The struggle of man against power [...] is the struggle of memory against forgetting.¹

Unlike in her first novel, *All the Blood is Red* (1996), in which Leone Ross chiefly explores the lives of three young contemporary black British women, in her second novel, *Orange Laughter* (1999), a double shift, temporal as well as spatial, has occurred.² Not only has the writer’s focus shifted to the past and especially to the damaging legacy of the past, but it has also moved to the USA. With this shift of attention from the present to the past and from Britain and Jamaica to the USA, Leone Ross, as a black British writer of mixed background, establishes a clear transnational and intertextual link to the African-American literary tradition.

Indeed, *Orange Laughter* strongly recalls the novels of several eminent African-American authors – most notably those by Toni Morrison. More particularly, themes such as haunting memories and infanticide are reminiscent of Morrison’s novel *Beloved*, while part of the setting of *Orange Laughter*, during the civil-rights movement, recalls Alice Walker’s *Meridian*. Moreover, the fact that the protagonist Tony goes underground to live in the New York subway sys-


² While in *All the Blood is Red* the issue of the inability to assimilate past experience into the present is addressed in the character of Mavis and the process of reconnecting with the past is captured in Nicola’s struggle, the novel’s emphasis is, however, on the present day and on contemporary issues. On this topic, see Petra Tournay-Theodotou, “Gender and Ethnicity in the Body Politics of Everyday Life: Leone Ross’s *All the Blood is Red,*” *Interactions: Ege Journal of English and American Studies* 16.1 (Spring 2007): 151–63.
tem evokes both the main character's submerged life in an apartment house basement in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and the protagonist's descent into the city's sewage system in Richard Wright's short novel *The Man Who Lived Underground*. *Orange Laughter* is thus replete with thematic references to literary predecessors in a veritable “mosaic of quotations.”3 With the act of recuperation of buried memories as the driving narrative force, the text furthermore shares the concerns of slave narratives or witness testimonies – hence, enters into a further dialogue with earlier genres of the African-American literary tradition.

Through this postmodern intertextual play with elements of dominant themes and issues in the works of major African-American literary figures, Ross draws on and goes beyond these texts in an effort to make her own artistic and narrative contribution to the “act of imaginative rediscovery”4 and the project of passing on silenced stories and memories.

In the following discussion, I will focus on the novel's exploration of the detrimental effects and ensuing trauma of an unassimilated past and the painful process of coming to grips with suppressed memories in order to achieve full recovery.

Alternating between chapters describing the events as they occurred in the USA of the 1960s, written from a third-person, omniscient perspective, and chapters set in the 1990s, told from a first-person point of view, the narrative oscillates not only between two narrative perspectives but also between two temporal planes. In the suspense-filled, gradual unfolding of the plot, it becomes apparent how both planes are inextricably linked and how, without acknowledging and assimilating the past, a healthy, viable present – never mind a future – remains an impossibility.

The chapters set in the late-twentieth century present the protagonist Tony's troubled voice struggling to regain access to his repressed childhood memories, captured most aptly in the stream-of-consciousness technique, omitting punctuation. Tony's run-on narrative, indeed, performs – and at times graphically enacts – his painful attempt at unearthing the repressed memories and dealing with the trauma he is suffering from. This alternation between past and present, reality and hallucinations, current events and memories also suggests Tony's fragmentation, disconnection, and lack of unity. In addition, through the narrative composition of alternating between past and present, the novel draws

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