cultural Psychology of Shame*, “Social Research” 2003, Vol. 70, No. 4, pp. 1114-1115.

<sup>20</sup> T. Fuchs, *The Phenomenology of Shame, Guilt and the Body in Body Dysmorphic Disorder and Depression*, “Journal of Phenomenological Psychology” 2003, 33:2, p. 223.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 227.

crossed. Nevertheless, there is a subtle difference in the origins of shame and guilt, which provides a sufficient criterion for the said distinction:

However, whereas shame occurs when one is negatively evaluated by others for behaving inappropriately, involves global and stable attributions for transgressions, and is associated with maladaptive consequences, guilt occurs when one negatively evaluates one's own self for behaving inappropriately, involves specific and temporary attributions for transgressions, and is associated with adaptive consequences.<sup>22</sup>

For the vast part of the novel the reader is disoriented when it comes to identifying the real reasons for Frank Money's inability to adapt. The protagonist seems to be a worn out man who due to experiencing war became indifferent. Yet, Frank may be aggressive and his outburst shows that something must be hidden underneath the cloak of numbness. He finds out about his sister's misery because Sarah, a woman who worked with Cee in Doctor Beau's house, decided to write a letter to inform Frank about the situation. The doctor had a rather unusual interest in the female body and he needed an object for his experiments. Sarah partially blamed herself for the situation as:

She knew he gave shots, had his patients drink medicines he made up himself, and occasionally performed abortions on society ladies. None of that bothered or alarmed her. What she didn't know was when he got so interested in wombs in general, constructing instruments to see farther and farther into them. Improving the speculum.<sup>23</sup>

When Frank finally reaches the white man's home, nothing happens. He just takes his sister and there is "No theft. No violence. No harm"<sup>24</sup>. A man who has been surrounded by death and who himself delivered it during the war does nothing, which is rather an untypical solution. A black man skilled at killing enters the house of a white man who used a member of his family as a guinea pig and does not demand justice. It is worth considering that throughout his entire journey Frank was informed about his sister being in danger and for this reason it is natural that his anger should have risen. The lack of brutality is not what most readers would expect to find. Still, the odd finale of the rescue provides an insight into Frank's mind and is the first evidence of his carefully hidden guilt. The explanation employed by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* for the purpose of analyzing the case of Hamlet in the context of Oedipus complex might be a good explication for the actions of Frank Money:

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<sup>22</sup> Y. Wong and J. Tsai, *Cultural Models of Shame and Guilt*, [in:] *Handbook of Self-Conscious Emotions*, J. Tracy, R. Robins & J. Tangney, eds., New York 2007, p. 211.

<sup>23</sup> T. Morrison, *Home*, Toronto 2012, pp. 112-113.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 112.

“Thus the loathing which should drive him on to revenge is replaced in him by self-reproaches, by scruples of conscience, which remind him that he himself is literary no better than the sinner whom he is to punish”<sup>25</sup>. The existence of Frank’s burden of secret guilt is not entirely evident and demands other proofs before arriving at a conclusive verdict.

As a consequence of the doctor’s experiments, Cee becomes infertile. She and her brother live together until one day their peaceful life gets distorted by an unwelcomed visitor: “It’s like there’s a baby girl down here waiting to be born. She’s somewhere close by in the air, in this house, and she picked me to be born to. And now she has to find some other mother”<sup>26</sup>. The presence of a girl felt by Cee resembles the means of expression introduced by Morrison in her earlier novel. In *Beloved* the specter was a call of the history. A voice that linked the past with the present and a recollection of a horrendous deed. Its signification is exactly the same in *Home*. The occurrence of the girl-like images give an ultimate explanation for the arrangement of the book and the structure of Frank Money’s psyche. The introductions to consecutive chapters cease to fulfill a merely explanatory function. After the appearance of the visions the reader discovers them to serve a different purpose: they are a confession of a guilt-ridden man. A person who forgot what it means to be a human. That person was Frank Money:

*I shot the Korean girl in her face.  
I am the one she touched.  
I am the one who saw her smile.  
I am the one she said “Yum-yum” to.  
I am the one she aroused.  
A child. A wee little girl.  
I didn’t think. I didn’t have to.  
Better she should die.  
How could I let her live after she took me down to a  
place I didn’t know was in me?  
How could I like myself, even be myself if I surrendered  
to that place where I unzip my fly and let her taste me right  
then and there?  
And again the next day and the next as long as she came  
scavenging.*<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> S. Freud, “The Interpretation of Dreams”, [in:] *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, V. B. Leitch ed., New York 2001, p. 923.

<sup>26</sup> T. Morrison, *Home*, Toronto 2012, p. 131.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 133-134, italics in the original.

*Home* ends with Frank and Cee performing a funeral of a man who was buried in the ground by some white men. The dead man was a victim of no rules “men-treated-like-dog fights”<sup>28</sup> and the siblings by chance witnessed this mock burial when they were children. The corpse is moved to a different place and buried at the base of a sweet bay tree. Redemption achieved by this action is desperately needed for Frank’s recovery. In this way the novel reaches its ending. It begins with death and ends with bringing peace to a dead man and also providing tranquility to a person who is still capable of living. There is hope for Frank and his sister. Peace is restored after the service and a distant dream becomes finally available when Ycidra says to Frank: “*Come on, brother. Let’s go home*”<sup>29</sup>.

The symbols used by Toni Morrison in the novel foresee the protagonists’ brighter future. Michael Ferber perceives the symbolic connotation of a tree as complex, but in the context of Toni Morrison’s newest novel its complexity may seem comforting: “Most symbolic trees are specified, for the symbolism of individual trees is usually highly specific. But anything that can grow, “flourish,” bear “fruit,” and die might be likened to a tree: a person, a family, a nation, a cultural tradition”<sup>30</sup>. The sweet bay tree denotes death as it is a burial ground, but at the same time a new start and a chance to prosper. The name of the siblings’ hometown is also a good omen. According to J. E. Cirlot: “In Egypt, the lotus symbolizes nascent life, or a first appearance (19)”<sup>31</sup>, therefore Frank and his sister have reached the end of their struggle and have a chance to begin anew. Shoes, which Frank was deprived of at the beginning of the novel, are an allegory of freedom that was to be gained. Footwear is interpreted as: “A sign of liberty amongst the ancients, since slaves walked barefoot (46)”<sup>32</sup>. Ycidra and her brother have laid the foundations that are needed for building a place that would reflect the title of the novel. The key described at the beginning is an indispensable element required to transform a ‘house’ into a ‘home’. The symbol: “Because it both locks and unlocks, frequently associated with the bearer’s power to confine and set free”<sup>33</sup> could have become Frank’s undoing. The symbolic key is of course the man’s psyche – once controlled by guilt, it has now become restored and prepared for what lies

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, p. 138.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, p. 147, italics in the original.

<sup>30</sup> M. Ferber, *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*. Second Edition, Cambridge 2007, p. 219.

<sup>31</sup> J. E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*. Second Edition, Taylor & Francis e-Library 2001, p. 193.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, p. 112.

<sup>33</sup> H. Biederman, *Dictionary of Symbolism: Cultural Icons and the Meanings Behind Them*, New York 1992, p. 194.

ahead. *Home* is not a book to be evaluated swiftly. The first impression might of course be that similar stories have already been told by the author. Nonetheless, Toni Morrison's works have an important function restricted not only to the literary tradition as they contribute to a collective conscience and remorse. Perhaps *Home* will not be ranked amongst the most prominent works by the author, but the perception of the book through rankings is not the most significant. The aspect that should be considered as fundamental is that there are still stories that need to be told, should be told and must not be omitted if one wants to be just; and as Homi K. Bhabha observed, "Justice, it is said, must not only be done, it must be seen to be done"<sup>34</sup>.

NIE MA JAK W DOMU – BEZDOMNOŚĆ, WSTYD I WINA  
W NAJNOWSZEJ POWIEŚCI TONI MORRISON

Streszczenie

*Home*, najnowsze dzieło Toni Morrison, przenosi czytelnika do USA lat 50. Główny cel amerykańskiej noblistki to prezentacja niewygodnej rzeczywistości powojennej, która według autorki powinna zostać ocalona od zapomnienia. Kwestia dyskryminacji rasowej i rasizmu – wielokrotnie poruszana w powieściach Morrison – zostaje przywołana po raz kolejny. Tym razem wspomniany temat jest wzbogacony o wojenne doświadczenia traumatyczne, które mają destruktywny wpływ na losy głównego bohatera. Czynniki definiujące ówczesne życie społeczne w USA uniemożliwiają protagonistom powieści założenie właściwie funkcjonującej rodziny. Stworzenie „domu rodzinnego” jest celem i obiektem dążeń. Marzenia o szczęśliwym domostwie są niestety zagrożone. Negatywny wpływ wstydu, poczucia winy oraz krzywdzących wspomnień okażą się skuteczną przeszkodą w budowaniu lepszego jutra. Dla protagonistów *Home* nie wszystko jest jednak stracone. Alegoryczny charakter powieści pozostawia nadzieję na lepszą przyszłość, której zapowiedź ukryta jest w szerokiej gamie zastosowanych symboli literackich.

Frank Money, weteran wojny koreańskiej, po powrocie do kraju nie jest w stanie znaleźć swojego miejsca i zaznać spokoju. Jest to człowiek, na którym wojna pozostawiła trwale piętno. Wspomnienia z frontu nie pozwalają mu na aktywny udział w życiu społecznym oraz uniemożliwiają poprawne funkcjonowanie. Zagmatwany system relacji rasowych definiujący stosunki międzyludzkie wzmaga efekt alienacji i poczucie obcości we własnym kraju. Wszelkie próby powrotu do normalności są z góry skazane na niepowodzenie, ponieważ Frank nie może zapomnieć o wojnie. Ycida, młodsza siostra mężczyzny, która została zatrudniona jako służąca przez białego lekarza, znajduje się w poważnym niebezpieczeństwie. Udzielenie jej pomocy staje się jedynym celem motywującym głównego bohatera do dalszego funkcjonowania. Weteran decyduje się wyruszyć w podróż, aby odnaleźć siostrę i ocalić ją od zagrożenia. Podróż ta pozwoli mu równocześnie na odnalezienie siebie.

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<sup>34</sup> H. K. Bhabha, *A Good Judge of Character: Men, Metaphors, and the Common Culture*, [in:] *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power*, T. Morrison ed., New York 1992, p. 232.



