Tribhuvan University

Female Consciousness in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*

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Approval Letter

This thesis entitled "Female Consciousness in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*", submitted to the Department of English, Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus by Mr. Tek Raj Trital, has been approved by undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 The Emergence and Development of African American Literature

African American literature concerns the pathetic state of the ex-slaves who left the South in the post-bellum period in the hope of gaining sheer freedom, and faced a dangerous threat in the North. Even the North was not the promised land for the blacks. Racial and cultural prejudices were greater in the free states of the North than the slave states of the South. Though they were free from the yoke of slavery, they were isolated from almost every institution like education, religion, and judiciary. The blacks encountered segregation and discrimination everywhere in the North. They were barred from most public places; they were denied the right to vote as in the South. The revolutionary economic growth expanded employment opportunities for thousands of workers in the cities, but they were not for the blacks yet. The blacks benefited little from the new demand for labor because the white workers often demanded the exclusion of the blacks from the job market. The social, political, economic, racial, and cultural oppression black people experienced in the American States shaped the repression of black; the pattern of discrimination, segregation and mass violence degraded and reduced the blacks to the deplorable condition of illiteracy, hopelessness, and poverty. The sum total of white cultural supremacy over the blacks was psychological disintegration, worthlessness of black self, and split of the black soul.

Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* makes a penetrating study of the instability and doubleness of the black consciousness in the post-bellum period:

> [T]he Negro is a sort of seventh son born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world --a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but lets him see himself through the revelation of

> the other world. One ever feels his two-ness: an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unrecognized strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (364-365)

Du Bois, throughout the book very minutely analyzes how the Negro self is torn apart. By quoting some of the stanzas and passages from some famous literateurs--Mrs. Browning, Tennyson, Swinburne, Morrison, Byron, Fitzgerald and so on--he tries to establish parity and complementarities between the blacks and the whites, who were considered to be separate and unequal until then. He then makes a subtle analysis of the effects of black dehumanization by the whites and discloses how the Negro self has been entangled in the maze of crises through which the way out is neither straight nor clear.

The portrayal of the socio-psychological state of the black consciousness that Du Bois has analyzed in this book *The Souls of Black Folk* is based on scientific objectivity and the socio-cultural reality in which the blacks find themselves. The blacks tend to judge the aesthetic beauty and other values through the perspective of the whites, and lose faith in what they possess. This practice of looking or judging one's self through the values and standards of the other's who always invariably deride and loathe the former is definitely a self-destructive act. Due to this erroneous act, the black self has torn apart; firstly, because it has failed to recognize its true self and secondly, because it is impossible to acquire the "self" of the others. The resulting impact is the danger of the self being annihilated and the 'self' is not disentangled from its limbo. Such a state of the black 'self' is the consequence of centuries-long enslavement and cultural oppression.

During the days of slavery, the Afro-Americans expected to see in one single divine event the end of all doubts and disappointments. They thought that slavery was indeed the prime cause of all mistreatments and villainies and the cause of all sorrows and hoped that the Emancipation would confer on them the promised land, where they could live with freedom and dignity. But the promised land for the blacks always became the slipping of the signifier over the continuum of the signified; they could never grasp it in their hand. In their songs, tears, and exhortations, the blacks implored divine power to bestow freedom on them. But even after the centuries of liberty, the blacks have not yet felt freedom in actuality.

However, their quest for freedom is still far away from their goal and resting place. Though it has at least enabled them to have some leisure for reflection and self-examination of practices and values. When we throw a glance at American literature, the black writers are seen to have made abundance use of their myths, songs, music, legends, folktales, and other African oral narratives to create their literary works. In the beginning, the literary production of black Americans was basically based on their folk tales, songs, legends, myths, etc. The methods of slave narratives and their materials also helped to begin the tradition of the Afro-American fiction. As outsiders and marginal people of American society and culture, many black American novelists began to explore the literary possibilities of their residual oral Afro- American folk forms and Western literary tradition. Talking about the origin of the Afro-American novel, Bell argues, "the Afro-American novel is the hybrid narrative whose distinctive literary tradition and vitality are derived basically from the sedimented indigenous roots of black American folklore and literary genres of the Western world" (xii).

The first generation of the Afro-American novelists did not only rely on black folklore for their literary creation and form but also drew heavily on abolitionist

literature, in particular, slave narratives, the Bible, and popular fiction. Whatever the literary sources might be in the production of their fiction, all of them dead with the pain that they underwent in race-prejudiced American society. Their union is reflected in numerous ways in the quest for dignity as the free people of African ancestry and the fulfillment of individual potential by merging a divided, alienated self into a truer and better unified self. Therefore, from the very beginning, the Afro-American novelists are concerned with the need to unearth the historical reality about their ancestors. Shedding light on the theme and structure of the Afro-American novel, Bell contends, "thematically and structurally, the tradition of the Afro-American novel is dominated by the struggle for freedom from all forms of oppressions and by the personal odyssey to realize the full potential of one's complex bicultural identity as an Afro-American" (341).

The black American writers have tried to establish autonomy and originality in their fiction. But the social and cultural change in American society has also influenced a lot in shaping the form and content of the Afro-American novel during its development.

The first black American novel *Clotel* by William Wells Brown was published before the Civil War. This novel is abolitionist in theme and tone. Brown, in the Preface of the novel exposes the instructional entrenchment of slavery in the United States. In the first section of the novel, he exposes how the black family is destructed. Most of the chapters of the novel begin with an epigraph in which the novelist shows that chattel slavery in America undermines the entire social condition of man. He also exposes the injustice and plight of female mulattoes as the major moral theme in this novel. Bell holds that "the structure of the novel is episodic, the style elevated, and the

subject matter rooted in the legends, myths, music, and the concrete eye-witness accounts of the fugitive slaves themselves" (40).

Another novelist of ante-bellum period, Frank J. Webb, does not directly attack slavery like Brown in his novel *The Garies and Their Friends*. His novel demonstrates the problems of growing up as a free black in Brotherly Love city and also the tragedy that overcomes an inter-racial couple who moves North. The fortune of two transplanted Southern families--the dark-skinned, lower middle class Ellises and their three children--are contrasted with the inter-racial Garies, a wealthy white Georgian, his mulatto wife and their two children. There are prejudices and discriminations in jobs, education, housing, public transportation, and public offices and all these culminate in terrorism by Irish immigrants. By the end of the novel, the Ellis family is crippled whereas the Garies, except for young Emily, are completely destroyed. The black characters in the novel strive to achieve power and prestige. They feel that their white contemporaries respected the power of money and property more than democratic and Christian principles. "To enhance the credibility of his characters and the theme of northern hypocrisy" argues Bell, "Webb carefully manipulates the moral and temporal distance between the characters themselves and between the reader and white characters" (45).

Harniet E. Wilson, the third black novelist of the ante-bellum period published her novel *Our Nig* (1859), which was based on her life as an indentured servant. After the death of her black father, the mulatto protagonist Frado is deserted by her white mother and indentured to a nineteenth century white Massachusetts family that abuses her life as a slave for several years. The main theme of this novel is that Northern blacks must struggle for liberation and literacy against the Southern principles of racist oppression and Christian hypocrisy practiced by many Northern whites. Bell

opines that "this novel is an intriguing synthesis of the sentimental novel and the slave narratives, of fact and fiction, of romance and autobiography" (47). The same critic further says, "the point of view, narrative structure and style also reveal the double vision characteristic of the American experience and the Afro-American novel" (48). Henry Louis Gates comments the novel in question saying that "even though *Our Nig* shares many of the elements of the plot of nineteenth-century women's fiction, It significantly inverts the plot structure of the 'white women's novel' to create the black women's novel" (qtd. in Bell 48). Wilson's novel is considered to be important to the tradition of the Afro-American novel and feminist literature and the illuminating power of her double vision. This novel is also important in the sense that it introduces the first interracial marriage into American fiction in which the wife is white and the husband black. She also develops the character of her mulatto protagonist, the couple's daughter, as an individual rather than a type. Frado's story is about the violation of human rights because of the hypocrisy of New England Christians and of the racial and class exploitation by some white middle-class women.

Martin Robinson Delany's novel *Blake* is in part the fictionalized adventure of the author who was a political activist. In characterization and theme, this novel is the most radical black novel of the nineteenth century. The novel is abolitionist in theme and it is intended for black rather than white audiences. The male protagonist is a young black Cuban revolutionary who is scornful of organized religion and preaches war against the tyranny of white rule. He puts his trust in black-reliance and advocates immigration to Cuba. Bell puts, "*Blake* is the story of . . . the daring 'pure Negro' organizer of an underground revolutionary force who plans to liberate blacks in the United States" (51).

By the end of the Civil War, the tradition of the Afro-American novel revealed a preoccupation with the struggle of black Americans for freedom from color and caste discrimination. The black American fiction writers affirmed their humanity in the process of defining and developing themselves as an ethnic community and individuals: "this search was symbolically expressed in their fiction in a mixed narrative form in which romantic elements often dominated social realism" (Bell 55). But the post-bellum Afro-American fiction was a move toward social realism. During this period, the black American fiction writers felt that their task, while writing fiction, was to clear the ground of the lore of white racism and sow the seeds for the more faithful portrayal of the complexities of black characters and culture.

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, a black novelist of the post-bellum period, published her novel *Iola Leroy*, which is based on "the melodramatic study of the color line" (Bell 58). This novel stresses the moral duty of mulattoes: to repress the sexual urge and to inspire others by their selfless dedication to social reform and service to their race. Bell argues that the novel "combining the sentimentality and the rhetoric of romance with the psychological and sociological truth of mimesis, it is the first Afro-American novel to treat the heroism of blacks during and after the Civil War" (58). The major characters in the novel reflect the novelist's deep involvement in the abolitionist temperament, and women's rights movement. *Iola Leroy*, as a transitional novel, depicts the role of blacks during the Civil War and the struggles for personal and group mobility during the Reconstruction era. It provides a panoramic view of the courage and commitment of mulattoes for freedom and justice especially motherhood. This novel is in the tradition of abolitionist novel and the narrative centers on the breakup of slave families.

One of the most controversial novelists of the Post-bellum period Sutton Elbert Griggs's *Imperium in Imperior* is, thematically, the most radical Afro-American novel of the period. This novel announced to the world that blacks would no longer tolerate the denial of their rightful voice in the government. This novel glorifies black characters and attacks the myth of white supremacy. "This novel is an ambitious step toward social realism," says Bell, "and it extends the limits of black romance and melodrama" (63).

Charles Waddell Chesnutt who is generally considered to be the first major Afro-American fiction writer, published short stories and three novels and turned in his fiction to the theme of color and caste. His novel *The Marrow of Tradition* is a realistic illustration of the blood and cultural ties that bind black and white Americans together. Bell contends. "Its moral purpose of unmasking white terrorism and lore, its ironic, more persuasive treatment of the complex influence of color and class on black characters enriches the tradition of the black American novel and moves it further on the road towards social realism" (69).

The black American novelists of the post-bellum period generally accepted their dual responsibility in fiction. one responsibility is to their race and the other to their craft. The early Afro-American novel was employed as a vehicle for counter-attacking white literary distortions of the black experience and the characters symbolize the survival strategies and values of Afro-American culture. As the romantic and realistic modes continued, it was left for future generations to create the social climate in which black novelists could explore the American color, class, and gender conflicts more honesty and powerfully.

The black American novelists before the First World War took the mode of realism, romance, and naturalism in their fiction. The novelists of this period are

closely related to the prevailing hope or despair of blacks who fully realized their racial and national identities in America. The novels of this period continued to explore the tragicomic vision and heroic struggle of black Americans. The depiction of the double consciousness of the protagonists reflects the major internal and external conflicts of black Americans during the turbulent years.

W. E. B. Du Bois, an American cultural critic, published five novels: *The Quest of the Silver Fleece, Dark Princess, The Ordeal of Mansart, Mansart Builds a School,* and *Worlds of Color*. Critiquing on his novels, Bell argues that "his novels reflect his critical view of American society and the stylistic flexibility of the beginning of naturalism in the Afro-American novel" (82). His novels follow the sociological tendencies of naturalism and indicate the ideological tensions and melodramatic endings.

Another novelist of this period, James Weldon Johnson's novel, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, follows the psychological tendency of naturalism. The novel emphasizes the prototypical significance of Du Bois's trope of double-consciousness. The Harlem Renaissance, which spanned during the 1920s, was the period of large-scale developments in the field of black literary production. During this period, many literary talents like Claudius McKay, Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Bill Robinson, Florence Mills, Josephine Baker, Louis Armstrong appeared in the field of black literature. It was, indeed, the heyday of Afro-American culture that highlighted black music, dance, and literature. The Afro-American writers of this period turned to African and Afro-American folklore for durable past. The nineteenth century image of Africa as a primitive land which was taken as a source of shame and hatred for many black Americans was changed into a symbol of pride. These writers, writing out of the debts of their group and personal

experience, spoke with a particular representation. The Harlem Renaissance novelists reconstructed the experience of blacks in America and highlighted those elements of the racial and national past that define their personal identity and social vision.

Toomer's *Cane*, a poetic novel, "is the quest of a modern black artist for socio-psychological wholeness and creative authority" (Bell 97). On the surface, this novel is a pastoral work contrasting the values of uninhibited, unlettered black folk with those of the educated black bourgeoisie. Drawing on the Afro-American tradition of music as a major structural device, Toomer in this novel presents the story of a metaphysical quest, a search for the truth about man, God, and America that takes its nameless poet-narrator on a journey of self-discovery. Bell argues, "the artistic fusion in *Cane* is of Christian myth and elements of the African and Afro-American experience, especially the tradition of black music" (101).

Arna Wendell Bontemps, a novelist of the Harlem Renaissance, makes use of history and black lore in a more traditional manner than Toomer. In his three novels, *God Sends Sunday, Black Thunder* and *Drums at Dusk*, "there is a shift from urban folklore to revolutionary history" (Bell 102). His latter two novels are the stories of revolution and the will to freedom. His second novel *Black Thunder* turns to the slave narratives and court records for the legendary efforts of blacks to liberate themselves and focuses on the pent-up will of oppressed people to be free. His last novel *Drums at Dusk* relies heavily on historical documents.

Jassie Fauset and Nella Larsen, two women novelists of the period, reject the romantic extremes of nationalism and assimilation in favor of cultural dualism. They see the substance of middle-class American values as the goal of black women and plead for the necessity of racial pride, family background, and formal education.

The folk romance of the Harlem Renaissance was the evolution in the tradition of the Afro-American novel as a form of pastoralism or ancestralism. The intention of the black American fiction writers during this period was to discover a usable past and to define and explore their culture. Bell, stressing on the purpose of the folk romance by black writers, views, "their purpose was to express the historical struggle of black Americans to achieve a dynamic synthesis of their individual and collective double-consciousness" (113). The basic thrust of the novelists of this period was to reconcile the urban present and future with the rural past. The black American novelists tried to destroy the myth of white supremacy and to resurrect the beauty of blackness in order to develop self pride and to win respect for cultural pluralism and equality in the American society.

The concept of Negritude was developed in the years between 1934 to 1948 by Leopold Sedar Senghor and Aime Cesaire, who were the admirers of Claude McKay. They founded a journal with Leon Damas which attempted to give authenticity to a unique African personality. Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) is perhaps the most important single figure in contemporary black arts and letters for the theoretical development of Negritude after Senghor and Cesaire. The Negritude writers refused to continue their deference to the white gods of European culture and sought to destroy the myth of white supremacy. They also tried "to resurrect the beauty of blackness in order to foster self-pride and to win respect for cultural pluralism and human equality" (Bell 115).

In Claudius McKay's novel *There is Confusion* and Zora Neal Hurston's *Home to Harlem*, the quest is not only for the resolution of the psychological and social dilemma of the modern black American but also for an affirmation of the human spirit over the forces that threatened its integrity and development. The literary reaction of

Hurston and other novelists of that time was a more intense personal search for modern forms of ancestralism and the continuity of the folk tradition. Hurston's *There Eyes were Watching God* is the best romance which has beautifully used Southern folk material and emphasized on the complex relation between black men and women. This novel and her anthropological work *Mules and Men* provide the platform and the framework for black feminist writing in the 1980s. The work of Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and other young writers like Amiri Baraka are prefigured in them. Charles Johnson points out, "Hurston treated the popular subject thoroughly by using the most interesting Harlem Renaissance ideas- the importance of the common folk to explore the "New Negro" female on subtler levels than her contemporaries did" (12).

The novels of Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen focus on the everyday life of ordinary Church-going black folk. Bell highlights:

> Their characters are less idealized, their settings less exotic, and their plot less melodramatic. Their novels strive for the truth of a particular environment and the social rituals of common folk rather than for the truth of the world at large and the life style of street people and migrants. (128)

During the decline of the Harlem Renaissance, satiric realism emerged in the scene of the Afro-American novel. Several black American writers of this period turned to comedy and satire for models to depict the ordinary experience of black people. Focusing on these genres of the period, Bell asserts, "Whereas comedy, as in Hughes's *Tambourines to Glory*, is basically a humorous representation of the everyday life of low-brow characters for its own sake, satire, as in Cullen's *One Way to heaven,* has a clear moral aim" (137). The black American experience has

historically been a mixture of the comic and the tragic by the black satirists, such as Rudolph Fisher, George Schuyler, and wallace Thurman who generally combined the conventions of both forms in their fiction. These satirists, who wrote at the close of the Harlem Renaissance, displayed the common follies and vices and assumed the role of moralists revealing the truth beneath the mask of surface reality. The Harlem Renaissance closed with Schuyler's wonderful science fiction novel *Black No More* and Thurman's *The Blacker the Berry* and with novels of other black satirists.

In the wake of the depression we can see a creative school of black young writers– Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Frank Yerby and Willard Motley– rising in the Afro-American fiction. Wright's novel *Native Son* left a large artistic impression on black literature. Bone says, "Urban nihilism is the real subject of *Native Son*. Wright confronts us with a segment of the nation that believes in nothing. His hero . . . can affirm no values other than his own acts of violence . . . his nihilism threatens not only the tranquility but the very foundations of the republic" (484). This novel, which is taken as one of the two or three best known novels by black American writers, influenced many other writers and produced imitators such as James Baldwin, Chester Himes, and John A. William.

The Afro-American novel in the decade of the forties from Wright's *Native Son* to William Gardner Smith's *Anger at Innocence* reveals both continuity and change in the tradition of the Afro-American fiction. The theme of color and class conflict remains dominant in the decade. The change that was introduced in the Afro-American novel of the forties, as Bell puts, "was Wright's creation of Bigger Thomas as the prototypical urban black American, obsessed by a fear and hatred of white people and driven to violence in rebellion against and in affirmation of his dehumanization" (186). Another change that occurred in the post-World War Second

period was an increase in the inclusion of white protagonists and other major characters who were also white. As the tradition of the Afro-American novel continued into the fifties, the novelists of the period moved beyond naturalism to the re-discovery of myth, legend, and ritual as well as modern cultural codes and literary constructs.

In the decade from 1952 to 1962 two parallel movements in the tradition of the Afro-American novel emerged. On the one hand there was a movement away from naturalism and non-racial themes and on the other hand there was a movement toward the re-discovery and re-vitalization of myth, legend, and ritual that aimed to express the double-consciousness, socialized ambivalence, and double vision of the modern black experience. The non-racial theme and white protagonists continued to appear in the novels of the fifties. The most dramatic break with naturalism occurred in the re-discovery of myth, legend, and ritual in the novels of Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin. Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* are the best examples of the continuity of traditional narrative forms in an appropriate modern black context. Although both of them were influenced by Wright, they chose a different and distinctive approach to the novel. Both were aware of the literary possibilities of their folk tradition as a result of their own personal experiences and the study of literature. In Bell's words, "Both novelists reveal their own socialized ambivalence and double vision in their themes, plots, characterization, and point of view" (234).

Ellison's *Invisible Man*, which traces a nameless black youth's journey, is a monumental book of extraordinary intensity and richness. Bell opines that "this novel portrays the historical quest of the black Americans for identity in a society whose traditions simultaneously inspire and inhibit their impulse toward freedom and self-

realization" (203). Focusing on this novel, O' Mellay argues, "the novel is built not only upon the foundation of black lore but also of black literature. It is a benchmark black novel that seems aware of the entire tradition of Afro-American letters. In it one overhears the black and white tricksters of slave narrative locked in combat" (243). Ellison employs the black American as the metaphor of America and the modern human condition. This modern odyssey of a nameless black American is Ellison's legacy to the tradition of the Afro-American novel.

James Baldwin, in his novels, focuses on a single dimension of black culture. His emphasis is not political but spiritual and sexual, and the terrifying possibilities of love. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* is Baldwin's first and best novel, and tells the story of a Harlem youth called John Grimes who undergoes a religious experience on his fourteenth birthday. Kinnamon argues that "this novel is a carefully constructed novel about the black Church that has penetrating characterization, and intensely poetic style and fully realized psychological and social themes. It gives religion its due, but finally implies religious skepticism" (543).

The development of the Black Arts movement in the contemporary Afro-American fiction is the result of the concept of Black Power that expresses the determination of black people to redefine and liberate themselves. This concept depends on the fundamental principle "that group solidarity is necessary before a group can operate effectively from a bargaining position of strength in a pluralistic society" (Bell 236). Both the concepts of the black arts and black power relate broadly to the Afro-American's desire for self-determination and nationhood: "one is concerned with the relationship between art and politics; and other with the art of politics" (Bell 239).

The Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s fired the women's rights movements. In the late sixties, many Afro-Americans were encouraged by historical circumstances to continue resisting Eurocentric models and interpretations of manhood and womanhood. They turned instead to non-Western or non-white communities and Afro-centric models to discovery or create possibilities for autonomous selves and communities. Black women of this time were primarily concerned with power, autonomy, creativity, manhood and womanhood in the black family and community. Helen Washington argues that "black women are searching for a specific language, specific symbols, specific image with which to record their lives . . . for purposes of liberation, black women writers will first insist on their own name, their own space" (Bell 243).

The Afro-American novel from 1962 to 1983 has been characterized by continuity and change. During this period, black novelists sought structures and styles appropriate to the imaginative reconstruction of their sense of the double-consciousness of black people. The black American fiction writers like John O. Killens, John A. William, and Alice Walker tried to displace personal ambivalence continuing the tradition of realism, whereas Toni Morrison explored poetic realism. The novels of the former group of writers took the mode of critical realism or social realism.

Killens is the contemporary force of critical realism. His *Youngblood* and *The Cotillion* are the best examples of critical realism. His other novels, *And Then We Heard the Thunder* and *Sippi* reveal an increasing use of the black oral tradition and focus on the themes of black awareness and unity. John A. William's novels, in the tradition of the new realism, reveal a growing radical consciousness and preoccupation with form. Bell argues. "using the conventional techniques, Killens is

less concerned in his novels with the forces breaking up our society than with those leading toward a new nation, a new social order" (252).

Alice Walker, an important black woman novelist of the modern time, has published four novels. Explaining the thematic concerns in her novels, Walker in an interview says,

> I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties, and the triumphs of black women . . . . For me, black women are the most fascinating creations in the world. Next to them, I place the old people– male and female – who persist in their beauty in spite of everything. (Bell 259).

Similarly, Bell comments, "In her fiction as in her life she has an openness to mystery, animism, which she believes is both the one thing that is deeper than any politics, race, or geographical locations" (260). Her themes are generally revolutionary and confront the contemporary experience of black Americans, particularly those of black American women, focusing on their cultural, social, and political history. Her early novel *Meridian*, as Janet Gray argues, "chronicles, in episodic form, the life of Meridian, a young black woman from the South who rejects the simple options available to black women, such as marriage, children, and religion in favor of, at first, the civil rights movement and education in the north" (917).

The Color Purple, which is the best among Walker's novels won, the Pulitzer Prize and is concerned with the politics of sex and self than with the politics of class and race. It is in the form of epistles and attacks on male supremacy, especially the violent abuse of black women by black men. According to Bell, "like Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the style of *The Color Purple* is grounded in black folk speech, music, and religion; and its theme is a contemporary rewriting of Janie

Crawford's dreams of what a black woman ought to be and do" (263). Although rooted in the particularity of the folk experience of some Southern black women, the awakening of the protagonist, Celie's consciousness to love, independence, and sisterhood is more romantic than realistic. Walker has created the liberated woman as her protagonist in this novel.

In her novels, Alice Walker provides a contemporary black feminist's vision of the lives of black Southerners. She focuses on the need to change a patriarchal economic system that breeds alienation, exploitation, and the destruction of people's lives, especially black women's. Her characters are uneducated, ignoble young working-class types who lack the inner sovereignty and embedded strength of educated, heroic women. Her male characters are traditional black male chauvinists of both the lower and middle class who vent their hatred of exploitation by whites on their families, especially the women. Consequently, the struggle by her women characters to reject traditional roles of motherhood, nurturing, and dependence heralds the emergence of a new generation of radical black heroines in search of selfhood, security, and power.

Toni Morrison also seems to be working in line with Alice Walker, but with a difference. Morrison is considered to be one of the truly outstanding and influential black writers of the age. Her novels deal with the painful past of the black ancestors with a distinct mode of presentation and imagination. Morrison, in her novels, is seen to have beautifully synthesized the multi-faceted aspects of racism, sexism, and cultural marginalization in a distinctly different way. Bell emphasizes,

> In theme and style Toni Morrison's novels are a fine example of vintage wine in new bottles. Her exploration of the impact of sexism and racism on the lives of black women in her Gothic fables provides a

> more complex and, perhaps, controversial vision of the personalities and bonding of fiercely alive modern black women. (276)

The forthcoming chapter will now focus on Morison's fictional art and her aesthetic viewpoint in detail.

1.2 A Survey of Toni Morrison's Fiction

Toni Morrison, an internationally-acclaimed fiction writer who became the first black American to win the Nobel Prize for literature, was born in a mixed and sometimes hostile neighborhood of Lorain, Ohi. From her parents and grandparents Morrison received a legacy of resistance to oppression and exploitation as well as an appreciation of African American folklore and cultural practices. Morrison recalls the African American cultural rituals in her childhood and adolescence: the black music, black folklore, ghost stories, dreams, signs, and visitations that are so vividly evoked in her fiction. The influence of these presences in her early life informs Morrison's commitment to inscribing the characteristic modes of black cultural expression in her fiction. In addition to the tropes and forms of African American cultural expression, the geography of her childhood years figures centrally in her work. Morrison says, "I would rely heavily and almost totally on my own recollections and, in so doing was able to imagine and to recreate cultural linkage that were identified for me by Africans who had a more familiar, and overt recognition of them" (Davis 414).

Literature was an important presence in Morrison's childhood and youth. She read widely in a variety of literary traditions, the classic Russian novelists, Flaubert, and Jane Austen among her favorites. However, she was not exposed to the work of previous generations of black women writers until her adulthood. Her delayed introduction to the work of those earlier writers does not mean that she writes outside that tradition. Rather, the connections between her work and theirs confirms her

notion that African American women writers represent their characters and landscapes in certain specific, identifiable ways. But Morrison, as a writer, has managed to invent her own mode of literacy representation. "Her themes are often those expected of naturalist fiction- the burden of history, the determining social effects of race, gender or class- but they are also the great themes of lyrical modernism: love, death, betrayal, and the burden of the individual's responsibility for his or her own fate" (Gates and Appiah ix). Morrison's fiction, therefore, holds a mirror to the internal conflicts and external oddities faced by the black people. In her fiction, Morrison, "draws from rich store of black oral tradition as well as from her own imaginative angle of vision to describe the possibilities for both annihilation and transcendence within black experience" (Rubenstein 126). Morrison's fiction also dramatizes both psychological and cultural dimensions of boundary through a number of recurring motifs and images. These images have a communal dimension, implying the divisions and the splits within individuals that mirror their cultural situation. These divisions and splits within the individuals and the constriction of the growth of the self is implicitly linked to oppressive cultural circumstances.

Traditionally, black communities have functioned as structure that sustain and preserve the individual, particularly in difficult conditions. Rubenstein argues, "Morrison's narratives address the nature and forms of this connection between self and other, individual and group, that may ambiguously shape people's values and impede their capacity to express them within the community's norms" (127). Morrison, in her fiction, juxtaposes the appearances and perceptions-the way people regard themselves and the way they are regarded. This juxtaposition permeates every relationship and suggests the intangible boundaries that arise between individuals as well as groups.

Morrison delves deep into the black past and tries to establish its connection to the present with a view to paying the way to the future. Heaton views, "The dominant aspects of her works are an exhaustive, mythical exploration of place and the search for the nexus of past and present" (661). She evokes place and culture of an utterly different kind, that is, America's black underclass. She is to the black milieu of Lorain what Joyce and Faulkner are to Dublin and Oxford because Morrison in her novels focuses on the Southern ethics that her characters inherited from their parents and grandparents. Her stories translate a multiplicity of places, often superficially showy, into a rich cultural matrix. But "the times of her forebears and herself in Ohio are a duration, not a chronology. She thus makes the legendary altogether new, and discovers in colloquial habit and naming the altogether legendary." (Heaton 661). Legend includes not only the tales of her black folk, but also the myths of world literature. She has excluded the whites from her fiction but her focus on personality and character is indisputably universal.

Morrison's fiction demonstrates a central interest in the issues of boundary, attachment, and separation. "Morrison's characters experience themselves," says Rubenstein, "as wounded or imprisoned, not only by virtue of their gender but also by racial and economic divisions within American culture" (126). The boundaries that confined black people of both genders are not only the prejudices and restrictions that prevent their entry into the mainstream but also the psychological ones, they internalize as they develop in a social structure that historically has excluded them. Therefore, the context of Morrison and her work is clearly linked to her race and gender. Her novels juxtapose and combine joy and pain, laughter and tear, and love and death.

Morrison's novels have a complex relationship to history. During her life there have been significant changes in civil rights for black people in American and wider public recognition of African American women writers. All her novels are in a sense historical novels in which characters, as Barbara Rigney has said, "are both subjects of and subjects to history, events in "real time", that succession of antagonistic movements that include slavery, reconstruction, depression and war" (Peach 2). Critiquing on Morrison's novels the same critic has it that on the surface "they may appear to be quasi documentaries that bear historical witness but they posit history as narrative, sometimes deliberately distorted or half-remembered, as fantasy or even as brutal nightmare" (Peach 2).

In her novels, Valerie Smith opines, "Morrison boldly reveals the silences and undermines the presuppisitions, assumption, hierarchies, and opposition upon which western hegemonic discourse depends and which legitimizes the oppression of people of color, women, and the poor" (364). Her novels simultaneously invoke the lyrical and the historical, the supernatural and ideological elements of black cultural heritage. She simultaneously seeks to show the place of enchantment for people like the ones among whom she grew up, even as she explores the complex social circumstances within which they live out their lives.

Morrison also gives the mythic, familial, and cultural meanings of American South in each of her novels. Indeed, the South has served as a backdrop in her novels. The South hovers in the night dreams and daydreams of Morrison's characters in their private and clarifying conversations. In all of her novels, central characters are the Southern migrants themselves or their daughters and sons. Pauline and Cholly Breedlove in the *Bluest Eye*, Eva Peace in *Sula*, Macon Dead in *Song of Solomon,* Sydney, Ondline, and Son in *Tar Baby*, Sethe in *Beloved*- all these characters come

from the South. The North where they live and where the action of her novels takes place is, for most of her characters, a recently arrived-at place. It is the place they have come to after leaving the place they call home and that home for most of them was the South. Most of the characters' formative growth, in her novels, occurs in the South. Morrison does more than unearth the meaning of the South in the cultural and psychological lives of the black people. Deborah Barnes argues the Morrison "uses fictive narratives to transfigure the old South-the bedrock of Black dehumanization, degradation, and sorrow-into an archetypal Black homeland, a cultural womb that lays a mother's claim to history's orphaned, defamed, and disclaimed African children" (qtd. in Denard iv). Morrison establishes the South as a site for both disjunction and reunion with the self.

All of Morrison's works are unified by a passion for black history and issues of black identity. Her characters are eccentric and maimed as a result of their experience as black men and women in an environment that rigidly defines their humanity by economic, sexual and cultural myths. But still, they persevere in their efforts to cope with or triumph over the obstacles in their path to self-esteem, freedom, and wholeness.

In broad terms, Morrison's fiction as a whole spans the whole of the Afro-American culture from the beginning to the present. Her novels are based on history and combinely explore the history of American slavery, emancipation, migration, and integration. The subsequent consequences of racial division in American history are portrayed in her fiction. For the setting, her novels clearly express time and place which in part define characters' place in the society. The characters in her novels have some relationship with their ancestors, Afro-Americans who had experiences of hardships, difficulties, and travails during slavery in the New World. Differing from

the American fictional tradition, Morrison's evolution of a new trend "magic realism," which she vehemently protests, has succeeded in obliterating the boundary between the fact and the fiction (Peach 3). History, which unearths the reality of the oppression of the whites over the black and their myths, which give early history of Afro-American race, combine in Morrison's fiction to draw a reliable picture of Afro-American community and its culture.

Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, published in 1970, is set in the black community of a small town of Ohi. This novel chronicles the experience of the Breedlove family, who have traveled from the South to the Midwest, confronting a loss of purpose and identity in their lives. The story basically centers on an eleven-year-old black girl, Pecola Breedlove, who fantasizes that she will be given blue eyes like Shirely Temple, the adored white child of films. She, instead, goes mad because of the combined weight of her feeling of ugliness as it is confirmed by her family, neighbors, and schoolmates, and the experience of being raped by her father. The novel, which is mostly narrated by her friend Claudia MacTeer, illustrates the destructive potential of a culture over-invested in rigid conceptions of beauty, propriety, and morality. The novel can be said to have addressed the psychological and political implications of black people's commitment to the whites' standard of beauty and order that is unattainable. Morrison' in this novel, contrasts the experience and values of two black families, the poor yet proud MacTeers and the poor, but ashamed Breedloves, with those of the Shirley Temple of the white Fisher family. This novel is structured into chapters in order to "sharpen the contrast between the ideal experience of the white world and the actual experience of the blacks" (Bell 273).

Sula (1974), Morrison's second novel, focuses on the friendship of two black women and moves into retrospection over a period of forty-six years. Deborah E. McDowell describes *Sula* as “a work that questions the existence and construction of a unitary self defined in opposition to other” (Smith 367). Indeed, Morrison interrogates the ground upon which individual and collective identities are constructed. The novel begins with a brief account of the Bottom, the community within which the novel is set. The narrator establishes that the novel is set during the moment in the life of the town when it was animated by black people's music, stories, dance, and rituals. *Sula* is situated in a place associated with change and loss. The narrator describes how the Bottom received its name. A white farmer promises his slave freedom and piece of bottomland in exchange for his doing some very difficult chores. But when the time comes for the farmer to fulfill his promise, he tricks the slave into believing that by bottomland he meant the land in the hills. That land may be high up from a human perspective, but from the God's perspective it is the bottom of heaven.

As a tale that white people tell about black people and blacks tell about themselves, the story comments upon the history of oppression and the strategies of resistance that inflect the condition under which African Americans have lived. It suggests the ways in which blacks have made meaning from practices that seek to disenfranchise and oppress them. In addition to emphasizing the place of irony in African American cultural practices, the account of the bottom introduces the issue of the instability of meaning that is central to the text.

The novel focuses on the friendship of two black women, Sula Peace and Nel Wright. By the end of the novel, Sula and Nel seem like the contrasting and irreconcilable parts of a single self. It explores equally an extraordinary consciousness

and the gap between generations. "Morison's language throughout *Sula*," comments Bell, "is charged with the beauty, wonder, and pain of the poetry of the black experience" (271). Morrison makes Sula an ambitious character. Sula represents a liberated modern black woman who rejects marriage and other black moral values.

Song of Solomon, Morrison's third novel published in 1977, tells the story of Milkman Dead's unwitting search for identity. Smith views, "Milkman appears to be destined for a life of self-alienation and isolation because of his commitment to the materialism and the linear conception of time that are part of the legacy from his father, Macon Dead" (368). During his mythic journey what he discovers is the buried humanity of the family's past and he comes to understand his place in an emotional and familial community and to appreciate the value of conceiving time as a cyclical process: “Milkman is the inheritor of a complex family conflict that is also a conflict of black identity” (368).

"Morrison's depiction of the Dead family," opines Smith, "demonstrates the incompatibility of received assumptions with the texture and demands of life in black American communities" (368). Milkman's development rests on his understanding the ways in which life is bound up with the experience of others and his establishing an intimate connection with the land for which his father died. These accomplishments attend his greater achievement: learning to complete, understand and sing a song that contains the history of his family. The song, which draws on African and African American stories of blacks who escaped slavery by flying back to Africa, explains Milkman's lifelong fascination with flight. Milkman assumes his identity when he learns the whole song and allows himself to accept his personal and familial past. Through Milkman's story Morrison discards "Western individualistic notions of selfhood in favor of more complex, fluid constructions of identity" (368).

The design of *Tar Baby* (1981), so allegorical and symbolic, probably overextends the mythic note of *Song of Solomon*. This novel is cast in the form of an allegory. It begins on a French island in the Carribbean, at the home of a wealthy Philadelphian named Valerian Street. Valerian and his wife Margaret, who are whites, have black servants, including a couple named Sydney and Ondine, whose light-skinned niece; Jadine is a beauty and model. Jadine has little relations at all to her black heritage. The edgy tranquility of the house is suddenly disrupted by the appearance there of a young runaway black man. Son, who suggests primitive black past. The remainder of the novel, in which Jadine and Son attempt to come together but can not, explores and cultural divisions created by white society between black men and women. The union and divorce of the two key figures embody a black man's search for an authentic, natural past and a black woman's estrangement from it.

Craig H. Werner argues that in *Tar Baby* "Morrison explores the variety of ways in which characters understand and use myths in their lives. Two characters in particular. Son and Jadine are represented in terms of the tar baby story." The same critic further says that for Morrison, "the myth of safety, by which characters seek to protect themselves from the complexities of human interaction, becomes a trap from which they cannot escape" (Smith 370). The novel exposes the nature of the safe havens people create for each other and the consequences of willed ignorance. It explores the variant meanings and constructions of blackness.

Beloved (1987), for which Morrison was awarded the 1988 Pulitzer Prize of fiction, is based on the true story of Margaret Garner, a slave woman who killed her own child rather than let her be taken into slavery. It unearths the historical reality of a horrifying situation during the time of slavery, the emancipation and its aftermath. *Beloved*, set in Cincinnati, Ohio, eight years after the end of the Civil War, when a

great deal of violence was rampant upon blacks, deals with how blacks were preyed on and victimized by the whites during the period of slavery and its aftermath. The novel abruptly opens at 124 Bluestone Road, which is constantly haunted by the ghost of Sethe's baby girl, Beloved, whom she had killed to prevent her from being taken back to slavery by a vicious plantation manager who had come to Cincinnati. The novel explores the workings and the power of memory; to represent the inescapability of the past. Morrison avoids linear plot development for a multidirectional narrative in which the past breaks in unexpectedly to disrupt the movement forward in time. The narrative thread is so intricately woven that the characters' psyche travels back and forth between the past and the present. The characters have been so profoundly affected by the experience of slavery that time cannot separate them from its horrors and havoc wrought upon them during the antebellum period. Morrison, using magic realism allows the child's ghost to cross back into her mother's world in the form of a living and troubled young woman. Heaton argues, "the details Morrison provides in this novel about plantation existence for slaves, chain gang existence for black convicts, and the terrors of the runaway's passage to freedom is potently authentic" (662).

Morrison's *Jazz*, which was published in 1992, deals with the improvisation of migration events and their consequences in black communities during the 1920s. In this novel. Morrison offers literary portraitures of Southern black women during three significant historical moments of American history– American slavery, Reconstruction, and the Great Migration. Her last novel *Paraside* (1998) explores the cultural, religious and racial clashes that exist in American society.

1.3 Toni Morrison's Fictional World and Her Aesthetics

Black American fiction writers are preoccupied with the need to discover and explore the historical truth about Africans and their descendant black. American culture. Although the experiences vary from time to time, the main thrust of their writing is to connect the black American experience with its own African root. The cultural codes of the Afro-Americans remain the most influential in shaping the literary sensibility in black. American today. African folklore, residues of African oral forms, which were transmitted from generation to generation, their myths, legends, songs, language, and the experience itself are the roots from which Afro-American literature stems. The discrepancy between the whites and the blacks the blacks' endurance of the oppression, Southern plantation, black oration for early American fiction and migration, northern ghettoes where they had to live, depression, wars are the additional matters that help the emergence of black literature. The blues and the jazz assist the musical basis for its new shaping.

Black writers feel that it is their job to recover the annihilated black history. In this adventurous job of unearthing their history, a single person can do a tiny part. So black writers are collectively bounded to make an adventure for recording, reestablishing, and reshaping their tumultuous history. Thus, the project of African American writers is the same; their ways of fulfilling the project may sometimes differ. The concept of ancestors, as an abiding, interested, benevolent, guiding presence, grants them shelter and energy to complete the job (Davis 415). The relation between the ancestors and the black Americans is very strong. It deepens as much as one goes further to unearth the ancestry; it never loses the relationship.

Morrison can not remain untouched with this living presence of ancestors. A bit different from the views of Baldwin and Ellison, like many other black novelists,

Morrison believes that artistry derives from ancestry. For Morrison, ancestors are a sort of timeless people whose emotional and intellectual intelligence is considerable. Morrison insists that ancestors play an essential role in individual works in the Afro-American literary canon. She asserts: "It seems to me interesting to evaluate these Black literature on what the writer does with the presence of the ancestors .... And these ancestors are not just parents ... whose relationship to the characters are benevolent, instructive and protective, and they provide a certain kind of wisdom" (Awakward 176). She makes an effort to explore the imagination as well as the problem of the black people, a more contemporary and perhaps more recent pursuit among the black fiction writers.

Writing, for Morrison, is a way where all sensibilities are engaged. Similar to a dancing exercise, writing needs revision and proof reading. Both, being balanced, fluid and growing have the same relation to space and time. All experiences are vital to sort out the past and to correct it to the present. "I start with an idea, and then I find characters who can manifest aspects of the idea-children, adults, men or women," says Morrison (McKay 400). They can act in accordance with the authoritative view to the aim. They are in perfect control under the power of the writer who has created them (McKay 400).

The language in Morrison's fiction is distinctive, effortless, suggestive, and provocative. And at the same time, it is the language black people love playing with. Morrison herself says, "the function of the language is like a preacher's: to make you stand up out of your seat, and to make you lose yourself and hear yourself" (LeClair 373). Life and experience are expressed in clinics through the medium of language in reliable and convincing way. She treats even the old ideas and old situations with the language and the readers can speak and read them.

Writing in the twentieth century, Morrison's purpose is still a corrective one: the history of slavery must not be forgotten. Her purpose is to fill in the blanks that the traditional slave narratives have left. She chronicles the psychological damage slavery inflicted on blacks. However, she concentrates on an elaboration of female plain, the history that is inscribed in the mental and physical scars that each woman in her narrative bears.

Morrison, in her fiction, creates communities and neighborhoods with an extraordinary sense of place and time from where her writing comes. Places with parenthetical addresses and time with cyclical seasons are given in terms of details rather than of the country of the state. For example, in her novel *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison creates the community where Pecola, Claudia, and the rest live in. Similarly, in *Sula*, Morrison describes the place where Sula lives. These places are set in time; there are addresses including house numbers. Years are mentioned, seasons are mentioned and details are given. Sometimes she is interested in making the town, the community, the neighborhood, as strong as a character. The mood and feeling of the community is strongly stressed on her novels (Stepto 378). The most extraordinary thing about any group of community is a fantastic variety of people, things, and behaviors; still there is a cohesiveness among themselves. As long as one does not exist in a community in her fiction, he/she never lives at his/her home. They have a strong sense of fraternal relationship; each depends on and takes care of others. They find that they are connected by a strong thread that can never be broken. Morrison sometimes gets lost in the characters and seems much more interested in the beauty of the place and its environment. Morrison herself confesses, "I sometimes lose interest in the characters and get much more interested in the trees and animals" (LeClair 370).

Morrison is sometimes accused of having written the stories of eccentric people in her novels but she defends by saving that what is applicable to the ordinary can be found in them. She argues that she is personally enchanted with people who are extraordinary. According to LeClair, "Morrison writes on the tragic mode in which there is some catharsis and revelation; there is a whole lot of space between," and her inclination is in the tragic direction (374). The characters in her novels are adventurous in search of their original names connected with their ancestors. Once they get the names, they will have power. Morrison takes some Biblical and pre-Christian names for her characters and which shows the depth of the impact of Christianity on black people (375).

Morrison herself confesses that she writes what is recently called village literature, i.e. the fiction that is really for the village or for the tribe. Her fiction is peasant literature for the black people, which is necessary and legitimate but which also allows her to get in touch with all sorts of people. She says she thinks long and carefully about what her novels ought to do. According to her, they should clarify the roles that have become obscured; they ought to identify those things in the past that are useful and those things that are not; and they ought to give nourishment (LeClair 370). But most of her novels are set in urban areas. So there is always a confrontation between old and new values, old values of the tribe and new urban values (371). With the modern concept of urbanization, the black people have to leave their own places for work. Morrison simplifies the complex stories with complex people. The old-fashioned stories are posited in narrative form in a completely new and simple way. She says that she tells the readers a very simple story about complicated people (371). Morrison asserts:

> I had to divide my books into chapters because I had to do something in order for people to recognize and understand what I was doing. But they do not necessarily have to have that form, I am not experimental, I am simply trying to recreate something out of an old art form in my books–the something that defines what makes a book "black" ... I stand with the reader, hold his hand, and tell him a very simple story about complicated people. (LeClair 371)

Though Morrison is not a Southerner by birth, she pays a high esteem to the South. Most of her characters are from the South and they inherit the Southern ethics. The Southern culture, music, language habits that her parents and grandparents brought with them are very familiar to her. The Southerners are the guardians and protectors who show the blacks their moral route. After the migration to urban areas, black people, though they bring Southern ethnics and black culture with them, find it difficult to adjust themselves with urban neighborhoods. So there is a tension between their past life and present life. The South always haunts them as ancestors do the black writers. The women characters in her fiction mostly feel the tension; they remember domestic support-friends, exchange of food and so on. Male characters, on the other hand, feel it more urgent to conquer and make their way out on the street.

Black people, as characters, are not treated seriously in American literature since its inception. As slaves and ex-slaves, they are not portrayed in the mainstream American fiction. There is no interaction between the whites and the blacks in American literature because the whites conceive that they are morally and culturally superior to blacks. Masking is a common theme in black American literature. Morrison is not exceptional to the black writing which consists of a tension between what comes from outside and what comes from inside. There is always a

conglomeration of different interesting traditions. "There is joy and pain; there is success and there is failure. There is always a tension that is the struggle for integrity," says McKay (408).

Black American writers have played vital roles but mainstream discourse ignores them in creating American stories. The mainstream fiction from its beginning systematically distorts and erases the African American presence in their contribution to the American literary tradition. Anglo-American master narratives fail to acknowledge the African Americans' investment, which is not less than that of Anglo-Americans in building American institutions. They place the black people even out of circumference as virutal aliens even though African roots were planted during the sixteenth century in the New World. It is the while people's misconception that black America is a burden to America's global prosperity. Master narratives are designed to establish and to maintain a hegemonic hierarchy that legitimizes its own power to define who is American and who is not.

Morrison in her critical work *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* critiques the mainstream cannon and claims that black writers and the black characters are the relative means by which the white texts demonstrate to be human and superior. Imagination is possible in the presence of black characters and black contents. At the same time, taking African American discourse as inferior or submissive tends to impoverish cultural interpretation of realty. She also questions the validity and vulnerability of a set of assumptions conventionally accepted and taken for granted among literary historians and critics. In order to preserve the white male views, genius, and power, they presuppose that knowledge consists of traditional canonical American literature-free, uninformed, and unshaped by the four-hundred-year-old presence of African Americans in the United States. Africanist presence, a

constitutive part for the body politic in 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 American literature emanate from a particular "Americanness" that is separate from the unaccountable to this presence. The literary scholars believe that the American literature is without relationship to and removed from the overwhelming presence of back people in the United States. In her own words, "[t]he 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" (5).

The very modes of literary writing in the United States are the immediate responses to Africanist presence. The white American body politic is coherent in the presence of unsettled and unsettling black population. Though the Africanist presence is purposefully restricted from the American national literature, it has significantly influenced the writing in America. This Africanist presence, the presence of black culture, has become the center for "policing matters of class, sexual license, repression, formations, and exercises of power, and meditations on ethics and accountability" (Morrison 7).

The presence of Africanist persona in the literary imagination is of paramount interest because it may be possible to find out, through a close analysis of literary "blackness," the nature and the cause of literary "whiteness" (9). The literary whiteness is impossible in the absence of blackness. Therefore, the blackness has played a significant role to shape the literary sensibility of the whites. But whites do not see the black characters already available in the works of white writers. They overlook the contents that are guided by racial and cultural matters.

Morrison's critical work *Playing in the Dark* brings black culture and Africanist persona in the center by clarifying that whiteness is impossible and immute in the absence of blacks. She examines the work of Willa Cather. Poe, Hawthorne, Melville and Hemingway and the dark presence within their writing. Her aim is to reinterpret and redefine the alienated and hidden Afro-American presence in American mainstream discourse. Morrison's effort is to demonstrate that America's master narratives have historically displaced black cultural reality-past and present-by ignoring, misrepresenting or misunderstanding the African American they seek to describe. Both fictive and non-fictive canonical discourses do not recognize African Americans as equally human or capable. American's master narratives are unlikely even now to see and record the African Americans objectively. These hegemonic narratives are devised to deny blacks who are culturally others, the very privileges and powers. Mainstream accounts of African Americans focus their narrative sights on racist oppression. Even when the mainstream's narratives feature black people, the characters are rarely constructed apart from their subordinate relationship to Anglo-Americans. For Morrison, "In order to place black people at the conceptual center of stories about the American past they must be depicted as subjects, that is, as generative and creative change-agents, rather than as objects, or victims of hegemonic agency and control, as master narratives have traditionally portrayed them" (Barnes 20).

The black population in America has given the feeling of security for white people. To the artists the transformation of internal conflicts to conventionally bound and violently silenced black bodies has become a major theme in American literature. The origin of it can be found in the notion of hierarchy of race. So black slavery has

enriched the country's creative possibilities. Morrison described how the new themes become possible in the New World:

> [T]hese concerns-autonomy, authority, newness and difference, absolute power-not only become the major themes and presumptions of American literature, but that each one is made possible by, shaped by, activated by a complex awareness and employment of a constituted Africanism. It was this Africanism, deployed as rawness and savagery, the provided the staging ground and arena for the elaboration of the quintessential American identity." (*Playing* 44)

Yet, the white American writers use too many vocabularies to disguise the matter that enables them to be distinctive. The Africanist presence, explicitly or implicitly, informs in compelling and inescapable ways the texture of American literature. It is a dark and abiding presence, therefore the literary imagination is both a visible and an invisible mediating force. Morrison emphasizes that though American texts are not about Africanist presences or characters or narrative or idiom, the shadow hovers in implication, in sign, in line of demarcation (47). In fact, race functions as a metaphor necessary to the construction of Americanness. This Africanist presence is something that the United States cannot do without. "[W]hiteness, alone, is mute, meaningless, unfathomable, pointless, frozen, veiled, curtained, dreaded, senseless, implacable" (59). Blackness is the center, which guides intellectual scholarship in America.

Summing up Morrison's aesthetics, what is revealed is that the literary imagination of the United States has been without the responses to African people and their descendants who have inhabited this country for about four centuries. American literary tradition follows the tradition of Europe in which Africanism has become as a

disabling virus within literary discourse. Black people signified nothing in the imagination of the white American writers. They made no appearance in the white discourse. The reason of this absence of black people was of the marginal impact that blacks had on the lives to characters in the work and the creative imagination of the white author.

Morrison, in her narratives, places the black past, which was erased and distorted in the mainstream fictions, at the center of the American chronicle. She negates those mainstream histories and fictions that marginalize, trivialize or exclude the African Americans from their accounts. Her novels subvert the cultural authorities of white canonical discourses. "Her novels can be read as fictive cultural documentaries that recall and record America's past using African American historiography ... preserved orally in personal and communal recollections, rememories, fables, folktales, music, gossip, humor, and lore" (Barnes 20). Morrison's novels offer a full range of African American realities that define authentic Afrocentric interpretations of humanity, culture and history.

Morrison, in *Tar Baby*, portrays how the cultural supremacy and intra-cultural hostilities among the blacks has resulted in the characters' disintegration and the loss of their individual selves and identities from the entire black community and culture. In this novel, Jadine Childs and Son Green regard themselves as cultural orphans, outsiders, neither defined nor limited by the boundaries of black American life. Both try to locate themselves within an ethnic tradition that is multiple and varied; each is forced to confront the meaning of the past and the possibilities of the future; each considers the values of a complex heritage that simultaneously co-exist with and opposes the dominant power structure.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Modality

2.1 Emergence of Feminist Movement

Feminist movement can be divided into three broad categories, or waves: defiance of patriarchy, Celebration of female self, and recognition of equal rights. Movements in the first category endeavored to show that the roles and behaviors believed to be acceptable and appropriate for women had also entrapped them and limited their opportunities. The women's movement was not a unified force with a single ideology or goal. Some activists fought for equal job opportunities; others focused on changing relations between men and women. They questioned traditional gender roles and tried to change society's view that a woman's worth was based on her physical attractiveness.

An important issue for many women was control over their bodies. Abortion was illegal in almost all states, rapes were rarely prosecuted, and domestic violence was widely accepted as a private matter. Some radical activists believed that English society would have to be entirely remade. They rejected what they called patriarchal values, or men's values, such as competition, aggressiveness, and selfishness. They believed that women were naturally more nurturing and compassionate and advocated a society based on women's values. Millions of women who never attended a public demonstration used feminist rhetoric and legal victories won by women activists to create greater equality in their marriages and personal lives and to expand their economic and political opportunities.

The struggle for women's rights began in the 18th century during a period of intense intellectual activity known as the Age of Enlightenment. During the Enlightenment, political philosophers in Europe began to question traditional ideas that based the rights of citizens on their wealth and social status. Instead, leaders of

the Enlightenment maintained that all inequalities that existed among citizens result of an inadequate education system and an imperfect social environment. Enlightenment philosophers argued that improved education and more egalitarian social structures could correct these inequalities. Such radical ideas about equality and the rights of citizens helped inspire both the American Revolution in 1776 and the French Revolution in 1789. However, the ideas of the Enlightenment initially had little impact on the legal and political status of women.

Most Enlightenment thinkers had little to say about the position women held in society, and many of their followers assumed that the concepts of liberty, equality, and political representation applied only to men. For example, one of the most influential writers from this period, French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau, claimed that women were sentimental and frivolous. Rousseau argued that women were naturally suited to be subordinate companions of mien.

In response to Rousseau and others who belittled the role of women in society, English writer Mary Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). In this book, Wollstonecraft argued that, like men, women were naturally rational but their inferior education often taught them to be silly and emotional. Education, she believed, should cultivate the natural reasoning capacity in girls. She also claimed that the best marriages were marriages of equals, in which husband and wife were friends as well as legal partners. Wollstonecraft argued that equality in marriage would only conic about with equality of education. In the early 19th century, the vast majority of married women throughout Europe and the United States still had no legal identity apart from their husbands. This legal status—known as *coverture—prohibited* a married woman from being a party in a lawsuit, sitting on a jury, holding property in her own name, or writing a will. In custody disputes, courts routinely

granted permanent custody of children to the father. The great pioneer figure of British feminism was the writer Mary Wollstonecraft, her chief work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is one of the major feminist documents of the 18th century.

During the 1830s and '40s British suffragism received notable aid and encouragement from the Chartists, who fought unsuccessfully for a sweeping program of human rights. In subsequent years the woman-suffrage issue was kept before the British public by a succession of liberal legislators, among them the statesmen and social philosophers John Stuart Mill, John Bright, and Richard Cobden. Mill helped to found in 1865 the first British woman-suffrage association. All efforts to secure the franchise for women were effectively opposed. Prominent among the antifeminists of the period were the reigning monarch Queen Victoria and the British Prime ministers William Gladstone and Benjamin Disraeli.

The British woman-suffrage movement acquired additional impetus when in 1897 various feminist groups merged to form the National Union of Woman Suffrage Societies. A section of the membership soon decided that its policies were timid and indecisive, and in 1903 the dissident and more militant faction, led by feminist Emmeline Pankhurst, established the Women's Social and Political Union. Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928), British suffrage leader, who led the movement to win the vote for women in Britain. Born Emmeline Goulden in Manchester, she studied (1873-77) at the I3cole Normale in Paris. In 1879 she married Richard Marsden Pankhurst, a barrister, who worked with her to promote equality for women. In 1889 she was one of the founders of the Women's Franchise League, which five years later succeeded in promoting passage of a law granting women the right to vote in local elections. In 1903 she founded the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in Manchester.

The group came to prominence when Pankhurst moved its headquarters to

London, held public meetings, and led protest marches to the House of Commons. Becoming increasingly militant, she was arrested and sentenced to prison terms several times between 1908 and 1913. During her periods in jail she used the hunger strike as a means of protest. The beginnings of World War f in 1914 prompted Pankhurst and the WSPU to cease their campaign and devote themselves to war work. Pankhurst died in London on June 14, 1928, a few weeks after British women were granted full voting rights.

Pankhurst's suffragists soon won a reputation for boldness and militancy. Tactics employed by the organization included boycotting, bombing, window breaking, picketing, and harassment of antisuffragist legislators. In 1913 one dedicated suffragist publicized her cause by deliberately hurling herself to death under the hooves of horses racing in the derby at Epsom Downs. Because of their forceful and provocative behavior, the suffragists were often handled roughly by the police and repeatedly jailed and fined. During World War I the British suffragists ceased agitation and made notable contributions to many aspects of the war effort, favorably influencing public opinion. In 1918 Parliament enfranchised all women householders, householders' wives, and Women University graduates over 30 years of age. Parliament lowered the voting age of women to 21 in 1928, giving them complete political equality with men. In 1929 British trade union leader Margaret G. Bondfield became the first woman cabinet member in British history. A major breakthrough occurred in 1979 when Margaret Thatcher became the first woman prime minister of the United Kingdom; she served three successive terms before leaving office in 1990. With the widespread extension of the franchise to women, the women's rights movement broadened its scope during the 20th century.

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), British novelist, essayist, and critic, who helped create the modern novel. Her writing often explores the concepts of time, memory, and people's inner consciousness, and is remarkable for its humanity and depth of perception. Woolf contends *in A Room of One 's Own* (1929),"the history of man's opposition to women's emancipation is more interesting than the history of emancipation itself (Adams 823). Woolf published many works of nonfiction, including two extended essays exploring the roles of women in history and society: *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938).

The contemporary women's movement began in the late 1960s. Many women who participated in the movement had also worked in earlier movements, where they had often been relegated to menial tasks, such as photocopying and answering phones. Some began to protest these roles and to question the traditional roles for women in U.S. society. During the 1950s and early 1960s, society pressured women to marry, have children, and then remain at home to raise those children. The prevailing view was that women's abilities in the workplace and in public life were limited by their physical fragility and by their roles as mothers. Women were expected to stay at home and to depend on men to provide their financial support. As a result women were routinely excluded from high status or well-paying jobs. They had only gained the vote in 1920 and had little voice in the nation's political and economic life. In 1963 *The Feminine Mystique,* by Betty Friedan, was published and became a best-seller. This book spoke to many women's dissatisfactions with the role that society expected of them. The book encouraged women to work for change. One of the movement's first successes was the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which, among other things, outlawed discrimination based on gender. However, government officials rarely enforced the antigender discrimination provision. As a result of this official indifference, in 1966 a

small group of women led by Friedan formed the National Organization for Women (NOW) to demand that the government prosecute cases of job discrimination against women.

A pioneering work in this category was *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) by Betty Friedan, which challenged several long-established American attitudes, especially the notion that women could find fulfillment only as wives and mothers. Friedan's phrase *feminine mystique* refers to the idealization of the traditional female role of wife and mother; Friedan contended that this idealization constituted a conspiracy to prevent women from competing with men. The second category of feminist writing focused on direct social action, such as protesting against male--dominated institutions and forming advocacy groups to represent and promote women's interests politically and socially. Two representative works of activist feminist writing, both published in 1970, are *Sexual Politics* by Kate Millett and *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* by Shulamith Firestone. The third and most recent trend in feminist writing focuses less on criticisms of society and more on the establishment of full, flourishing women's cultures, where such subjects ass literature, politics, and art are reassessed from a specifically female viewpoint or ideological framework. This movement has been termed cultural feminism; one of its early and influential spokespersons was Robin Morgan, whose essays were collected in *Going Too Far* (1978).

By the mid-1970s, feminists had achieved some change. In 1971 Congress banned discrimination against girls and women in schools. In 1973 feminist lawyers won a Supreme Court decision, *Roe v. Wade,* in which the justices ruled that women had the constitutional right to choose to have an abortion. Among the rights sought currently by feminist groups throughout the world are the right to serve on juries, the

right to retain earnings and property after marriage, the right to retain citizenship after marriage to an alien, and the right to equal pay and equal job opportunity.

2.2 Theoretical Development of Feminism

Just after Marxism prevailed through Europe, scholars celebrating female self sat together to theorize those new but often old--implicit and disguised in Victorian novels, mostly by Jane Austen, Emily Bronte and George Eliot--women tendencies. The significance became quite clear and symbolic suggesting a silver line around dark cloud. A torrent of feminist theories came to front to assimilate resistance against closure, center seeking tendency and this blurring visage of structure that the white-male-elites fermented. Female consciousness that was once a far cry became the primary concerns to unlid the vast mass of female experiences, not excluding those works by male writers almost endowed with clerical and evangelical beliefs on females of the spices.

The nexus in between Marxist-Feminist theories emerge to question the previous theories that elide racialized, gendered, and class processes, and underwrite hierarchies with their focus on great power politics and security, reading narrowly, naturalizes these hierarchies and thus reproduces the status quo. Such attentiveness leads to different kinds of questions in the literature and constitutes an effort to generate an alternative critique of power hierarchies and relations. These theories argue that mainstream feminist theories premised on an understanding of power that privileges hierarchy, and a predominantly male-centric worldview, mystifies the ways in which states and the social system are anchored in social relations. Second, although critical feminist theories interrogate many of the assumptions of conventional feminism, they nevertheless fail to address the woes and eerie of females of English midlands and country with some exceptions, to systematically of race,

class and gender in the production of power in recent feminist theories challenge the gendered assumptions of both mainstream and critical feminist theories, it generally neglects to address the relationship of gender to neo-imperialism and race. We begin with an exploration of power in mainstream feminism, followed by discussions of critical and feminist approaches to power.

Power has been the foundation of feminist theories' scholarship, particularly realist scholarship, whose treatment of power is exemplified in the classical realism of feminist politics. The novels by women writers of nineteenth century import male ideology in the guise of somebody's wife, mother, mistresses, and patrons. M.A.R. Habib in *A History of Literary Criticism* contends:

> In her seminal text women's oppression today(1980),Michele Barrett outlines some of the central problems facing any attempt to forge a coalition of Marxist and feminist perspective flow can a Marxist analyses, conceived on the basis of "a primary contradiction between labor and capital," be reconciled with a feminist approach, which must begin with the relations of gender? In general terms, suggests Barrett, the object of Marxist feminism must be to "identify the operation of gender relations" as they relate to the "process of production and reproduction understood by historical materialism." Marxist feminism must "explore the relations between the organization of sexuality, domestic production ... and historical changes in the mode of production and systems of appropriation and exploitation." Such an approach will stress the relations between capitalism and the oppression of women. (Habib 693)

M.A.R. Habib's emphasis is on Barrett's focus on three concepts that have been central to the Marxist feminist dialogue: "patriarchy, reproduction, and ideology," she begins by nothing the "enormous problems inhering in the concept of patriarchy"(693). Habib further sites Radical feminists such as Kate Millett who have used this concept as "an over-arching category of male dominance" (693). He writes:

> Millett sees patriarchy as a system of domination that is analytically independent of the capitalist or any other mode of production; its apparent mediation by class is merely tangential. Shulamith Firestone goes even further and aims to ground the analysis of class in the "biological division of the sexes," her aim being "to substitute sex for class as the prime motor in a materialist account of history" (WT, 11). Barrett objects to these uses of patriarchy as a "universal and trans-historical category of male dominance," grounded in biological determinants. (Habib 694)

Such uses are reactionary (treating social arrangements as somehow naturally given) and regressive since they overlook one of the early triumphs of feminist analysis, namely, a distinction between sex as a biological category and gender as a social one. Other feminist have formulated a materialist analysis of patriarchy, such as Christine Delphy. Habib quotes of Delphy, "however, stressing social rather than biological relations" (694). Habib argues that Delphy's assessment argues that the "material basis of women's oppression lies not in capitalist but in patriarchal relations of production" (Habib 694). He further quotes Barrett:

> [...] most recent theorists, says Barrett, attempt to represent contemporary capitalism as patriarchy. Such an endeavor not only poses patriarchy as a universal and transhistorical mode, but also

> reveals confusion between two meanings of patriarchy, between "patriarchy as the rule of the father and patriarchy as the domination of women by men (WT, 17). This is the case, according to Barrett, with Annette Kuhn's theory that the crucial site of women's oppression is the family, which has a relative autonomy from capitalist relations. Kuhn argues that patriarchy unites psychic and property relations. (694)

Another concept used by recent theorists to relate women's oppression to the organization of production in society is "reproduction." Habib assimilates Barrett's contribution on the theorization of feminism, "Interest in this concept derives from Engel's formulation that the "determining factor in history is ...the production and reproduction of immediate life" (694). Habib says that those versions of feminist theories give themselves to the primary formulation of Marx and Engels who is referring here both to "the production of the means of subsistence" and "the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species" (694).

Also important is Louis Althusser's treatment of social production in his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." Again, part of the problem with this concept is its range of definition: women's role in biological reproduction can have only a highly refracted relationship with their role in economic and social production. In fact, the fundamental problem faced by Marxist feminism is "to combine an analysis of social reproduction with an analysis of patriarchal human reproduction." Habib writes:

> The third important but problematic notion in Marxist feminism is that of ideology. As Barrett points out, feminists have insisted that Marxism take account of the sexual division of labor and the familiar

> ideology that sustain women's suppression; this insistence has coincided with a "revolution" in the Marxist theory of ideology. This shift in Marxist theory was largely occasioned by Louis Althusser's rejection of ideology "as a distortion or manipulation of reality by the ruling class," as well as of the vulgar Marxist view that "ideology is simply a mechanical reflection(in ideas) of a determining economic base." While Althusser's accepts the basic Marxist premise that the economic substructure determines the ideological superstructure "in the last instance," he nonetheless sees ideology as having a "relative autonomy," and stresses its experimental character as "the imaginary relationship of individual's to their real conditions of existence. (694)

Habib is enthusiastic over Barrett's theorization of Marxist feminist impulses: "In the conclusion to her book, Barrett revisits the three essential components of Marxist feminist analysis with which she began arguments concerning the "reproduction" thesis -that capital supports the reproduction of labor power through domestic labor should be historicized" (696). And, while the concept of patriarchy should not be jettisoned, its use might be restricted to context where male domination is "expressed through the power of the father over women." Habib further elaborates Barrett's conclusion, "as for ideology, our recognition of its role in gender construction most move to deeper analysis of subjectivity and identity, effectively continuing the work of earlier feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir" and that "in general, Barrett stresses that there is no "programmatic answer" to the question of whether women's liberation can be achieved under capitalism." For which Habib further quotes Barrett as

> She does affirm, however, that such liberation would require: first a redivision of labor and the responsibilities of childcare; second, the

> extrication of women from dependence on a male wage or capital; lastly, the ideology of gender would need to be, transformed. Non of these changes, she observes, is compatible with capitalism as it exists at present. Hence, although the women's movement needs to be autonomously organized, it can profitably collude with socialism on the basis if overlapping political objectives. These might include the need to improve women's wages and working conditions, and to abolish the use of female labor as a means of keeping general wages down (WT, 257-58). Since women's oppression is "entrenched in the structure of capitalism," the struggle for women's liberation and the struggle for socialism cannot be disengaged. (Habib 697)

Habib's assimilation of Berrett highlights the need for revisiting feminist literary tradition on the yoke of Marxism.

Despite a bourgeois upbringing and early philosophical interests (or perhaps, finally, because of these), Simone de Beauvoir produced perhaps the greatest classic of post world war second feminism. Hazard Adams, in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, introduces Beauvoir and her most acclaimed critical work *The Second Sex*: "when the second sex first appeared in 1949 Simone de Beauvoir was attacked by those who felt her account of women's lives was too heavily based on her personal experience and her middle class values . . . was also criticized for her historical inaccuracy and anthropological suppositions" (993). Adams Writes: "Indeed, it was encyclopedic in its coverage, offering historical, biological and psychological perspectives on women, a consideration of the prevailing patriarchal myths about them, and all account of female love and sexuality in virtually all of its form"(Adams 993). Simone de Beauvoir contends in *The Second Sex*:

> It is to be seen from these examples that each separate writer reflects the great collective myths: we have seen women as flesh; the flesh of the male is produced in the mother's body and recreated in the embraces of the woman in love. Thus woman is related to nature, she incarnates it: vale of blood, open rose[the rose of Jericho], siren, the curve of a hill, she represents to man the fertile soil, the shape, the material beauty and the soul of the world. She can hold the keys to poetry; she can be mediatrix between this world and beyond: grace or oracle ... praying mantis, an ogress. In any case she appears as the privileged other, through whom the subject fulfills himself: one of the measures of man, his counterbalance, his salvation, his adventure, his happiness. (Adams 994)

The myth of women plays a considerable part in literature; but what is its importance in daily life? To what extent does it affect the customs and conducts of individuals? In replying to this question it will be necessary to state precisely the relations this myth bears to reality. There are different kinds of myths. "This one, the myth of woman, sublimating an immutable aspect of the human condition—namely, the "division" of humanity into two classes of individuals-is a static myth," *The Second Sex* holds, "It projects into the realm of platonic ideas as reality that is directly experienced or is conceptualized on a basis of experience; in place of fact, value, and significance . . . timeless, unchangeable, and necessary" (Adams 996).

Feminist approaches have taken to task feminist scholarship for rendering gender and women invisible. Although there are important distinctions among the various feminists, who address what may be broadly termed "post positivist" feminist contributions to the debate on power, focusing specifically on the arguments advanced

by feminist theories. On of the key contribution of feminist thought has been to draw attention to the necessity for a "deconstruction of gender-biased knowledge claims." And the "reconstruction of gender sensitivity theory Spike Peterson has pointed out that this has followed feminist theories to unsettle the gendered foundations of mainstream thought and to introduce gender into the analysis of key construct in feminist theories such as the state and sovereignty. Feminist theories also show how and to what effect mainstream and also non feminist critical theory has ignored gender hierarchy. While this problem is more explicitly associated with the masculine assumptions of realists and neo liberal feminist theories. It is also something that eludes those theorizing from a Marxist or Gramscian perspective.

Feminist point out that theories of structural violence pay little attention to "male violence against women" and gendered power and domination. Postmodern feminist point out the marginalization of feminist voices in between the positivist and post positivist, where feminists are represented "with out giving one among us voices, interpretations, writings, words, brushes, and canvases. In the feminist view, it is imperative that give women voice and take seriously the feminist critic of the gendered sources of organization of labor among other concerns. While feminists have contributed much to envisioning theories, they seem more hesitant to confront directly the exclusion of country women in feminist theories. Catharine R. Stimpson acknowledges sexual politics (1970) by Kate Millet for the book's publication "symbolized the beginning of feminist criticism" (251) in *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literacy Studies*. The wave of this theoretical uprising became "like air and language" (251). The awakening shaft has introduced "women and representation of women and gender everywhere" (251). Stimpson holds:

> [. . .] mark of otherness is one's inability to shape one' psychological, social and cultural identity, Beauvoir analyses men's depictions of women in biology, psychoanalysis, history and literature ... read Hamlet and Shakespearean criticism to find a new Gertrude, a queen both lustful and 'intelligent, penetrating ... gifted.' A decade later, Katharine Rogers had traced the representation of misogyny from Genesis and the classical Greeks to Faulkner. (252)

Stimpson's observation penetrates through the narratives of women's existential otherness, "the discrepancy between a woman's decorous appearance and flaring subjectivity-in a Jane Eyes, for example was to become a theme for feminist criticism" (252). In an answer to the question why female self remained a mystery, Stimpson puts, "indeed, a women's movement, whatever it's specific name and historical context ... women have always been educated in the general language, roles, and customs of their culture." For her history of educating women itself is itself flawed set of female marginalization. "My female ancestors, in the damp peasant cottages and wet fields of Wales and the English midlands, learned how to speaks, stitch, plant, cook, give births, and pray" (254). Stimpson doesn't fail to examine the cause of late feminist uprising which is because: "Same converts were centers of learning for women" (254). Stimpson rejoices in feminist criticism which is "oppositional" in terms of politics, psychology and epistemology. Pointing out to the male minds who often access feminist critical uprising as "so esoteric and yet so vulgar", and as "the grim agenda of a bunch of man-hating women's libbers," Stimpson argues, "there are no values out there that human beings have not created ... our conversation will examine our cultural, intellectual, and literacy traditions in order to ground and then regrind the values" (258-259).

Stimpson compares the wave of female consciousness throughout history with "Piagetion Child" or a "fashionable creature putting on one set of cloths for breakfast in 1970, another for lunch in 1980, another for dinner in 1990" (259). However, Stimpson agrees with three activities that constitute feminist criticism: the defiance of difference; the celebration of difference; and, the recognition of difference.

Chapter Three: Textual Analysis

3.1 Celebration of Female Self in the Naming of Characters

Toni Morrison has named her third novel in the same way that Macon Dead named his children in the novel. By letting his finger drop on a random word in the Bible, the first Macon Dead named a daughter Pilate, and, continuing the tradition, the second Macon Dead called his daughters Magdalene and First Corinthians. Anticipating the discovery of its meaning contributes to the sustaining of tension in the novel: the stereotyping of African American females by the African American males in particular, and the so-called 'second sex's effort to affirm their identity in general. Milkman's struggle to understand his own family history in *Song of Solomon* has led to the unfolding of historical discrimination bestowed upon African American women and their struggle to overcome this situation.

The apparent randomness, however, in the biblical naming of Macon Dead's children plays itself out meaningfully in their identities. Pilate ("pilot") can fly "without even leaving the ground" (340); Magdalene sells herself into a kind of prostitution and is redeemed by the grace of anger; Hagar is the abandoned wife of a latter day Abraham. So it is with the biblical reference in the novel's title, which focuses the reader's attention both within the book and beyond it. The Song of Songs which is Solomon's is surely the most explicitly sexual book in the biblical canon, written in dialogue, which describes the experience of sexual pleasure. This description certainly fits Milkman's experience of correcting sexual exchange with Sweet, who, like the biblical lover, is "black and comely":

> She put salve on his face. He washed her hair. She sprinkled talcum on his feet. He straddled her behind and massaged her back. She put witch hazel on his swollen back. He made up the bed. She gave him gumbo

> to eat. He washed the dishes. She washed his clothes and hung them out to dry. He scoured her tub. She ironed his shirts and pants. He gave her fifty dollars. She kissed his mouth. He touched her face. She said please come back. He said I'll see you tonight. (288-89)

The structure of Hagar's funeral (320-323), with its resounding amen— “and she was loved"--suggests another "love poem written in dialogue." The novel's perspectivist point of view defines the relationship between Macon and Ruth as an ironic inversion of the dialogic structure of loving exchange. In another context, Deborah E. McDowell has suggested that dialogic representation is a particularly useful device for the African-American woman writer because it implicates a broad spectrum of viable possibilities within the community, and thus avoids limited, boundary-defined representation of a "beau ideal" of blackness (60). Such representation, demanded historically in order to provide "good" literary models of African-American life, necessarily sets in motion a series of binary oppositions--good/bad, black/white, male/female--as well as traditional hierarchies that relegate the black woman in particular to the inferior position.

Dialogic structures, however, resist definitive judgment and insist upon "the reader's participation in the creation of meaning in the text" (McDowell 69): they lend weight and validity to a variety of voices, and force readers to revise their interpretations as they read. Morrison's developing such structures in a novel whose central protagonist is a black male, whose identity is very much "in process" and shaped by the dialogues in which he participates, makes the novel "roomier," so to speak, creates places of positive identification for female readers as well. In a similar way, Morrison herself has described as essential to her fictional project the creation of a racially identified "place" or community within which the black woman defines her

own space as separate or "different from, say, my brother's or my father's or my sons"' (Stepto 477). We might, then, be content to say that the title of the novel points us not only to the "song of Solomon" we finally hear at the end of the book, but also to the themes of sexual and familial love, even as it complicates those themes through a dialogic aesthetic. The biblical reference in the novel's title identifies other issues that define the book's form, as well as the political implications of that form for the African-American writer. As a reader of the novel, I find the connection between its title and a traditional model of pastoral particularly suggestive. The biblical *Song of Solomon* has presented problems of interpretation for nervous commentators uncertain about the placement of such explicitly sexual material within the canon of revealed truth.

3.2 The Pastoral Female World

The details in the initial description of Shalimar which begin Chapter 11 place us immediately in a traditional pastoral female world isolated from the "real" world, by a set of values as convincing as a fence:

> The women's hands were empty. No pocketbook, no change purse, no wallet, no keys, no small paper bag, no comb, no handkerchief. They carried nothing. Milkman had never in his life seen a woman on the street without a purse slung over her shoulder, pressed under her arm, or dangling from her clenched fingers. These women walked as if they were going somewhere, but they carried nothing in their hands. It was enough to let him know he was really in the backwoods of Virginia. (262)

The very name of the place is redolent with pastoral associations. Like virtually all the names in the novel, this one reflects a curious combination of "Shalimar" as an oral

corruption of "Solomon." In giving this name to the garden spot in Virginia where Milkman finds himself, Morrison evokes its separateness from the world of work, its exotic atmosphere for the city boy, its value as a source of sexual knowledge. The implications of the name itself are played out in what actually happens to Milkman in this place. Deflecting the characterization of the community itself into the details with which she initially describes it, Morrison establishes its identity as a kind of contemporary Eden, free of the encumbrances of modern civilization and the potential for violence implicit in a woman's "clenched fingers."

We see other fruits of his pastoral education before he leaves Shalimar-for example, in his new camaraderie with the young men in Solomon's store and in his exchange with Sweet (284, 289). Then Milkman leaves the pastoral world of Shalimar, retracing his steps to that unnamed city from which he started, where indeed he demonstrates the value of his pastoral experience: he feels new affection for his father, although little has changed in their relationship; he has lost interest in the gold he had originally set out to find; he accepts responsibility for Hagar's death.

But this novel does not end in the city; rather, Milkman, now accompanied by Pilate, travels to Shalimar a second time. Morrison's variation on the conventional pastoral structure locates us, finally, in the pastoral world, where we as readers are asked to discover and enact in our own hearts the meaning of Milkman's pastoral education. It seems appropriate, of course, that Milkman return to Shalimar, not to escape from the pressures of his own life, but to complete the work he started there, taking full responsibility for his own life and for another's. Having long ago accepted responsibility for her father's bones as her inheritance, Pilate carries them home to Shalimar to be buried; but it is Milkman who brings Pilate home. She belongs, finally, in Shalimar, whose ideals she has carried in her heart all her life; "she blended into the

population like a stick of butter in a churn" (339). In her death, Pilate flies away, merging with nature in the form of the bird that scoops up the little gold box containing her name. As Pilate dies, the novelist indicates Milkman's full maturity in having him change roles with her: he teaches her the way, he sings the song of Solomon to her.

That female values, despite pressures against them, can so endure is confirmed by the central position of Pilate in the narrative. She participates throughout the novel in the pastoral norms it defines, carrying those values with her wherever she goes, like the pine needle she always has in her mouth. Pilate's androgynous appearance--the navy cap, the men's boots, her height and physical strength--suggests a fully realized and independent sexuality. Pilate educates the central hero into maturity. And Pilate is confident enough to adopt disguises. For Pilate, it is the demeaning appearance of Aunt Jemima, an artifice that paradoxically expresses the truth of her "deep concern for and about human relationships" (150). Pilate has no navel, like Eve, the First Resident of the first human world. Pilate's household, with its casual investment in things, provides a happy retreat for the young Milkman from his father's relentless acquisition. Pilate's capacity to live in the world without being corrupted by it defines her personal freedom and suggests that she has internalized the female values learned during "those twelve years in Montour County" (150) as surely as Milkman has been defined by values of the man, whether in accord with or in reactive opposition to them. To recognize Pilate as the central female character, independent of physical place, encourages readers to identify and interpret a central conflict in the novel played out in the triangle created by Pilate, Guitar, and Milkman. The male protagonist, himself disturbingly uncommitted, stands between two characters, each intensely committed to different definitions of human relatedness, the one to open and general affection,

the other to a frightening tit-for-tat justice: the murder of an "innocent" person for the death of any black person killed in racial conflict. The uncommitted character, in other words, stands between the "humanist" in Pilate and the "politician" in Guitar. The full and painful irony of this configuration does not become apparent until the end of the novel. The relentless conviction of Guitar's logic denies the reader simple access to the novel's point of view. Guitar is an able disputant who scores a number of points in this formal debate (155-162). Just as certainly, however, the structure of the novel directs our judgments and implicitly undermines Guitar's argument.

Ultimately, of course, Guitar's commitment to political justice goes awry: in seeking a death for Hagar's death, presumably, Guitar "sacrifices" the innocent Pilate. Her death thus underscores with poignant irony the opposition between their views of the world. We affirm the female values-and the urgently humanist perspective-Pilate represents, but we come to that affirmation primarily through a sense of loss. The conclusion is as inescapable as it is discomfiting (and unsentimental): racism kills, whether it is expressed directly (in the bombing of a black church, for example), or reflected in and translated through Guitar's narrowed experience. That Pilate does not survive the end of the novel suggests that the African-American writer, speaking in a pervasively racist culture, cannot afford to give full assent to the humanist "we." Despite apparently defining a democratic mixture of classes and stations as "natural" in a "natural" world, the female nonetheless affirms a less problematic status quo in the larger social world it purports to criticize: the shepherdess who marries the prince turns out to have been royally born herself, and thus a proper match for her high-born partner. In the traditional pastoral world, love is less a democratic leveler than it is a pair of aristocratic spectacles through which one perceives one's own socially-appropriate kind despite the disguise he or she wears.

At first only listening, and later peering through a window in the dark, Macon, eavesdropping, muses upon the ceremonial scene in Pilate's home: They were singing some melody that Pilate was leading--a phrase that the other two were taking up and building on. Her powerful contralto, Reba's piercing soprano in counterpoint, and the soft voice of the girl, Hagar, pulled him like a carpet tack under the influence of a magnet. Surrendering to the sound, Macon moves closer:

> He wanted no conversation, no witness, only to listen and perhaps to see the three of them, the source of that music that made him think of fields and wild turkey and calico. Near the window, hidden by the dark, he felt the irritability of the day drain from him and relished the effortless beauty of the women singing in the candlelight. As Macon felt himself softening under the weight of memory and music, the song died down. The air was quiet and yet Macon Dead could not leave. He liked looking at them freely this way. (30)

Outside Pilate's home, Macon witnesses the songs and rituals of a ceremony. He is a distant observer. But seduced by the music and stimulated by his oral memory, he actively participates in the ceremony. Brief reflections such as these show the cultural tensions and distance between Macon's boyhood rituals and freedom--the emotional wealth of his youth--and the materialistic values to which he adheres as a man. Guitar Bains's grandmother, a black woman whom Macon threatens to evict because she is late with her rent, aptly describes the effects of Macon's adherence: "a nigger in business is a terrible thing to see, a terrible, terrible thing to see" (22). The terror, Morrison's readers see, is evident in what Macon's own cultural tensions have driven him to become spiritually and emotionally impotent. Macon uses people to acquire things. As his son Milkman comes eventually to see, Macon "distorted life, bent it, for

the sake of gain" (304). Through these stories of Macon Dead and his father, Morrison's storyteller moves her readers to question Western assumptions about discredited sources of knowledge and to challenge familiar images of power. Who is actually empowered in these stories: Macon Dead, whose keys and property symbolize his literacy? or his illiterate father, Jake, the son of a cultural hero, the flying African named Solomon, also spelled Shalimar? Jake's own name and identity will be keys to the puzzle Milkman must solve.

Milkman knows the story of how his grandfather became the first Macon Dead because of a drunken Yankee's mistakes in filling out a form. "Got his name messed up because he couldn't read," Milkman's father tells his son, harping on his familiar theme. Yet the first Macon Dead accepted this arbitrary new name because, as his wife pointed out, "it was new and would wipe out the past." But when Milkman, trying to recover that past, asks his father, "What was his real name?" (54), the question goes unanswered. Macon Dead II remembers only the name that was written down; his own father's original name, which existed only in speech, he has either forgotten or dismissed as insignificant. If Macon Dead II's memory of his father's name does not extend to history unrecorded in writing, it is not surprising that he says nothing at all of his grandfather Solomon, whose identity and mysterious powers will lie at the end of Milkman's quest.

In the case of Solomon, too, names are significant, and here too the literate consciousness proves an impediment to the discovery of identity: Milkman's literate habits of mind make it difficult for him to recognize the true names of either his ancestor or his family's place of origin, which will turn out to be one and the same. Circe tells him that Jake and Sing came from a place called "Charlemagne or something like that" (246), and he seeks in vain for a town called Charlemagne before

an AAA office informs him of "its correct name: Shalimar" (262). Once he arrives there, he hears the local pronunciation of the town's name--"the man pronounced it Shalleemone" (264). But this makes no impression on him at first. Shaleemone is presumably exactly what Circe said; it is Milkman who leaps from this phonetic configuration to the name of a medieval European emperor with its exotic French spelling. Similarly, the mapmakers or bureaucrats who recorded what has come to be the town's "correct name" for the literate perceived its spoken name in terms of an alien discourse and a remote geography, imposing on it another false, exotic, and misleading identity.

3.3 The Double Marginalization

The story of First Corinthians Dead illustrates the effects of traditional Western literate values on her own consciousness and oral memory. Both black and a woman, she suffers a dual powerlessness. Her father, black but a man, is successful in ways that she cannot be, despite her highly literate training. Racial and class barriers are significant social influences for First Corinthians Dead, and she explicitly confronts issues of class and her image of social superiority through-out this episode. Her highly literate training contributes to her superior self-image. First Corinthians is fluent in not one, but two Western literate traditions, English and French. She did not attend an historically black college or university, such as "Fisk, Howard, Talledega, [or] Tougaloo" (189), but instead Bryn Mawr, a racially integrated institution where she would clearly have been a "minority" student immersed in the study of Western literacy. This background elevates First Corinthians. Her education teaches her "to contribute to the civilization-or in her case, the civilizing-of her community" (188). But with potent irony, Morrison remarks:

> Bryn Mawr had done what a four-year dose of liberal education was designed to do: unfit her for eighty percent of the useful work of the world. First, by training her for leisure time, enrichments, and domestic mindlessness. Second, by a clear implication that she was too good for such work. After graduation she returned to a work world in which colored girls, regardless of their background, were in demand for one and only one kind of work. (190)

First Corinthians works as a maid for the city's Poet-Laureate, Michael-Mary Graham, but she tells her mother that she is employed as an amanuensis, which sounds important. Historical context illuminates the irony of the passive, receptive role of the amanuensis, who, as a mere transcriber, was always held in low regard by teachers of classical rhetoric, and who, later in the history of Western letters was a person of low social and political status, similar to the historical status of women. We might recall the status of Milton's daughters in this regard. The forceful argument with Henry Porter in which First Corinthians attempts to distinguish herself from "those women on the bus the only people she knew for certain she was superior to" (197) closely illustrates oral-literate, agonistic gesturing. Emotionally, she argues:

> [Those women] would love to have a greeting card dropped in their lap. But oh, I forgot. You couldn't do that, could you, because they wouldn't be able to read it. They'd have to take it home and wait till Sunday and give it to the preacher to read it to them. Of course when they heard it they might not know what it meant. But it wouldn't matter-they'd see the flowers and the curlicues all over the words and they'd be happy. It wouldn't matter a bit that it was the most ridiculous, most clichéd, most commercial piece of tripe the drugstore world has

> to offer. They wouldn't know mediocrity if it punched them right in their fat faces. (197)

Noticeably, Morrison omits the voice of the oral consciousness in this argument. We do not hear from or know anything about "those women." Thus the hierarchical, literate consciousness that First Corinthians represents in her criticisms seems to prevail in the structure of this argument. But First Corinthians does not say anything significantly concrete or "close to the human life world" (Ong 42) about the women to whom she feels superior. She fictionalizes them: "they'd see the flowers and they'd be happy" (112). And she uses clichés and stereotyped images: "they'd give [the card] to the preacher to read it" (112) in order to invent the arguments that support her views of superiority. It is from this hierarchical and distanced position that she too easily critiques their inabilities. The argument about literacy and class proves to be ineffectual. But at this moment, this argument about it brings into focus the kind of fictionalizing about her own life that First Corinthians later begins to confront. The significance of these social tensions is that First Corinthians, the great-granddaughter of the flying African, cannot tell anyone her stories. She has no audience. Despite her broad and valuable cultural exposure and refinement, Western literate values place a mask of abstraction on her life in the black community. Viewed semiotically, her role as an amanuensis constrains her self-expressions and blocks her social channels. She cannot tell her mother the truth about her job. She dare not reveal to her boss that she speaks fluent French. She must hide her love affair with a yardman who works for her father. With these constraints, we see that race, class, and her social conceptions of literacy negate her ability to cultivate what Toni Cade Bambara calls a "personal mythology." Like her father, who learns to suppress his oral memory, she, too, learns to suppress and ignore the real value and meaning in the stories of her life. Instead of

recognizing and fulfilling her own desires and motivations, she becomes a forty-four-year-old baby doll. But unlike her father, First Corinthians becomes aware of her mask. In a pivotal moment of her life, she walks toward her home but then, self-consciously, runs away from it, just as her father did in an earlier scene. Emotions and memory move her thoughts and body from a wild frenzy to catharsis, as her oral memory of the past sheds light on her present tensions:

> Corinthians ran toward [her lover's car], faster than she had ever run in her life, faster than she'd cut across the grass on Honord Island when she was five and the whole family went there for a holiday. Faster even than the time she flew down the stairs having seen for the first time what the disease had done to her grandfather. (198)

Finding the car locked, her rapping and pounding failing to awaken her sleeping lover,

> First Corinthians climbed up on the fender and lay full out across the hood of the car. She didn't look through the wind-shield at him. She just lay there, stretched across the car, her fingers struggling for a grip on steel. She thought of nothing. Nothing except what her body needed to do to hang on, to never let go. Even if he drove off at one hundred miles an hour, she would hang on. (200)

In this dramatic context, we see that her lover, Henry Porter, is her antagonist, enabling her to confront her cultural tensions and saving her from the imminent "smothering death" (200) that surround her life. She must stop denying her own emotional reality, stop living as a literate "other." Through her antagonist, First Corinthians faces herself as a woman with "fake feelings" (196), who uses a distanced "reading voice" (196) even when she speaks to those who care deeply for her and who feels superior to others because of her social conceptions of literacy. First Corinthians

develops confidence and skill in her "intellectual intelligence," but she suppresses her "emotional intelligence" (Davis 142). In this pivotal scene--with an explosion of primal emotions--the feelings stored in the well of her oral memory pour forth relentlessly, rupturing and crumbling her mask of abstraction. She begins to assume ownership of her own language. What she achieves, that her father could not, is the ability to recognize, name, and act on her cultural contradictions.

Milkman's mother was born Ruth Foster, only child of this segregated black community's only doctor. She married Macon Dead in the hopes of perpetuating the gentility of her father's house. Macon's ambition quickly converted her father's reputation, and capital, into a real estate business. He became the community's chief landlord, hated by his tenants for his ruthlessness. Ruth and Macon Dead became increasingly estranged. He despised her continuing devotion to her father. She mourned his lack of love and the coldness he embodied. He convinced himself that incest had bound her and her father. She believed he let her father die to spite her. There is a shape to the male lineage in this genealogy, as it goes from Solomon to Jake (the first Macon Dead), to Macon Dead, to Milkman (the third Macon Dead). These male figures mark out, and are in sync with, a discernible pattern in African American history.

They represent important junctures at which dislocation (the middle passage, the South- North migration, the rural-urban migration) generated new modes of work: slavery, farming, business, and new identities and values-freedom is, successively, flight, land, money. At the same time, there is the sense that the line running from the magical, soaring great-grandfather down to Milkman is a decline of talents: from flying to farming to the work of calculating, down to Milkman's malaise. Let us look now at the female lineage, for its patterning differs decidedly from the linear,

historically synced male figures. Historical and social changes are in fact marked, especially by the satirized position of Ruth and her daughters Lena and First Corinthians. That said, the pattern nonetheless has no arc of progress or decline. Instead, there are elements of circularity, polarity, and complementarity. A symbolic circularity connects Ryna and Hagar. The first ancestor and the last descendant both go mad grieving lost love. Ryna's wailing voice still echoes through Ryna's Gulch in Shalimar, Virginia, and Hagar declines in a slow suicide when she cannot recover from Milkman's abandonment of her.

But there is also a central polarity in the pattern. Pilate and Ruth are opposing types. Ruth's gentility, her imitation of white society's Victorian accoutrements, her need for respectability, and her dependence on men stand off against Pilate's iconoclastic life- caring for her fatherless child and grandchild, bootlegging, singing the blues. Yet there is also a complementarity or solidarity between Ruth and Pilate dramatized in their poignant recognitions of one another as mothers and women. The differentiated patterns of male and female characters invite allegorical interpretation. Perhaps Morrison is separating men's and women's spheres, the former predicated on labor as shaped by white-dominated economies, the latter on the more autonomous economies of the house- hold. Alternatively, the differentiation suggests a distinction between history and heritage. History is associated with the evolving, successive forms of property and labor, while heritage claims a very different temporality of recurrences and recuperations as represented by women's memories and their care of others.

More than any other figure in the novel, Pilate anchors the sense of community. Her death also violates this value even as her dying words reaffirm it: "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." The processes and patterns that threaten to unravel the community run deeper than Pilate's fate. Insofar as sense of community arises from the women's sphere, it remains unrealized because that sphere itself is left largely cut off from the world of men and from the world of politics. Insofar as it also arises in the world of men and politics, especially in the tireless "crisscrossed conversations" at Tommy's Barbershop, sense of community is lost in the pathologies of the Seven Days. It dies in every one of their acts of justice, which, being shrouded in secrecy, remain unknown and uncomprehended by the very community in whose name they are carried out.

All of Morrison's characters exist in a world defined by its blackness and by the surrounding white society that both violates and denies it. The destructive effect of the white society can take the form of outright physical violence, but oppression in Morrison's world is more often psychic violence. She rarely depicts white characters, for the brutality here is less a single act than the systematic denial of the reality of black lives. The theme of "invisibility" is, of course, a common one in black American literature, but Morrison avoids the picture of the black person "invisible" in white life. Instead, she immerses the reader in the black community; the white society's ignorance of that concrete, vivid, and diverse world is thus even more striking. The constant censorship of and intrusion on black life from the surrounding society is emphasized not by specific events so much as by a consistent pattern of misnaming. Power for Morrison is largely the power to name, to define reality and perception.

Thus, the displacement is parallel to the white attribution of rejected qualities to blacks. But the position of the black woman is doubly difficult. Black women in Morrison's fiction discover "that they [are] neither white nor male, and that all

freedom and triumph [are] forbidden to them" (44). Womanhood, like blackness, is ‘Other’ in this society, and the dilemma of woman in a patriarchal society is parallel to that of blacks in a racist one: they are made to feel most real when seen. Thus the adolescent girls, parading before young males who label them "pig meat," are "thrilled" by the association of voyeurism with sexuality. But their role as image is complicated by their blackness.

They are not just women in a society that reduces women to such cold and infantile images that Corinthians Dead can think that "She didn't know any grown-up women.” Every woman she knew was a “doll baby" (197). They are also black women in a society whose female ideal is a white "doll baby," blonde and blue-eyed. Even if they accept their reification they will always be inadequate; the black woman is "the antithesis of American beauty" (6). No efforts at disguise will make them into the images they learn to admire. Defined as the Other, made to be looked at, they can never satisfy the gaze of society. Because they are doubly defined as failures and outsiders, they are natural scapegoats for those seeking symbols of displaced emotions. Morrison shows the look taking on monstrous proportions as the humiliated black male allies himself with the third by making the black woman the object of his displaced fury. So Macon, in his sexual humiliation, looks not at his tormentors, but at his partner, with hatred: never did he once consider directing his hatred toward the hunters. Such an emotion would have destroyed him. For now, he hated the one who had created the situation, the one who bore witness to his failure, his impotence: “the one whom he had not been able to protect, to spare, to cover from the round moon glow of the flashlight” (118).

Chapter-Four

Conclusion

Morrison’s fiction blends themes of race and class, coming-of-age stories, and mythical and realistic genres to reach into the universal conclusion of female subjugation and their efforts of retaliation. The precedding discussion on Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* and the fiction’s ideological valance is an attemt to illumine the ruthless African American world and the subjugation of African American females. As some scholars argue that African-American oral narratives provide the raw material for her work, Morrison draws on all of these styles to create a rich tapestry of backgrounds and experiences for her distinctive female characters. Although the black community provides the setting of *Song of Solomon,* the novel’s themes are universal: Pilate and Ruth’s quest toward self-discovery and assertion of female self, a major concern that feeds this research, reflects the historical discrimination over female of the species and their effort to liberate themselves.

Robert Smith, an insurance agent in an unnamed Michigan town, leaps off the roof of Mercy Hospital wearing blue silk wings and claiming that he will fly to the opposite shore of Lake Superior. Mr. Smith plummets to his death. The next day, Ruth Foster Dead, the daughter of the first black doctor in town, gives birth to the first black child born in Mercy Hospital, Milkman Dead. This descriptive beginning of the novel offers the hoppe of liberation for all African American population, entitling them to the basic health services in the line of white settlers, and blows the horn of female liberation as Milkman Dead is brought to the world by Pilate and Ruth against his father’s will , at the same time.

Pilate can also be seen as the protagonist of *Song of Solomon* because she is the novel's moral guide. Although the narrator rarely focuses on what Pilate is feeling or thinking, preferring instead to concentrate on Milkman's quest, Pilate's presence is felt everywhere in the novel. Despite being named after the Roman statesman who, according to the New Testament, ordered Jesus' crucifixion, Pilate is completely incapable of cruelty. It is more accurate to see her name as a homonym for 'pilot.' She is frequently leading someone who is in need of guidance, such as the skeleton of her dead father, or Milkman, during his spiritual journey.

Although Pilate's actions in the novel are less visible than Milkman's, her role is just as important. Born without a navel and alienated from others, Pilate is a survivor of the same racism that has embittered Macon Jr. and Milkman. Pilate is nevertheless loving and selfless. Pilate's loving nature does not connote weakness but rather strength. When a man beats her daughter, Reba, Pilate pushes a knife within an inch of his heart and persuades him never to touch Reba again. Even though she is in her sixties and Reba's abuser is a strong young man, Pilate prevails. Morrison suggests that Pilate's supernatural powers, great strength, lasting youthfulness, and boundless love come from African-American cultural traditions. Although Pilate suffers the same disadvantages as Macon Jr., she is still able to preserve a link to her family's forgotten past. By singing folk songs about Sugarman's flight, Pilate recreates a past in which her ancestors shed the yoke of oppression. Both Macon Jr., who secretly eavesdrops on her nightly singing sessions, and Milkman, who uses the songs to find his ancestral home, Shalimar, need Pilate to keep alive the remaining vestiges of their humanity. Indeed, as Milkman realizes at the end of his journey, Pilate is the only human being he knows who is able to fly without ever leaving the ground. That is, she is already liberated and does not need to escape to attain freedom.

Ultimately, Pilate becomes the novel's model character. Pilate's daughter and Milkman's lover, Hagar, devotes herself to Milkman, even though he loses interest and frequently rejects her. Like her biblical namesake—a servant who, after bearing Abraham's son is thrown out of the house by his barren wife, Sarah—Hagar is used and abandoned. Her plight demonstrates a central theme in *Song of Solomon*: the inevitable abandonment of women.

Unlike Pilate, who is strong-willed, Ruth is a subdued, quiet, upper-class woman. Ruth relies on Pilate for financial support. As a result, Ruth never develops into a strongly independent person. Until age sixteen, she was cared for by her father, Dr. Foster. After she married Macon Jr., he took care of her. Because she considers giving birth to Milkman her life accomplishment, some critics argue that Ruth represents the unliberated woman whose own goals are dictated by a sexist society.

However, Ruth does not always submit to the will of men. Ruth is less assertive than Pilate, but she exercises her will in more subtle ways. For instance, while Ruth was pregnant with Milkman, she and Pilate collaborated to ensure his safe birth despite the efforts of Macon Jr., who tried to force Ruth to abort the child. Pilate threatened Macon Jr. directly by storming into his office and leaving an impaled voodoo doll in his chair. Ruth's evasion of Macon Jr. was more subtle. When Macon Jr. forced Ruth to stick needles into her womb in order to damage the fetus, she only partially inserted them, ensuring that Milkman remained unharmed. Furthermore, despite Macon Jr.'s seething anger over Ruth's affection for her father, Ruth continues to visit his grave. frequently. Her subtle independence makes her a foil for Pilate.

Men's repeated abandonment of women in *Song of Solomon* shows that the novel's female characters suffer a double burden. Not only are women oppressed by racism, but they must also pay the price for men's freedom. Guitar tells Milkman that black men are the unacknowledged workhorses of humanity, but the novel's events imply that black women more correctly fit this description. The scenes that describe women's abandonment show that in the novel, men bear responsibility only for themselves, but women are responsible for themselves, their families, and their communities. For instance, after suffering through slavery, Solomon flew home to Africa without warning anyone of his departure. But his wife, Ryna, who was also a slave, was forced to remain in Virginia to raise her twenty-one children alone. Also, after Guitar's father is killed in a factory accident, Guitar's grandmother has to raise him and his siblings. Although she is elderly and ill, she supports her children financially, intellectually, and emotionally. Relying on this skewed idea of gender roles, the society in the novel judges men and women differently. While men who fly away from their communities and families are venerated as heroes, women who do the same are judged to be irresponsible. Although Solomon abandoned his family with his flight to Africa, generations later he is remembered as the brave patriarch of the whole community. At the same time, Ryna, who was left to care for a brood of children, is remembered as a woman who went mad because she was too weak to uphold her end of the bargain. Residents of Shalimar have named a scary, dark gulch after Ryna, while they have given Solomon's name to a scenic mountain peak. The community rewards Solomon's abandonment of his children but punishes Ryna's inability to take care of them alone.

Thus, this research concentrates on the voice of African American females and the possibility of their emancipation envisioned in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*.

This work attempts to illumine the African American cultural call in Morrison's work, emphasizing that Morrison adresses age-old themes of African culture. Moreover, this work depicts a conversation among feminist theorists over the problematics of female consciousness. Similarly, it outlines how Morrison's novel is a celebration of the triumph of earthly love: Morrison compares her female characters to epic heroines whose experience transcends cultural and temporal boundaries. Morrison's tale contends that women will be abused in any patriarchal society and also that it is only their personal and communal effort which can liberate themselves from age-old male hegemony. Morrison suggests that African American females have to transcend their present position in order to identify themselves.

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