

**WRITING THE OTHER:  
A STUDY OF RACE, GENDER AND MARGINALITY  
IN TONI MORRISON'S FICTION**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH**



**BY  
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**TO  
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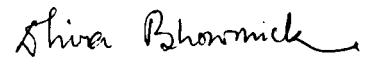
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**DECLARATION**


I, **Dhira Bhowmick**, hereby declare that the subject matter of the thesis entitled “**Writing the Other: A Study of Race, Gender and Marginality in Toni Morrison’s Fiction**” is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form the basis of award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to any body else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.

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***Dedicated to my father Lt. Mr. P K. Bhowmick***

*Toni Morrison's voice transcends colour and creed and she has become one of America's outstanding post-war writers... A great story teller ... Her characters have amazing and terrible pasts – they must find them out, or be haunted by them ... One who begins not so much with ideas and characters, but, like a Whitman or even a Bellow, with a voice and words*

*James Wood*

## Chapter I

### Introduction

Considering the fact that both writing and reading require “being alert and ready for unaccountable beauty... being mindful of the places where imagination sabotages itself, locks its own gates, pollutes its vision” (1993: xiii), Toni Morrison interrogates and documents white America’s literary representation of ‘race’ and ‘gender’ in her work *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1993). It is indeed difficult for a writer like Morrison to transcend the boundaries of ‘race’ and ‘gender’, for she is the product of a community that has been historically and creatively subjected to racism and marginalization. As an African-American and a woman writer, Morrison’s writerly position is constantly challenged. As she maintains, “My work requires me to think about how free I can be as an African-American woman writer in my genderized, sexualized, wholly racialized world. To think about (and wrestle with) the full implications of my situation leads me to consider what happens when other writers work in a highly and historically racialized society. For them, as for me, imagining is not merely looking or looking at; nor is it taking oneself intact into the other. It is, for the purposes of the work, *becoming*” (1993:4). The process of *becoming* is directly related to the author’s *situatedness*. The authorial location is self-reflexive to questions such as: Is a writer’s imagination (belonging to a minority culture) neutral to ‘race’ and ‘gender’? Is there any reading position that is free from biases of racism and gender? To Morrison, both the writerly and readerly positions in

American literature are not free from contestations as the American imagination implicitly or explicitly is not free from the problematic of 'race' and 'gender'. The present study has attempted to explore the problematic of 'race' and 'gender' in the context of the American literary culture with reference to the works of Toni Morrison.

Toni Morrison, the first African-American writer to win Nobel Prize for literature in 1993, was born as Chloe Anthony Wofford, the second of the four children, in Lorain, Ohio in 1931. Both her parents Ramah (Willis) and George Wofford came from southern families. After graduating from Howard University where she changed her name to Toni, she earned a master's degree from Cornell University in 1955, writing a thesis on Faulkner and Virginia Woolf. The same year she started teaching at Texas Southern University. A year later she joined the Howard University faculty. In 1957, she married Harold Morrison, a Jamaican architect and the former Chloe Wofford now became Toni Morrison. The marriage was dissolved in 1965 and Morrison left teaching to join the Random House as an editor. In 1967 she became the senior Editor for Random House, and published the works of many African-American writers: Leon Forrest, Gayl Jones, Toni Cade Bambara, Angela Davis, Muhammad Ali, Ivan Van Sertima, Andrew Young, Henry Dumas and John Mc Cluskey. She published her first novel *The Bluest Eye* in 1970. It was followed by *Sula* in 1973, *Song of Solomon* in 1977, *Tar Baby* in 1981, *Dreaming Emmett* a play in 1986, *Beloved* in 1987, *Jazz* in 1992 and *Paradise* in 1998. Besides the novels, she has also produced an important critical work, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* in 1992. Morrison has also edited an

anthology of essays on Clarence Thomas – Anita Hill controversy titled *Racing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas and the Constitution of Social Reality* (1992). As a teacher of American and English literature and a successful editor, Morrison has brought into her work the alertness of an academic and the finesse of a literary editor. Apart from winning the Nobel Prize for literature in 1993, she won the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for her work *Beloved*, the 1978 National Critics Circle Award for fiction and the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award for *Song of Solomon*. She was the first African-American woman to appear on the cover of *Newsweek*. She has achieved professorial status with Schweitzer Chair at the State University of New York, Albany, and later on the Robert F. Goheen Chair, Council of Humanities, Princeton University.

Racial and cultural marginalization has been to a large extent the story of human history. Under different mechanisms of control and suppression it has taken different forms. For example, class marginalization have taken religious, economic and socio-political forms in the USA as well as in other multicultural countries like India (where caste is also a category of differentiation) evolving into norms and practices. In the process the marginalized never gets out of the discursive discourse as a subject and s/he gets ensnared in what Adorno calls as a practice of hegemonic control. In the process the marginalized loses identity, in a history that is already always appropriated by the dominant group. Thus the discourse of the marginalized performs under a dialectical mode in which loss of history and self-possession result in loss of cultural and other identities. Contesting some of the prevailing

assumptions regarding the Afro-American's identity in the melting pot of America, Michael Eric Dyson hopes: "to disrupt traditional notions of race and to interrogate how race, class and gender get constructed in ways that reinforce structures of domination" (Olson and Worsham 1999:xiii). The discourse of marginality needs to be translated into a discourse of disruption and resistance. It is in this sense narratives offer the space to articulate resistance. Thus 'race' and 'gender' relations need not be debated only as political and social issues, but also as narrative representations. This precisely is the concern of Morrison in her fictional works in that she has never idealized blackness nor has she demonized whiteness, but as she maintains: "I am a black writer struggling with and through a language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive "othering" of people and language which are by no means marginal or already and completely known and knowable in my work" (1993: xii-xiii). The discourse of marginality is aligned to the concepts of race and gender in their constructions and deconstructions, which constitute the core of the thesis.

'Race' as a concept and construct has been central to the Euro-centric discourse of "otherness". Constituted in the Hegelian binary thesis of *self/Other*, over the centuries, it has taken different forms in different cultural and national discourses. Although the concept of 'race' is as old as human civilization, racism has been a product of European colonial expansion. Either privileged or subordinated race as a category of classification of *difference* is subsumed in the affirmation of popular, scientific and political assumptions. Naomi Zack says, "modern concepts of race derive from eighteenth- and nineteenth-

century pseudoscience that rationalized European colonialism and chattel slavery.” (1996: x). Europeans invented the idea of biological race after they enslaved Africans as a part of their strategy to rationalize a crime that was already under way. David Brion Davis also says, “responsible scientists have long discredited any biological or genetic definition of racial groups” (1997: 7). According to him, the groups that we call races are “social constructions” that exist only because of our ideas, beliefs, and practices. As a consequence, the history and the views of the oppressed are erased/appropriated attributing to them inferior and indeed animal like status. To be born as a black, a Negro or an African is to represent according to this discourse, all the negative attributes of the human species. The relation between “racial character” and certain types of characteristics was inscribed through tropes of race, “lending the sanction of God, biology, or the natural order to even presumably unbiased descriptions of cultural tendencies and differences” (Gates, Jr., 1986: 5).

The history of slavery in the Americas has taken different forms but what is significant for us is its textualization. What is of particular importance is that in the United States racism has become an instrument of reinforcing the white American sense of superiority, while suppressing and brutalizing a race of people deprived of history and identity. Thus the Negro in the white American imagination emerged as a stereotype that was culturally institutionalized. While interrogating the representation of the Negro in white literary works, Toni Morrison attempts to place him in a wider canvas not erasing his history, but pleading for an alternative approach in locating his voice and identity. Although creative literature is considered to be emancipatory, often the so-called

humane and emancipatory aspirations of literature get trapped in the author's biases and prejudices. How does literature behave in its encounter with 'racism', then, becomes a relevant question? Morrison is concerned with the textualization of 'race' in order to explore how literature implicates and imbricates race and literalizes racism.

Silence and evasion have been the twin strategies adopted by scholars in matters of literary discourse on 'race'. The question of race is either ignored on the ground that colonial literature responds to universal human condition or its inevitability is ensured through silence allowing the dominated, subject race to participate in the white cultural discourse. Although a non-white presence was created in the narrative discourses of American mainstream literature it was mostly self-serving. In the context of America, the Africanist presence offered both romanticisation and a redress to a deep sense of insecurity. However, during the early decades of the last century, the Afro-American creative writing challenged the assumption that African species of men could not create formal literature and master the "arts and sciences".

Writing, among other things, is taken as the visible sign of reason. Enlightenment as the culmination of the march of reason delimits and circumscribes the humanity of culture and people of colour while preaching universalism. In the literary texts produced by the whites the blacks were relegated to the lowest place in the 'great chain of being'. "Writing," says Henry Louis Gates Jr., "for these slaves, was not an activity of mind; rather it was a commodity which they were forced to trade for their humanity" (1986: 9). The ideological environment in which Black writing emerged is one in which other

race specific texts of the period were marked by a single priority—the social and political empowerment of Black Americans. Charles Hamilton along with Carmichael in *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* asked to read the violent eruptions in the Ghettos as narratives of political desire. Social change was represented as appropriation and modification of African modes of dress and signs of national identity. There was linguistic resistance to cultural domination marked by displacement of 'standard English' viewed as the language of the dominant. Christian liturgy was rewritten and reinvented in which traditional religious symbolism was replaced by radical signs of Black culture. In spite of the vehement attempt at creating an alternative discourse, Black writing in America remains a hybrid cultural experience. It is neither completely African nor completely European, both traditions contributed to the birth of a complex genre called Black writing. Toni Morrison has inherited this heritage and in her unique way has contributed immensely to this tradition. Besides race she has been concerned with gender. The second chapter of the present study therefore deals with "narrating gender".

Elaine Showalter believes that a feminist theory based "on a model of women's culture... can provide a more complete and satisfying way to talk about the specificity and difference of women's writing" (1982:72). While accepting that a "cultural theory acknowledges that there are important differences between women as writers" and that these differences include class, race, nationality, and history as "literary determinants as significant as gender" (1982: 27), Showalter, along with other white feminist critics, fails to take this proposition to its logical conclusion—that feminist criticism can be

further defined through these cultural differences. Such a definition is implicit in the literary explications of Toni Morrison. Because of the evolving and increasing complexity of Morrison's works the discussions if any on her works need to encompass possibilities other than literary considerations. Although a sensitivity to the issues of women's reality initially unifies Morrison's works, the schism of individual racial and cultural perspectives eventually distinguish them.

Criticism and theory on feminist discourse underline *difference* and welcomes alterity. Although the concept of Black Feminism is problematic nevertheless it is a discourse that is constructed on *difference* within a *difference*. Alice Walker, a prominent Afro-American woman writer rejects the term *feminist* and replaces it with *womanist*, asserting that one is 'womanist' when one is "committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female" (1983: pxi). In her work, *In Search of Our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose* (1983), she identifies black female creativity in the earlier generations, through folk art, including quilting, music and gardening. Black writers such as Walker looks at figures like Zora Neale Hurston (1906), the writers of Harlem Renaissance and folklorists who insisted on the connection between folktales and other artistic pursuits of black women that led to the creation of black womanist literature. Although approaches to other black women feminists are quite varied, Toni Morrison is part of a nascent group of black women writers, who are concerned with the conditions of black women. Morrison along with Alice Walker, Paule Marshall, Audre Lorde, Toni Cade Bambara, Maya Angelou, Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni and Gayl Jones

directs her gaze on subject matters previously marginalized in literature i.e., black women and their worlds.

In an interview with Claudia Tate (1983), Morrison underlines differences in writing strategies that characterize the works of black women:

Aggression is not as new to black women as it is to white women. Black women seem able to combine the nest and the adventure. They don't see conflicts in certain areas as do white women. They are both safe harbor and ship; they are both inn and trail. We black women do both. We do not find these places, these roles, mutually exclusive...

There's male/female thing that's also different in the works of black and white women writers, and this difference is good. There's a special kind of domestic perception that has its own violence in the writings of black women not bloody violence, but violence nonetheless. Love, in the Western notion, is full of possession, distortion, and corruption. It is a slaughter without the blood (Bill Moyers, pbs video 1992:161 –162).

For Morrison, the development of black fiction becomes important as an articulation of resistance as well as reconstruction. For the African-American writer, fiction has been the most dominant form of articulating 'race'. Contextualizing 'race' in the form of fictional narratives, white American writers have considered racism as a narrative recipe for domination of the Other through rhetorical devices. These devices ensure division at the level of phoneme, sentence and story. The fear of merging or loss of identity through synergistic union with the Other uses the idea of racial purification as a strategy against difference. It is evident that the literature of the United States, like its history, represents commentary on the transformations of biological, ideological, and metaphysical concepts of racial difference.

This socio-cultural frame of reference has ensured that literature redistributes and mutates in figurative language the social conventions of

Africanism. It is in this sense 'race' is a text. Its intertext unfolds into a tense interface between categories such as domination/marginalization, appropriation/resistance, history/historylessness. The textuality of 'race' is further conflated in the linguistic response to Africanism. A writer's response to American-Africanism often provides a subtext that either sabotages the surface text's expressed intentions or escapes them through a language that mystifies what it cannot bring to articulation. Morrison feels that the linguistic responses to Africanism serve the text by further problematizing its matter through resonance, where language becomes allegorical. As a black author Morrison's writerly position is not to simplify the narrative, but to comprehend the limits of narrative art in order to deal with a complex and problematic category like 'race', particularly, in the American context. In other words, her strategy has been to give her texts a deeper, richer, more complex life than the sanitized one commonly presented to the reader. Morrison's abiding concern has been not to present a particular writer's attitude to 'race', but to explore and examine the larger question of a non-white Africanist presence and the construction of its personae.

It is in this context that 'gender' cannot be considered as an isolated category from 'race'. Like racism, gendered spaces also victimize and marginalize. As an African-American and a woman writer, Morrison's authorial position is very challenging. As an author, she is alert to the validity and vulnerability of her assumptions about 'race' and 'gender'. As with 'race', 'gender' differences are socially constructed. Sex is a term that can be used to indicate the biological differences between men and women, but 'gender'

signifies the socially constructed differences that operate in most societies, which lead to forms of inequality, oppression and exploitation between the sexes.

Approaches to 'race' and 'gender' by other black feminists are quite varied. The autobiographies of black women, especially in slave narratives, have been important to many. Audre Lorde asks us to seek "the Black mother in each of us"; that is, to rely on "intuitive" language rather than analysis and see African culture's emphasis upon the mother-bond as an alternative to white patriarchal culture's way of *thinking* (1984.13). In *Inspiring Influences: Tradition, Revision, and Afro-American Women's Novels* (1989), Michael Awkward makes an important distinction between the ways black female writers influence each other and the way male writers do. Awkward points out that black female writers carry out their relationships as mothers, daughters, sisters and aunts rather than sons vying with fathers. From *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970) to *The Heart of a Woman* (1981), Angelou emphasizes African-American women's condition; their violation and betrayal by men, guilt at their own perceived betrayals of their race, the life of the single mother, their sense of displacement, their experimenting with cultural identities, and the continuing process of self-discovery.

A considerable body of criticism produced by both male and female black scholars revolved around questions of representing blackness or, more broadly, the black experience. Those who follow an anti-essentialist position attempt to retrieve the black voice distancing it from 'race'. Whether essentialised or not, race is important for recording black experience and

unearthing authentic black voice of slavery and the historical consequence of racism through institutionalisation of it. Morrison is alert to the problematic of race. Unlike Angelou, Morrison puts very little of her own life into her own writing. But she connects her texts to earlier stories and incidents. In that, she creates a special narrative through intertextuality and attempts to move beyond the stereotype.

Some African-American critics try to underline that Morrison's novels invert familiar myths and stereotypes of black women. For example, de Weever (1991) argues that Morrison evokes a range of mythical mother figures, such as that of the nurturing mother who devours her children as a reaction to the stereotype of the black mother (134). The black Mammy is the legendary figure of sentimental novels and popular films, obedient, obliging, cheerful, resilient and resourceful. It is a stereotype created by white writing. As such the black mother provides a powerful example how inherited Euro-American language organizes and shapes our perceptions of black people. It is understood that any black writer must subvert this stereotype. The Euro-American stereotype forced black women to function chiefly as mothers ignoring many other dimensions and strengths of them. These qualities rather than simply a desire to subvert stereotypes drive Morrison's characterizations of black women.

Each of Morrison's novels embodies diverse and broad social background and becomes increasingly open in form. Epiphany, both embraced and turned from, becomes more of a necessity than a possibility in each novel. *The Bluest Eye* presents the world from a child's point of view. It is the story of three black schoolgirls, the sisters Claudia and Frieda and their friend Pecola,

growing up in Ohio. Claudia, who tells much of the story, is a strong-willed eight-year-old. Pecola, her eleven-year-old friend, thinks that her life would be perfect if only she could have blue eyes. *Sula* presents black girlhood and adulthood. The relationship between Nel Wright and Sula Peace is unique. Even as little girls, they are bound together by a terrible secret. Sula leaves town and returns several years later, and betrays Nel, putting their friendship to test. *Song of Solomon* is a sweeping epic, much larger than the story of the Milkman's quest for his family heritage. Milkman leaves his house in Michigan and travels to the South in search of the fabled family fortune, a hidden treasure of gold. Although he never finds the gold, Milkman finds something more important to his life—his legacy. This novel attempts to define the consciousness of Black male and the mid-western black culture. *Tar Baby* widens Morrison's geographical sphere presenting the American characters against another culture's racial hierarchies. The work leans heavily on the black folklore and records the conflicts between white and black cultures. Morrison's next work *Beloved* has its origin in a violent historical incident—the story of the woman she had read about while doing research for *The Black Book*. Sethe in *Beloved* struggles to create a new life for herself while her house is haunted by the ghost of the baby she killed some eighteen years earlier to save her from slavery. Paul D, a former slave, tries to cast out the baby's spirit and seems to have succeeded until one day a beautiful twenty-year-old stranger with a scar on her throat arrives at Sethe's house. In *Jazz*, Joe Trace, a middle-aged salesman, falls crazily in love with Dorcas, an

eighteen year old girl "with one of those deepdown, spooky loves that...he shot her just to keep the feeling going" (*Jazz*, p.3). Joe's wife crashes at the funeral and tries to cut the dead girl's face with a butcher knife. In *Paradise*, the isolated, past-obsessed citizens of the all-black town of Ruby project their faults and blame their problems on the women who live in the Convent, a mansion in the outskirts of the town. "They shoot the white girl first (*Paradise*, p.3) and kill the rest subsequently. Although the outlines of the novels given here indicate the diversity of themes they are interlinked to an understanding of the complexity of racism and gender. The symbolic and the real merge into a narrative pattern in which Morrison attempts a multilayered structure for each of her works. Morrison comes out strongly in defence of her writerly position in asking: "How does literary utterance arrange itself when it tries to imagine an Africanist other? What are the signs, the codes, the literary strategies designed to accommodate this encounter?" (1993:16). She structures her novels in an attempt to answer these questions. Hence she has to be self-reflexive to her own subject position in exploring the fears and desires that reside in her consciousness as a black woman writer. The oral culture, its narratives and the myths of the blacks are invoked in order to distinguish her work from others and connect them to the broader context of 'race' and 'gender'.

Morrison's novel tends to be 'dialogic' where there is a constant interaction between meanings with each having the potential for conditioning others. Her fictions in fact are multilayered and competing discourses that bear upon concepts such as community, authority, individuality, and moral responsibility. She inverts the western philosophical tradition and its modes of



ordering and classification. Generally speaking no one character gives us the whole truth in her fiction. The oppositional narrative modes of realism and fantasy in a continuous struggle to become the language of truth are like the voices in a dialogical novel. There are strong elements of fantasy, recurring non-realistic structures in Morrison's novels. For example, Pecola's obsession with blue eyes, Sula watching her mother burn to death, Pilate's absence of a navel, Ruth's obsessive breast feeding of her son and necrophiliac love for her father; the myth of Solomon's leap, the appearance and dismemberment of Beloved. Parts of the events are presented not as flash back but as 'rememory' in which the past interrupts the narrative and reminds the characters of their struggle. The openness of the narratives has allowed Morrison to use fantasy. In fact Bakhtin's identification of the inconclusiveness of the novel as a genre that is always in the process of development, can help us to understand how it has proved to be such a popular vehicle for non-European subjects and worldviews, in that, it also accommodates the openness of traditional black culture.

Instead of firm closures, Morrison's novels end with moments of insight. At the end of *Sula* (1973), as de Weever says, Nel realises that she has been lonely for Sula and not for Jude, at the end of *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Claudia realizes that the town's people have made Pecola their scapegoat. *Song of Solomon* (1977) and *Tar Baby* (1981) are inconclusive and leave many questions unanswered. Thus Morrison's works extend the dimensions of the narrative in that novel as an art form is probably characterized by incompleteness, disruption, confusion, contradiction, internal inconsistencies

and unfulfilled expectations. Concepts such as linearity, progress, and chronology are not applicable to the works of many African-American writers, especially Toni Morrison. Her novels are evolutionary, circular, repetitive, contradictory, and often ambiguous, with the histories of the characters revealed in fragments from a variety of sources. de Weever (1991) argues that until the social movements of the 1960s, our definitions of American literature were determined by Attic-Hebraic-Christian traditions that make up European culture (1991: 21). Morrison herself has complained to Claudia Tate (1983) that the works of African-Americans have been approached from a sociological perspective rather than being considered as texts:

Critics generally don't associate black people with ideas. They see marginal people; they just see another story about black folks. They regard the whole thing as sociologically interesting perhaps but very parochial. There's notion out in the land that there are human beings one writes about, and then there are black people or Indians or some other marginal group (Bill Moyers, pbs video 1992: 160).

Henry Louis Gates Jr. also endorses the view of Morrison:

If Euro-Americans have used the creative writing of Afro-Americans primarily as evidence of the blacks' mental or social 'perfectibility' or as a measure of the blacks' 'racial' psychology or sociology, then they have used African literature as evidence of African 'anthropology', of traditional and modern African customs and beliefs (1984: 5).

He goes on to say that because of the valorization of the social and polemical functions of black literature, the structure of black text has been repressed and treated as if it were transparent.

Toni Morrison's works go beyond inverting the stereotype. She gives expression to desires, needs and aspirations that are articulated through

cultural myths. Throughout Morrison's works, there is a recurring concern with black, female-headed households where survival is dependent upon 'self-inventing'. Morrison feels that emancipation of black people can only be realized in the context of their culture

In view of the above discussion, it is proposed that a study of Morrison's works may be critically aligned to our understanding of 'race' and 'gender'. The study through the thematic of 'race' and 'gender' is expected, to throw up insights that may help in understanding Morrison's works better and exploring the complexities of her perceptions. It is evident that 'race' is not simply a category of differentiation; it is many things, is in fact, a very complex construct. The textuality of 'race' covering the spectrum of outside/inside, self/Other alterity needs to be deconstructed in the context of theory as well as fictional narrative. Similarly, the dynamics of 'gender' calls for a different kind of reading. Because Morrison is a theoretically informed writer, she mediates various visible/invisible aspects of 'race' and 'gender' as they are conceptually formed, reformed and deformed. Her narratives welcome strong feminine bonding and deconstruct *difference* in its diversity and complexity. Otherisation is one way of articulating marginality, but writing the Other is altogether a different task. In order to bring authenticity and sincerity to her fictional voice, Morrison uses various narrative devices. She subverts the linearity of traditional narrative and escapes its closures making her narratives magical. The present study will also examine Morrison's use of language and the methods of unlocking their multiple meanings. Morrison employs a number of perspectives on language, meaning,

narrative and history with an understanding that language does not merely reflect 'reality', but constructs it

The study is divided into six chapters and organized in the following manner:

1. Introduction
2. The Discourse of the Marginal
3. Race as Text: Textualizing Race
4. Narrating Gender and Representing Women in Toni Morrison's Fiction
5. Writing the Other: Narrative Strategies in Toni Morrison's Fiction
6. Conclusion

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## Chapter II

# The Discourse of the Marginal

Marginality implies exclusion. This exclusion admits the excluded a liminal space. This liminality makes the marginalised voiceless, and dispossessed of history and identity. There are different forms of marginality in human history that informs caste, class, race and gender. In case of the blacks in the United States, exclusion has been historically complete. This exclusion is based on racism. While explaining the discourse of marginality what is implied is the development of the ex-slaves in the United States to a stage of being voiced. This position is achieved through their self-articulation. Among all types of discourses, literature is widely if not universally considered to be one of the most important and the most powerful. Continuing exploration of the nature of literature is thus crucial in the applied as well as in the theoretical sphere. In the Hallidayan conception of language as a social semiotic it is accepted that "the function of all discourse is a blend of the interpersonal and the ideational" (Cook, 1994:1). This position considers literature as a social mode of interaction, reflecting and creating its own institutions and power relations. In its social relativity literature recognizes a common experience which cuts across the boundaries of nation, culture and history and also underline differences between/among them

Literary writing as a practice is both meaningful and discursive. As Terry Eagleton maintains, it is "more useful to see literature as a name which people give from time to time for different reasons for certain kinds of writing" within a

whole field of what Michel Foucault called "discursive practices" and that if anything is to be an object of study it is the whole field of practices rather than just those sometimes obscurely labeled as "literature." Eagleton's definition of literature places it within the larger field of discursive practices. Literary writings in spite of their humanistic impulse and claims to universality implicitly or explicitly represent dominant cultural concerns in that the subordinated and the voiceless always already historically constituted deconstruct the homogenizing impulse of literature. Race and gender sensitive writings always move through conflicting trajectories. These writings underline the nature of language and status of communication as the basic principles of discourse formation and problematize social and political phenomena in which the author and his/ her text are located. Discourses therefore can interweave with each other so that within a specific institution employing a certain discourse, other discourses may circulate which inculcate broader social power structures.

Literary discourse has certain distinguishing linguistic characteristics and produces certain kinds of value and 'truth'. Literary texts incorporate many other forms of discourse in that it borrows from and weaves together very diverse discourses. Discourses in both social contexts and literary texts are normally arranged or come to organize themselves into some sort of hierarchy where a privileged or controlling discourse exerts power over those which surround it. For example, in the nineteenth century English fiction, discourses of property, class, family relations combine to centralize and empower certain figures and values, in order to marginalise and exclude others.

The view of language as a form of political and social control in which 'truth' becomes more relative and pragmatic rather than absolute and ideal, functioning only in a specific historical context, was promoted most strongly by the French philosopher Michel Foucault. Discourses are seen as products of power relations. As he puts it "it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together"(1979:100). He also asserts that we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth.

Although language is usually taken to be a neutral and transparent medium for describing the world with the assumption that meaning lies in the world rather than being invested in language, the theory of *discourse* provides a radical alternative to those views and locates meaning and our sense or knowledge of the world in language. Language is thus the source of our sense of reality and is responsible for producing meaning. The concept of discourse plays an important role in contemporary social sciences. The social world can be seen as composed of a range of discourses, which arise and function around the institutions, which they are a part of. Thus we have the 'legal discourse', 'medicinal discourse', 'political discourse' etc. These discourses exert some kind of power over our lives.

Foucault uses the term discourse to relatively well-founded areas of social knowledge. He stresses the way discursive practices form the objects and subjects of 'discursive formations'. Discourses he says are "practices that systematically form the objects of which we speak" (Foucault, 1972: 49), and they consist of historically specific rules of formation that determine the difference between grammatically well-formed statements and 'what is actually

said' at particular times and places. He argues that certain discursive rules enable subjects to produce objects, statements, concepts and strategies, which together constitute discourses. A discourse would then be what ever constrains—but also enables—writing, speaking and thinking within specific historical limits. It is believed that what an individual, group or a society as a whole can imagine is both permitted and constrained by the discursive possibilities at its disposal. Foucault argues that it is the modalities of discourses and discursive practices that produce both the knowledge and the social itself. The modalities function differently in different historical 'epistemes' that means a historical period is unified by the rules and procedures of the modalities producing knowledge. His work thus brings to the fore the operation of discursive practices within institutions and the terms of his analysis are readily applicable to the study of discursive formations of literary studies.

The discourses of 'gender' and 'race' have operated with modifications throughout western history in ways that privilege certain groups and naturalize the inferiorisation of others, and they tend to permeate into most other discourses. As has been said each discourse is a product of power and authority relationship and this relationship produces different subjectivities. The subjectivities that are formed under 'race' and 'gender' discriminations exist on the margins. Thus a discourse of the marginal is instituted as an alternative to the dominant either in its subjection, subordination or resistance.

Resistance is inclusive in the alterity because it cannot be external to power, for power is not a system of domination with an inside and an outside. It mediates the social forces and makes alliances. The classic form in which

power relations have been thought to be governed are race and patriarchy. Foucault's idea of power stands in opposition to Hobbesian as well as Marxist formulations. According to him, power is dispersed across complicated and heterogeneous social networks marked by on going struggles. This understanding of Foucault is reflexive upon the 'race' and 'gender' relations within American society. First it is the domination of the white races over the blacks making the history of slavery very ugly. During this time the power relations are aligned around religion, racial superiority and control of property. The post-slavery period is further complicated as a group of dispossessed people has to fight for their existence and are subject to inhuman suffering. They were denied access to education, learning and social justice. This in turn resulted in social stereotyping of the blacks as primitive, illiterate and almost considered no better than animals. The stereotype image of the black in fact becomes an excuse of their literary representation. Even within white creative writing the marginalization of the black was almost total. The black becomes voiced very late in the American literary scene only when they started writing about themselves.

It is a common place assumption of the contemporary intellectual disciplines that language and social life are inextricably linked, as Sapir says:

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language, is merely an incidental means of solving special problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group... We see and hear

and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation (Whorf, 1956: 134).

This quotation throws into perspective the linguistic practices that are caught up in and around the forms of power and inequality that are pervasive features of a society as they actually exist. As classification is the basis of language and thought, so classification also exists in discourse. According to Marx, the ruling ideas in every epoch have always been the ideas of the ruling class.

An inter-disciplinary approach drawing resources both from culture studies as well as sociological theories will help us to understand black discourse better. Where traditional literary studies have defined literature as timeless, an "aesthetic" category, culture studies see cultural values as socially constructed. From the beginning cultural studies would be interested in the interplay between cultural text and such conventionally "sociological" indicators of social inequality as 'race' and 'gender.' In the cultural context it is Foucault's emphasis that underlines the subjection of the individual, who is positioned by dominant discourses of a particular historical moment although he does acknowledge the possibility of resistance. Williams recognizes the force of economic determinism but sees the possibility of resistance and change. Althusser views culture as "material" in the sense that culture is a part of our physical fabric, of our lived experience and our material conditions of existence. Defining "otherness" Edward Said maintains that European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the orient as a sort of underground self. Said's reflection also bears upon the otherisation of the

blacks by the whites in America. Foucault talks about enmeshing of power, truth and practices, and the positioning of human beings within these historical configurations. He talks about three modes of 'objectification' by which human beings are transformed into subjects. The first involves the substitution of a linguistic for a philosophical conception of the subject. The second logic of subject formation centres on what he calls the operation of dividing practices, in which the subject is either divided inside him or divided from others. Here Foucault is talking about the social and political processes by which the social and political processes by which division of self and other, for example, mad and insane, sick and healthy, criminals and 'good boys' are produced in specific historical conjectures. The third logic of subjectivisation that Foucault focuses is the way in which human beings turn themselves into subjects through processes of recognition, self-mastery and transgression. Foucault is interested in the way in which the subject constitutes himself in an active fashion, by the practices of the self.

Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci writing in the 1930s has had much influence on the area known as cultural studies. Gramsci argues that historically the ruling classes have been able to exercise leadership not through direct coercion but by indirect means through the concept of hegemony. Under hegemonic control people work towards their own subordination which coincides with the continuation of dominant power groups. Gramsci stresses on the role of culture that perpetuates hegemony so that a whole range of communications from literature to mass media, allow people to make sense of themselves and the world in ways which reinforce and perpetuate the dominant

power relations in a society. Such forms of knowledge are legitimated and neutralized under the category of common sense, which pass off as timeless, obvious, natural. Yet quite contradictory positions have rationalized through common sense in different periods of history from racial persecution and sexual discrimination to corporeal punishment and nuclear energy.

The objective of this chapter is to develop the concept of the discourse of the marginal as an alterity that has formed out of a process of otherisation. The race of people identified as Negroes, inhabiting the continent of Africa has been otherised in various ways: biologically, culturally and politically and deprivileged as a category in order to signify the superiority of the whites and their culture. Eurocentricism that subsumes all that is good and great about the white people is a discourse of otherisation. This critical-theoretical position not only calls for deconstruction but also informs the construction of the discourse of the other. Gates, Jr. says that when the black Africans came to the New World they were "violently and radically abstracted from their civilization and culture. But they carried with themselves aspects of their cultures that were meaningful, that could not be obliterated, and those that they chose by an act of will not to forget: their music (a mnemonic device for Bantu and Kwa Tonal languages), their myths, their expressive institutional structures, their metaphysical systems of order, and their forms of performance" (Gates, Jr. 1988: 4). Slavery in the New World, where the slave was exposed to cross cultural contact, served to create a dynamic of exchange between various previously isolated black African cultures on an unprecedented scale. Emergence of a new African culture a truly Pan-African culture fashioned as à

colourful weave of linguistic, institutional, metaphysical and formal threads. It thus became an Africo -American culture with a difference whereas signified by the catalysts of English, Dutch, French, Portuguese or Spanish languages and cultures.

Language and representation become important factors in the constitution of black literary identity. Although the African-American is a complex construct, he carries with him a history that Toni Morrison calls fragmentary and dispersed. As writing provides authentication to the speaking voice black writing is reflexive of the historical otherness that the community has suffered. Language in this context becomes an important vector. Language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language that is half some one else's becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. In making the white man's language as their own, the blacks have made it transparent to their own historical and cultural situation. It is in the black writing in the United States that the otherness is contested and the self is articulated. Although marginality still constitutes the dominant trend in the black writing nevertheless it has been self-reflexive attempting to produce authentic black

experience. Therefore slavery has been a dominant point of reference to most of the black writers.

The black literary discourse is essentially a resistant discourse aiming at proving and disproving a whole lot of the white writing. The narrative of the escaped slave becomes the most popular form of written discourse in America three decades before the civil war. The slave narratives were a counter genre between picaresque and novel of sentiment. Frederick Douglass's narrative of the in 1845 came to determine the shape of language use in the slave narrative. These slave narratives written in the form of autobiographies were meant to be major document in anti-abolitionist struggle. Slave narratives also employ the first person form which shaped the development of point of view for the next hundred years. The slave narratives also resemble American romance and utilize as a structural principle the irony of seeming innocence. As with other romantic modes of narration the language remains primarily an expression of the self, a conduit for particularly personal emotion, structuring of the self is coupled with minute explication of the gross evil and human depravity.

For Hegel, cast into silence by their own loss or absence of voice, Africans could have no history, no true consciousness, no power to present or represent this black self. There could be no presence of Africans in history without the power of representation "possessing no true self consciousness, as signified by the absence of voice and therefore no history, for Hegel blacks lay veiled in a shroud of silence..." (Gates, Jr. 1987: 104).

Thus abolitionists and slaves conspired to break this silence by publishing narratives of ex-slaves. And this written language of blacks to quote Jacques Lacan “signified for someone” even before it signified something. To become subjects had to show their language using capacity before they could become social and historical entities, Gates, Jr. says, “Ironically this self same notion of people as subjects and as language, which Europeans and Americans used to displace one sort of enslavement of the blacks for another *sort of enslavement is the very idea that lay at the core of their major innovations of post-structural analysis in contemporary literary theory*” (Gates, Jr., 1987: 105).

As language moves beyond mimicry, the other’s voice assumes a prominence of different kind. From the Nineteenth century slave narratives to the contemporary black writing the discourse of the marginal has followed different trajectories. One of the most dominant voices among the black writers today is Toni Morrison. Morrison maintains that writing to her is a kind of ‘literary archaeology.’ She revisits the black oral tradition to find a voice for the silent and silenced people. She provides her own theory in representing the unrepresentable that encourages multiple critical responses to her works. However, these tributary strands are not unilaterally ‘represented’ nor are they in competition. Rather they register a common conspectus of concerns, which also derive from and circulate around her concerns on ‘race’ and ‘gender’ that underline the decentreness of the human subject; the transgression of textual, social or ethnic boundaries; and the appearance of heteroglossic story-telling in place of discredited ‘grand narratives.’

The next two chapters take their cue from the formulations of the discourse of the marginal by examining the context of 'race' and 'gender'. While the chapter on race examines its textualization, the chapter on gender analyses the representation of African- American women in Toni Morrison's fiction.

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## Chapter III

### Race as Text: Textualizing Race

'Race' is central to the Eurocentric discourse of otherness constituted in the Hegelian binary thesis of *self* and the Other. Viewed from a historical perspective it becomes evident that usages of the notion of 'race' has taken on various forms in different national contexts over the past two centuries. Although historicity of 'race' is very old, the scholars have focused their attention on the rise of racism in the aftermath of the European expansion. Thomas F. Gossett in *Race: The History of an Idea in America* claims to find the use of 'race' as a marker of difference around 5000 years ago, in India, among the early Chinese, Egyptians and Jews (1997: 3). Others contest that the idea of race is modern. Ivan Hannaford says that the idea of 'race' is invented or fabricated only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries after the "French and American Revolutions and the social upheavals which followed" (1996: 4, 5).

Either privileged or subordinated 'race' as a category of classification of difference is subsumed in the affirmation of popular, scientific and political discourses that humanity can be divided into distinct groups whose members possess common physical characteristics. Various groups of white-skinned, black-skinned, yellow-and brown-skinned people that we call the races are biological races with common physical characteristics. But in addition to this basic criteria of classification, belief in the existence of races with attributions of different origins to human groupings and attribution of cultural and social

significance to racial boundaries are also important. In fact David Brion Davis says that responsible scientists do not agree with any biological or genetic definition of racial groups. According to him, what we call races are 'social constructions' and social constructions are classes of individuals that exist only because of our ideas, beliefs and practices (1997: 7). It cannot be denied that Eurocentric worldview of 'race' has consolidated in the process of the formation of colonialism and imperialism.

Although 'race' and otherness are culturally constructed yet racism has a painful history. Differences and discrimination on the basis of cultures have been theorized so as to underline domination of one group of people over another. The history and worldview of the oppressed are erased, appropriated while attributing to them inferior and indeed animal like status. For instance, to be born as a Negro is to represent all the negative attributes of the human individual.

Ever since the earliest migrations brought different ethnic groups into contact with each other relations of power, domination, exploitation, conflict and war have become modes of negotiations between/among them. An attempt to locate the history of 'race' within a broadly historical perspective shows that racial differences on the basis of colour and phenotypical features existed in the ancient world also. But there were no racial segregation or exclusion in the classical Greek society because there was no racial conception of the social subject. The language of 'race' emerged much later. In an essay entitled *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* Frank Snowden contends that racial prejudices did not exist in classical antiquity. He claims

that the black people's equality in beauty, culture and intellectual capacity were seriously entertained. Herodotus called Ethiopians the most handsome people on earth. Snowden also says, "On the whole...the number of expressed preferences for blackness and whiteness in classical literature is approximately equal" (1970: 178-9). Even if there might have been some sporadic negative description of blacks there was no stereotyping of blacks as primitive, deficient in intellect and culture. At this time in the absence of both the term 'race' and its conception as a category of difference, the social perception of self and the Other was hardly considered racist (Goldberg in Essed and Goldberg, ed. 2002: 284).

In medieval times we have individuals and groups conceived of as subjects of theological categories. There also appear in medieval literature and art representations a range of strange, exotic beings. Pliny lists some mythological and fabulous figures like Amyctyrae or 'unsociable' who have lips protruding so far as to serve as sun umbrellas; Hippopodes or "horse footed" men, horned men and so on. Pliny also listed people whose identities were based on geographical, physical and cultural grounds like Albanians, Ethiopians and Pygmies, speechless men, cave dwellers and so on (Friedman, 1981: 9-15). Pygmies were deemed as representing a stage in the development of men. True reason was thought to consist in the Aristotelian ability to formulate syllogisms and derive conclusions from universals, which the pygmies failed to do. Pygmies could speak instinctively, from the perception of particulars and not from universals that showed that they lacked the discipline of 'rationally' controlled instinct and imagination. This emphasis on

rationality is a very significant factor, which was to emerge later as the basis for the crucial difference between different racial groups.

In the later medieval period when there was an increasing contact between people of different geographical areas, people who were different physically and culturally, the image of the 'savage man' emerged. The image of the savage man was that of violence, sexual license, lack of civility and civilization. David Theo Goldberg says that "with the psychological interiorizing of the moral space in late medieval thinking, the savage man came to represent the wild man within--sin or lack of reason, the absence of discipline, culture, civilization, in a word morality—that confronts each human being" (Goldberg, in Essed and Goldberg ed.2002: 286). The primary forms of discriminations were against non-Christians, or infidels. Those subjects who were seen to fail in putting some constraints upon themselves would deserve to have discipline imposed upon them or would merit exclusion. Thus medieval exclusion and discrimination were not racial but religious.

The sixteenth century marks the beginning in the rise of race consciousness. Oliver Cox in *Caste, Class and Race* (1970) has tried to locate the origins of race prejudice from the period of European expansion at the end of fifteenth and beginning of sixteenth centuries. European exploration, expansion, slavery, colonization and imperial domination were factors that went into the making of specific racist discourses and practices. In fact the emergence of the discourse of 'race' was simultaneous with the process of economic expansion. For instance, as Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow have shown Africans were perceived in a more or less neutral and benign

manner before the slave trade began. However, once the triangular trade became established, Africans were newly characterized as the epitome of evil and barbarity (Hammond and Jablow, 1970: 20-23). In their initial encounters with the Africans in the 1550s, the Englishmen met Africans as merely another type of men attributing their physical differences to climatic contrasts between Europe and Africa. But some explanations that they offered for the differences between them, for example, Sir Thomas Browne's 'quasi-genetic' argument that the blackness of Africans was carried in the sperm, appealed unmistakably to the idea of 'race'. Although the concept did not fully develop till the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the discreet notion of racial difference was already there-- that the members of a race carry within themselves a minute but potent and practically unalterable structure that account for their observable similarities with each other and differences with members of other races. This structure was later called a racial essence that is passed on from the parents to the off spring. James Sweet says that 'the pseudo scientific claims' of race science developed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries "merely reinforced notions of biology that had been evolving for centuries" (1997: 165).

'Race' as a classificatory device gained new credence and authority in the eighteenth century, the age of Enlightenment. In fact, modern racism had its origin in the eighteenth century Europe. Naomi Zack, for example, says that "modern concept of race is derived from eighteenth and nineteenth-century pseudoscience that rationalized European colonialism and chattel slavery" (1996: X). Evidences from Geology, Zoology, Anatomy, Botany and other fields of scientific enquiry were assembled to support a claim that racial classification

would help explain many human differences. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach provided the first systematic racial classification in his *On the Natural Variety of Mankind* (1776). The science of race began in comparative morphology with stress on 'pure' types as classificatory vehicles. Linnaeus, the Swedish botanist contributed prominently to this unfolding agenda. "Scientists of his generation believed that by finding the categories to which animals, plants and objects belonged they were uncovering new sections of God's plan for the universe. Nineteenth century race theorists inherited much of this way of looking at things" (Banton and Harwood 1975: 46). Cuvier a French anatomist put forth a physical cause theory of race in 1800 arguing that physical nature determined culture. He classified human beings into three major groups along an implied descending scale: whites, yellows, and blacks. It was at this time that in Johann Friedrich Blumenbach's works (one of the founders of modern Anthropology) the aesthetic criteria and cultural ideals of Greece began to come to the forefront. Anthropology became increasingly identified as "the science of people without history". It primarily sought to establish the physical grounds of racial difference. General categories like "exotic", "oriental" and "East" emerged and specific categories like "Negro", "Indian," "Jew" were also invented. If the east was associated with violence and lascivious sensuality, Africa was considered to be the old world of prehistory. Blumenbach accused the Negroes of extremism, lack of a sense of proportion and lack of culture. Charles Hamilton Smith in the *Natural History of Human Species* (1848) attributed Negroes lowly place in the human order. Smith also treated the complexion and physiognomy of the white man not merely as indication of

superiority but as the hallmark of civilization. The discipline of physiognomy openly articulated what many of the early naturalists and anthropologists tacitly assumed: "the classical ideals of beauty, proportion, and moderation regulated the classifying and ranking of groups of human bodies. In short physiognomy brought the "normative gaze" into day light" (West, in Essed and Goldberg, ed. 2002: 102). Two other disciplines phrenology (the reading of skulls) and physiognomy (the reading of faces) also combined to propagate the idea of white supremacy. Following Wickelmann, Camper held that Greek proportions and stature exemplified beauty and embodied perfection. Camper also held that a beautiful face, beautiful body, beautiful nature, beautiful character, and beautiful soul were inseparable. Most notably in the United States, Dr John Augustine Smith, and naturalist Dr. Samuel George Morton of Philadelphia were fervent proponents of black inferiority (Jordan, 1968: 505-6). Further there was Count Joseph Arthur de Gobineau's four-volume *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races* (1854) in which he argued that the major civilizations were the creations of different races and that race mixing was leading to inevitable deterioration of humanity. These ideas, although not very influential at the time of their publication, later became so when Hitler used them in support of his claims regarding superiority of 'Aryan race' (Banton and Harwood, 1975: 29-30).

Racism also permeated into the writings of the major figures of the Enlightenment. The idea of white supremacy was fully accepted and endorsed by these figures without putting forth their own arguments to justify it. Montesquieu and Voltaire of French Enlightenment, Hume and Jefferson of the

Scotch and American Enlightenment and Kant of German Enlightenment held racist views and had a firm belief that the authority for these views rested in the domain of naturalists, anthropologists, physiognomists and others.

Montesquieu said satirically in his *Spirit of the Laws*:

It is impossible for us to suppose that these beings should be men; because if we supposed them to be men, one would begin to believe we ourselves were not Christians (Davis, 1966: 403).

Voltaire also endorsed the idea of white supremacy. In his essay "The People of America" he claimed that black people (and Indians) were distinct species from Europeans:

The Negro race is a species of men as different from ours as the breed of spaniels is from that of greyhounds. The mucous membrane, or network, which nature has spread between the muscles and the skin, is white in us and black or copper—colored in them ... If their understanding is not of a different nature from ours, it is at least greatly inferior. They are not capable of any great application or association of ideas, and seemed formed neither for the advantages nor the abuses of philosophy (Gossett, 1997: 45).

Jefferson said in *Notes on Virginia*:

Comparing them by their faculties of memory, reason and imagination, it appears to me that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior...and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless and anomalous... Never yet could I find that a black had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration; never see even an elementary trait of painting or sculpture (Jordan, 1968: 436-7).

Kant held that the Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling. He also said that "So fundamental is the difference between the two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color." (Kant, 1960:111) The colonial consequence of racism was to put into vehement practice the Eurocentric thesis of the self and Other.

The 'self' equipped with a superior knowledge and technology, attempted to erase the native's indigenous knowledge systems and practices. Gobineau, the father of twentieth century racism said that the white race held the monopoly of 'beauty, intelligence and strength' and further that the white race was blessed from infancy with "the two elements of all civilization: a religion and a history" (Palikov, 1999: 53). So the argument followed that because the other species were not so well endowed, so it was the duty of the Semitic species (White race) to help them as much as possible. Frederick Van Amringe, a New York lawyer, said that the white race must go on conquering and to conquer until each species of man has been brought to the highest degree of perfection. His views were not based on any kind of empirical research but they were taken seriously and disseminated through the politically influential *Democratic Review*. The colonialist has therefore moved with a desire to be recognized as the 'master' and the 'dominant'. The process of otherisation also resulted in the loss of native subject's autonomy. The colonial mechanism of control was refined to such an extent that the colonial subject was silenced and his culture systematically atrophied. The colonial legacy engendered by an intellectual system to dominate reduced the colonial subject to a virtual non-entity. Rudyard Kipling's both exclusive and patronizing statements that east is east and the west is west and the two can never meet and the use of the too familiar phrase, 'Whiteman's burden' can be read as part of the colonialist thesis of domination and control.

In India, James and John Stuart Mill and their administrative followers tried to justify colonial rule by talking about the general civilizing and utilitarian

benefits of capitalist development and by using paternalistic logic. Mill in his *History of British India* talked of "hideous state of the Hindu and Muslim Civilization" that prevailed in India. Indians like the Chinese, Mill maintained, were found to be "tainted with the vices of insincerity, dissembling, treacherous... disposed to excessive exaggeration... cowardly and unfeeling...in the highest degree conceited... and full of affected contempt for others. Both are in the physical sense, disgustingly unclean in their persons and houses." Further he added that incapable of representative democracy Indian government should submit to the benevolent direction of the British Parliament (1820: 135,vol.2, 166-7; Cf. Stokes (1959) 48, 53-4).

Hegel also put forward similar type of justifications for slavery. He observed:

In Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness has not yet attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence—as for example, God or Law—in which the interest of man's volition is involved and in which he realizes his own being...The Negro...exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state...there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character...the devouring of the human flesh is altogether consonant with the general principles of the African race; ...want of self control distinguishes the character of the Negroes. This condition is capable of no development or culture and as we see them at this day, such have they always been... Slavery is itself a phase of advance from the merely isolated sensual existence—a phase of education—a mode of becoming participant in a higher morality and the culture connected with it. The gradual abolition of slavery is therefore wiser and more equitable than its sudden removal (1956: 93-99).

There was excessive 'fetishization' of the Other, whereby the socially or ideologically determined factors were substituted by natural or generic categories. For example, all the negative attributes of the native, which the

colonialist endowed him with, were presented as characteristics inherent in the 'race'—in the "blood" of the native. Actually the image of the Other was fabricated to derive maximum gain by the colonizer. Thus the Africans were projected as childlike--as people who were incapable of remembering anything about the past and were to be directed towards administrative, legislative, pedagogical and other controls. This kind of rationale provided justification for a number of colonial practices such as (i) drive for power, (ii) restoring moral balance in favour of the colonizer, (iii) justifying racialized colonialism and (iv) systematizing the institutions.

The colonialist transformed the social and cultural dissimilarities into universal metaphysical differences. If Africans could be projected as animals and as Abdul R. Jan Mohamed says, "mystified...as some magical essence of the continent, then there can be no meeting ground, no identity, between the social, historical creatures of Europe and the metaphysical alterity of the Calibans and Ariels of Africa" (Gates, Jr., ed, 1986: 87). If there exist such radical differences between European and the natives then the process of civilizing the natives can continue indefinitely. As Jan Mohamed further says the "Exchange value remains the central motivating force for both the materialist practices and colonialist literary representations" (Ibid.,87).

According to Banton and Harwood, the science of 'race' peaked during the middle of the nineteenth century. But racial classification of the earlier times brought about some kind of confusion because no one was quite sure as to why the races were to be classified. "No one can tell what is the best classification without knowing what it has to do" (Banton and Harwood 1975:

38). The situation was both assisted and complicated by the work of Darwin and Mendel. Herbert Spencer and Ludwig Gumpowicz attempted to apply Darwin's principles regarding heredity and natural selection to human groups and thereby tried to provide firmer ground to the science of "race". Thus social Darwinism emerged. Such moves were particularly useful in justifying the dominance of certain groups over others for example British over Irish; Europeans over Africans etc. Darwin's *Origins* however shifted the terrain of scientific discourse from morphology and the stability of "pure types" to a subsequent genetics-based approach to individual characteristics. The effects on them of processes of change were studied and thus the focus was now on the analysis of variety. In the additional work of Mendel, this development proved revolutionary:

A racial type was defined by a number of features which are supposed to go together. ...The racial theorists of the nineteenth century assumed that was a natural law which said that such traits were invariably associated and were transmitted to the next generation as part of a package deal. Gregor Mendel's research showed that this was not necessarily the case...(It) also showed that trait variation *within* a population was just as significant as trait variations *between* populations...traits do not form part of a package but can be shuffled like a pack of playing cards (Banton and Harwood, 1975: 47-9).

Since, environmental factors condition natural selection and the interplay between dominant and recessive traits were important factors in the "shuffling" of traits, the notion of pure race types with fixed essential characteristics was displaced.

At this point of time biology of races became a study of diversities within and among groups. To many scientists the old nineteenth century notion of

'race' had lost its meaning as a classificatory concept. Thus revolutions within science both natural and social, conditioned transformed approaches to 'race'. The twentieth century conception of 'race' continued to be, to a large extent, the notion of "evolution" and was significantly conditioned by the work of Mendel and Darwin. "In the space opened by this concept it became possible at least to work at synthesizing insights drawn from both natural sciences (genetics, biochemistry) and social sciences (anthropology, sociology, psychology, ethnology) for a fuller understanding of geographical races" (Banton and Harwood, 1975: 62).

Significantly enough, as the biological conception of 'race' had been increasingly attacked, another conception of 'race' emerged: race as culture. Cultural conception of 'race' included "identifying race with language group, religion, group habits, mores or customs, a dominant style of behaviour, dress, cuisine, music, literature and art. Primarily at issue in such cultural differentiations are group-circumscribed values" (Goldberg in Bulmer and Solomos, ed. 1999: 367). According to Goldberg, such identifications in the name of race are not new. Linguistic differentiations of racial groupings were popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also. Turning on the dictum that it is "language that makes man" (Muller, 1895: 45). What is new he contends, is that since the World War II the "cultural conception of race have tended to eclipse all others" (Goldberg in Bulmer and Solomos, ed. 1999: 367).

Appiah says that what differentiates ideas about race from earlier ideas about group difference and from claims about ethnicity that is necessary to the former, but missing from both of the latter is commitment to the view that

common racial membership entails shared 'biologically heritable, moral and intellectual characteristics' not shared with members of other races. This in turn, has entailed the widespread claim not necessarily but as a matter of historical fact, that 'some races were superior to others' (Appiah, 1990b: 276-7). Appiah seems to contend that ideas about race developed with a commitment to judgments of superiority and inferiority.

Stuart Hall however talks about the possibility and existence of new forms of cultural identity. He emphasizes a style of cultural self-construction that is not just nostalgic but future-oriented, not simply static but transformative, concerned not only with similarity and continuity but also with difference and rupture ( 1990: 235-7). It is a type of cultural identity, distant from biological presupposition or implication. "That such identities could be called races is not a testament to the biological grounds of such identification but to the fluidity of race as a concept" (Goldberg in Bulmer and Solomos, ed.1999: 30). But Ann Laura Stoler says that "The complex legal machinations and political strategies by which racial membership has been redefined and realigned in any number of historical contexts—from the nineteenth- century Dutch East Indies and French Indo-China to twentieth century South Africa, Latin America, and the United States—should alert us to the fact that nineteenth-century racism was not built on the sure-footed classification of science but on a potent set of cultural and affective criteria whose malleability was a key to the flexible scale along which economic privileges could be cordoned off and social entitlements reassigned." This is not to deny that notions of "fixity" do not underwrite racial logics. Rather she says that "the force of racial discourse is precisely in the

double-vision that it allows, in the fact that it combines notions of fixity and fluidity in ways that are basic to its dynamic" (Stoler in Essed and Goldberg, ed. 2002:383 - 384).

Slavery in America can best be understood as a 'race' question. Nowhere else are the workings of racism more evident than in the institution of slavery. Slavery has been a system featuring racially distinct subordinate groups owned by and working for others. Slavery, according to the Slavery convention of the League of Nations (1926) is "the status or conditions of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised". Theoretically therefore "the slave was, an extension of the will of another, without any rights needing to be recognized, lacking almost all formal acknowledgement of human worth and therefore honour" (Turley, 2000: 6).

The assumptions of 'superior, civilized and cultured' underpinning the ideology of the ethnographic superiority of the whites were invoked in the historical moment of the beginning of slavery in America. In the dispersed and displaced history of racism, slavery became a complex discourse that physically displaced people with the ideology that they were born to be ruled. Orlando Patterson who views slavery as an extreme form of domination and exploitation says in "Slavery as Human Parasitism":

Slavery began as the violent and permanent overpowering of one person by another. Distinctive in character and dialectics, it originated as a substitution for certain death and was maintained by brutality... The slave was natally alienated and condemned as a socially dead person, his existence having no legitimacy whatever. The slave's natal alienation and genealogical isolation made him or her the ideal human tool, an *instrumentum vocal*—

perfectly flexible, unattached and deracinated... To all members of the community the slave existed only through the parasite holder, who was called the master. On this inter subjective level the slaveholder fed on the slave to gain the very direct satisfactions of power over another, honor, enhancements and authority. The slave losing all claims to autonomous power was degraded and reduced to a state of liminality (Bulmer and Solomos, ed. 1999: 92).

From the fifteenth century onwards in the Atlantic world the enslaved population was brought from sub-Saharan Africa. "The men, women, and children who became slaves were themselves moveable commodities and with what they produced, formed the substance of complex economic networks criss-crossing the Atlantic, the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf and both Saharan and Sub-Saharan Africa" (Turley, 2000: 1-2).

Due consideration should be given to the fact that slavery was not a product of racism universally. The institution existed in ancient Greece and Rome where its basis was not primarily racial at all. But even if racial distinctiveness of slaves may not have been an invariable historical attribute of slave systems, almost universally the enslaved have been perceived as apart in terms of language, religion or culture and inferior in cultural strengths considered important, or even in mental and intellectual capacities. The prime importance of race and ethnicity, as sources of separateness and inferiority came into vogue much later. The fates of being conquered enemies belonging to different religion or cultural minority have served as imperatives for marking out people for enslavement.

According to David Turley, slaves were 'outsiders' though the designation of 'outsiders' became quite complicated. Initially Christians,

Muslims, Jews felt justified in enslaving those not of their faith and culture “Eventually and notoriously within Christianity, Judaism and Islam differences of skin colour, and particularly blackness and associated notions of race were developed as marks of the ‘Other’ amongst those who reciprocally grew in awareness of their own racial distinctiveness” (Turley, 2000: 19). Whatever may be the case, the different significations of distinctiveness and inferiority have had disastrous consequences for the slaves. Slaves, as the most inferior of the outsiders became most vulnerable to the exercise of their owner’s power. Coupled with it were their “theoretical defencelessness, a product of their virtual non-possession of any rights that had to be observed” (Turley, 2000: 3), which has been subsumed in the resonant phrase of the historical sociologist Orlando Paterson as ‘social death’ in his *Slavery and Social Death*.

From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, slavery in America was identified primarily with the Africans. The physical distinctiveness of the Africans was considered to be the outward signs of a nature fitted for slavery. This may partly explain why Black-Americans in contrast with the English indentured servants or Native-Americans who were there when the colonialists arrived were particularly thought to be fit for slavery. Often justifications for slave trade were provided with a Christian theological gloss. The biblical curse of Canaan was invoked to explain why black people could be enslaved, as a punishment for their ancestors’ sins.

George Frederickson emphasizes the inadequacy of ideas alone in explaining the character of black American slavery. Focusing upon the American colonies and United States he suggests that America was from an

early period a genuinely racist society, strengthened by a racial ideology. In the United States, slavery and racial discrimination were the cause and effect of acting and reacting on each other dynamically joining hands to hustle the Negro down the road to complete degradation. Virulent prejudice probably did not take full possession of the white mind till slavery became fully established as the basis of social and economic order. U. B. Phillips, one of the U.S.A.'s distinguished historians along with others succeeded in persuading the audience that the great achievement of the American slavery was the civilizing of black race, its tutorship and elevation from savagery to civilization. Patterson sees the irony in such claims, the shifting of the meaning of 'master' as a man 'having control or authority' to that of a teacher or one qualified to teach. The shift was from the "conception of the slave plantation as a brutal system of exploitation and human degradation to a pastoral college for the edification of poor savages eager to learn the superior arts of the civilized 'master'" (Patterson in Bulmer and Solomos, ed. 1999: 90). Patterson conceived of Slavery as a relation of parasitism and said that slaveholders tried to camouflage their dependence on the slaves by various ideological strategies.

Initially free slaves enjoyed a lot of rights and were not treated in a discriminatory way. A free slave could acquire property, had the right to vote, take legal action against whites and were to hold minor offices. From 1690s the situation changed with restriction imposed on the manumission of slaves and in 1723, many of the rights of the free blacks including right to vote was taken away. Slowly they were made to identify with the slaves and they fought consistently against discrimination, unemployment, segregation, lack of

education, disenfranchisement, prohibitions against bearing arms, testifying in court and serving on Juries. One of the main reasons for the discrimination against free Negroes was that Negroes who were not slaves would provide an unfortunate example to those in servitude and would encourage insurrections. It led to the elaboration of the slave codes that served to distinguish North American slavery from its Latin American counterparts.

Racism in America reached its crescendo towards the end of the nineteenth century when it was supported by pseudoscientific Darwinian racism with its basic assumptions about racial difference. What gave this reformulated doctrine its new virulence was its association with southern campaign for the legal segregation and the disenfranchisement of blacks who three decades earlier had been freed from slavery. Forms of unfree labour during the post emancipation period retained many of the features of parasitic relationship between the former masters and slaves. Various forms of debt peonage and sharecropping tied free labourers to rural agriculture under what Tinker calls *A New System of Slavery*. The legal ending of slavery did not mean the end of racism and in fact led to its accentuation in the absence of legal protection. Thus racism became both a means of maintaining dominance and was a product of the dominance in reinforcing the American sense of superiority and control over the blacks. Campaign mounted against ideological racism in the recent years has met with much success but societal racism retains much of its strength and its persistence has prevented the achievement of full racial equality in America.

Michael Omi and Howard Winant maintain, "For most of its existence both as European colony and independent nation, the US was a *racial dictatorship*" (Essed and Goldberg ed 2002.: 129). From 1607 to 1865 the non-whites were firmly eliminated from the sphere of politics and after the civil war the brief egalitarian experiment of Reconstruction terminated ignominiously in 1877. After that there followed a century of legally sanctioned segregation and denial of the vote, nearly absolute in the South and much of the Southwest. The barriers fell only in the mid 1960s, but the success of the black movement did not mean that all obstacles to their political participation had now been abolished.

The stereotyped opinions of the Negro also find expression in institutionalized behaviour in jokes and stories, and in fiction. "Fiction as a sounding board for, and as a magnifier of, popular prejudices, is an object for research which deserves much more attention" (Myrdal, 1972: 101). The printed word Myrdal further says has a magical import and authority for the unintellectual mind. Sterling Brown the author of an essay called "Negro Character as Seen by White Authors" says:

The Negro has met with as great in-justice in American literature as he has in American life. The majority of books about Negroes merely stereotype Negro character...Those considered important enough for separate classification, although overlapping do occur, are seven in number: (i) The contented slave, (ii) The wretched Freeman, (iii) The comic Negro, (iv) The Brute Negro, (v) The Tragic Mulatto, (vi) The Local color Negro and (vii) The Exotic Primitive (Footnote to Myrdal's *An American Dilemma, The Negro Problem and American Democracy*. 1972: 1196).

These stereotypes are to be found in abundance in American Literature and are generally accepted as contributions to negative racial understanding.

Although creative literature is considered to be emancipatory very often the so-called humane and emancipatory aspirations of literature gets trapped in an author's prejudices. Thus the relevant question that one may ask how does literature behave in its encounter with racism? To authors like Toni Morrison the question how does literature implicate and imbricate racism becomes important.

In spite of its implicit and explicit acknowledgement 'race' is still a virtually unspeakable thing and silence and evasion are the twin strategies adopted by scholars in matters of literary discourse on 'race'. In this connection Taun A. van Dijk says, "Given general social norms that prohibit explicit discrimination and outgroup derogation, white group members usually do not want to be seen as "racists". When they want to say something negative about minorities, they will tend to use denials, disclaimers, or other forms that are intended to avoid a negative impression with their listeners or their readers" (Essed and Goldberg, ed. 2002: 308).

An examination of the western literary history does not reveal any explicit connection between 'race' and writing. The response to the question as to what importance does 'race' have as a category in the study of literature and shaping of critical theory has tended to be one of the order of a "humanistic nostrum"—or a dismissal mandated by the "political". But Morrison says, "A criticism that needs to insist that literature is not only "universal" but also "race-free" risks lobotomizing that literature and diminishes both art and the artist. Morrison further contends that for three hundred years when blacks insisted that 'race' is not the distinguishing factor in human relationships then every

academic discipline including theology, history, natural science insisted that it is. "When blacks discovered that they had become a culturally formed race, they were told that there is no such thing as "race", biological or cultural, that matters and that genuinely intellectual exchange cannot accommodate it" (in James and Sharpley-Whiting, ed. 2000:26).

But Morrison says, "Just as the formation of the nation necessitated coded language and purposeful restriction to deal with the racial disindigenousness and moral frailty at its heart, so too did the literature, whose founding characteristics extend into the twentieth century, reproduce the necessity for codes and restriction. Through significant and underscored omissions, startling contradictions, heavily menaced conflicts, through the way writers peopled their work with the signs and bodies of this presence—one can see that a real or fabricated Africanist presence was crucial to their sense of Americanness—And it shows"(Morrison,1993: 6). Further, she laments that the literary critics in the United States fail to see meaning in the presence of black surrogacy as an "informing, stabilizing and disturbing element—in the literature they do study" (Ibid., 13). They also take pleasure in their ignorance of African-American texts. It is possible, she says, to read Henry James scholarship exhaustively and never arrive at a nodding mention of the fact that it is the black woman who makes easy the turn of the plot and becomes the agency of moral choice and meaning in *What Maisie Knew*. The urgency and anxiety of in Willa Cather's rendering of black characters are liable to be missed entirely. The problem that race causes in the technique and credibility of Willa Cather's last novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* is also ignored

completely. Morrison also seems to rue the fact that "An instructive parallel to this willed scholarly indifference is the centuries—long, hysterical blindness to feminist discourse and the way in which women and women's issues were read (or unread)" (Ibid., 14). The literature of the United States has taken as its concern the architecture of the new white man.

As a reader, Morrison found that black people signified little or nothing in the imagination of white American writers. They were objects of an occasional bout of jungle fever, provided local colour or lent some touch of verisimilitude or supplied a much needed moral gesture, humor, or bit of pathos, otherwise they seemed marginal.

When she began to read as a writer, Morrison saw how literature behaved in its encounter with racial ideology. American literature was not only complicit in the fabrication of racism but also there were moments when it exploded or undermined it. More importantly she also contemplated on how Africanist personae, narrative, and idiom moved and enriched the text in self-conscious ways and considered what the engagement meant for the writer's imagination. Literary utterance seems to have arranged itself in a special way when it imagined the Africanist other. There are certain signs, codes and literary strategies designed to accommodate this encounter. The inclusion of Africans or African-Americans served a specific purpose. The fabrication of the Africanist other served as a meditation on the self, exploring fears and desires residing in the writerly conscious. There is a surprising revelation "of longing, of terror, of perplexity, of shame, of magnanimity"(Ibid.,17). What became self-evident were the ways in which Americans chose to talk about through and

within sometimes allegorical, sometimes metaphorical, but always choked representation of an Africanist presence.

At the end of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, Edgar Allan Poe describes the last two days of the extraordinary journey:

“March 21<sup>st</sup>—A sullen darkness now hovered above us—but from out the milky depths of the ocean a luminous glare arose, and stole up along the bulwarks of the boat. We were nearly overwhelmed by the white ashy shower which settled upon us and upon the canoe, but melted into the water as it fell...

“March 22<sup>nd</sup>—The darkness had materially increased, relieved only by the glare of the water thrown back from the white curtain before us. Many gigantic and placidly white birds flew continuously now from beyond the veil, and their scream was the eternal Tekeli-li! as they retreated from our vision. Here upon Nu-Nu stirred in the bottom of the boat; but upon touching him, we found his spirit departed And now we rushed into the embraces of the cataract, where a chasm threw itself open to receive us. But there arose in our pathway a shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of the snow” (Morrison, 1993:31 -32).

The narrative ends here and there is a scholarly note, explanation and a “piled-up” conclusion. The latter states that it was whiteness that terrified the natives and killed Nu-Nu. Morrison maintains that no American writer is more important to the concept of Africanism- American than Edgar Allan Poe. And the image described in the passage above is telling: the visualized but somehow closed and unknowable white form arising from the mists at the end of the journey. The images of the white curtain and the “shrouded human figure” with skin “the perfect whiteness of the snow” both occur after the narrative has encountered blackness. The first white image seems to erase the serviceable and serving black figure, Nu-Nu. “Both are figurations of

impenetrable whiteness that surfaces in American literature whenever an Africanist presence is engaged" (Ibid.,32).

These closed white images that are found frequently at the end of the narrative, appear almost always in conjunction with representations of Black or Africanist presence, who are dead, impotent or under complete control. The images of blinding whiteness seems to "function as both anti-dote for and meditation on the shadow that is companion to this whiteness—a dark and abiding presence that seem to move the hearts and texts of American literature with fear and longing" (Ibid., 33). This is indicative of the fact that American literature found it difficult to extricate itself from the haunting darkness in its early period. It also suggests the complex and contradictory situation in which the American writers found themselves during the formative period of the nation's literature.

America in its formative years distinguished itself by and understood itself to be, pressing toward a future of freedom, towards achieving a kind of human dignity unprecedented in the world. A whole lot of yearnings collapsed into the famous phrase "American dream". In their zealous pursuit of this dream the Americans were rushing from oppression and limitation of the old world to the freedom and possibility of the New. Old world had offered them "poverty, prison, social ostracism and death" (Ibid.,34). There were of course a clerical, scholarly group of immigrants who came to seek, adventure in founding a colony for the motherland and there were merchants who came for the cash. The attempt was thus made to be born again in new clothes. They also wanted to benefit from their earlier mistakes. New world offered limitless

possibilities to them—when they ventured into the New world in the seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries they realized that now they would be in a position to command rather than being commanded and would be powerful enough to control their own destiny. Thus they seized upon the chance to move from discipline and punishment to disciplining and punishing, from social ostracism to social rank. It also signalled a release from a binding, repulsive past to a kind of historylessness, a blank page waiting to be inscribed. Both noble and base impulses were made into law and appropriated for tradition.

The young nation therefore produced literature in which it inscribed the fears, forces and hopes of the New World. There is an absence of hope, realism, materialism and promise in the literature of the earlier period. “For a people who made much of ‘newness’—their potential, freedom and innocence—it is striking how dour, how troubled, how frightened and haunted our early and founding literature truly is” (Ibid.,35).

Romance remained the cherished expression of young America and Melville said that there is no romance free from “the power of blackness”. This is especially so in a country where there is a resident black population upon which the imagination could play. Through this blackness, historical, moral, metaphysical and social fears, problems and dichotomies could be articulated. The slave population was used as surrogate selves for meditation on problems of freedom, for meditation on terror, of their fear of failure, powerlessness, nature without limits, natal loneliness, internal aggression, evil, sin and greed.

Thus internal conflicts were transferred to blank darkness to “conveniently bound and violently silenced” black bodies. The rights of man on

which the nation was founded was yoked to Africanism and “its history, its origin permanently allied with another seductive concept, the hierarchy of race” (*Ibid*, 38). Orlando Patterson says it is not surprising that Enlightenment accommodated slavery that the concept of freedom was not created in a vacuum. Nothing highlighted freedom more than slavery (in Bulmer and Solomos, ed. 1999: 95)

According to Morrison slavery seemed to have enriched the country’s creative possibilities in various ways. Besides the construction of blackness and enslavement in which the blacks were found the not free, the dramatic polarity created by the skin colour provided to project the not-me. Thus emerged American-Africanism—“a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm and desire that is uniquely American”—that allayed the internal fears and rationalized external exploitation (*Ibid*,38). The image of suppressed and repressed darkness became objectified in American personae. Writers also tried to celebrate or deplore an identity through racial difference. The difference provided a huge payout, of sign, symbol and agency in the process of organizing, separating and consolidating identity along culturally valuable lines of interest.

Bernard Bailyn provides with an extraordinary investigation of European settlers in the act of becoming Americans. A long passage from his *Voyagers to the West* underscores the salient aspects of the American character discussed so far.

William Dunbar... a man in his early twenties appeared suddenly in the Mississippi wilderness to stake out a claim to a large parcel of land, then disappeared to the Caribbean, to return

leading a battalion of 'wild' slaves with whose labor alone he built an estate where before there had been nothing but trees and uncultivated soil...this wilderness planter was a scientist who would later correspond with Jefferson on science and exploration, a Mississippi planter whose contributions to the American philosophical society...included linguistics, archaeology, hydrostatics, astronomy and climatology and whose geographical explorations were reported in widely known publications...an exotic figure, the plantation world of early Mississippi—known as 'Sir' William...he too imported into that raw, half-savage world the niceties of European culture: not chandeliers and costly rugs, but books, surveyor's equipment of the finest kind, and the latest instruments of science.

Ever eager for gentility, this well educated product of Scottish enlightenment and of London's sophistication—this bookish young litterateur and scientist who only five years earlier, had been corresponding about scientific problems—about 'Dean Swifts beatitudes,' about the virtuous and happy life,' and about the Lord's commandment that mankind should 'love one another'—was yet strangely insensitive, to the sufferings of those who served him. In July 1776 he recorded not the independence of the American colonies from Britain, but the suppression of an alleged conspiracy for freedom by slaves on his own plantation... Dunbar, the young *erudit*, the Scottish scientist and man of letters, was no sadist. His plantation regime was, by the standards of the time, mild; he clothed and fed his slaves decently, and frequently relented in his more severe punishments. But 4000 miles from the sources of culture, alone on the far periphery of British civilization where physical survival was a daily struggle, where ruthless exploitation was a way of life, and where disorder, violence, and human degradation were commonplace, he had triumphed by successful adaptation. Endlessly enterprising and resourceful, his finer sensibilities dulled by the abrasions of frontier life, and feeling within himself a sense of authority and autonomy he had not known before, a force that flowed from his absolute control over the lives of others, he emerged a distinctive new man, a borderline gentleman, a man of property, in a raw half savage world (Bailyn, 1986: 488-492).

Few things emerge distinctly from the passage—the historical connection between Enlightenment and slavery, the relationship between Dunbar's education and his new world enterprise. He had exceptional

education and he was exceptionally cultivated—a product of Scottish Enlightenment and a London intellectual. On July 1776, he records with astonishment and hurt a slave rebellion in his own plantation. “Judge my surprise...of what avail is kindness and good usage when rewarded by such ingratitude”. “Constantly bewildered”, Bailyn observes “by his slaves behaviour...(Dunbar) recovered two runaways and condemned them to receive 500 lashes each at five different times and to carry a chain and leg fixed to the ankle.”

As Morrison observes, this brief portrait shows the process by which the American as new, white, and male was constituted. Dunbar senses an authority and autonomy he did not know before, having absolute control over the lives of others. He emerged as a distinctive new man, a borderland gentleman, and a man of property in a ‘raw half savage world.’ The life of a planter in Mississippi provides him with an authority, an autonomy that his, fine education had failed to offer him. He thus becomes a new man, rather resurrected as a new man, a distinctive man—a different man. Whatever he is in London, in the New World he is a gentleman. The location of his transformation is within rawness being backgrounded by savagery. The rawness and savagery associated with Africanism provided the staging ground and arena for the “elaboration of the quintessential American identity” (Morrison, 1993:44). Interestingly the lashes ordered are not evidence of one’s own savagery. Dunbar persuades himself to believe that savagery is ‘out there’. This kind of contradiction is very much present in American literature.

Explicitly or implicitly the Africanist presence informs in compelling and inescapable ways the texture of American literature. "It is a dark and abiding presence, there for the literary imagination as both a visible and an invisible mediating force" (*Ibid.*, 46). Even though the American texts are not about Africanist presences or narrative or idiom, the shadow hovers in implication, in sign, the line of demarcation. Immigrant population saw themselves as Americans in contrast to the resident black population. "Race in fact now functions as a metaphor so necessary to the construction of Americanness that it rivals the old pseudo-scientific and class-informed racisms whose dynamics we are more used to deciphering" (*Ibid.*, 47).

Like Dunbar for the American writers the Africanist other becomes a means of thinking about body, mind, chaos, kindness, and love, provided the occasion for exercises in the absence of restraint the contemplation of freedom and of aggression; permitted opportunities for the exploration of ethics and morality, for meeting with the obligations of social contract for bearing the cross of religion and following out the ramifications of power. Although there was nineteenth century publication boom of slave narratives, the press, the political campaigns, the political parties and elected officials all spoke about slavery and freedom. But whatever popularity the slave narratives had, there was a master narrative that spoke for Africans, and their descendants. A vocabulary was designed to disguise the subject: The master narrative went on making adjustments to keep it self intact.

In the essay entitled *Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature*, Morrison says that "invisible things are not

necessarily “not there”; that a void may be empty but is not a vacuum” (in James and Sharpley-Whiting, ed. 2000: 34). She is interested in a kind of ‘intellectual feats’ that had to be performed by the American writer to erase an Afro-American from a society seething with his presence and the kind of effect that performance had on the work, the strategies of escape from knowledge, of wilful oblivion. Further, she adds, “Is the nineteenth century flight from blackness, for example, successful in mainstream American literature? Beautiful? Artistically problematic? Is the text sabotaged by its own proclamations of “universality”? Are there ghosts in the machine?” (Ibid., 35).

African idiom is used for different purposes like establishing difference or signalling modernity. Specific themes, fears, forms of consciousness and class relationship are embedded in the use of Africanist idiom. The dialogue of black characters is made unintelligible by spelling, to construe it as alien and unfamiliar, evoking the tension between speech and speechlessness, reinforcing class distinction and otherness to assert position, privilege and power, used also as a marker and vehicle for illegal sexuality, fear of madness expulsion, self-loathing. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* written by Mark Twain, Jim, the nigger speaks in the following manner:

‘I see a light a-comin ‘ roun’ de p’out, so I vade’ in en shove’ a log ahead o’ me en swum more’ n half-way acrost de river, en got in’ mongst de drift-wood, en kep’ my head down low, in kinder swum agin de current tell de raff come along (1966: 39).

Traditionally, African characters are used to portray and emphasize the invention and implication of whiteness. Black characters are used strategically to define goals and embellish the qualities of the white characters. Through

black characters the whites explore and penetrate their own body in the guise of "sexuality, vulnerability, and anarchy of the other" (Morrison, 1993: 53). Such anarchies are controlled through disciplining and punishing. Narrative appropriation facilitates contemplation on limitation, suffering, rebellion and speculations on fate and destiny. Such narratives are used for discourses on ethics and morality, used for the "construction of history and context for blacks by positing historylessness and contextlessness for blacks "(Ibid.,53).

Abdul R Jan Mohamed maintains that colonialist literature "Instead of being an exploration of racial Other, merely affirms its own ethnocentric assumptions; instead of actually depicting the outer limits of "civilization", it simply codifies and preserves the structures of its own mentality. While the surface of each colonialist text purports to represent the specific encounters with specific varieties of the racial Other, the subtext valorizes the superiority of European cultures, of the collective process that has mediated that representation " (in Gates, Jr., ed. 1986: 84). A number of linguistic strategies were employed in fiction to achieve this. They are (i) stereotyping for instance, a statement like "like most Orientals Aziz overrated hospitality" (Forster 1961: 142), (ii) metonymic displacement like colour coding and other physical traits like association of blackness with sin, dirt, foulness, atrocity, wickedness, (iii) metaphysical condensation allowing the writer to transform social and historical differences into universal differences such as in *Passage to India*: India says no to the possibility of overcoming racial alterity, (iv) 'fetishization' used to assert the categorical absolutism of civilization and savagery," (v) allegorical foreclosure: this produces foreclosure rather than disclosure for example,

Carson McCullers deploys allegory among her characters in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, to mourn the inevitability of closure and the fruitlessness of monologue, (vi) patterns of explosive, disjointed, repetitive language.

All these strategies can be seen at work in Ernest Hemmingway's *To Have and Have Not* (1937). Harry Morgan is the hero of the tale—a classic American hero, competent, wise, risk taking, risk loving, virile and so righteous *and guiltless in his evaluation of himself that it seems shame to question it*. Hemmingway's attempt at establishing these qualities of the hero is an interesting case study. There is a black character in the novel, who is a part of the crew having no name in the first part of the novel. The reason for his inclusion Harry says is the black man's skill "he put on a nice bait and he was fast". The rest of the time he sleeps and reads. In part two with the shift in narrative voices, Hemmingway uses the third person point of view. Now two formulations of the black man occur. He remains both nameless and stereotyped and becomes named and personalized. Harry calls him "Welsey" when speaking to the black man in direct dialogue; Hemmingway writes "nigger" when he refers to him as a narrator. Initially he is denied speech but the denial proves problematic and the novelist is forced to take strenuous measures.

When the sign heralding the promising water arrives and Harry sights the flying fish "The nigger was still taking her out and I looked and saw he had seen a patch of flying fish burst out ahead." (P. 13) "Saw he had seen" is improbable in syntax, sense and tense but Hemmingway is left with no other choice. It is risked to avoid a speaking black. Logic of the narrative's

discrimination prevents a verbal initiative of importance to Harry's business coming from this "nameless, sexless, nationless Africanist presence." (Morrison, 1993:73) The power of looking is Harry's; the passive powerlessness is the black man's that sets up a curious silent captain-mate relationship. His presence is needed to establish virility; competence and his absence would signal the absence of a figure, which can be assumed to be in some way bound, fixed, unfree and serviceable.

In Part Two, Harry and the black crewman engage in a dialogue. But "what he says and when he says it are plotted to win admiration for Harry" (ibid.,74). Welsey's speech is restricted to grumbles, complaints and apologies for weakness. Welsey's grumbles, groans continue for three pages (as Welsey responds to his gunshot wounds) before we learn that Harry is also shot and much worse than Welsey is. But Harry not only tolerates his own pain, he also treats Welsey compassionately. The serviceability of the Africanist presence becomes more pronounced with Hemmingway describing male female relationship. The last voice that we hear is of Harry's wife Mary. Mary lists and celebrates the virtues of her husband as virile, good and brave. Mary also expresses her hatred for Cubans for they killed Harry. She recalls an earlier incident when in Havana a nigger had said something to her and Harry had smacked his face thus associating Harry with sexuality, power and protection. Here we see Africanism being used as a fundamental fictional device to establish character. Harry and Marie (an Ex-prostitute) solicit our admiration by the comparison struck between their claims to fully embodied

humanity and a discredited Africanism. The voice of the text is complicit in these formulations.

Toni Morrison comments: "Ernest Hemmingway who wrote so compellingly about what it was to be a white male American, could not help folding into his enterprise of American fiction its Africanist properties" (1993: 91). As Gates, Jr. echoes her sentiments:

Few literary traditions have begun or been sustained by such a complex and ironic relation to their criticism: allegations of an absence led directly to a presence, a literature often inextricably bound in a dialogue with its potentially harshest critics (1987: 26).

The African-American literary tradition had a very unusual origin. It was generated as a response to eighteenth and nineteenth century allegations that persons of African descent did not and was unable to create literature. Philosophers like Kant were one of the earliest major European philosophers to conflate colour with intelligence; positing the correlation between blackness and stupidity as self-evident. Kant based his observations on the absence of published writing among blacks and noted that "Americans (Indian) and blacks are lower in their mental capacities than all other races" (1960:111). Francis Bacon writing in *The New Organon* in 1620, considered arts as the ultimate measure of man's place in nature. Peter Heylyn, in his *Little Description of the Great World* used Bacon's formulation to relegate the blacks to the subhuman status. Hegel echoed Kant and noted the absence of history among black people and derided them for failing to develop indigenous African scripts or even to master the art of writing in modern languages. Jefferson and Hume cited the absence or presence of a written literature as the signal measure of

the potential, innate humanity of a race. Thus “the African living in Europe or in the New World seems to have felt compelled to create a literature both to demonstrate implicitly that blacks did indeed possess the intellectual ability to create a written art and to indict the several social and economic institutions that delimited the humanity of all black people in Western cultures” (Gates, Jr. 1987: 25).

A sense of urgency thus characterizes the whole of Afro-American writing since the publication in of *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings and Surprising Deliverance of Britain Hammon, A Negro Man*. This is because in the first century of its literacy tradition, the blacks were attempting to register a public black voice in English letters. The intended aim was to negate the image of the black as an absence. Writing was the testimony to their humanity, a common humanity that they sought to exhibit through the writing of a text of an ex-slave’s life. The gesture was distinctly political-presenting their image as a negation of all that was white and western. Black formal writing began with the publication of the five autobiographical slave narratives published in English between 1760 and 1789, which were collective and functional. These narratives documented the black’s potential for “culture” and the command of the written language “virtually separated the African from the Afro-American, the slave from the ex-slave, titled property from the fledgling human being” (Gates, Jr., 1987: 4). The abolition of slavery did not however diminish the force of this impulse to write the race fully into the text.

The literacy of writing came to be of overwhelming importance in the life of a slave, a process larger than even physical manumission since the mastery

of arts and sciences was Enlightenment Europe's sign of the solid line of distinction between human beings and animals. Gates also says that the literacy of formal writing was both a technology and a commodity—commodity in the sense that African's right to be considered human being could be traded with it.

In fact nowhere else are question of social and political relevance in literature more pronounced than in the body of Afro-American literature. This is because of the 'social compulsion' of black literature as Du Bois maintains (1925), "sorrow and strain inherent in American slavery, on the difficulties that sprang from emancipation, on the feelings of revenge, despair, aspiration, and hatred which arose as the Negro struggled and fought his way upward."(qtd in Gates, Jr., 1987:30) And "when the African walked into the court of Western letters he or she was judged in advance by a fixed racist subtext, or pretext, which the African was forced to confront, confirm or reject" (Gates, Jr. 1986: 403). Countering the claim that blacks had no history, the blacks started publishing individual histories which was intended to narrate in segments the larger yet fragmented history of the blacks. The writings of the five authors, James Gronniosaw, John Marrant, Olaudah Equiano, Ottobah Cugoana and John Jea served to criticize the sign of the chain of being and the black person's figurative "place" on the chain. Their collective act gave birth to the black literary tradition and defined it as the "'Other's chain'—the chain of black being as the black people themselves would have it."(Ibid.,12) These writings made the first political gesture in the Afro-American literary tradition. But certain questions arose at this point of time. For instance, was it possible to realize the

type of subjectivity that the blacks sought through the act of writing? Could it be realized through a process that was ironic from the very outset or else how could the black subject posit a full and sufficient self in a language in which blackness itself was a sign of absence? Would it be possible to mask blackness through writing that used idiom, which contained the signs of irreducible cultural difference separating the white voice from the black? "Black writing and especially the literature of the slave served not to obliterate the difference of race; rather the inscription of black voice in Western literatures has preserved those very cultural differences to be repeated, imitated, and revised in a separate western literary tradition, a tradition of black difference" (Gates, Jr. 1986: 12).

Each of the great western intellectual racialists like Bacon, Hume, Kant, Jefferson and Hegel demanded that blacks write poetry to prove their full humanity. Frederick Schlegel accentuated an already pervasive view when he said that poetry was the most specific human energy, the central document of any culture. A Negro servant, Phillis Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* to Mr. Wheatley of Boston published in 1773, became the anti-slavery's most salient argument for proving the African's innate mental equality. The attestation of authenticity by eighteen renowned personalities prefacing the book, meant to have no doubt about the authorship. But the reviewers of the book from Voltaire to George Washington, from Benjamin Rush to Benjamin Franklin did not discuss the book as poetry. The contest was an unequal one. The documentary status of black art assumed priority over literary judgment.

The black American novel begins with the publication of *Clotel* or the *Colored Heroine* (1853) by William Wells Brown. It was a pioneering work for two directions in nineteenth century black writing were brought together: the tradition of black social criticism and the novel form. The beginning of black fiction shows two tendencies—in the writings of Martin Delany and Sutton Griggs there are glimmerings of black separatism calling the blacks to consider migration to different lands to escape oppression. Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois and others developed writings that were integrationist, but the movement was expected to preserve the essential element in such polarities as black and white.

The black American writer began his career with and continues to exhibit till today a crisis of identity. The black fiction is a troubled quest for identity and liberty, focusing on the agony of social alienation and plagued with a longing for real or mythical home. Robert Bone says in the *Negro Novel in America* (1958), the black at the tail end of romantic tradition opted for the strategy of melodrama but retained a strong abolitionist flavour from its origin in the slave narrative. A special mention needs to be made here of Charles Chestnut's short stories such as "The Gophered Grapevine" and "The Passing of Grandison". There are touches of irony, ingenuity and innovation in these stories. Harlem Renaissance spanning the 1920s saw large-scale developments in black history. For example, the decade saw large-scale black migrations from the southern repression to the northern industrial cities. It also saw the development of Harlem as the black cultural centre in the East; the rise of a black middle class, the cultural impact when the West Indians, Africans

and American blacks found themselves side by side in Harlem. Distinguished writers of this period include James Weldon Johnson, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, W. E. B. DuBois and in later decades James Baldwin. It was Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association that inspired Washington's separatist philosophy. Certain writers of this period presented blacks as exotic, sexually liberated creatures free of white man's care, which won many patrons for these black writers. In *A Century of Negro Portraiture in America* (1966), Sterling Brown isolated a few such damaging images current at the time. For instance, the comic Negro, the Exotic Primitive, the contented slave of the Joe Chandler Harris's stories. The most frightening portraiture was that of a Negro beast described by Joseph Gobineau and portrayed in such films as *Birth of a Nation*. The essay "The New Negro" (1925), promoted the idea of Negro race consciousness, as well as Pan-Africanism. Allan Locke wrote the days of the "aunties", "uncles", and "mammies" are gone and the Negro is being transformed.

The movement is remarkable for the return of some of its writers to black folk culture. The indigenous black American folklore reached full power in Jean Toomer's highly sophisticated work *Cane* (1923), a montage of poetry and short fiction and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God* (1937). With George Schulyter's science fiction novel *Black No More* (1931) and Wallace Thurman's *The Blacker the Berry* (1929). The Harlem Renaissance closed with the novels of black satire, books that foreshadowed the barbed fiction of Ishmael Reed.

The confusion of realms of art with propaganda plagued the Harlem Renaissance in the twenties. Each piece of creative writing became a political statement. "The black writer," said Richard Wright approached the critical community dressed in knee pants of servility curtseying to show that the Negro was not inferior that he was human, and that he had a gift comparable to other men" ( qtd .in Gates, Jr., 1987:29). In 1925, Heywood Brown argued that only through art would the Negro artist get freedom. Black literature became at this point of time a cultural artifact or a document bearing witness to the political and emotional tendencies of black people, as victims of white racism.

DuBois made the distinction between "method" and "content", the same distinction that allowed James Weldon Johnson to declare with glee that all that separated the black poet from the white was "mere technique!" Structure was atomized by now. "Form was merely a surface for a reflection of the world, the world being an attitude toward race; form was a repository for the disposal of ideas; message was not only meaning but value; poetic discourse was taken to be literal or once removed; language lost its capacity to be metaphorical in the eyes of the critic; the poem approached the essay, with referents immediately perceivable; literalness precluded the view of life as allegorical; and black critics forgot that writers approached things through words, not the other way round. The confusion of realms was complete: the critic became social reformer, and literature became an instrument for the social and ethical betterment of the black person " (qtd in Gates, Jr. 1987: 30).

Amongst those associated with the Harlem Renaissance it was Langston Hughes, who had the longest productive career, and by the early

1960s, his impressive accomplishments won him a considerable following. But none of the other representatives of the Harlem Renaissance succeeded in making any large impact on the general literary scene except James Weldon Johnson and Countee Cullen who were cherished within the Negro community for a brief moment.

According to Gates, Jr., race and super structure became, during the forties and fifties, the mode of criticism of black literature. The communist party mostly influenced the writers like Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Frank Yerby, and Willard Motley. Race as the controlling mechanism reached its peak during this period. Blackness—as theme was employed to forward one argument or another for the redressal of the Afro-American's social dilemma. Message was the medium: message reigned supreme and form became a mere convenience or worse, a contrivance.

Richard Wright's *Native Son*, a best seller in the 1940s is one of the best-known novels by a black writer. There is a kind of brutal 'realism' in the novel gained at the expense of portraying positive cultural features in black life. It is layered with existentialist, Marxist and religious themes. "What Wright achieved in *Native Son*, and what no American writer has done quite so well since (including Wright), was the construction of a consistent, coherent, and complete racial universe—south side Chicago—that is shaped by a sensitive if seared black subjectivity" (Johnson, 1988: 14). It echoes Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* and anticipated the thesis of Franz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).

Although the novel in America makes its full acknowledgement of all the bitter social realities that are the consequences of racial animus in general, the terrifying capacities for violence and cruelty that are there in the human heart are subtly articulated in the work of Ralph Ellison. His sense of the relationship of art to life, merging of narrative with music and his deconstruction of 'race' in the context of American civilization, constitute the narrative of *Invisible Man* (1952). The novel is an outstanding rebellion against all forms of "authority," all "fathers"; anything that limits Ellison's idea of freedom as equalling the lack of restraints. It is in a way the ultimate protest novel.

The Black Arts Movement was a child of Negritude and cultural Nationalism. Negritude was developed in the years between 1934 and 1948 by Léopold Sédar Senghor and Aimé Césaire who were admirers of Claude McKay with Leon Damas and founded the Journal *L'Étudiant Noir* and nurtured a literary movement memorable for its attempts to give authenticity to a unique African personality. For Senghor "emotion was Negroid", and by emotion he meant a sympathetic, even magical grasp of the world. This is the general spirit, or *élan* of Negritude. According to Janheinz Jahn in *Neo African Literature* (1966), the term Negritude broadly covered several meanings: (i) It was to be an instrument of liberation, (ii) an incantatory approach to poetry calling forth the essence of things, (iii) more often the style, feeling, and vision of a poetical work than its content, (iv) rhythm springing from deep emotion and feelings and from humour, (v) sympathy in contrast to understanding, (vi) the self-affirmation of blackness, (vii) also skin coloration and shared experience of oppression and finally, (viii) the *élan* of African civilization.

Negritude was a well-intended effort to correct destructive racial images. Senghor saw black people less as historical beings than as metaphysical types. The African universe, according to Negritude is full of "forces" one of which is man. Negritude's theory of "forces" is close to the doctrine of Neo-Platonism, such that the African life world is vibrant with divinity. Negritude continued to exert its influence in one form or the other even in the 1980s.

The most important figures in the 1960s and 1970s were Leroi Jones who called himself Imamu Amiri Baraka, the novelist, John Oliver Killens, the ideologue John Henrik Clarke, poets Larry Neal and Don L. Lee, and the editor of the now defunct *Black World*, Hoyt Fuller. There was an attempt to distinguish the Negro writer with a separatist ethnicist attitude, disengaging him not only from the larger world of American literature but also from the entire western tradition. By 1968, in a decade full of political assassinations, an unpopular war and a new militancy, Baraka was thrust completely 'outside' the mainstream. In the 1960s the dominant themes in black arts were paranoia and genocide. The pressure to write "politically" was tremendous, though little of this fiction survives till today. In Harlem Baraka was instrumental in founding the Black Arts Repertory Theatre and school. But the black theatre movement failed and Baraka immersed himself in Black Power struggle of the late 1960s and formulated key ideas for the Black Arts Movement and its literary counterpart.

Ron Karenga the head of the militant, nationalist self-defence organization called the black art as part of the revolutionary machinery of change. It was to be judged on two levels the social and the artistic—for

Karenga the social was primary. He argued that black art must be (i) functional, (ii) collective and (iii) committed. "It must expose the enemy, praise the people, support the revolution" (in Gayle, Jr. ed. 1972: 32). It was Baraka who for the most part established the style of cultural Nationalist poetics in the period between 1960s and 1970s. His works include a number of plays, collection of poems, essays, stories and a novel. Johnson says, "Black literature abounds with faintly Hegelian variations on the phenomenon of black body as stained." Once one is one-sidedly seen by the white Other the blacks have the option of accepting this being seen from outside and craftily using the "invisibility" of the interior to deceive and thus win a survival as the folk hero Trickster John does in the "Old Master and John" cycle or one may seize the situation at its roots by reversing the negative image of the black body. One might say, "It is beautiful" and "I am a child of the sun" (Johnson, 1988: 28).

The anthology of *The Black Women* (1970) signalled along with other post-civil rights era works, a shift in the character of fiction by black women. It emerged as a literature distinct yet not wholly separate from the earlier Black Arts Movement of the 1960s. Much of the momentum in this 'new incarnation' came from the works of Ntozake Shange, Gayl Jones and Paule Marshall.

Shange's choreopeom, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow is Enuf* strikes as the first fusion of black arts movement and women's movements. Through a collage of dance, poetry and prose narrative, Shange's shows presented the lives of seven unnamed women for whom being alive, being a woman and being coloured are part of a metaphysical dilemma. Gayl Jones's works include *Correigidora* (1975), a

haunting “blues novel” about Ursa Correigidora, a battered blues singer oppressed equally by black men and generations of white males. Her *Eva’s Man* (1976) is a horror story, about a mentally deranged woman who creates a bizarre murder. Paule Marshall’s works are distinctive for her dual American West Indian background provide her works with interesting interface of cultural variations within the black Diaspora. Her career starting from “The Valley Between” (1954), to her novel *Praise Song for the Widow* (1983) is remarkable for her first-rate writing, spiritual balance and emotional maturity rare to come across in black fiction.

Toni Morrison the most celebrated black woman writer is considered to be a direct descendant in style and sensibility of Ralph Ellison. She places fictional excellence above political appeal without diminishing the social importance of her works. This is evident in “*Sula* (1973), a beautiful, race transcending exploration of evil and existential freedom presented through the lives of two women in a small town in Ohio” (Johnson, 1988: 101). *Song of Solomon* is highly textured with details of black culture, is about Milkman’s effort to achieve self-knowledge and recover his past that reveals and confirms the black myth that Africans could fly. Altogether she has written seven novels including her latest novel *Paradise*.

Another great figure of this period is Toni Cade Bambara. She charms as a truly comic writer. Her first novel *The Salt Eaters* is the story of bottomed-out Movement people eager for the experience of wholeness after their civil rights efforts collapsed. Bambara uses a blend of satire and grief to batter at social hypocrisy offering a measure of hope.

But Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) stands at the crest of black women's fiction in the 1980s. It is the most commercially successful novel in the entire Afro-American letters. Walker's earlier novels, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970) and *Meridian* (1975) are stronger artistic achievements than *The Color Purple*. Other notable women writers of the period include Gloria Naylor, Kristine Hunter, Jamaica Kincaid and Octavia E. Butler

All these women in their works engage in a quest for identity. They mostly offer a criticism of social crimes and do not present a coherent, consistent, complete 'identity' for black women. This is one feature that distinguishes its essential elements from cultural Nationalism or Negritude. The conjoining of race and sex thematizes the black experience in hitherto unexplored ways, "but it triples the number of philosophical and political dilemmas to be resolved in the pursuit of selfhood." Du Bois might have said of black women of the 1980's that they ever feel their "threeness, an American, a Negro, and a woman; three souls, three thoughts, three warring ideals in one dark body" (Johnson, 1988: 117).

An attempt was also made to refute intellectual racism by an act of cannon formation by black writers. H. L. Gates, Jr. says, "until we free ourselves of the notion that we are "just Americans, "... and that what is good and proper for Americanists is good and proper for Afro-Americanists, we shall remain indentured servants to white masters, female and male, and to the western tradition, yielding the most fundamental right that any tradition possesses, and that is the right to define itself, its own terms for order, its very

own suppositions.” (in Baker Jr. and Redmond, ed. 1989: 29-30). And Further as Wlad Godzich points out in his introduction to Paul de Man’s *The Resistance to Theory*, theory “is a public institutional act of certification which assumes the authority to ‘effect the passage from the seen to the told’; and provides the basis for public discourse” (1986: pp. xiv-xv).

The first evidence at canon formation in relation to the Afro-American literary tradition was seen in 1849, in a speech delivered by Theodore Parker. Lamenting the state of American letters Parker remarked: “Our scholarly books are only an imitation of a foreign type, they do not reflect our morals, manners, politics, or religion, not even our rivers, mountains, sky ” (1907: 32) and added, “We have one series of literary productions that could be written by none but Americans, and only here; I mean the lives of Fugitive Slaves. But as these are not the work of the men of superior culture they hardly help to pay the scholar’s debt. Yet all the original romance of Americans is in them, not in the white men’s novel” (1907: 37). Parker was right about the originality and peculiarly American quality of the slave narratives. As Charles Summer said in 1852, the fugitive slaves and their narratives “are among the heroes of our age” (1985: P. xv). But the implications of these saying took three-quarters of a century to be realized.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., says, that the first attempt to define a black canon was made by Armand Lanusse, who edited *Les Cenelles*, an anthology of black French verse published in New Orleans in 1845. In the introduction, Lanusse defended poetry as an enterprise for black people, in their larger efforts to defend the race against “the spiteful and calumnious arrows shot at

us," at a target defined as collective black intellect. (p. xxxviii). Though these poems imitate the themes and style of French romantics yet they argue for a political effect -- the end of racism. Like Lanusse, Allen sought to refute intellectual racism by the act of canon-formation. Pointing to the achievement of Pushkin, Placido and Augustine as the great African tradition to which Afro-American are heir, Allen claims Wheatley and Horton as exemplars of this tradition. Attempts at canon-formation was also marked in the twenties by James Weldon Johnson's *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922), Alain Locke's *The New Negro* (1925), and V. F. Calverton's *An Anthology of American Negro Literature* (1929) anthologies. Each of these works defined as their goal the demonstration of the existence of the black tradition as a political defence of the racial self against racism. As Johnson observes:

The status of the Negro in the United States is more a question of national, mental attitude toward the race than of actual conditions. And nothing will do more to change that mental attitude and raise his status than a demonstration of intellectual parity by the Negro through the production of literature and art (1922: vii).

Calverton attempted to form the black canon to provide for the influence and presence of black vernacular literature in a major way. "Spirituals", "Blues", and "labor songs" each comprise a genre of black literature for him. It had its influence upon the editors of *The Negro Caravan*. Calverton said that his selection principles have been determined by his sense of black literary forms leading him to make selections because of their formal "representative value". He says in his conclusion:

The Negro, in the eyes of the critics, is an oddity, and as artist and intellectual is stranger far than fiction... His work is greeted from the point of view of race, and not of art...

In song, the Negro spirituals and to a less extent the Blues; in tradition, Negro folk-lore; and in music, Negro Jazz—these three constitute the Negro contribution to American culture... the Negro in his simple, unsophisticated way, has developed out of the American *milieu* a form of expression, a mood, a literary genre, a folk tradition, that are distinctly and undeniably American... The white man in America has continued and in an inferior manner a culture of European origin (1929: 3-5).

He asks the black writers to return or turn to the black vernacular for unearthing the veiled structures of black difference.

Although Calverton influenced the shaping of *Negro Caravan*, his idea of black canon as a formal, self-contained identity did not work because as the editors put it in the introduction: "Literature by Negro authors about Negro experience is a literature in process and like all such literature (including American literature) must be considered as significant, not only because of a body of established masterpieces, but also because of the illumination it sheds upon a social reality." (1929:7) The editors later elaborate on this idea by pointing to the relation of revision between *Iola Leroy* and *Clotel*. There are repetitions of situations from Brown's *Clotel*, "something of a forecast of of a sort of literary inbreeding which causes Negro writers to be influenced by other Negroes more than should ordinarily be expected" (*Ibid.*, 139). The black canon these editors asserted repudiated the white racist stereotypes that embodied the shared theme of struggle. They also wished to project an integrated canon of American literature:

They (Negro writers)... have been influenced by Puritan didacticism, sentimental humanitarianism, local color, regionalism, realism, naturalism and experimentalism. Phillis Wheatley wrote the same poetic pattern as her contemporary poets in New England. ...The bonds of literary tradition seem to be stronger than race (pp. 6-7).

An exactly opposite black canon-formation is the canon defined by Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal in *Black Fire*, published in 1968. This canon is the blackest canon of all. The valorized presence in this volume is the black vernacular no longer summoned through the comfortable rubrics of 'The spirituals' and 'The Blues' but "*embodied, assumed, presupposed*, in a marvelous act of formal bonding often obscured to some readers by the stridency of the political message the anthology meant to announce." (Baker, Jr. and Redmond, ed. 1989: 37). Gates, Jr. talks about the *Norton Anthology of Afro-American Literature*, as "A well-marketed anthology—particularly a Norton anthology—functions in the Academy to create a tradition, as well as to define and preserve it" (ibid: 37). His ideas of canon-formation Gates, Jr. says are to stress the formal relationship between various texts in the black tradition—of revision, echo, call and response, antiphony stressing the vernacular roots of the tradition.

Toni Morrison's works indeed attempt to integrate many features of the black narrative tradition. Besides 'race', 'gender' has been another important issue before her. She thus moves by these twin aspects of her situation and tells her stories trying to capture the reality in which the blacks live in the United States. In the next chapter on 'gender' an attempt is made to offer a comprehensive picture of Morrison as a novelist.

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## Chapter IV

### **Narrating Gender and Representing Women in Toni Morrison's Fiction**

In her essay "What the Black Woman Thinks About Women's Lib" (1971), Toni Morrison maintains that the black woman "had nothing to fall back on: not maleness, not whiteness, not ladyhood, not anything. And out of the profound desolation of her reality she may very well have invented herself" (qtd. in Johnson 1988: 97). Johnson who argues that she is rhetorical and not realistic contests this statement of Morrison on the status of African-American women. Further, he adds that Morrison refuses to take note of what he calls "social progress" that depends on the progressive leaders of both white and black communities. Johnson's argument lacks the incisiveness, as it tends to universalize the situation of black women Morrison's understanding of the status of the black woman however does not only depend on the concept of "social progress" but on her "identity" and "autonomy of selfhood" and, as woman and African-American. The twin concepts of "identity" and "autonomy of selfhood" are central to feminism whether black or white.

It is in this context it becomes necessary to have a brief overview of feminism(s) vis-à-vis black feminism. From its beginning in the mid-nineteenth century to its contemporary formation feminism has traversed diverse trajectories. It is conventional to distinguish two waves of feminism, the first-wave spanning the period 1830-1920 and the second-wave from 1960 to the present. According to this division, first-wave feminism is characterized by its grounding in a classical liberal rights perspective having its focus on campaigns

for women's enfranchisement and the extension of civil rights to women. Second-wave feminism, frequently dated as emerging with the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 in America, was characterized throughout the 1960s and 1970s by extensive and active networks of academic research combined with activities of women's groups. Contemporary feminist theoretical endeavour has increasingly challenged the dominance of materialist-theoretical perspective, focusing, in the processes, on its symbolization and representation. This development has shifted the focus from 'working on women' to 'theorizing gender'.

The search for depiction of women to escape the straitjacket of already-existing symbolic forms has led to an analysis of the relation between images and social representation, identity and the upholding of social orders. Questions of vision, power and knowledge are also evident in redefinitions of women as subject. As Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires in the introduction to their edited volume *Feminisms* maintain:

It is important that the focus of such questioning is not primarily the central question of early second-wave feminism — 'what is to be done?', but rather the more reflexive, 'what is the basis of my claim to knowledge' and 'who is the "I" that makes such a claim?' This shift from the overtly collectivist and the political to the more individualist and philosophical might be viewed negatively as a shift from insurrection to introspection, or positively as the coming to age of feminism as an intellectual endeavour, or perhaps more neutrally as simply symptomatic of the 1990s. However one views the development, it is clear that epistemological, ontological, and representational questions currently serve as a key locus of feminist concern and the significant ground for dispute between feminists (1997: 8).

This shift of focus within feminism has drawn heavily on the contemporary critical theories. Derridian deconstructive reading, Lacannian psychoanalysis and Foucauldian discourses of power and corporeality. It is this theoretical

restlessness that underlines the multi/inter-disciplinary stance of contemporary feminism. However, in spite of the multiplicity of feminisms, some feminists feel that the 'first-wave' and the 'second-wave' feminist movements and theories are overtly dominated by white, middle-class women who are theorizing and generalizing from the perspective of their own personal experiences. Thus, white, middle-class western women are not speaking only for all women in their societies that carries an Euro-centric veneer but for women everywhere, universalizing from their own experiences and life-situations and ignoring the effects of capitalism, racism and colonialism which proved decisive in the lives of non-white women.

One of the key challenges to the supposedly Euro-centric and essentialist nature of some feminisms has come from black feminists who have challenged white women's ability, and indeed their right to speak for black women. A key black feminist whose work has underlined this problematic is bell hooks, who, in her work *Ain't I a Woman* (1981), writes about the history of black women in the United States and their relationship to feminism. She argues that the rape and brutal assaults on black women during slavery led to a devaluation of black womanhood that permeated the psyches of all Americans and shaped the social status of all black women once slavery ended. Even now, a century after the abolition of slavery, US society still perceives and represents black women as 'fallen women', whores and prostitutes. The importance of this specific history of racial and sexual violence and the ways in which it has structured black women's lives and experiences in the United States has not however been fully taken into account by white feminists.

A central tenet of white feminist thought has been the assertion that “all women are oppressed”. This assertion implies that “all women share a common lot and that factors like class, race, religion, sexual preference etc. do not create a diversity of experience determining the extent to which sexism becomes an oppressive force in the lives of individual women” (bell hooks in James and Sharpley -Whiting, ed. 2000: 134). White feminist theory has no understanding of the white domination of other races that is contingent upon socio-political constructions and practices of racism, sexism and economic marginalization. Differences in the nature of work and family experiences and grounding in African-American culture suggest that African-Americans, as a group, experience a world different from those who are not black and female.

Lack of control over ideological apparatuses made expression of self-defined standpoints difficult for the blacks. The self-defined collective standpoint came to assume tremendous importance for the survival of the blacks in the United States. It depended on their ability to forge the individual, unarticulated yet potentially powerful expressions of everyday consciousness into an articulated collective standpoint. As Audre Lorde pointed out, “it is axiomatic that if we do not define ourselves for ourselves we will be defined by others — for their use and to our detriment” (1984: 45). Though ‘race’ and ‘gender’ are social constructions yet they are not constructed in the same way for both Blacks and Whites. In fact, black women are the only ones who have experienced the triple oppression of race, gender and colonization.

African-American women intellectuals have favoured the view that black women’s struggles are part of a wider struggle for dignity and empowerment. Alice Walker preferred the term “womanist” to feminist. To her “womanist is to

feminist as purple is to lavender," and one is "womanist" when one is committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female" (1983: p.xi). The ideas of Anna Julia Cooper, Pauli Murray, bell hooks, Alice Walker, Fannie Lou Hamer and other black women intellectuals too offer a powerful answer to the question "What is Black Feminism?" "Inherent in their words and deeds is a definition of Black Feminism as a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community" (Collins in Essed and Goldberg, ed. 2002: 170).

In the 1960s and 1970s, black women as individuals and in collectives issued cogent calls for a transformative black feminism. Questions about black women's sexuality, the interrelations of 'race' and sex and the nature of black women's political, social, economic and social roles were raised in the writings of Sonia Sanchez, June Jordan, Audre Lorde and Toni Cade Bambara. As recorded in *The Cambahee River Collective: A Black Feminist Statement*, the black feminist presence evolved in the late 1960s. In 1973, black feminists primarily located in New York, felt the necessity of forming a separate black feminist group, which became the National Black Feminist Organisation.

What made black feminism different from white feminism was the black women's necessity to have solidarity around the theme of 'race'. Although black women fought along side black men against racism they also struggled against the sexism of black men. By the late 1970s and 1980s black women writers sought to correct the racial and gender bias of women's and black studies within and outside the academy. Women's studies received such influential texts as Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* and *The Color Purple*, Ntozake Shange's

play *For Colored Girls*, bell hooks' *Ain't I a Woman*, Gloria T. Hull's *All the Women are White*, Patricia Bell Scott's *But Some of Us are Brave: Black Women's Studies*, Barbara Smith's edited volume *Home-Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* and Paula Gidding's historical narrative *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*.

By 1980s male academics and writers started promoting works by and about black writers and feminists. Quite significant in this regard were Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s anthology *Reading Black, Reading Feminist* and his editing of the New York Public Library's Schomburg series on black women writers that helped in introducing readers to women authors from early nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. In the early 1980s Alice Walker contrasted black feminism with white or Euro-centric feminism, using the expression "womanist" to refer to women beyond women of African descent, positing a culturally specific womanism. In the mid to late 1990s the varied ideological, cultural and literary contributions made by black women presented a complex body of black women's writing. Nevertheless, the influence of historical women like Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Frances E.W. Harper, Ida B. Wells, Barnett and Mary Church Terrell, and thousands upon thousands of unknown women—who have had a shared awareness of how their sexual identity combined with their racial identity to make their whole life situation and the focus of their political struggle "unique" cannot be denied. Black women writers altered the course of African-American world of literature and directed their unwavering gazes on matters previously marginalized in literature: black women and their worlds.

The 1993 Nobel Prize for Literature not only recognizes Toni Morrison as an exceptionally brilliant creative writer but also underlined the importance of

black women's writing. In an interview with Sandi Russel, Morrison has clearly stated her writerly position:

I write for black women. We are not addressing the men as some white female writers do. We are not attacking each other, as both black and white men do. Black women writers look at things in an unforgiving/loving way. They are writing to repossess, re-name, re-own (Mckay, 1988: 54).

The experience of re-possessing and reclaiming is crucial for black women's identity and selfhood.

Morrison's representation of black women characters has invoked mixed responses from critics. Each one of her fictional works depicts women of colour in different roles. These characters as a group as Patricia Hill Collins maintains, "experience a different world than those who are not black and female" (2000: 184). Collins's statement centralizes the uniqueness of black experience in America. Morrison also echoes similar sentiments while talking about the black women. In an interview in 1986, she explained that she came to writing fiction because she felt that "There were no books about me, I did not exist in all the literature I had read ... this person, this female, this black did not exist ..." (Interview with Sandi Russel in Mckay, ed. 1986: 54). In the beginning she was "just interested in ... placing black women center stage in the text, and not as the all knowing, infallible black matriarch but as flawed here, triumphant there, mean, nice, complicated woman and some of them win and some of them lose. I am very interested in why and how that happens, but here was this vacancy in the literature that I had any familiarity with and the vacancy was me, or the women I knew. So that preoccupied me a great deal in the beginning" (Interview with Christina Davis in Gates, Jr. & Appiah, ed. 1993:419). This explains her focus on Pecola, Claudia and Frieda in *The Bluest Eye* and Sula

and Nel in *Sula*. Later on she was also interested in the relationship of black men and black women and the axis on which those relationships frequently turn, and how they complement each other, fulfill one another and are made whole or prevented from wholeness by things that they have incorporated into their psyche. Morrison invests them with physical qualities that are often necessary for their survival. Further, their will to survive is an act of falling back on mythologies and wisdom of Africa. Morrison views the black people including women as timeless people whose interpersonal relationships are managed for the survival of the black community.

From this it follows that representations of women in Morrison's fiction revolve around the questions of 'race' and 'gender'. Her writing is interventionist in the sense while deconstructing white theories of 'race' and 'gender' she reconstructs the conflicting and contradictory formations of black representation. One of the important vectors in understanding 'gender' within African-American Feminist discourse is the representation of an identity that is simultaneously coherent and fragmented and situated in the intersection of 'race' and history.

Although theoretically 'gender' refers to male/female distinction, it also distinguishes female bodies from male bodies for sexual difference, for this difference is subjected to what is socially constructed as opposed to what is biologically given. Therefore, sex is not something separable from 'gender' but is subsumable under it. However, black feminists have argued, among them bell hooks, that racism has taken precedence over sexism, an understanding that does not figure anywhere within white feminist theories. Thus black feminists are of the view that although the family may be a site of sexist

oppression for black woman, it can also be a site of strength and resistance to racial oppressions.

Racism not only classifies certain groups as different on the basis of phenotype and skin colour, but also classifies them as inferior. Black feminism is a response to the racist definitions of blackness and the devaluation of women of colour. In constructing black woman's selfhood, attempts have been made to recover black women's history, literature, music, art and other cultural forms and traditions. Along with racial oppression resistance to such oppressions have also been textualised. "Crucial in these other histories are positive narratives of historical agency and self-definition in the face of racist stereotypes and Euro-centric narratives of history" (Weedon, 2002: 162). Whereas histories of oppression throw important light on the present as well as the past, histories of resistance provide alternative traditions in which to ground positive ideas of difference and new forms of subjectivity.

Afro-centric approaches to black women studies locate their culture within a tradition with identifiable African features that gives rise to a shared worldview. As Patricia Hill Collins maintains

Within African-American extended families and communities, Black women fashioned an independent standpoint about the meaning of Black womanhood. This self-definition enabled Black women to use African-derived conceptions of self and community to resist negative evaluations of Black womanhood advanced by dominant groups (1990: 11).

Morrison follows what Collins advocates in the meshing of theory with lived experience, which can acknowledge and respect difference without fixing it outside history or contemporary social situation. Thus for Black women the

struggle involves embracing a consciousness that is simultaneously Afro-centric and feminist.

Toni Morrison's concern in representing black women follows from the forms and institutions of oppression as well as the mechanisms of resistance to them without denigration or idealization. She fictionalizes the various constructs that revolve around the identity of black woman and her selfhood in that she does not depict them as triumphant or defeated characters but places them in an inter-subjective space attempting to make their representation a kind of progress from bondage to bonding and also undoing that bonding; from sisterhood to individuals with their achievements and failures. Thus she follows a deconstructive practice to maintain her authorial neutrality. This position is analyzed in contextualising her fictional works in detail.

*The Bluest Eye* is a product of Morrison's interest "in racism as a cause, consequence, and manifestation of individual and social psychosis" ("Home" in Lubiano, ed. 1997:9). Here Morrison explores the disastrous consequences of the western notion of physical beauty. The idea of physical beauty, which is a product of male 'gaze', according to her, 'glamorizes' the female body and has racist connotations. Such a construct privileges physical beauty over personal worth and virtue. In the context of the African-American women who traditionally don't qualify to be called beautiful as they don't have fair skin, blue eyes and blond hair—necessary parameters of the white sense of being a beautiful woman. In a racist society like the United States, the concept of the beautiful is a 'site' of cultural and ethnic difference. Morrison does not favour the appropriation of the white concept "White is beautiful" and changing it to Civil Rights slogan, "Black is beautiful." This counter construct, according to

Morrison, is to accept the white values at the cost of black values. Besides, she does not valorize everything black, for she wants to depict black men and women not as idealized figures but as human beings with both inherent strengths and weaknesses.

The entire Breedlove family believed that they are ugly. The master had said, "You are ugly people". They looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance "Yes", they had said, "You are right" They thus inherited the myth of unworthiness associated with ugliness. (p.28).<sup>1</sup>

Actually, the assertion of racial beauty was required to put up a strong defence against the damaging internalization of assumptions about inferiority originating from an outside gaze, Morrison says in the Afterword to the novel. "If her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures and knew the sights — if those eyes were different ... she herself could be different" (p.34). Pecola's obsession with blue eyes and her desire for 'radical alteration' is the direct consequence of the ostracization that she suffers because society decrees her ugly and therefore considers her unworthy of love, affection, encouragement and self-esteem. *The Bluest Eye* is a tale of the negative influence of the community on one of its most vulnerable members, an eleven-year-old black girl, Pecola, who becomes the victim of society's anger, frustration, ignorance and shame. The society thwarts all her attempts at discovering a means of self-definition. Raped by her father Cholly Breedlove, she gives birth to a stillborn child, loses all sense of self and descends into madness. The tragic story is about the refusal of the society to recognize that 'Black is beautiful'. The belief that black is not beautiful was one of the major hindrances to the development and realization of a healthy self by black people during their stay in America. Thus implicit in

Pecola's desire for blue eyes is racial self-loathing. Importantly enough, Morrison raises these questions in the 'Afterword' of the novel "Who made her (Pecola) feel that it was better to be freak than what she was? Who had looked at her and found her so wanting, so small a weight on the beauty scale?" and then says, "The novel pecks away at the gaze that condemned her."

Karla F.C. Holloway observes that in this novel "society/culture acts as a stifling force with no help or compassion strong enough to redeem its members"(1987: 31). From the beginning Pecola has to battle her way through "dragons" of abuse heaped on her at home, in the school and the society at large. As soon as she is born, Pauline Breedlove, her mother, laments "... Lord she was ugly" (p.98) and knew she is going to be on the periphery for the rest of her life. The Shirley Temple Cup and Mary Jane Candies allow Pecola to carry the image of 'blonde hair, blue eyes and creamy skins' into her very being and she seeks to become one with it for the time being as she gazes "fondly at the silhouette of Shirley Temple's dimpled face" (p.12).

The mother-daughter bond, which is so central to feminine identity, spirituality and affirmation, are denied to Pecola. Here the bond does not heal, instead alienates Pecola as her family life is defined by violence that her parents perpetrate on each other. Morrison writes "Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove fought each other with a darkly brutal formalism... . They did not talk, or groan or curse during these beatings" (p.32). The narrator comments, "Tacitly they had agreed not to kill each other" (p.32). During such violent moments Pecola would whisper into the palm of her hands "Please God", "Please make me disappear" (p.33). A pattern of caring or incorporation never reaches Pecola to help her to define a positive self-image or form a positive opinion about her.

In the school, Pecola is called out by her name, which becomes negatively powerful as it denies her a confirming identity. Cruel school children shout names at her, calling her “Black e mo. Black e mo ya dadd sleeps nekked” (p.50). Her colour and features are used as a way of denying admission into their society. They had extemporized a verse made up of two insults about matters over which “the victim had no control” (p.50). Maureen Peal the light skinned girl also indulges in discovering if the insults shouted about Pecola’s father are really true. Not satisfied with the kind of answers she gives, Maureen draws a circle of acceptance around her leaving the other three girls, Claudia, Frieda and Pecola outside and shouts: “I *am* cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I *am* cute!” (p.56). Pecola is unable to return the insults back to Maureen as Claudia and Frieda did because she is conscious of her ugliness and senses rejection at an irredeemable level.

All sections, all age groups combine to reinforce Pecola’s belief that the only way to escape this stultifying pain and humiliation is to become beautiful by acquiring bluest eyes of all, that will reverse the bleak circumstances of her life and dazzle everyone into loving her or at least tolerating her presence. She was thrown into a “blinding conviction that only a miracle could relieve her”(p.35) and never gets to know her beauty. The community’s point of view about Pecola becomes very important to an understanding of her plight. Claudia and Frieda learn a “secret, terrible, story” from overheard conversations centering round Cholly Breedlove and Pecola. They overhear ‘pregnant’, ‘her daddy’ and ‘dirty nigger’ (p.148). They piece together the information and feel what Pecola in her traumatized state fails to feel — embarrassment, hurt and sorrow: “And I believe our sorrow was more intense

because nobody else seemed to share it. They were disgusted, amused, shocked, outraged or even excited by the story .. We looked for eyes creased with concern, but saw only veils ” (p.149). Pecola does have the protective alliance between Claudia and Frieda in her favour but the real world condemned and despised her and the alliance fails to rescue her from the speechless insanity into which she finally descends. The contrast between the life of the two sisters and Pecola was too stark, their lives too distant from the ugly reality that Pecola confronts daily.

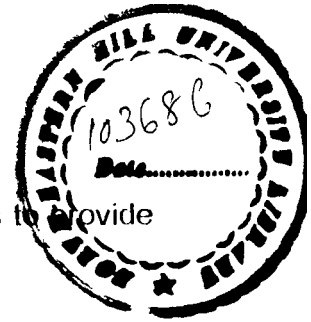
Karen Carmean maintains, “Claudia’s story of loss and reconciliation assumes the form of pastoral tragedy”(1993:19). In the beginning of the novel there is a formal evocation linking nature’s failure to reproduce with Pecola’s stillborn child. Images of the earth as a sterile mother also emphasizes the darkness of the tragedy - a tale of grief, that includes conscious and unconscious acts of violence towards Pecola. Claudia and Frieda planted marigolds in the year Cholly impregnated Pecola. Shortly thereafter she miscarries and goes mad. But the earth like Pecola refuses to grow the planted seeds. The novel ends with Pecola wandering about amongst refuse and sunflowers. “The ungrown, sterile marigold seeds symbolize Morrison’s sense of earth as untrustworthy, contingent, penurious, grudging” (Holloway,1987: 32) The novel rejects the cyclicity of time as a healing force and rejects nature as a primal force that can nurture and rejuvenate, for instance, the season of spring is not associated with resurgence of beauty but Claudia connects it with the ache of whipping. “Morrison creates an environment and a landscape in which infertility is the norm, where values with the potential to sustain have been reversed or perverted” Her depiction of the cycle of

seasons without growth, from autumn to summer, evoke in their mythological implications comparisons to the legend of the Fisher King and to the world T.S. Eliot creates in *The Waste Land*" (Harris 1991: 27).

The novel does not concentrate on Pecola's tragedy alone. The larger story of the novel is also a tragedy because people potentially great are waylaid by beliefs that are adopted from outside which become a cause of cruelty and destruction in the novel. Beauty is as much a political as an aesthetic concept. Ugliness is not merely a matter of outward appearance; it is also considered to be a manifestation of an inner ugliness, one indicative of spiritual and moral failure:

That which was 'white' (or Anglo, male, Christian, wealthy) was extolled and infused with connotations of benevolence and superiority, while that which was not white (or not Anglo, female, non Christian, poor) was debased and associated with malevolence and inferiority (Braxton and McLaughlin 1990: 153).

Claudia, as a mature narrator, condemns the white concept of beauty as one of "the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought" (p.95). In fact the novel explores the impact of the white ideologies on the black community. The inner dislocation suffered by them because of this imposition inhibits personal growth and takes away their nurturing abilities. Nowhere is this more evident than in the case of Pauline Breedlove. Pauline suffers from a kind of social and spiritual dislocation as she moves North and falls a prey to the destructive concepts of 'romantic love' and 'physical beauty' both of which, the narrator comments "originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion" (p.95). Distancing herself from her family whose members she considers as ugly she seeks to find "beauty, order, cleanliness, and praise"



(p.101) in the white woman Mrs Fisher's home. Thus, Pauline fails to provide any kind of emotional sustenance to her family.

Both Pauline and her husband Cholly are miserable failures as parents. Like Pauline, he is also a victim of racism and his rape of his daughter is to be viewed in the light of his past. He is a man with scarce emotional resources. The novel focuses on Cholly's past to explain how what appears to be a totally shocking, immoral behaviour is actually a result of unnatural experiences suffered at the hands of the white people by the blacks. The only personal link of his childhood is Blue Jack who, for a while, reckons out to share his stories with Cholly, but the bond gets broken again and again. His grandmother takes him to bed for warmth in winter, an act with reference to her wrinkled, and sagging breasts suggest something unnatural. Thus the novel shows severance of the ties and shows how racism and colonialism fractured relationships between parents and children. The kind of essential bonding that Pecola requires and has been denied by her parents' leaves her with no sense of self. Women to women bonding are crucial to Black women's self-definition and its denial is disastrous to black women as in case of Pecola. Cholly's self-image suffered a jolt when a leering voyeur humiliated him during his sexual initiation. Further, his uncaring father inflicts on him a psychological injury that forces Cholly to withdraw into infantilism and then to become "dangerously free" unable to give coherence to the pain as well as few pleasures of his life" (p.125). Fatherhood shoves Cholly from the brink of indifference into dysfunction since he has neither models nor expectations. He acts solely on momentary whim. When he rapes his daughter, he abandons all moral and familial responsibility. "His soul seemed to slip down to his guts..." (p.128).

If Pecola's mother finds her too ugly to be loved, her schoolmates find the darker shade of her skin too repulsive and the only kindness that she receives is from the three prostitutes: China, Poland and Miss Marie, themselves outcasts who do not intervene to stop the destruction that visits her. Pecola's unquestioning assumption of a standard that denies her self-worth makes her invisible in many cases. Morrison also stresses more on the universal female invisibility than just depicting black invisibility. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* was "the original and powerful introduction of this black self concept into American consciousness" (Holloway, 1987: 34). But his protagonist at least knows that he is invisible. Pecola on the other hand is cut off from self-knowledge because she is abused and is a child. She is also obstructed and deflected from reaching a higher consciousness of self because she is female. She is ostracized from human society before she has reached a consciousness of self. "Pecola stands for the triple indemnity of the female Black child. Children, Blacks and females are devalued in American culture" (Ibid., 34). In this context Pecola's encounter with Mr. Yacobowski, the white migrant assumes tremendous importance. When Pecola goes to his shop to buy candies, he does not see her because "How can he see a little black girl? Nothing in his life even suggested that the feat was possible, not to say desirable or necessary." Not wanting to touch her hands he takes the pennies without touching her hands. "His nails graze her damp palm" (pp36-37). Pecola senses the lack of human recognition in the eyes of the migrant and concludes that the distaste must be for her, for her blackness. Black people are visible to the whites only in so far as they fit into the white frame of society. This frame is deconstructed through dismemberment of the American Dick and Jane

mythology, essential features of the white world contrasted with the world of the Breedloves — house, family, cat, mother, father, dog and friend. They are separated from each other and their ideological significances probed through their inclusion and recontextualisation as plot elements in the Breedlove narrative. This process of dismemberment is similar to Claudia's dismemberment of the white doll in an attempt "to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability..."(p.19) that had escaped them:

I fingered the face, wondering at the single-stroke eyebrows; picked at the pearly teeth stuck like two piano keys between red bowline lips. Traced the turned up nose, poked the glassy blue eyeballs, twisted the yellow hair. I could not love it. But I could examine it to see what it was that all the world said was lovable (p.14).

Claudia's destruction of the doll and Pecola's standing near the mirror "trying to discover the secret of ugliness" (p.34), according to McLaughlin, is demonstrative of how western culture "inspires hatred toward and among people of African descent, inducing destructive behaviours and an equally adverse disconnection from anything not western" (Braxton and McLaughlin 1990: 170). Claudia is a survivor because her anger is directed towards her white adversary. She hates Shirley Temple, the white child in the kitchen and everything associated with her. Rather than embracing the white values, which Pecola does, and which results in her complete erasure, Claudia rejects those values and survives. Pecola fails to realize that her ugliness does not lie within herself but within the culture that defines her as ugly.

The negative consequences of embourgeoisement of black culture become evident in the novel in the characters of Maureen Peal and Geraldine. They are the people who try to accommodate themselves into the white society

by appropriating white values. Stable minded Claudia, describes light skinned Maureen Peal in an ironic, bitter tone: "A high yellow dream child with long brown hair ... she was rich, at least by our standards, as rich as the richest of white girls, swaddled in comfort and care" (p.47). With her "sloe green eyes, something summery in her complexion, and a rich autumn ripeness in her walk" (p.48), she casts a magical spell over the community:

She enchanted the entire school. When teachers called on her, they smiled encouragingly. Black boys didn't trip her in the halls, white boys didn't stone her, white girls didn't suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partners (p.48).

The entire community is bewitched by a phenomenon that keeps Pecola outside of it. Maureen is vicious and cruel and senses a power and freedom that her colour has given her and the compliments she receives for her 'silver-screen' features. She is scornful of black people, insensitive towards their plight and is egotistical. In the kind of vicious insults that she hurls at Pecola she uses her power to reject those who seek to identify with her. Whereas Pecola blindly internalizes the white values and suffers. Claudia being analytical sees that "Maureen Peal was not the Enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The *Thing* to fear was the *Thing* that made her beautiful, and not us" (p 58). Both she and her sister realize that they have been kept out of the mythology of beliefs that has shaped cultural norms for beauty in America.

An extreme version of Maureen occurs in Geraldine, whose internalization of white standards is complete and creates hatred against the blacks. Product of land-grant colleges, she is an example of middle class black women who has divorced herself from African-American roots. In these colleges Geraldine is taught thrift, patience, high morals and good manners.

She is also taught to get rid of "the dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of the wide range of human emotions" (p.64). The word 'dreadful' conveys the views of the land-grant colleges, which inculcate white values in black students. Geraldine's loss of passion is indicative of her loss of identity as a black woman. Cleanliness to the point of blandness, houses made into artifacts, children becoming possessions to be pointed out are the pitfalls of this middle class status to which she aspires. Morrison seems to condemn those who fit into the mould, who allow individuality to be consumed by their notions of progress. Trudier Harris says: "Their status becomes another of the wedges splintering the community into almost unsalvageable pieces. As Pecola finds her way through the splinters she can only reap cuts and bruises, not a pattern for healthy growth" (1991: 29).

Though her brief encounter with Pecola cannot save her, Mrs. MacTeer has a place in the novel as "the spark of healthy fertility in the world of stagnation and a light in so much spiritual darkness" (Harris 1991: 41). A positive image of the familial bond becomes evident only in the MacTeer family. Although here the adults are overwhelmed with the struggle for survival Mrs. MacTeer does care for her children and "part of Claudia's life urge is in the tactile memory of her mother's hand on her feverish forehead in the middle of the night a loving mother's touch that belies the antagonistic angry mother of the daytime" (Holloway 1987: 33). Claudia's father is silent but protective. When Mr. Henry attempts to sexually molest his daughter Frieda, he goes into a rage and has to be stopped from killing him. So there is a backdrop of strong and caring adults in Claudia and Frieda's childhood. The girls learn from their

mother the lessons of life learn of their blackness, and their femaleness by listening to the songs that Mrs. MacTeer sings:

If my mother was in a singing mood, it wasn't so bad. She would sing about hard times, bad times, and somebody-done-gone-left-me-times ... Misery colored by the greens and blues in my mother's voice took all the grief out of the words and left me with a conviction that pain was not only endurable it was sweet (pp.17-18),

In the novel both the working class and the middle class families fail to nurture because of their insipidity. The home that should provide them the basis for growth turns out to be a prison where Sammy and Pecola along with their parents are trapped in the Breedlove household. The failure to instill a healthy self concept, the negative examples of parenting and the absence of role models worthy of emulation keep the characters stranded in their own world without any route of escape. No values are passed on to them and Pecola in her hypersensitivity and Sammy in running away try to draw sustenance from sources beyond their homes. In Geraldine's home there is no family relation to break down because she has already built holes into it. In her house her husband becomes an appendage rather than a personality and she becomes the centre of control and activity. She is wholly responsible for the failure passed on to Junior, her son. Junior the little boy from this structured stifling home kills his mother's cat and blames Pecola. Geraldine drives Pecola away from her house because Pecola had killed her favourite cat. But that is not the only reason for her hatred of Pecola. Pecola disturbs Geraldine because she sees in her the ghost of all that she has left behind — poverty, disorder, and funkiness: "Hair uncombed, dresses falling apart, shoes untied, caked with dirt"(p.72). Pecola reminds Geraldine the necessity of building a

home against intruders even if it happens to be within the home itself. She calls Pecola a “nasty little black bitch” (p.72) and asks her to get out of the house. Thus rather than assuming the role of mother and passing on ancestral wisdom, what Geraldine passes on is divisiveness. She sees Pecola as representative of a class for whom she nurtures contempt and disgust:

They were everywhere. They slept six in a bed ... Grass wouldn't grow where they lived. Flowers died. Shades fell down. Tin cans and tires blossomed where they lived ... Like flies they hovered, like flies they settled (p.72).

The society thus mirrors back to Pecola the same ugliness she sees in her own family. But here the image of the dead cat with its blue eyes closed “leaving only an empty, black and helpless face” (p.71) suggests the cultural vacuum in which blacks like Geraldine who aspire to white norms may eventually find themselves in. Cultural dislocation also brings about emotional and sexual dislocation for Geraldine. She never experiences the kind of passion, which Pauline experiences with Cholly.

Raised to fear life, Pecola is unable to challenge the cruel realities and bleak circumstances of her life: “both the implicit racism inherent in the Shirley Temple icons and explicit acts battering her submissive ego”(Carmean, 1993:25). She sees herself as the problem and wishes for some kind of transformation. First she prays to God for blue eyes, then timidly approaches Soaphead Church, a man said to possess supernatural powers. Soaphead is struck by Pecola's request: “Of all the wishes people had brought him — money, love, revenge — this seemed to be the most poignant and the most deserving of fulfillment” (p.137). He identifies Pecola as the victim of God's absent mercy. Then he also victimizes her by having her poison the dog he

detests and makes her believe that she has got blue eyes –eyes that only she will be able to see. Violence takes away voice from Pecola. Therefore, Claudia has to tell her story. It is only in the final few pages presented in the stream-of-consciousness style that we get to know Pecola's version of what actually happened to her. "One has to visit the immured insanity of Pecola's dialogue with her invisible friend, a dialogue that displaces her sense of blame onto a desire for blue eyes that would redeem all "ugliness" (Holloway 1987: 35). Claudia realizes that the entire community was responsible for the tragic disintegration of Pecola. She sees that Pecola's subservience has made her a scapegoat. She concludes:

All of us – all who knew her felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health ... We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength" (p.163).

She considers the community hypocritical as it has taken advantage of Pecola's virtues. "We rearranged lies and called it truth, seeing in the new pattern of an old idea the Revelation and the Word" (p.163). Claudia understands as to 'why' instead of only "how" Pecola becomes a victim. Certainly for Pecola it is too late but Claudia tries to learn from Pecola's sad example, transcending the enervating image imposed on minorities in America and attempts to develop a strong self-image.

The marigold seeds that did not sprout in the prologue re-emerge in the final imagery of the sunflowers around mad Pecola — "this form insists that this female victim, with her poetic, inward nature, is lost, expunged forever, her voice and story lost" (Holloway, 1987: 35). Unlike Morrison's second novel

*Sula*, in the first novel there is no room for epiphany, no possibility of reaching inner wholeness, as does Nel at the end of *Sula*. *The Bluest Eye* is thus a story of loss: "...recognition of loss, irrevocable loss" (Ibid., 35).

In *Sula* Morrison was preoccupied with "the culture of gender and the invention of identity, both of which acquired astonishing meaning when placed in racial context" ("Home" in Lubiano, ed.1997:9). *Sula* depicts two black women friends Nel Wright and Sula Peace and their community of Medallion, Ohio. It follows the lives of Sula, and her cherished friend Nel, from their childhood to maturity and to death. They come from opposite types of matrilineal lines and the tension between two typologies form the basis of the whole work. "Because each had discovered years before that they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them, they had set about creating something else to be"(p.52).<sup>2</sup> We also meet three generations of women in the novel. The novel further underlines change and stability in the life of women at various stages of their lived life. Each woman's identity is at least partially worked out vis-à-vis the masculine principle. Therefore, close attention is paid to male/female relationship as the book works through the complex patterns of major female characters as feminine typologies.

The family that we are first introduced to in the novel is the Wright family and the last voice that we hear is of Nel Wright. Nel's background is typical of most women. In fact she is every woman. She has been taught to repress parts of the self-more intensely because she carries the burden of the shadow that white culture projects on to the Black people. Nel's matrilineal line also suffers from "an Eve/Mary bedrock of feminine duality, the whore/Madonna polarity" (Holloway, 1987: 53). Nel's mother Helene has been carefully taught to hate

her own mother who was a "Creole Whore" and was raised by her grandmother in a house guarded by four virgin Marys: "Counseling her to be constantly on guard for any sign of her mother's wild blood" (p.17). At the age of ten Nel goes with her to bury her mother's pious grandmother. There Nel meets Rochelle, her own grandmother for the first time and her mother disclaims any affiliation to her and asks her to go away. Before she leaves, Rochelle, Nel's grandmother embraces Nel in a tight, hard and anguished way with a parting injunction "Voir!" which means to inspect and see (p.27). The parting embrace becomes an emblem of great loss. "It reflects the separatism among women caused by polarized and largely Christian, male-created images of the feminine; the women lose their roots and connections, their continuity (Holloway, 1987: 53). But after her encounter with her grandmother Nel returns to the Bottom, aware of her separate identity: " I'm me. I'm not their daughter. I'm not Nel. I'm me. Me"(p.28). The "trip ... or her new found me-ness," gives Nel the strength to cultivate a friend in spite of her mother (p.29).

Nel's own background is so orderly, contained and stultifying that she develops a fascination for the disorderly house of Sula. The narrative reads, "Nel regarded the oppressive neatness of her house with dread"...she preferred Sula's "woolly house"(p.29). Helene's fear of the resurgence of her mother's wild blood leads her to controlling repression of Nel's sexuality and drives her imagination underground. "Her parents had succeeded in rubbing down to a dull glow any sparkle or splutter she had"(p.83). All the three generations of women that we meet in Nel's family are matrifocal. Helene Wright's husband is always out at sea being a seaman, Jude abandons his wife and family and Nel ends up being a single parent. But unlike the women of

Sula's line, Nel has some years of peaceful married life with Jude. Basking in her man's love she matures into an adult woman. They gaze at each other's pain, individuality and vulnerability very closely and have a deep sense of each other. It is the betrayal of this bond that hurts Nel. She takes it as a personal betrayal when Jude leaves her for Sula. She says:

"But Jude ...you *knew* me. All those days and years, Jude, you *knew* me. My ways and my hands and how my stomach folded and how we tried to get Mickey to nurse and how about that time when the landlord said ... but you said ... and I cried, Jude. You knew me and had listened to the things I said at night, and heard me in the bathroom and laughed at my raggedy girdle and I laughed too because I knew you too, Jude. So how could you leave me when you knew me?" (pp.104-105)

Although Nel lives out the life of a conventional "good" woman she loses out her man to Sula. Morrison here seems to be suggesting, "the separatism that the Peace matriarchy symbolizes is at least a less vulnerable way of life"(Holloway, 1987:54).

The trinity of Peace women Eva, Hannah and Sula embody images of the feminine that is natural, ancient and universal. Breaking away from expected codes of behaviour they transcend the usual depictions of black women in African-American literature debunking numerous myths and stereotypes. Eva is the founding matriarch of the line. She establishes the value of this line sitting in a wagon on the third floor directing the lives of her children, friends, strays, and a constant stream of boarders. We see her as a reigning deity in her household. Hannah defies expectations of conventional morality by sleeping with the husbands of her neighbours and defies expectations of motherly behaviour when she says, "she loves Sula but does not like her" (p.57). Sula, however, is the epitome of independence. "Eva's

arrogance and Hannah's self-indulgence merged in her and, with a twist that was all her own imagination"(p.118) and she throws the community's morality on its face. Elaborating on this point Linden Peach says that Koenen's theory of 'generational degeneration' in Morrison's novels is too simplistic. This is because although Hannah is weaker than her mother Eva, and Reba in *Song of Solomon* is weaker than Pilate the personalities of grand daughters are usually very strong. Their level of 'self-inventing', is disturbing because it is so self-obsessed (Peach, 1995: 16). Sula "lived out her days exploring her own thoughts and emotions, giving them full reign, feeling no obligation to please anybody except her own"(p.118). In fact Sula in her disrespect for traditional mores posits the folk logic and folk amorality of the trickster.

Black women in America have the responsibility of voicing the legacy of Africa. It is an accident rather than an evolution of culture that voice is taken away from men because of slavery. Morrison's women refuse to be bound by traditional morality or traditional roles. In their new roles they exhibit the ability to make or create them that is more closely associated with characters from black folk culture than black communities.

Eva assumes regal authority by passing through many harrowing experiences. The novel details out in a flashback the circumstances that Eva has overcome in order to survive and give her children life. Deserted by her husband she and her children face starvation. In order to feed them, she mysteriously sacrifices her own leg "she swept down from a wagon with two crutches"(p.34), after an absence of eighteen months and thereafter receives money to live on. She loses the left leg, which symbolises the severance of intuitive capacities of the feminine --- the softer, gentler virtues of a woman.

Choosing the self over sacrifice, bordering on immorality, she becomes truly free. Her separation from people in the community and acting against their norms enables her to develop an ironic posture in relation to them. She can live with them because she now assumes superiority over them. Her freedom is the result of the loss of her leg and it "gives her the ability to love, hate, create, conquer, kill, with responsibility and accountability only to herself" (Harris 1991: 73). She becomes fiercely protective about her children and grandchildren and as long as they are under her care, her house is organized and carefully run.

Eva's transcendence of human bonds becomes manifest when her husband Boy Boy visits her the year after she returns from an eighteen months long absence. This time Eva hates a positive and sustaining emotion "Hating Boy Boy, she could get on with it, and have the safety, the thrill, the consistency of that hatred as long as she wanted or needed it to define and strengthen her or protect her from routine vulnerabilities" (p.36). Thereafter scarcely ever descending to the lower floors, she sits on a throne like wagon to receive the faceless, nameless and interchangeable suitors who are nothing more than toys to her. These men surround and worship her but they are like the weak and wispy forces of the masculine.

Except for Jude and Ajax, all the men in the novel are nameless and faceless, their individuality never acknowledged by the Peace women. Nevertheless Eva bequeaths man love to her daughters:

Those Peace women loved all men. It was man love that Eva bequeathed to her daughters. Probably, people said, because there were no men in the house, no men to run it. But actually that was not true. The Peace women loved maleness, for its own sake (p.41).

Hannah, like Eva lives by her own set of rules. For her it is simply a matter of getting "some touching everyday" (p.44). She refuses to give access to the men to her sleeping quarters, her personal territory. Hannah can best be described as a pleasure principle. The women may be exasperated with her because "she seemed too unlike them, having no passion attached to her relationships and being wholly incapable of jealousy" (p.44). But even whores resent her generosity and the churchwomen who call her "nasty" are not inclined to believe that she is evil. Her sexual independence does make her a disruptive force in the community, a rebel although not a terrible one. Hannah weakens the community's cohesiveness but does not topple it completely. This becomes evident from the fact that the women with whose husbands she has slept take care of her body when she burns to death. Perhaps they unconsciously respect the rebel in Hannah because she does what ties to the church and community structures would not allow them to do. Rather her attention to their men seems to be "complimenting the women" (p.115) on their good taste. Her deviation from the norm is not seen as personally insulting to the women of the community as her daughter Sula's lawless behaviour was to become later.

Eva adopts Tar Baby, a drunken man, refusing to see him as a person. She adopts the three Deweys who become absolutely interchangeable to their teachers and entire household. She would like to take care of all the children but restrains any move towards unique individuation. She passes judgment over others and in the process puts herself beyond similar judgement. In her ultimate elevation to the position of a goddess, she appropriates power over life and death. In a mixture of love and revulsion, she also burns her son Plum,

egotistically eliminating what offends her. "There is not even remorse for Eva, just commitment — passionate and self-sacrificial for life that has quality"(Holloway, 1987:57).

Trudier Harris says, "in killing Plum and trying to save Hannah, Eva exhibits a preference for women centered-consciousness that pervades most of the novel"(1991: 75). Plum in his addiction is a reminder of the ineffectiveness of her husband and she fears its repetition in her son. Thus she puts an end to a seemingly useless life. Her murder of Plum is deliberate but "her attempt to save Hannah is instinctive born of an intuitive identification with her daughter" (Harris, 1991: 75). Perhaps Eva senses that Hannah is her last opportunity to perpetuate something in her own image.

de Weever says that three of Morrison's women characters, "Sula in *Sula*, Pilate in *Song of Solomon* and Jadine in *Tar Baby* realize the 'not-yet-imagined'; their sense of owning themselves; the way they work out their destinies; the freedom and adventure they show in seeking to satisfy their own needs and desires" (1991:32). Whereas Nel never arrives at a full understanding of herself as a woman, "Sula pushes herself towards an ultimate radical isolated image of the individual female separated from society, family, and friends, but still with an intact sense of her own selfhood" (Holloway, 1987:68). She travels from town to town, never taking root, she acts out of self-interest alone when she takes Nel's husband or puts Eva in Sunnydale the old age home. She does not identify with any other character except Nel and is divorced from her own feminine principle. As Sula says to Eva, "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself"(p.92). Sula sleeps with several men discarding them at her whim. "She went to bed with men as frequently as

she could. It was the only place where she could find what she was looking for: misery and the ability to feel sorrow”(p.122). For her, her sexual partners are relatively unimportant. They are merely means to an end that she desires. The narrative reads, “She waiting impatiently for him to turn away and settle into a skim of satisfaction and light disgust, leaving her to the post-coital privateness in which she met herself, welcomed herself, and joined herself in matchless harmony”(p.123). The townsfolk ostracize her for her lack of morality and sexuality. Thus “the old women drew their lips together, small children looked away from her in shame and young men fantasized elaborate torture for her.” “Labeling her first as a ‘roach’ then a ‘bitch’ and finally an ‘evil’ the townsfolk laid broomsticks across their doors at night and sprinkled salt on porch steps”(p.113) to keep themselves away from any harm that Sula may bring on them. Thus “Sula has no one but herself and it is through this solitude that she crafts herself into a woman”(Holloway, 1987:68). As a child Sula is most individualistic and is not threatened by aggressive males. On one occasion to ward off the threat from white boys she slashes off the tip of her own finger (p.54) thus sending the silent message “If I can do that to myself, what you suppose I will do to you?”(p.55) She stands as a model of female constancy for Nel. Sula embraces her natural powers fully and does not separate it from her physical self. Nel disengages herself from its power and therefore loses its strength and protectiveness. The connection with things natural is suggested very early in the novel when Nel and Sula engage in a sexual play with earth (p.58-59). Her relationship with Nel, Eva or Jude does not add any dimension to her personality and she remains unchanged by other’s identities. Like nature ravaging and replenishing its own self, Sula also has her own source of power.

Nel has first dreamt of individuation when she says, "I'm me"(p.28), but she never realizes its full potential. Sula however dies with her sense of self intact although others question her lifestyle, values, sanity and morality. Unfortunately this wildly individualistic woman is threatened by her relationship with Ajax. Morrison calls Sula an *artiste manqué* because she never found a medium, a form: "Had she paints, or clay, or knew the discipline of dance, or strings; had she anything to engage her tremendous curiosity and her gift for metaphor she might have exchanged the restlessness and preoccupation with whim for an activity that provided her with all that she yearned for"(p.121).

Her burning up with fever over Ajax becomes strangely logical. Sula who to this time has been acting only out of masculine archetypes herself, needs to ground herself in home and relationships to prepare herself for the kind of true wisdom that comes in the second stage of life. Comparisons with Nel throws Sula's dilemma into greater relief. Although devastated by Jude's betrayal, Nel now gains some valuable access to the feminine roots during her years as Jude's wife. She establishes her home and discovers her earthly sides, her roots. She has her children and some mildly satisfying affairs after the departure of her husband.

According to Holloway, Sula demonstrates the principle of *enantiodromia*, the "regulative function of opposites" ( Hillman, 1979: 76) the automatic recoil to the opposite pole when only one side of the archetype is lived out. Before her affair with Ajax she adopts the extreme masculine values, denies roots and connections all the while preferring to fly and drift. When Ajax touches her other side she instantly metamorphoses into a caricature of Nel. "Sula becomes a

dependent, yearning woman who can be killed by the same deserting behavior that she herself has lived out" (Holloway, 1987: 59).

Sula's death after Ajax's rejection can also be explained in terms of the type of cosmic bliss they experience during their lovemaking. Ajax seems to transform her very being and they merge into a mystical, primordial, elemental oneness with the universe. Ajax's "gold", "alabaster", "loam", and "fertile" (pp. 130-131) masculine elements merge with Sula's newly awakened feminine elements of "silver" and "water." Although alabaster image is not associated with masculinity, according to Holloway, the alabaster "reflects the artist's perspective in Sula that appreciates the pure, sculptural, and elemental masculine in Ajax" (1987: 59-60). But Sula's clinging and cloying frightens Ajax away because Ajax thought that Sula was the only "other woman he knew whose life was her own, who could deal with life efficiently, and who was not interested in nailing him" (p. 127).

Unable to connect permanently to a man, Sula tries to hang on to her feminine oneness with Nel. She lives through a polarity that only causes separatism, loneliness and alienation. Her feminine roots connect only to Nel not to the larger patriarchal system of the community. She refuses to move towards becoming a part of the matrix of responsible 'umbrella women' that Morrison has identified as the stabilizing force in the Black community. Sula's last thoughts are of Nel, "Well, I'll be damned" she thought, "it didn't even hurt. Wait'll I tell Nel" (p. 149). Her death finally becomes a peaceful one, a sleep of water imaginatively. Nel is Sula's shadow and Sula loves Nel for herself and for all that they have shared. Though she dies of fire (fever) she sinks into the

comfort of water, she senses final psychic and spiritual oneness with Nel, the only human being she has known or loved.

Feminist theologians point out that when a woman fails to develop her integrated self, everyone coming in contact with her suffers; it does not remain a personal problem when a woman is kept from growing into all that she should be. Both Sula and Ajax live on the fringes of the society. Sula's love relationship takes place in a vacuum. Their relationship is not contextual so the community remains untouched by Sula's final capitulation of its values of connection and stability. "Morrison's novels show that individual transformation need the ceremonial presence of the community to reify and support ritual passages. Sula and the community both suffer catastrophe from their alienation" (Holloway, 1987: 61).

Nel, as a foil to Sula, values duty and tradition more than the idea of self-sacrifice. It is because of this instinct she survives and ensures the survival of her line also. But the cost of this sacrifice is the repression of knowledge of the free and imaginative Sula, who is buried and smoldered deep within. "To know that she is there is the first step of feminine completion a founding self-knowledge that gives spiritual breadth" (Holloway, 1987: 62). Whereas Nel has cared to listen to the dictates of her culture and community, Sula does whatever she wanted and tells Nel those truths that go against the conventions of the community: "...the free fall, oh no, that required – demanded invention... Now Nel belonged to the town and all of its ways" (p.120). Thus Nel is incapable of inventing her true self. It is only towards the end that she realizes that whatever Sula stood for may not necessarily have been evil. In an exchange just prior to Sula's death she says to Nel

"How you know?" Sula asked.

"Know what?" Nel still wouldn't look at her.

"About who was good. How you know it was you?"

"What you mean?"

"I mean may be it wasn't you. May be it was me" (p.146).

Sula stands for feminine freedom of thought. Even a woman like Nel who has lived out the cultural norms realizes this. There is pain and exultation in her final cry for Sula. Nel becomes familiar with the masculine principles of flight and freedom that Sula always brought into her life. So it is an aged Eva who starts the internal grounding in the fusion of polarities in the character of Nel. When Nel visits her in the old age home Eva tells her: "You. Sula. What's the difference?"(p.168) And Nel realizes that her deepest bond was with Sula and not with her husband Jude

"Sula embodies a connection between feminine archetypes that has been held down, repressed even within the feminine collective unconscious" (Holloway, 1987: 62). Morrison dramatizes the tradition's unperceived barriers to self-discovery, which reflects her belief in the need for experimenting with life. The exploration of the possibilities of life also demands keeping in touch with the lawless side, breaking rules so as to be the roving woman.

Sula discovers the terror and thrill of the free fall in life through her own creative capacity for invention. The novel thus leaps into unknown space, beyond the boundaries of self, beyond norms set forth by male literature. Nel eventually breaks through the barriers of traditional moral certainty and recognizes a Sula she hasn't seen for a long time. Morrison's last image in the novel reflects this. Nel cries out for Sula, cries out her loss, cries out her knowledge of Sula and her Sula-self.

“We was girls together,” she said as though explaining something. “O Lord Sula,” she cried, “girl, girl, girlgirl girl.” It was fine cry – loud and long but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow (p.174).

What she understands in a moment of epiphany is the glory of feminine individuation, a statement of selfhood unfettered by male definition.

In *Song of Solomon*, human relationship is further deconstructed. Although the novel “develops in depth Morrison’s vision of masculine archetypes, the portraits of women are as strong and compelling as her more centrally feminine previous novels” (Holloway, 1987: 85). The novel focuses the education of Milkman Dead as he quests for his identity through discovery of his family heritage and understands human responsibility. The novel depicts the urban life of Milkman in Michigan between 1931 and 1963 and the last part of the novel features Milkman’s flight South to reclaim material wealth. The strength and spirituality of several women in his family finally redeem him. In a poignant moment, no longer bored, spiritually barren, proud and selfish, Milkman discovers the value of human relationship, reducing it to an essential question: “Would you save my life or would you take it?” (p.331) Though he determines the answer in relation to his life, he does not consider his response to others till Guitar mistakenly shoots Pilate on Solomon’s Leap. Pilate, his aunt points the way towards love and caring for others: “I wish I’d a knowed more people. I would of loved ’em all. If I’d a knowed more, I would a loved more” (p.336). As Pilate dies Milkman imbibes her ferocity and takes a leap in faith to his final bouts with Guitar. It affirms his relation to his ancestors and he joins them. A “lodestar” setting his own course, he meets them in their mythic and

elemental flight. "For now he knew what Shalimar knew: If you surrendered to the air, you could *ride* it" (p.337).

The initial cause and the final result of relinquishing ones ego for true humanity lie in the world of women. Milkman achieves the fullness of self through feminine principle. It is in the realization of his love for his aunt Pilate and Ruth, his mother, that Milkman begins his first step towards adulthood.

In *Sula* curiosity combined with courage leads to adventure. While *Sula* ends with adventure, *Song of Solomon* goes a little further showing how adventure gets transformed into a story (song) and myth, linking the past to the present. The southward journey of Milkman becomes a journey backward, a journey back home to his own people. Milkman goes through and is chastised through the process of initiation, which prepares him for reinstituting his identity as a black man having learnt his lessons about black cultural life.

Milkman first awakens to family history through his aunt Pilate. Pilate enchants Milkman with her stories and enters his life to take over the nurturing function replacing his natural mother Ruth. Milkman hears from his aunt how his father saved her life. Pilate says, "Hadn't been for your daddy, I wouldn't be here today...Our Papa was dead, you see. They blew him five feet into the air"(p.40). Ruth is unable to nurture because she suffers from sterile, soul killing white values and patriarchal oppression of her husband, Macon Dead. Pilate guides him beyond the peacock plumage of materialism binding him to earth and teaches him to fly.

"Pilate represents the secular side of traditional dichotomy — she is a non-conformist, with freedom to explore." She has "ties to history that transcend written record and extra-natural quality that Ruth's limited

imagination can barely have glimpses of'(Harris, 1991:92). Her lack of navel suggests her extra-natural mothering role and mythical connotations of an individual who literally had to "invent herself". When she realizes, "what her situation in the world was and would probably always be she threw away every assumption she had learned and began at zero" (p.149). Such a distinguishing feature ties her to Sula. Because of her lack of a navel others view her as having the traits of voodoo doctors and conjurers. "Pilate, who never bothered anybody, was helpful to everybody, but who also was believed to have the power to step out of her skin, set a bush afire from fifty yards and turn a man into ripe rutabaga – all on account of the fact that she had no navel" (p.94). She knows no fear. Unafraid even of death, she carries on conversations with her dead father. "It was right after Reba was born" when she was lonely and depressed that her father came back to her and her father said, "Sing. Sing," which "relieved her gloom immediately" (p.147). Pilate is also a "natural healer" (p.150). Though her absent navel leads people to conclude that she is a "mermaid" or a "witch" she is incapable of holding malice against anybody. She has a special "way of being in the world" one that highlights her ability to make contacts with the other world. Her flat stomach becomes a mark of her "otherness", as Sula's birthmark and Pecola's ugliness become marks of "otherness" for them.

Pilate's stories connect Milkman's present to his past in an unsuspecting way. Those stories inspire Milkman's interest in others and provide a way for him to discover where he belongs. "The lessons Pilate subtly offers can provide him the solid perch from which he can fly"(Carmean, 1993:49). Having learnt to listen and to relate to people and places in an entirely different way Milkman

begins to think of stories he might tell of his own. In the last scene with dying Pilate in his arms he sings, "Sugargirl don't leave me here/Cotton balls to choke me/Sugargirl don't leave me here/Buckra's arms to yoke me"(P.336).

Macon and Pilate represent two separate spheres. While Macon follows the footsteps of Jake, which values property and status, Pilate embodies the spiritual and community oriented part of him. While Macon teaches his son to "Own things" and tells him, "Then you will own yourself and other people too,"(p.55) Pilate asks him to cultivate a love for human beings in general. Macon also tells Milkman, "Please get it son. Get the gold"(p.166). Pilate's own home stands in contrast to Macon's. Ruth and her daughters make fake roses and the only confirmation of Ruth of her existence is the ugly spreading watermark left on the dining room table that once held fresh flowers.

In part one of the novel we are reminded of the presence of nature through Pilate and Circe. Pilate's house is filled with the smell of nature with which she is associated. Her house smells of forest and blackberries and Circe's home has a 'sweet spicy perfume'- "Like ginger root – pleasant, clean and seductive"(p.239). Thinking of his sister Pilate, Macon remembers that she smells like a forest and that she is "born wild" (p.166). As a child of nature, she is free to follow her own inclinations and is unconcerned with finding herself. Her unique self-knowledge of herself does not derive from an awareness of her name though Morrison consistently associates names with identity, choice and function throughout this novel. Instead, Pilate's self-awareness and self-confidence are the results of direct experimentation with life, not vicarious, imagined or protected experience. Pilate provides Milkman with an opportunity for re-evaluating his relationship with his parents. She herself has been

estranged from her brother for years now. Pilate tells Milkman, "After my Papa was blown off that fence, me and Macon wandered around for a few days until we had fallin out and I went off on my own"(p.141). Although they are not reconciled, she says, "It's a good feelin to know he's around"(p.141). The geographical, spatial support provides a kind of commitment to his kin that Milkman with no knowledge of his family legacy can hardly fathom. The depth or relationship between Macon and Pilate and Pilate and Ruth are difficult to measure. They have undergone shared traumas of existence, which makes their failures to socialize or squabbling insignificant.

"The specific lessons that Milkman fails to learn are but fractional representations of the philosophy of wholeness that Pilate practices"(Harris, 1991:94). When Milkman goes to her house, he finds himself in a peaceful environment, unmarred by the blistering hatred of his parents for each other. In Milkman's house "Macon's hatred of his wife glittered and sparked in every word he spoke to her"(p.10). He finds a soothing place where the love of money has no meaning. Pilate, Reba and Hagar have allowed the world to pass them by, at least the world in which most people find themselves trapped. "In their voluntary retreat they have salvaged more valuable things a leisurely appreciation of life, joy in each other's company, a love of music, and the simple credulous wonder in things, as they are, with which most adults have lost contact"(Harris, 1991:94). Contentment with her own situation and being herself without any kind of pretension is her forte.

This philosophy she offers to Milkman. But he is too intent on marveling at her differences, his vision is seared with his father's materialism and the narrowness of the world on Not Doctor Street to penetrate the surface of

Pilate's existence and have a proper look at its life-saving depths. When Milkman learns to fly, we evaluate his success as a testament to Pilate's guidance and training. He becomes a heroic personality only because he learns to be human, more sinning than saved. He experiences the flexibility of modality. He shows that goodness alone is not the prerequisite for heroism. Morrison blurs the lines of absolute values, as is characteristic of the trends in African-American folk cultures, one that gives Morrison's writings such a distinctive flavour. In *Sula* she blurs the lines of distinction between good and evil. While other female characters fear some sort of rejection, Pilate fears neither rejection nor isolation. "Already without family she was further isolated from her people...every other resource was denied to her: partnership in marriage, confessional friendship, and communal religion"(p.148). Death also "held no terrors for her"(p.149). All her attributes qualify her to be a guide but her example inspires few followers except Milkman. "Her simple life illustrates its richness, her insistence upon fairness evokes his sense of responsibility, her love demands his consideration" (Carmean, 1993:56). Consequently, at the end of *Song of Solomon*, Milkman risks his life to save Pilate and in doing so, discovers the courage that gives him wings.

Throughout the novel, however, Pilate's individual strength acts as a foil to the conventional weaknesses of other female characters: Ruth, Lena, First Corinthians, and Hagar. With Hagar especially Morrison shows the difference between beneficial effects of her altruistic love: "she ...acquired deep concern for and about human relationships"(p.149). It is compared with the destructive results of Hagar's possessive, blinding obsession. Hagar has had an insulating and pampered childhood. To her mother and grandmother, Hagar remains a

"baby girl" (p.319). Hagar's life is wasted because she has no other desire other than to be loved. Guitar teaches tormented Hagar "You think he belongs to you because you want to belong to him Hagar don't. It's a bad word, 'belong.' Especially when you put it with somebody you love"(p.306). All of Pilate and Reba's "tender love" takes from her the development of strength needed to survive Milkman's abandoning her. Hagar surrenders her self-respect, and smothers the little remaining interest Milkman has in her. Without him she feels she will lose her grounding in the feminine world, in the world even. She says, "Look at how I look. I look awful. No wonder he didn't want me"(p.308). She thinks she can metamorphose into Cinderella by going on a mad shopping spree in which she pathetically dons all the Madison Avenue clichés. She simply wants to be reborn by changing her exterior. She also attempts to kill Milkman. At thirty-six she still continues to be a girl, has not tracked the linear passage of time and cannot believe that she has given nineteen years of her life to Milkman and that he can write her off. Four elements contribute to her total destruction. Firstly by totally protecting Hagar as the future of their line, Pilate and Reba unwittingly participate in her destruction. Secondly, her own temperament is responsible for her destruction; thirdly Milkman's cynical indifference towards her and the commercial values of American culture destroy her. The aspect that is most missing in her is the strength that comes to women from either raising children or working to support oneself. Hagar's "anaconda love," (p.137) finally, consumes her, leaving her with "no self", "no fears", "no wants" "no intelligence" (p.137). Having mistakenly assumed that Hagar needs only love to sustain her, Pilate fails to see her love "stumped" in two senses: its brevity and scope of development (p.319).

Ruth Foster's life is also similarly "stumped" though she describes herself as having been "pressed small" to fit her father's concept of a dutiful child and later Macon's idea of an acceptable wife (p.124). She is encouraged, even at times coerced into passive, quiet ways both by her father and her husband. In direct contrast to Pilate a fully independent woman, Ruth remains a child. Ruth's helplessness, her ineptitude and her blandness develop to protect her from the men in her life, who consider her only in terms of her usefulness to them. "Lots of people were interested in whether I lived or died but he (her father) cared"(p.124). She longs to talk to somebody who would listen. Throughout the novel Ruth remains a nebulous figure, largely content to assert her individuality in apparently insignificant ways. She stands as a total contrast to Pilate's gigantic presence.

The lives of Lena and First Corinthians, in their turn, are thwarted by Macon's expectations. As girls, they are "displayed then splayed" before others to arouse envy and aggrandize Macon's self-image (p.216). Daily asserting his authority, Macon manages to keep "each member of his family awkward with fear" (p.10). He pays little attention to the practical aspects of his daughter's future, a painful lesson for Corinthians who later discovers that their education has left them unfit for "eighty percent of the useful work in the world"(p.189). There is no man who her parents deem worthy as a marriage partner for her and she is rejected by Black men who want a strong upwardly mobile spouse, not a pampered flower. She becomes a maid to a spiritually vacuous, repulsive old white woman. Corinthians also discovers her own ego at the age of forty-two.

Corinthians's development in the novel parallels Milkman's growth and encapsulates the struggle for identity described in Morrison's first two novels. Like Claudia McTeer and Sula, Corinthian reaches a point where she is faced with the choice of finding her own function or accepting the one prescribed for her, between following conventions or challenging it, between leading a sheltered life and risking it.

Incensed by Milkman's revelation of the love affair between Corinthians and Macon, Lena confronts her brother with scathing truths about himself, which he has ignored for so long. She says, "You've been laughing at us all your life. Corinthians, Mama, Me. Using us, ordering us and judging us ... where do you get the right to decide our lives" (p.215). Lena continues ignoring his feeble protest and continues, "From that hog's gut that hangs down between your legs"(pp.215-216). She reminds Milkman that his sex is insufficient to ensure his superior position, now that she has become conscious of her rights. "I don't make roses anymore," She concludes "and you have pissed your last in this house" (p.216). However, shadowy Lena's presence in Milkman's life, she steps into light during this occasion demanding to be seen and heard. Lena deflates Milkman's phallogocentric and unconscious existence and becomes stronger and more autonomous: "Her eyes doubled in size behind the lenses and were very pale and cold" (p.216). All through their lives they have depended on others for identity. "The sisters suddenly solidify and become fiercely separate. These women are portraits of what gerontological data calls an increased extroversion in the later half of their lives. As middle age nears, these women's drowsing ego-selves suddenly flare, come alive, and individuate into the world" (Holloway, 1987: 96-97).

For all these women of the younger generation, Lena, Corinthians and Hagar — Morrison uses life-stage boundaries to delineate character change and growth. The women explode out of the niches and these explosions Holloway says, reinforces Milkman's individuation. He has tried to force Corinthians to give up Henry Porter but she escapes. Then Lena tells him of his selfishness. Hagar kills herself and Pilate gives Milkman Hagar's hair saying he must carry his guilt (p.334).

Milkman's ego-death comes about when he realizes how selfishly he has treated Pilate and Ruth. "Hating his parents, his sisters, seemed silly now. And the skin of shame that he had rinsed away in the bathwater after having stolen from Pilate returned" (p.300). He realizes that Ruth's life "from the age of twenty to forty had been celibate, and aside from his consummation that began his own life, the rest of her life had been the same", that her mother lived through all that by nursing her son and paying occasional visits to the graveyard of her father. She wonders, "what might she have been like had her husband loved her?"(p.300) Pilate dies in his arms and continues to instruct him about love of all human beings, his oneness with the universe. He understands why "without ever leaving the ground she could fly" (p.336). He learns how to construct a true self and a better life. He leaps to wrestle with the nihilism and narcissism of Guitar and wins.

In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison debunks one myth to create another. Born in the North and heir to material advantages that generations of blacks have identified with the North. But Milkman Dead finds the meaning for his existence by reversing the pattern, by going South, back to the territory of his ancestors. Initially he goes in search of gold, but it is not the land of riches. It is the land of

blood and death, of slavery and Milkman learns a different lesson from his journey south.

All through his life Milkman has been a privileged black man. He has the power, manner, clothes and money that black men identify with white men. Therefore, the men in the South focus their test on his sexual capacity. They intend to humiliate him with homosexuality and attempt to embarrass or drive him away; this way they hope to restore to themselves some of the lack of manhood his presence makes them feel.

Men in Solomon's General Store begin their test with a verbal assault, in the tradition of one of oldest forms of contest within black communities. Milkman succumbs to the physical battle they all anticipated but is a little match for a knife flashing opponent "His face got slit, so did his left hand, and so did his pretty beige suit, and he probably would have had his throat cut if two women hadn't come running in screaming ." (p.268). Milkman is left tending to his wounds reflecting on the incident as others go their way casually.

The measure of his worthiness continues in the older men's invitation to join them in a night hunt. Milkman claims superiority saying he is the "best shot there is" (p.269) and decides to join them. Change on his part will bring him closer to them and, on theirs, will encourage them to respect him at a mutual horizontal level rather than hierarchical one. Milkman is learning lessons that he will not be able to value until later but his current predicament has caused a previously unmatched reflection on his part. Guitar's attempts to strangle him to death shortly after these reflections makes Milkman realize that material goods are fragile, goods which he has clung to throughout his life. A close brush with death in the forest sharpens his desire to live.

He passes the test and the men in the South now share food and company with him and provide him with the first lead to information about his grandmother, Singing Bird. Finally, they send him to a woman who completes the process of his initiation into their community.

"Sweet" is one of the "pretty women" Milkman has observed on his arrival in Shalimar. Now that he had passed the tests, having proved his manhood on their on terms they judge him to be ready to sleep with one of the local women. Milkman is awakened to a new sense of awe in the physical contact with a woman. "What she did for his sore feet, his cut face, his back, his neck, his thighs, and the palms of his hands was so delicious he couldn't imagine that the lovemaking to follow would be anything but anticlimactic" (p.285).

Milkman has been tested verbally, physically, emotionally and sexually by the men in the South. He travels by plane, bus, and then on foot, and gradually sheds layers of his former cultural identity. He also becomes better prepared and more sensitive to recognize that his family history is more important than any gold that he was seeking. All the people that he meets tie him to a communal and familial heritage going back to Africa. His rediscovery of his humanity makes him sensitive enough to Susan Byrd's information to realize that the children in Shalimar are singing about his great-grandmother and great-grandfather, Ryna and Solomon. He deciphers names and connects their songs to Pilate's blues song about Sugarman: "O Sugarman don't leave me here"(p.300). The puzzle of the family history becomes more interesting than the search for gold. Knowing one's name, being able to call it in spite of personal or institutional distortions, becomes all-important to Milkman. He

understands that names have meaning just as Pilate understands hers by putting hers in her ear. "Pilate's name, copied it out of the Bible. That's what she got folded up in that earring" (p.53). He understands why people in Michigan insist on calling the street in which he lives 'Not Doctor Street, for they value nicknames heard in the pool halls and the barbershops. The names taken from "yearnings, gestures, flaws, events, instances, weaknesses" (p.330), all "bear witness" to the concreteness, the reality of black people's lives in spite of the census Bureau, or the post office or drunk recorders who distort their names. Inherent in the traditions of which the names are a part is the penchant of black people to adhere to their own reality in spite of insurmountable barriers Milkman can link his own family names to others representing black history and struggle. He exults: "Wow! Woooooe! Guitar!, my great grand daddy could flyyyyyyy and the whole damn town is named after him"(p.328). The golden threads tying him to his family history are far more valuable than the original gold he has come seeking.

"He avoided commitment and strong feelings, and shied away from decisions" (p.180). But his journey changes him from a self-centred middle class bore to a community man. He realizes how he is wrong about his father and mother, how he has used all women in his life, especially Hagar. He realizes how, "He had hurt her, left her, and now she mistakenly was dead –he was certain of it"(p.332). He repents the way he judged his mother harshly and ignorantly and his attempts at chastising his father. He violates Pilate's home by trying to steal and by journeying hundreds of miles in search of the gold he believed she has hidden. He realizes further, "Pilate's version of punishment was when somebody took another person's life. Hagar...She would abide by

this commandment from her father herself, and make him do it too. You just can't fly on off and leave a body"(p.332). In the darkness of the coon hunt and in later scenes Milkman comes to realize many of his shortcomings in his relationships.

When Milkman discovers his great grandfather's flying abilities, he has two options. He can either continue to follow the path of Solomon, which means celebration without commitment or he can use kinship as a sign to renew his familial ties. The journey cannot work for Milkman unless some reversal occurs. Flight itself must be made secondary to commitment. If he follows the footsteps of his great grandfather – his flight pattern, he runs the risk of separation and if he puts commitment first then he must show allegiance to Pilate who repeatedly reminds him: "You just can't fly on off and leave a body" (p.147, p.332). Milkman evidently changes his attitude and follows the footsteps of Pilate.

In an interview with Mel Watkins in 1977 Morrison said: "Men are most prominent. They interested me in a way I hadn't thought about before, almost as a species" (In Bill Moyers pbs video 1992:45). But her men are pathological in the sense that they are neither grounded in nature nor in the feminine. They face alienation, isolation and rejection from predominant white culture. The major symbol of this book is therefore flying, men out of touch with the ground, song is its theme and its multifaceted and shifting presence is its identity. "The extensively networked metaphors of song and flight connect their novel first to universal childhood memories, then to specific racial mythologizing and finally reemerges with a universal and mystical epiphany that compels our spirits towards earthly mansions" (Holloway, 1987: 103)

Morrison looks at the archetype of masculine flying from the women and children's point of view. She also broadens and complicates the myth. Although she finds flying as "one of the most attractive features about the black male life ... Its part of the whole business of breaking ground, doing the other thing ... Its very beautiful, its very interesting and in that way you know they lived in the country, they lived here, they went all over it." Yet she also underlines the loss of freedom. Morrison said in an interview with Robert Stepto in 1976: "going from town to town or place to place or looking out and over and beyond and changing and so on — that, it seems to me is one of the monumental themes in black literature about men ... It is the Ulysses theme, the leaving home... in sociological terms that is described as the major failings of black men — they do not stay at home and take care of their children, they are not there — that has always been to me one of the most attractive features of black male life" (in Bill Moyers pbs Video 1992:26).

We are reminded of Eva and Nel trying to rear up their children after being abandoned by their husbands. Susan Byrd tells milkman during his journey South that "there's a ravine near here they call Ryna's Gulch, and sometimes you can hear the funny sound that the wind makes. People say it's the wife, Solomon's wife, crying. Her name was Ryna. They say she screamed and screamed, and lost her mind completely" (p.323) because she was deserted by Solomon with twenty-one children to take care of, when he flew away. Susan further informs Solomon that Ryna was unable to love again because she was a one-man woman. The truth was that she went mad "trying

to look after the children" (p.323). Milkman's grandfather Jake was deserted as a baby by mad Ryna and was raised by an Indian woman.

Interacting with others solely in terms of politics is another hindrance to the establishment and development of any kind of bonds. For example, in the novel, a group of seven black men who avenge the death of Black people, killed by whites remain totally disconnected with family or friends. The patterns of migratory men create problem for characters like Guitar who is unable to take his great energy and passion into mature love. Guitar is like Sula, without a constructive form, a medium. He stays ready to fly and can kill with ease because of his lack of connections. Macon and Pilate had also lost the security of their father's parenting and Macon is made spiritually barren. He is even unable to sustain a relationship with his sister Pilate. Their angry separation reinforce the gulf of their parents absence that becomes evident from Pilate carrying of her father's bones which hangs from the ceiling of her house. Her lack of a navel shows the severance of her ties with her mother and is in fact provides physical evidence of the lack of connection with her mother. Both Macon and Pilate suffer due to their separation from each other as well as from the loss of their parents. Through their fierce love for their children they try to compensate for the loss. Pilate surrounds her home with her warmth so much so that for the women inside, life outside become dangerous and threatening. Both Pilate and Macon have to go backwards in time to a community that remembers them as a part of it. Milkman accomplishes this journey for them and Hagar becomes the ritualistic sacrificial emblem of the link between their present and the past. She re-incarnates the myth of Ryna, her great grandmother who died after her husband Solomon "flew" back to Africa:

It like to killed (her) ...she's supposed to have screamed out loud for days ... . You don't hear about women like that any more the kind of woman who couldn't live without a particular man. And when the man left, they lost their minds or died or something (p.323).

Morrison juxtaposes the event of Hagar's death with the event of Milkman's awakened understanding. Hagar is like her great grandmother, her psyche is linked tragically to her past. Hagar thus returns to the myth.

All the children's tales in this novel "involve loss, betrayal, conflict in roles and values and lack of nurturance" (Holloway, 1987: 108). Whites figure in the novel as the murderers of parents, as the source of conflicting values within the family, as the reason for the instability of the family. The children thus have been left in need of a black myth for their survival. In this sense Guitar's murder becomes less important than his ability to do so without regret. Milkman's grandfather's murder becomes less important than Milkman's solving the secret of the song and gaining his soul through the experience. Pilate's 'soul-felt' cry at her granddaughter's funeral "and she was *loved*" (p.319) underscores the essence of her too quickly spent life. Through the tales of women and men in this novel we see the quality of life that is lost or denied or too quickly spent as their survival is critically connected to their return to the dependable and sustaining mythology of their pasts.

Most of the black men in the novel remain airy, committed to flight, but Macon Dead is totally grounded. He is fiercely materialistic and "bunchy solidity" of the keys to all the doors to his houses calm and comfort him (p.17). Full of anger and bitterness, the novel describes him as a volcano ready to erupt. He dries up every kind of feminine relationship. His dangerous dryness "sifts down like ashes around them" (p.10). Macon's story of his wife Ruth and

her father Dr. Foster is full of sexual defilement – he believes he saw her sitting naked with her father’s bloated and diseased body and he refused to renew their sexual intimacy. Ruth’s story is full of overwhelming grief for her father and loss of sexual fulfillment from her husband. Her version of the incident is also that she has only knelt by his father’s side at his death and kissed his fingers – the only part of his body that was not deformed by the disease. In the stingy and malicious living and in the ugliness of Doctor Foster’s death, his daughter and her husband would never be able to free themselves from his perverted values and will never be able to separate themselves from the ugliness of his memory. Macon’s daughters Lena and Corinthians also become objects as their mother. His daughters are “boiled dry from years of yearning”. Eternally infantile their work of crafting the velvet pieces into roses for a department store occupies them through their childhood and into their adulthood. They were raised to be childlike brides of “correct men”(p.188). But none of these men wanted women like them. Macon dries up the feminine in Ruth also and corrodes his son’s self-confidence because of his severe and harsh criticism. Weighed down by his property he sees his rental property as “anchors” preventing him from becoming a “landless wanderer” (p.27). He is shown as emulating the white values in his severance of the ties with his sister Pilate over gold, marrying a woman who was light skinned and in urging Milkman to steal from Pilate. But all that his wealth purchases him is spiritual death. His mortuary quiet house and his “hearse” automobile is an apt comment on his state of being. Guitar points out in the novel that the male peacock cannot fly because of its tail! “Too much tail. All that jewelry weighs it down. Like vanity. Can’t nobody fly with all that shit. Wanna fly, you got to give up the shit that

weighs you down" (p.179). Morrison develops the peacock image several times in the novel to develop the masculine narcissism of Macon. Macon's keys to all the houses he owns in fact locks him out of the Black world and he suffers from isolation. His one moment of spiritual ease occurs when he stands outside Pilate's house and listens to her singing and recalls "fields and wild turkey and calico" (p 29)

Macon's desire for property as dominion is very likely to be thwarted as it becomes evident in the doom liturgy delivered by male prophets to Milkman and Guitar. They tell them about the things black men will never have:

And you not going to have a governor's mansion, or eight thousand acres of timber to sell And you not going to have no ship under your command to sail on, no train to run, and you can join the 332<sup>nd</sup> if you want to shoot down a thousand German planes all by yourself and land in Hitler's backyard and whip him with your own hands, but you never going to have four stars on your shirt front, or even three" (p.60).

Railroad Tommy tells them what they will have: "a broken heart" and "A whole lot of folly" (p.61). Flying away from the whole problem seems to be the easier answer. The black man is deprived from getting what he deserves as is evident in the snatching away of land from Jake, which he managed to carve out, by sheer dint of hard work. Therefore flying and folly are the only two options left to the black men.

Flight in this novel means a "spiritual passage" from adolescent solipsism and materialism of Milkman Dead to valuing the real treasures of family and heritage. Flying is dynamic if it is grounded in some kind of psychic anchoring in the real world as Milkman finally learns from Pilate. Flight becomes folly when it is used as an escape mechanism. Flight and dominion

are seen as contradictory forces in the world of men instead as complimentary forces.

In the novel *Pilate*, Reba and Jagar are the women of substance and sustenance. They stand as total contrast to the ineffectual doctor's daughters. Removal from males it seems has awakened them to a kind of potential bond within feminine bonding and assured them their health. "Protected in Pilate's home their strength is intact. Outside their home however this exclusive unit is exposed to a world that needs the strength of a family and community complete and healthy to survive"(Holloway, 1987:111).

*Tar Baby*, according to Walker, focuses on "individuals who have cut their ties with community, family and the past" (1991: 189). The novel shows us what happens to black girls whose familial ties are snapped with the community and traditions. One learns where to place one's loyalties, learns what bonds and allegiances last and the ones that are vain and dangerous (Holloway,1987:117). *Tar Baby* reflects on all these issues and presents an African-American perspective of life.

The novel grounds its human relationships on an island in the Caribbean. On this island, a microcosmic universe emerges where one can come to an understanding of the implications of the past. Here the Black-African past is as significant as the Black-American past. The novel focuses on African-Americans who shun their black identities in favour of the values and norms of white America. Sydney and Ondine for example, are servants of a retired white factory owner Valerian Street and Margaret Street both of whom are victims of a false American dream. They refer to themselves as Philadelphia Negroes, extremely proud of their hardworking habits and contemptuous of Gideon and

Therese and Son whom they call "Swamp Nigger". In their pursuit of American dream of material safety, personal dignity defined by a steady job they disavow their roots and histories. Relationship develops between their niece Jadine the light-skinned African-American whose life revolves around New York and Paris, where she has become an art historian and a model, and Son, a dark-skinned fugitive on the run for murdering his wife Jadine who was brought up and educated with the money of her aunt's employer, rejects African ethos. Morrison here shows the results of abandoning African ethos by showing how "abandonment leads to spiritual emptiness and cultural vacuity" (Holloway, 1987: 118)

Jadine's cultural experiences and psychic make up are essentially different from those of the "authentic" blacks. The contest as she sees is between "blackening up or universalizing out." Although Jadine falls in love with Son, they split because their hopes and dreams are irreconcilable. They also can't let go off each other as if stuck to a tar baby. Jadine tries to construct her own identity without submitting to a dominant myth of racial authenticity. She is unwilling to have herself interpellated by other and says to Son "I belong to me"(p.118)<sup>4</sup>. She resists the definition of a black woman and proceeds in her own manner to construct an identity. Hence the discomfiture she has created to the woman in yellow and the attraction she feels towards Son are points in a long and arduous process of self-identification.

Even Sydney's recurring dream indicates self-betrayal and betrayal of his wife. He left Baltimore for Philadelphia. But fifty years later he still dreams of "The fish, the trees, the music, the horses 'harnesses" (p.59), a place quite different from respectable, staid and bland Philadelphia. Although drowned in

respectability, his wife also has a revealing dream defining her failed life. She dreams of "sliding into water frightened that her heavy legs and swollen ankles will sink her" (p.59). They do, in fact sink her, her legs and ankles swollen with respectable work, in the sense that her obsession with a decent end to her life drowns the best qualities of her inherited blood. Sydney's reiteration of European contempt for African culture compared with the way the woman in yellow bears upside down V's scored into each of her cheeks is an attempt to accord himself more status. Throughout *Tar Baby* the possession of European prejudices about blacks is an important indicator of the extent to which individuals have lost contact with their roots. Jadine's reflection of the way Son unsettles her is riddled with stereotypical assumptions. She has become so far removed from her own people that she has come to believe that they are either 'creeps' or possessed of rare sexual energy and dynamism. "Besides that fear ...there was another authentic loathing she felt for the man.... She had not seen a Black like him in ten years .. in the college she attended the black men were either creeps or so rare and desirable they had every girl in a 150-mile radius at their feet" (P.126).

The 'images of African spirituality, especially the Earth Mother and son are important in understanding the pattern of Morrison's *Tar Baby*' (Holloway, 1987: 118). Her prose involves African mythology and racial identity and invigorates the links between an African-American spirit and the mother continent.

Holloway says that this theme and spirit is in jeopardy in *Tar Baby*. Without an African sense of the universe man and nature are in conflict. The earth that embodies the cosmic life principle calls Jadine. Rejecting the call of

the trees she is cut off from good consciousness — knowledge of the mother. The trees sustain the feminine image. First the women hanging from the branches are delighted with the appearance of Jadine, then, they are hostile towards her, because they see that :

the girl was fighting to get away from them ... mindful of their value, their exceptional femaleness; knowing as they did that the first world of the world had been built with their sacred properties; ... they wondered at the girl's desperate struggle down below to be free, to be something other than they were (p.184).

Son is a part of the femininity as much as he is masculine. When he plunges into the sea and at the end and emerges from the sea on to land in a sequence that mirrors the evolution of life, crowding, standing and eventually walking upright. Son has a female guide. In the sea the water spirit 'like the hand of an insistent woman' keeps him afloat" (p.2). At the end of the novel, Therese offers Son advice on negotiating the rocks and wants him to keep away from Jadine because "she has forgotten her ancient properties" (p.308). Then Therese cuts off the engine of the boat so that it moves with the tide. The implication is that he has been singled out in some way and the trees on the island are stepping back "as if to make way for a certain kind of man" (p.309). Son has some primal link between his soul and the tree women who cover and caress this island. Jadine lacks this identifying bond. She is nobody's child. Morrison further suggests the bond between Earth Mother and Son when older, black, fecund and nurturing women become a threatening aspect of Jadine's dreams. The night women visits Jadine in waking dreams in Eloë including Son's dead mother Ondine, Therese and her own mother. Son also dreams of these women. But in his dreams the very same women populate the pie tables in the

basement of churches and suggest physical and spiritual nourishment. They beckon him with "Come on in, you honey, you" (p.119).

These women represent traditional black womanhood, which Jadine denies and from which she is running away. The women in her dreams show their breasts and the woman in yellow stretches out her arm and shows her "three big eggs" (p.261), taunting her with their femininity. The fact is that Jadine, the orphan, serves as a symbol for her 'disconnectedness from her ancestral mothers'. Moreover, her womanhood is seriously in question in front of these ancient females who have not lost touch with who they are, who inhabit the trees and who understand their primal connection to their archetype. When she "struggled to life her feet and sank an inch or two farther down into moss covered jelly" (p.183). She attempts to pull herself out of the tar by clinging on to a tree, manages to save herself out of the earth's tar baby by kneeling on "the hard thing that seemed to be growing out of her partner, the tree" (p.184). She kneels on masculinity and uses it to extricate herself out of the earth's tar baby clutch rather than to identify and complete her being. There is this strong pull towards individuation that scorns and treads on masculinity and this tendency becomes the basis of her loss. Jadine sacrifices her feminine and social self as she attempts to exist without discovering whose "child" she is.

Early in the novel when an African woman enters the grocery store, in which Jadine happened to be in she becomes spellbound. The woman is entirely regal and strikingly beautiful in a canary yellow dress that brings out the deep, tar like quality of her skin. Balancing these eggs in her hand she walks out of the store looking and spitting at Jadine. The gesture of the woman

disturbs her and somehow makes her feel “lonely” and “inauthentic” (p.48). She stands for “authentic” black person neither culturally uprooted, nor spoiled; she remains proudly a member of the tribe, which as far as Morrison is concerned is ultimately the question. In an interview with Nellie McKay Morrison said, “she is a real, a complete individual who owns herself ... There is always someone who has no peer, who does not have to become anybody. Somebody who already “is”. What Jadine fails to see in her is her original self” (“An Interview with Toni Morrison” in *The World of Ideas: Conversations with Toni Morrison* by Bill Moyers pbs Video 1992:147). Unfortunately for Jadine although haunted by this figure, till the end she does not really learn to ‘see’ and follow this other self which is ‘authentic’.

Son, like the African woman is depicted in symbolically suggestive terms. As Jadine was looking at a mirror, “a smell hit her”, she becomes aware of a human presence in her room. She realizes that the smell is his “black smell” and at the same time discovers Son’s reflection in the mirror. His skin is “as dark as a riverbed” and his hair looks wild and overpowering. She feels frightened and repulsed and struggles “to pull herself away from his image in the mirror” (pp.113-114). When he advances towards her she resists him and all that he stands for. He tries “to breathe into her the smell of tar and its shiny consistency” (p.120). This is indicative of the fact that he tries to inject into her qualities that come from living a natural “Black” life. A frightened Margaret, who is unable to describe him to Jadine and Valerian, utters just one word “Black” and marks his entry into the novel. To her, Son is the archetypal black rapist. Her evocation of the crude image of “Black sperm ... sticking in clots to her French Jeans or down in the toe of her Anne Klein shoes” (p.85) constantly

terrorizes her and makes her anxious about his presence in the house, for he is taken as the disruptive “primitive” other, evident from Ondine’s reflections. “The man upstairs wasn’t a Negro – meaning one of them. He was a stranger (pp.101-2), like the trickster figure Brer Rabbit. Son lives on the edges of the society. He is not only a veteran of Vietnam, but also a fugitive who having murdered his wife and her teenage lover, has been on the run for eight years. Changing his name several times like the trickster figure he assumes different identities among different people – William Green, Herbert Robinson, Louis Stover – the reader never really learns his true name in keeping with the trickster tradition. Son disrupts the lives of others but he also learns that he cannot run away from his past Mbalia suggests (1991) that more than a trickster figure he is ‘a disciple for African people, a modern day revolutionary’ who has to realize that such powerful influences have permeated the African-American psyche that a doctrine of returning to a traditional African identity in an increasingly capitalistic world is naively idealistic. Literally and metaphorically he is a skeleton in Margaret’s closet. He emerges from Margaret’s wardrobe and he is black bearded with ‘chain gang hair’. He represents the African-American past which Valerian a white capitalist forgets, a past with which Sydney and Ondine have lost touch and which Jadine eschews. He begins with the way Margaret abused her son, for bringing out the skeleton of the slave past out of the closet for both Valerian and white America in general.

The complexity of the novel arises from the way Jadine and Son are attracted and at the same time repelled by each other. The contrast between them constitutes the dialogic dimension of the novel. If Son is the Brer Rabbit,

then Jadine may be seen as the latter day version of the tar baby itself. As the niece of Sydney and Ondine, she is educated with Valerian's financial support. She becomes a Europeanized African, an art history graduate of Sorbonne, in Paris, an expert on Cloisonné and a cover model for *Elle*. But Jadine, instead of having a sense of herself as a black woman, she chooses to dispossess herself. For Mbalia, "Jadine represents that which is inhuman built by the European as a trap for other Africans, an artificial lure to trap them to a Europeanised lifestyle" (1991:75). Her association with tar is ironic because she is much lighter skinned than the term would suggest, significantly called 'copper venus'. Ondine's pride that Jadine has replaced the white model on the cover of *Elle* is especially ironic because she does not appreciate that Jadine has achieved this as a European version of black beauty.

In the novel identity is both externally multiple and internally fractured. The novel complicates and defers the definition of African-American. Son makes the mistake of trying to define African-American in terms of an imposed traditional Africanism without recognizing that it offers little opportunity for growth and intellectual development. Both Jadine and Son differ in their responses to places. Jadine views New York as a "home . . . a black woman's town" (p 223), whereas Son sees it as the site of cultural death, where black girls are crying and black men have found the "whole business of being black and men at the same time too difficult and so they'd dumped it" (p.217). Driven by a singular perspective it is less convincing than the account of Jadine's return to the city, enabling her legs to feel longer and to feel her head once more connected to her body. New York and Paris are cosmopolitan and eclectic which is a reminder of the fact that traditional boundaries of race,

gender, place, class have become fractured by the continuous flow of people, cultures, information and ideas across geographical frontiers. When Son takes Jadine to Eloë, a small town in Florida, back to his family and people, Jadine has the opportunity to realise that it is her journey home as well. But her first reaction to the townsfolk, which is taking pictures of them, is crass. "She photographed everything during the ride until she was out of film" (p.259). Her discomfiture at not knowing her role leads her to emphasize her sense of distance from them. She also makes a futile attempt to speak like them, which shows that she has been permanently uprooted. She is a detached observer and does not try to recall or reconnect. Her picture captures the surface images leaving what lies beneath unprobed or undiscovered. As Son unwraps her sexuality, so the visit to Eloë disturbs her racial memory. The night women who visit Jadine in a waking dream in Eloë include Rosa and Therese and Son's dead mother Sally Sarah Sadie Brown, Ondine, Soldier's wife, Ellen, Francine, her own dead mother and the 'woman in yellow' representing traditional 'authentic' black womanhood, which Jadine denies and tries to run away from. (p.263) Jadine also rejects Eloë as a meaningful social and cultural construct.

Eloë was rotten and more boring than ever. A burnt-out place. There was no life there. Maybe a past but definitely no future and finally there was no interest. Southern small town country romanticism was a lie, a joke, kept secret by people who could not function elsewhere (p.262).

The rejection of Eloë represents Jadine's rejection of everything implied in it: "the myth of an authentic Black existential modality, reified black womanhood produced by that myth and Son as the romanticised Black male" (Butler-Evans, 1989:161). The separation between them at the conclusion is the direct

consequence of the irreconcilability of their respective value systems. Son chooses to embrace his ancient properties and Jadine denies her own. Both Jadine and Son along with their counterparts in the novel create a universe that in many ways reflect the history and sociology of Black America.

Son decides to pursue Jadine but then the pursuit is futile. Jadine was lost since she began to live under Valerian's sponsorship of her education. She tells Son, "They educated me...I am an orphan. Sydney and Ondine are all the family I have, and Valerian did what nobody else even offered to do"(p.118). She grounds herself in her acquired culture so much so that she cuts herself off from her roots completely. Severing her roots later develop into a deliberate choice. Gideon calls this type of blacks "Yallas" and he knows how hard it is for *culturally confused blacks raised in a white world "not to be white people"*. These "Yallas" he says "don't come to being black natural-like. They have to choose it and most don't choose it" (pp.155-56).

In the end Jadine boards a plane for Paris convinced that she has chosen the right culture because it has given her the means to control her own life. "How could she make a life with a cultural throwback"(p.277) she wonders. Now she was in control of her own world and no longer does she strive for safety, she now feels "lean and male" (p.277) and realises that "She was the safety she longed for" (p.292). Yet as she looks forward to a life of self-control, she remains nagged by the split from Son (p.292) and realises it would be "So very hard to forget the man who fucked like a star"(P.294).

Jadine's desire to achieve different roles for herself is reinforced by her recognition that Eloë offers few challenges or opportunities for fulfillment intellectual or sexual for black women. In denying her lineage completely she is

totally committed to individual fulfillment rather than having a sense of solidarity with other people. This is evident in her favouring of the interpretation of the mythic horse riders told by a neighbour that rather than a hundred ex-slaves there is only a French soldier or a horse. Morrison shows us that Jadine fails to move either forward or backward and is stranded in the island being in need of spiritual solitude. She searches for cover in the Caribbean islands because nowhere in the artificial world is there a place for seclusion. But searching for cover in the Caribbean island means accepting her primal relationship to the earth. This she fails to do. Her venture outside is the frightening episode of the tar and inside the house her relationships are less than honest. She sacrifices her black and female self-failing to confront the dilemma of a life in a white world. Despite Jadine's embracing of the white world, she continues to be no one's child. It is not surprising but disappointing to see the fury of Jadine's confrontation with her aunt. Ondine tries to confront Jadine with her matrilineal connections, but Jadine fails to see the link. Having ostracized herself expertly from this area she thinks her aunt's motives are for retribution. Her angry confrontation with her aunt is evidence of her confusion. She says, "You want me to pay your back. You worked for me and put up with me. Now it's my turn to do it for you that's all you're saying." Ondine cryptically retorts "Turn? Turn? This ain't no game a bid whist..." Ondine tells Jadine a girl has got to be a daughter first. She have to learn that. And if she never learns how to be daughter, she can't never learn how to be a woman. I mean a real woman: a woman good enough for a child; good enough for a man — good enough even for the respect of other women: ... You don't need your own natural mother to be a daughter. All you need is to feel a certain way, a certain careful way about

people older than you are" (p.283). She is unaware of this value because she is unaware that feeling "careful" of people older than you are happens because one's lineage is connected to these people. Women like Ondine are mothers and daughters and are connected in this way to things past and future. Jadine is yet to learn how to be a daughter. Morrison herself has said in an interview with Charles Ruas in 1981, "she needs a little bit of Ondine to be a complete woman .... The race may need it, human beings may need it, she may need it. That quality of nurturing to me is essential. It should not, certainly limit her to be only Therése with the "magic breasts". There should be a lot of things: there should be a quality of adventure and a quality of nest"(in Bill Moyers pbs video 1992:104). Jadine sees her debt lying with the Street family whereas Son sees her as a progeny of the race, and a child of Ondine and Sydney.

Although Jadine may be a "helpless victim of a dream" that chooses her, her own dream of the black women, her mother and Nanadine among them, is calling for a participatory role, willingly nurtured by most black women. Jadine rejects this role. Morrison reminds us that black women who learn to be daughters first, in order to be women, manipulate and manage their lives so that it never comes to a choice of identity – racial or sexual. Jadine is not grounded in her culture and identity for which she is tortured by the dream.

Interestingly, when Jadine talks because she thinks that Son is about to rape her, he accuses her of embracing the white stereotype of the African. "Rape?" he says, "Why you little white girls always think somebody's trying to rape you?" (p.121) She protests at being called "white". Here Jadine reacts more because Son denies her the right to think for herself more than responding to being someone who has betrayed her race. She threatens to kill

him for pulling that black-women-white-woman "shit" on her and for telling her "what a black woman is or ought to be ..." (p.121). She further says to Son, "A white man thought you were a human being and should be treated like one. He's civilized and made the mistake of thinking you might be too" (p.121). Son has very traditional dreams of their life together. He thinks of himself earning money to keep them while Jadine will have their baby. Thus he protests her refusal to accept the traditional role of a black woman.

Jadine is given every opportunity to assert her gender and colour. Her refusal to do both diminishes her stature as a black woman. She has long since pushed under the self that allowed close human contact:

Never ... Anybody who wanted nice from this little colored girls would have to get it with pliers and chloroform, because Never. When her mother died and she went to Philadelphia and then away to school, she was so quick to learn, but no touchee, teacher, and no, I do not smile, because Never. It smoothed out a little as she grew older .... But beneath the easy manners was a claw always ready to rein in the dogs, because Never (pp.124-125).

Jadine's sexuality is also her racial identity and as one is suppressed, so suffers the others. It is Son who releases her frozen sexuality. "In a serious denial of the feminine, Jadine fears and fights her own sexuality", says Karla F.C. Holloway. When Son pressed himself against her, what she minded was not so much of his bad smell as his smelling of her. Jadine was scared that a rank nigger wearing his hair in seductive dreadlocks was unmasking her sexuality. She sees his hair as "physically overpowering, like bundles of long whips or lashes that could grab her and beat her to Jelly. And would...." (p.113). Jadine's reaction is to run for the shears. But she is subconsciously aware that she is losing control but is powerless because she is no woman.

But Jadine like Sula is independent and sexually liberated. She is free and nearly white. Therefore, she also reminds us of the sacrifice that this role demands for black women. Her sleeping naked is a sign of her liberated sexuality. Although Mbalia (1991) says that she insults the Eloeans by sleeping naked (1991: 81) and the night women make her feel obscene actually she feels the heat of the room stifling besides her liberated sexuality. Soldier attracted and disturbed by her spirit and independence asks "You a hot one, ain't you?" (p.257) We get a glimpse of the nature of Jadine's sexual independence before her arrival in Eloe:

Jadine was so ruttish by the time she got to Hilton, she could barely stand still for the doorman to take her bags, and when she was checked in, and had gotten his room number from information, she did not call him she took the elevator to his floor and banged on the door. When he opened it, she jumped on him with her legs around his waist crashing him into the purple carpet (p.224).

The passage indicates Jadine's independence and sexual confidence. She takes the initiative and seeks satisfaction for herself in relationships like Sula. She is also tough and self-indulgent.

Morrison also shows how black woman can be threatening to black men especially when they happen to be women who have no security within their own identities, they disrupt the legacy of family.

"Black women carry the voice of the mother — they are the progenitors, the assurance of the line. Biological factor alone does not tie Black women to Black men. Women as carriers of the voice carry wisdom – mother wit. They teach the children to survive and remember"(Holloway, 1987:123). Marie Therése is the woman who embodies this role. She has not lost her "ancient properties" and instructs Son how to reclaim his own. Her voice comes "out of

the darkness”(p.308) to him like an ancient memory. Without these women who teach – the pie-ladies, the mothers, the feminine trees who sustain the voice, black children would have, no roots, no memories of their pasts.

Thus the black women who withhold or deny these truths carry a threat to emasculate by taking away the power to survive manhood. Jadine makes an attempt to strip on of his identity by brining him to her superficial world. Son makes a conscious attempt to fight it out and says:

The truth is that whatever you learned in those colleges that didn't include me ain't shit. What did they teach you about me? What tests did they give? Did they tell you what I was like, did they tell you what was on my mind? Did they describe me to you? Did they tell you what was in my heart? If they didn't teach you that, then they didn't teach you nothing, because until you know about me, you don't know nothing about yourself. And you don't know anything, anything at all about your children and anything at all about your mama and your papa You find out about *me*, you educated nitwit!” (p.267)

He wants to drive home the fact that she knows little and understands little of her Black responsibilities. Jadine here can be condemned as selfish. She disrupts consciousness and Son is vulnerable. He “admits his maleness, relishes in it and allows it to submerge him, like tar”(Holloway, 1987:124). He makes an attempt to breathe his smell of tar into her as he silently watches her sleeping. He understands his maleness as linked to femininity. His bond to her is primal. We find that Jadine “kept him on the defensive; demanded clarity, precision, very specific solution to open ended problems, and any notion he had in mind of what to do or where to do it matted before her rakelike intellect” (p.269). Jadine avoids facing his offensive assault on her femininity and blackness and attempts to teach him to be white thinking as she is. She attempts to deprive him of feeling, thought and sensuality. She also attempts to

force him into a mindset that will relinquish his racial linkage and African continuity. Selfishly she encourages him to be like her and he does start seeing things differently. Marvelling at her industry he thinks, "There is power,...right there"(p.270).It becomes evident from the changed way he starts looking at the photographs of the people of Eloë. Son brings out the photos Jadine "had taken in the middle of the road in Eloë ..They all looked stupid, backwoodsy, dumb, dead..."(p.275)and decides to find her. "I have to find her, he thought. Whatever she wants, I have to do it, want it"(P.275).

Even though there is potential for Son's destruction by Jadine's vacuity, yet the stronger myth and the stronger heart links with the past saves him. Son's theme is continuity and therefore he is made to interact with the important figures and symbols in this novel. Both Margaret and Ondine feel threatened by his presence. Margaret's horrid child abuse comes to light and Ondine worries about the threat to Jadine's life style by Son, the lifestyle that she and Sydney have sacrificed their Philadelphia Negroes to maintain. "The basic problem of the Street household is that it contains families out of their elements"(Holloway, 1987:126). Therefore Son's entry into the household threatens its tenuous existence. Son represents natural truth and tells the inhabitants of the place of L'Arbe de la Croix of what is permanent and continuous as well as what is transient.

"The island is woman/nature suspended in time, and powerful. She compels us with her myth – the blind horsemen, the treewomen, and the knowing control of Sydney and Ondine who connect it to her slave past " (Holloway, 1987: 127). Jadine drives Son from his original being. But Māry Therése brings him back to self and the island. She is also a link with the past

carrying as he does the knowledge of island's myth. The island and Marie Therése become his salvation and ensure continuity.

Sydney and Ondine survive because though they lost their social identity, their racial identity is intact. They survive by recapturing an image of black servants and white masters. They take control of the Street household. He directs his future as he tells Valerian to stay in the island because "we like it down here" (p.289). Although Sydney understands the power of this place to dislocate everything he feels equal to the task of co-existence. Sydney and Ondine represent the continuity of ethnicity.

The confusion as to who really is the tar baby continues till the end of the novel. We cannot be sure of Son's relationship to this myth till the end. At one point we feel it is Jadine, because Son accuses her of being a trap the white folks set out to catch unwitting black men. But earlier in the story, as Son watches Jadine sleeping, before she is even aware of his presence on the island, he breathes "into her the smell of tar and its shiny consistency..." (p.120). At this point he is the tar baby. What is confusing is the shifting of the image of the tar baby. How has he come by this tar? Who is he out to trap? We get an explanation for these in the final pages of the novel.

At the end of the novel Son runs "lickety-split. Looking neither to the left nor to the right" (p.309). Marie Therése leaves him ten miles from where he wanted to be. The natural impediments of rocks and hills and water stand in the way of his reaching L'Arbe de la Croix. Marie Therése asks him to stay away from Jadine because she has forgotten her "ancient properties". Therese offers him salvation by asking him to "choose them" (p.308). meaning the mythic men in the hills. She says, "You can choose now. You can get free of her. They are

waiting in the hills for you. They are naked and they are blind too. I have seen them, their eyes have no colour in them. But they gallop; they race those horses like angels all over the hills where the rain forest is, where the champion daisy trees still grow. Go there. Choose them" (P.308).

The rabbit in the tar baby story escaped the trap by jumping into the briar patch. The island saves Son and enables him to raise his ancient properties. He is thus offered a route to escape. The 'mist lifted and the threes stepped back a bit as if to make way for a certain kind of man" (p.309) and "By and by he walked steadier, now steadier" (p.309). Son's salvation thus lies in his restoration to Earth Mother. Son has a sense of being dislocated from his present from his inability to cope with his environment in New York or in Eloe. He is alienated because of his ancient status. Thus he returns to the myth and that is the appropriate place for him.

Morrison's novel speaks to cultural relocation of Black values and survival in a white world, of Black women and their primal connection to the natural world. She speaks of the cultural price of the distance created by white world between black men and women. Linden Peach says that though Jadine and Son are propelled into a kind of transformation, "The inclusiveness of these respective transformations concomitant with the reclamation of open-ended mythic narratives, highlights the complex process by which black people, especially black women have to negotiate the competing discourses which influence individual and cultural behaviour" (1995:42). The separation between Son and Jadine at the end of the novel is the direct consequence of the irreconcilability of their respective value systems. Morrison suggests that strength comes from assuming our ancient traditions. But although Son's

character frames the narrative, both voices are given equal weight. It is difficult to arrive at a single ideological position because the narrative is open to plurality of meanings. Morrison here “brings to the fore the contentious nature of the relationship between the desires of the mythical community and those of black women whose existence is structured by historical and social circumstances different from those of the community”(Butler-Evans, 1989:162).

The best thing was, was her children. Whites might dirty *her* all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing – the part of her that was clean (p. 251)<sup>8</sup>.

One of the strongest characters in the annals of fiction, Sethe, the central character in *Beloved* puts up a determined resistance to any attempts at enslaving 'her best thing', her children, refusing to let them go through the same degrading and harrowing experiences that she as a slave had gone through. So, she commits an outrageous act of violence, choosing to kill her crawling child with a firm conviction that what “she had done was right because it came from true love” (p.251). Sethe’s decision to kill her child rather than have her taken into slavery has to be viewed in the context of slavery. As the slave master sees it Sethe has atleast “ten breeding years left” but now she has gone wild “due to the mishandling of the nephew who’d overbeat her and made her cut and run” (p.149). Sethe recalls, that she has suffered the degradation of being chained while the white men sucked her lactating breasts. The experience of slavery continues to haunt her. So she decides to run away and after a month’s stay with her mother-in-law Baby Suggs, Sethe’s capture and return to the plantation would have been too much for anyone in her place.

The character of Sethe is modelled on the real life character of Mary Garner, a fugitive who had escaped from Kentucky with her children and had

settled just outside Cincinnati. When pursued and threatened with re-enslavement she resisted by killing one child and threatened to kill the others. Morrison does not talk about the institution of slavery with a capital 'S' but about the anonymous people called the 'slaves' she says. Thus this novel cannot be termed as a historical novel as such.

Sethe feels her act of violence was justified because her daughter would now be free from "undreamable dreams" as she did "about whether the headless, feetless torso hanging in the tree with a sign on it was her husband or Paul; Sethe would also be free from such fears for her daughter as to "whether a gang of whites invaded her daughter's private parts" and finally it assures her that "nobody on this earth would list her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper. ... Sethe had refused and refused still" to live even with the likelihood of it (P.251).

If Eva in *Sula* burns her son a necessary sacrifice she makes of her spiritually destroyed man-child Plum, Sethe's violent act in *Beloved* shows her dogged determination to protect her procreative right and her commitment to a life that has quality. Through this violent act she also exerts her right to self-determination.

Sethe's transgression of what is termed as "the limits morally permissible for humans" is to be viewed in the context of slavery - the system that deprives the slaves all human rights and dignities and left them totally dispossessed and at worst reduced them to the status of animals. Christian says, *Beloved* takes us into the chaotic space between mother-love and mother-pain in which a mother kills her own child to save it" (Braxton and McLaughlin, 1990: 338-9). Here the subject and its context is different from

*Sula* where Eva kills Plum who returns as a drug addict from the First World War. *Beloved* pushes this chaotic space to the extreme where the child is killed by the mother to prevent the repetition of sordid existence.

In the opening pages of the book we are told about Baby Suggs an ex-slave that “suspended between the nastiness of life and the meanness of the dead,” she couldn’t get interested in “leaving life or living it”(p.4), which holds true for Sethe also. Sethe highlights the kind of terrible onslaught that slavery caused on the institution of family, not sparing even the most essential of human ties – that of a mother and a child. Sethe’s poignant revelation to Paul D. reads:

And I all I knew was I had to get my milk to my baby girl. Nobody was going to nurse her like me. Nobody was going to get it to her fast enough, or take it away, when she had enough and didn’t know it(p.16).

Then comes Sethe’s agonising cry to Paul D. She says they “Held me down and took it”, she also tells him about how they stole her milk. Paul D. is bewildered: “They beat you and you was pregnant”? (p.17). Sethe repeats maniacally “And they took my milk!” (p.17)

Sethe’s defiant maternal cry that she has “milk enough for all” – repeated insistently over the course of the novel – is as much a response to Paul D’s specific moral accusation as it is a reminder of her powerful will to survive” (Mohanty, 1998: 217). Linden Peach says, “Mothering and motherhood were denied, devalued and obliterated by slavery since black women were regarded as breeding stock (1995: 104-105). This denial and obliteration of mothering and motherhood distort the notion of womanhood in Morrison’s works. In *The Bluest Eye* the tragedy of Pecola results to a great extent in the

lack of bond between her and her mother Pauline Breedlove. In *Sula*, Sula's estrangement from her mother and her grandmother are partly responsible for her disregard of traditional wisdom normally passed down in African culture from the mother to the daughter. In this relationship, a mother's main function is to teach her daughter survival strategies in the face of tremendous odds that they might have to suffer under slavery. The black women were forced to fulfill this function through "absence, neglect, overwhelming love, or concerted inattention due to the severity of their conditions" (Holloway, 1987: 153). If Eva burns her child Plum she also jumps from the window of her room to rescue her burning child Hannah. The opposite extremes in the characters of these women's mothering are but stressed reactions of a particular situation.

In *Beloved* Sethe remembers her mother primarily through absence: "She must of nursed me for two or three weeks ... Then she went back in rice and I sucked from another women whose job it was ... Right on her (mother's) rib was a circle and a cross burnt right in the skin. She said, "This is your ma'am. This and she pointed" (pp.60-61). Sethe's mother a victim of Middle Passage throws all the children away except Sethe. "She threw them all away but you" (p. 62) Nan, Sethe's surrogate mother, tells her. Sethe does something of a similar kind in deciding to slit the throat of her child. So Paul D's injunction – "You got two feet Sethe, not four" (p.165) becomes a subject of scrutiny in the light of Sethe's situation and other slave mothers who remind us that "humanity itself is measured in terms of moral personhood, a capacity for self-determination which the institution of slavery denied the slave" (Mohanty, 1998: 228).

The utter apathy and insensitivity with which slaves were viewed comes to the fore in the most poignant scene where Sethe kills her child. When the “four horseman came – school teacher, one nephew, one slave catcher and a sheriff” (p.148). Sethe, instantly kills her child and stands in the shed holding a “blood soaked child to her chest with one hand and an infant by the heels in the other” (p.149). At this point of time, the narrative, which reflects the white point of view, reads “All testimony to the results of a little so-called freedom imposed on people who needed every care and guidance in the world to keep them from the cannibal life they preferred” (p.151).

Sethe demonstrates full self-control, responds calmly to emergencies, and possesses a fiercely independent spirit. Refusing to allow herself to be lowered to the level of a mere breeder, early in the novel she insists on making her wedding a formal event. For Sethe freedom even under slavery is an ineliminable human need for self-determination. She tells Mrs. Garner:

“Halle and me want to be married, Mrs Garner”  
 “So I heard”. She smiled ... Are you already expecting?”  
 “No ma’am”  
 “But I mean we want to get married ” (p.126).

Sethe wanted that there should be a ceremony, a preacher, some dancing and a party to celebrate the occasion.

As in other novels of Morrison here also she emphasises the need for developing a healthy self-concept. Andrea O'Reily quotes this statement from a radio conversation, which explains Morrison's view on development of selfhood. “The self must be known and loved and in Morrison's words, ‘honored and released’ ... self-love depends upon the self's first being loved by another self.” (in *African-American Review*, Vol.30, No.3, 1996: 367)

The problem with most of the characters in the novel are that the characters carry a scarred self as a result of oppression and psychic injuries inflicted during slavery. Thus they show a powerful reluctance to remember anything about the past. Survival depended on keeping the “past at bay” (p.42). But suppressing the past leads to another sort of enslavement, “holding the inner life captive to recurrent fears and possibly neurotic obsessions” (Carmean, 1993: 87). Thus the main challenge and hope in the novel that Morrison holds out for the characters are that they will dare to confront the past however traumatic it might have been.

As Sethe realises after her arrival in Cincinnati, that freedom from slavery implies not just freedom from legal condition of bondage. It implied “claiming ownership of the freed self” (P.95). And this ownership Sethe argues cannot be a purely individual affair. Understanding this ownership adequately requires getting access to the buried memories and experiences of others who have shared the same fate. One needs to reconstruct the relevant community, appreciate the social and historical dimensions of innermost selves. That is why Sethe suggests that her act be seen in the context of the knowledge of the common historical experience of the blacks, a knowledge that remains unavailable to the individual by herself.

Thus it is of utmost significance that at one level bonds get disrupted (the most primal level), and is reconstructed at another. In *Beloved* the bonds that are developed are based on friendship, love and empathy, which crosses the boundaries of race, age and gender. When Paul D enters Sethe’s house he senses correctly that he “wants to put his story next to hers” (p.273) that will enable him to complete his journey out of enslavement. Sethe, with his help

can reclaim her life and love life once again. Paul D realises that Sethe is a woman who can “gather” him into a whole, take the pieces” that he is and “gather them and give them back ... in all the right order ” (pp.272-273).

The two main healers in the novel are Baby Suggs and Amy Denver and also Paul D who, although a man is associated with the feminine for “he had become the man who could walk into a house and make the women cry Because with him, in his presence, they could” (p.17).

Sethe continues to blame herself for the murder of her child until her mother-in-law Baby Suggs, enables her to view it otherwise. The real responsibility for killing the child lies with the whites, she says. Their inhuman system has dehumanised the slaves. She also utters a heart rendering cry, “Those white things have taken all I had or dreamed and broke my heart things too. There are no bad luck in the world but whitefolks” (p. 89).

Baby Suggs, a survivor of the Middle Passage also has the most tragic tale to tell. She lived as a slave in different places and gave birth to many children fathered by various men. After sixty years of slavery she crosses the Ohio River as a free woman. Her account gives an insight into the kinds of fracture and fragmentation that has taken place during slavery. Describing the horrors of slavery that Baby Suggs went through the narrator says, “Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn’t run off, or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized. So Baby’s eight children had six fathers. What she called the nastiness of life was the shock she received upon learning that nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children” (p.23). All her

eight children were taken away from her. She laments "Eight children and that's all I remember" (p. 5).

Halle, her son buys her freedom and having reclaimed her hands, she exclaims "These hands belong to me" and she discovers something else as new: "her own heart beat" (p. 141). She becomes "Baby Suggs Holy" and encourages development of pride and self-esteem amongst the members of her community. She says: "Love your hands! Love them! Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them ...You got to love it, you" (p. 88) Lomax observes that Baby Suggs gives the slave community a context in which it could place itself and which could act as a refuge and source of strength. She is also an example of what Braxton identifies as an outraged female ancestor, angry at the abuse of her people and feeling keenly every wrong done to them. (Braxton and McLaughlin, 1990: 302). But her great heart breaks after Sethe's act of infanticide and the subsequent spiteful withdrawal of the black community, she has served for so long with dedication.

The bond between Amy Denver, the white woman and Sethe is purely based on empathy. Sethe recalls her words early in the novel: "Anything dead coming back to life hurts" (p. 35). Amy is the daughter of a poor white unindentured servant who helped her when she escaped from the plantation. Amy's nursing of Sethe for two days is described in detail in the novel. Her words of reassurance to Sethe are applicable to all the victims of slavery unwilling to confront their pasts. Amy says "Good for you. More it hurt more better it is. Can't nothing heal without pain, you know. What you wiggling for?" (p. 78). This bond between the two women is based on fellow feeling and a

shared history of suffering and deprivation. The bond violates the rules of inter-racial interaction with which the blacks were familiar.

With Paul D. Sethe dares to "Trust things and remember things because the last of the Sweet Home men was there to catch her if she sank" (p. 18). "Paul D. is important because he can raise the possibility of trust, because he can help create the emotional conditions in which a new kind of knowing is possible" (Mohanty, 1998: 218-219). When Paul D. an ex-slave who was together with Sethe in the plantation Sweet Home, arrives on the scene, their reunion promises to bring love into the haunted house. Their relationship becomes part of the healing process, which Morrison hopes that the novel would provide (Peach, 1995: 93). But the ghost of the daughter she killed, seeking revenge has long haunted the house of Sethe. "Who would have thought that a little old baby could harbor so much rage" (p.5)? Her other two children have been unable to live with the signs of a spiteful ghost living in the house and thus ran away in fright. Paul D. on his arrival drives out the malicious spirit from the house but another figure arrives and possesses the house and its inhabitants. She is a mysterious child-like young woman of untold origin who fails to explain herself clearly. Sethe's daughter Denver concludes that she is the ghost of the murdered infant returned from the dead. There is a tendency to see Beloved as a spirit become flesh, but Beloved like a true spirit remains elusive "embodying certain ideas and functions, embodying not just herself literally but also metaphorically, and always ambiguously" (Carmean, 1993: 85). In the novel Morrison intends the ghost to perform two types of function: Beloved was intended to be a mirror character reflecting the inner lives of the characters with whom she came into contact. Thus, in the case of

Sethe, *Beloved* acted as a reflection of her mother's hopes and fears surrounding the killing of her baby daughter. The other intention was telling the story of slavery as fully and honestly as possible. Thus *Beloved* reflects the real experience of native Africans who lived through the Middle Passage. By means of this double intent design of *Beloved*, Morrison hoped to bridge "the gap between Africa and Afro-America and the gap between the living and the dead and the gap between the past and the present" (Carmean, 1993:85).

Sethe comes to the conclusion that her dead daughter has come to haunt her seeking revenge and Denver believes that *Beloved* has come in response to her own yearnings for reunion. But on the literal level she is also a survivor from a slave ship. In this sense she is flesh- she is a human being with her horrifying stories to tell about the dreadful Middle Passage. But *Beloved* becomes incapable of telling her story except in bits and pieces. She talks about one death meaning the Middle Passage and Sethe and Denver think another that is the infant's death. Both "these experiences overlap, and in the final analysis, merge into the text and into a general statement that the death of Sethe's child and "death" the young woman experienced through Middle Passage have the same root cause of slavery. They both being inseparable parts of the story of slavery and the memory of the enslaved " (Carmean, 1993: 86).

Sethe's resolve of "beating back the past"(p. 173) is weakened after Paul D's reappearance. But it takes the presence of *Beloved* to break down her resolve to the point where she can confront the most disturbing facts of her past life. She believes that *Beloved* is her lost daughter and she feels relieved of the burden of memory. "I don't have to remember nothing", Sethe thinks, "I

don't even have to explain. She understands it all. I can forget how Baby Suggs' heart collapsed" (p. 183). Sethe also voluntarily recalls the death scene of her daughter. She recalls the painful memory of the disappearance of her husband, the loss of her two sons. Finally, she tells Paul D. of her most humiliating experience in Sweet Home. This was her discovery that she was studied as a creature with her "human characteristics" listed on the left side and her "animal ones on the right" (p. 193). It was this experience that weighed more than any other behind her decision first to escape with her children from the plantation and then to kill her child rather than see them return to slavery.

Beloved's presence also has a destructive effect in that she becomes a possessive presence feeding on Sethe's "thick" love. Sethe becomes obsessed with pleasing her so that she can make up to her and reclaim her love. In the case of Denver, Beloved increasingly holds her affection in thrall. Beloved drives Paul D. out of the house by offering herself to his animal lust. Sethe also begins to resemble Beloved. This strong resemblance between Beloved and Sethe and the near exchange of places and personalities is indicative of Sethe's guilt feelings and strong maternal affection. Sethe is thus held captive again "this time to a consuming love threatening her well being just as much as the emotional death that slavery brought" (Carmean, 1993: 90). This encourages a feeling of self-contempt.

Sethe can break free of the bondage of her past and present enslavement, by accepting the lesson of love preached by Baby Suggs. "Here", Baby Suggs preached, "in this place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick

them out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And. O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face, cause they don't love that either. *You got to love it, you!*" She ends by urging her listeners to love above all their hearts "Love that too," she cries out. "More than eyes or feet. More than lungs that have yet to draw free air. More than your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize" (pp. 88-89).

Sethe finally accepts this message of love with the help of people who themselves have undergone the process of reclaiming their hearts. Denver escapes from the emotionally enslaving house so that she can return to it as its benefactor. The community of women who did not keep any contact with Sethe out of spite and resentment returns to the haunted house to drive out the consuming spirit. When the ghost left the house of Sethe it had taken the shape of a pregnant woman, naked and smiling in the heat of the afternoon sun. Thus "this time", Beloved manages to run off while her mother fights for her with heartfelt passion. The disappearance of Beloved becomes the most fortunate development because it frees Sethe from a constant reflection on her guilt. Although there has been a catharsis and an attempt made to reclaim the self in the face of fragmentation and isolation at the end of the novel, the sense of loneliness still haunts Sethe. Sethe cries at the loss of Beloved: "She was my best thing"(p.272) she tells Paul D. This time Paul D. is there to take care:

She looks at him. The peachstone skin, the crease between his ready, waiting eyes and sees it – the thing in him, the blessedness, that has made him the kind of man who can walk in

a house and make the women cry. Cry and tell him things they only told each other... (p. 272).

The narrative however does not end with a sense of closure. Paul D. reassures Sethe "You, Your best thing, Sethe. You are" attempting to drive home the lesson to Sethe that only through self love can she hit the road to freedom. Sethe asks incredulously: "Me? Me?" (p.273). In spite of Sethe's incredulity her final words remain a recognition of black woman's selfhood. Traumatized under slavery and subject to 'racial gaze' she can claim her identity only in relation to her tradition and women to women bonding.

Morrison has described her goal in *Jazz* as wanting to "tell a very simple story about people who do not know that they are living in the Jazz age and to never use the word" ("Art of Fiction", 1993:117). The novel is set in the Harlem Renaissance in 1926 when the United States was in the throes of 'The Jazz Age' or what was called 'The Roaring Twenties'. But it refers only passingly to the various public events of the time, such as the July 1917 East St. Louis riots, the much celebrated return of the 369<sup>th</sup> regiment (an all black unit) in 1919 from The First World War, and talks about the presence of the clubs, leagues and societies in Harlem in the twenties. To some extent the novel does convey the strong sense of Harlem as Mecca, as a Promised Land for the African-Americans in the nineteen twenties. "Everything that you want is right where you are: the church, the store, the party, the women, the men, the postbox...club, organisation, group..." (p.10)<sup>6</sup> providing a picture that the blacks for the first time would have access to economic, educational, and social opportunities previously denied to them.

But as in *Beloved* Morrison's emphasis moves away from the "big" picture and returns to the everyday lives of the black people. The decade saw a large-scale migration from South to the North along with a newly conceived image of black selfhood. In spite of the euphoria that the decade saw, there was a heavy melancholic strain, which Morrison has tried to capture in her novel. Morrison dwells on the theme of rupture and fragmentation that the migrations brought about in the lives of the black people during this time. A fundamental and irreversible shift took place during the half century after the Civil War; initially the southern cities drew a large number of ex-slaves from their hinterlands, but the segregation, the violence and the poverty drove hundreds of thousands of African-Americans northwards. But if this narrative had to be reclaimed for the African-American novel, it was already preserved in the blues which articulated the aspirations, difficulties, frustrations of their transition not only from slavery, but from a rural to an urban lifestyle for generations of black people.

Among those who have 'train danced' to the city from the South are Violet and Joe Trace. Many years later, Joe murders his young lover Dorcas, who has been unfaithful to him. He was initially attracted towards Dorcas by the inattentions of his wife who had started sleeping with a doll because she could not have her own children. The novel focuses on the consequences of the murder for Joe and Violet. At the outset of the novel, Violet comes to be known as "Violent" in the community for attempting to mutilate the face of Dorcas at the funeral. Fortunately, however, Dorcas's guardian, Alice, refuses to disclose the name of the person or the ward of the person who tried to mutilate the body. Moving backwards and forwards in time the novel takes us on a reverse

journey from that which many blacks undertook after the Civil War. The novel in retracing the past lives of Joe, Violet, and their families takes us back to the South from the North, from the city to the country, from the twentieth to the nineteenth century.

Rodrigues observes "More than just a story of three individuals, the novel as a continuation of *Beloved* jazzifies the history of a people". (1993:742) Urban black music talks about the complexity of human relationships and sometimes underline anger and frustration at others the melting sentimentality, all of which, are played off against each other in Morrison's novel. The image of women in the Jazz age was ambiguous in films light-hearted, unconventional and daring, and in songs melancholic and even tragic. There were numerous songs of unrequited love and loss. Despair and resignation were keynotes popular torch songs. "The novel highlights the same concerns of the period as the music; loneliness, the changeability of feelings, emotional insecurity in personal relationships and the anguish of failure"(Peach, 1995:115). In doing so, it draws on the personalised nature of Jazz lyrics, which enabled singers and songwriters to break new grounds in exploring emotional situations. Taking its cue from Jazz, the novel alternates between external description and internal longings such as Violet's desire to have a baby or the jealous thirst for vengeance experienced by a number of characters in the novel. Indeed it is the sensuality, the unpredictability and the dissonance of African-American life during the Jazz age that the novel probes and develops.

Whether it is Cholly's rape of Pecola, in *The Bluest Eye*, Eva's amputation of her leg in a railway line in *Sula* or Jazz's opening scene where Violet interrupts the funeral service, are events which are unpredictable and

often inexplicable. Joe's falling in love with Dorcas is also unpredictable and his murder of her inexplicable. Description of his character is reminiscent of the character of Paul D in *Beloved*. He is a man whom women trust, in whom they confide and with whom they establish some kind of rapport usually reserved for other women. Here the narrator whose identity is uncertain enhances the unpredictability. After Violet's attempted mutilation the narrator says, "May be she thought she would solve the mystery of love that way. Good luck and let me know" (p.5). Again in the description of Dorcas's aunt as hardheaded and sly, she admits she is not the best judge of character; she has lived too long in her own mind, she hasn't mixed with people enough and that she needs to get out more.

The social space of the novel, where the instability of the urban meets the unpredictability of Jazz, turns volatile and Dorcas's association with the Jazz age encapsulates the uncertainty and unpredictability of people's lives in the 1920s. Many of the characters occupy a space, which Jazz is constructing for them, a space in which morality, life styles, familial patterns and religion are renegotiated. In the novel it is Alice who specifically identifies the role that African-American music has played in shaping the social space:

It was the music. The dirty get-on-down music, the women sang and the men played and both danced to, close and shameless or apart and wild ... It made you do unwise disorderly things. Just hearing it was like violating the law (p.58).

Lawlessness was rampant in the city in the twenties. Ordinary people took the law into their own hands. It was an era of new manners, self-conscious fashions and of the exploration of new tastes. The narrator, enthusiastic about Harlem and excited by its people, becomes increasingly

aware of and interested in, how this self-consciousness is linked to violence, as an integral feature of life in the Jazz age. According to the narrator survival depended upon being streetwise, a key element of which is learning to “watch everything and everyone and try to figure out their plans, their reasonings long before they do” (p.8).

Most of Morrison’s novels focus on fractured bonding and she presents numerous instances of orphaned or abandoned children. Cholly Breedlove is reared by his great grand mother. Dorcas is raised by her aunt Alice after being orphaned; Sweet is raised by her aunt Malvonne, but despite her best efforts, he joins a gang, robs postal boxes and disappears from Harlem. Violet’s mother Rose Dear jumps into a well and drowns herself to escape her pain, and so Violet vows never to have children of her own, Joe’s mother is perhaps Wild, he never knows for sure and his father is totally unknown, so Joe too does not want to have children of his own. Young black women like Violet and Alice have learnt to exercise some kind of willpower to become mature women who lead relatively comfortable lives, but their emotional lack is profound. By giving such close attention to the traumatic lives of Alice and Violet, Morrison’s work points to the necessary resilience and creativity of black women in trying to make lives for themselves and their families amid tremendous adversities and suggests the pain that is the underside of such achievements. In this way, Morrison’s novel implicitly provides a much different, more complicated explanation of the fractures and fissures in black families than sociological, historical accounts such as Stanley Ellain’s 1959 book, which argues that slavery has totally dehumanised blacks or the Moynihan report of 1965, which produced the cultural image of a controlling and emasculating black matriarch.

The idea that Africans are one people bound by history and culture, in general and by race, gender and class oppression in particular pervades all of Morrison's novels. In *The Bluest Eye* Claudia realises that Maureen Peal is not her enemy as much as both of them are products of the same society in which they are taught that beauty has to be measured by the standard of the ruling class: "And all the time we knew that Maureen Peal was not the enemy and was not worthy of such intense hatred. *The thing to fear was the Thing* that made her beautiful and not us" (p.62) In *Sula*, Nel comes to realise the truth of Eva's words: "You, Sula, what's the difference?" (p.168) that she and Sula though from drastically different social backgrounds, are bound by factors much stronger than those which tend to separate them. In *Tar Baby*, Jadine's isolation from her people, including Sydney and Ondine, makes her more a tanned European ("Copper Venus") than an African. In *Beloved* Sethe relies on the African community in order to purge the ghost from 124: "Unloaded, 124 is just another weathered house needing repair " (p.264)

Gender solidarity and bonding, as an only viable solution to woman's suffering is given prominence in *Jazz*. The idea of women coming together as a result of oppression is not a new idea in Morrison's fiction, but as Mbalia suggests, "It is a jazz melody plucked anew and given prominence by the musician who is Morrison" (1993:635).

We may say that Toni Morrison has always been a Jazz musician, "not only because she signifies, assimilates and advances the themes and structures of great African works, but also primarily because she signifies, assimilates and advances the themes and structures of her own canon" (Mbalia, 1993:623). *Jazz* continues the tradition of signifying, assimilating and

advancing the mutuality of theme and structure. The theme and structure blend together to suggest the unity that must exist among African women. This unifying process is evident in the novel's inscription:

I am the name of the sound  
and the sound of the name  
I am the sign of the letter  
and the designation of the division  
(Epithet to the novel *Jazz*)

The inscription implies that nothing is separate and distinct and that theme is structure and structure is theme. Thus the message of bonding cannot be conveyed in a better way than in Jazz, a music form in which songster, song and song telling are one and the same. We may say that James Lincoln Collier's description of a great Jazz musician is applicable to Morrison as well: "The truly great Jazz musician is great for the same reasons that a great writer or painter is great; He can make a unified whole out of fascinating parts which join in surprising ways. And we can only explain how he does it by saying that he is a genius" (Collier, 1973: 31). Morrison erases the seams between theme and structure and the narrator is not distinct from the story he is telling.

Morrison is mostly interested in focussing on the plight of Afro-American women in *Jazz* facing the triple oppression of race, gender and class. African people were in danger of exploitative conditions caused by the changing U.S. economy in 1920s – an economy that shifted radically from slavocracy to industrialism. This economy spawned racism. The results were the worst race riots in the history of America. If conditions for all African people were barbaric and wild, then conditions for African women were downright warlike for they were in danger of sexism that like racism is spawned by capitalism.

Northern cities like Harlem were no different from the south especially for women: "Every week since Dorcas's death, during the whole of January and February, a paper laid bare the bones of some broken women. Man kills wife. Eight accused of rape dismissed. Woman commits suicide. White attackers indicted..." (p.174). While migrating, the African-Americans thought that they were coming to a peaceful place, free of exploitation and oppression. Their hopes and expectations were belied once they came up North. There was also a new concept of black selfhood — the new Negro as someone who is self-assertive and militant: "Negroes were really the same people all along — the so-called Old Negro was merely carried within the bosom of the New as a kind of self doubt, perhaps self hate" (Huggins, 1971:65). Focusing on black women, Houston Baker argues in the opening chapters of *Workings of the Spirit* that this rupture had specific ramifications on generations of black women writers who came of age in the Harlem Renaissance. Black women's identification and solidarity is the idea of black women seeking their own identity and defining themselves through bonding at various levels — psychic, intellectual and emotional with other black women. Almost all of Morrison's novels are replete with instances of women to women bonding. In fact Morrison's dedication in the *Tar Baby* voices Zora Neale Hurston's vision in her *Dust Tracks on a Road*: "When I had come to these women, then I would be at the end of my pilgrimage, and not the end of my life. Then I would know peace and love, and what goes with these things and not before" (Hurston, 1971: 58).

In *The Bluest Eye*, Claudia dreams of the "security and warmth of big mama's kitchen" (p.15). Claudia sees love, "Thick and rich as Alaga syrup" (p.7) behind her mother's outbursts. In *Sula*, Nel has been to Sula "the closest

thing to both an other and a self" (p.119). In *Song of Solomon*, Pilate becomes a source of strength for Ruth to stand off Macon Dead. In *Tar Baby*, Jadine's identification of the black women at Eloë as the "other" leads to a discovery of her self. In *Beloved*, Sethe finds a culture mentor in Baby Suggs who kindles a desire in her to know her past and love herself as a person.

In *Jazz* Violet discovers herself through her relationship with Dorcas, Alice Manfred and Felice. It is her identification of self with the black women that leads Violet to discover the real "me", as she goes out in search of Dorcas's past and encounters Alice Manfred, Dorcas's aunt. The urgency to make some kind of connection with their previous selves is felt by both Violet and Alice. Violet suffers "public craziness" and "private cracks in Harlem" (p.22). Violet has a split self: "Violet" and "that Violet". She begins to heal these fractures, by creating a historical narrative for herself. Midway through the novel, she says to Alice "Everybody I grew up with is down home" (p.111), and to Felice late in the novel Violet says "Before I came North I made sense and so did the world" (P.207), showing her ability to articulate the traumatic effects caused by the geographical and emotional dislocation migration entailed. Violet's healing, her ability to talk about herself occurs as a result of the bond she and Alice form after Dorcas's death. The bond between Dorcas, Alice and Felice not only lead Violet to self-discovery but also help her in her relationship with Joe Trace.

Once in the city Violet becomes a victim of exploitative working conditions. Because she does not have the license to set up a hairdresser's shop, she is exploited by the whites who offer her lower wages for her work. The emotional void created by migration makes her less and less concerned

with love and communication and more concerned with possessions. For instance the parrot who squawks "I love You" is the one she calls my parrot just as Joe is "my Joe Trace, Mine". She further says: "I picked him out from all the others. ... My Joe Trace, my Virginia Joe Trace" (p.96). But as with the parrot, she thinks of Joe as hers without bothering to communicate with him. Violet is silent with Joe: "Over time her silences annoy her husband, then puzzle him and finally depress him" (p.24). Ultimately, these silences force Joe to act crazy, twice shooting off a gun without meaning to do so. And like Wild, Violet is mistakenly thought to be "violent". The narrative reads, "Violent they call her now" (p.75). The novel traces the path to the understanding of the "self" Violet comes to in her relationship which are not quite apparent with other black women. Morrison adopts a new technique of telescoping the "philosopher's double" into a "split personality". She attempts to show how Violet turns violent how she recovers the self by destroying the violent in her.

When Violet tries to disfigure Dorcas's face at the latter's funeral, the entire community shuns her. But it is women who empathise with her. Opposing Joe's suggestion to rent Malvonne's place to bring in Dorcas she tells Joe: "Okay, there is no love lost between Violet and me but I take her part, not yours..." (p.46). When Violet initially meets Dorcas, she intends to know more about her, to gather "information". "May be she thought she could solve the mystery of love that way" (p.5), instead found herself growing attached to the dead girl. "When she isn't trying to humiliate Joe, "she is admiring the dead girl's hair; when she isn't cursing Joe with 'brand-new cuss' words, she is having whispered conversations with the corpse in her head; ... Just a quarter inch trim would do wonders, Dorcas .Dorcas." (p.15)

Violet reminds us of Sethe in *Beloved*. Though Sethe kills her daughter with the idea of saving her from slavery, later on she feels guilty of murder, till the dead daughter returns to her in flesh to redeem her mother from the torment. The photograph of Dorcas serves the same purpose in *Jazz*. It becomes a symbol of her guilt. Her sense of guilt is based on the notion that an induced miscarriage is also an infanticide. In Violet's perverted thinking, Dorcas becomes the child she miscarried. So Violet finds herself both loving and hating the girl alternately.

As Violet journeys to Dorcas's past she starts associating herself with her. She recognises that Dorcas could have been the daughter she never had, or rather miscarried, a daughter whose hair she as a hairdresser would have liked to dress. Violet begins to wonder whether Dorcas was "the woman who took the man or the daughter who fled the womb" (p.109). Thus Violet learns to admire and love Dorcas. Yamini K. Murthy observes, "Violet's relationship with Dorcas becomes an affirmation of love of one woman for another, although Violet starts out with hatred in her heart"(1993: 82).Violet's identification with the black women like Dorcas gradually leads her to discover the real 'me'.

This affirmation of love and more importantly identification with the "other" develops into an understanding of the self in Violet's relationship with Alice Manfred. As Alice stitches up Violet's frayed and torn dress, then her coat, she listens to her closely and repairs her own battered sense of self. Together they discover that "sisterhoods" are necessary between black women if they are to save themselves from becoming "wild, armed and dangerous"(Peterson, 1997:208). Initially, when Violet tries to meet Alice Manfred, she refuses to meet her as Violet had disrupted her niece's funeral.

Alice says later, "At first I thought you came here to harm me. Then I thought you wanted to offer condolences. Then I thought you wanted to thank me for not calling the law. But none of that is it, is it?" and Violet replies "I had to sit down somewhere. I thought I could do it here. That you would let me and you did ... I wanted to see what kind of girl he'd rather me be" (P.82).

Thus Alice becomes the person Violet can sit with, and talk to someone who might understand her. Alice understands Violet and soon she becomes the only visitor she ever looked forward to. Alice also begins to speak with Violet in a way she never did with other people. Soon "the women became so easy with each other, talk wasn't always necessary" (p.112). More importantly, Alice and Violet learn to laugh and learn that "laughter is serious .... more complicated, more serious than tears" (p.113).

Violet tries to convince Alice as to why she tried to disfigure the face of her niece Dorcas. She makes Alice realise that she, a woman who had never held a knife to harm others would definitely fight and kill for her man and asks Alice "Wouldn't you? You wouldn't fight for your man?" (p.85) This leads to Alice's understanding of Violet's violent act at the funeral. Alice's friendship helps Violet to see the real 'me' inside her, to define herself and become self-confident. Further Violet learns from Alice the true meaning of life. She realises that she has been denying herself all along and that she has to make the most of it. Alice teaches Violet to love. She tells her, "You got anything left to you to love, anything at all, do it" (p.112). Violet identifies with Alice almost totally and through her identification with Alice she establishes her own identity and becomes a person even Joe learns to love and admire. What is however important is that both Violet and Alice have become interdependent.

Violet also helps Felice, Dorcas's friend to review her life. Felice arrives at the Trace household to recover her lost ring, but stays back not only to discover her own self, but also understand her relationship with her mother. Violet makes her feel perfectly at home. For the first time Felice talks about her past to Violet and Violet makes Felice realise that her mother stole the ring from the shop only "out of spite" (p.203). As in the case of Alice Manfred, Violet's relationship with Felice also helps her to understand her mother, Rose, and her grandmother True Belle, better. Felice's arrival also helps in restoring harmony in the Trace household. Violet's understanding of herself leads to a more harmonious relationship with her husband, where they start talking about personal things again in their chequered life. Thus "as Violet, Alice and Felice come together as black women and discover their own selves through bonding with other black women, they come to an end of a pilgrimage to know and be their own true selves"(Murthy,1993:83). Thus through bonding, African-American women become more than close friends. They nurture each other, each becoming a "mama" for the other. As Mbalia rightly points out, "what Violet, Alice, Dorcas and Felice have in common is the need for 'mamas'. Violet's mother Rose commits suicide, Dorcas's mother is killed and Felice's mother is absent. That is why, in times of crisis each of them utters the word 'mama'. Alice says, "Oh, Mama". She blurted it out and then covered her mouth. Violet had the same thought. "Mama. Mama" (p.110) When Dorcas is asked about the name of the killer she says: "I know his name but Mama won't tell" (p.193). Fortunately, for Felice she gets surrogate parents in Joe and Violet. Felice says, "All I wanted was my ring and tell the old man he could stop carrying on so" and again, "I can see why Mrs. Manfred let her visit. She

doesn't lie, Mrs. Trace. Nothing she says is a lie the way it is with most older people" (p.205). So this passing encounter between Felice and Violet turns into a promising relationship as they reconstitute the Trace family.

In *Paradise* privilege and exclusion are the two greatest hurdles to the founding of a community based on love, obstacles to "the love of God and love for fellow human beings" (Donahue, 1999: 1). Ruby was a town founded by the descendants of freed slaves one who have survived the hostile world and found a town. The patriarchal community of Ruby is based on an ideal of purity and righteousness, rigidly enforced moral law and fear. But seventeen miles away another group of exiles gather in a promised land of their own, that is the Convent. It is upon these women that the men of Ruby lay their murderous rage.

Deacon Morgan and Steward Morgan are the twins who are at the heart of the patriarchal system that has controlled Ruby since its inception. "Ruby centered narratives focus on the patriarchy and emphasize a rigidly controlled communal historiography predicated on the subordination of the individual to the group!" (Davidson, "Racial stock and 8-rocks: Communal historiography in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*" in *Twentieth Century Literature* Vol.47, pp.355-373, 2001, taken from Internet, Pro Quest, p.1). Ruby is founded on a code of ethics, supreme among which is the protection of women. There were legendary stories of its men defending the community from "Out There where every cluster of white men looked like a posse" (p.16)<sup>2</sup>. In the opening pages of the "Grace" section of *Paradise*, the Morgans, and the Fleetwoods meet at the Fleetwood house to discuss a problem: K.D. Morgan, the nephew of the twin Morgans Deacon and Steward struck Arnette his girlfriend. In Ruby no outside

or judicial force is wanted or needed. Reverend Misner is called in to negotiate a truce. They believe a woman is safe enough to walk around the town unescorted and “Nothing for ninety miles around thought she was prey” (p.8). This line seems ironic given the violent opening of the book.

The exchange in the Fleethouse makes one thing clear – that the town elders negotiate on behalf of younger men and all the women. Unfortunate accidents like Arnette’s pregnancy are overlooked to preserve the town’s stability and the Morgans’ interest has been to preserve the status quo.

Every potential threat to the status quo becomes an emergency for the Morgans. If the white teenagers whistled at young girls “Their eyes crinkled in mischief they drive around the girls, making U-turns and K’s churning up grass seed in front of the houses, flushing cats in front of Ace’s Grocery Store”, the guntoting men of Ruby surround their offenders and wordlessly force them to leave (pp.12-13). When the threat becomes more grave as in the case of the younger generation attempting to reinscribe the message on the Oven, the older men threaten “If you, anyone of you, ignore, change, take away, or add to the words in the mouth of that Oven, I will blow your head off just like you was a hood-eye snake” (p.87). The assault on the convent women demonstrates the kind of terrible violence the men may indulge in to hold on to their power.

The community’s extant historical narrative recounts a long history of terror and abuse from the days of slavery to the modern-day exodus which serves as a justification for the “state of emergency” in the world of *Paradise*. In the opening section of the book the narrator tells us that the Morgan “Twins have powerful memories. Between them they remember the details of everything that ever happened – things they witnessed and things they have

not ... . And they have never forgotten the message of the specifics of any story, especially the uncontrolling one told to them by their Grandfather the man who put the words in the Oven's black mouth. A story that explained why neither the founders of Haven nor their descendants could tolerate anybody but themselves (p.13). The "controlling" story is the Disallowing-the story of how 158 freed black slaves left Mississippi and two Louisiana parishes" (p.13) in 1890 and at every stops were turned away by the whites, by Native Americans and by fellow blacks for being "too poor, too bed raggled-looking" (p.14). They asked "Us free like them; was slave like them. What for is this difference" (p.14)? Morgan historiography is based on memory and oral history. Apart from few family Bibles, few written documents are available and the history of the town is passed down from one generation to the next.

But the militant defensiveness of Ruby's leader's carries the potential for corruption and abuse. The assault on the women of the Convent or the "quasi-fascistic" impulses of the men cannot be justified on any ground. Linda J. Krumholz comments, "Community spirit shifts to individual acquisitiveness, old interpretations and memories are authorized to squelch dialogue and dissent, and values rigidify into repressive dogma" (in *African American Review*, Vol.36, Issue 1, 2002 pp.21-34 taken from Internet, Pro Quest p.5).

The women unadulterated by patriarchal repression construct competing versions of Ruby's history. History seems to be gendered in Ruby. Dovey Morgan for instance feels that arguing over Oven's motto is futile. "Specifying it, particularizing it, nailing meaning down, was futile" (p.93). Soane Morgan goes even further, believing that "Minus the baptisms the Oven had no real value." What were needed in Haven's early days had never been needed in Ruby. The

women seemed to acquiesce "when the men took the Oven apart, packed moved and reassembled it." Privately, they resented the truck space given to it ... A utility became a shrine " (p.103).

Gender differences in the novel are explained in a few ways. Patricia Best Cato, school teacher and secret historian of Ruby, derives from the town's hidden history the desire for pure African "8-rock blood" and "immortality". "Unadulterated and unadulteried 8-rock blood held its magic as it resided in Ruby. That was their recipe. That was their deal. For Immortality" (p.217). She thus concludes, "everything that worries them must come from women" (p.217). Patricia's daughter Billie Delia believes that the community battle "was not about infant life or a bride's reputation but about disobedience, which meant of course that the stallions were fighting about who controlled the mares and their foals" (p.150). Patricia's observations suggest that because of their connection to birth and death, of all the associated dangers of difference and "tainted blood" that reproduction brings, women embody the threat of change to men. Billie Delia suggests that women represent men's power and control other men. "Gender differences also arise from men's use of women to symbolize national or community values, an historical tendency seen, for example, in the conflation of rape with the attack on national borders" (Krumholz in *African American Review*, Vol.36, 2002, pp.21-34 taken from Internet, Pro Quest, p.5).

The women of the Convent are not a threat to Ruby because of their skin colour but because they reflect the illegitimacy of the authority of the men of the town. Their desire for maintaining purity of race, sexuality and Christianity leads to their scapegoating of the women of the Convent. These "women define themselves not simply by a gendered role below the authority of

men, but by memories of what they have suffered and what they need to heal". (Kearly, "Toni Morrison's Paradise and the politics of community" in *Journal of American and Comparative Cultures*, Vol.23, Issue 2, 2000, pp.9-16 taken from Internet, Pro Quest, p.4). They do not need men for their protection or survival. In fact their distance from men create a space for community which stands in stark contrast to the patriarchal authority of the men in Ruby.

The nine men from Ruby seem to have a unified intent as they trek to the Convent. But as the narrative follows the perspective of individual man the distance between the act and beliefs and heritage of the men who commit the act clouds the unity of intent. Certain questions are raised at this point of time. For example, how is it possible for men devoted to protecting women to decide to kill them? The second question and a pertinent one is what kind of logic justifies the act that contradicts their very basic aims of creating a safe Haven free from persecution and mob violence?

Further, according to Krumholz, if "Ruby exemplifies the dangers of home structured on national identity and fixed ideals" Morrison's, "redemption of the Convent, the palimpsestic "racial house", suggests that the hard work of dismantling racial ideological, linguistic and psychological "architectures" is necessary to create an "open house" and the possibility of home." (Krumholz in *Afro-American Review*, VI.36, Issue 1, 2002, pp.21-34 taken from Internet Pro Quest, p.6).

The women who migrate to the Convent have all been victims of abandonment and abuse by their parents and men. "What (Consolata) knew of them she had mostly forgotten, and it seemed less and less important to remember any of it, because the timbre of each of their voices told the same

tale: disorder, deception and, what Sister Roberta warned the Indian girls against, drift. The three d's that paved the road to perdition...." (p 222). Morrison undermines the reader's foothold in racialized judgements destabilizing stereotypical assumptions. Mavis happens to be a failed mother who mistakenly kills her babies in an attempt to please and avoid being beaten by her male lover. She flees first to her mother's house but soon realises that her mother like her children will conspire against her because of the social norm that women and children need to have a husband and a father. Like Mavis, other women who come to the Convent must deal with their traumatic pasts and learn to escape cycles of abuse. Grace, who first calls herself "Gigi" represents female sexual desire and desirability. So dependent is she on the approving gazes of men that she indulges in gaudy sexual flirtation. Seneca abandoned first by her father, then her mother, and abused in a string of foster homes, mutilates herself using the physical sensation to substitute the emotional pain. Pallas, witnessed her mother committing adultery with the man she loved and thus developed a eating disorder. These women are out on the streets and their racial identities also become mobile, unfixed and unresolvable.

They come to the Convent where the abundance of food sprouts from its soil as if the garden is Eden. All these women experience the unconditional love and forgiveness of Consolata, the baptized Native American woman possessing magical healing powers. The women of the Convent carry no ideals of family or society in their wanderings and challenge the social and historical strictures that surround them by daring to confront the scary things inside themselves. Under no obligation to play family roles or the need to live up to the ideal of being a virgin mother, they learn to convert their pain into

understanding and mutual nurturing. "Insight" is the special word used to describe the healing process of Consolata, the longtime resident of the Convent. She learns from Lone, the elder midwife of Ruby who teaches her to raise the dead by "stepping in". Being raised up in the Convent, she finds the use of the term unholy because it amounted to 'witchcraft' and prefers calling it "seeing in". "Thus the gift was in sight" (p.247). Consolata starts teaching the women of the Convent and they gain insight. They start exploring and expressing themselves in paint. With Consolata in charge, like a new and revised Reverend Mother.... they altered." (p.265) Mavis, Seneca, Grace and Pallas stand for female empowerment midst patriarchal social structure, which refuses to listen and understand. "Mavis is reduced to a criminal, insane, infant killer, Grace reduced to a shit, Seneca reduced to a masochist and Pallas reduced to a dyke in the patriarchal language of non-acceptance." (Kearly in "Toni Morrison's Paradise and the politics of community" in *Journal of American and Comparative Cultures*, Vol.23, Issue 2, 2000, pp.9-16, taken from Internet Pro Quest, p.5).

These women from diverse backgrounds and environment come together in a sisterly bond magnetically drawn by the compass of Consolata, the spiritual healer. "This sweet, unthreatening old lady who seemed to love each one of them best; who never criticized .... who listened; who locked no doors and accepted each as she was .... this ideal parent, friend, companion in whose company they were safe from harm" (p.262)? She enables expression of the repressed, articulation of the unsaid. She absorbs pain and forgives and in a highly symbolic act of sacrifice helps her followers to be reborn as they remember her, piece together their relationship with her and become whole

themselves. In the story of the Convent women as it unfolds in a scene prior to the massacre, Morrison seems to be suggesting that paradise may also be obtained in everyday terms. The women in this scene undergo collective healing ritual in which they confront and transcend their individual pasts one by one. It is preceded by a meal carefully prepared by Consolata who functions as a type of high priestess.

In this scene the central function of the sacred Oven shifts to the Convent where the women cook together and dance in the baptismal rain. Going through it the women arrive at spiritual and erotic ecstasy:

Gathered in the kitchen door, first they watched, then they stuck out their hands to feel. It was like lotion on their fingers so they entered it and let it pour like balm on their shaved heads and upturned faces. Consolata started it; the rest were quick to join her. There are great rivers in the world and on their banks and the edges of the oceans children thrill to water. In places where the rain is light the thrill is almost erotic. But those sensations bow to the rapture of holy women dancing in hot sweet rain. They would have laughed, had enchantment not been so deep. (p.283)

This clearly is the paradisiacal moment to the Convent women. The women are soon massacred and therefore their feelings are short lived. For Morrison it is interesting that once the women are coherent and strong and clean in their interior lives, they feel saved. They feel impenetrable so that when they are warned of the attack on the Convent, they don't believe it.

The structural organisation of the novel shows the transition from daughters to mothers: Grace, Seneca, Pallas form what could be called the daughter chapters and Patricia, Consolata, Lone, form the mother chapters. Ruby and Save-Marie, the first and last chapters frame the transition from daughters to mothers. The former chapter introduces the male perspective of female migration and hysteria while the latter shows the transformation of

Mavis from an insecure woman to a self-actualized unified self – a woman able to assert a will of her own.

The women in the Convent are not anti-male. Social norms demand that women accept subordinate and dominated position in the house as children need fathers and women need husbands (p.331). Similarly religious instruction indoctrinates women to be ashamed of their own bodies, teaches them to be obedient to and fearful of male authorities. The women of the Convent survive systems that have tried to exclude and repress them. Their survival does not depend on either blaming men or seeking retribution. But in trying to recover lost memories and establishing a community based on healing and mutual understanding.

Patricia Best Cato, Ruby's self-appointed local historian, collects and records the town's various family trees. But one of the reasons for her failure of her history project is gender. Patricia is investigating a rigidly patriarchal system that invokes a "state of emergency" constantly. Although the town closes its "invisible doors" to her project yet she persists. Examining old family trees and finding countless women with only one name or "women with generalized last names", Patricia realizes that in Ruby, the woman's identity depended on the man she married (p.187). She investigates into the gaps and omissions left by the patriarchal version of history: "The Town's official story, elaborated from pulpits, in Sunday School classes and ceremonial speeches, had a sturdy public life" (p.188).

Patricia believes that rejection by the fellow blacks is the great unspoken, unacknowledged keystone of the town's identity. "Everything anybody wanted to know about the citizens of Haven or Ruby lay in the

ramifications of that one rebuff out of many" (p.189). "Now they saw a new separation: light skinned against black. Oh, they knew there was a difference in the minds of whites, but it had not struck them before that it was of consequence, serious consequence to Negroes themselves" (p.194). Therefore, Patricia realises that this becomes the foundation of the town's isolationism and its desire to keep racial lines and family stocks "pure". The fact that both whites and lighter skinned blacks despise the dark skinned ones, the 8-rocks continue to feel unsafe. Patricia also realizes the reason behind the representation of seven families instead of nine Christmas pageant on stage. She realizes that as certain families have married outside and have bought in lighter skinned blacks, they have been quietly removed from the town's 8-rock history. Patricia thus questions her father Roger Best one of the 8-rock men, "the holy families get fewer and fewer .... It was skin colour wasn't it? .... The way people get chosen and ranked in this town" (pp.215-16). But Patricia burns all her research papers, her letters and her town history project. for this makes her feel "clean" and prompts her to "laugh" (p.217). She realizes again that Morgans are in charge of Ruby and muses on the bizarre fact that no one ever died within the town limits of Ruby: "Did they really believe that no one died in Ruby?" (p.217)

Patricia's project is a historiography of the *self*, that leads to new knowledge of her position within Ruby's hierarchy. But burning her work puts an end to her project of personal reconstitution. Billie Delia, Patricia's daughter perhaps provides the most plausible explanation for this act of Patricia. She says that if one does not agree with the official history and politics, the only option for him or her is to leave town, which would be too heavy a price for

Patricia to pay. This makes Patricia different from Sethe, Violet, Trace and the other women of the Convent. "In the character of Patricia Best Cato, Morrison creates a female character who fails at – or defensively backs away from the liberating process of reconstituting the self through "literary archaeology" (Davidson, "Racial Stock and 8-rocks: Communal historiography in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*" in *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol.47, Issue 3, 2001, pp.355-373, taken from Internet Pro Quest, p.7).

The men in their insistence of maintaining racial purity, masculine dominance and economic competition ultimately replicate what they had sought to escape and repudiate. The women in the Convent are made scapegoats for the fears and doubts created when they want to control destiny:

Here, when the men spoke of the ruination that was upon them – how Ruby was changing in inescapable ways – they did not think to fix it by extending a hand in fellowship or love. They mapped defense instead and honed evidence for its need, till each piece fit an already polished groove (p.275).

Morrison seeks to deconstruct a central part of Ruby's exceptionalist self-identification that only two people have died in Ruby – a fact that lends it an air of immortal perfection. But she also emphasizes the lack of new life in the community. There are numerous instances of miscarriages, provoked abortions, and barren women in addition to many "broken" children. Thus the community's sense of perfection is turned inside out and Morrison shows "it to be inherently interconnected with and inhabited by its negative other: stagnation and closure" (Dalsgard, "The One All Black Town Worth the Pain: African-American Exceptionalism, Historical Narration, Critique of Nationhood in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*" in *African American Review* vol.35.no.2 2001:242).

In the fictional world of Morrison both 'race' and 'gender' are complimentary. The women characters of her novels are victims of both, though they resist both forms of domination violently. One of the ways of looking at her representations is to consider all black women having a shared history of suffering. The concept of shared history brings about homogeneity in constructing the black 'identity'. However, this 'identity' has many other aspects. Within the supposedly cohesive identity of the black, there are other disquieting aspects like the status of black women in the community. Black women are not only victims of racism but also of sexism and patriarchy.

In fact one of the main criticisms of Morrison's work has been her delineation of the heterogeneous nature of the African-American community and her exposure of violence and sexual abuse that black women and black children suffer at the hands of black men. Linden Peach says that in Morrison's novels "the communal 'we' is the site of internecine, internal struggles mediated ....including Claudia, Sula, Jadine, Sethe, Violet, by multiple subjectivities" (Peach, 1995: 136). But there is a quest for integration with the community, that is contingent on one's sense of responsibility and community. This sense of responsibility is one of the nurturing responsibilities of motherhood. Motherhood to Morrison is divine though it is disrupted because of racism. "Morrison's novels celebrate the feminine potential; the reclamation of legacy, and the beauty and righteous acknowledgement of a vision of things past" (Holloway, 1987: 21). In her novels the development and reach of voices are clear and powerful. They emerge from the tragedy of child Pecola, whose divestment of soul is symbolically imaged through her silence, to the magical powerful older women Circe and Pilate in *Song of Solomon* and also in the ancient mysterious

Marie Therése in *Tar Baby*. Their voices and songs call the African-Americans back to their lineage, because for the black people emancipation can be realised within the context of black culture and black community.

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## Chapter V

### Writing the Other: Narrative Strategies in Toni Morrison's Fiction

The discourse of alterity constitutes the Other as a discursive representation. Bulgarian literary critic Tzvetan Todorov inspired by the philosopher Levinas "refers to various sorts of otherness: the other in oneself (*je est un autre*); the otherness of groups within the society in which we live to which we do not belong (women as seen by men; men, as seen by women; the rich for the poor; the 'mad' in the eyes of the 'normal'; ...); the otherness of those who are external to us, others in terms of language, customs, etc" (Mason, 1990:2). Among the various forms of otherisation, the otherness of a group, in the United States of America of the blacks in particular, is reflexive upon the categories of 'race' and 'gender'. The Other is often attributed all the negatives that the *self* negates in its signification. The formulation of the *self/Other* dichotomy is at the very centre of Eurocentric discourse. This discourse while privileging the *self*, presents the Other as a stereotype, lacking in a fully developed selfhood. Eurocentric literary narratives also are not free from this. Edward Said maintains: "Narrative itself is the representation of power, and its teleology is associated with the global role of the West" (qtd in Webster 1996 (ed): 120). He further underlines the fact that the discourse of Orientalism produced by the West circulated narratives about the cruelty, sensuality, despotism, laziness and so on which constitute the negative Other against which a positive identity could be constructed

Racism like Orientalism is another product of the West's hegemonic/totalizing discourse. Racism is effective because it works by consensus, in juxtaposing whiteness norm of 'us' against blackness the other of 'them.' This consensual dichotomy of 'us' and 'them' not only figure in literary writing by the whites, but across a range of discourses and texts. Examples of canonical literary texts that have been re-read from a perspective of otherisation (in the post colonial context) are Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. Homi Bhabha in his essay "Mimicry and Men: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" (1984) argues that the western 'racist gaze' denies the possibility of a whole being, unlike 'the myth of the undifferentiated whole white body.' (qtd in Webster 1996 (ed.):121) This insight of the postcolonial theory on 'otherness' is relevant to the study of blacks and women in white America. Satya P Mohanty offers a discussion of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* in his work *Literary Theory and the Claims of History* as a postcolonial text. Drawing upon the complexities of the postcolonial and postmodern theory, Mohanty maintains, "at the heart of Toni Morrison's postcolonial cultural project ... is a vision of continuity between experience and identity..." (1998: 216). Morrison also underlines this vision in the context of identity and representation of the blacks in American Literary imagination in her work *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. She maintains:

For sometime now I have been thinking about the validity or vulnerability of a certain set of assumptions conventionally accepted among literary historians and critics and circulated as "knowledge." This knowledge holds that traditional, canonical American literature is free of, uninformed, and unshaped by the

four- hundred-year-old presence of, first, Africans and then African-Americans in the United States. It assumes that this presence – which shaped the body politic, the Constitution, and the entire history of the culture – has had no significant place or consequence in the origin and development of that culture's literature. Moreover, such knowledge assumes that the characteristics of our national literature emanate from a particular "Americanness" that is separate from and unaccountable to this presence. There seems to be a more or less tacit agreement among literary scholars that, because American literature has been clearly the preserve of white male views, genius, and power, those views, genius, and power are without relationship to and removed from the overwhelming presence of black people in the United States ... The contemplation of this black presence is central to any understanding of our national literature and should not be permitted to hover at the margins of the literary imagination (1993: 4-5).

She goes on to argue that the major characteristics of the national literature – 'individualism, masculinity, social engagement versus historical isolation; acute and ambiguous moral problematics; the thematics of innocence coupled with an obsession with the figurations of death and hell – are not in fact responses to a dark, abiding, signifying Africanist presence (Ibid., 5). There were significant and underscored omissions, marked contradictions, heavily nuanced conflicts, in the way writers peopled their works with signs and bodies of this presence. Thus a real or a fabricated Africanist presence was crucial to their sense of Americanness, which is clearly visible.

What Morrison terms as American-Africanism is an investigation into the ways in which a "nonwhite African like (or Africanist) presence" or persona was constructed as the other in the United States, and the imaginative uses this fabricated presence served. American-Africanism is used as a term for "denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify" (Ibid., 6). It also refers to the whole range of views, assumptions,

readings and misreading that attends the Eurocentric learning about these people. "Through a simple expedient of demonizing and reifying the range of color on a palette, American Africanism makes it possible to say and not to say, to inscribe and erase, to escape and engage, to act out and act on, to historicize and render timeless. It provides a way of contemplating chaos and civilization, desire and fear, and a mechanism for testing the problems and blessings of freedom" (Ibid., 7). There was an absence of a real knowledge or open-minded enquiry about Africans and African-Americans under ideological and imperialistic pressures. Thus an American brand of Africanism emerged that which was strongly pressed, that which was thoroughly serviceable and helped in reinforcing the white man's ego.

The narratives that are informed by such an understanding have not been fair to the African-Americans. Because white America's narrative agenda historically has been constructed in privileging 'race' and colour. It has been successful in its sway either erasing the African-American presence from authorial consciousness or at least stereotyped the blacks not as individuals but as an ugly, indistinguishable frenzied mass. Thus as Said has maintained narratives have become the source and also the very form of power. The articulation of the true narrative representation of the blacks, the Other, therefore requires a different linguistic register and narrative style.

In a broader sense, narratives underpin all our writing and thinking: all forms of knowledge. "Narrative and language can be seen as mutually inclusive aspects of literary texts or discourse" (Webster, 1996 :48). Narrative is a way of combining units of language into larger structures implying a sense of

time, direction and action. To Frederic Jameson, narration is "the central function or instance of the human mind" (1981:13). As with language, we might expect certain elements, which narratives have in common with each other, and also that narratives are distinctive and distinguishable through differentiation. "The tension between similarity or convention and difference is very much at the centre of narrative theory and helps to account for the ways in which we classify and organize different forms of writing to which we assign various kinds and hierarchies of knowledge and truth" (Webster, 1996: 49).

The theory of narrative postulates the existence of a level of structure what is generally known as plot, independent of any particular language or representational medium. The plot or story is the given and the discourse is the varied presentations of it. Because plot is a way of shaping events to make them into a genuine story, writers and readers shape events into a plot in their attempts to make sense of things. Plot is also what narratives shape as they present a story in different ways. The basic distinction that a theory of narrative draws is between plot and representation, story and discourse. When a reader reads a text, he makes sense of it by identifying the story and then seeing the text as one particular representation of that story. By identifying 'what happens' we are able to think of the rest of the verbal material as a way of portraying what takes place. Only then one is in a position to ask what type of representation has been chosen and the difference that it makes. There are many variables and all these are crucial to narrative effects.

Narrative voices may have their distinctive language, in which they recount everything in the story or they may adopt and report the language of

others. Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin describes the novel as fundamentally polyphonic or dialogic rather than monological : the essence of the novel is its staging of different voices or discourses and, thus, of the clash of social perspectives and points of view.

Novel in the western tradition shows how aspirations are tamed and desires adjusted to social reality. For example, many novels are stories of youthful illusions crushed. They tell us of desire, provoke it, lay down for us the scenarios of heterosexual desire, and since the eighteenth century they have increasingly worked to suggest that we achieve our true identity, if at all in love, in personal relations, rather than in public action. We become who we are through a series of identifications. Novels are powerful devices for the internalization of social norms. However, narratives also provide a mode of social criticism exposing the hollowness of worldly success, the world's corruption, and its failure to meet our noblest aspirations. They expose the predicaments of the oppressed.

The basic question for theory in the domain of narrative is whether a narrative is a fundamental form of knowledge, is a rhetorical structure that hides as much as it reveals, is a source of knowledge or illusion. Since there is no clear cut answer available for this question, it is prudent to acknowledge that narratives are rhetorical structures that produce the illusion of perspicacity and are the principal kind of sense making objects at our disposal. After all even the understanding of narrative as rhetoric also has the structure of a narrative.

Although Toni Morrison claims that she does not experiment with but only makes new the old novel form, her works nonetheless are innovative in

form. The radical content of the novels determine her experiment with forms. In her novels she does not merely intend to subvert the Euro-American aesthetic assumptions, but gives expression to the desires and needs of African-Americans. Gerard Genette's model of narrative as creative possibility informs Toni Morrison's works. A narrative like a sentence can be divided into its component parts because a narrative does not merely function at the level of characters, events and places but also facilitates their narrativisation. In Morrison's works the succession of events are broken up in the telling and rearranged so that characters are not presented in relation to each other in ways that make immediate or complete sense.

The traditional first or third person narratives with expectations of coherence and consistency with the *presumption what the narrator's perspective is synonymous with that of the figure in the text through whose eyes the events are seen* are belied in Morrison's novels. In fact, her narratives move backwards and forwards in time, shifting perspectives while plunging into internal longings. In her novels there is a distinction between 'focalizer' and 'narrator,' which affects the presentation of a unified and coherent worldview. Such practices are proactive to African-American context rather than being reactive to Euro-American tradition. The space that opens between focalizer and narrator challenges the imposition of a singular unified perspective and promotes a plurality of worldviews.

Morrison's novels are also enigmatic; there are distances, spaces, gaps, dislocation, alienation and ellipses. Linden Peach observes that this may be because in the 1960s and 1970s there were wider reassessment made of

“monolithic and monologic versions of black identity. Black fiction in the 1970s and 1980s moved away from a homogenized sense of a unified and unifying black community and from overreliance upon the binarism of positive/negative images of black people. It tended instead to engage with a pluralistic sense of experience, incorporating the multiple subjectivities, which constitute any individual's sense of identity.” She further says “Issues of ethnicity were explored within a larger hierarchy of articulated differences: racial, gendered, cultural and sexual” (1995: 17-18). Morrison has developed a complex narrative style combining the oral with the written and has crowded the narrative space with many voices with the objective that a “ participatory relationship between the artist or the speaker and the audience” is maintained. Further, Morrison is aware of the inseparability of oral traditions from written works in African American culture as such writings have “the keys to unlocking African-American literary history” (Harris, 1991: 1). And again incorporating Black music in the narratives is another way of giving her characters a different kind of identity. Allied with varied images in the texts, these musical movements become reflective of communal values and inspirations.

Morrison's texts interweave myths, legends, passions, obsessions, superstitions, religion, and the overwhelming power of nature and the supernatural, which can be compared, to Isabel Allende's definition of magic realism:

Magic realism means allowing a place in literature to the invisible forces that have such a powerful place in life...dreams, myth, legend, passion, obsession, superstition, religion, the overwhelming power of nature and the supernatural. All these are present in African poetry, Hindu sagas, Arab tales, and used to be

present in Western literature up to the Gothic novel and Edgar Allan Poe. Only in the past few decades have they been excluded by white male authors who decided that whatever cannot be controlled doesn't exist (Lewis, 1993:26).

Morrison however has denied this label of 'magic realism'. But by using the invisible forces in her works, Morrison has not inverted Euro-American literary conventions. Rather it has enabled her to extend the creative possibilities of the narrative.

For Morrison, the call to write is not a personal vocation because it also serves her community. There is no tension between function and aesthetics for her. Her fiction, like all art she says, is inherently political and should be 'beautiful.' She does not sacrifice aesthetics for polemics. She notes that it is her challenge is to craft with language a distinct cosmology and historical perspective that too often have been ignored and forgotten. Morrison retrieves for the "village" its past and its ancestors. As in traditional black music, new experiences are synthesized or interpreted according to the logic of the community via an art form. She believes that black music has lost this ability because of crass commercialization and that contemporary African- American fiction in innovative forms is in a position to fill this cultural void.

Morrison has identified certain characteristics which according to her can authenticate a piece as "black" writing: (i) a participatory quality between a book and reader; (ii) an aural quality in the writing; (iii) an open-endedness in the endings of her books that is agitating; (iv) an acceptance of and ability to detect differences versus a thrust towards homogenization; (v) acknowledgement of a broader cosmology, and system of logic – one that

includes magic and mystery and listens to the body when it speaks; (vi) a functional as well as aesthetic quality, (vii) an obligation to bear witness, (viii) service as a conduit for the “ancestor”; (ix) uses of humour that is frequently ironic; (x) an achieved clarity or epiphany and a tendency to be prophetic; (xi) a novel that would take her people through the pain and denial of their racially haunted history to a healing zone

In Morrison's novels it is the form of the novel – the way the story is told, the way the pieces are arranged and what that arrangement implies – that generates the novel's power. This is evident in her very first novel *The Bluest Eye*. *The Bluest Eye* is about a lonely victimized black girl, Pecola Breedlove, who wants to be loved by her family and her school friends and the society at large. She realizes that the reason she is despised is because she is black and therefore ugly. Consequently, Pecola sublimates her desire to be loved into a desire to have blue eyes. Unfortunately enough her father rapes her. Pecola, unable to bear the trauma goes insane quietly and withdraws into a fantasy world where she thinks that she has the bluest eyes of all. This disturbing incident brings a host of issues; of racism, marginalization, guilt, shame, and community values vis-à-vis individual crime into focus.

The novel has three different beginnings. The opening words of the novel is a slice out of Dick and Jane American Primer presenting a standardized, white American family embracing Euro-American views of beauty and happiness. Linden Peach maintains, “This introduces the major theme of *The Bluest Eye* that the white voice is inappropriate to dictate the contours of

African American life" (1995: 24). The novel opens with a borrowing from the

Dick-and-Jane Primer:

Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick and Jane live in the green -and- white house. They are very happy. (p.1)<sup>1</sup>

The Dick-and-Jane Primer makes several points without mentioning them directly. Every child in America aspires to be Dick-and-Jane. The failure to measure one self up to Dick-and-Jane image results in a lack of self-esteem that turns into self-hatred. At the end of the novel, Claudia and Frieda overhear snippets of gossip about the Breedlove family that goes on to show the social consequences of the imposition of Dick-and-Jane model :

"Did you hear about that girl?"

"What? Pregnant?"

"Yas. But guess who?"

"Who? I don't know all these little old boys."

"That's just it. Ain't no little old boy. They say it's Cholly."

"Cholly? Her daddy?" (p. 148).

In Western thinking beauty is as much a political as an aesthetic concept, while ugliness is thought to be a manifestation of inner ugliness, a spiritual and moral failure and is not merely a matter of outward appearance. "That which was 'white' (or Anglo, male, Christian, wealthy) was extolled and infused with connotations of benevolence and superiority, while that which was not white (or not Anglo, female, non-Christian, poor) was debased and associated with malevolence and inferiority" (Braxton and McLaughlin, 1990: 153).

On page two, the Dick-and-Jane story degenerates into chaos. The letters run together into one, long, ugly, meaningless word: "... willplaywithjanetheywillplayagoodgameplayjaneplay"(p.2). The order and the

apparent moral certainty of the white world is contrasted with the inner dislocation and search for coherence in the lives of the Breedloves. What Toni Morrison manages to do is that in little more than a page she tells her entire novel in microcosm.

The second beginning is the one-page "gossip" in which Claudia as a grown up woman looks back on the story. The novel begins "*Quiet as it's kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941*" (p 4) Morrison says "it was a familiar phrase familiar to me as a child listening to adults; to black women conversing with one another; telling a story, an anecdote, gossip about someone or event within the circle, the family, the neighbourhood. The words are conspiratorial. "Shh, don't tell anyone else," and "No one is allowed to know this. It is a secret between us and a secret that is being kept from us. The conspiracy is both held and withheld, exposed and sustained. In some sense it was precisely what the act of writing the book was: the public exposure of a private confidence" (2000: 43).

"Quiet as it's kept", is a figure of speech chosen, according to Morrison, for its speakerly qualities, the phrase speaks and bespeaks a particular world and its ambience. There is the suggestion of gossip that is illicit and that the teller is on the inside sharing his/her privileged information. It strikes an immediate intimacy between the reader and the page because of the secret being shared. As Morrison explains further, in the sentence "Quiet as it's kept there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941," we are talking about a skip in "the natural order of things: a September, an autumn, a fall without marigolds indicating something grim is about to be divulged" (Ibid.,44). It is the point of

view of the child, Claudia. Thus the priority that the adult world would assign this shocking information is changed. " We thought... it was because Pecola was having her father's baby that the marigolds did not grow" (p.4). As Morrison says, this statement of Claudia, as a child, "foregrounds the flowers, backgrounds illicit, traumatic, incomprehensible sex coming to its dreamed fruition." (Ibid.,44).

The story is about 'female violation' told from the victim's point of view. Pecola does not have the vocabulary to understand the trauma. Claudia, her friend, looking back as knowing adults (she and her sister pretended to be in the beginning) does that for her. Thus the opening does more than sharing a secret. It is "... but a silence broken, a void filled, an unspeakable thing spoken at last. And they draw the connection between a minor destabilization in seasonal flora with the insignificant destruction of a black girl" (Ibid., 44).

The book indeed opens at the end because by the time we are told the story, Pecola's baby and her father Cholly are both dead, her mother continues to do the household work in a white household and Pecola insane, listlessly wanders around. The reader speculates about the disruption of 'nature' as a social disruption with tragic consequences in which s/he is implicated because s/he also happens to be part of the crowd in the text. Thus the rhetorical organization of the text emphasizes several points — it is 'speakerly', aural, colloquial, uses the embedded codes of black culture. It is also conspiratorial in tone producing the effect of intimacy. Morrison attempts to transfigure the complexity and wealth of African-American culture into a narrative crafting that is worthy of its culture.

We have the third beginning of the novel on page three. The beginning with autumn is divided into sections that correspond to seasons thus suggesting that it does not have a beginning and an end, it's circular, part of an ongoing process. Morrison's novels have close connection with nature, to the seasons and to the past. To quote Barbara Christian "Wind and fire, robins as a plague in the spring, marigolds that won't sprout, are as much characterizations in her novels as the human beings who people them" (qtd in David, 2000: 45).

In the seasons that follow, Claudia introduces the action, time, place, and characters and sets the tone for the scenes and chapters within that season. Much of the time, Claudia doesn't say "I", she says "We", speaking for herself and her sister – and in a very important sense, speaking for us.

There are two levels of articulation in the narrative: one level arises from the role of Claudia as a survivor and her retrospective account of episodes introduced within the context of a season; the other is narrated by an omniscient narrator providing information which Claudia does not have and is able to involve characters outside Claudia's range of experience. In the words of Linden Peach, "The ironies arising from these two levels of narration are developed within a wider framework provided by the mismatch between what the primer suggests is the norm and the lived experience of the black families" (1995:26).

*The Bluest Eye* can also be seen as the formation of African-American folk culture in process. Claudia becomes the active tradition bearer in the novel, that is, an individual who can shape and tell the community's stories.

“Like a griot, learning her craft, she orders the events of the past, assigns values to them, and offers the possibility of future transformation” (Harris, 1991: 15). The story of Pecola Breedlove and Lorain, Ohio, can be seen as a narrative in the best tradition of an African-American interactive, communal event, where by negative example, corrective possibilities are offered. The tale told by Claudia is one in which the culture has been threatened both from within and outside. Its focus is thus on the difficulty of survival and giving voice to their heroic or failed attempts.

Further, the informality of Claudia’s narration is a proof of her recognition that there are people listening and that there is coherence and logic in the story. The first person narration establishes a close reader – text relationship. As Morrison has commented in an interview with Claudia Tate in 1983: “My writing expects, demands participatory reading, and that I think is what literature is supposed to do. It’s not just about telling the story; it’s about involving the reader. The reader supplies the emotions. The reader supplies even some of the color, some of the sound. My language has to have holes and spaces so the reader can come into it. He or she can feel something visceral, see something striking. Then we (you, the reader and I, the author) come together to make this book, to feel this experience” (in B.Moyers 1992:164)

*The Bluest Eye* shows Morrison’s abiding interest, in dislocation, alienation, gaps and ellipses – all these features arising out of the distortion of self created by the imposition of Euro-American cultural values on black people. In her novels, the struggle to define and create a notion of selfhood

involves a process of inner dislocation. Raised to fear life, Pecola is unable to challenge the cruel realities she confronts. Like many children she wishes for transformation seeing her as the problem. Pecola suffers from a sense of self-loathing and false identity and becomes mad after being raped by her father.

The blacks are visible to the whites in *The Bluest Eye* only in so far as they accommodate themselves to white society. Morrison seeks to deconstruct this white frame by dismembering the American Dick-and-Jane mythology: all the essential features of their world – house, family, cat, mother, father, dog and friend – separating them from each other and from their ideological significances are probed through their recontextualisation as plot elements in Breedlove narrative. Claudia's dismemberment of the white doll is also an attempt to discover the source of white culture's superiority:

I fingered the face, wondering at the single-stroke eyebrows; picked at the pearly teeth stuck like two piano keys between red bowline lips. Traced and turned-up nose, poked the glassy blue eyeballs, twisted the yellow hair. I could not love it. But I could examine it to see what it was that all the world said was lovable (p. 14),

According to McLaughlin, western culture “inspires hatred toward and among people of African descent, inducing destructive behaviours and an equally adverse disconnection from anything not western” (1990: 170). In dismembering the toy, Claudia dismantles the structure that constitutes and sustains it as an emblem of white beauty. This is analogous to the way the primer is dismantled in the preface. The extract is reprinted first without punctuation and then the spacing removed until all the letters run into each other. The first chapter introduced by the primer extract highlights the ironic

difference between the pretty house of the primer and the abandoned store in which the Breedlove family lives. In the Breedlove home, the storefront in which they live, there are rooms that have partitions that do not reach the ceiling with a bathroom but a toilet bowl. The irony is emphasized by the repetition of the word 'pretty' which occurs only once in the preface breaking off the extract rather manically.

HEREISTHEHOUSITISGREENANDWHITEITHASAREDDOOR  
ITISVERYPRETTYITISVERYPRETTYPRETTYPRETTY(p 24).

Morrison's novels show the reader how inherited Euro-American language organizes and structures its culture's relations with the world excluding Africa-Americans or at best marginalizing them. In fact, the contrast between Dick- and-Jane world and the "real" world of the Breedloves is structured around several sets of binary opposites: White/Black, affluence/poverty, desirability/undesirability, order/chaos, valued/devalued. The truth of the authoritative discourse is belied by the internally persuasive discourse. The novel thus illustrates Michael Bakhtin's concept of the relationship between authoritative and internally persuasive discourses. Authoritative discourses "embody various contents: authority as such or the authoritativeness of tradition, of generally acknowledged truths, of the official line truths and other similar authorities." Of internally persuasive discourse, Bakhtin argues:

When someone else's ideological discourse is internally persuasive for us and acknowledged by us, entirely different possibilities open up. Such discourse is of decisive significance in the evolution of an individual consciousness: consciousness awakens to independent ideological life precisely in a world of alien discourses surrounding it, and from which it cannot initially

separate itself; the process of distinguishing between one's own and another's discourse, between one's own and another's thought, is activated rather late in development. When thought begins to work in an independent, experimenting and discriminating way, what first occurs is separation between internally persuasive discourse and authoritarian enforced discourse, along with the rejection of those congeries of discourses that do not matter to us, that do not touch us (qtd in Butler- Evans 1989:67-68).

In contrast to the realistic novels, where language gives the impression of transparency, that is where the representation and the represented are seen as the one and same thing, in Morrison's novels, language is enmeshed in the power structure and forces under what we might call 'social reality.' And the reason why "power is invincible is that the object in which it is carried for all human eternity is language the language that we speak and write" (Barthes, 1981: 459). In Morrison's novels, ideology is not, as envisaged by Marx, an illusion or false consciousness, but as conceived by the French Marxist theorist, Louis Althusser, is the shape of daily living, embodied in language and in the social institutions such as the school, the family and the media. In fact, the dialectic between inherited codes of representation and imagined codes is one of the features which Morrison's works share with novels from Latin America classified as 'magic realism.' This dialectic emerges in *The Bluest Eye* as in subsequent novels of Morrison from an understanding of the black culture as an insider and of the distortion of self-created by the imposition of white norms on black people.

The prostitutes, China, Poland and Miss Marie, seem to contribute to the 'local color' of the town and yet their significance is much greater than what it appears to be:

They did not belong to those generations of prostitutes created in novels, with great and generous hearts ... Nor were they from that sensitive breed of young girls, gone wrong at the hands of fate ... Neither were they sloppy, inadequate whores who unable to make a living at it alone ... Except for Marie's fabled love for Dewy Prince, these women hated men, all men without shame, apology or discrimination ... Black men, white men, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Jews, Poles, whatever – all were inadequate and weak, all came under their jaundiced eyes and were recipients of their disinterested wrath (pp. 42-3).

These women generate issues entirely unrelated to the dominant focus of the novel. What is stressed is their absolute economic and sexual autonomy, which becomes significant when compared with another group of women. The prostitutes embody women's independence and empowerment while Aunt Jenny's peers address the complexities of Black women's existence. Although they contribute to the complete representation of Black culture, as specific articulations of black lives, they disrupt the novel's focus on the struggle between authoritative discourse and internally persuasive ones.

The embedded narrative in the novel is developed to support feminine issues. The schoolteacher Geraldine, a middle class Black woman divorces herself from the "real" African-American culture and roots. Morrison's focus in this novel is to show the negative consequence of the embourgeoisement of black culture:

They go to land-grant colleges, normal schools, and learn how to do the white man's work with refinement: home economics to prepare his food; teacher education to instruct black children in obedience; music to soothe the weary master and entertain his blunted soul... The careful development of thrift, patience, high morals, and good manners. In short, how to get rid of the funkiness. The dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of

nature, the funkiness of the wide range of human emotions (p 64).

Funkiness here does not signify primal African-American essence although it is placed at the centre of the African-American sensibility. "Nature", "passion", and "human emotions" are but feminine traits. It however cannot be denied that Geraldine's loss of passion also indicates erosion of her black identity. While the control of passion is the dominant issue, stability and security are its corollary concerns. Pecola disturbs Geraldine because she represents disorder. These issues become prominent in the contrasting portraits of Geraldine's family life and her perception of Pecola's life. The narrator presents Geraldine's life as a symbol of stability

They never seem to have boy friends, but they always marry. Certain men watch them without seeming to, and know that if such a girl is in his house, he will sleep on sheets boiled white, hung out to dry on juniper bushes, and pressed flat with a heavy iron. There will be pretty paper flowers decorating the picture of his mother, a large Bible in the front room. They feel secure. They know their work clothes will be mended, washed and ironed on Monday, that their Sunday shirts will billow on hangers from the doorjamb, stiffly starched and white. They look at her hands and know what she will do with biscuit dough; they smell the coffee and the fried ham; see the white smoky grits with a dollop of butter on top. Her hips assure them that she will bear children easily and painlessly. And they are right (p. 65).

What is most striking here is the narrative perspective and the objects that are described. The Bible, the "sheets boiled white," and mother-in-law's photograph decorated with flowers have a powerful symbolic force. They signify a sense of order and stability, symbolic encoding of myth of respectability. While Geraldine as a type is the apparent focus of the narrative, her life is also viewed from the aspect of male gaze. The complicated aspect of

representing Geraldine's way of life suggests the social suppression. However, Geraldine views Pecola's life as a representation of all those values that she has been advised to struggle against:

She looked at Pecola. Saw the dirty torn dress, the plaits sticking out on her head, hair matted where the plaits had come undone, the muddy shoes with the wad of gum peeping out from between the cheap soles, the soiled socks, one of which had been walked down into the heel of the shoe. Saw the safety pin holding the hem of the dress up. Up over the hump of the cat's back she looked at her. She had seen this little girl all of her life. Hanging out of windows over saloons in Mobile, crawling over the porches of shotgun houses on the edge of the town, sitting in bus stations holding paper bags and crying to mothers who kept saying "Shet Up!" Hair uncombed, dresses falling apart, shoes untied and caked with dirt. They had stared at her with great uncomprehending eyes. Eyes that questioned nothing and asked everything. Unblinking and unabashed, they stared up at her. The end of the world lay in their eyes, and the beginning and all the waste in between (pp. 71-2).

Pecola's life is characterized by a lack of control, ironically the same control that imprisons Geraldine.

In Pauline Breedlove's personal story, the novel fuses narration with an extensive use of the interior monologue. She recounts the time when she first met Cholly Breedlove:

*"When I first seed Cholly, I want you to know it was like all the bits of color from that time down home when all us chil'ren went berry picking after a funeral and I put some in the pocket of my Sunday dress, and they meshed up and stained my hips. My whole dress was messed with purple and never did wash out. Not the dress nor me. I could feel that purple deep inside me" (p. 90).*

And again,

*"We came up north; supposed to be more jobs and all ... It was hard to get to know folks up here, and I missed my people. I weren't used to so much white folks. The ones I seed before were something hateful, but they didn't come around too much ..."*

*Up north they was everywhere – next door, downstairs, all over the streets – and colored folks few and far between. Northern coloured folk was different too. Dicty-like. No better than whites for meanness. They could make you feel just as 'no-count, 'cept I didn't expect it from them. That was the lonest time of my life. I 'member looking out them front windows just waiting for Cholly to come home at three o' clock ... I didn't even have a cat to talk to," (p. 91).*

The use of the interior monologue makes the presentation of Pauline's life seem factual, objective, elaborated and reinforced. It also enables the reader to experience Pauline's consciousness of her situation. The mode of presentation is largely fragmentary yet it is possible to link the individual episodes as the monologue comments on Pauline's specific plight as a woman, particularly as a Black woman. In certain places in the narrative, the narrator's voice is fused with Pauline's fantasies "about men and love and touching":

In none of her fantasies was she ever aggressive; she was usually idling by the river bank, or gathering berries in a field, when a someone appeared, with a gentle and penetrating eyes, who – with no exchange of words – understood; and before whose glance her foot straightened and her eyes dropped. The someone had no face, no form, no voice, no odor. He was a simple Presence, an all embracing tenderness, with strength and a promise of rest. It did not matter that she had no idea of what to do or say to the Presence – after the wordless knowing and the soundless touching, her dreams disintegrated. But the Presence would know what to do. She had only to lay her head on his chest and he would lead her away to the sea, to the city, to the woods ... forever (p. 88).

The passage appears to be consciously literary. The rhythmic structure of the sentences and the elaborate use of figurative constructions like "the Presence," "wordless knowing," "soundless touching" makes it obvious that the language is of the narrator. Yet the perceptions are very much Pauline's. Pauline's mode of discourse is different, as the following lines will show:

"Cholly commenced to getting meaner and meaner and wanted to fight me all of the time I give him as good as I have got. Had to. Look like working for that woman and fighting Cholly was all I did. Tiresome " (p. 92)

The two passages cancel out each other advancing an ideology that undermines the notion of romantic love. Pauline's innocent love and self-deception becomes evident as the marriage is pervaded later by chaos and confusion. Through interior monologue Pauline continues to address the complexity of her plight as a Black woman. Her employer, Mrs. Foster asks her to leave Cholly because of his abusive treatment of her:

*"...She said she would let me stay if I left him. I thought about that. But later on it didn't seem none too bright for a black woman to leave a black man for a white woman. She didn't never give me the eleven dollars she owed me, neither. That hurt bad. The gas man had cut the gas off, and I couldn't cook none ... She was mad as a wet hen kept on telling me I owed her for uniforms and some old broken-down bed she gave me. I didn't know if I owed her or not, but I needed my money. She wouldn't let up none, neither, even when I give her my word that Cholly wouldn't come back there no more. Then I got so desperate I asked her if she would loan it to me. She was quiet for a spell, and then she told me I shouldn't let a man take advantage over me. That I should have more respect, and it was my husband's duty to pay the bills, and if he couldn't, I should leave and get my alimony ... What was he gone give me alimony on? I see she didn't understand that all I needed from her was my eleven dollars to pay the gasman so I could cook..." (pp. 93-4).*

Pauline places 'race' above any romanticizing concept of sisterhood yet her involvement with Cholly proves to be essentially destructive. The different worlds of the women – black and white, which are separated by race and class, come into conflict at this point in the narrative

Sexuality is both a means of empowerment and enslavement in the novel.. When Pauline speaks of the moments of intimacy as providing her with

the opportunity to “feel a power.” This is the single context of personal affirmation for her. Yet even this power is diminished and she retreats into bad faith:

*“...But it ain’t like that any more. Most times he’s thrashing away inside me before I’m woke, and through when I am. The rest of the time I can’t even be next to his stinking drunk self. But I don’t care ‘bout it no more. My Maker will take care of me. I know He will. I know He will. Besides, it don’t make no difference about this old earth. There is sure to be a glory...” (p. 102).*

Each of the embedded narratives in *The Bluest Eye* focuses on women’s stories, intensifying the problem of feminine desire while developing the dominating themes of the novel. Various issues relating to women’s objectification, oppression and attempts at autonomy are presented in an episodic fashion and remain unresolved. These issues are subsumed by the larger methodology and the emphasis on form and like dissonant chords usually remain on the periphery of the text.

Men’s stories largely unfold within the narratives of women. They are accorded secondary roles in the novel. Men are presented as hostile to women, the only exception being Mr. Mac Teer, whose characterization is subordinated to that of Mrs. Mac Teer. “They are to be seen as agents in the larger myth and at the same time as flawed creatures” (Evans, 1989: 77). To achieve this end the narrative makes use of irony. The use of irony is also evident in the characterization of Cholly Breedlove.

The description of father as big, strong and protective in the primer extract is contrasted with Cholly. The chapter in which this contrast is shown begins by fleshing out his past and concludes with his rape of Pecola, his own

daughter. Compounding the irony, the primer extract begins by asking the white father if he will 'play' with his daughter Jane, 'a verb' Linden Peach says, "acquires a much less innocent connotation" (1995: 35) in the Breedlove episode. There is further irony in the way in which Frieda recollects how her father had beaten up Mr. Henry because he touched her breasts. Frieda also informed how she was taken to the doctor in case she had been 'ruined.' Cholly, on the other hand, ruins his own daughter. The primer does not only contrast the white father with Cholly, but also with Cholly's father. Abandonment of Cholly by his father, rejection by his mother and humiliation suffered during his sexual initiation by the white males invites the reader to sympathize with him and forgive the rape of his own daughter. Morrison is concerned here not only with the obliteration of Cholly's relationship with his father but also with the way in which white racism and colonialism fractured relationships between mother and child. After her father has raped her, Pecola lies on the kitchen floor trying to connect the pain between her legs with the face of her mother looming over her. Pecola has been denied the mother/daughter bonding which in Morrison's novels is crucial to black women's self-definition. However, the reader is made to sympathize with Cholly through the narrator's description of Cholly's life:

The pieces of Cholly's life could become coherent only in the head of musician. ...Only a musician would would sense, know, without even knowing that he knew, that Cholly was free. Dangerously free. Free to feel whatever he felt – fear, guilt, shame, love, grief, pity. Free to be tender or violent, to whistle or weep .... Free to be gentle when she was sick, or mop her floor, for she knew what and where his maleness was ... He was free to live his fantasies, and free even to die, the how and when of which held no interest for him. In those days Cholly was truly

*free. Abandoned in a junk heap by his mother, rejected for a crap game by his father, there was nothing more to lose. He was alone with his own perceptions and appetites, and they alone interested him (pp. 125-6).*

The entire passage leads the reader to view Cholly's treatment of Polly and Pecola as results of brutal system of dehumanization and that social forces have conspired to produce the kind of man that Cholly had become. Main passages from the episode describing Cholly's rape of Pecola reveal recurrent movement of textual dissonance. His young daughter's helpless presence arouses a range of emotions within him:

*The clear statement of her misery was an accusation. He wanted to break her neck – but tenderly. Guilt and impotence rose in bilious duet. What could he do for her – ever? What give her? What say to her? What could a burned out black man could say to hunched back of his eleven-year-old daughter? If he looked into her face, he would see those haunted, loving eyes ... How dare she love him? Hadn't she any sense at all? (p. 127)*

The moment of sexual arousal is still couched within a context of tenderness. The whole episode is shot through with confusion: he recalls a previous erotic moment with Pauline, between the past with Darlene and the present with Pecola, between desire for Pecola and tenderness for her. Finally, he approaches his daughter crawling on all fours like an animal, which whites have made him feel:

*The tenderness welled up in him, and he sank to his knees, his eyes on the foot of his daughter. Crawling on all fours towards her, he raised his hand and caught the foot in an upward stroke ... closed his eyes, letting his fingers dig into her waist. The rigidness of her shocked body, the silence of her stunned throat, was better than Pauline's easy laughter had been. ... surrounding all of this lust was a border of politeness. He wanted to fuck her – tenderly. But the tenderness would not hold. His soul seemed to slip down to his guts and fly out into her, and the gigantic thrust he made into her then provoked the only*

sound she made – a hollow suck of air in the back of her throat. Like the rapid loss of air from a circus balloon (p. 128).

What makes the description an ironic one is the recurrent use of the words 'tenderness' and 'tender' in a context clearly intended to be ironic. The text provides a dual voice; the narrator's and the character's perspectives are merged leading to an interweaving of two positions. The fusion of tenderness with acts of fantasized force the reader must experience real violence. Consequently, Cholly's antiheroic stature is significantly diminished in the text. This is reinforced when the narrative focus shifts to Pecola:

So when the child regained her consciousness, she was lying on the kitchen floor under a heavy quilt, trying to connect the pain between her legs with the face of her mother looming over her (p. 129)

The character of Soaphead Church is also presented ironically in the novel. His presence is needed to provide blue eyes for Pecola – and he contributes to the fictional construction of a black community. He is one of those faith healers who prey on less educated and superstitious in the community. The ironic strategy that is used to describe Cholly's rape of his daughter is employed in describing Soaphead's pedophilia:

He could have been an active homosexual but lacked the courage. Bestiality did not occur to him, and sodomy was quite out of the question, for he did not experience sustained erections and could not endure the thought of someone else's ... He abhorred flesh on flesh ... His sexuality was anything but lewd; his patronage of little girls smacked of innocence and was associated in his mind with cleanliness. He was what one might call a very clean old man (pp. 131-2).

The details provided about him are subverted by the last sentence of the citation. To view Soaphead as "a very clean old man" after depicting his

manipulation of children alters his position radically. Soaphead further satirizes his position when he describes his position in a "letter" to God:

The little girls are the only things I'll miss... Playful, I felt, and friendly. Not like the newspapers said. Not like the people whispered. And they didn't mind at all. Not at all. Remember how so many of them came back? No one would even try to understand that ... with little girls it is all clean and good and friendly (p. 143).

In *New Dimensions of Spirituality: A Biracial and Bicultural Reading of the Novels of Toni Morrison* Holloway has said, "One way into the novel is to understand the impact of language" (1987: 38). The novel provides us with numerous opportunities to sympathize with characters through their story telling as well as author's narration. The role of linguistic communication has a special cultural identity as such and language helps in retaining the ties between mother and child and other members of the same community. The response to indignities of racism, Holloway says, has been to draw boundaries around African-American cultural identity and linguistic identity that has been vital in maintaining this boundary (1987:38). "Whether we call it a dialect, Black English, Ebonics, or numerous other terms, the language of the black community has African roots and maintains African identity in a world where identity is constantly threatened by cultural assimilation and dissemination" (Smitherman, 1977: 1).

In Claudia's opening reflection that she and her sister felt that planting the marigolds and saying "the right words over them" (p. 4) would help the flowers to blossom and things would be alright. In this event other events are discreetly embedded such as fixing Pecola's ugliness, ensuring the life of the

child Pecola carried, blotting out the gossip and their own ignorance of the kind of knowledge others have. As Claudia continues with this reflection, she says 'there is really nothing more to say' (p 4). She seems to be apprehensive of language not being able to carry the truth and this story. When language within the black community becomes an inadequate medium for resolution or thoughtfulness that actual desolation takes place. Cholly, Mrs. Breedlove and finally Pecola lose their verbal expression as they fall into a 'chasm of despair' and realize that they cannot be rescued. Only Claudia, who distances herself from the tragedy, regains her voice.

Language also becomes a means of catharsis. Following an ancient ritual from the days when blacks worked in fields, songs and singing have become a signal for many things inexpressible by direct or indirect action.

Claudia recalls:

If my mother was in a singing mood, it wasn't so bad. She would sing about hard times, bad times, and somebody-done-gone-and-left-me-times ... Misery colored by the greens and blues in my mother's voice took all of the grief out of the words and left me with a conviction that pain was not only endurable, it was sweet (O. 17-8).

It also helps Claudia and Frieda to learn from their mother of their blackness and femaleness by listening to those song messages:

In Black America the oral tradition ... preserves the Afro-American heritage and reflects the collective spirit of the race. Through song, story, folk sayings, and rich verbal interplay among everyday people, lessons and percepts about life and survival are handed down from generation to generation ... (Smitherman, 1977: 73).

It is in the fusing of soliloquies and the songs that Mrs. Mac Teer's singing is instructive. In contrast, Mrs. Breedlove has almost lost her voice.

The narrator takes over her story. If Mrs. Breedlove turns to Jesus and 'discourses' about Cholly, Cholly Breedlove pours out his 'inarticulate' fury on his wife and their fights were conducted with a "darkly brutal formalism" during which they did not "talk or groan or curse" (p. 32).

Claudia is a survivor in the story because her attitude ensures her survival. She hates Shirley Temple and her anger is directed towards the whiteness of her adversary. The woman's real strength lies in real speech and its power can be destructive or sustaining. Cholly has been rendered inarticulate by his previous experiences and Pecola loses her voice when the tremendous and overwhelming act of parental violence takes place. Whatever the reasons for Pecola's madness she goes into it speechless:

If language and speech do indeed offer retribution and salvation, then her silence is sufficient evidence to insure the hopelessness of this child. Linguistic structuring of emotion, image and thought became for Mrs. Mac Teer and her children magic words and song that brought grace (Holloway, 1987: 45).

Thus *The Bluest Eye* can be seen as an "innovative novel in which its experiments with form are determined by the perspectives and approaches which it brings to the condition of the Afro-American at the tense interface between two cultures" (Peach, 1995: 38). One of the major concerns of the novel has been to show how language has been enmeshed with power structures and how linguistic communication takes on a special cultural identity within black culture. There is a persistent contrasting of Dick-and-Jane mythology of the primer with the Breedlove family. Through the ironic interplay of difference the novelist brings a particular perspective to the impact of white ideologies on the black community and examines the nature of

whiteness which is inappropriate to determine the contours of African-American culture and lived experience

Like her first novel *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* is also innovative in form and is a finely crafted narrative. The first part focuses on the relationship between two black women Nel Wright and Sula Peace. Set in the "squinchy little town" (p.33) of Medallion, Ohio, between 1919 and 1965 it is the story of these two women. They meet at the age of twelve, both "wishbone thin and easy-assed," (p.52) both only children, both friendless except for each other, and both determined to explore everything in the world. Together they become responsible for the death of a boy named Chicken Little as he slips from Sula's hands and swoops into the water. The girls do not own up responsibility for the boy's drowning. A few years later Sula leaves town in search of an "experimental life"(p.118) and Nel settles down to a life of happy domesticity.

In the second part of the novel, Sula returns after a gap of ten years. Sula's return is accompanied by a plague of robins. As she is not bound by any social codes of propriety, she indulges in all sorts of outrageous behaviour alienating herself from the community who sees in her an "evil".(p.117) Soon after she dies, and years after her death, in a sudden flash of insight, Nel realizes that all these years she has been missing her friend and not her husband Jude as she had thought earlier.

Each part of the novel appears to be an 'inverse mirror image' of the other in a number of ways (Peach, 1995: 40). Characters who are introduced and developed in the first part are reintroduced in inverse order in the second part of the novel. The centre of the novel literally remains a blank with no

explanation offered for Sula's ten years of absence. The novel opens and closes with an act of memory. There are ten chapters each of them located in a particular year – 1919, 1920, 1921, 1922, 1927, 1937, 1939, 1940, 1941 and 1965. On the whole the novel is fragmentary and elliptical. In part two, in fact, it appears that the lives of the characters receive a sociological explanation as to why they are the way they are. The following quotation from the text is intended establishing this particular point – a passage which provides explanation for Sula's behaviour:

As willing to feel pain as to give pain, to feel pleasure as to give pleasure, hers was an experimental life ...The first experience (her mother saying that she loved Sula but didn't like her) taught her that there was no other that you could count on; the second (Chicken Little's drowning) that there was no self to count on either. She had no center, no speck around which to grow (pp. 118-9).<sup>2</sup>

Apparently, it seems that Morrison has dramatized the insignificant scenes and events in the second part of the novel and skipped the important ones. For example, she skips from Jude saying that Sula fascinates the mind but doesn't attract the body, to Jude and Sula doing something ostensibly sexual. There is a "poetic" description about sex in the next several pages. Again, she doesn't show how Sula's badness made the towns people good. It is just announced.

Although critical readings of *Sula* have tended to focus on Nel-Sula relationship which is assumed to reveal the text's specific feminist dimension, closer readings of the text goes on to show that Sula-Nel relationship, though one of the dominant themes of the novel, is contained within a larger textual

enterprise. In fact it is the larger enterprise that determines the relationship and not the other way round. Central to *Sula* is the construction of a myth that is focused through the strategies of narration. Great attention is paid to minor details, to affect the real. We have vivid description of individual acts and detailed incorporation of folklore. All these constitute the larger theme within which the Sula-Nel narrative is embedded. The reader is placed immediately in this world in the ironic naming of the black sections of Medallion:

A joke. A nigger joke. That was the way it got started. Not the town, of course, but that part of town where the Negroes lived, the part they called the bottom, in spite of the fact that it was up in the hills. Just a nigger joke. The kind the white folks tell when the mill closes down and they are looking for a little comfort somewhere. The kind colored folks tell on themselves when the rain doesn't come, or comes for weeks, and they are looking for a little comfort somehow (pp 4-5)

This prologue describes the redevelopment of the black neighbourhood and exploitation of black people by the whites. Laying stress on the ability of the propertied classes to change the geography of an area, the prologue in *Sula* points out that the black neighbourhood is called 'the suburbs now, but when black people lived there, it was called the Bottom' (p. 3). Linden Peach says that "the linguistic shift emphasizes how language can be and has been manipulated by those in authority to maintain their advantage and protect their positions, a concern developed in all Morrison's work" (1995: 40). This issue is developed in the prologue as the narrator completes the history of the Bottom by relating how "the master" through guile, swindled "the slave" out of a valuable piece of land. The "good white farmer" dupes his freed slave into accepting land in the hills:

"But it's high up in the hills," said the slave.

"High up from us," said the master, "but when God looks down, it's the bottom. That's why we call it so. It's bottom of heaven – best land there is."

So the slave pressed his master to try to get him some. He preferred it to the valley. And it was done. The nigger got the hilly land, where planting was backbreaking, where the soil slid down and washed away the seeds, and where the wind lingered all through the winter (p. 5).

The town thus becomes a metaphor for the kind of relation that has existed between whites and blacks besides assuming a personal history. Morrison adapts proverbial folk anecdote, a vital technique of traditional African writing for communicating ancestral wisdom. The irony is compounded when Morrison says that the black people have the higher ground in that they hold the higher moral ground:

...just a neighborhood where on quite days people in valley houses could hear singing sometimes, banjos sometimes, and, if, a valley man happened to have business up in those hills – collecting rent or insurance payments – he might see a dark woman in a flowered dress doing a bit of cakewalk, a bit of black bottom, a bit of "messing around" to the lively notes of a mouth organ... The black people watching her would laugh and rub their knees, and it would be easy for the valley man to hear the laughter and not notice the adult pain that rested somewhere under the eyelids, somewhere under their head rags, and soft felt hats, somewhere in the palm of the hand, somewhere behind the frayed lapels, somewhere in the sinew's curve (p. 4).

The town also functions as a frame just as marigolds do in *The Bluest Eye*. At the end of the novel, the focus returns to Bottom, noting the changes that have occurred there over forty years and the displacement of its black population. So, the narrative of the town encloses and subordinates all other narratives. Toni Morrison in an interview with Robert Stepto in 1976 said:

...When I wrote *Sula*, I was interested in making the town, the community, the neighbourhood, as strong as a character as I

could, without actually making it "The Town, they," because the most extraordinary thing about any group and particularly our group, is the fantastic variety of people and things and behavior and so on ( in Bill Moyers, 1992: 11).

According to Trudier Harris, three oral sources are helpful in illuminating the structure of *Sula*. The structure (1) evokes the formulaic opening of fairy tales; (2) evokes a pattern of joking in African-American communities; and (3) evokes the form of the ballad. In the very first paragraph of the prologue, Morrison establishes an almost mythical status for Bottom, a place where strange and supernatural incidents have taken place. "In that place, where they tore the nightshade and blackberry patches from their roots to make room for the Medallion City Golf Course, there was once a neighborhood" (p.3). The description deviates a little from the "once upon a time" formula of fairy tales and the fictional reality of the Bottom is juxtaposed with the pictorial nature of some of these never-never lands.

Toni Morrison in one of her essays, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature" comments on the opening sentence of the novel as follows:

... In between place and neighbourhood I now have to squeeze the specificity and the *difference*; the nostalgia, the history, and the nostalgia for the history; the violence done to it and the consequences of that violence. The nostalgia is sounded by "once": the history and a longing for it is implied in the connotation of "neighbourhood." The violence lurks in having something torn out by its roots – it will not, cannot grow again (in James and Sharpley-Whiting, ed. 2000: 47).

Thus in the novel what seems to be fantastic happens to be disturbingly ugly. The bits and pieces of individual lives that are offered in the novel also make sense in a tradition that does not expect fairy tale completeness. For

example, we have a fragmentary sketch of Helen Wright's background and are required to construct a narrative of our own to fill out the spaces. Eva's life is crystallized in several scenes: pushing lard up Plum's rectum in the midst of unbearable poverty, (p.34) knowing that she would hate Boy Boy "long and well"(p 36) which enables her to get on with life, trying to save Hannah from a burning death, and being carted off to old folks home are the important events in her life. No plausible detail or explanation is offered for her sudden departure in 1921 and her return after eighteen months with an amputated leg. We are left to speculate about the circumstances under which the amputation might have taken place. What the loss enables her to do becomes more significant. Nel and Sula become intimate friends after Sula hears from her mother's remark "I love Sula, I just don't like her. That's the difference" (p. 57) which is also the day, when Sula accidentally drowns Chicken Little. Nel's peaceful marriage collapses once she finds Jude and Sula together and her grief careens off the tombstones on the day, after her visit to Eva in the old folks home, that she realizes the extent of her love for Sula. Trudier Harris says, "In reality her tale of passions, burnings, drownings, and witchery, Morrison too, is interested in the highlights, the peaks, rather than the ordinariness represented by the valleys" (1991:58).

The novel seems to subscribe to the "leaping and lingering" method of storytelling employed in the ballad tradition. Morrison selects the most impressive events and concentrates upon them for each of her most impressive characters. The effects of war on Shadrack become more important than depicting him in battle although he does recall a scene in which "taking no

direction from the brain, the body of the headless soldier ran on, with energy and grace, ignoring altogether the drip and slide of brain tissue down its back" (p. 8). The bloody images of the war haunt him and lead to his perennial celebration of National Suicide Day. Shadrack's disorientation is resonant of the conditions of African-Americans in the twentieth century America: "Twenty-two years old, weak, hot, frightened, not daring to acknowledge the fact that he didn't even know who or what he was .. with no past, no language, no tribe, no source ..." (p.12)

The "leaping and lingering" of the ballad tradition also implies the jazz structure of the novel. For example, the theme of death has many variations and improvisations upon it that is evident in the kind of meanings that it has for the various characters. In the case of Sula, who is unconventional, the note of variation in Jazz is brought in. But the community is not ready to play the creative deviation allowed in Jazz composition and would prefer that she play the straight refrain of the Blues.

There is also a journey motif in the novel, that of Shadrack moving from innocence to experience to innocence again. Nel moving from innocence to her unbearable realization that "All that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude." And the loss pressed down on her chest and came up into her throat. "We was girls together," she said as though explaining something. "O Lord, Sula," she cried, "girl, girl, girlgirlgirl" (p. 174) Thus we see Morrison using folk tradition to expand the possibilities of the novel. This expansion certainly adds to the richness and complexity of her novels.

In the novel, Morrison avoids a judgemental narrative voice in favour of a documentary mode where judgement is implicit. Her main reason for doing so is to present Medallion as a kaleidoscope of different behaviours and viewpoints. There are people who are unusual in habits and manners and appearances and the community designates some of them as "weirdos," "crazies" and "loonies." Sula and Nel watch life in Medallion "as though it were a movie arranged for their amusement" (p 55). In fact the personal history of Helen Wright, the construction of the Peace family, Shardack and his National Suicide Day and the Deweys are all part of a strategy designed to illuminate and elaborate on the character of Bottom. The varieties of characters are depicted from a historical perspective in that the identity of the black community is constituted. The black community has the capacity for containing those unlike themselves. Morrison writes of Shadrack, "Once the people understood the boundaries and the nature of his madness they could fit him, so to speak, into the scheme of things" (p 15). The notion of the Bottom becomes a consciously contrived black community in which folks create and venerate their own traditions.

This raises many complex issues relating to women but they are either passed over or presented elliptically. We get a fragmentary sketch of Helen Wright's background. She is presented as a descendent of New Orleans Creoles struggling to retain her past and yet trying to reject it. She accomplishes this by an excessive emphasis on propriety and perfection:

Helen Wright was an impressive woman, at least in Madallion she was. Heavy hair in a bun, dark eyes arched in a perpetual query about other people's manners. A woman who won all social

battles with perseverance and a conviction of legitimacy of her authority. Since there was no catholic church in Madallion then, she joined the most conservative black church. And held sway. It was Helen who never turned her head in church when latecomers arrived; Helen who established the practice of seasonal altar flowers; Helen who introduced giving of banquets of welcome to returning Negro veterans. She lost only one battle – the pronunciation of her name. The people in the Bottom refused to say Helene. They called her Helen Wright and left it at that (p. 18).

Her narrative is marked by constant references to her inauthenticity like her behaviour in the train where she treats the white train conductor deferentially thus earning the scorn of the black soldiers and of her daughter. Again, she makes an attempt to stifle any signs of life in Nel, which goes on to reinforce the image of inauthenticity. Although much of her narrative is omitted, we don't fail to recognize her as a complex character. If in the name 'Creole' there is a confusion of identity, she as the "daughter of a Creole whore" is constantly aware of her vulnerability. The narrative at one point does allude to that situation:

It was November. November, 1920. Even in Medallion, there was a victorious swagger in the legs of the white men and a dull-eyed excitement in the eyes of colored veterans.

Helen thought about the trip South with heavy misgiving but decided that she had the best protection: her manner and her bearing, to which she would add a beautiful dress. She bought some deep-brown wool and three-fourths of a yard of matching velvet. Out of this she made herself a heavy but elegant dress with velvet collar and pockets (p. 19).

Although there are sexual tensions and ambivalences played out during the train ride, their broader historical significance is not developed.

The issue of women's independence and autonomy remains ambivalent in the text. The presentation of the characters of Sula and Nel appear to be dramatic and initially they appear as two rebellious characters:

So when they met, first in those chocolate halls and next through the ropes of the swing, they felt the ease and comfort of old friends. Because each had discovered years before that they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them, they had set about creating something else to be. Their meeting was fortunate, for it let them use each other to grow on. Daughters of distant mothers and incomprehensible fathers (Sula's because he was dead; Nel's because he wasn't), they found in each other's eyes the intimacy they were looking for (p. 52).

The consciousness of their historical roles in terms of race and gender is not developed further in the text.

The narrative skips ten years of Sula's personal history. Her absence during this period is referred to by a single sentence at the end of the first section of the novel: "It would be ten years before they saw each other again, and their meeting would be thick with birds." (p. 85). Significant changes take place during this period and she returns to Medallion as a rebel. The conversation between Sula and Nel assumes a mysterious tone, as Nel attempts to know more about Sula's life away from Medallion:

"Tell me about it. The big city."  
 "Big is all it is. A big Medallion."  
 "No. I mean the life. The night clubs, and parties ..."  
 "I was in college, Nellie. No nightclubs on campus."  
 "Campus? That what they call it? Well. You wasn't in no college for – what – ten years now? And you didn't write to nobody. How come you never wrote?" (p. 99)

This period in Sula's history is suppressed because that keeps the focus of the novel on the town. Sula's return to Medallion is said to be "accompanied

by a plague of robins" (p. 89), that is within the pattern of beliefs in the town. What is of importance is the townspeople's approach towards evil, death, nature, and their position as oppressed people:

What was taken by outsiders to be slackness, slovenliness or even generosity was in fact a full recognition of the legitimacy of forces other than good ones. They did not believe doctors could heal – for them none ever had done so. They did not believe death was accidental – life might be, but death was deliberate. They did not believe Nature was ever askew – only inconvenient. Plague and draught were as "natural" as springtime. If milk could curdle, God knows robins could fall. The purpose of evil was to survive it and they determined (without ever knowing they had made up their minds to do it) to survive floods, white people, tuberculosis, famine and ignorance. They knew anger well but not despair, and they didn't stone sinners for the same reason they didn't commit suicide – it was beneath them (p. 90).

The focus thus remains on the Bottom – Bottom as repository of black culture.

Often there is a shift in narrative focus, which seems to undermine Sula's freedom in the text. The episode that follows the sexual encounter between Jude and Sula is designed to gain sympathy for Nel. There is a beautiful fusion of indirect discourse and interior monologue which is designed to generate pathos:

Could he be gone if his tie is still here? He will remember it and come back and then she would ... uh. Then she could ... tell him. Sit down quietly and tell him. "But Jude," she would say, "you *knew* me. All those days and years, Jude, you *knew* me, My ways and my hands and how my stomach folded and how we tried to get Mickey to nurse and how about that time when the landlord said ... but you said ... and I cried, Jude. You knew me and had listened to the things I said in the night, and heard me in the bathroom and laughed at my raggedy girdle and I laughed too because I knew you too, Jude. So how could you leave me when you knew me? (p. 104-5)

The reader has all the sympathy for Nel; the emotionally shattered Nel renders the issue of Sula's freedom secondary. Much of this is reinforced in

the encounter between Nel and Sula, as Sula lies dying. There are many other important issues that remain unresolved in the text – questions such as how would either one of them know who was good, “I mean may be it wasn’t you May be it was me” (p. 146) Sula dies far removed from her community and without reconciling with her friend. The issue of independence is raised in the text only to be subordinated by other issues.

The main focus in the novel has been the “literariness” and the semiotic and mythological construction of black community. But then there are a number of other contending discourses, which bring about the tensions and dissonances in the narratives of both *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*. They take the form of embedded narratives in that stories of oppression of women, ambivalent and ironic characterizations, representation of males, and shifts in narrative perspective allow specific mediations by external contexts. According to Derrida, western thought is characterized by a tendency to construct a hierarchy of values, for example, reason over imagination; mind over body; work over leisure. *Sula* resists such hierarchical value systems. Wilkerson (1988) has observed without offering an explanation that this novel is “moved through dialogue and the narrative restricted to moments of silence” (188).

The most explicit definition of Sula as a trickster figure comes from Nel: “Her old friend had come home Sula Who made her laugh, who made her see old things with new eyes . ” (p. 95) is not the same friend that Nel remembers. Jude says she has “an odd way of looking at things” (p. 104) when the black mark over her face is likened to a rattlesnake. Through the character of Sula the issue of individuality is pursued, rejecting blackness in

favour of assimilation in the mainstream Sula's birthmark that is a stemmed rose changes to ashes suggesting her transition from rootedness to loss of cultural identity. The description at the end of the book is ironic – "Things were so much better in 1965." (p 163) which deconstructs and undermines the validity of the statement. The narrator's voice merges with Nel's to lament the passing away of community. "Every time they built a road they built a old folks' home" and "Even the whores were better then: tough, fat, laughing women with burns on their cheeks and wit married to their meanness: or widows couched in small houses in the woods with eight children to feed and no man" (p. 164). Two examples of change – the new type of prostitute replacing the older ones and the tendency to put the old folks into residential homes suggests the melting away of black community's cohesiveness and increasing assimilation into white norms and values Even Nel's sorrow at the end is intense and deep. But she is not pacified by the community. So her agonized cry at the end remains a private grief "with no heaving and gasping for breath" (p.65).

According to Linden Peach, "*Sula* like *The Bluest Eye* is not usefully approached through perceptions and reading habits derived from European novel" (1995: 54). This is so because the main character in *Sula* is introduced late into the novel and dies before the end of the novel with the novel's centre literally being a blank, with numerous ellipses and loose ends. There are several challenging issues that the novel raises like the African-American woman's need to create her own notion of selfhood, her need to have control over her own sexuality. But these issues remain ambiguous for Sula herself,

like the trickster challenges the community and forces the reader to constantly reinterpret the narrative

Morrison has termed Sula as “quintessentially black, metaphysically black. She is new world black and new world woman extracting choice from choicelessness, responding inventively to found things. Improvisational. Daring, disruptive, imaginative, modern, out-of-the-house, outlawed, unpolicing, uncontained and uncontainable. And dangerously female. In her final conversation with Nel she refers to herself as a special kind of black person woman, one with choices. She further says that her perception of Sula’s “double-dose of chosen *blackness* and *biological* blackness as in the presence of those two words of darkness in “nightshade” is referred to in the opening sentence of the novel. The blackshade’s uncommon quality, its twin varieties one called “enchanter” and the other “bittersweet” and the belief in which nightshade was thought to counteract witchcraft “seemed a wonderful constellation of signs for Sula.” And the “blackberry patch” of the opening sentence “seemed equally appropriate for Nel: nourishing, never needing to be tended or cultivated, once rooted and bearing reliably sweet but thorn bound” (in James and Sharpley-Whiting(ed ) 2000 48) On the whole, the novel opens up another frontier in the black women’s search for identity. The new values that the community adopts are not black but an effect of acculturation of the white values. In a scenario like this, Morrison is for new black that has to define its frames of reference in that both woman-to-woman and individual vs community relationships are problematised.

Far ranging in complexity and breadth is *Song of Solomon*, which unlike the two former novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* features the lives of many characters. It starts as a “generational-rare-view-mirror” novel. The story begins in 1931 and ends without any reference to a particular year but with the spiritual liberation of the protagonist Milkman Dead at the age of thirty-two. The excursions into the past cover the three generations of the Dead family. The last part of the novel features Milkman’s flight to the South to reclaim the lost family gold. What he finds is the spiritual wealth of his legacy. While in the North his mystical aunt becomes his spiritual mentor in the search, in the South, Circe, a highly symbolic Sybil like figure and Susan Byrd, help to reconnect him to the song and memory of his family.

Seeking once again to deconstruct the white frame of reference and reconstruct the black discourse, Morrison in *Song of Solomon* appropriates the archetype of white American literature and its narrative romance. Although the mode of narrative is Euro-American, the worldview that the novel presents is distinctly African in that black folk tales, myths and legends, are incorporated to privilege African values. For many Nineteenth century American writers, romance meant working with folklore, myth and ritual. It also meant exploration of anti-rational structures and levels of meaning while dramatizing the institutional and the passionate. Toni Morrison says in this connection that “ten years after (Alexis de) Tocqueville’s prediction in 1840 that “Finding no stuff for the ideal in what is real and true, poets would flee to imaginary regions ...” In 1850 at the height of slavery and burgeoning abolitionism, American writers

chose romance." (in James and Sharpley-Whiting, ed. 2000: 35). Romance, she further says is :

... an exploration of anxiety imported from the shadows of European culture, made possible the sometimes safe and other times risky embrace of quite specific, understandably human, fears: Americans' fear of being outcast, of failing, of powerlessness; their fear of boundarylessness, of Nature unbridled and crouched for attack; their fear of the absence of so-called civilization; their fear of loneliness, of aggression both external and internal (1993: 36-7).

*Song of Solomon* is a romance in the Nineteenth century American as well as in the European sense. It works with myth, rituals and folklore that are from Africa. For example, while talking about "the flying myth" in *Song of Solomon*, Morrison in an interview with Thomas LeClair in 1981 said.

If it means Icarus to some readers, fine; I want to take credit for that. But my meaning is specific: it is about black people who could fly. That was always part of the folklore of my life; flying was one of our gifts. I don't care how silly it may seem. It is everywhere – people used to talk about it, it's in the spirituals and gospels (in Bill Moyers, ed. 1992: 122).

Another example is of the Greek and Roman worldviews in which the dichotomies between good and evil are clearly marked – Odysseus is good, Sirens are bad. But what Morrison presents in the novel is a typically African-American worldview – a complex world drawing upon a dualism as old as African-American existence in the New World. This worldview, Trudier Harris maintains, "presupposes an intertwining of the secular and sacred realms of existence. Individuals, who worked all week and went to root doctors on Saturday could just as easily shout in ecstasy through calling upon the name of the Lord on Sunday" (1991: 87). In the novel, stories of various kinds are essential to its structuring and the different versions of events which are often

contradictory, reflects the essence of African-American story telling tradition. Krumholz has argued that in the novel there are evidences of the influence of the African epics, the Mwindo epic and Kambili epic (1993:563-7). Moreover, the novel expresses the fears of black America, of the dissolution of black culture, of the loss of black identity by pursuit of white values. It is in this context that myths, folklores and rituals are thought to be important and essential means reclaiming the black cultural heritage. It may also be a little ironic that in *Song of Solomon*, Morrison uses American romance conventions to explore the appropriation of white, middle class American values by African-Americans.

*Song of Solomon* is a dialogical novel. Linden Peach calls it a "hybrid of multiple motifs and allusions" (1995: 59). Medieval romance motifs are combined with classical allusions and Biblical references. The title of the novel suggests the biblical song of ancestral wisdom. We have the name First Corinthians and the reference to St. Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians. Again Milkman's search for gold is compared to Jason's search for the Silver fleece, or to Odysseys' journey home. The classical Circe comes to mind when Milkman meets a woman with the same name, a strange being in an unkempt house full of dogs. In the Circe episode realism seems to collapse altogether. Circe, the sorceress dominates the childhood memories of Macon and Pilate and assures Milkman's regeneration. She is the incarnation of Pilate. Circe's witchlike appeal forces Milkman to surrender to her and he finds himself helpless to pull away as she vows to watch the white vision of the world rot. But her more important function is to renew the spirit of the myth that will save

Milkman's soul and enable him to return to Pilate what he had stolen from her. She is the woman who had saved Macon and Pilate years ago and they return to discover their pasts. "These are the keys to his life with which Circe hastens Milkman on his way" (Holloway, 1987: 112). Once she accomplishes her task, she fades away into the fabric of the story and we are left to wonder if the encounter with her was real. "They think you are dead" (p. 246), Milkman tells her. But she lives long enough to tell him the story he needs for his survival.

Although in the novel there is a traditional emphasis upon 'initiation, renunciation, atonement and release through ritual divestment (Peach, 1995: 58), the experiment with the quest narrative in which Milkman goes out on a search for his legacy is determined by the radical content. For example, Milkman's status as a central character remains ambiguous at first. He does not have the makings of a hero because of his unimaginative nature and also because he is uncommitted and most of the time the conclusion that he draws is wrong. His heroism can be defined through dualistic and sometimes ambiguous actions and his qualifications for heroism does not depend upon his goodness. Folklorist, John W Roberts has argued that definitions of heroism vary with cultures and communities: "figures (both real and mythic) and actions dubbed heroic in one context or by one group may be viewed as ordinary or even criminal in another context or by other groups, or even by the same ones at different times" (qtd in Trudier Harris, 1991: 88). Milkman deviates from classical western perceptions of heroism that does not necessarily preclude him from elevation to that status. Milkman is not chosen; rather he is raised from his inconsequential state as long as it takes Ruth to satisfy her desperate

mothering urges. In the initial years he is frequently a shadowy figure, sometimes an embarrassment, but was never of any real consequence to anyone in his family. When at last he learns how to fly, with the help of Pilate, he emerges as a heroic personality.

A simplistic approach to the evaluation of heroic deeds will not be enough for the complex novels of Morrison. Blurring of the lines of absolute values is characteristic of the trends in African-American folk culture that help to define Milkman and makes Morrison's writing distinctive yet fragmentary. There are several versions of truth in the novel – the text literally dramatizes the gap between telling and what is told. The narrative does not show any concern for chronology or linear development of the plot which goes on to suggest that fragmentariness is at the heart of the novels' worldview and within the fragmentariness, different view points, many important concepts like community, authority, commitment and individuality are subject to serious scrutiny.

There is an ambivalence and discrepancy that defies the western Aristotelian philosophical tradition that gives credence to singular, unified meaning. The same story in the novel is picked up in different places, retold and expanded into other stories. The circumstances surrounding the death of Ruth Foster Dead's father is a prime example of this. Macon Dead explaining the reasons for the tension between Ruth and him says to Milkman that Ruth had a necrophilic love for her father. He found her after her father's death:

"In the bed. That's where she was when I opened the door. Laying next to him. Naked as a yard dog, kissing him. Him dead

and white and puffy and skinny, and she had his fingers in her mouth.

"Now, I want you to know I had a terrible time after that. I started thinking ... If Lena and Corinthians were my children. I come to know pretty quick they were, cause it was clear that bastard couldn't fuck anything. Ether took care of whatever he had in that area long before I got there (p. 73)<sup>3</sup>

Ruth's version of her relation with her father shows her as a lonely figure for who "it was important ... to be in his presence, among his things, the things he used, had touched. Later it just was important for me to know that he was in the world" (p. 124). Further she tells her son, "... I know whoever told you that he killed my father and that he tried to kill you ... Macon took away his medicine and I didn't know it, and I wouldn't have been able to save you except for Pilate Pilate was the one brought you here in the first place" (p. 124). Each retelling of the story raises questions about the authenticity of the version, of the one that is told and generates fresh interpretations.

In *Song of Solomon* numerous discourses that surround Milkman's journey have more importance than the quest narrative itself. The novel is sprawling, river-with-tributaries branching in all-directions. It branches out into multiple mini novels that include stories of Pilate and Macon, Old Macon's naming frenzy, Pilate's journey of self-discovery, Ruth's strange relationship with her father, Hagar's relation with Milkman, Guitar and The Seven Days' and many other stories.

In the novel, Morrison debunks one myth while creating another. Milkman is born in the North, inherits property and enjoys all the material advantages that generations of blacks have accumulated identifying with the territory. But Milkman must find meaning of his existence by reversing the

pattern, by going back to the land of his ancestors. Initially he goes searching for gold, but what he carries is his conception of *self*, his contentment with communal and family history and the satisfaction of knowing and being who and what he is.

Milkman's complacent, middle class existence in the North takes him far away from the black people in the South, the land of his ancestors. All symbols of separation, he must get rid of and his city ways and attitudes have to be changed. He undergoes a devolution from which he emerges as a sensitive human being. Milkman travels by plane, by bus and then by foot that is emblematic of the layers of his former cultural identity. The stripping process begins with his arrival in Danville, Pennsylvania, where he hopes to find leads to the place where Pilate has left the gold. His emotions, clothing, accessories, and manners are all signs of the distance between him and the people in the south.

Down South, he realizes for the first time the need for creating a "pleasant impression" and "did not remember ever asking anybody in the world how they were."(p.229) This happens when he goes to Rev. Cooper's house looking for Circe. His trip to Circe's house and to the cave induced physical discomfiture to match the earlier emotional one. Thus his literal stripping process begins. The loss of his clothes, watch, suitcase and shoes symbolize the white cultural values he has absorbed and assimilated at the expense of black values. The loss of his watch is especially significant as Milkman loses the western concept of time, which is essentially linear as opposed to the traditional African concept of time as cyclical.

Milkman's quest within his own mind revolves round and resolves in the conflicts between North and South, male and female, white and black. In doing so, certain discreet discourses emerge and become dominant in the "spiritual-physical" makeup of Milkman. The coon hunt in the South becomes extremely important for Milkman's growth. It serves a triple purpose. "It is a part of Milkman's journey South, a part of the ritual testing, and most importantly a part of his journey inward, his "hunt" for the best within himself."(Harris,1991:101) His reflections at this point show strongest signs of growth in him. He realizes that he has treated his family and Pilate's badly and that none of the things separating him from the men in the South was of any use to him:

There was nothing here to help him – not his money, his car, his father's reputation, his suit, or his shoes. In fact they hampered him ... His watch and his two hundred dollars would be of no help out here, where all a man had was what he was born with, or had learned to use (p. 277).

Guitar's attempt to strangle him soon after makes him realize the fragile nature of the material goods he has considered important throughout his life. "The coon-turned-bobcat hunt has additional significance from the perspective of African-American folklore and culture."(Harris,1991:102) Coon is a derisive term for blacks. Going on the coon hunt is a metaphorical way of shedding the negative connotations of his lack of manliness, his indifference or lack of commitment to black community and black people. Thus Milkman's journey becomes a narrative of escape from a Dead household – dead in the spiritual as well as in the metaphoric sense – a story of growth reinforced by the interjection of the account of Corinthians.

In short, "Morrison gives her hero a different task in his quest for maturation for self. For Milkman to become a whole person, he must undergo an ego death that makes both flying and owning, fear and ambition, no longer the prevailing forces in his life" (Holloway, 1987: 93). Interestingly, this happens to be in contrast to the situation of Nel in *Sula*, where to be reborn, she must let go off her fantasy that losing Jude was central to her life pattern; she must embrace all the sides of her feminine soul, including the Sula side, to consolidate her ego's strength.

Milkman, unlike the hero in a traditional quest novel who takes revenge on his father, frees himself from his father's obsessive materialism. He takes pride in his discovery that he is the descendent of Solomon Sugarman, renowned for his ability to fly, a progenitor of 21 children commemorated in a nursery rhyme and for the naming of his launching site as Solomon's Leap. Here the novel draws on the concept of the mythological hero and attaches great importance to the ancestor. The epigraph to the work reads: "For fathers may soar/And the children may know their names" as a reference to the biblical song of ancestral wisdom.

*Song of Solomon* is framed by the African-American oral tradition of the flying African. The song that Pilate sings at Milkman's birth is taken from the Gullah folktales of the ancestor who flew back to Africa to escape the trap of slavery. Milkman takes a leap like Solomon at the end "Without wiping away the tears, taking a deep breath, or even bending his knees – he leaped" (p. 337). Thus he experiences the mythical past. As underlined by Segy (1976): "He was able to identify himself with that which was presented to him as a

permanent and sacred reality. Because of this identification, he was able to step out of his ordinary, ego-centred daily life. His individual life was depersonalized, elevated" (8). However, Morrison broadens and complicates the myth of flying by looking at it from an outsider's vantage point rather than Robert Hayden's lyrical masculine point of view which sings:

Night is an African juju man  
Weaving a wish and weariness together to make two wings  
*O fly away home, fly away*  
Do you remember Africa?  
*O cleave the air fly away home*  
My gran, he flew back to Africa,  
Just spread his arms and flew away home (1970. 120).

Although she says that she finds flying one of the most attractive features about the black man's life she insists upon the cost of freedom. Milkman hears the wailing winds of Ryna's Gulch, named after his grandmother who was deserted with twenty-one children, when her husband, Solomon, flew away. Solomon is identified with a number of male characters in the book who abandon women, including Jake Solomon, Macon Dead and Milkman Dead. *Song of Solomon* looks at this problem in a fresh way, in that Morrison makes the ramifications of the masculine flying the cause of suffering for women and children who undergo suffering of every kind. Here as de Weever (1991) points out, the text expounds the potentially dangerous routs out of life, away from the need for commitment and stability, implicit in the Greek myths of Icarus and Daedalus and the folktales of the flying African (28-9). We can call these types of flights "escape" that may imply the symbolic opportunity for the oppressed slaves to free themselves from the shackles of slavery as expressed in black spirituals. The rich and complex spirituality of the African people parallels what

they understood as a miraculous liberation, a miraculous event – the power of flight as transformation and transcendence.

The novel invokes ancestry in African culture in an African-American context through an emphasis on the significance of naming:

Naming after all, is one of the great orchestral themes of *Song of Solomon*: If not for a Pilate and a Guitar, Macon (Milkman) Dead would not have learned to fly ( Leonard ,in *Nation* 1994).

Like everything else in the novel, naming branches out in many directions. Old Macon named his house as President Lincoln, and his farm as Lincoln's Heaven, as if naming were an act of bitter humoured vengeance. He also names his daughter by opening the Bible and putting his finger on a word that looked like a tree. He couldn't write and so he drew the word and showed it to Circe. Circe told him he couldn't name her "Pilate" because it sounded "like a Christ-killing-Pilate. You can't get much worse than that for a name. And a baby girl at that" (p. 19). Each black American whose ancestors were taken from Africa by force had been robbed of his family name. One's name, family name are badges of one's identity. So reclamation of the identity became crucial for blacks. In one scene, Guitar gets fed up of Milkman's self-pity and self-absorption and tries to jolt him back to reality:

"What's your trouble? You don't like your name?"

"No." Milkman let his head fall to the back of the booth. "No, I don't like my name."

"Let me tell you somethin, baby. Niggers get their names the way they get everything else – the best way they can. The best way they can" (p. 88).

Milkman's own nickname has ignominious origin: his mother had breastfed him for a long time and as such he was named Milkman by Freddie,

the Janitor, who believes that he is a friend of the family. Macon recognizes that his name sounds "dirty, intimate and hot," and his son's name also compounds the shame of his own name:

Surely, he thought, he and his sister had some ancestor, some lithe young man with onyx skin and legs as straight as cane stalks, who had a name that was real. A name given to him at birth with love and seriousness. A name that was not a joke, nor a disguise, nor a brand name. But who this little young man was, and where his cane-stalk legs carried him from or to, could never be known. (p. 17-8).

Linden Peach in her critical essay on Toni Morrison says, "In the traditional European quest either during or before pregnancy there is usually an omen against the birth which seems to endanger the father" (1995: 64). Milkman is compared to a little bird before he is born "A little bird'll be here with the morning" (p. 9). He is the first black child to be born in the Mercy hospital. The physical power of both flight and song are woven together at every crucial juncture in the novel as it happens at Milkman's birth. The song of his ancestor Solomon accompanies his birth. It is also marked by the insurance salesman's leap from the top of the hospital. But the circumstance round Milkman's birth is to be seen not as an appropriation of European literary convention, but that which serves to emphasize a key myth. As Karla Holloway observes, "The extensively networked metaphors of song and flight connect this novel first to universal childhood memories, then to specific racial mythologizing and finally reemerges with a universal and mystical epiphany that compels our spirits towards dominion over earthly mansions" (1987: 103). At the end of the novel, Milkman says that children's "sweet voices reminded him of the gap in his own childhood." The song of the children "Jake the only son of Solomon/Come

booba yalle, come booba tambee/ Whirled about and touched the sun/ Come konka yalle, come konka tambee ...” (p. 303) gives him the clue in identifying his forefather.

In the European Romance the lands through which the hero passes provide the narrative the main geographical element. *Song of Solomon* creates three overlapping zones in which people live that have been created by the white political system. As Guitar tries to explain to Milkman:

“No Geography? Okay, no geography. What about some history in your tea? Or some sociopolitico – No. That’s still geography. Goddam, Milk, I do believe my whole life’s geography” (p. 114).

“The three zones as portrayed in the novel reinterpret the geography of USA in terms of a sociopolitical dialectic. There is a black zone, a disenfranchised community, a white zone and a zone between them, which allows entry into the white zone but to a limited extent only. Interestingly enough, Macon Dead occupies a no-man’s land, the in-between space that overlaps between the white and black zones. The walking down Fifteenth Street shows this:

Tired, irritable, he walked down Fifteenth Street, glancing up as he passed one of his other houses, its silhouette melting in the light that trembled between dusk and twilight. Scattered here and there, his houses stretched up beyond him like squat ghosts with hooded eyes. He didn’t like to look at them in this light. During the day they were reassuring to see; now they did not seem to belong to him at all – in fact he felt as though the houses were in league with one another to make him feel like the outsider, the propertyless, landless wanderer (p. 27).

The legacy, which Macon hopes his son will inherit, is the one built by power and property that he hopes will remove the boundaries and enable him to be integrated into the white society.

In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison seems to be combining a number of mythologies each acting as a critique of the other. Up to a certain point Macon Dead can be said to be a self made man, but unlike Gatsby, Macon Dead comes to experience a rejecting society and a past that is corrupted. He realizes his quest by eschewing any moral responsibility for others; he also rejects his black cultural heritage. The novel also suggests at many places that even if black people become part of the American middle class, they do not have the same license as Gatsby. For example, they could not create their own identities, an ideology on which American middle class prosperity is founded. Milkman is thus thrown into confusion about his own identity.

Milkman's journey has been a process of learning and knowing his heritage. He returns to the feminine myth of the song that offers an intimate reconnection to the men and women who were "dead." Pilate takes over the nurturing function and provides him with guidance required for undertaking his journey. Ruth, his biological mother, on the other hand, delays his development as she is too much oppressed by her husband and lacks the freedom of Pilate. So, Pilate becomes his new mother who spiritually attended to him at his birth and now guides him beyond the peacock plumage of materialism that binds him to earth and teaches him to fly. According to Linden Peach, "Pilate's lack of navel associates her with Eve, source of innocence, and paradoxically, of primal knowledge (1995: 68).

The images of roses, wings and song occur simultaneously and these images provide the multilayered text with a sense of coherence around themes of spirituality, freedom, life- in-death, the value of myth and the role of

ancestors. The music becomes the connecting link between the children, the men and women. Even Macon who attempts to erase his past, and forge ahead into the sterility of materialistic existence cannot deny himself the need for this link. As Pilate sings, Macon feels "himself softening under the weight of memory and music" (p.30). It is established quite early in the novel that music coming from these women and children are the lifeline for the survival of lost souls. Circe appears, to retell the story as the "healer deliverer" of Milkman.

Morrison has said that she attempts "to recreate the civilization of Black people...the manners, judgments, values, morals..." ("On the 'Spoken Library'" in *The English Journal*, Feb., 1978). She wanted to "write out of the matrix of memory, of recollection". This novel of hers is concerned with reclaiming and not simply discovering the priorities of a culture founded upon different philosophical and spiritual principles from those of the West. African values in the novel are privileged as exemplified by Pilate. She illustrates the role of the African female ancestor who transmits familial and cultural knowledge. In the book, reclaiming the black legacy involves reclaiming a mythological and 'pre-reflective' awareness. "Milkman's ability to accept the myth and the supernatural stems from his acceptance that Pilate is without a navel, and it is this openness though it takes twenty years to act on it which separates him as Wilentz says from his father" (Peach, 1995:71).

Significantly enough there are no "real" white characters in this novel. "It is a black event. Morrison shows us the wholeness of a Black cycle. She affirms that although white people figured in the gyrations of a Black universe, they have been catalysts only for Black mythologizing. Morrison gives us the

entire race in *Song of Solomon* – the men and women and the children- and enfolds us into their myth of flight and its musical configurations” (Holloway 1987: 105).

If the early works of Morrison are marked by irresolution, ambiguity and ambivalence, the novels written around 1980s, signal more radical inscriptions of 'race' and 'gender'. While conflicting concerns of race and gender still account for the structure of her texts, the mode of representation and the narrative strategies differ significantly from the earlier works. The structure of *Tar Baby* published in 1981 follows Umberto Eco's concept of the "Open work". Open works, according to Eco, always involve a dialectical relationship between the reader and text in the production of meaning. He says:

(i) Open works, insofar as they are in movement, are characterized by the invitation to make the work together with the author and (ii) On a wider level...there exist works, which though organically completed, are "open" to a continuous generation of internal relations which the addressee must uncover and select in his act of perceiving the totality of incoming stimuli (iii) Every work of art, even though it is produced by following an explicit poetics of necessity, is effectively open to a virtually unlimited range of possible readings, each of which causes the work to acquire a new vitality in terms of one particular taste, or perspective, or personal performance (Cited in Elliot Butler-Evans, 1989: 151).

In *Tar Baby* there are also traits or signs that Jameson identifies with postmodern discourse. Among these are "pastiche" and "collage" as structuring devices. History is displaced by "historicism" in which past is reread and reconstructed in the present following a valorizing and privileging of nostalgia.

Although the term 'postmodern' should not exactly be applied to the novel *Tar Baby* some of the features of postmodernism do find their resonances in the novel. J.F. Lyotard's (1985) observations on the defining characteristics of postmodern discourse provide a useful theoretical tool for interpretation of the text. He assigns the position of a philosopher to the postmodern artist because the text he writes and the work he produces are not governed by any set of pre-established rules. Therefore they cannot be judged by a fixed set of rules. Infact the rules and the categories are what the art itself looks for. Hence the work and text have the character of an "event" according to him.

The "event" of the text that had been previously considered unrepresentable because of historic and generic constraints, surfaces in a manner that is characterized by a kind of narrative violence. The *Tar Baby* thus is an attempt at representing the unrepresentable having an open dialogue on the politics of 'race' and 'gender'.

The novel shows its concern with the ideological nature of language as with the ways individual African-Americans have been seduced by white values. This becomes evident when Sydney, the black servant of the white retired factory owner, Valerian Street, says to son the fugitive: "I am a Philadelphia negro...My people owned drugstores and taught school while yours were still cutting their faces open so as to be able to tell one of you from the other" (p.164). What Sydney repeats here is Europe's contempt for African culture, in an attempt to accord himself more status or to accommodate himself to the white society. Sydney also uses the language to its full potential, with a multiplicity of meanings, both explicit and implicit. He pronounces the word

'Phil-a-delphia' self-consciously and the way he lays stress on the word 'book' indicates his superiority that he is attached to written culture. In fact throughout *Tar Baby* the loss of African values is understood as something that have been erased under the white hegemony. Reflecting on Son, Jadine, the niece of Sydney thinks that "he... was going to rape her, may be Margaret too, or worse" and "...there was another authentic loathing she felt for the man" because "...in the college she attended the black men were either creeps or so rare and desirable they had every girl in a 150-mile radius at their feet" (p.126). Jadine's reflection on the way Son unsettles her is riddled with stereotypical assumptions.

The novel also explores how African-Americans have been caught up in an alienating language and ideology. They have had to adapt to the language of their oppressors for finding their space within European post-Enlightenment civilization that goes against the very grain of their cultural and social identities. According to Linden Peach, "in *Tar Baby*, these twin complexities are further explored within a tripartite focus, connecting meaning, race and difference," (1995: 77).

In *Tar Baby*, Morrison's ideological project is significantly different from earlier works. Set in a period from autumn 1979 to autumn 1980, the text incorporates a wide range of perspectives by positing several binary oppositions and inscriptions of difference marked by dichotomies of inside and outside. The novel also uses myths and concepts whose meanings have undergone changes over a period of time. Son, represents the mythical black culture, Jadine becomes the 'embodiment of deracination'(Butler-Evans,

1989:154). Margaret and Valerian, the sole white characters, signify racial difference. The places Isle des Chevaliers, Eloe and New York are geographical spaces in which a character's desire is realized. The oppositional patterns, of the structure determine the narrative focus. The characters and their ideological positions assume equal significance.

Margaret and Valerian are the first whites depicted in a Morrison narrative but she does not assign any central role to them. Their status is marginal and Morrison stresses their presence as signs of racial difference through several modes of constructing and depicting them. Margaret and Valerian's characters are further established when the novel allows credible characters to comment on them. Therese thinks of the couple while performing household chores for them:

It was true, she thought. She had forgotten the white Americans. How could they fit into the story? She could not imagine them. In her story she knew who the others were: the chocolate-eating man was a lover, the fast ass a coquette who had turned him down; the other two were the traditional hostile family. She understood that, but now she had to get a grasp of the tall thin American who played in the green house whom she had never seen clearly and certainly never spoken to. And also the wife with the sunset hair and milk-white skin. What would they feel? She realized that all of her life she thought they felt nothing at all. Oh, well, yes, she knew they talked and laughed and died and had babies. But she had never attached any feeling to any of it...What went on inside them? Inside. (pp. 111-2)<sup>4</sup>

The use of free indirect speech and the metafictional nature of the passage make the representations of Valerian and Margaret problematic and highlight the underlying ambiguity in their characterizations. Therese admits her ignorance of whites in general: "What would they feel?" "What went on

inside them?" It looks as if the novel is questioning the racial other within a larger narrative where problems relating to race are central.

Another instance of othering of white couple comes from Son, in his reaction to the row between Ondine and Margaret at Christmas dinner. Jadine wants to come to terms with whatever has happened and ponders over the meaning when Son says:

"It means," he said, talking into her hair, "that white folks and black folks should not sit down and eat together."  
 "Oh, Son." Jadine looked up at him and smiled a tiny smile.  
 "It's *true*," he said "They should work together sometimes, but they should not eat together or live together or sleep together. Do any of those personal things in life " (p. 211).

The issues that Son raises are not pursued further in the novel although these observations remain unchallenged. The status of his words as "truth" is reinforced by the credibility of his character. The marginalization of Valerian and Margaret makes one thing clear that they function primarily as signs of whiteness and difference. The focus of the narrative however is on the Jadine-Son story. The ideological text is revealed within this narrative.

One of the important strategies of narration that Morrison has adopted in her novels is the inscription of many points of view. Bakhtin found this process dominant in Dostoevsky's fiction as Morrison replaces monologic discourse on racial authenticity by adopting Bakhtin's concept of polyphony. The dialogic structuring of *Tat Baby* is central to the presentation of Jadine and Son. Both Jadine and Son are shown from three perspectives: "self-representation, descriptions and delineations by other characters in the novel, and mediations by an external narrator" (Butler- Evans, 1989: 156). Although it seems that

Son's viewpoint and value system take precedence over Jadine's actually both the viewpoints are given equal weightage in the novel. Each position however remains unresolved.

Jadine is sharply differentiated from the swamp hags, Gideon/ Yardman and Mary/Therese, and the "vision of the woman in yellow" (p.42). They are all mystical and in their mysticism and implicit claim to black ontology their claim to authenticity is in direct contrast to Jadine's apparent deracination. Marie Therese warns Son, "there is nothing in her parts for you. She has forgotten her ancient properties" (p. 308). The women in her dream taunts her with their femininity, and Jadine vaguely retorts that she has "breasts too," but Morrison tells us that she "said it" or "thought it" or "willed it," but not that she felt or believed it" (p. 261). Her womanhood is seriously questioned in front of these women who know who they are, who inhabit the trees and who understand their primal connection to the archetypes. Jadine finds it difficult to identify with the myth of black authenticity. Her cultural experience and psychic makeup are basically different from authentic blacks. The contest as she sees it is between "blackening up or universalizing out." Quite early in the novel these problems surface when Jadine reminisces about the lover she left behind in Europe:

I guess the person I want to marry is him, but I wonder if the person he wants to marry is me or a black girl? And if it isn't me he wants, but any black girl who looks like me, talks and acts like me, what will happen when he finds out that I hate ear hoops, that I don't have to straighten my hair, that Mingus puts me to sleep, that sometimes I want to get out of my skin and be only the person inside—not American—not black—just me? (p. 45)

The reader who thinks of "placing her within the mystical-racial politics runs the risk of missing a serious black feminist issue: such as the black

women's need to construct their own identities without submitting to a dominant myth of racial authenticity "(Butler-Evans, 1989:157). This issue reappears in an episode in which Son accuses Jadine of "acting white." Jadine protests to her being called white by Son:

"Rape? Why you little white girls always think somebody's trying to rape you?"

"White?" She was startled out of fury. "I'm not...you know I'm not white!"

"No?" Then why don't you settle down and stop acting like it?"

"Oh, god," she moaned. "Oh, good God, I think you better throw me out of the window because as soon as you let me loose I am going to kill you. For that alone. Just for that. For pulling that black-woman-white-woman shit on me. Never mind the rest. What you said before, that was nasty and mean, but if you think you can get away with telling me what a black woman is or ought to be..." (p. 121).

The novel does not suggest anywhere that Jadine's preferences and choices are insincere. Her preference for Picasso over an Ituma mask, or the "Ave Maria" over gospel music can be read as signs of racial inauthenticity. They allow Jadine's character to unfold without the intrusion of the author and the external narrator. Morrison may be raising political issues grounded in racial and gender problems here. Jadine wants to construct her own identity and refuses to have her "interpellated" by others. She resists the definitions of black woman constructed by others. Interestingly enough, the discomfiture that she feels once she meets the woman in yellow and the gradual attraction that she feels for Son are evidences of her self-identification. Through Jadine's unmediated voice, the reader witnesses a long and arduous process of self-construction.

In *Tar Baby*, the various layers of meaning within the original African myth are explored, reclaimed and adapted with its new kind of significances for black America. In the late twentieth century, the Brer Rabbit enters as a trickster figure in the person of Son. His entry into the Valerian household augurs ill for he turns the household upside down. But there is an endless deferment of meaning in the text and Son can never be identified with Brer Rabbit completely even though in the last paragraph of the novel he is shown as running "Lickety-split, Lickety-split" (p. 309) which makes the identification of the two explicit.

What the text does is that it presents Son through the intervention of the external narrator, descriptions by other characters and self-representation as a black male whose existence is informed by an ideal and authentic black culture. Racial and cultural differences are his signifying traits and the narrative seems to enforce that difference. Son is presented as a typical black character. Margaret's first reaction is to call him black:

"... Something's in her closet."  
 "What's in your closet?"  
 "Black," she whispered her eyes shut tight. (p. 77)

His social idiolect is largely monosyllabic and colloquial which stands in direct contrast to the largely stilted language of Valerian and Margaret. His dread locks "his hair... like bundles of long whips or lashes that could grab her and beat her to jelly. And would. Wild, aggressive, vicious hair that needed to be put in jail" (p. 113) and his dark skin go on to structure his character as the

semiotic embodiment of blackness. That Son signifies race is accentuated in Ondine's description of him:

The man was black. If he'd been a white bum in Mrs. Street's closet, well, she would have felt different... The man upstairs wasn't a Negro-meaning one of them. He was a stranger... And even if he didn't steal, he was nasty and ignorant and they would have to serve him anyway, if Mr. Street wanted it (pp. 101-2).

Margaret's fears that Son is the archetypal black rapist, her constant anxiety about his presence in the house are connected with and reinforced by the idea of the black as a disruptive "primitive" other as suggested by Ondine's reflections.

The enigmatic nature of Son becomes evident from the first and last episodes which frame the narrative. According to Linden Peach "...Son's plunge into the sea" in the prologue "not only suggests death by drowning but also rebirth ... At the end of the book, he emerges from the sea on to land in a sequence that mirrors the evolution of life; crawling, standing and eventually walking upright" (1995: 81).

So from the opening of the novel, when Son swim's away from the ship he has abandoned, to its conclusion, when he swims towards the mythical horsemen in the hills, the novel points at the mythical value of his character. Like a trickster figure, Son has also lived on the edges of the society. The narrator observes:

In those eight homeless years he had joined that great underclass of undocumented men. And although there were more of his kind in the world than students or soldiers, unlike students or soldiers they were not counted. They were an international legion of day laborers and musclemen, gamblers, sidewalk merchants, migrants, unlicensed crewmen on ship with volatile cargo, part-time mercenaries, full-time gigolos or kerbside musicians. What

distinguished them from other men... was their refusal to equate work with life and an inability to stay anywhere for long... Anarchic, wandering, they read about their hometowns in pages of out-of-town newspapers (p. 167).

He is further romanticized and mythologized by the text's identification of him with all the signs that suggest the natural and the mystical. Morrison pays great attention to nature in this novel. She constructs her story on African values and images of nature bearing upon the experiences of a black man and woman brought together to this island. "*Tar Baby* develops a thematic interpretation of natural elements—an explicit thematic interplay basic to an African view of the universe" (Holloway 1987: 117). Wilfred Cartey notes that in African literature:

The Spirit world is alive and gives life to the living. The essential ontology of Africa linking and curving through ancestor and offspring, man and nature, beast and trees, sea and fires... nothing is dead, no voice is still... An essential continuity is preserved between earth-mother and child, earth-mother whose breast provides sustenance to son, son who is son of all Africa, son through whom dead father lives and is reborn... (1970: 11)

The island is presented as woman/nature, a place suspended in time, and powerful. The island leads us to her myths--- the blind horsemen, the tree women, and the knowing control of the island inhabitants; Sydney and Ondine who reconnect her to her slave past. The sub-culture represented by Gideon and Therese becomes an extension of home for Son who feels at ease with the swamp women, and identifies with the woman in "the canary yellow dress," a mythological construct. Even though he faces the threat of destruction from vacuous Jadine, ultimately Marie Therese brings him back to the island. She is also a link with the past because of her knowledge of the island's myth. Marie Therese thus becomes Son's salvation and ensures continuity. When Son tells

his own story he grounds himself very specifically in the discourse of black mythology. As Jadine makes queries about his future—"what do you want out of life"—he replies:

"My original dime," he said. "The one San Francisco gave me for cleaning a tub of sheep head."...Nothing I ever earned since was like that dime," he said. "That was the best money in the world and the only real money I ever had. Even better than seven hundred and fifty dollars I won one time at craps. Now that felt good, you know what I mean, but not like that original dime did" (p. 170).

The nostalgic evocation of the past, combined with other mythological constructions of Son, reinforces his status as the sign of racial authenticity. When asked about the value of the culture of which he is the product he asks a few questions to Jadine that brings out the essential cultural difference between them:

The truth is that whatever you learned in those colleges that didn't include me ain't shit. What did they teach you about me? What tests did they give? Did they tell you what I was like; did they tell you what was on my mind? Did they describe me to you? Did they tell you what was in my heart? If they didn't teach you that, they didn't teach you nothing about yourself. And you don't know anything, anything at all about your children and anything at all about your mama and your papa. You find out about *me*, you educated nitwit! (p. 267)

In the above passage it becomes clear that Son takes pride in his position as a "real" black. Son, like the trickster figure changes his identity among different people—William Green, Herbert Robinson, Louis Stover. In keeping with the trickster tradition we never get to know his real name. He transforms his own life and others lives as well. He reminds others that they cannot sever their links with their pasts. As it is the novel's main focus is on individuals who have lost connection with their pasts. On the literal level the

family secret of child abuse comes out in the open in the Valerian household; how Margaret had abused her son Michael by burning him with cigarettes. At yet another level the fugitive Son brings out the larger ramification of the slave-past of America in general and Valerian's in particular.

The novel inverts and deconstructs the myth of Ananui, the West-African trickster spider and the American vernacular tale of Brer Rabbit. As a fable the Tar Baby story is supposed to reveal values but one of the ironies of the novel is that the values that it reveals are much more complex than those found in the original oral narratives. Thus what the novel leads the reader to is not a moral resolution but more complicated moral dilemma. The Tar Baby myth originates in Africa as a part of the trickster tales associated with the spider Ananui. It was later included in Uncle Remus plantation tales. The plot has however remained the same in both the versions. In Son's version white farmers catch Brer Rabbit whom they believe is eating their cabbages place the Tar Baby on the road. As he is caught up in the Tar and is completely immobilized, he makes an escape by manipulating the white farmer's cruelty, by being thrown by them into the briar patch where he makes good his escape. The black oral tales of the plantations also presented the Brer Rabbit as full of wit and guile, which was required by black slaves to outwit their masters. Here Gideon adopts this role by pretending to be illiterate to avoid being given extra work.

In the novel the character of Son is associated with the Tar Baby myth throughout. But we are not sure till the end who is the Tar Baby and what is Son's relationship to the myth? At one point it seems to be Jadine who is the

Tar Baby because Son accuses her of being a trap white folks have set to catch unwitting black men. But earlier in the story we have seen as Son watches Jadine asleep, before she is even aware of his presence on the island, he breathes "into her the smell of Tar and its shiny consistency..." (p. 120).

Son makes good his escape into the Briar Patch by returning to the hills, he runs too, unimpeded by the rocks or hills or water. The island saves his ancient properties and allows him an avenue of escape.

Toni Morrison in an interview with Thomas LeClair in *New Republic* year (1981) said:

I use that old story because, despite its funny, happy ending, it used to frighten me. The story has a tar baby in it which is used by a white man to catch a rabbit. "Tar Baby" is also a name, like nigger, that white people call black children, black girls as I recall... I found that there is a tar lady in African mythology. I started thinking about her. At one time a tar pit was a holy place; at least an important place, because tar was used to build things... it held together things like Moses's little boat and the pyramids. For me, the tar baby came to mean the black woman who can hold things together. The story was a point of departure to history and prophecy. That is what I mean by dusting off the myth, looking closely at it to see what it might conceal ( in Bill Moyers 1992:122).

Because of Jadine's absolute denial of lineage, she lacks an inherent sense of herself as a black woman and for this reason she fails to make a connection with her past, her family, and her own femininity. In denying all these she denies her racial identity. Ondine makes a futile attempt to remind her of her matrilineal connections. When Ondine tells her that a "girl has to be a daughter first in order to be a woman"—in order to learn how to feel a "certain, careful way about people older than you are" (p. 283), Jadine retorts "you want me pay you back," which is an evidence of her confusion. Jadine sees her debt lying

with the Street family: "They educated me. Paid for my travel, my lodgings, my clothes, my schools... Sydney and Ondine are all the family I have and Valerian did what nobody else even offered to do" (p. 118). Son sees her as a progeny of the race and child of Sydney and Ondine, which Jadine fails to see. Jadine also makes an attempt to force Son into a mindset that will relinquish his racial linkage and African continuity. She wants him to be like her.

Endless deferment of meaning is extended to issues of identity as identity happens to be internally fractured and externally multiplied. Though *The Bluest Eye* and *Tar Baby* have parallel concerns, the issue of African-American identity has been further complicated in the text. Jadine views New York "as a black woman's town" (p.223), while in New York Son wonders "if those were the black folks he was carrying around in his heart all these years" (p.215) Further he sees it as a site of cultural death. He is a man displaced and Morrison calls him "heart weary" (p.218) in New York. He is a man with a past, a history and he has to be rescued, for he would have to return to this past. Their differences are further reinforced when Jadine imagines the room haunted by the presence of all "authentic" women "Rosa and Therese and Son's dead mother and Sally Sarah Sadie Brown and Ondine and Soldier's wife Ellen and Francine from the mental institution and her own dead mother and even the woman in yellow" (p. 260). She also rejects Eloe as rotten and more boring than ever "a burnt out place" (p. 262). For Son, Eloe symbolizes traditional Africanism. The comparison between the two places brings out two important facts. The cosmopolitan nature of New York suggests that traditional boundaries of identity such as place, gender, race and class have broken down

giving rise to a fractured identity because of the flow of people, ideas, and cultures across geographical frontiers. Secondly, Eloë may stand for the idea of wholeness, of unified personality, singular identity but as De Weever points out accomplishment of such an ideal is no longer possible for black women (1991: 173). Jadine's rejection of Eloë stands for her rejection of everything black--- the myth of an authentic black existential modality, of idealized black womanhood and Son as the romanticized black male. Their separation at the end is a direct out come of the irreconcilability of their respective value systems.

The novelist does not seek to valorize the ideology of black authenticity in the novel. In the episode where Jadine thinks she saw the swamp-women while trying to extricate herself from the green tar-like slime with difficulty, they are delighted that she is desperately trying to get away from them. The swamp-women compound the ambiguity and the ambivalence of meaning. They are refigured in Jadine's waking dreams. Jadine is disconnected from her ancestral mothers. Morrison here once again seems to be drawing upon the African concept of ancestors who are believed to be taking an active interest in the welfare of their living descendants, intervening in their lives to remind them of their culturally specific moral obligations.

Although Son's character frames the narrative, the narrator's voice is often suppressed and the narrative opens up to a plurality of meanings. The essential nature of the novel is interrogative and thus it is impossible to arrive at a single ideological position. Though *Tar Baby* seems to be focusing on the racial myth, it is possible to interpret it in an entirely different way. We can say

that within a narrative that includes politics of race, gender and class, Morrison's attempt has been to bring to the fore the disjuncture between the mythical community and those of the black women whose lives are conditioned by totally different historical and social circumstances than those of their community. It cannot be denied that both Jadine and Son are propelled into a kind of transformation in the island because as de Weever (1991) argues that there is an association in western culture to islands as 'places of transformation' (45). Whatever may be the case, *Tar Baby* eschews the concept of a coherent, fixed identity and accepts a model of identity that sees the individual as conditioned by multiple impulses and desires, constructed from various forms of interaction with the world.

*Beloved* is the most fragmentary of Morrison's novels. Roland Barthes' concept of a given text as a point of intersection for a range of different discourses is particularly appropriate to *Beloved*. "Bits of codes, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages, etc. pass into text and are redistributed within it" (1981: 39). *Beloved* also qualifies Barthes' definition of an ideal text as we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one.

The novel opens in the year 1873, eight years after the Civil War. Sethe and Paul D, both victims of slavery make an attempt to rebuild their lives by "keeping the past at bay" (p. 42).<sup>5</sup> Sethe refuses to allow the past to form a coherent narrative with the present and the future. She tries to close off her mind but chunks of memory seep through her brain. "Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world ... Try as she might to make it otherwise,

the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forgive her memory for that" (p. 6). Sweet Home, that hateful place was so beautiful it made her wonder if hell was pretty too... Paul D, a former slave also from Sweet Home turns up, and as he tries to enter the house he's stopped in his tracks by "a pool of red and undulating light" (p. 8). He remarks on the feeling of evil as Sethe says, "It's not evil, just sad" (p.8). Sethe and Paul D. develop a relationship and the novel seems to suggest that they must be able to "work through" the implications of their complex cathartic relations with Sweet Home and everything that followed. The historical context (their reunion in post-Civil War America) also makes their relationship special, for under slavery people were not allowed to have free physical and emotional relationships. As such their relationship becomes part of the healing process, which Morrison hopes the novel would provide. Their reunion is problematized by the presence of the ghost figure *Beloved*, the child murdered by Sethe. The novel bearing her name shuttles back and forth in time and connects the past to the present.

*Beloved* is loosely based on the story of one Margaret Garner a slave who fled slavery from a plantation in Kentucky to a town outside Cincinnati, Ohio. Tracked down by slave catchers, Margaret attempted to kill her children so that they couldn't be forced into a life of slavery. She wished her children to be dead rather than became slaves and "murdered piece meal." Morrison's novel seems to illustrate that female slave narratives preceded contemporary Black feminist and 'womanist' writing (Braxton and McLaughlin 1990: 302).

In the early chapters both Sethe and Paul D. show a determined resistance to confront the past on any level, which is manifested in their inability

to narrate their personal stories. The attempt to construct and narrate the story together with Paul D. can succeed only if the past ceases to be a form of uncontrolled repetition, “acted out” by them rather than having integrated into their lives. Thus the unease is apparent for “ “working through” the traumatizing past that involves dealing with the way it effectively arrests one’s agency” (Mohanty 1997: 221). Thus nothing explains the narrative strategy better than the following quotation about Sethe.

She was spinning. Round and round the room. Past the jelly cupboard, past the window, past the front door, another window, the sideboard, the keeping-room door, the dry sink, the stove—black to the jelly cupboard. Paul D sat at the table watching her drift into view then disappear behind his back, turning like a slow but steady wheel... the wheel never stopped (p. 159).

What Sethe needs to do is to go beyond this image of motion and energy that signifies no real movement. She needs to realize that the past is not hers alone so that she can regain its meaning through individual effort with Paul D. It’s a collective past, a shared history. Thus the novel set in 1873, moves from the present to the past, particularly to the period between 1850-1855, and back again. Single events are revisited from multiple points of view, a strategy Morrison adopts in her very first novel *The Bluest Eye* employing first and third person perspectives. These characteristic techniques of the novel acquire tremendous importance as it seeks to explore how authoritative discourses, for example, historical, biblical, cultural and political attempt to distort or bury alternative discourses thereby silencing other voices.

The novel draws upon Black Aesthetic discourse of 1960s, in some respect in which through elaborate self-representation attempts are made to

produce a counter-discourse generally identified with black consciousness to displace the dominant western mode of representing black "reality". Narratives buried within other narratives are integral to the structure of *Beloved*, where there are two interrelated levels of 'occlusion': the white distortion of black experience and the suppressed subconscious of the victims of slavery as well as of perpetrators of it. Thus the suppressed subconscious is pursued both at the levels of the individual like Sethe and of the nation's need to confront what it has done to black people and to itself.

As in other novels, Morrison joins her narrative style with the content of the work. The experience of slavery that left blacks battered, broken, resulting in fragmentation of *self* is the focus of the novel. The novel's very structure offers to reveal this fragmentation. The main events of the novel are presented in a fragmentary way, which the reader needs to construct piecemeal. The process of memory on which the narrative depends becomes complicated, as there is reluctance on the part of the novel's main characters like Sethe and Paul D. to remember. Sethe "worked hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe" (p.6). Paul D. has a "tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be. Its lid rusted shut" (pp. 72-3). And he does not intend to pry it open because "if she got a whiff of the contents it would shame him" (p. 73). An occluded text is buried within the surface narrative which Sethe and the reader have to reclaim and recover. Sethe has to understand the main events of her life and the reader to make sense of the fragmentary text.

The main focus of the novel is on slavery and its disastrous consequences on the lives of individual characters. It left the slaves totally

dispossessed and their sense of self-esteem turned into self-loathing. Central to the novel *Beloved*, maintains Mohanty, "is a vision of the continuity between experience and identity, a vision only partly articulated in the juxtaposition of the dedication ("sixty million and more") with its claim to establish kinship with the unnamed and unremembered who perished in the infamous Middle passage..." (1998: 217).

Through the character of Sethe, the novel reflects on some hard questions like how does one go about living 'freely' after an experience that negates the very concept of the *self*? For Baby Suggs, it is a case of complete erasure of identity. When Garner, the "nice" slave master asks Baby Suggs her name, she replies, "Nothing," she said "I don't call myself nothing" (p 142) If in *The Bluest Eye*, Cholly Breedlove's rape of Pecola is to be seen as a result of unnatural experiences that he suffered at the hands of the whites, in *Beloved*, the murder of the child by Sethe cannot be extricated from her experiences as a slave, for the kind of brutality she suffered at the hands of the whites under slavery. Prior to killing her child, she had endured an almost fatal whipping. She suffered the degradation of being chained while the white men sucked her lactating breasts. The description in the text about how she was driven wild by 'mishandling of the nephew' confirms the kind of animal like status that was accorded to the slaves. The animalistic nature of slavery is also revealed in the "metal bit" (p.69) that was placed in Paul D's mouth—the barbaric symbol of silence and oppression. The 'bit' keeps him away from communicating with his friends, thereby forcing silence upon him by the rigidity of the cold metal.

In the silence of the slaves, *Beloved* also subverts the white myth of southern paternalism in which the slave owners were seen as presiding over extended and subservient families of both blacks and whites. The ideological inversion of reality was the creation of the slaveholder class where the masters believed that they cared and provided for them. Nearest to the truth that the southerners were prepared to accept was that the relationship was one of mutual dependence. John B. Adger a Presbyterian minister once said about the blacks:

. a race distinct from us, yet closely united to us; brought in God's mysterious providence from a foreign land, and placed under our care and made members of our state and society; they are not more truly ours than we are truly theirs.(qtd in Bulmer and Solomos, ed. 1999: 94)

Many other narratives are occluded by the authoritative version. For instance, Sethe blames herself for the murder of her child till she is told by Baby Suggs, her mother-in-law that the real responsibility for the murder lies with the whites who have perpetrated this inhuman system. "Those white things have taken all I had or dreamed", she said, and "broke my heart strings too. There is no bad luck in the world but white folks", (p. 89). She made an attempt to enable Sethe to absolve herself of the responsibility for the killing. Baby Sugg's sermon in the clearing provides a counterpoint to the servile status to which the blacks were reduced to during slavery. The gathering at the clearing provides an opportunity for black people to come together. As Lomax observes:

By listening and fervently responding to the pure poetry of the Negro preacher, the Negro masses got a sense of history and

moral philosophy... Even those of us who couldn't read came to think of history as a moving, changing thing; we were never allowed to doubt that man as a created thing had purpose and that we, to be sure, were a part of that purpose (1962: 47).

What Baby Suggs seems to subscribe is a collective healing ritual, the ritual that gives the survivors of slavery the strength to go on. The collective effort produces something new, a fusion of voices. When at last Baby Suggs renounces her vocation, Stamp Paid sees her as a strong woman defeated by whites and tries to feel her pain when the community which she served so well, steps back to "hold itself at a distance" (p. 177).

Interest in occluded text in the narrative is evident from the use of the Bible. The words that Sethe reuses to claim *Beloved*—"beloved she mine" (p.200) and "I am *beloved* and she is mine" (210) have their source in *Song of Solomon*, which inspired the title. The epigraph of the novel reminds us that the title comes from a part of Paul's epistle to the Romans. Paul quotes Hosea in the Old Testament. One of Hosea's three children was called 'not Beloved', a representative of the Israelites who had been temporarily rejected as a punishment for their own betrayal. After a period of retribution, God reclaimed the lost people:

I will call them my people  
Which were not my people  
and her beloved,  
Which was not beloved.

Religious instruction was used as a form of social control in the plantations. The *Bible*, read from a particular historicized, cultural perspective implied that colonizers tried to inculcate western values in the African mind. The contrasting images of 'black Satan' and 'show-white-lamb of god' were

used as a justification for slavery. Linden Peach says that the major occluded narrative in the novel is the absent text around the word 'beloved' that highlights the political message of the book (1995: 100). The *Bible* is a multilayered text that can be interpreted from a black perspective. Critics who try to locate the title of the book in the *Bible* fail to realize that in the novel, Morrison has involved a different *Bible*. Here the source of the word 'beloved' is taken from the preacher's speech over Beloved's grave. Beloved is remembered through an engraved stone in her grave that Sethe procured having ten minutes of stand-up sex with the stone engraver. The preacher used the word 'Dearly' which she further liked to have been engraved. As Walker (1991) points out there were other words too: "we are gathered here together..."(11). These words draw attention to the main subject of the novel that is to reclaim a sense of community in order to ward off the threat of fragmentation and isolation.

The concept of 'rememory' and the notion of repossessed ancestry are inextricably linked in the novel. The novel addresses a very pertinent question through the character of Sethe. After her flight from Cincinnati, Sethe realizes that freedom for the slaves involves more than freedom from legal condition of bondage: "Freeing oneself was one thing," she thinks; "claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (p 95). For Sethe claiming ownership of one's freed self is not an individual affair. One needs to have access to the buried memories and experiences of others who might have had a shared experience. As S.P. Mohanty maintains: "We need to reconstruct what our relevant community might have been, appreciate the social and historical dimensions of

our innermost selves" (1997: 220-221). The central principle on which the novel rests is rememory, which actually means that memories of the past has a "physical existence beyond the minds of individuals in whom they originate: it is possible to bump into and inhabit another's memory" (Peach 1995: 101). Paul D is associated with rememory throughout the novel. He brings Sethe's rememories of her husband, Hall and offers the explanation as to why he did not come to console her:

The day I came in here. You said they stole your milk. I never knew what it was that messed him up. ...All I knew was that something broke him. Not a one of them years of Saturdays, Sundays and nighttime extra never touched him. But whatever he saw go on in that barn that day broke him-like a twig."

"He saw?"...

"He saw. Must have."

"...Last time I saw him he was sitting by the churn. He had butter all over his face" (pp.68-69).

Sethe literally learns to inhabit and take for herself those rememories, which are Paul's:

Add my husband to it, watching above me in the loft hiding close by—the one place he thought no one would look for him, looking down on what I couldn't look at all. And not stopping them. Looking and letting it happen...There is also my husband squatting by the churn smearing the butter as well as its clabber all over his face because the milk they took is on his mind (p. 70).

Sethe's healing starts only when she starts having the knowledge of the absent narratives. 'Braiding of consciousness' a kind of interweaving of emotional perspectives, through which a memory is relived resulting in the creation of new meaning. Sethe and Paul D's sexual encounter has been disappointingly short, abrupt and meaningless. As they lie down together feeling uncomfortable and embarrassed, a fused memory wells up. Sethe remembers her wedding night

and the first time she had sex with her husband in the cornfield of Sweet Home. Paul also thinks of the not-so-private event, which adds a counterpoint and resonance to Sethe's perspective. Fusion is achieved gradually after the narrative shifts back and forth. And the text points at the new knowledge registered in the word 'free'. The repetition of the word 'free' suggests the fusion of perspectives and implies something that Sethe and Paul D have in common—being enslaved and being free

Memory is privileged in African-American novels both for political and aesthetic reasons. As Gates, Jr (1992) points out that it is a white lie that encouraged the myth that the blacks and Indian Americans have lower mental capacities in comparison to other races. But the connection between 'rememory' and the reclamation of ancestry, racial pride and self-esteem is much deeper than what Gates, Jr. suggests. The idea of 'rememory' could have originated with a dispossessed people. Slavery destroyed communities, families; practice of indigenous faith, stopped music and erased what were dear to the blacks in their culture. In the face of such threats the only way left for them is to know about their ancestral line to repossess and piece together the memories and stories of others. Through its figurative language the novel impresses upon us the enormity of the fractured and the fragmentary nature of the novel that has been designed to convey a deep sense of loss.

One such loss was the denial of mothering and motherhood during slavery. Sethe's scars become significant in the text. Her own reading of the scars is a 'rememory' of what Amy, the white girl, told her: "White girl... but that's what she said it looked like. A chokecherry tree" (p. 16). Paul D. sees it

as a "revolting bump of scars" (p. 22). Paul D's inability to reclaim Amy's text signifies the distance he and Sethe have yet to travel.

There are other issues which the novel foregrounds—issues like division within the black community as is evident in the episode where Baby Sugg's neighbours who attended the feast are the very people jealous of her position and remained silent when the white strangers arrived. It also raises questions about the complicity of certain blacks with the white slave masters. These very people came to Sethe's house at the end to exorcise the ghost. Once again we have the braiding and fusion of voices and emotions "...where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash" (p. 261). The dense allusions bring to mind varieties of ways people join to transcend their present condition, in recreating past and future through collective imagination and will. The novel's movement from present to past without warning denies the conventional division between present, past and future into separate units.

The various discourses in *Beloved* are dovetailed and cannot be read independently of one another. The integration of each of the different narratives within the novel is one of the keys to the healing process that's suggested through the image of the quilt as "Paul D sits down in the rocking chair and examines the quilt patched in carnival colors" (p. 272). He achieves release

and reclaims the alternative narrative the one in which both Paul D and Sethe are locked

“Sethe,” he says, “me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow.”  
 He leans over and takes her hand with the other he touches her face. “You your best thing Sethe. You are.” His fingers are holding hers  
 “Me? Me?” (p 273)

Thematic folk expressions and folk beliefs find their parallels in the structural patterns of Morrison's novels. She constantly and consistently weaves folklore into her writings by taking recognizable traditions and personifying them into fictional accounts. This is most apparent in her use of the traditional ghost story and the African belief that the death of the body is not the death of the soul. In the novel, Morrison has blended the temporal and eternal planes of existence. Beloved is presented as a shape shifter taking on flesh and blood human characteristics thus introducing a logic and a world view that defy usual responses to such phenomena. As Trudier Harris says:

Certainly in black folk tradition, a ghost might occasionally appear among the living—to indicate that all is well, to teach a lesson, or to guide the living to some good fortune, including buried treasure (1991: 156).

In the novel however Beloved appears as a malevolent spirit seeking revenge. In her encounter with Paul D she becomes the traditional succubus female spirit draining the male's life force. She casts a powerful spell on Paul D. Beloved at another level represents not the single child but the pain and anguish of sixty million blacks who have been enslaved, tortured and perished. Thus before his reconciliation with Sethe, Paul D realizes that his dependency

on Beloved is his link to his past. His need for her is like the need for air, the "clear air at the top of the sea," but the life he unwittingly seeks is his own unreclaimed history, the "ocean deep place" of the dead female ancestors to whom he once "belonged" (p.264). Although Beloved can be identified with fantastical elements in African literature, she moves from one frame of reference to another, which brings about some kind of ambiguity in her presentation, for she reverses/undermines our expectation of what ghost stories should be like.

The multiple voices in the novel also subscribe to another important folkloristic technique in that the characters become subjects as well as transmitter of tales about themselves. As in other novels, here Morrison suggests that a communal story telling session is in progress. In a tradition of story telling both she and her characters become the creators of the tale. Thus in her works the barriers between fiction and folklore get blurred. Denver's birth provides an important example of the multiple compositions. Denver relates a part of her story: "And it was the tender embrace of the dress sleeve that made Denver remember the details of her birth..." (pp.29-30), and again "Denver was seeing it now and feeling it—through Beloved. Feeling how it must have felt to her mother. Seeing how it must have looked. So she anticipated the questions by giving blood to the scraps her mother and grand mother had told her - and a heart beat" (p. 78). The audience before whom it is created shapes each teller's tale. In telling her tale to Beloved, Denver uses her creative imagination to leap for beyond the facts of her mother's experience. Denver nursed "Beloved's interest like a lover whose pleasure was to overfeed the loved" (p.

78) There is a seamless transition from Denver and Beloved's stories to the story actually happening

Denver's birth is too fantastic to be taken at face value and thus passes into the folktale. "She's never gonna know who I am You gonna tell her? Who brought her into this here world?" she lifted her chin, looked off into the place where the sun used to be "You better tell her. You hear? Say Miss Amy Denver. Of Boston" (p.85). The story violates the norm of interracial interaction in that the white girl Amy not only laid healing hands upon Sethe's lashed back and swollen feet, but also attended to Denver's birth. Morrison assigns tremendous powers to these stories seeking to extend the function of folklore. If stories about Denver's birth helps her to estimate her value, stories about Sweet Home sends her into fits of depression. Similarly, the stories told to Beloved both pacifies and agonizes her. Sethe discovers quickly as Denver does how much Beloved appreciates stories: "It became a way to feed her. Just as Denver discovered and relied on the delightful effect sweet things had on Beloved, Sethe learned the profound satisfaction Beloved got from story telling" (p 58).

Morrison draws on the Biblical implications of the word and the connotations of creation, pervading the African-American folk-Bible. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." (John 1 1) Thus it is not only the word that brings forth this world to life, but the pre-word condition of creation as sound having powerful consequences. " It is sound that eventually drives Beloved out of 124 just as it has been the word that made her flesh" (Harris, 1991:169) Words, shaped into larger units

become stories and acquire a greater force. Words also have the power to distort facts as the white narrative did of the killing of Sethe's child. The horror of the tale, diminishes her in the eyes of the black community as well as in eyes of Paul D.

The power of words is manifested even in Baby Sugg's verbal art of preaching. Baby Suggs stands for the intertwining of sacred and secular traditions in African-American culture. She uses the form of religious rituals to impart secular advice. In her interactions with the crowd gathered at the Clearing Baby Suggs draws upon the 'call and response' tradition of folklore. Trudier Harris calls her a "wordsmith" as she blends the best of secular and sacred worlds.

Language is the most distinctive trait in Morrison's fiction. In an interview with Thomas Le Clair she said that the black people have a love for language — "saying of words, holding them on their tongue, experimenting with them." Defining it as a love, a passion she further says, "its function is like a preacher's" that makes one stand up out of one's seat, makes one lose oneself and hear oneself (Bill Moyers pbs video 1992: p.123). She seeks to exorcise the pain and humiliation of slavery in a communal linguistic catharsis. By giving up her role as a communal poet, a visionary Baby Suggs descends from the legendary status to that of another victim of slavery. There is also the myth of the Sweet Home. Before the arrival of schoolteacher it is imbued with an aura of myth, of folktale defying linearity, memory and imagination combined to give an oral quality to the telling of the tale.

The narrative structure in each of her novels is different. If it is circular in *The Bluest Eye*, in *Sula* it is spiral, while *Song of Solomon* is neither circular nor spiral. *Beloved* has a pyramid like structure—large bottom (beginning), medium middle, and small top. Each of the three parts begins with a long chapter describing the state of the house, “124”, as it goes from “spiteful” to “loud” to “quiet”. Each of the parts is related to the whole. The first part of the novel is twice as long as part two and three combined. The language in the first part is restrained showing the emotional state of the main characters, towards the end of the first part nearer to the climax the language gets more expansive which again shows that healing for the traumatized characters have begun. The stream-of-consciousness or interior monologues are attempts at reproducing the process of thinking. There are four stream-of-consciousness chapters. Sethe ruminates on being a mother and her own mother, who survived the middle passage and was forced to nurse white children. Sethe’s mind wanders through the past. She remembers telling Mrs. Garner how her nephews violated her breasts and remembers Mrs. Garner’s book of helplessness. We have Denver’s stream-of-consciousness where she recalls her brother’s fears that their mother might kill them like she killed Beloved. Denver admits that she is a recluse, always on the alert that her mother might kill her too; her mission is to protect Beloved from their mother.

Beloved’s ‘Middle Passage’ is most difficult in that sentences run without punctuation and phrases seem to elbow out each other. These lines are intended to evoke a mood, to give voice, pay homage, and honour millions of Africans killed during the Middle Passage. In death, Beloved merged with her

own dead ancestors in an under water nightmare of the collective unconsciousness. Beloved was only a two years old child at the bottom of the ocean. Beloved, despite death, despite her spirit cast into the ocean and her soul left to wander among the souls of her dead ancestors longs for life and for her mother: "She is my face smiling at me" (p.213).

In Beloved's stream-of-consciousness the poetic dialogue is obsessive and possessive. In the poetic dialogue between Sethe and Beloved, and Denver and Beloved, there is a longing to possess each other. "The trio for three voices end—as many curses, incantations, and prayers end—while repeating three times."(David, 2000:132). Each of them say, "You are mine. You are mine. You are mine" (p. 217)

Morrison has used a lot of symbols and motifs in *Beloved*. For example, the inability to see colour signifies a closing off of the senses and a withdrawal of the self. Morrison uses metal as a symbolic representation of a number of slavery-related concepts. Metal by its very nature exists as cold, hard, rigid and heavy substance. Paul D's "the bit" (p. 69), "the tobacco tin" (p. 72) and the "hand forged chain" (p. 107) suggest the characteristics of metal with little explanation. There are other important symbols in the novel like 'milk' standing for motherhood, 'water' dividing earth from after life, colour 'red' symbolizing Beloved's signature colour as a spirit—"a pool of red and undulating light" (p. 8). "124" is repeated like a motif,  $1+2+4=7$ —7 is key number in myth and religion and "the men without skin" (p. 212) standing for white men.

The vividness of writing which is another notable quality of Toni Morrison is attributable to meticulousness, enhanced by the specificity of much of the

observation. For example, the poignancy of the scene after Sethe's murder of her child is conveyed vividly:

. neither Stamp Paid nor Baby Suggs could make her put her crawling- already? Girl down Out of the shed, back in the house, she held on.  
 "It's time to nurse your youngest," she said. (Baby Suggs)  
 Sethe reached up for the baby without letting the dead one go. They fought then. Like rivals over the heart of the loved, they fought. Each struggling for the nursing child. Baby Suggs lost when she slipped in a red puddle and fell. So Denver took her mother's milk right along with the blood of her sister. (pp. 151-152).

Rhythm or music of the prose is equally important in *Beloved*. Images of music pervade Morrison's work as many of her characters who are women like Poland, Mrs Mac Teer, Pilate, Sethe and a host of others rely on songs which Rigney (1991) argues "breaks an enforced silence and are expressions of desire" (9). In *Beloved* the rhythmic repetition of elements in the first chapter helps to unite the narrative like the squares of a quilt: "Beloved she my daughter, she mine" (p.200); "Beloved is my sister" (p.205); "I AM BELOVED and she is mine" (p.210); "I AM BELOVED and she is mine" (p.214). The language of *Beloved* is powerful but does not overwhelm its characters. It is as if there is "no author, no ego, nothing between the people in the book and us." (David 2000: 133). Only petrified and joyous soulful songs!

In Morrison's next novel *Jazz*, *Jazz* is used as a metaphor for the changing conditions of African-American life in the 1920's. The novel however does not offer full view of the artistic, cultural or political events that the African-Americans achieved in those years because Morrison does not seem to be interested in writing a conventional historical novel. Morrison has always

questioned the very premises of history and historical writing, particularly pertaining to the African-Americans. Through her fictions she intends to choose selectively those details, which are useful for her community in the struggle to create a past that can enable African-Americans to have, in the words of *Beloved* a "livable life in the present and future." Nancy J. Peterson in her article "Say Make me, Remake Me: Toni Morrison And The Reconstruction of African American History" says, "The unconventional historicity of *Jazz* is directly linked to Morrison's improvisational exploration of alternative concepts and forms for reconstructing African-American history" (1997: 202).

In *Jazz* like her other novels, the content and the form have coalesced. She seems to be deliberately and conscientiously constructing this novel with principles and ideas of Jazz in mind while using Jazz as a metaphor for the defining ideas of modernism—ideas that become signified when we consider events of historical importance, such as black migrations of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries. *Jazz* focuses much of its attention on the problems and consequences of the migratory experience. The novel intends to explore the psychological and environmental dialectics of migration resulting in displacement and excitement, hope and disillusionment. The migrant indeed undergoes a complete reorientation of experience, in other words, a renewal of the self and reformulates his/ her values, personal vision and behaviour. It is basically the kind of change that came about in the lives of the blacks in 1920s that Morrison attempts to capture and reflect in *Jazz*.

Both Joe and Violet in *Jazz* yearn for some kind of connection with their former selves in order to deal with the trauma of migration and the demands of

urban life. The mutability is most poignantly illustrated in the character of Joe Trace, who undergoes seven distinct changes during his young life and compares himself to a snake that must continually shed its skin. He says, "I changed once too often. Made myself new one time too many. You could say I've been a new Negro all my life" (p. 129).<sup>6</sup> The concept of continual self-renewal which the rhetoric of Harlem Renaissance made central proved to be extremely difficult and painful.

Although in an interview Morrison said that the title *Jazz* might not be right for the novel her style reflects the sounds and rhythms of the Jazz; the structure of the novel also mirrors the typical patterns and configurations of Jazz compositions. Morrison identifies five characteristics of Jazz: (i) In Jazz unanticipated things can happen when the performance is going on requiring constant alertness on the part of the musicians; (ii) the Jazz music is egalitarian in that a single musician never dominates the whole performance; this egalitarianism is what Morrison adopts in her novel, employing multiple voices and viewpoints to narrate the story without the correct or the dominant voice; (iii) Morrison contends that Jazz compositions follow a general musical pattern or arrangement in which a coherent melody that gets dissolved away eventually returns. Relating the musical pattern of *Jazz* to the narrative style of her work, Morrison maintains that like the musical notes the theme of the novel should be revealed at the beginning. Such narrative revelations are necessary so that there cannot be music without melody or a novel without a theme; (iv) According to Morrison, a fourth characteristic of Jazz is that it locates the music in a historical framework in that it functions as an embodiment of the ethos of

the African-American experience during the 1920s. Thus the historicity of the novel bears upon the history of Jazz; (v) Morrison further adds that Jazz is imbued with a certain degree of romanticism. Similarly, *Jazz* the novel dramatizes most poignantly a romance through the central love story. In the novel, Morrison presents a true-to-life story of an eighteen-year-old woman who hides the name of her ex-lover who had shot her, pleading him to get away. She eventually bled to death without telling who fired the shots. In an interview with Sheldon Hackney in 1996 Morrison said, "That seemed to me when I first heard it, since she was only eighteen years old, so romantic so silly, but young so young. It is that quality of romance, misguided but certainly intense, that seems to feed into the music of that period" and added, "I was convinced that reckless romantic emotion was part and parcel of an opportunity snatched to erase the past in which one really didn't have all those choices, certainly not the choices of love" ("I Come from People Who Sang All the Time," p. 6).

In the novel the influence of Jazz becomes evident in places where the melody is introduced and subsequently unravelled and embellished, as in the beginning where the story is told within the first ten lines and subsequently retold from different viewpoints. The novel begins:

Sth, I know that woman. She used to live with a flock of birds on Lenox Avenue. Know her husband, too. He fell for an eighteen-year-old girl with one of those deep down, spooky loves that made him so sad and happy he shot her just to keep the feeling going. When the woman, her name is Violet, went to the funeral to see the girl and to cut her dead face they threw her to the floor and out of the church (p. 3).

In the first few lines we are introduced to the tragic triangular relationship of Joe Trace, Dorcas and Violet and just when we start thinking that there is nothing left to find out about the story the narrative takes a turn. Violet decides to learn everything she could about the dead girl, going so far as to visit Dorcas's aunt, Alice Manfred, and to bring home a picture of Dorcas that she puts on the mantle.

Both Violet and Joe take turns in their restless nights to look at the photograph and arrive at some kind of understanding of her and find clear answers about what has happened to them. They find that they are not gazing at Dorcas, but at their own reconstructions of her: "If the tiptoer is Joe Trace, driven by loneliness from his wife's side 'Her face' appears to be 'calm, generous and sweet...But if the tiptoer is Violet... The girl's face looks greedy, haughty and very lazy" (p. 12). Although the photograph does not tell them what they need to know it does provide a desire for some kind of understanding which forces them to revisit their more distant past and recollect the stories that will enable them to comprehend their present situation.

In Jazz improvisation and spontaneity of performance create a fluid and shifting text. The novel after establishing the initial melodic foundation in the reader's mind, begins to distort, decorate, plays with and improvises on the main events of the novel. Whether it is Cholly's rape of Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* or Eva's rumored amputation of her leg in *Sula*, Morrison's texts have revolved around a series of unpredictable, often inexplicable events. Jazz opens with Violet's interruption of Dorcas's funeral service where she tried to mutilate the face of the dead girl. The incident serves to focus on the element

of unpredictability in the sense that her kind of behavior is outside the range of normal social behavior. Joe's falling in love with an eighteen-year-old girl is also inexplicable. The element of unpredictability is further reinforced by the presence of a curious narrator whose identity is not known and who loses his grasp on the narrative finally. The narrator not only has the detachment and overarching knowledge that is generally associated with an omniscient narrator, but is also characterized by having limited knowledge, prejudices and involvement associated with an unreliable first person narrator. The narrator knows part of Joe and Violet's past that they never shared with any one. But there are many instances where the narrator admits not having any knowledge of certain things. In this context remarks like – "Any way, Joe didn't pay Violet or her (boy) friend any notice. Whether she sent the boy friend away or whether he quit her, I can't say" (pp. 4-5) – shows the narrator's ignorance. In one of her asides she says: "May be, she thought she could solve the mystery of love that way. Good Luck and let me know" (p. 5). We as readers instantly become aware of the fact that she is a destabilizing element in the narrative. She also uses such phrases as "I've wondered about it" (p. 71) without any follow up or "If I remember it right ..." (p. 71). Again, while describing Dorcas's aunt as hardheaded and sly, she says that she is not the best judge of characters. The narrator gains an identity as an individual voice in the narrative although she is supposed to narrate the stories of various characters in the novel. At times, she has the voice of a gossip, "Sth, I know that woman" (p. 4). At other times, she expresses her own feelings saying things like "I'm crazy about this city" (p. 7). "Her voice as a narrator has a wide range of inflections and levels, moving

fluidly from relatively straight forward narrative reportage to lyrical prose to slang to blue lyrics" (Peterson, 1997: 211).

The chapter organization also contributes to the Jazz like structure of the novel. Sections of the novel are not divided into carefully enumerated or titled sections. Morrison signifies each chapter break with blank pages as she stops with one idea or motif, while picking up the idea or the motif from the last sentence of the preceding chapter. All the chapters operate under this design. For example, the first chapter ends with the narrator talking about Joe and Violet's relationship: "He is married to a woman who speaks mainly to her birds. One of whom answers back: 'I love you'" (p. 24) and the next chapter begins, "Or used to" (p. 27), again in chapter three, the end reads: "You don't know what loss is," she said, and listened as closely to what she was saying as did the woman sitting by her ironing board in a hat in the morning" (p. 87). Chapter four starts with the sentence: "*The hat* pushed back on her forehead, gave Violet a scatty look" (p. 89). Through this type of structural technique Morrison "produces a textual continuum by using transitional slurs and glides across sections ... Such carry-overs make for rhythmic flow" (Rodrigues, 1993: 740). By linking her chapters, Morrison creates a sense of rhythmic continuity within an otherwise circuitous and disconnected narrative. By transferring one idea to the other, from one chapter to the next, Morrison makes pausing difficult. In this way she breaks away from the western mannerism of art-standards tersely embodied in the institutional hallmark of western music, the symphony. Because unlike the clearly demarcated movements of a symphony, the sections of Jazz never come to a complete stop. "Like nonstop sequences

during a jam-session, they keep moving restlessly on and on (,) giving the text a jazz feel" (Rodrigues, 1993: 743).

Jazz age was also the decade which saw the motion picture industry come into its own and by 1926 there were over 20,000 cinema houses in America. According to Linden Peach, the influence of the movies on *Jazz* is different from *The Bluest Eye* "where the emphasis is on white middle class American values and standards beauty" (1995:119). In *Jazz* the preoccupation is with the visual images of a culture that is given priority over other sensual impressions. Cinema is the most imaginary of all the art forms in which representation is most enigmatic and far removed from 'recording of an authentic experience.' Following cinematic technique, the novel creates a gap between image and reality. The narrator describes Dorcas as a person for whom "everything was like a picture show" (p. 202). She is forgetful of the fact that Joe Trace was a married man, that is, "really old." The difference between the images she has of Joe and Violet as a couple and the possibility of her eloping with Joe to Mexico makes her understanding of reality cinematic. Violet perceives each of the public events in which she behaves in an eccentric manner. She does not see herself doing it but sees them being done. Violet's description of her own behavior at the funeral when she tried to slash Dorcas' face is also an example of this: She watched as "a woman she recognized" and *elbowed her way through the mourners and raised a knife over the dead girl's face*. Violet tells Alice how silly she must have looked bursting into Dorcas' funeral, fumbling with the knife, "trying to do something bluesy" and both Alice and Violet burst into healing laughter (p. 114). Here the split between 'I' who

speaks and the 'I' who is spoken to is a kind of split Kristeva and Lacan have talked about "watching, being watched and looking into mirrors are in fact, salient motifs in the novel" (Peach, 1995: 119). Violet by attacking the dead face of Dorcas violates the tradition of 'viewing' a corpse. In stealing the baby, Violet violates the promise of 'watching' the child for its mother. Violet's birdcages have images where the birds can view themselves. Dorcas practices in front of the mirror to tell Joe that she wishes to end their relationship. Seeing oneself in the mirror means seeing the separation of the external and the internal. Joe eventually discovers that he is able to recall a visual narrative of his life with Violet, as he fails to reclaim how he felt with her and feels greatly disturbed when the visual memories of Dorcas begin to fade after killing her. The separation of external reality from the inner person pervades the Jazz Age.

The multiple voices and shifting points of view in the novel reflect what Morrison called the 'egalitarian' nature of Jazz. The narrative constantly shifts view points and narrative tone: Violet, Joe, Dorcas, Alice, Golden Gray, Felice, and the narrator are those characters who are allowed to give voice to their respective outlooks on the novel's central events and life in general. An interesting example of Morrison's use of this technique would be to take up the case of Violet whom people called violent "because she had tried to kill what lay in a coffin" (p.79). But Violet tries to justify her action. To Alice's angry remark "I don't understand women like you. Women with knives" (p. 85), Violet replies, "I wasn't born with a knife" and further asks Alice "wouldn't you fight for your man?" (p. 85). The multiplicity of versions and mirror reflections bear

upon multi-instrumentation of Combo Jazz, where the various "solo" viewpoints merge together for a total effect.

The word "Jazz" does not figure anywhere in the novel except on the cover and title page. Nevertheless there are direct references to the Jazz music. The music is referred to sometimes fleetingly and at others discussed in depth. It takes on a variety of forms in the novel. The narrator calls it "race music" (p.79). Joe Trace refers to it as "sooty"(p.132) and Alice Manfred calls it "low down music" (p. 57). The sounds of Jazz fill the city streets day and night careening off the rooftops where the Juke bands play. The narrator in a particular passage deifies them as "pure" and "holy". That's the way the young men on brass sounded that day. Sure of themselves, sure they were holy. . .lifted those horns straight up and joined the light just as pure and steady and kind of kind" (p.197).

Alice views Jazz differently and it is through Alice's eyes that the reader gets many of his impressions about Jazz:

The dances were beyond nasty because the music was getting worse and worse with each passing season the Lord waited to make himself known. Songs that used to start in the head and fill the heart had dropped on down, down to places below the sash and the buckled belts. Lower and lower, until the music was so low down you had to shut your windows (p. 56).

Alice therefore wants to keep her niece Dorcas away from the "city seeping music that begged and challenged each and every day" (p. 67). Alice also feels that the music urges people to "do wrong" (p. 67) and that it "made you do unwise, disorderly things. Just hearing it was like violating the law." (p. 58) Dorcas and her friend Felice fall under the spell of "fast music"(p. 64) and

succumb to its seductive powers. Describing it as "greedy, reckless words, loose and infuriating" (p. 60), Alice feels that the music "had something to do with the silent black women and men" (pp. 56-57) marching in protest at the July 1917 race riots in St. Louis.

Thus the music, as depicted in the novel, is mutable, viewed by different people in different ways. Assuming different identities under different circumstances and depending on the perceiver, sometimes it is referred to as sordid, provocative, disorderly, and chaotic, and other times as divine, restoring, reinvigorating. Morrison makes a reference to Jazz music's restorative powers in the penultimate section when Violet and Joe come to terms with each other after their recent disastrous past. As Violet, Joe and Felice talk in their apartment a Jazz song creeps in through the window from a neighbor's house, which spurs the renewal of Violet and Joe's love for each other. Indicating their future happiness or "felicity" could be restored through the music, Felice recounts the episode, "The music floated in to us through the open window. Mr. Trace moved his head to the rhythm and his wife snapped her fingers in time. She did a little step in front of him and he smiled. By and by they were dancing" (p. 215).

In order to lend strength to the Jazz motif, Morrison attempts to re-create a distinctive Jazz "feel" and sound through the novel's style and structure. Stylistically, she employs repetition, unconventional punctuation, and internal rhyme to create a polyrhythmic background for narrative "improvisations." She also uses call-and-response technique one of the important characteristics of Jazz music, making verb-tense shifts, and using Jazz imagery to enhance the

Jazzy ambience of the narrative. Repetitions of words and phrases between and within lines are to be seen analogues to Jazz riffs. Golden Gray's description of his intense feeling of pain as a result of never having met his father is expressed with the help of the metaphor of a severed limb. He says:

Now I feel the surgery...Singing pain... there is nothing for it but to go away from where he is not to where he used to be and might be still. Let the dangle and the writhe see what it is missing; let the pain sing to the dirt where he stepped in the place where he used to be and might be still (p. 158).

The 'singing pain' echoes throughout this passage while the phrase "where he used to be" is included almost awkwardly in two consecutive sentences. In the rooftop passage (pp. 196-7), the phrase "kind of kind" is repeated in subsequent paragraphs to mimic the supposed rhythms emanating from heights above. There are numerous other examples of repetition and riff like passages that suffuse the novel. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (1988) has maintained in *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*, "The riff is the central component of Jazz improvisation. It is a figure, musically speaking, a foundation, something you could walk on" (p. 105). These repetitions in Morrison's novel also provide an underlying foundation, a stable infrastructure, in her otherwise circuitous narrative and add to the novel's rhythmic movement

Morrison has employed the call-and-response technique in the novel thus imbuing and enhancing the style with Jazz hues. For example, in the following passage the narrator presents a series of questions and answers about the "unarmed women" of the gender wars fought at the time:

Who were the unarmed ones? Those who found protection in the church and the judging, angry God whose wrath in their behalf was too terrible to bear contemplation. He was not just on his way, coming, coming to right the wrongs done to them... Did the world mess over them? Yes, but look where the mess originated (pp. 77-8).

The question and answer format clearly resembles the call-and-response interplay between minister and congregation in traditional black churches. She also makes room for reader's participation. In the last few lines of the novel the narrator seems to be envious of Joe and Violet's 'public love' and wishes to experience the same kind of uninhibited love as a reader would wish:

I...have...longed to show it—to be able to say out loud what they have no need to say at all: That I have loved only you, surrendered my whole self reckless to you and nobody else (p. 229).

Through out the text the tense shift occurs frequently without warning, as such changes suggest shifting of perspectives in a Jazz performance. The tense shift creates a feeling of tension and relaxation. Certain Jazz imageries are also used in her novel. In fact the very first word of the novel, "sth" recalls the sound of a ride cymbal or as Rodrigues says the "muted sound splash of a brush against a snare drum" (1993: 733).

As *Jazz* is not a typical historical novel its unconventional historicity is linked to Morrison's improvisational exploration of alternative concepts and forms for reconstructing African-American history. As in *Beloved*, so also in *Jazz* the focus shifts from the "big" picture to the everyday lives of the black people. Following individual lives closely, Morrison reconstructs a history that is faithful to the past and is not predetermined. Morrison seems to have no

faith in monumental history where she senses the danger of creating a master narrative, which will bury alternative texts. Moreover as Nancy J. Peterson in her article ‘Say Make Me, Remake Me: Toni Morrison and the Reconstruction of African-American History’ (1997) says: “a historical master narrative has a grand resolution whose outcome has already been decided; and so individual players are unimportant except as they contribute to this final already-determined conclusion. Individual lives outside of such grand narratives, however, are much more chaotic, contradictory, and unpredictable—which creates a necessary space for resistance, agency and counter narratives” (209). In the novel the image of the groove of a Bluebird record conveys the impression of coercive and oppressive conditions adversely affecting African-Americans. But it has more meanings that stand in total opposition to such predeterminations. The narrator suggests that the ‘city’ with a capital C which echoes the idea of Harlem during the Renaissance as the capital of the world, predetermines what will happen to Joe:

Take my word for it, he is bound to the track. It pulls him like a needle through the groove of a Bluebird record. Round and round about the town. That’s the way the city spins you. Makes you do what it wants, go where the laid out roads say to. All the while letting you think you’re free...you can’t get off the track a city lays for you (p. 120).

Thus the title of the novel can be read in two ways—as a reference to the historical setting of Harlem Renaissance during the 1920s and also as a model for her historical reconstructive project.

Self-reflexivity is one of the major concerns of the post-modern fiction and is introduced into the text through the narrator. She confesses to having serious inadequacies as a narrator. Her competence as a narrator is particularly pointed out in the elaborate story of Golden Gray that unfolds within the novel. It is the longest background strand, which reveals part of Joe and Violet's past, explaining the reasons of their lonely lives. The episode highlights the problem of *narrating such an intricate story*. The narrator starts with the saga of Golden Gray's search for his father Henry Les Troy, who is also known as Hunter's Hunter on page 143. But the story does not come out right and so she retells it in page 150

While continuing with the story of Golden Gray the narrator gets stuck once again and seems to be a little confused. 'What was I thinking of? How could I have imagined him so poorly? ...I have been careless and stupid and it infuriates me to discover (again) how unreliable I am as a narrator (p. 160) The narrator's self-reflexivity tends to take away much of the credibility of any of the versions. Questions about the authenticity of any of the versions become more acute when the narrator reveals how can she arrive at a fair estimation of Golden Gray. "Not hating him is not enough; liking loving him is not useful. I have to alter things" (p. 161)

So the narrator takes the role of a historian in the Golden Gray episode and is confronted with pieces of evidence, which can be used to construct different versions of the same tale. She becomes unreliable, as a narrator because she does not use her imagination to alter things enough and create a narrative that could be genuinely informative or useful. Morrison in an essay,

"The Site of Memory" suggests that "To dwell too much or too soon on the facts, is to miss the opportunity to explore the mystery of the interior lives that she is trying to reconstruct. Fiction offers a kind of truth because by connecting the world of facts to the world of imagination, it provides a vital understanding of two worlds—the actual and the possible" (1987: 117).

That there is a necessity to create a narrative that is faithful to the actual and is pointed toward the possible is what the narrator learns in the Golden Gray episode. This point is most beautifully brought out in the later part of the novel where she corrects her mistaken prediction made in the opening chapter. As Violet, Joe and Felice establish another Triangle after Dorcas's death, the narrator predicts a bleak future for them. According to the narrator, only one thing changes: "What turned out different was who shot whom" (p. 6). We wait for a second shooting that never takes place. Rather Violet and Joe work through their problems and the narrator realizes her fallibility:

I was sure one would kill the other I waited for it so I could describe it... I was so sure and they danced and walked all over me. Busy, they were, busy being original, complicated, changeable—human, I guess you'd say, while I was the predictable one, confused in my solitude into arrogance, thinking my space, my view was the only one that was or that mattered (p. 220).

The narrator thus makes mistakes and integrates her mistakes into her narrative.

Through the use of the self-reflexive method, the narrator underpins the usefulness of certain kinds of narratives through intricate retelling of past events. *Jazz* emphasizes that history is first of all a story—a set of stories. African-Americans need to tell and retell in order to create the foundation for a

livable life both in the present and the future. The novel closes with an articulation of public or collective self-love that recalls the words of Baby Suggs in *Beloved* that the black people should love themselves, love their “own bodies and flesh”.

...I have loved only you, surrendered my whole self reckless to you and nobody else That I want you to love me back and show it to me. That I love the way you hold me, how close you let me be to you... I have watched your face for a long time now, and missed your eyes when you went away from me. Talking to you and hearing you answer—that’s the kick (p. 229).

The passage underlines the intimacy, the connection through communication between Joe, Felice and Violet.

Reminiscent of “the talking book” that Gates Jr. discusses in *The Signifying Monkey*, the self-reflexivity of post-modern fiction and the non-linear design of *The Black Book*, make the narrator the book itself who invites the reader to participate in the construction of the story.

With the publication of *Paradise* (1999), Morrison completed a trilogy of historical novels that began with *Beloved* (1987) and followed by *Jazz* (1992). Broadly speaking, Morrison’s trilogy is concerned with “remembering” past for herself, for African-Americans and for America as a whole. *Beloved* reconsiders the period of Emancipation and Reconstruction, *Jazz* the Harlem Renaissance and *Paradise* is mainly concerned with the Vietnam and civil rights era of the 1960s and 1970s.

*Paradise* offers us the story of a small Western African-American community, Ruby, whose contemporary members understand themselves in relation to a historical narrative of ancestral perseverance, idealism and

triumph. According to their self-narrative, they are the descendants of a group of wandering ex-slaves who—at god's command and after having been rejected by a string of already established pioneer communities both black and white—eventually succeeded in establishing the perfect all black community of Haven in a far away place in Oklahoma in the year 1890. Though the community was later removed to another secluded place called Ruby in 1952 by 1976 it has come to fulfill its founding fathers' paradisiacal promise. It thrived and prospered where other black communities failed in its own parlance it now appears “the one all-black town worth the pain” (p. 5).<sup>7</sup>

However in spite of its superior self-narrative, by 1976, vast discrepancies develop between the community's perfect and stable self-image and its actual conditions and cultural practices. The young begin to react against the community's conservative life style and authoritarian politics; the community's patriarchs react by accusing the young members of failing in their ancestral responsibilities. The novel however culminates in a horrific massacre conducted by two groups of men on a group of unconventional women living in a place called the Convent. The incident of murder and violence strip the community of its moral superiority and subvert the very concept of establishing a perfect paradise. What Morrison implies is that the ideal is always an illusive concept and the reality is what reminds us the implicit violence in our nature.

Morrison's deconstructive approach towards history implies skepticism towards any national historical narrative. She seems to be in line with the British critic Catherine Belsey, who rejects the notion of history as “an

irrecoverable experience" in favour of a history of meanings, the signified in its plurality According to Belsey, history is not

...objective, authoritative, neutral or true. It is not outside history itself, or outside the present. On the contrary, it is part of history, part of history, part of the present. It is irreducibly textual, offering no place outside discourse from which to interpret or judge. It is explicitly partial, from a position and on behalf of a position (1986: 405).

In destabilizing African-American past along this line, Morrison herself makes an attempt to reconstruct African-American history in addressing issues such as racism and sexism. However, Morrison operates in an open-ended, endlessly productive textual terrain in which her historical production is discursively embedded in change: "I know I can't change the future but I can change the past. Insight and knowledge change the past. It is the past, not the future, which is infinite" (qtd in Bigsby, 1992: 29).

Morrison's approach to history is evident in her narrative structure. The narrative structure in *Paradise* is not linear or monovocal as would befit a master narrative. It is an open-ended fabric woven by Ruby's multiplicity of fragmented and sometimes competing voices. Moreover the chapter headings are named after characters, as RUBY, MAVIS, GRACE, SENECA, DIVINE, PATRICIA, CONSOLATA, LONE, SAVE-MARIE that show that the novel is without a unifying protagonist. The stories don't follow any chronological order. The narrative moves back and forth intersecting time. As she explains in an interview, "...even though we live chronologically, our consciousness works quite differently. We constantly think about yesterday, or 20 years ago, or the future, as we go about the day. Our minds are always moving back and forth,

planning, remembering, regretting.”(qtd in Marcus n.p.) Like *Beloved* the narrative is consciously presented in a fragmentary way subverting historical continuity. Open-ended, fragmented, and multi voiced, the novel serves the subjective and collective memory and stands against the notion of a focalizing master narrative.

In *Paradise* like her two earlier novels *Beloved* and *Jazz*, Morrison has used the technique of repetition with a difference. Morrison's recapitulation of the murder scene in *Paradise* is a narrative trope. There are numerous doubling of scenes, characters and points of view that generate a constant process of repetition with a difference for the reader. But more importantly, Morrison also considers what the dangers of repetition are. This happens when the elders of Ruby convert the narrative into a political dogma, an ideology that enables them to perpetrate any amount of violence so long as it defends the town's common interests. Repetition is a technique of subversion achieved through rigidity and exclusion thereby destroying the very ideal it seeks to preserve. The Ruby-centred narratives in *Paradise* focus on patriarchy and emphasize a rigidly controlled communal historiography which is based on the subordination of the individual to the group.

By employing these narrative techniques, Morrison underlines the changing relation of race and gender in that she constructs a process of revelation or insight that teaches readers to see beyond the visible, the veils of history, ideology, subjectivity and divinity. What Satya P. Mohanty says about *Beloved* applies to *Paradise* as well: The novel urges us “to pay attention to the way our social locations facilitate or inhibit knowledge by predisposing us to

register and interpret information in certain ways. Our relationship to social power," he continues, "produces forms of blindness just as it enables degrees of lucidity" (1998:74).

*Paradise* begins with nine men from Ruby preparing to kill five women who live in the nearby Convent. As the women leap and men take aim, Morrison freezes the action and returns to this scene in the eighth and penultimate chapter after the histories of the people of Ruby and the convent have been told. In the first chapter, the account is presented from the men's perspective and later on from the women's. Between these two accounts is the space of insight and new knowledge. Morrison calls this insight 'Grace' in the chapter by that name. When Connie discovers Gigi's name is Grace, she says "Grace. What could be better?" and Morrison writes:

Nothing. Nothing at all. It ever there came a morning when mercy and simple good fortune took to their heels and fled, grace alone might have to do. But from where would it come and how fast? In that holy hollow between sighting and following through, could grace slip through at all? (p. 73)

Here the description of 'mercy' and 'fortune' taking flight and recollected in the doe-like running women, caught in mid leap cover 250 pages. Morrison's narrative is placed in the "holy hollow between sighting and following through" as the men take aim but are yet to fire. This moment is expanded into a space of insight, revision and grace. The leaping posture signifies a new point of departure, a leap out of the known into new possibilities of representation and imagination.

In *Paradise*, Morrison confronts the contemporary representations of 'race' and 'gender' and challenges the declarations of truth and law. Morrison

has discussed her approach to the novel in "Home" an essay written by her. She says: "Unlike the successful advancement of an argument, narration requires the active complicity of a reader willing to step outside established boundaries of the racial imaginary" (1997:8-9). In *Paradise* she has confronted the racial imaginary in its inseparable connection to gender, class and sexuality. She has made use of contemporary feminist, black, and post-modern theories of representation in her literary choice. Morrison moves the readers outside the "established boundaries" by posing multiple subjectivities as in the case of the convent women against fixed and unified subject positions by displacing whiteness and the power of white gaze. The first sentence reads, "They shoot the white girl first"(p.3) Here Morrison has reversed the accepted racial logic by making whiteness the exception and thus constructs the invisible point of view as not white. However, she does not reify blackness and creates an artistic practice that brings about insight.

In "Home", Morrison further describes her work in *Paradise* as battling "the accretions of deceit, fluidness, ignorance, paralysis, and sheer malevolence embedded in race language so that other kinds of perception were not only available but were inevitable" (1997: 7). To do this, Morrison embarks on a contradictory project, "to see whether or not race-specific, race-free language is both possible and meaningful in narration" (Ibid.,9). Through a language that "emphasizes racial specificity mimics racist hierarchy in its figurative choices" (Ibid.,8), Morrison tries to create "a place where race both matters and is rendered impotent" (Ibid.,9). Morrison calls this place "home," setting it in contrast to the prison house of language, the "racial house" which,

like the “master’s house” is a linguistic and discursive construct that “reproduce(s) the master’s voice and its assumptions of the all-knowing law of the white father.” Morrison seeks to create “an open house” Or “transform this house completely.”(Ibid.,4)

According to Linda J Krumholz, “Morrison’s figures of house and home refer to linguistic and imaginary constructs that reside in the space of the novel. In *Paradise*, Ruby and the convent represent these conflicting ideas of house and home” (*African American Review*, Spring 2002:pp.21-34, taken from Internet Pro Quest:3 ). The all black town of Ruby is a place of safety and freedom, where a woman can walk alone at night “beyond the limits of town, because nothing at the edge thought she was prey” (p. 9). It is a place “where race both matters and is rendered impotent.” The Convent on the other hand exhibits the imprints of the “master’s voice” The racist and violent history of the United States is imprinted there. It is an embezzler’s mansion shaped like a bullet representing the brutality, economic and sexual domination of the European conquest of the Americas. The place was later taken over by nuns and turned into a school for Native-American girls representing the colonizing antic of religious domination and sexual repression. Whereas Ruby comes to stand for the dangers of home based on sameness, unity and fixity. The convent becomes an “open house” where women of unidentified race meet and “move through and transform the layers of historical accretion” (Krumholz in *African American Review* 2002 Pro quest 3).

The all black town created in 1952 was intended to be an exact replica of the all black town of Haven in 1890 without any difference from the original

one. The two brothers Deacon and Steward, consider themselves the rightful heirs who "repeated exactly" (p.113) the founding of Haven in Ruby. The two brothers Deacon and Steward Morgan and other men of their generation have wanted to be authors of their own history. They control interpretation, make their history a closed book. It is not a text to be rewritten with each new generation, as they fear destabilization by 'transitional social reality'. It appears that the men of Ruby seek the perpetual overarching authority of the creator at the moment of creation.

Morrison calls the need to create a home "an anxiety of belonging" which is peculiar to the rootlessness of modernity ("Home" 1997:10). Seeking to counter the "anxiety of belonging" by establishing a town based on racial and gender ideals the New Fathers of Ruby initiate the process of exclusion and othering. Contemporary Ruby's effort to maintain its notion of itself as paradise eventually brings about its exact opposite. For example, the name of the town captures men's ideal of women underlying their dream of paradise. Ruby is the name of the sister of Deacon and Steward Morgan who died there. Ruby describes women as enshrined jewel and sexually dangerous. Thus the twins shared memory of nineteen Negro ladies in summer dresses as an idealized version of womanhood is contrasted sharply with Steward's memory of his desire to punch a black prostitute. This distinction between good and bad women leads to their scapegoating of women in the convent to see in these women an insult that "call into question the value of almost every woman he knew" (p. 8). The men in Ruby believe that a woman is safe enough to walk around the town at night unescorted because "Nothing for ninety miles around

thought she was prey” (p. 8). But such protective attitude has often led to oppression and possession of women. The decision to create an all-black town is based on the need to protect them against “out there...where random and organized evil erupted when and where it chose” (p. 16). The kind of rejection that they suffered in 1880s which is called Disallowing is repeated when in 1949 after the war they hear about missing testicles of coloured soldiers, about medals being turn away by gangs of rednecks and some of the confederacy and recognized the Disallowing Part II (p. 194).

Thus the emergency situation that prompted resettlement from Haven to Ruby persists till 1976 along with the attendant prejudices against both outsiders and lighter-skinned blacks. The men become blind to the fact that laws of racial purity, masculine dominance, economic competitions replicate the society, which they had meant to escape and disown. The attack on the Convent seems to be an evil, not an attack on perceived evils that the New Fathers cannot accept within themselves and in their town. But Consolata tells us directly: “Most scary thing is inside” (p. 39).

The Convent women who carry no ideals of family or society in their wanderings tackle the “anxiety of belonging” by creating an open house together, which challenges social and historical strictures surrounding them. They also confront the scary things inside themselves. Thus an attempt is made to dislodge the reader’s “racial imaginary” by exemplifying nomadic subjectivity. As Braidotti says, nomadic subject does not stand for “homelessness or compulsive displacement” but expresses the desire for an identity made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes,

without and against an essential unity (1994:22). To Braidotti the nomadic subjectivity should "be taken as a difference within the same culture, that is to say, within every self" (p. 13).

In *Paradise* struggles over interpretation have a generational component. The struggles centre round the control of meaning of the cryptic and damaged inscription of the Oven. Morrison makes the Oven symbolize both male and female, womb and phallus, a "flawlessly designed Oven that both nourished them and monumentalized what they had done" (pp. 6-7). The Oven is "round as a head, deep as desire" (p. 6), with the sacred and disputed words at its iron lip. But when it is transferred from Haven to Ruby the Oven loses its functions as a communal hearth and also as the site of baptism which was its original purpose. Deacon's wife Soane remembers the women's resentment when the men insisted on transporting it to Ruby, their new home a: "utility became a shrine and, like anything that offended Him, destroyed its own self" (pp. 103-4). Linda Krumholz maintains, "The Oven represents the dangers of utility made sacred of useful choices repeated and sanctified as law, of necessity redefined as piety" (2002:4).

Morrison employs the strategy of pastiche or "repetition and variation", in Patricia, one of the most interesting sections of the novel. Patricia Best Cato is Ruby's self-appointed local historian, who collects and records the town's various family trees. But the townspeople resent her prying questions and shut their "invisible doors" (p. 187) thus forcing Patricia to abandon "all pretense to objective comment" (p. 187). Rather "the project became unfit for any eyes except her own" (p. 187). In Ruby all communal history is patriarchal and

rigidly controlled. She thus pursues the project as an exercise in personal historiography. This theme is a familiar and oft repeated one in Morrison's novels and is of central importance to *Paradise*. However Patricia's personal historiography proves to be of limited use as her failure is contrasted sharply with similar situations in *Beloved* and *Jazz*. In both the novels the characters try to liberate their present from the 'burden of the past' trying to reconstitute the past through personal narratives. And as in the case of Violet her history most imaginatively reconstituted or "re-membered," so as to change the meaning and significance of the events for her. Patricia fails because she was investigating a rigid patriarchal system. Pondering over old family tree and finding countless women with "only one name" or "women with generalized last names," Patricia realizes that in Ruby, a woman's identity rested on the man she married (p. 187). She is keen on filling up the gaps and omissions left by the patriarchal version of history. Patricia's "free and insightful" interpretation of facts is essential to the historiographer who seeks a fresh interpretation of old ideas. The realization of the fact that the "state of emergency" that prompted men to move from Haven to Ruby with attendant prejudices against both outsiders and lighter skinned blacks underpins Patricia's history. She realizes why the town has distanced itself from the Best family: "They hate us because she (Patricia's mother) looked like a cracker and was bound to have cracker-looking children like me, and although I married Billy Cato, who was an 8-rock like you, like them, I passed the skin onto my daughter..." (p.196). This realization offers a more convincing explanation for the town's ostracization of

Patricia's daughter, Billie Delia. She also intuits the real reason behind Menu Jury's chronic drunkenness.

Menu returned from the Vietnam War with a woman he loved, but the town collectively "(forced) him to give back or return the woman he brought home to marry," a "pretty sandy-haired girl from Virginia" (p. 195). Ironically, Billie Delia is considered to be a loose woman when she is still a virgin, "untouched" at Arnette's wedding. Arnette Fleetwood is pregnant outside wedlock, but because she is the "racially pure" dark skinned daughter of Jeff Fleetwood, the town supports her. The Christmas pageant ultimately puts an end to Patricia's personal and communal history projects.

During the Christmas pageant Patricia and Rev. Misner engage in a debate about historicism. Misner uses the Sunday school classes as a forum for introducing new ideas to the community. He also says, "Isolation kills generations. It has no future" (p. 210). But Patricia along with the townspeople does not receive well Misner's African-oriented cultural view. Patricia reverts to isolationism when she says "(Africa) doesn't mean anything to me...slavery is our past" (pp. 209-10). During the Christmas pageant seven families are presented instead of nine, as the families happened to marry outsiders. Thus they have been removed quietly from the reenactment written out of the town's 8-rock history.

Although Patricia dares to articulate the town's racism what she does next is most ambiguous and problematic in the novel. She burns all her research papers, her letters and all papers regarding her town history project. While this makes her feel "clean" and prompts her to laugh (p. 217), she also

realizes that Morgans are in charge of Ruby and muses on the bizarre fact that no one ever dies within the town limits of Ruby. Thus in the character of Patricia Best Cato, Morrison creates a female character who fails, or defensively backs away from the liberating process of reconstituting the self through "literary archaeology".

In the chapter called "Divine", the novel's characters battle over meanings of the cross in relation to love and divinity. While one minister preaches that "love is divine only and difficult always" (p. 141), Misner silently holding up the cross for the congregation to see the meaning, himself sees in the cross, "God loved the way humans loved one another; loved the way humans loved themselves; loved the genius on the cross who managed to do both and die knowing it...not only is God interested in you; He is you" (pp. 146-7). Thus Misner attempts to connect human and divine love. Steward Morgan looks at the cross and remembers his father's story about a town called Pura Sangre. "At its northern edge was a sign: No Niggers. At its southern edge a cross" (pp. 153-4). Since that moment Steward has seen "crosses between the titties of whores; military crosses spread for miles; crosses on fire in Negroes' yards, crosses tattooed on the forearms of dedicated killers," and he concludes whatever Misner was thinking he was wrong because "A cross was no better than the bearer" (p. 154). But his memory is ironic, for he happens to be at the forefront of the New Father's efforts to maintain pure African blood. He rejects Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, and any connection with Africa.

Morrison rejects Steward's dismay over the multiple meanings of the cross, but she also cautions against the appropriation of the cross for any purpose, especially if it happens to be used as a sign of purity and righteousness of a select group. Morrison uses multiple interpretations to counter the ideal of purity, to reconstruct the cross as a symbol of the embrace of difference. The streets of Ruby on one side of the town are also named after the Gospels: Cross John, Cross Luke that ironically reconfigures the cross as a crossroad.

Morrison also dismantles racial ideology in *Paradise* by deconstructing whiteness. She doesn't however sanctify blackness. In her essay "Unspeakable Things Unspoken," Morrison emphasizes the importance of first sentences in her novels. The first sentence in *Paradise* disrupts the reader's racial imaginary. She succeeds in creating a changed racial and gender scenario in that the scene of black women killing a white woman conforms to hundreds of years of representations in which black men are presented as over sexualized animals preying on white women. But the exceptional status of the white girl amid black perspectives does not reify blackness and black judgments because the white girl is not identified. Morrison's construction of a nomadic subject destabilizes the racial identity among the women—Mavis, Gigi, Seneca and Pallas. Mavis is a failed mother who mistakenly kills her children. Grace embodies and expresses female sexual desire. Seneca, abandoned by her mother and abused in foster homes militates against her "anxiety of belonging." Pallas's parents and lovers' betrayal is followed by

rape. All these women are homeless and are on the road, for their racial identities are mobile, unfixed, irresolvable.

This nomadic circulation of whiteness and blackness among the women prevents blackness from replacing whiteness as gaze and judgment. Thus Morrison opens up the limits of racial imaginary without substituting one fixed system for another. Between the first and the penultimate chapter, Morrison provides the space for insight, an insight that is brought about by repetition with a difference, a shifting and multiple subject position, and the destabilization of racial identity. Insight has a special meaning in the novel. Morrison expands on Consolata's gift for "insight" when Consolata begins to teach other women at the convent. Thus they gain insight into themselves. As they explore and express in paint their inner selves, "with Consolata in charge, like a new and revised Reverend Mother...they altered" (p. 265). As the women gain insight into themselves so do the readers into the novel. Like Consolata who 'sees in' or 'steps in' to another, a reader while reading the novel steps in like Consolata who offers him the possibility of acquiring new knowledge or action, new thoughts and new ways of understanding what is within oneself.

Art can be used to reinforce blind acceptance of status quo. In *Paradise* the school Christmas play becomes a secret conveyance of the ruling beliefs of Ruby. The story of nativity is intertwined with significant events in Ruby's history that is called Disallowing. The conflation of stories dramatized by the children's play converts Ruby's history into a sacred text and as a sacred text it becomes the God-given truth.

In this novel, Morrison reveals the invisible presences of history, subjectivity and divinity. The convent itself represents history as a densely layered palimpsest and is a metaphor for Morrison's trilogy, *Beloved*, *Jazz* and *Paradise* in which she adds layers of revelation and revision onto a historical text whose original is as irretrievable as burnt pages of Patricia's Best's historical accounts.

Various literary and artistic texts also embedded into the present of which we have numerous instances in this novel. In Morrison's trilogy, Milton's *Paradise Lost* is rewritten as an alternative North- American history. Further in the novel, one can also get traces of various other texts like *Divine Comedy*, *Genesis*, *Exodus*, and numerous stories of origins, migrations and the writing and interpreting of Laws and the Gospels. Morrison also questions the traditional reading of the Bible as a book about punishment and redemption. This type of reading is limiting for African-American community that needs to grow out of the language of retribution into a language of healing—healing in the sense of recovering what has been repressed and ignored in order to make their lives more meaningful. Healing means escaping the language of punishment, escaping the language of restriction that makes new options seem impossible and improbable. As Morrison engages in some kind of literary dialogue with these sacred and canonical texts, the texts reveal their power in the present and their grip is loosened as Morrison questions their status to unquestioned truth and supreme knowledge.

Insight also requires a kind of inward vision that enables one to project the self in the Other and the Other in the self. The lack of insight on the part of

men in Ruby results in their scapegoating the Convent women. Projection of *self* into the Other creates common ground, a kind of bond. The perception of the Other in the *self* creates possibilities for self-knowledge.

Insight in the novel also involves a perception of the divine, feeling spiritual presences. This includes ancestors who abide with us, while remembering life around us, the unknowable that we should make an attempt to know in spite of the limits of our knowledge. Although Morrison has not defined divinity in this novel, we understand that imagination is needed to open up this vision. In presenting the convent women as living presences even after they have been murdered, the reader needs to imagine and accept something that is beyond the reader's comprehension. After the leap that they take at the end of the first chapter, the women move beyond the boundaries of representation into new possibilities of knowledge and imagination.

Divinity is also presented as a dynamic process of insight and not a singular truth. It combines an apprehension of the invisible or inexpressible in a process of reading that opens up in-between spaces where new forms of political subjectivity can be explored (Braidotti, 1994:7). After the women in the convent disappear mysteriously, Misner and Anna go to the convent and have a look at a door and a window. The questions that they avoid are "what would happen if you entered? What would be on the other side? What on earth would it be? What on earth?" (p. 305). This is a vision of otherworldly possibilities, which is reinforced in Save-Marie's funeral, "when he bowed his head and gazed at the coffin lid he saw the window in the garden, felt it beckon toward another place—neither life nor death—but there, just yonder, shaping thoughts

he did not know he had" (p. 307). Deacon also gets intimations of another life when he looks in Consolata's eyes before Steward shoots her. "He longed to know what he saw, but Steward, who saw nothing or everything, stopped them dead lest they know another realm" (p. 301). Anna Flood, Misner and Deacon represent insight, the possibility of new thoughts and realms to explore Morrison, by indicating the presence of spiritual meaning and mysteries opening of the doors of possibilities demonstrates the limits of human knowledge, vision and judgment.

Morrison's method of teaching readers is best expressed in Lone's words when she describes God's methods:

Playing blind was to avoid the language. God spoke in. He did not thunder instructions or whisper messages into your ears. Oh, No. He was a liberating god. A teacher who taught you how to learn, to see for yourself. His signs were clear, abundantly so, if you stopped stepping in vanity's sour juice and paid attention to his world (p. 273).

Morrison tries to do the same with her readers teaching them to see differently by granting insight to see the unseen signs of historical, psychological, spiritual, and economic forces, to enable readers to read the world and their positions in it in new ways

In the section called "Save-Marie" which is also an example of communal historiography, the townspeople try to make sense of the women? Within a week of the brutal massacre at the convent there are "two editions of the official story" (p. 296). The first version is that the nine men tried to talk to the convent women and urged them to mend their ways or leave, but violence somehow followed and the second version is five men Steward, Deacon, K.-D.

Morgan, Sergeant Person and Wisdom Poole went to the Convent with the intention of evicting the women, while four others—Harper, Menus Jury, Arnold and Jeff Fleetwood followed trying to restrain the other five. When the Convent women responded with violence, one of the five men killed the white woman in a state of fury. Again, greater violence followed (pp. 296-7). Patricia Best Cato offers three more unofficial versions. No single version can satisfactorily explain the assault on the convent in the complex weave of *Paradise*:

But this “exponentially multiplying versions” of the attack on the convent is a “postmodern narrative strategy”. The postmodern situation is that a “truth is being told, with ‘facts’ to back it up, but a teller constructs his/her own truth selectively using facts. In fact a teller-of a story or history-also constructs those very facts by giving a particular meaning to events. Facts do not speak for themselves in either form of narrative:” the tellers speak for them, making those fragments of the past into a discursive whole” (Lutcheon, 1989: 58) When the bodies of the slain women all mysteriously disappear no one feels the need to call the police into town, Lone concludes, “God had given Ruby a second chance” (p. 297).

Talking about the kind of insight that Morrison provides in her novel, it can be said that although the massacre leads to a loss of paradise, the fall this time has been a fortunate one. As Morrison shows that the fall has been from a narrow path of righteousness—from a burning desire to set up a home based on exclusion and othering to a realization of the need for an unsettling and demanding open house. She also transforms piety from an image of rigid adherence to the law to Consolata’s imagination of Piedade, the lost mother,

the singing woman consoling her on the ocean shore. But the postmodern skepticism towards closure implies that the paradisiacal experience is not a permanent one, but is temporary. It is a moment of wholeness in the midst of a fragmented everyday life.

Morrison identifies the last scene of the novel as Paradise. Here we have the setting of a geographically unspecified ocean beach, centred on Consolata's specter as she is comforted by the old, black woman Piedade, who restores the blissful childhood memory to Consolata and whose singing is generally held to bring solace to the ship wrecked survivors. The passage reads:

There is nothing to beat this solace which is what Piedade's song is about, although the words evoke memories neither one has ever had: of reaching age in the company of the other; of speech shared and divided bread smoking from the fire; the un-ambivalent bliss of going home to be at home—the ease of coming back to love begun.

When the ocean leaves sending rhythms of water ashore, Piedade looks to see what has come. Another ship, perhaps, but different, heading to port, crew and passengers, lost and saved, atremble, for they have been disconsolate for some time. Now will rest before shouldering the endless work they were created to do down here in Paradise (p. 318).

In contrast to the everlasting peace promised by Biblical Heaven, this Paradise offers limited rest period in which its newcomers may recuperate before they will once again have to struggle. Paradise as Morrison suggests may also be attained and experienced in every day terms as the convent women undergo the collective healing ritual in which they confront and transcend the trauma of their past. Preceded by a meal, the ritual rises almost

to sacramental proportions. Going through it women arrive at a state of spiritual and erotic ecstasy:

In those places where rain is light the thrill is almost erotic. But those sensations bow to the rapture of holy women dancing in hot sweet rain. They would have laughed, had the enchantment not been so deep... (p. 283)

In the novel, paradise is thus not a permanently peaceful, utopian moment of eternal sameness but a dynamic and complex process where insight informs action and responsibility. The act of reading *Paradise* teaches one to think of alternative ways of making a community, where individuals derive a sense of belonging and identity not by following a predetermined order, but by accepting diversity of living in the moment. Only then Paradise can emerge as a reality we can all share. As Rev. Misner wondered, "How can they hold it together", this hard won heaven defined only by the absence of the unsaved, unworthy and the strange? (p. 306).

Morrison's strategy all along has been to offer a historical perspective on the dispersed and integrative aspects of black identity and articulations. Her fictional works though deal with a variety of aspects of Black life in America has been alert to their presence in a white culture and having a painful history like slavery. The fractured and fragmentary racial history are reclaimed through a past that does not offer a 'mirror image' of things and experiences but invokes the past to reflect on the present. At the heart of Morrison's literary project is an attempt to deconstruct alterity/otherness in order to capture the contingent histories of individuals in a community that has been silenced and suppressed for years.

She undertakes a sustained interrogation of the Western/white discourse of otherness. In order to maintain authority over the Other in a racial situation, dominant discourse strives to delineate the Other as radically different from the self, yet at the same time it must maintain sufficient identity with the other to valorize control over it. The Other can only be reconstructed out of the 'archive of the self', yet the self also must articulate the Other as inescapably different. Literary otherness indeed is an articulation that variously deconstructs the self and Morrison in fact has tried to reconstruct that. One of the significant aspects of Morrison's works is not to engage in any kind of nostalgia in idealizing blackness. She is equally insightful of the failures of black characters and also the community in many occasions. If we see individual failures we also take note of individual courage and convictions. Thus Morrison's world is a balanced world, an authentic depiction of black situation.

Morrison frequently asserts that the past of the slaves in America is important to her. In reconstructing that past her narratives move through social, communal and individual trajectories in order to gain historical knowledge. Her narratives therefore manifest both the epistemological as well as ontological significance. Her narratives are not therefore a 'cognitive instrument' but ways of seeing, organizing and expressing the inexpressible. A community, whose members refer to themselves as "we", exists in a reflexive form which draws together a remembered past and a projected future, and these jointly serve to make sense of the present that is being lived through (Carr, 2002: 199). Thus like the individual, a community has a remembered birth. It is in this sense the concept of 'rememory' is important in Morrison's fictions. As if in the face of the

community's non-being it preserves itself by constructing and living out a coherent story. This story may actually be told by a few (like the author Morrison) but it must be addressed to all. This communal story like the story of an individual is constantly under revision and these revisions are attempts at knitting together the fragments without disputing their nature and formation. Thus the act of writing is an act of re-enactment.

Morrison says that the way Africanism functioned in the literary imagination is of supreme significance because it enables one to discover through a close examination literary "blackness" as the cause of literary "whiteness". Enforcing its invisibility would enable the black body to participate shadowlessly in the dominant cultural body. Morrison wants to explore the impact of racism on those who perpetuate it. She intends to examine the impact of the notions of racial hierarchy, racial exclusion, and racial vulnerability positing non-blacks who held, resisted, explored or altered those notions. Thus she considers the intellectual endeavour in this direction most important to see what racial ideology does to the mind and creative imagination.

As a novelist Morrison draws on many an influence from African, European and Biblical myths and sources. It is impossible to ignore her preoccupation with the process of labeling and naming as a functioning of the symbolic order. At their best Morrison's novels "mine rich, linguistic seams that are easily the equal to hitherto unspoken narratives, the deep secret thoughts and, sometimes, the terrible yearnings which have not been previously

articulated in novel form (Peach, 1995: 129). Her vividness of writing is reflective of an articulation that has successfully narrativised otherness.

### Notes

1. All references to Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* are from the London: Vintage edition, 1999, marked by page numbers.
2. All references to Morrison's *Sula* are from the London: Vintage edition, 1998, marked by page numbers.
3. All references to Morrison's *Song of Solomon* are from the London: Vintage edition, 1998, marked by page numbers.
4. All references to Morrison's *Tar Baby* are from the London: Picador edition, 1993 marked by page numbers.
5. All references to Morrison's *Beloved* are from the London: Vintage edition, 1997 marked by page numbers.
6. All references to Morrison's *Jazz* are from the London: Picador edition, 1993 marked by page numbers.
7. All references to Morrison's *Paradise* are from the New York: Plume edition, 1999 marked by page numbers.

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## Chapter VI

### Conclusion

Although “lives are lived and stories are told” (Carroll in Roberts (ed.), 2001: 251) the dichotomy between lives/stories are not exclusive of each other. This argument is true in the context of black narratives in which individual lives are lived under compelling historical conditions. The African-American literature is, therefore, not made up, but is made from the contingencies and experiences of life. Morrison reflects on this construct and says, “Winging one’s way through the vise and expulsion of history becomes possible in creative encounters with that history. Nothing, in those encounters, is safe, or should be. Safety is the foetus of power as well as protection from it, as the uses to which masks and myths are put in Afro-American culture remind us ” (Morrison in James and Sharpley-Whiting (ed.), 2000: 53). For an African-American writer like Morrison the creative engagement has been a backward look at the history and its reconstruction through masks and myths. However, it is not through the tropes of masks and myths but at the same time taking the actual situation and naming the things, people and events that are significant for a culture in search of itself. The reflexivity needs to centralize ‘race’ and ‘gender’ to be signifying. Therefore “124 was spiteful”, is important for the house Sethe lives in with its number as opposed to the “Sweet Home” from where she fled as a slave. The readers of Morrison’s work should be in search of an address to the ‘Home’ of black literature. This address is metaphorically a splendid presence in America

and is a personalized one: "personalized by its own activity, not the pasted on desire for personality" (*Ibid.*, 53).

The activity is, therefore, significant. However, no activity takes place without an objective. Morrison's activity as a novelist has been to understand the pain of African life and work towards its representation. Her novels are multi-voiced and distinctive in the sense that they are not self-anointing on the western model. In the game of valorizing a particular literature at the cost of another, Morrison feels her writerly mission is not to value the process but the product. For her, writing is also an exploration, and examination of Africanist presence in America that forms the very structure of work with the linguistic and cultural practices of the blacks. "A work does not get better because it is responsive to another culture; nor does it become automatically flawed because of that responsiveness" (*Ibid.*, 41-42).

Tradition becomes a loaded referent in Morrison's endeavour as a writer. As black tradition theorizes itself, it echoes and renames other theories as well. In this renaming the black writing aspires towards 'transparency'— writing which presents itself to the reader as unmediated and full in a transcription of reality without gaps. Morrison's effort has been to make the black tradition 'transparent'. As Gates Jr. maintains: "The black tradition is double-voiced. The trope of the Talking Book, of double voiced texts that talk to other texts, is the unifying metaphor within this book" (1988: xxv). Morrison's works are in this sense double-voiced; they talk to other texts, to other discourses, both western and non-western. Black tradition as a fractured text insists on a writer to go beyond the obvious and piece together the pieces from history to knit them

together to have a sense of fullness of experience. This very complex act puts Morrison constantly on guard that her writerly position remains free from the accusations of valorizing one literature over another or idealising one character over another. Morrison has dwelt on this problem deeply in her work *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*.

An analysis of her works show that she is surprisingly successful in maintaining her authorial neutrality although it is impossible to maintain racial neutrality in the face of violence in the name of race, gender and language. 'Racism' in America has been a preoccupation with Morrison. Black-White racial problem and the attendant social consequences seem to be most severe, given the history of slavery, segregation and poverty. As 'racism' is not a neutral category, Morrison's works attempt to deconstruct this category in order to underline the fact that blacks are at the receiving end. All the male characters in her works like Cholly Breedlove, Milkman Dead, Paul D. and Joe Trace have been victims of racism in different ways. Their personality, conduct and actions have been conditioned/shaped by racism. The pain of slavery is difficult to forget and the black man returns to it using 'rememory'. There are two aspects to it: one is a historical return to account for the present and the other is a mythic return in that the heroic characters of the past come alive. Both ways the past reinforces the understanding of the present.

The discourse of feminism reconstructs women's subjecthood. The forms of subjectivity of black women are different from the Eurocentric white feminism. 'Gender' becomes a crucial context for the development of black feminism. But within the black discourse 'gender' cannot be considered

independent of 'race'. In Morrison's works 'gender' is complimentary to 'race'. Black women as has been said are doubly marginalized. They are objects of both white and black sexism. However, black mother is a survivor as she is the key to the survival of the race. In the final pages of *Song of Solomon*, an aged, weary and dying Pilate gifts her nephew Milkman with a valuable gift – she gives him her voice and urges him to sing. His song "Oh Sugargirl don't leave me here" that he could not stop ... from coming" (p.336), connects him to his lineage. "Pilate, Circe, Mary Therése, Eva all these women are embodiments of women... who impart feminine spiritual wisdom (which) become the basis for survival of children and culture" (Holloway, 1987:152). Morrison's works also deal with the tragedies of the lives of women like Pecola, Sethe, Violet, Ruth and the women in the Convent. The tones of most of these novels are sombre and violence racial, sexual or domestic figure invariably in most of her works. In fact one controversial aspect of Morrison's novels has been her portrayal of the heterogeneous nature of African-American community and her exposure of the violence and sexual abuse suffered by black women and children at the hands of black men. But in Morrison's novels it is not an image conscious criticism with 'race' as the only determinant of identity subsuming sexual difference. She refuses to see the concepts of history and identity as fixed or essentialist, *Tar Baby* predicates the identity of the displaced person – Son, Jadine, Valerian, Margaret Sydney, Ondine. Son discovers that there is no easy retreat into ethnic absolutism or illusory notions of classless organic community. Throughout Morrison's work "identity is the product of psychic struggle. The self is perceived as perpetually in process" (Peach, 1995: 137).

As an empathetic writer she feels that the black women does not figure anywhere. As an individual engaged in creative writing she endeavours to create her with her story of humiliation, pain and desperation. She also inverts the representation of both black male and female characters. In doing so she interrogates not only the rationale of white racism but also deconstructs the black consciousness so as to make each character responsible for what they do beyond 'race' and 'gender'. This is certainly an unique achievement of Morrison as a creative writer.

Morrison's strength has been her narrative strategy. She employs different resources to complicate the narrative such as folklore, myths, religious texts, history and real experiences. Experience indeed becomes an important vector in the telling of the various characters' personal stories. This technique brings strong measure of authenticity to her narrative. Beyond this the narrative becomes fragmentary. This fragmentariness is contingent upon the black experience in that Morrison puts to contestation opposing categories like white/black, male/female, truth/falsehood, moral/immoral, history/historylessness etc. These categories are woven together like 'quilting' to give the desired effect. In order to make her works both effective and affective she in some of her works uses the techniques of parody, pastiche and elipses making case for representing the unrepresentable. Language in this endeavour becomes a major tool. She uses both the vernacular narrative and standard English to give her novel the status of the talking book. Very often the narrative swings between the allegorical and the real, the fantastic and the bizarre. It seems that Toni Morrison is not preoccupied with the sense of an ending. The

linear time and the classical notion of a text with a beginning, middle and end have not been used by Morrison. Her works are open ended. The author liminality bears upon the works as they are perpetually placed in between places and inter-subjective zones. Time becomes circular for the black people, as Morrison maintains are timeless – a belief expressed by Son in *Tar Baby*: “He thought he was rescuing her from Valerian, meaning them the aliens, the people who in a mere three hundred years has killed a world millions of years old” (p.271). The metaphoric allusion to the timelessness of black people is in a sense emancipatory as they need to move beyond the discursive struggles of race, gender and marginality. Morrison’s works thus underline a perspective where marginality need not be a perpetually socio-economic dispossession rather than a method of altering the system. This altering needs to go beyond the western practice of exclusion and appropriation. Therefore, rediscovering oneself becomes a quest for re-discovering one’s own culture, roots.

To Morrison, writing is a means of self-discovery. The quest of self-discovery is not driven by the endeavour of writing individual texts but engaging in the act of writing and rewriting the interminable text of the black people. Thus for her, the end is always, already the beginning.

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