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From The Blues to Yin-Yang: Navigating Extremes in Toni Morrison's *Home* and Amy *Tan's The Kitchen God's Wife*

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Abstract
This study intends to discuss the relationship between the blues and the yin-yang, two dualistic concepts, through the comparative analysis of T. Morrison's *Home* and A. Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife*. The study examines the cultural influences (the blues and yin-yang) that inform the texts and interrogates the strategies mobilized by the characters to resolve their contradictions within societies that marginalize them. Drawing on textual analysis, S. de Beauvoir's traditional gender roles and J. Derrida's binary opposition, the study concludes that Morrison's text is - both structurally and thematically - shaped by the spirit of resilience found in the blues. Similarly, the yin-yang philosophy functions as the aesthetic framework of A. Tan's novel, inexorably guiding the heroine toward reclaimed balance and regeneration. Ultimately, this analysis contributes to broader debates on gender, race, and identity by demonstrating how the texts disrupt traditional gender roles and racial dynamics.

Keywords: blues, extremes, fiction, yin-yang, worldview.

Du Blues au Yin-yang : négocier les extrêmes dans *Home* de Toni Morrison et *The Kitchen God's Wife* d'Amy Tan

Résumé
Cette étude se propose d'explorer la relation entre le blues et le yin-yang, deux concepts dualistes, à travers l'analyse comparée de *Home* de T. Morrison et *The Kitchen God's Wife* d'A. Tan. L'étude examine les influences culturelles (le blues et le yin-yang) qui façonnent les textes, tout en interrogeant les stratégies mobilisées par les personnages pour résoudre leurs contradictions au sein de sociétés qui les marginalisent. S'appuyant sur l'analyse textuelle, la notion de rôle traditionnelle de genre de Simone de Beauvoir et l'opposition binaire de J. Derrida, l'étude conclut que le texte de Morrison est, tant sur le plan structurel que thématique, imprégné de l'esprit de résilience propre au

blues. De même, la philosophie du yin-yang sert de cadre esthétique au roman de A. Tan, guidant la protagoniste inexorablement vers l'équilibre et la régénération. En définitive, cette analyse contribue aux débats plus larges sur le genre, la race, et l'identité en démontrant comment les textes bouleversent les rôles traditionnels de genre et les dynamiques raciales.

Mots-clés : blues, extrêmes, fiction, vision du monde, yin-yang.

Introduction

Human experience is frequently characterized by extremes – suffering and happiness, marginalization and inclusion, hate and love. Scholars have long striven to reconcile these contrasts, putting forth paradigms through which individuals or communities may achieve a sense of equilibrium. According to K. J. Warren (2015), dualism represents a Western mode of thinking, a "logic of domination" (A. Goff-Yates, 2000) which accounts for the creation of oppressive social structures. In this regard, L. K. Porterfield and L. Mawhinney (2025) propose Anzaldua's concept of the borderlands as a framework to cope with the multiple oppressions Black women face both as mothers and academics. Much in the same line, Daniel Rosen (2014) has expressed the urge – as a white psychologist – to transcend his personal dualities by navigating privilege and racism in the context of multicultural psychology. Similarly, to understand Indigenous negotiations of colonial situations, the concept of "residence" has been imagined as an alternative to "pull away from the domination/resistance dichotomy" (S. W. Silliman, 2014, p. 61). In this sense, residence refers to a strategy that enables the oppressed to survive without stark resistance against the oppressor. These various positions unveil the constant and complex search for mechanisms in order to resolve problems related to coexistence in society.

This study contributes to the ongoing discussion on the negotiation of dualities by examining the literary contributions of Toni Morrison and Amy Tan through their respective novels: *Home* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*. How do the authors reimagine the blues and the yin-yang as conceptual frameworks of resistance? Put differently, how are the

narratives and characters' struggles informed by the blues and yin-yang philosophies? The study attempts to show how the concepts of the blues (in African American tradition) and the yinyang (in Chinese philosophy) operate as cultural paradigms through which marginalized subjects can find meaning within oppressive societies.

The two authors address the intricacies of navigating dualities as they craft characters that maneuver through their internalized and societal contradictions to achieve healing or/and balance. In *Home*, Frank and Cee must contend with racism in an American society divided by the color line. Likewise, Tan's protagonist, Weili, wrestles with the traditional gender line that marginalizes Chinese women and legitimates her first husband's oppressive influence. Though they are culturally different, the comparative study (R. M. Brown, 1978 & 2001; J. P. Makouta-Mboukou, 2003) of the two concepts shows some similarities, mainly in their shared exploration of dualities, thereby underscoring the centrality of culture as a foundation of resistance in multicultural communities.

The study draws on textual analysis, J. Derrida's notion of binary opposition and Simone de Beauvoir's theory of traditional gender roles. The textual analysis is employed to explore the narrative structure, tone, imagery and characters' actions embedded in the narratives to show how they relate to the blues and yinyang. J. Derrida's binary opposition shows that meaning emerges from the difference between opposing terms. It also reveals that resistance occurs through the deconstruction of such hierarchical binaries. For S. de Beauvoir (2011), the gender roles assigned to women are socially constructed and therefore must be contested in order for women to achieve emancipation. These theoretical lenses allow us to analyze how the characters grapple with their dualities by subverting the intersectional oppression embedded in racial and patriarchal binary hierarchies.

The work is divided into three sections. The first one exposes the blues and yin-yang as worldviews. The second section compares the aesthetic dimensions of each story, highlighting the impact of either the blues or the yin-yang. The third and last section examines the texts from a feminist

perspective to surface the commonalities embedded in the female characters' reclamation of agency as they tap into their respective cultural wisdoms.

1. The Blues and Yin-Yang Ethos

'The Blues' and 'Yin-yang' are two key-concepts which distinguish from one another by their basic tenets and philosophy. J. Rudinow (1994) traces the origin of the blues to African American culture. He argues that white musicians cannot authentically sing the blues, since they did not experience the historical and emotional conditions that gave rise to this musical form. D. Evans (1982) situates the origin of the blues in the Deep South and Midwest, noting that the genre probably emerged in the 1890s. The focus of the blues is put on personal experiences conveyed through musical expression. In the same vein, A. Y. Davis (1998) stresses that the blues singer stands as a witness to personal and intimate lived experience, yet their performance speaks to the whole Black community. In this light, the blues transforms individual emotion into a shared cultural expression.

As J. Simon (2017, p. xi) argues, "Immediacy, spontaneity and feeling" constitute some of the characteristics of the blues. Thus, a blues performance establishes a dynamic connection between musicians and audience, giving the feeling that the music is being created, imagined, and felt in the moment. J. B. Buttram (1993, p. 5) observes that the blues' "call-and-response" echoes the "African leader/chorus" tradition. In addition, the blues lyrics are characterized by paradoxes. For instance, in *The Story of the Blues*, P. Oliver (1997) argues that the blues conveys sorrow through a form that simultaneously affirms life, thus turning pain into artistic resilience. A remarkable trait that binds together the Afro-American blues and the Chinese yin-yang is their ability to move from negativity to positivity, from light to darkness.

Being one of the essential characteristics of Chinese culture, the concepts of *Yin* and *Yang* permeate key sectors of Chinese life, ranging from religion to the arts. This concept correlates with the idea of harmony and balance. In *The Religion of China,* M. Weber (1951, p. 28) writes that the

"conception of cosmic harmony is fundamental for China and has gradually evolved from the primitive beliefs in spirits." Trying to clarify this point, he stresses the "dualism of good (useful) and evil (harmful) spirits, of the "*shen*" and the "*kwei*". They animate the whole universe and express themselves in natural events as well as in man's conduct and condition" (M. Weber, 1951, p. 28). According to this belief, "Man's soul […] was believed to be composed of the heaven-derived *shen* and the earthly *kwei* substance which separated again after death" (M. Weber, 1951, p. 28). In this sense, the constitution of the human being illustrates the agreement of spiritual and material entities. Underscoring the harmonious dualism of the Chinese philosophical doctrine, M. Weber shows that the 'good' spirits are equated to the "(heavenly and masculine) yang principle". In contrast, "the 'evil' ones" as related to "the (earthly and feminine) Yin principle. The world, he explains, originates from the fusion" of the good and the bad (M. Weber, 1951, p. 29).

Similarly, in *Yin and Yang: The Taoist Harmony of Opposites*, J. C. Cooper (1981, p. 13) elaborates on the functions of the Yin and the Yang, which he describes as the "Two Great Powers" and "the alternating forms of the creative force as it is manifest in the world." In the same vein, he adds, stressing the inseparability of the yin and the yang, or simply put, the agreement of contraries:

> They are the primeval substance in differentiation, the yin the physical, emotional, cerebral, inertia, the square; the yang the intelligence, energy, the spiritual, the circle. They are the passive and the active, resistance and generation, kept in proportion to each other by the energy expended. Everything involved in the yin-yang concept implies that which is inseparable, unable to maintain itself except in relationship. They are two aspects of one and the same power, but in polarity as distinct from absolute duality (J. C. Cooper, 1981, p. 14).

Thus, J. C. Cooper describes the yin and yang as unity within duality. In *Yinyang: The Way of Heaven and Earth in Chinese Thought and Culture*, R. Wang (2012) goes a step further than J. C. Cooper by exploring the complexity of the concept of yin-yang and the multiplicity of the use thereof. Wang would rather refer to the concept using one word (yinyang)

instead of the widespread spelling (yin and yang). In so doing, he hopes to emphasize the interrelatedness and interdependence that are inherent to the twofold concept. Venturing beyond the common understanding of yinyang as referring to two distinct "things or fixed qualities of things", he argues that "In fact, yin and yang are not simply things, entities, or objects" (R. Wang, 2012, p. 7). He contends that yin and yang "can be used to characterize structures in which things exist, but they can also be used to analyze the functions of a thing in any given condition" (R. Wang, 2012, p. 7). The context, he shows, is central in understanding the nature of yinyang. Thus, both the blues and the yin-yang represent two modes of meaning-making processes that help interpret Morrison and Tan's fictional worlds.

2. The Aesthetics of Duality in Morrison's *Home*

The transversal notion of duality is articulated through the novels' form, lyricism, imagery and character development.

2.1. Lyricism and Imagery: Echoes of the Blues

In *Home*, T. Morrison employs a subtle language fraught with images. This rich imagery helps articulate the Black community's ethos grounded in the blues. Among other traits, African American ethos is characterized by the belief that suffering must not be denied but challenged and endured, using the blues as a site of transition from fragmentation to wholeness. Otherwise stated, Black people's historical resilience – manifesting in the ability to turn trauma into art – finds a perfect illustration in the blues as a dualistic philosophy.

As a symbol of the blues, the setting, Lotus, evokes contradictory feelings in Frank's mind. The town shows two faces: a gloomy face at the onset of the novel, and a soothing one at the end of the story. The two faces signal two opposing psychic poles, which in turn mirror Black fragmented consciousness. Put another way, Frank's double perception of Lotus reproduces the racial divide between the marginalized community on the one hand, and the dominant group on the other. This reveals the novel's structural unity between setting, characters' consciousness and the theme

of racial segregation. Ultimately, Frank's dual perception from self-loath to self-worth captures the resilient spirit of the blues mindset.

Another layer of signification resides in Morrison's selection of a strange name for the protagonist's hometown, Lotus. Having reference with neither African nor American tradition, "Lotus" traditionally designates the name of an aquatic plant that is symbolic in Hinduism and Buddhism (T. N. Hanh, 2014). The plant, which is said to draw its strength from mud, is revered in Hinduism as a symbol of splendour and happiness. In the same way as the literal lotus grows from mud, the figurative Lotus is placed within the dirt of Anglo-American intolerance and terror, paradoxically deriving its strength from such an oppressive environment. Actually, the symbolism of Lotus suggests that suffering is not a final state. Instead, it is likely to be turned into happiness. This is symptomatic of the blues philosophy, which is rooted in an ontological vision that rejects the idea of rigid, fixed binaries or hierarchies. Thus, Lotus and the blues are conflated in order to forefront Black people's ability to resist the white-induced oppression by transforming it into – or drawing from it – the energy required to achieve triumph and self-realization.

The concept of transformation seems central in the narrative. A close observation of life in Lotus, by the end of the narrative, shows that the inhabitants are happy despite their being placed in the margin. The margin which according to western culture connotes inferiority, loss and failure is transformed and given new meaning. The inhabitants of Lotus redefine their marginalized position as one of identity re-conquest, rebirth and cultural connection. In a sense, the margin only exists in the oppressor's mind. In the mind of the oppressed, the margin is re-centered and transformed into the locus of a socio-cultural resistance and re-structuring.

Furthermore, metaphorically each individual in Lotus is likened to a lotus (the plant). Because a plant needs its roots to survive, each inhabitant in Lotus cannot expect to survive when they are disconnected from their hometown. The visual image of Lotus as a plant is a telling device that makes the reader feel how vital the communal bond is to Black folks. Viewed from this angle, Frank and Cee's journeys away from and back to

Lotus parallel their cultural deracination and final reconnection. War and bodily traumas account for the misfortunes tied to dis-connection, and their final healing bespeak the benefits resulting from re-connection. For instance, both Frank and his sister sink into trauma when they find themselves away from Lotus, and recover from their disease after they get back to Lotus. Thus, Morrison makes a dualistic depiction of Frank and Cee's home as both the pivotal point of their crisis and the departure point of their healing. Hence, the broader racial contradiction is surreptitiously displaced from the outside to the inside, from the public to the private sphere (the hometown), menacing to alter the characters' internal balance. The ambivalence of home as a concept reveals how the protagonist's understanding of it alternately disempowers, then empowers him, mimicking the half-mournful and half-joyful cadence of the blues.

Another symbol borrowed from the natural world is the sweet bay tree, an image that runs through the narrative ringing like a Blues musical refrain. The sweet bay tree keeps resurfacing on pages 52, 118, 132, 144, and 147. This repetition infuses rhythm in the narrative, also marking a form of musical haunting. As the narrator puts it, "For shade and comfort she [Cee] would be sitting under the sweet bay tree, the one with branches spread like arms" (*Home*, p. 118). The tree stands as a place of succor, which is underscored by the simile comparing branches to human arms. The natural world is depicted as welcoming, foregrounding by contrast the hostility of the white society.

Besides, the tree is described as a "lightning blasted sweet bay tree whose top had been burned off" (*Home*, p. 52). In this description, the tree evokes a violent victimization, pain and destruction. Yet, this tone of desolation is counterpoised by some positive details provided later by the narrator: "When he found himself on the bank of Wretched, the sometimes stream, sometimes creek, other times a bed of mud, he squatted beneath the sweet bay tree. His sister was gutted, infertile, but not beaten." (*Home*, p.132) Despite its being blasted by lightening, the tree keeps offering comfort to the protagonist, revealing its exceptional invincibility.

Moreover, Cee's description as "gutted, infertile, but not beaten" admirably mirrors the tree's portrayal as "split down the middle, beheaded, undead" (*Home*, p. 144). In other words, by conflating Cee and the tree, the narrator amplifies the former's resilience. The diction employed by the narrator sheds light on the dualism embodied in Cee and the tree's experiences: "gutted, infertile, split, beheaded" on the one part, and "not beaten, undead" on the other part. The superior number of the negative adjectives accounts for the depth of the characters' suffering, which by contrast brings to focus their heroic resilience. Like the lyrics of a blues song, the enmeshed stories of the tree and Cee are emotionally loaded, exuding sorrow but also hope, and even survival beyond distress. These stories of rebirth resonate with the figure of "Wretched, the sometimes stream, sometimes creek, other times a bed of mud." Stream, creek, and mud represent successive states that exemplify the Black community's flexibility, that is, their ability to escape rigid definitions. The same idea of dynamic change recurs as at the base of the tree, "Frank placed the bone-filled quilt that was first a shroud, now a coffin" (*Home*, p. 144). Again, quilt, shroud, and coffin imply an improvisational process in which art (Cee's quilt) is associated with death. In so doing, this association shows how art may be used to articulate Black people's vision of death. This highlights Black creativity and resourcefulness in a context of mourning. The modification from quilt to coffin mirrors the tone shift from bereavement to a form of homage paid to the dead. It stands as an attempt to reclaim voice and celebrate the Black belief in the immortality of the soul, which also forefronts the collective endurance of Cee, Frank, the tree, and Wretched.

The blues lyrics recall Black painful experiences in America while incorporating accents of victory. Likewise, Frank and Cee's stories retrace tragic moments ending in triumph. In so doing, Morrison has the blues ethics infuse her text's tone, setting, characterization and symbolism, bearing witness to its lyricism and accentuating Black cultural strength.

2.2. The Poetics of Yin-Yang in *The Kitchen God's Wife*: Dual Perspective, Tone, Character Development and Plot Dynamics

Amy Tan demonstrates a perfect mastery of the yin-yang aesthetics applied to her fiction. Her novel is peppered with symbols reminiscent of yin-yang. From the narrative structure to the character development and tone, the story unfolds according to the shifting and fluctuating rhythm of the yin-yang dynamics.

The dual narration employed in the novel shows how two generations, bound by blood and history, clash throughout the narrative before ultimately achieving balance and harmony. In this regard, the incipit is significant: "Whenever my mother talks to me, she begins the conversation as if we were already in the middle of an argument" (*The Kitchen God's Wife*[2], p.1). The narrator's statement sets the emotional décor of a narrative that alternates between daughter and mother. Such a fragmentary narrative structure incorporates the yin-yang essence in at least two ways.

First, the quarrelling undertone of the incipit portends the two narrators' antagonistic stances. Second, and more importantly, the novel's introductive sentence stands as the first step in a story arc that gradually leads the audience to the resolution of the daughter-mother embroilment. Indeed, as a conclusion to the novel, the second narrator joyfully states: "Now help me light three sticks of incense. The smoke will take our wishes to heaven. Of course, it's only superstition, just for fun. But see how fast the smoke rises—oh, even faster when we laugh, lifting our hopes, higher and higher" (*KG*, p. 415). In other words, the beginning and the end of the story – despite their contrasting tones – harmoniously connect to each other, facilitating a holistic view of the story, and fostering a sense of completeness and emotional release. The two quotes represent two interconnected poles that - beyond their apparent dissonance – convey the yin-yang belief that disagreement evolves into agreement. This aspect

[2] Hereafter, all subsequent references to this novel will appear with the acronym KG followed by the page number.

pervades the storyline, and metaphorizes the internal motifs of tension/resolution, marriage/divorce, hate/love, secret/revelation, lie/truth. This admirably shows how the yin-yang ethics opens up a philosophical framework for decision-making, enabling Tan's characters to cope with their existential contradictions. By helping navigate differences, the yin-yang ethics appears not only as an abstract interpretive lens, but also as a relational force that grounds people in their daily realities.

The change of Weili's name to Winnie illustrates the idea of transformation inherent in yin-yang, indicating that identity is a fluid and non-static concept. This expresses the shift from a weak yin identity (Weili) to a more resilient yang identity (Winnie). The trajectories of some key characters are influenced by diverse stimuli, leading them to renegotiate their own sense of identity. Jimmy Louie is a striking example thereof. Being both Chinese and American, he is able to express himself in Mandarin and English alike. This intriguing character appears at a juncture, a critical moment in the protagonist's life, when she is grappling with a sense of disorientation. Jimmy emerges as a providential counterweight to help Weili achieve a sense of equipoise in the power relation that pits her to Wen Fu, her tyrannical husband. Tan employs the Chinese concept of yin-yang to describe the power dynamics at work within a marital framework. She articulates the idea that within the couple, the yin-yang dialectics, far from representing two clear-cut antagonistic positions, rather portends a quest for balance between husband and wife. Oscillating between the two extremes, that is, Wen fu and Jimmy, the wife's swinging position underscores the tenet that the home is a living organism integrating both yin and yang elements. Thus, the survival or success of marriage closely hinges on a wise balancing of these two ever competing yet interconnected extremes.

From another perspective, Wen Fu and Jimmy can be interpreted as the symbolic projection of Weili's own yin and yang. According to Chinese thought, these two forces reside within every human being, and their proper regulation allows one to achieve a harmonious state. Thus, Tan takes us on a journey into Weili's mind, illuminating how yin and yang

shape the structure of human thought. Thus, the two opposing husbands parallel the wife's internal yin-yang interplay. This leads Weili to view the two husbands from a holistic perspective, that is, by considering them as complementary, not mutually exclusive. Put differently, Wen Fu's wickedness serves to push Weili toward Jimmy's tender love, thereby validating his presence in the narrative. The fact of viewing Wen Fu in relation to Jimmy is a typical trait of yin-yang philosophy that emphasizes the notion of interconnectedness or interdependence. In so doing, Tan suggests that the goal is not to erase Wen Fu however bad he is, but to acknowledge him as part and parcel of Weili's lived experience. That is the reason why she crafts a villain, Wen Fu, whose presence continues to haunt Winnie long after the divorce, and even beyond death – through Pearl, his daughter.

In a symbolic sense, Winnie is married to a two-faced husband: one face is Wen-Fu, and the other Jimmy. At the end of the story, Winnie stays alone, for the two husbands eventually pass away. Their death emphasizes the mental image of their two faces coalescing into one another in Winnie's consciousness and recollection. As a result, both Wen Fu and Jimmy's interconnected figures strikingly call up the Taijitu symbol bearing witness to Tan's artistry. That symbol is comprised of two tightly linked comma-shaped figures forming a circle, "with the black representing yin and the white representing yang" (M. D. Fetters, 2018).

Tan also employs plot twists that keep recurring as a technique instilling acceleration and dynamism in the narration. For example, the narrator states: "someone saw me walk into a parlor, and when I came out, two policemen took me to jail" (*KG*, p.371). This unanticipated action intervenes as Weili is hiding from Wen Fu and getting ready to migrate to America. Another unexpected turn of events occurs on the eve of Weili's departure for America, after she is freed from prison (*KG*, p. 392). In this scene, Wen fu nearly cancels Weili's travel, using a gun to force her into having sex with him. In turn, Weili uses the same gun to force him to run away. Tan thus deploys an aesthetics that replicates the flux and rhythm,

the ebb and flow embodied in the yin-yang concept. Through the plot twists, ends morph into new beginnings.

Similarly, Weili's marriage with Wen Fu, her divorce and re-marriage with Jimmy stand as a reflection of the yin-yang cyclical movement. In this case, divorce is not envisioned as a separation or a break. Instead, it takes on the form of a bridge toward a new horizon. Through the lens of yin-yang, Winnie's divorce is construed as a smooth transition, a balancing of contrastive marital realities.

From this perspective, oppression is conceived not as something undesirable but as necessary for resistance and survival to take place. Thus, Wen Fu, viewed as the metaphorical representation of oppression, is described as inseparable from Weili. After Weili's immigration to America, Wen Fu is still present in her nightmares (*KG*, p. 394). Even after his death, he continues to survive through their daughter Pearl's flesh, standing as the painful reminder of Wen Fu's raping act. As Pearl bitterly recognizes, "Wen Fu was my father, that awful man, the one she [Weili] hated." (*KG*, p. 397) Therefore, evil and good, love and hate appear as locked in an unending battle. First, she tries to flee the contradiction, the confrontation represented by Wen Fu's invisible presence. Yet, at the end of the narrative, she comes to understand that she cannot absolutely escape evil but needs to integrate it into her scheme of resistance if she is to achieve healing and liberation. Resistance through confrontation helps her to reinvent herself. In a sense, she dies, i.e., her old self dies, and a new one is born, a more self-confident persona is created. Had she not married an evil husband, Weili would not have been able to get a better knowledge of herself. Put another way, she would not have acquired a new understanding of women's status and the ability to turn oppressive realities into opportunities for self-discovery.

3. A Feminist Reading of the Blues and Yin-Yang

The feminist approach to the Blues and Yin-yang in Morrison's *Home* and Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* brings into focus the ways in which – by drawing on the blues and yin-yang traditions – the writers' feminist

gaze reimagines the female characters' struggles against intersectional marginalization in their respective societies.

3.1. From Oppression to Black Women's Empowerment

As a philosophy providing a mode of being in the world, the blues ethics represents a framework that helps interpret Black women's shift from oppression to agency in segregated America. Particularly, Morrison reclaims the blues' values of relationality, improvisation, self-awareness and resilience as essential ingredients in the development of her female characters. The value of relationality shows through sisterhood. Inescapable and central to the dismantling of oppression is the idea of a Black community of women united by the threads of solidarity, and fighting for a common cause: the betterment of female condition.

One of the author's strategies is to employ cuisine imagery to suggest how the kitchen, as a setting, is transformed into a space of feminine power and retrieved voice. The narrator writes:

> In the kitchen, Sarah removed three melons from a peck basket. She caressed one slowly, then another.
> 'Males,' she snorted.
> 'Female,' she laughed. 'This one's a female.'
> 'Well, hallelujah.' Sarah joined Cee's laughter with a low chuckle. 'Always the sweetest.'
> 'Always the juiciest,' echoed Cee.
> 'Can't beat the girl for flavor.'
> 'Can't beat her for sugar' (*Home*, p. 66).

The kitchen, which is customarily a space that is associated with domesticity and confinement, is subtly re-structured as a site designed to voice female contestation of male supremacy. Male melon is pitted against female melon. Through this technique, Morrison moves from food symbolism to the gendered terrain of power and identity. In other words, masculinity is contrasted with femininity, the latter being attributed the most favorable superlatives - "the sweetest", "the juiciest". By extolling their intrinsic value, this device emphasizes the Black women's self-awareness and self-assertion. By identifying with the female melon, both

Sarah and Cee express a strong sense of femaleness, a healthy sense of female pride. The use of the superlatives implies a figurative upward movement from erasure to visibility, thereby subverting the patriarchal notion of female inferiority.

In the passage above, Morrison juxtaposes the characters' utterances in such a way that they harmoniously fit in one another as if in a song, compellingly recalling the call-and-response trait embodied in the blues tradition. The lyrical tone of this passage arouses vivid emotion and sonority that help equate Cee and Sarah to blueswomen. Indeed, through their conversation, both characters express their harsh female condition employing an optimism-flavored language. They also share their emotions and hope, which makes the song-like passage sound like a ritual performance where speech becomes an energizing power. This manner of twisting language in order to have it say the unspeakable is reminiscent of the blues dualism. The double-voiced language – both literal and symbolic – works as a ploy that disrupts the language of the dominant culture, reshuffling it to generate a Black female-centered narrative. Simply put, the passage interweaves the voice of patriarchy and the voice of feminism. In this sense, cuisine bespeaks both female marginalization and rebellion. The familiar and gendered activity of cooking is turned into an instance of mutual emotional sharing. As the narrator states, "Sarah joined Cee's laughter with a low chuckle" (*Home*, p. 66). The terms "joined" and "echoed" emphasize the idea of female solidarity. The signifiers "laughter" and "chuckle" unveil the cathartic function of the melon ritual, that is, by allowing Cee and Sarah to release such destructive feelings as sorrow, anguish and lament.

By placing the scene of the kitchen within the broader setting of Beauregard's house, Morrison situates the Black female characters as figures of resistance encroaching on white male space. This scene represents a form of ritualistic preparation for Cee to endure her forthcoming trial. With an enigmatic tinge, the narrator thus concludes the novel's section: "Sarah slid a long, sharp knife from a drawer and, with intense anticipation of the pleasure to come, cut the girl in two." (*Home*, p.66) The passage reveals an almost sadistic tone, blending pleasure with

the blood-chilling "anticipation" of Cee's impending tragedy. The word "anticipation" works on a dual level. On the one hand, it refers to the prospects of having a delicious meal. On the other hand, it suggests that the phrase "cut the girl in two" refers to both Cee and the melon. Such a conflation foreshadows Cee's bodily trauma due to Dr. Beau's appalling experiments, as Frank lets us know: "[…] some arrogant, evil doctor sliced her up […]" (*Home*, p. 120).

Hence, the two actions – the cutting of the melon and the slicing of Cee by Dr. Beau – are interrelated. By juxtaposing the kitchen and Dr. Beau's experimental room, Morrison attempts to show how sexuality intersects with oppression and female agency. Simply put, by medically raping Cee, Dr. Beau indicates how the Black female body becomes a space where patriarchal and racialized domination is enacted. Dr. Beau's action signifies the violation of Black women's right to control their own body. Conversely, the joyful tone of the melon allegory prefigures Mrs. Ethel's victorious announcement that Cee is "mended finally" (*Home*, p. 125). Thanks to the communal assistance of the women healers of Lotus, Cee's recovery epitomizes the reclamation of Black women's right to control their body. In short, Sarah, Cee, and the community of women healers articulate the dualistic vision of the blues tradition, which shows through cuisine and medical care, transformed into an art of resistance and bodily reclamation.

3.2. Winnie's Mythic Revolution: A Yin-Yang Based Interpretation

The myth of the Kitchen God glorifies husbands at the expense of wives. It is invented by the patriarchal system of beliefs to naturalize female subservience in popular consciousness, even to present it as divinely certified. However, Weili counters the male-centered myth by criticizing the function and undeserved privileges of the Kitchen God. When Phil - Pearl's American husband – hears the story of the Kitchen God, he compares the deity to Santa Claus. Weili, on the contrary, disagrees with her son-in-law: "Hnh!" my mother huffs in a tone that implies Phil is stupid beyond words. "He is not Santa Claus" **(***KG*, p.55). The disagreement between Weili and Phil uncovers a contrast of perceptions based on cultural

differences. Pertaining to a different culture, Phil mistakenly defines Kitchen God by taking Santa Claus as a reference point. Weili's reaction serves to readjust Phil's perception of the myth. She works as a mediator to facilitate cultural understanding. In so doing, she is helping – in a figurative sense – Phil, her daughter and her grandchildren cross the cultural border back to China. This reveals the cultural tension that emerges in mixed-racial families. Living at the junction of America and China, Weili manages to ward off acculturation and restore a sense of cultural balance for her family and herself. Weili's action operates on a twofold level. While she endeavors to preserve and transmit her Chinese cultural heritage, she also approaches her tradition through critical, almost rebellious feminine eyes.

For example, the protagonist likens the cultural figure of the Kitchen God to "a spy—FBI agent, CIA, Mafia, worse than IRS, that kind of person!" (*KG*, p.55**)** To make things clearer to her listeners, Weili resorts – in her comparison - to American symbols. She goes on to explain that the Kitchen God assumes more the function of a detective and a profiteer than the expected function of protection and blessing: "And he does not give you gifts, you give him things" (*KG*, 55). Her statement seeks to debunk the paradox hidden in the Kitchen God's social role. In so doing, she emphasizes the futility of the male deity, by portraying him as a racketeer, and depicting the worship performance as an act of bribery:

> All year long you have to show him respect—give him tea and oranges. When Chinese New Year's time comes, you must give him even better things—maybe whiskey to drink, cigarettes to smoke, candy to eat, that kind of thing. You are hoping all the time his tongue will be sweet, his head a little drunk, so when he has his meeting with the big boss, maybe he reports good things about you. This family has been good, you hope he says. Please give them good luck next year (*KG*, p. 55).

The passage conveys an undertone of derision as it evokes the possible drunkenness of the deity, which downgrades his worth. Besides, the narrator implies the constraint involved in the act of worshipping, insisting on its duration – "all year long" – as well as on the uncertainty of the deity's favorable response. The notion of constraint is conveyed by the use of "have to" and "must" in relation to the idea of devotion. Families therefore

appear as trapped by their act of piety, caught in an endless circle of devotion – repeated on a yearly basis – in honor of an unfair god. By so disfiguring and demystifying the Kitchen God, Weili engages the fight on the cultural terrain as she tears down the old social construct of the Kitchen God myth. The following excerpt opens a window on the symbolic aspect of the female protagonist's struggle against the Kitchen God:

> 'And then I was thinking to myself once again — about that time she told me about the MS. Oh, I was angry, I was sad. I was blaming myself. I blamed Wen Fu. After Pearl went home, I cried. And then I saw that picture of Kitchen God, watching me, smiling …' (*KG*, p. 413).

These lines suggest an emotional contrast that reflects the dividing line between Weili and the Kitchen God. Weili's sadness - due to her awareness of Pearl's mysterious disease – stands in sharp contrast with the Kitchen God's happiness. "So happy to see me unhappy" (*KG*, p. 413), Weili says. The emotional conflict finds expression in the *happy/unhappy* opposition. The statement implies that the deity's happiness is fueled by Weili's unhappiness. Otherwise stated, the Kitchen God, so Weili deems, feeds on her sorrow. In her eyes, the deity's smiling face reads as mockery and insensitivity to her misfortunes. As a consequence, she takes "his picture out of the frame" and "put it over" her "stove" (*KG*, p. 413). The act of dislodging the Kitchen God from his original frame is symbolically significant in that it figures the repudiation and demolition of the masculinized myth. This indicates a reversal of power, a form of cultural uprising. In doing so, she deconstructs the *happy/unhappy* binary antagonism, which foregrounds the fallacy of traditional gender role, the social expectation of women's subservience.

In addition, Weili's revolutionary act operates a deferment of meaning through which the Kitchen God is given a new frame, that is, through which this emblematic figure is reinstated in a new context. This new context is marked by a reshuffling of the Kitchen God story. In this story, a man called Zhang illtreats his wife, then later throws himself into fire out of shame. Paradoxically, the Jade Emperor – a Chinese deity – later judges

Zhang and promotes him to the rank of Kitchen God instead of punishing him for his wickedness.

In consequence, Weili's mythic revolution accounts for the contestation of the Jade Emperor's verdict. Thus, Weili replicates that judgement, making sure that this time the deity undergoes his rightful fate: damnation. As she watches the Kitchen God's "smiling face being eaten up by the fire", the narrator shouts: "You go see Wen Fu! You go to hell down below!" (*KG*, p.413). The evocation of the name of Weili's first husband suggests an association, a conflation of the two characters: Wen Fu and the Kitchen God.

These two characters are so enmeshed in Weili's mind that after she burns the Kitchen God's picture, she mistakes the smoke detector alarm for the signal of Wen Fu's vengeful return: "Right then my smoke detector went off. Wanh! Wanh! Wanh! Oh, I was scared. Wen Fu—coming back to get me. That's what I thought. But then I listened again. And I knew: This was not Wen Fu's ghost. This was like a bingo blackout. This was like a Reno jackpot" (*KG*, p. 413). Both Wen Fu and The Kitchen God capture the Confucianist misogynistic ideology of Chinese culture, and remind her of women's cultural legacies of humiliation, invisibility and silence. In an attempt to re-balance the story's emotional load, the narrator re-interprets the alarm sound as a signal of victory: "this was Kitchen God's wife, shouting, Yes! Yes! Yes!" (*KG*, p. 413). In so doing, Weili re-creates the myth by restoring voice to the Kitchen God's wife. This reinterpretation stands as a metaphor of Weili's revisioning of Chinese women's status – from subservience to self-empowerment. Hence, myth re-creation becomes a site for balance and restoring Chinese women's rights. In conclusion, the disruption of the Chinese patriarchal structure through the rereading of the androcentric myth illustrates the yin-yang tension, revealing how female silence morphs into triumphant voice and agency.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study has been to examine the roles played by the blues and the yinyang as conceptual frameworks of negotiation within societies structured by a rigid and oppressive dualism. Textual analysis has established that the writers' narrative techniques are deeply shaped by the cultural legacies of the blues and yin-yang. J. Derrida's concept of binary opposition has allowed one to demonstrate how the blues and yin-yang function as tools of subversion and spaces for survival within contexts of racial and patriarchal domination. Simone de Beauvoir's feminist framework further exposes the oppression embedded in racism and patriarchal interpretations of yin-yang, thereby illuminating the ways in which key female characters reconfigure male-female power relations. In *Home*, the blues tradition resists the white/black hierarchy by transforming racial segregation into an aesthetics of healing and resilience. In *The Kitchen God's Wife*, Tan undermines the Confucianist conception of the yin-yang that categorizes women as yin (negative force) and men as yang (positive force). The yin-yang philosophy appears as a framework where navigating extremes becomes a journey toward a dynamic human search for balance and happiness.

Ultimately, the comparative study concludes that the blues and the yin-yang emerge as pathways for re-building fractured worlds and healing bruised identities. Though they stem from internally different logics and distinct cultural backgrounds, both systems enable underrepresented groups – African Americans and Chinese women – to successfully navigate their dualities. Overall, this contribution demonstrates how culture plays a decisive role in the formation of identities within oppressive societies.

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