

THE POWER OF MUSIC AS CULTURAL MEMORY IN BERNARDINE EVARISTO'S *BLONDE ROOTS*

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Abstract: *This article analyses the construction and transmission of cultural memory through the use of music and lyrics in Bernardine Evaristo's neo-slave narrative Blonde Roots. The first section introduces the term 'cultural memory' and the subsequent sections engage in close textual analysis of songs in their original version, the usage of spirituals, the creation of new songs through inspirations, and the creation of music lyrics through repetitions. My paper tries to increase the understanding of how music in Blonde Roots constructs and functions as cultural memory, and to contribute to future research on similar topics.*

Keywords: *cultural memory, lyrics, music, neo-slave narrative*

1. Introduction

"It was so stirring that the song stayed with me long after it faded into the distance. Where had I heard it before?" (Evaristo 2009:14)

Doris, the protagonist of Bernardine Evaristo's *Blonde Roots*, hears a song that awakens feelings and memories during her arrival at the plantation. The main story of *Blonde Roots* is about Doris Scagglethorpe, the daughter of a poor cabbage farmer, who is abducted from her family in England by slave traders, a reversed version of slavery, where the white people are enslaved and the black people are the enslavers. However, this neo-slave narrative is more than a satirical prose novel that imagines an alternate version of the transatlantic slave trade. This specific usage of music and sound in *Blonde Roots* establishes a rich resource for the construction of cultural memory.

2. Music as cultural memory

It was Jan and Aleida Assmann who made the social basis of collective memory their starting point and took a further step toward establishing its cultural basis. Cultural memory refers to the steps undertaken by society to ensure cultural continuity both by preserving collective knowledge for the next generations and by making "references to the past" that reassure the members of a society of their collective identity, thus creating a shared past (Assmann, Czaplicka 1995: 126). According to Jan Assmann, cultural memory has fixed points, and its horizon does not change over time. By fixed points, he refers to fateful events in the past, "whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (text, rites, monuments)

and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance)” (idem 1995: 133). Cultural memory, therefore, encompasses remembering and forgetting. Aleida Assmann (2004: 47) defines the process and multidimensionality of cultural memory by categorizing it into functional memory and memory of archive. An element of functional memory that enters the archive and vice versa is music.

Music is one of the most powerful vehicles in the construction of cultural memory. Since the beginning of human history, music has played a crucial role and has been used for political, social, and religious events, as well as for diverse gatherings. But more than that, music is an obvious continual phenomenon whose emotional impact may persist until death. Michael Pickering defines this continuity through “nostalgia”, which is also immensely influential upon the human memory:

... for both individuals and members of specific generations, the music heard in one’s youth very often forms the source material of musical nostalgia later in life. This is a widely noted phenomenon and generally referred to as the ‘reminiscence bump’. As a result of this, we do not so much forget our general past experience because of the passing of time as remember a particular span of such experience all the more intensely. (Pickering 2018:193)

This “reminiscence bump” constitutes the fixed points defined by Assmann. While Pickering (2018:191) even argues that “Songs seem to evoke memories more powerfully than written prose, because of their combination of rhyme and rhythm, tempo and timbre”, the “reminiscence bump” is cleverly interwoven in many literary works. Novels such as Gayl Jones’ *Corregidora* (1975), which is recognized as a blues novel, where she uses “call and response and repetition in dialogues between characters” (Allen 2002: 257), or Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), where “music is everywhere and all around” (Eckstein 2006: 271), more recent works like *Blonde Roots*, which uses the power of music and combines it within its narration, have not received enough critical attention. In this last novel, music works specifically for the construction of cultural memory by creating new music lyrics and using known music lyrics.

3. Songs in their original version

The use of original song lyrics or original lines in a novel enables the reader to hear them in their mind while reading the story. This experience allows the reader to understand and directly reach the message and the emotion that is evoked in the novel. Through the lyrics, the reader can find the song and also listen to the sound, and therefore become part of the scene. Furthermore, the original song lyrics in *Blonde Roots* are foreshadowing future events in the novel.

The very first use of original song lyrics is an old traditional English Ballad known as the “Scarborough Fair”. When Doris carries the food to her father, she recognizes the “child” in her father’s voice who is singing while he is working:

His heart was full of yearning, for something he’d lost or wanted to have.
Are you going to Scarborough Fayre?
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme,
Remember me to one who lives there,
She once was a true love of mine. (Evaristo 2009: 13)

Corneeltje Van Bleijswijk (2013: 91) notes that “[t]his traditional English folk song operates on many metaphorical levels, but by recalling the requirement of lovers to

fulfil a series of impossible tasks, it implies the idea that it is impossible to escape the subjugation of this kind of economic and social system". Indeed, the Scagglethorpe family and its future generations are doomed to work for the Montagues and stay in poverty. Doris remembers that they are charged for extras by using Montague's "...cart to go to market or using his grain mill or bread oven, which, if we had poor harvests, meant a debt carried over on our annual accounts for several years" (Evaristo 2009: 8). Doris's heart, however "crumbled" because she realizes for the first time that her father is a sad and miserable person rather than the humorous man he usually pretends to be.

Similarly to Morrison (1987), who in *Beloved* foreshadows a traumatic event in her protagonists' life with a children's song, Evaristo uses a lullaby. During her pregnancies, Doris makes use of her cultural memory by singing nursery rhymes from her own culture:

Little Bo Peep has lost her sheep
And doesn't know where to find them.
Leave them alone, and they'll come home
Bringing their tails behind them. (Evaristo 2009: 22)

Here, Doris represents the unfortunate shepherd, a humble figure who is isolated from human society, and who is near poverty. David Clines (1998: 17) comments on this rhyme, stating that it is a tale "of the downfall of one who is originally a merely unfortunate shepherd but who soon becomes a wilful and deliberate loser of sheep, an unshepherdly shepherd. The circumstances are against her: her sheep have gone missing". Bo Peep ignores the reality that she will have to tell her master that she has lost his property and that she is going to be punished. Reflecting on Clines' analysis here, Doris is an unfortunate mother who is soon going to lose her children. She, like Bo Peep, is dependent on the owner of her children, the plantation master, Bwana. In contrast to Bo Peep, Doris is not careless, but she is unable to recognize the master's economic intentions concerning her babies. When Doris's children are sold away, she is not able to find out where they are, and she has to accept their absence. While Bo Peep, however, finds her sheep, Doris will never be reunited with her children. Doris's pregnancy makes her remember and use the nursery rhyme, which is an element of her cultural memory, but the slave system does not allow her to transmit it to her children.

Another folk song and nursery rhyme that serves as foreshadowing the future is "Lavender's Blue". While the original version dates back to the 17th century England and is usually very "bawdy" (Waltz, Engle 2021: 1), Doris uses this rhyme to tease her elderly sister Sharon, who dreams romantically of a prince on a white horse that will come to rescue her. Doris remembers singing:

Lavender blue, diddle daddle
Lavender green,
When he is king, diddle daddle
You shan't be queen. (2009: 48)

Doris sings especially this rhyme, because Sharon's eye colour is lavender blue. Although Sharon dreams of becoming a princess one day, she ends up being enslaved and the concubine of Bwana, the man who enslaved her whole family and

caused their death and sufferings. Sharon becomes a kind of queen, but a concubine queen, on the slave plantation.

Consequently, all music lyrics, lullabies, and songs should be read and analysed with caution. The lyrics are carrying hints and hidden messages. Lyrics with a message are not a new phenomenon. Evaristo makes use of this method, which was helping enslaved people to communicate with each other secretly. The following section presents the way gospel songs delivered messages and how Evaristo applied this in her novel.

4. The function of spirituals

Not only Doris, but also other characters in *Blonde Roots* are singing songs. Evaristo has no limits and includes gospel songs, English ballads, lullabies, and unique songs, created for the novel. While the unique songs are creative and underlining the story, other well-known songs create a sense of familiarity and certain emotions, present in those songs. Besides the feelings and the messages involved in the lyrics, this intertextual approach, by storing and transmitting the song, functions as a part of cultural memory. Some of the chapters in *Blonde Roots* are named after original songs, such as “Oh Lord, Take me Home”, “The Gospel Train”, “Oh Sweet Chariot”, “A Balm in Gilead” and “Wade in the Water” and give hints for the following events.

The first chapter of Book One is titled “Oh Lord, Take me Home”. In this chapter, Doris is a grown-up woman and receives a note from the Resistance, an anti-slavery organization, that she can escape her enslavement. During her escape, however, Doris describes her present condition as a slave and remembers her past as a serf’s daughter. The title “Oh lord, Take me Home” does not reappear in the text itself, but summarizes Doris’ yearning for freedom and home as well as of many other enslaved people in the novel. The title “Oh Lord, Take me Home” recalls “Take My Hand, Precious Lord” (1938), a gospel song written by the African American musician, composer, and Rev. Thomas A. Dorsey. As Michael Hawn (2019: 1) notes, “many hymns are conceived in the throes of tragedy”; the lyrics for “Precious Lord” were written after the death of Dorsey’s wife, Nettie, and infant son during childbirth. The lyrics of the three stanzas capture the grief of people who have experienced loss:

Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn
Thru the storm, thru the night, lead me on to the light
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

When my life is almost gone
Hear my cry, hear my call, hold my hand lest I fall
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

And the day is past and gone
At the river I stand, guide my feet, hold my hand
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

As the opening lines suggest, there is someone in pain, who reaches out for help and who walks through a “storm”; similarly, Doris fears the consequences of her escape. While the second stanza continues with a journey symbolized by the “long

road”, in the third stanza the singer reaches the final destination, which is the river – “at the river I stand”, and which is going to carry the person back home. Doris too, at the end of her journey, has to reach the ocean for her final step to freedom.

Another gospel song title, “The Gospel Train”, is given to the second chapter, which is still describing Doris’s attempt to escape. Doris meets the Conductor and reaches the Underground Railroad of the city, which does not work officially and is secretly used by the anti-slavery Resistance to carry enslaved people. Cross (2010: 27) writes that the Underground Railroad in history was a network of secret routes and safe houses established in the United States during the early to mid-19th century, used by enslaved people to escape into Free states. People who helped the enslaved people were former slaves or “just hated slavery” (Ford 2004: 24) and were usually called Conductors. The title “The Gospel Train” is inspired by a real traditional African American spiritual, called “The Gospel Train” or “Get on Board, Little Children”, published in 1872 and written by John Chamberlain, a Baptist minister from New Hampshire (Carter 1906: 461). The most prominent version is as follows:

Chorus:

Get on board, little children,
 Get on board, little children,
 Get on board, little children,
 There’s room for many-a more.
 The Gospel train’s a-coming,
 I hear it just at hand,
 I hear the car wheels rumbling
 And rolling through the land

[To Chorus]

I hear the train a-coming,
 A-coming’ round the curve,
 She loosened all her steam and brakes,
 She is straining every nerve.

[To Chorus]

The fair is cheap and all can go,
 The rich and poor are there,
 No second class aboard this train,
 No difference in the fare.

[To Chorus]

While this kind of spirituals allowed enslaved people to communicate through hidden codes, “The Gospel Train” became a symbol for the Underground Railroad, resembling a fast means of transportation away from enslavement. The “children” (Chorus, line 1) are the enslaved people, the information that the train is about to arrive is given by the “wheels rumbling” (stanza 1, line 3), and “I hear the train a-coming, A-coming’ round the curve” (stanza 2, line 2-3); this is also a secret message that a conductor is among them. This chapter, therefore, announces Doris’s escape from slavery, but this time she travels literally by a real underground railroad.

A similar gospel song, which is about freedom and is connected to the Underground Railroad, is “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot”; this is close to the title of the first chapter of Book Three in *Blonde Roots*, “Oh Sweet Chariot”. In this chapter, Doris is on a ship and is carried towards freedom. It is the first time when Doris is hopeful - “I was going home, oh Lord” (2009: 163). The song, according to *Hymnary.org*, runs as follows:

Refrain:
 Swing low, sweet chariot,
 Coming for to carry me home.
 Swing low, sweet chariot,
 Coming for to carry me home.

 I looked over Jordan, and what did I see,
 Coming for to carry me home.
 A band of angels coming after me,
 Coming for to carry me home. Oh, [Refrain]

Like “The Gospel Train”, this spiritual is loaded with secret messages for the enslaved people. The “sweet chariot” (Refrain, line 1) refers to the Underground Railroad, which “swing[s] low” (Refrain, line 1) and arrives from the North. Doris’s “sweet chariot”, in this chapter, however, is a ship. “Coming for to carry me home”, a line that is repeated twice in every stanza, announces that an enslaved person is going to be carried to freedom soon. While “I looked over Jordan” (stanza 1, line 1) stands for the Mississippi or the Ohio rivers, Doris’s ship is also moving on a river. Evaristo’s description of the river recalls Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), foreshadowing that Doris is still in danger:

Waterborne creatures rippled in the river.
 Airborne creatures flapped around me.
 The darkness wrapped me up.
 The darkness held me.
 The darkness carried me. (2009: 162)

The gloomy description as well as the repetition of the word “darkness” suggest that she is carried to the unknown. While darkness does not scare black enslaved people (Morrison (1987: 55) writes, for example, that Sethe is “not so afraid at night because she is the color of it”), Doris is white-skinned and the darkness surrounding her represents her unknown scary journey. However, like “a band of angels” (stanza 1, line 2) mentioned in the lyrics, which were the people who volunteered for the Underground Railroad (Liebergen 2005: 143), there are also people on the ship who provide shelter, food, and guidance to Doris.

“A Balm in Gilead” is the title of the fifth chapter of Book three in *Blonde Roots* and it refers to the spiritual bearing the same title. Doris finds herself at Sunday prayers, in a cave with the congregation and a white slave priest, who conducts Ambossan rituals proceeds with Christian rituals known from Europa that are evocative for Doris; she experiences: “It was heavenly. For a moment I was back singing ‘Loving Shepherd of Thy Sheep’ accompanied by the old organist Mr. Braithwaite inside the damp chapel at St. Michael’s Church, surrounded by a family I’d taken for granted until I lost them” (Evaristo 2009: 201).

Besides hearing the old church hymn, Doris feels the smell of incense, which is described as heavenly, and which also helps her to remember her past; and soon she finds herself “praying in a public place of worship to my own God” (2009: 202). In particular, religious rituals are important for communities, in order to carry on cultural memory. Since the balm of Gilead is known in many cultures literally as a rare healing potion, this collective singing activity is not only Doris’s balm, but also the “balm” for all enslaved people who endure the horrors of slavery. The original lyrics to “There is a Balm in Gilead”, which was sung as an African American spiritual, underlines the process of healing:

Refrain:

There is a Balm in Gilead
To make the wounded whole,
There is a Balm in Gilead
To heal the sin-sick soul.

Sometimes I feel discouraged
And think my work’s in vain,
But then the Holy Spirit
Revives my soul again.

[to Refrain]

Don’t ever feels discouraged,
For Jesus is your friend;
And if you lack for knowledge,
He’ll ne’er refuse lend.

[to Refrain]

If you cannot sing like Peter,
If you cannot preach like Paul,
You can tell the love of Jesus
And say, “He died for all.”

[to Refrain]

The refrain encourages hope for those who are desperate. Rather than to list the inhuman conditions and sufferings of slavery, the refrain mentions a spiritual illness, “sin-sick soul”, (refrain, line 4). Michael Hawn (2019:1) notes the connection of the balm with religion by focusing on Matthew Henry’s (1662-1714) explanation for the balm in Gilead: “The blood of Christ is a balm in Gilead, his Spirit is the Physician there, all-sufficient; so that the people may be healed, but will not. Thus [they] die unpardoned and unchanged, for they will not come to Christ to be saved”. Indeed Henry’s reading of the Old Testament text is reflected in the stanzas of “The Balm in Gilead”. Other people, such as “Peter” and “Paul”, are mentioned by name “for their capabilities in preaching and prayer, respectively” (ibid.). The lyrics reflect Doris’ experience: she is praying in a public place of worship to her own God for the first time since her enslavement. The worship is a balm to her heart and stirs up the feeling of belonging, hope, and healing.

“Wade in the Water” is the title of the last chapter of Book Three of *Blonde Roots*. It is known that “Wade in the Water” is an African American jubilee song, highly associated with songs of the Underground Railroad (Bradford 2008: 8). According to Steve Sullivan (2017), this song was first published in the 1901 edition of “New Jubilee Songs as Sung by the Fisk Jubilee Singers”, when it was already an “anthem” for the enslaved people:

Refrain:
 Wade in the water,
 wade in the water, children,
 wade in the water.
 God’s gonna trouble the water.

1 See that host all dressed in white,
 God’s gonna trouble the water.
 The leader looks like the Israelite.
 God’s gonna trouble the water.

[Refrain]

2 See that band all dressed in red, ...
 Looks like the band that Moses led.

3 If you don’t believe I’ve been redeemed, ...
 Just follow me down to Jordan’s stream.

Here the song lyrics present the “Israelitis’ escape out of Egypt” and, “according to a legend”, Harriet Tubman too instructed the enslaved people to “get off the trail and into the water” to avoid the dogs of the enslaver (Sullivan 2017: 387). Similarly, in this chapter, Doris has enough support to try to escape and lead a group of slaves into freedom. Her courage and determination mark her survival instinct and her success. In this way, she becomes a heroic figure and a legend that constructs cultural memory.

Although the gospel song lyrics do not appear in the novel, they are still used as titles for several chapters. With the use or close use of well-known gospel songs, Evaristo prepares the reader for the following events. Not only does the reader have background music playing in mind while reading the chapter, but s/he is also able to guess the emotions that the story is going to evoke. Evaristo keeps up with this construction when she creates new songs inspired by well-known songs.

5. The creation of new songs

Evaristo does not hesitate to mix and play with European and African elements. As a result, not only does Doris find plenty of exotic food while she walks through the streets of Londolo, but she also sees cabbage and potatoes and suddenly comes upon popular coffee houses called Starbright. The same colourful and playful attitude continues over the whole novel and is also present in the music lyrics. Doris finds herself intermingling traditional music from her own culture with the culture of their master in order to create new songs.

At the plantation of Bwana, called “Home Sweet Home,” which also recalls the plantation name “Sweet Home” in Morrison’s *Beloved*, Doris is finally able to

meet and communicate with other enslaved people. As soon as she arrives, Doris recognizes that she is going to be close to her own culture: when the cart she is in rolls past the field workers, Doris can hear the women sing while working:

Gahd save we grashus chief
 Long live we nobel chief
 Gahd save we chief
 Send him victorias
 Happee and glorias
 Long to rane ova us Gahd save ... (2009: 175-176)

The song that the women are singing influences Doris immensely, and she finds it “so stirring that the song stayed with me long after it faded into the distance” (2009: 176). Moreover, the song stirs a memory, and Doris asks herself, “[w]here had I heard it before?” (ibid.). The song is a version of the British national anthem, and Doris senses a familiarity, for it is as if she is remembering something that she had known before, a feeling of familiarity that is stirred by her cultural memory.

After some time, Doris starts working in the fields herself. Again, singing is prominently influential upon emotions. Doris describes the scene:

Out there in the fields the vibrations of sound reverberated from deep within our bellies with a power to match our physical exertions. We had to be loud enough to be heard in an outdoor space filled with a chorus of a cappella voices, and we were always so full of soul because we poured our hearts into the music. Even the overseers and drivers could sometimes be spied gazing off into the middle distance, as if transported.
 The newly arrived Border Landers among us broke down when we sang:

Shud ole akwaintance be forget
 An neva bring to mind
 Should ole akwaintance be forget
 An ole lang zine... (2009: 215)

As Laurie Treat (2019: 1) points out, “the power of singing as an individual and group provides significant mental and physical well-being”. While singing as a community, the enslaved people can announce their suffering through their voices.

Indeed, a lot of artists and academicians do not deny the healing power of singing. Robert Switzer (2001: 1) notes that “Doubtless it is part of the captivating mystery of the blues experience that it feels good to sing the blues, and to listen; that one is feeling bad, but somehow feeling good about it”. The field slaves are singing from their hearts and even the overseers are touched. Although the feeling that music evokes is much more prominent than the lyrics, it is no coincidence that the word “forget” is used twice. Contrary to forgetting the past by singing about it, the enslaved people are remembering their families and culture.

Another song inspired and changed according to its purpose is sung for the arrival of the master Bwana at the plantation. All enslaved people are dressed in their “Sunday best” and are enforced in a joyful welcome, singing a song in a chorus (2009: 250):

Yu iz we sunshine
 We onlee sunshine.

Yu mek we happee
 When skes iz gray.
 You neva know, Bwand
 How much we loves yu.
 Please don't tek we sunshine away. (2009: 251)

The original song is called "You are my Sunshine" and it became famous with Jimmie Davis and Charles Mitchell in 1939. According to Colin Larkin (2007: 34), the song "has been recorded by so many artists over the years that it is reputed that its copyright is the most valuable in the country music". While this popular song is usually categorized as a love song or a children's song, it is ironically sung by the enslaved people for a person who was the reason for their trauma and suffering.

Music creates an opportunity to express feelings that the singer may not be able to put in words. *Blonde Roots'* enslaved people take the songs of their own culture and create new songs for diverse purposes. A national anthem may well be turned into a work song for the fields or a children's song can be applied to praise the master. With minor changes of the original lyrics and the application of the vernacular language, Evaristo has successfully created new songs from the original songs. However, some practices enable the creation of unique songs to present the emotions of the characters.

6. The creation of music lyrics through repetition

During her first attempt to escape from slavery, Doris introduces her memories of her family into the narrative, starting with "I AM PROUD TO DECLARE that I come from a long line of cabbage farmers" (2009: 7). Doris incorporates other stories into her narration by using hints such as, "the story goes that" (2009: 17), or "I'd not seen it, but I'd heard the stories" (2009: 210), thereby turning herself into a storyteller. She continues to share her memories as part of an oral tradition. Doris grows up with the joy of music and rhythm, when their "NIGHTS WERE SPENT singing songs", which also influences her storytelling (2009: 55). Moreover, besides her poetic voice and account of her memories, Doris creates music lyrics with repetitions of words or phrases.

Doris' repetitions while remembering certain events in the past creates the illusion of a song. This is a phenomenon "in which a spoken phrase is perceptually transformed to sound like a song rather than speech, simply by repeating it several times over" and which is called "speech-to-song illusion" (Deutsch et al. 2014: 2245). Doris uses repetitions especially when she needs to present and signal the intensity of her emotions. Rather than list the things she missed from her childhood, she starts her sentences with "how I longed":

But oh, how I longed for those cloudy gray skies.
 How I longed for the incessant drizzle and harsh wind slapping my ears.
 How I longed for my snug winter woollies and sturdy wooden clogs.
 How I longed for Mam's warm dripping sandwiches and thick pumpkin broth.
 How I longed for the fire crackling in the hearth and our family singsong around it.
 How I longed for the far northern district from whence I was taken.
 How I longed for England.
 How I longed for home. (2009: 7)

The words “how I longed” do not only focus on Doris’ feelings, but also have a trancelike effect upon the reader. However, Doris does not hesitate to shift the focus to other characters as well. When she is on the ship with the other enslaved people, Doris tries to explain how much a mother longs for her daughter and how she tries to find consolation for her separation from her biological daughter:

I was the girl her child might have become.
 When she stroked my cheek, it was her daughter’s.
 When she looked into my eyes, she didn’t see me.
 When she spoke, it was to Rosie-May.
 In the absence of family, we all became surrogates. (2009: 81)

Doris creates here the song of a mother who laments the death of her daughter. Doris as a child herself observes the pain of the mother’s actions “when she stroked”, “when she looked”, “when she spoke” (81). The reader can observe the mothers’ suffering and the repetitions strengthen her depiction as someone whose contact with external reality is lost.

Another speech-to-song illusion is created with the repetition of single words or questions. Doris’s mind is sometimes wandering around and her worries construct a rhythm of a song:

Madge. Sharon. Alice.
 Beloved. Beloved. Beloved.
 Slave or dead? Slave or dead? Dead or slave?
 Not knowing their fate put my sleep on the torture rack for years. (2009: 46)

While each of her sisters is called “Beloved”, Doris’s main concern is her uncertainty about her sister’s fate. The use of “Beloved” recalls Toni Morrison’s novel, *Beloved*, which is a “musical” neo-slave narrative that displays the consequences of slavery upon black women, men, and children alike (Eckstein 2006: 217). The repetition of specific words and the wordplay recalls *Beloved* and therefore musically reflects trauma and death.

Doris repeats words, phrases, or whole lines, creating the impression of a song. As a result, when Doris remembers her past, it goes beyond a poetic voice and the reader can listen to Doris’s song lyrics.

7. Conclusion

The application of music and song in *Blonde Roots* is Evaristo’s way to deliver not only emotions and feelings, but also hidden messages and hints. By using known songs, ballads, or lullabies, she creates intertextuality; as a result of Evaristo’s giving her chapters the title of gospel songs, transforming well-known songs into new songs, creating unique songs through repetitions, the novel emerges as a musical neo-slave narrative. Moreover, with the utilization of music as a “reminiscence bump”, Evaristo is able to apply music and song for the transition of cultural memory. The songs or hints of songs remind the reader of a feeling and message that are already collectively constructed and continue to exist as a work of literature. Consequently, besides many other descriptions, Evaristo’s *Blonde Roots* deserves to be pointed out as a unique musical novel.

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