

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Motive Behind Progeny Homicide in Morrison's *Beloved* and *Sula*

A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in English

By

Deep Bahadur Singh

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu, Nepal.

May 2011

Tribhuvan University

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Letter of Approval

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “Motive Behind Progeny Homicide in Morrison’s *Beloved* and *Sula*” by Deep Bahadur Singh, submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee:

Internal Examiner

External Examiner

Head

Central Department of English

Date:.....

Acknowledgements

First of all I thank God for providing me sound health, patience and wisdom to carry out this meaningful research. There are numerous people behind this work who have directly and indirectly contributed and assisted me in many areas from moral to technical supports and many more.

I am very much indebted to my supervisor Mr. Shuva Rana Bhat for his insights, suggestions and valuable inputs. I am equally grateful to Mr. Badri Acharya for his assistance from the inception of this project. I am also thankful to several lecturers and staff of Central Department of English for their cooperation throughout this research. I also take time to thank various libraries for letting me use online and printed resources.

Though mere words will not suffice, I wholeheartedly thank and appreciate my family and friends near and far from different fields for their invaluable thoughts, suggestions, inspiration, support and contribution to execute this thesis successfully and develop it to the present state. It was my honor and privilege to work together and gather new experiences and insights.

I believe I have achieved new experiences which will further enhance my academic career.

Deep Bahadur Singh

Date:.....

Abstract

This thesis explores prolific African American female novelist Toni Morrison's novels *Beloved* and *Sula* from new historicist perspectives. Both texts present progeny homicide and justify it. In *Beloved*, fugitive slave Sethe, the mother slits her own daughter's throat and similarly in *Sula*, Eva Peace, the mother of Plum (Ralph), sets her only son on fire. The motive behind the mothers' killings is to free and protect their children from brutish slavery, racism and pernicious interminable wars acted out of purely instinctual maternal love.

Contents

Letter of Approval	
Acknowledgements	
Abstract	
Chapter I: Progeny Homicide by Mothers: An Outline of Work	1-9
Chapter II: Motive Behind Progeny Homicide	
Context and Historicity of the Text: <i>Beloved</i>	10-21
Context and Historicity of the Text: <i>Sula</i>	21-37
Signifyin(g): Inversion of Conventional Perceptions	37-41
Role of Discourses in the Construction of so-called Reality	41-45
Chapter III: Conclusion: Redemptive Act, Acted out of Instinctual Maternal	
Love	46-49
Works Cited	50-54

Chapter I: Progeny Homicide by Mothers: An Outline of Work

Nobel laureate African American female writer Toni Morrison in *Beloved* and *Sula* presents progeny homicide and justifies it. In *Beloved*, when the four slave catchers — schoolteacher, nephew, slave and sheriff — come to the house on Bluestone Road to take Sethe's children, the mother, slits her baby-daughter's throat (*Beloved* 148-49) and kills her and similarly in *Sula*, Eva Peace, the mother of Plum (Ralph), one night suffering from insomnia manages to set her only son on fire (*Sula* 45-48).

What would drive Morrison's characters— the mothers, giver of lives, to take the lives of their offspring by their own hand? The author does not provide single answer to this complex issue. So, our thoughts will be full of questions rather than particular answer to this paradoxical issue. If judged from the ethical, idealistic and religious perspective and from surface level, we might instantly think that the mothers involvement in murdering their own children as inhuman and inexcusable. We might reason that taking precious life is never to be forgiven. But at deeper level, we can seek understanding the reasons and causes of such acts because nothing in this world emanates out of blues, there are contexts, histories and several reasons, behind each action that human commits. Numbers of things are involved to shape our behavior, thoughts and ideologies.

Beloved is set in Cincinnati in 1873 after the end of Civil War but it revisits the antebellum and postbellum American servitude through the memories and stories of the characters. It is mainly about the incidents in the lives of the African American black slaves who were transported to 'New World' from different parts of Africa to serve and work in the huge plantations of immigrated European white masters.

Sethe, a black fugitive slave of Sweet Home plantation, murders her unnamed daughter while in the hands of slave catchers. After the incident Sethe's rented 124 Bluestone Road house where she lives with daughter Denver, is haunted by the ghost of the dead baby whom she killed. Her husband and sons whereabouts are not yet known. Paul D, whom she knew in slavery, comes to visit her and manages to drive the ghost out for a while. Time passes and Paul D is seduced by reincarnated daughter of Sethe, Beloved and leaves their house. Later Beloved disappears and Sethe's second daughter Denver also leaves the house. Sethe and Paul D reunite at the end.

Sula opens with the description of Medallion, Ohio, a black settlement. It covers the settlement's history beginning from the First World War to the Vietnam War. It talks about the First World War and its devastating effects and aftermath. Plum Peace, the only son of Eva Peace, after deserting his sisters and mother, joins the war effort in 1917. He returns to the States in 1919 as a "hopeless junkie," a war casualty" (Hunt 451). Only three years later in 1920 Plum was able to visit his home in Medallion. After his return to Medallion he is burned to death by his mother.

Morrison depicts the adversities of war through the plight of her character Plum; a war veteran inflicted by "post-traumatic stress" (Fulton 67). The remaining part of the novel is captured by the story of two black women, Sula Peace and Nel Wright's life and friendship, who are considered as evil and great threat to the community. Finally, when Sula dies Nel recognizes the importance of her absence much.

New Historical approach is relevant to analyze this complex issue of progeny homicide. This approach's theoretical avenues, tools and concepts like 'contexts', 'historicity of texts' and 'textuality of history', 'anecdotes', 'signifyin(g)' and 'flow of power everywhere' are helpful relevant discourses for explication and analysis of

this thesis because these are not abstract fictitious terms but are the terminologies of our day to day social milieu's vocabularies in which culture is deeply rooted and embedded.

New Historicism is a collage of different perspectives and it doesn't only privilege to one particular idea or ideology. Rather it gives equal space to 'othered' different disciplines, voices and is a combination of critical methodologies. However, nothing in this world can be bias-free and refrain from criticism it also has some limitations as well.

H. Aram Veaser, one of the pioneers of New Historicism, summarizes some of the principles of New Historicism as follows:

1. that every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices;
2. that every act of unmasking, critique, and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes;
3. that literary and non-literary 'texts' circulate inseparably;
4. that no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths nor expresses inalterable human nature;
5. finally, . . . that the critical method and a language adequate to describe culture under capitalism participate in the economy they describe.

(Brannigan173)

'Context' and 'content' are major components of New Historicism. It focuses on 'how' the critic presents the ideas, not 'what' s/he says. In each and every work of art the context, history and culture are embedded. The text cannot be judged formalistically, considering merely in its form; detaching it from context and aligning

it only with imaginary fictional work, created for aesthetic pleasure, not bearing with human life.

To understand literature one has to understand culture, “culture produces literature and literature produces culture” (Robson 22). So we can say culture is both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of literature and cannot easily escape from it.

Work of art is not autonomous and “sufficient to itself” (Robson 22) as the New Critics claim but “self-consciously embedded in specific communities, life situations, structures of power” (Greenblatt 7). It helps in transformation, representation and communication of social energies and practices. Ideas of some prominent thinkers and practitioners of New Historicism like Stephen Greenblatt’s ‘historical contexts’, Louis Montrose’s ‘historicity of texts’ and ‘textuality of history’, H. Aram Veeser’s ‘inseparability of literary and non-literary texts’, Henry Louis Gates’s ‘Signifyin(g)’ and Michel Foucault’s ‘influence of the then discourses in text’ provide way to analyze this issue.

Louis Montrose asserts: “[. . .] reciprocal concern with the historicity of the texts, . . . the historical specificity, the social and material embedding, of all modes of writing and textuality of histories . . . we can have no access to full and authentic past . . . process of *selective preservation* and *effacement* [. . .]” (410). Here, Montrose declares that literature must be interpreted within the context of both history of author and history of the text. Text is embedded in specific social and cultural contexts. Different contexts of the text such as socio-economic, politico-cultural issues of the period when the text was conceived and things that have influenced the writer in producing such text has to be taken into consideration and no text can be judged in isolation as “entities that lie outside of history . . . artistic texts contribute to the production of that culture” (Robson 9).

Our knowledge and understanding of the past can only exist through the “surviving textual traces of the society in question” (Brannigan 170). We cannot have complete reach to the past and there are gaps in the creation of history as well. So those gaps are to be replenished by presumption and fictionalization.

Literature cannot be perceived in the same manner as the historicist or the mimetic critics view. It is a combination of fact with fiction. Montrose blurs and breaches the boundary between ‘history’ and ‘text’ and consolidates them as one. Greenblatt also claims that “there are no transcendent and absolute rules about what belongs in the zone of literary and in the zone of the non-literary” (Greenblatt 5) but treats both with equal values.

Morrison’s texts *Beloved* and *Sula* after their prominences could not remain untouched from literary critics. Morrison’s novels incidents does not match the thoughts of many critics, some argue it as visceral— not purely factual and empirical— but still they are not less influential and important than so-called objective, true, logical human sciences like psychology, sociology, anthropology, law, culture or history. Different critics have tried their best to unfold various aspects and approaches to fulfill the purpose of the text. Critic Pamela E. Barnett, visiting assistant professor of English at Emory University comments on *Beloved* as the figuration of rape and the supernatural. As she articulates:

TONI MORRISON’S *Beloved* is haunted by history, memory, and a specter that embodies both; yet it would be accurate to say that *Beloved* is haunted by the history and memory of rape specifically . . . Morrison uses the succubus figure to represent the effects of institutionalized rape under slavery. When the enslaved persons’ bodies were violated, their reproductive potential was commodified. The succubus, who

rapes and steals semen, is metaphorically linked to such rapes and to the exploitation of African Americans' reproduction. (418-19)

Likewise another critic Deborah Ayer Sitter, an assistant professor of English at Spelman College in Atlanta focuses on the dialogic meaning in *Beloved* and affirms:

Beloved depicts slavery's insidious power to distort the two most basic human emotions and instincts: love and self-preservation . . . Morrison dramatizes Paul D's enslavement to an ideal of manhood that distorts his images of self and others . . . orchestrates meanings in a dialogue about fundamental human problems: the meaning of manhood, of womanhood, and of love. (18, 27)

Another critic Angeletta Km Gourdine reads the novel via the perspective of margin as she states:

We can easily agree that the novel is about black women's struggle for freedom and ownership of their bodies during and following slavery . . . *Beloved* both relies upon our amnesia about the horrors of our national history and reminds us of the price we pay for that comfortable historical amnesia. (16, 19)

Similarly, assistant professor of English, at the University of Missouri-Columbia Christopher N. Okonkwo observes *Sula*:

Sula literarily looks up at serious issues of black folk thought, as well as racial, class, and gender injustice. It wrestles with the politics of racial, spatial, and economic integration and the question of progress, especially in the context of black people's group survival. (665)

The aforementioned argument posits that the novel includes the issues of race, class and gender injustice and he adds that the novel fetches black people's group survival. Another critic Rachel Lee, Ph.D. candidate in the Department of English at the University of California, Los Angeles, giving priority to the relativity to meaning notes:

Sula especially throws into disequilibrium that exemplar dichotomy, good and evil, and by extension all Manichean systems which undergird traditional linguistic and ethical orders. By bringing to light the relativity of meaning, *Sula* broaches the subject not only of semantic integrity (how we can convey what we mean) but also of epistemological integrity (how can we know anything since there is no objective perspective and no objective essence or truth to know). (571)

Critic Sunanda Pal reads *Sula* from the perspective of friendship. She particularly emphasizes on intimacy and understanding between or among women. As she writes: “*Sula* explores the friendship between Nel and Sula, which nurtures them through girlhood. At the end of the novel, Nel needs to realize the value of her friendship with Sula in order to disperse the gray ball of depression that had enveloped her for years” (2442-43).

This study is different from the perspectives, area and issues of others critics and does not make a comprehensive study of Morrison's other major issues such as black-feminism, sexuality, friendship, narration, ethnicity, memory, class etc. This research's main attempt is to deal with the issue of progeny homicide. Its primary aim is to find out the motive behind the progeny homicide. What would drive a mother crazy to end the life of her infant? The research finally proves the motives behind progeny homicide on the basis of new historical tools and concepts like context,

historicity of text and textuality of history, anecdotes, African American theory of signifyin(g) and role of discourses in construction of truth etc.

After all the concern is to show the evils of slavery, war and racism which have damaged and left traumatic horrific experiences in the lives of the African-Americans by close reading, revisiting and “revisioning—the act of looking back, seeing with fresh eyes, . . . entering an old text from a new critical direction” (qtd. in Campbell and Kean 33) —and assessing history and it’s the then context critically through the eyes of the sufferer, an oppressed and alienated from cultural mainstream.

The study makes relevant contribution in the field of English literature and also assists interdisciplinary studies namely— psychology, history, sociology, anthropology and culture. This affirms literature’s interdependence and correlated nature and its relation to the non-literary texts as well. This further elucidates that literature is not conventional and outdated subject in the 21st century but has significant practical role in the lives of humanity. Moreover, it also intends to show the intensity of the depth of mother’s love, the plight and strivings of black females, their lived experiences, emotions and lives within their family and community.

This research project has been divided into three chapters. The first introductory chapter is an opening of the thesis which orients the research. It gives the overview of the work and consist theme of writing, statement of problem, methodology, hypothesis, objective, limitations and critics’ views on the texts.

To investigate and analyze the issues, the second chapter will discuss, explicate and underpin the issue thoroughly with textual analysis, theoretical basis and concepts. It attempts to highlight the issues of slavery, racism and war faced by minorities— especially the African Americans who were treated inhumanly, killed, victimized, the forgotten people of the past by means of new historical gaze along

with the ideas of critics like Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose, Henry Louis Gates, Lois Tyson, Michel Foucault etc. This chapter is further divided into sub-chapters: Context and Historicity of the Text: *Beloved* and *Sula*, Signifyin(g): Inversion of Conventional Perceptions and Role of Discourses in the Construction of so-called Reality. This second chapter has used some extracts from the texts to prove the hypothesis of the research.

The last chapter concludes the ideas put forward in the previous chapters and finally discloses the findings of motive behind progeny homicide in Morrison's *Beloved* and *Sula*.

Chapter II: Motive Behind Progeny Homicide

Context and Historicity of the Text: *Beloved*

A literary text like any other text is subject to the particular conditions of time and place, as well as its interpretation. We cannot understand African American culture and literature meaningfully without knowing the basic components in composition of texts which are “legendry” that ‘blend and interweave myth with fact’ (Levine 389). It is “inevitably and inescapably bound up with political and historical considerations: the kinds of writing made possible at any given time both reflected and were a consequence of prevailing conditions of the time in which they were produced” (Padley 172). The “relationship between literary texts and the diverse range of historical contexts in which they were produced is reciprocal: text are informed by and their historical contexts” (Padley 172) so there is symbiotic relationship between history and literature.

Barbara Rigney admits that Morrison’s novels are “both subjects *of* and subject *to* history, events in ‘real time’ . . . slavery, reconstruction, depression and war” (Peach 2) *Beloved* arrests the timeframe of slavery. It is set at the end of civil war, the time of reconstruction, in middle 1870s when “race relations in America were at their most crucial juncture” (Baym 2078). By nature most of us try to escape the vileness of the past, African Americans also had the tendency to forget heinous slavery which was bitter as Levine puts it, “[. . .] younger generation seldom speak of the days of yore . . . and ‘desired to forget past’” (160) because it was not a pleasant moment to recall and embrace. Morrison weaves her story amalgamating several fragments of events and incidents that happened and might have happened in the lives of her ancestors socio-political and cultural conditions, blending facts and myths with fiction; unwritten history by means of her African heritages of oral traditions;

imagination and fragmented memories in order to revive and pay homage to 60 million Africans, “unaccounted and dismembered” (*Beloved* 275) demised population.

The literary “text and the historical situation from which it emerged are equally important because text (the literary work) and context (the historical condition that produced it) are mutually constitutive: they create each other . . . literary texts shape and are shaped by their historical contexts” (Tyson 291-92). Morrison’s work was influenced by other works of African American writers, diaries of plantation owners, newspaper clippings, slave narratives, pamphlets, culture and history. According to Peach in “Signifying” one text ‘plays upon another, usually repeating it but making significant changes or inverting it’ (21). Considering Morrison’s writing tactics Barbara Johnson discloses that she takes nourishment from more than one source (McBride 763). Rushdy also sees *Beloved* as Signifyin(g) —invoking and reinterpreting— on the story of Margaret Garner and other stories in Camille Billops’s *The Harlem Book of the Dead*, and collection of pictures of ‘Harlem funerals’ by James Van Der Zee with commentary (21). A full text comes into being only by amalgamation of various other texts, anecdotes, images and histories and no artist can claim that his/her work as virgin because nothing in this universe is new.

According to Bhabha, Sethe’s murder of her daughter is a “rememoration” of slavery, . . . through that act history is remembered [. . .]” (Wu 793). Morrison in an interview avers: “[. . .] I’d written because it is about something the characters don’t want to remember, black people don’t want to remember, white people don’t want to remember” (qtd. in Rushdy 142). Though slavery is a matter of national amnesia Morrison represents it because it’s a trauma that cannot be erased completely from either history or memory.

Gates and McKay also opine that the idea of *Beloved* came from a story that Morrison discovered when she was “editing *The Black Book*, a scrap book of Black history” (2097). Morrison’s protagonist Sethe’s homicide of her daughter was modeled on the story of a runaway slave woman, Margaret Garner, who escaped with her husband Robert from a Kentucky plantation, and sought refuge in Ohio. When the slave masters overcame them, she killed her baby in order to save the child from the slavery she had managed to escape. So Morrison with incidents and assistance of other texts of her time is able to visit the vicious history of antebellum and postbellum America critically and thoughtfully in *Beloved*.

Historically, “Seth Cocklin, the white man leading the slaves to freedom ended with his recapture and death” (Levine 67). This incident is meaningful because Morrison in *Beloved* names her female protagonist from historical character Seth to Sethe, a fugitive slave longing for freedom. So Sethe signifies disciple and activist as Seth. In the story of Garner she presents the horrific events of progeny homicide in which Sethe, who “escaped a Kentucky plantation called ‘Sweet Home’ where she was bought at thirteen to be the sole female slave with five men,” (Perkins 1069) slits the throat of her daughter and continues to harm another as well as herself when the four ‘slave catchers’ come to take her and her children. So the historical Seth and novel’s Sethe both are longing for freedom at personal and communal level.

When we read the text, Sethe tries to vindicate her acts as mother’s responsibility towards her children by saying, “She had to be safe and I put her where she would be but my love was tough . . . if I hadn’t killed her she would have died [. . .]” (*Beloved* 200) and she being a mother wouldn’t bear it. As she proclaims it was her tough motherly love which made her to act abruptly. Though this sounds paradoxical, Sethe’s intention inwardly was natural. For her to let slave hunters to take away the

children from her would be like to send her children to the abyss of servitude knowingly, which was worst than death. In an interview also Morrison claims, “[. . .] Sethe’s murder of Beloved “was the right thing to do It was the *only* thing to do” (Otten 657). This statement makes it clear that Sethe’s murder of her daughter was not her choice but coercion and only remaining option.

When we go through the novel we frequently will be haunted by question like- What would cause a mother to end the life of her infant? Therefore, for reaching to logical conclusion; contexts, histories, anecdotes, text written during the author’s times have to be taken into consideration. The life of the slaves in the plantation was too severe, inimical and dehumanizing. We can envision it by the flashbacks and narrative stories, unfolded and articulated by the characters in different sections moving back- and- forth throughout the novel.

Morrison succeeds to keep the attention of the readers during the horrors of ‘Middle Passage’ where “sixty million and more” (Peach 58) people were victimized by the outrage of enslavement. The slaves were “whipped, sexually assaulted, ripped out of societies in which they had deep roots, and bartered away for pecuniary profit” (Levine 114). Sethe was incarcerated not because of killing but for the crime of stealing property-herself and her children from her master. Slaves in sugarcane plantation “were made to wear masks to keep them from eating the crop” (Sanna 25). This supplements that slaves were treated as animals, commodities, possessions, chattels that could be measured and weighed for sale in the slave markets.

The sharing of Sethe about her mother and her infancy where she and her mother were respectively deprived from their child rights and motherhood. The practice of body marking, putting bells, iron circles (torture apparatuses) were used

over the neck of slaves like animals (*Beloved* 30, 60, 61, 212) to prevent slaves from running away which is heart-rendering and horrific.

When Sethe suggests Baby Suggs, mother-in-law of Sethe, to move to another place she says—“Not a house in the country ain’t packed to it’s rafters with some dead Negros’s grief” (*Beloved* 5). She told she had eight children but “Everyone is gone away, four taken *sold* four chased [. . .]” (*Beloved* 5 italics added) and she was not able to even wave goodbye. Here we see mother and children’s relations being torn apart. Martha Harrison, a slave narrates about her master as, “[. . .] ‘Old Bufford’ who beat her mother savagely for refusing to sleep with him” (Levine 34). Baby Suggs even had to be ready for coupling for four months to keep her child for a year with her (*Beloved* 23). Husbands were mute spectators when their wives were abused and raped by whites (*Beloved* 71). The relation of wife and husband was estranged. They were not able to live a lasting familial life together. Fragmentation was rampant in black family. So, children and parents, husbands and wives rarely managed to live together though they craved a lot.

African American texts cannot be analyzed from Euro-American perspectives where individuality is shouldered a lot. In black culture children are not seen as separate autonomous individuals but have shared parental identity. So when Paul D scolds Sethe and suggests that her love for her children was too thick, Sethe replies, “Thin love ain’t not love at all . . . its my job to know what is and to keep them away from what I know is terrible” (*Beloved* 165). Being a mother she could not let her young ones be in a grave position.

Sethe tries to clarify the bond between children and mother. She opines that there is a strong bond where child belongs to mother and mother belongs to child. She asserts that she wouldn’t “draw a breath without her children” (*Beloved* 203).

Therefore we don't find any kind of separation between mother (self) and daughter (other). In their culture individual cannot exist alone and cannot claim secluded personal identity. Individuality is possible only in relation to communal bond.

Sethe has a belief that if one dies than they will be one with their loved ones (ancestors). So we can say instead of broken family and secluded torturous life, she wants her daughter to have communion with her ancestors, a common belief within the black community. During her talk with reincarnated daughter Beloved she opined that she preferred to be buried with Beloved and give her motherly love and warmth even if she was prevented from motherly responsibility (*Beloved* 204). This is a clear indication that Sethe acts very responsibly and cares a lot for her offspring. She doesn't want to be detached from her daughter.

When one is extremely suppressed s/he tries to find a way out and console herself/himself so did the slaves. They used the "subtleties of their song to comment on the whites around them with a freedom denied them in other forms of expression" (Levine 11). Through spirituals, blues and story-telling the harsh reality of slavery was revealed. For example we can go through one of the slave's (Paul D's) song which goes:

Little rice, little bean,

No meat in between.

Hard work ain't easy,

Dry bread ain't greasy. (*Beloved* 40)

These lines were the everyday reality in lives of the majority of slaves in the South. Freedom was arduous and one could buy only uncertain freedom by paying high a price such as getting shot and killed on their way or getting caught, send back, jailed and hanged by slave catchers (*Beloved* 78) for disobeying their white masters.

We can also internalize the impacts and compulsion of blacks which they had to undergo through, when Sethe says, “Those white things have taken all I had or dreamed . . . and broke heart strings too [. . .]” (*Beloved* 89). From this remark we get the impression that slave’s dear ones were taken from them breaking their heart. As Remond delineates on the situations of slaves more vividly:

[. . .] woman condemned to wear such a collar as it were cruelty to bind around the neck of a dog, working on that collar, eating in it, aye even sleeping in it, for no other crime than merely that of having asked permission to visit her child in the adjoining plantation [. . .] (Smith 120)

This shows that black mothers were strictly prohibited from visiting and communicating with their children. Their natural emotions and sentiments were termed as crimes. Sometimes females were maimed, assaulted and raped. Black mothers were left to suffer with traumas and mental disorders. Paul D’s narration of the incident of a witless colored women who was “jailed and hanged for stealing ducks *which* she believed were her own babies” (*Beloved* 66 italics added) substantiates the pathetic condition of the black mothers who were mentally challenged, same could be the possibility of Sethe as well.

The spirituals (songs) of the blacks which were popular among blacks, one goes— “before I’d be a slave / I would be buried in my grave, /and go home to my Lord and be saved!” (Levine 52) sung during the Civil War also depicts their preference for death rather than life. The black’s spirit preferred to go to God than back to slavery. We can say that Morrison is successful in bringing forth the harsh impacts and images of slavery of the past through artistic creation. Henderson also

articulates that, “[. . .] *Beloved* becomes the filter through which the internal suffering of the slave is made plain” (83).

When we are informed and conscious about several contexts and circumstances of black slaves we can claim that Sethe commits infanticide, paradoxically to protect and save her daughter from degrading inhuman institutionalized slavery’s woes forever. The horrific tragic ambience compels us to rethink and question the assurances and proclamation made by founding fathers of democratic nation. The fundamental principles of human life and values guaranteed in the constitution were jeopardized. How people created in the image of God can be treated as animals— exploited, inflicted and finally killed? The basics of American Dream— life, liberty and pursuit of happiness— remained mere rhetoric.

Sethe cherishes and foresees more meaningful life in death when she remembers the traumas of slavery. Due to that she wanted her daughter to keep in a place “where no one could hurt . . . where they would be safe [. . .]” (*Beloved* 163-64). She wants to perform her maternal authority. Therefore, she doesn’t regret much of her action. Guth agrees that when Sethe hunted by past, “[. . .] memory—of humiliation, of milk taken . . . *labeling with “animal” characteristics . . . impel her to grab her baby [. . .]*” (587 italics added) finally and murder.

Her friend Paul D thinks to love anything much is not good and parents cannot look after their children forever. Sethe refutes his views and asserts, “I’ll protect her while I’m alive and I’ll protect her when I ain’t” (*Beloved* 45). We find strong determination and desperateness of a mother. It was “[. . .] upfront love that made her try” (*Beloved* 161) to protect her infants from the torturous life.

By drawing an analogy of horse and slave the school teacher rebukes his nephew that even the horse would react wildly if he beats it beyond the point of

education [. . .]” (*Beloved* 149). She neither wants to submit herself nor her children to injustice. Therefore, we can say Sethe’s cause of so-called wild and immoral behavior is just a reaction to nephew’s thrashing and mishandling. So, Sethe fearing from recapture and risks of being taken by vicious slave master and re-enslavement, responds by cutting the throat of her baby and attempts suicide.

When Paul D visits Sethe he enquires about her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs. When he is informed that she has passed away, he asks her –“was it hard? I hope she didn’t die hard.” Sethe replies –“Soft as cream. Being alive was the hard part” (*Beloved* 78). According to this remark we can identify that for slaves living was much harder than dying.

Sethe justifies her acts and claims her maternal rights as mother and says— “I birthed them and I got em out and it wasn’t no accident [. . .]” (*Beloved* 162). She contends her guardianship over her children and doesn’t want to be disfranchised. Sethe tries to empower herself by grasping total control over the destiny of her daughter to the extent that she takes her life rather than allow her to live as slave by succumbing to white teacher and living the worse life than that of animal. She fully wants to practice the role of a protective mother for she knows what she did was “right” and came from “true love” (*Beloved* 251). Sethe finds better purity in death than degrading in life.

Stamp Paid, a slave who handed over his wife to his master’s son also sympathizes with Sethe and interprets her action as nothing more than a “rough response to Fugitive Bill” (*Beloved* 171). Sethe’s daughter, Denver who knows her mother better than any other also declares that—“there must be something else terrible enough” (*Beloved* 205) to make her act in that manner. We can agree with her

because events certainly have causes and pure science also claims that action leads to reaction. So Sethe's act is logical.

A relevant example of pressure cooker is worth mentioning here. If it is filled with maximum amount of pressure and left without any outlet, finally it explodes damaging itself as well as making casualties. Same was the condition of Sethe with slavery. There were no other alternatives left except to end the life of her infants and herself, eliminating dirty servitude personally forever. She had already entered the Free State with hard labor and risks and brought her daughter into non-slave holding zone. So, she cannot again allow her children to return to slavery. She wants to protect her daughter "from the world in which the next schoolteacher would deny their humanity" (March 55).

As Gates and McKay rightly present that *Beloved* was the outcome of a true story of "[...] Garner, a runaway slave, killed her daughter in Kentucky 1856 . . . Later Garner was tried not for attempting to kill her child but for the 'real' crime, of stealing property-herself and her children-from the master" (2097). This provides us to understand the social standards, mores and laws of the time of slavery which clarify that the murder was not considered as crime but stealing future valuables (Sethe's daughter) was a real crime. Blacks, whether young or old, were not valued for their lives but for their perspiring labor. They were treated as machines without emotion and chattels in market. This tendency is visible when Baby Suggs recalls that her children have been— "[. . .] hanged, got rented out, loaned out, brought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized . . . her two girls neither of whom had their adult teeth, were sold and gone and she had not been able to wave good bye" (*Beloved* 23). This harsh reality projects the real life struggles of the black people and depicts diabolic tyranny of the whites exercised over them.

Morrison “[. . .] reenacts historical truth: infanticide was a common occurrence among slave mothers, at times in rage against malefic white fathers, at times in paradoxical acts of mercy directed toward their children” (Otten 657). Sethe’s own mother murdered her children that were fathered by slave owners who demeaned her (*Beloved* 62). Similarly one black mother Ella, who was shared by white father and son, also refused to nurse “the hairy white thing” *she delivered after being raped by* “the lowest yet” (*Beloved* 258-259 italics mine).

From the mentioned examples it is clear that Sethe was not only the mother to kill her children but there were several other black mothers whose stories were yet to be written. The mothers’ do not intend to kill their children whom they have given birth until and unless there are big reasons enough. In African culture the “Great Mother, the giver of life and wisdom who is *nommo*, the creative and sacred actualization of nature. Like nature the Great Mother can kill as well as create” (Gray 102). So, Sethe justifies her acts, “I birthed them and I got em out and it wasn’t no accident.” (*Beloved* 162). In a way Sethe has the right to do what she decides.

Ultimately, it was the bond of love that worked as the catalyst which is sometimes desperate, sometimes possessive and sometimes seen as barbaric by some but it’s the instinctual love anyway. We can discern this from Morrison’s conversation as well where she affirms, “The woman who killed her children loved her children so much; they were the best part of her and she wouldn’t see them sullied” (Rushdy 143).

The intention behind homicide is made clearer when Sethe seeing Mr. Bodwin as a stand-in for Schoolteacher, thinks that he has again come to take her “best thing” reacts immediately and tries to stab him with an ice pick (*Beloved* 262, 264) when she finds herself free to express her rage aggressively, intended for protection. *Beloved*’s

departure after this incident suggests that she was also convinced that “her mother’s previous actions were motivated by love, *and not* anger, . . . her inability to kill Schoolteacher [. . .]” (March 55 italics added) and his men and not intended to kill her.

Context and Historicity of the Text: *Sula*

In the 50s and 60s Beat writers “emerged as rebellious figures willing to criticize and attack mainstream society [. . .]” (Campbell and Kean 30) among them was Allen Ginsberg. Therefore we find some of the influences of Beat Generation in Morrison as well. The other important aspect of the time was the rise of anti-war sentiments in the 50s and 60s. As we have mentioned earlier socio-cultural situatedness of the writer influence his/her thoughts either in manifest or in latent level. Therefore, close reading and textual analysis only reveals the meaning and interpretations of the text in which it was written. Greenblatt emphasizes that author’s ideas are firmly grounded in the culture in which s/he lives and works, in a specific time and place and so is the art that s/he produces. According to him author is:

[. . .] fashioning oneself and being fashioned by cultural institution—family, religion, state—were inseparably intertwined in . . . texts and documents . . . no moments of pure, unfettered subjectivity; indeed, the human subject itself began to seem remarkably unfree, the ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society. (Greenblatt 256)

Therefore, we can say that the world of Morrison was also entwined and embedded in the context of black experience in America. The popular propaganda of the Cold War silenced national anxieties “implying that everything truly American was the same as everything else: the system was fine, only individuals were wrong” (Hoffman 115).

So, Morrison confronts this notion and clarifies that what has been circulated was not true, in fact American world is infected by chronic disease of war which has to be stopped without any delay.

Morrison's dedication lines in *Sula*: "It is sheer good fortune to miss somebody long before they leave you. This Book is for . . . whom I miss although they have not left me." This also shows that her work and life is intermingled with each other. In the case of Morrison though her sons are physically present she misses them but what about the condition of numerous black mothers, wives whose sons join compulsory drafting and participate in wars and husbands forsake them? Morrison is concerned about boys and rampant disintegration of black male and female relationships in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The world and context of *Sula* reveals discrimination, segregation, injustice and partiality in Bottom's everyday life. Giving the pathetic picture of Bottomites Hunt writes, "The fates of the Bottom-dwellers represent a political system which has enslaved a people . . . enfranchised them, disenfranchised them . . . demanded their military service and denied them citizenship through civilian lives of poverty and terror" (Hunt 454). Blacks were hired to break strikes and then dismissed, veterans betrayed, black longshoremen were never paid the same wages as whites, there was a wave of black people running from want and violence. Though capable and willing they were denied good jobs on the tunnel project (*Sula* 81) because of their color. Residents of Bottom managed "as best they can, working menial jobs, scrimping, helping each other" (Nigro 726) through camaraderie.

Black people were "pariahs" (Nigro 735) in the racist Medallion. One could see 'Whites only' vacancies for the Federal government post. The bosses selected southern White boys, "Greeks, and Italians" (*Sula* 82) but never the young men from

the Bottom. This affected and offended in the vigor and masculinity of black males. Racism caused a long term psychological as well as physical damage in the development of black children. Poverty and unemployment rate reached its climax and to eke living was a great challenge. In the 1920s most of the blacks' houses were abandoned by male members of the family making the business of survival an everyday concern for black women. The only available paid work for women was either to work as domestic worker or as prostitute.

If viewed from one perspective *Sula* can be interpreted as an antiwar novel considering its themes and titles of the chapters which captures the period from First World War to Vietnam War. Evaluating and overviewing on the milieu of *Sula*'s inception Patricia Hunt notes:

Peace was a word of considerable, almost palpable, political significance at the time of *Sula*'s composition--during the height of the Vietnam War. *Sula* subtly interrogates the notion of war in terms of the political and social struggles of African Americans . . . military or . . . war-related issues such as the draft . . . Vietnam War was a testing ground for demands for equality and the end of racial oppression. (444)

Sula was set on first half of the twentieth century when the period was notorious for the two disastrous World Wars, Great Depression of 30s, Korean War of 50s, Vietnam War of 60s and several other race riots, fault line wars where huge populations were directly or indirectly decimated and afflicted. Morrison recollecting these incidents of her time states— “[. . .] In the late sixties, with so many dead, detained, or silenced [. . .]” (*Sula* xii). This silence is ambiguous. It can mean the silences of ‘death’ when people are no more alive. It can be the silence when one is

threatened and controlled, not allowed to raise voice against injustices. Both show the glum picture and tyranny of her time. She further in “Foreword” of *Sula* expresses:

Had I begun with Shadrack . . . the reader would be put to immediate confrontation with his wounded mind. It would have called greater attention to the traumatic displacement this most wasteful capitalist war had on black people [. . .] (*Sula* xiv)

By this statement it is clear and obvious that Morrison has been closely evaluating the consequences of the war. So, she doesn't want to make her readers pessimistic in *Sula*'s first reading. That is why she makes some partial change in the prologue and begins describing about the setting of the novel rather than starting from war.

According to the setting the modernized hilly suburb where few blacks are residing now, in the past was named as Bottom and populated with blacks. There was a joke about the origin of the Bottom which symbolically serves as a constant reminder of the oppression of black people by whites since the establishment of the settlement. Once a slave owner promised his slave good land in the hills, known as 'Bottom', telling him that it was “the bottom of heaven” (*Sula* 5) but ironically 'bottom of heaven' required 'backbreaking' labour for cultivation. The name Bottom itself is symbolic. It can mean the lowest (bottom) in social stratification because at the bottom were the blacks, in the middle were the mixed bloods and at the top were the whites. Contrary to blacks, whites lived in fertile rich valley's river town in Ohio where life was easy going and servants (blacks) were available for services.

Shadrack, an abnormal veteran after the events of 1917 (World War) returned to Medallion, handsome but ravaged. The Bottom dwellers observing his pathetic condition would imagine how well he was before he went off to war. When he was a young man of twenty he participated in war with his comrades in December of 1917

in France (*Sula* 7). This being his first war experience got terrified and had mixed feelings. In the battlefield he heard loud explosions and felt pain in his foot. While running, fixing the bayonet, he saw the head of a soldier flying by. Later, when he opened his eyes he found himself in a small hospital bed injured and unable to take food by himself (*Sula* 8). Some days later he was send home untreated when the hospital was overcrowded with inpatients. He was really inflicted and badly ravaged by war and “not daring to acknowledge the fact that he didn’t even know who or what he was” (*Sula* 12). While on his way he was crying soundlessly in the curbside of a small Midwestern town the police came and took him, booked him for vagrancy and intoxication and locked him in cell (*Sula* 13). He neither sought nor received companionship on his return.

Through lengthy description of Shadrack and examining on Morrison’s remark that “[. . .] *Sula* was begun in 1969 . . . in a period of extraordinary Political activity [. . .]” (Hunt 444) we understand that anti-war sentiment was very high in the 60s. Furthermore Morrison was opposed to the trends of war on which war mongers fought for their own vested interests and tried to rationalize it in the name of: patriotism, foreign interference, security threats, and promoting democratic ethos. Morrison was deeply concerned about the impacts of war on the lives of black families and whole nation.

The tombstones in the cemetery which read “PEACE 1895-1921, PEACE 1890-1923, PEACE 1910-1940, PEACE 1892-1959” (*Sula* 171) and the police notification over Eva’s dead body which read: Eva Peace at 7 Carpenter’s Road (*Sula* 172) towards the end of the novel are very symbolic and depicts the context of *Sula*’s inception scenario. Through this Morrison is advocating for peace and not war because absurd war has paralyzed humanity and whole world. Here ‘peace’ signifies

the need of the whole world where numerous wars are fought in the name of patriotism, democracy, liberty, religion, identity, terrorism and many others.

The novel's last section, '1965' coincides with the year that the United States began regular bombing raids on North Vietnam, the year of the well-known Southern California race war, the Watts Riots etc. Though blacks fought for democracy for the Vietnamese in their own land were not granted equality. Morrison exposes the hypocrisy of the nation that boasted for democracy. She continues to "resist the trends of the times without discarding the truths upon which they are based" (Mayberry 518).

1960s faced different violent and non-violent movements such as Civil Rights, Black Power, Black Panther, Black Freedom, Black Conscious, Women Liberation, Black Theology and many others. One of them was Black Revolution which made demands like—"we want all black to be exempt from military service" (Smith 123) which underpins that war was fought for vested interests where blacks were made scapegoat and compelled to kill for a living. Morrison being female and mother knows its harsh reality and advocates for peace and fraternity, rather than violence and war. She probably was influenced by Du Bois who analyzed race riots of 1919 and maltreatment of black troops in American army during the First World War which might have helped her to some extent to create the story of *Sula*.

The pathetic condition of black soldiers is portrayed by Patricia Hunt in the following lines:

Black men participated in U.S. wars from the Revolution forward, in a military that remained segregated until after the Korean War. During World War I, nearly 400,000 black men were drafted, half of them serving in France. The black 369th Infantry were under continuous fire

for a record of 191 days, for which they won the Croix de Guerre and the honor of leading the victorious Allied armies to the Rhine in 1918. The French had treated black soldiers as equals, but the American military authorities issued orders prohibiting them from conversing with or associating with French women, attending social functions, or visiting French homes. (448-49)

Neither the black veterans nor their contribution was acknowledged by the government, instead they were segregated, humiliated, terrorized and treated harshly. Though they were well behaved in foreign land the people of their own nation suggested for their discrimination. “Black soldiers from South *would not* be buried in some city cemeteries . . . *whereas Vietnamese (their enemies) received* greater acceptance than blacks” (Smith 55 italics mine). Instead black veterans were honored and rewarded with lynching and beating on their return from war.

Though in one part of novel we see Helene Wright, a member of conservative black church introducing the trend of the giving banquets to welcome the returning of Negro veterans (*Sula* 13) this was an obligation of state and had to be initiated from government side. For many Negroes World War I seemed “[. . .] a perfect test for proving their worth to the nation . . . *but* this loyalty and hope was rewarded by inferior treatment for black troops, by hardening the lines of discrimination, . . . increased humiliation, . . . bloody summer of 1919 which saw major race riots in the city after city” (Levine 269 italics added). We can see the practice of Jim Crow law on public transport when Helene, a Creole woman, and her daughter Nel find themselves in a “white only” carriage on the train to the South. Helene walks through the compartment to the “colored only” door and is scolded and humiliated by the

white conductor (*Sula* 20). The soldiers who fought for America were bound to sit in the “colored only” compartment of the train.

As mentioned before social-cultural contexts plays crucial role, religion is also one of them and cannot be bypassed. The new black churches assumed a central position in the lives of African Americans. Though blacks were not able to get physical freedom they consoled and assured themselves as having got spiritual freedom. Christianity which was used to control and dictate blacks in the past was assimilated and contextualized according to their life situation and experiences. This strengthened their communal life. The conventional stereotyped views, blacks as inferior, savage, powerless etc. was challenged and replaced. Blacks believed in the principle that ‘all human beings are created equal’ and any kind of value system introduced against this was no other than conspiracy and exploitation. This awareness helped them to fight against slavery and racism.

Theologians struggled to articulate a theology of liberation for their people in a period of intense political activity. A black nationalistic theologian James Cone writes: “The goal of Black Theology,” . . . is the destruction of everything white so that black people can be alienated from alien gods” (Hunt 450). This type of awakening was possible due to the rise in black conscious and development of contextual black theology where God was no more a far away transcendent reality and God of whites but God of their origin who was ‘real’ and understood them well.

The determination and strong spirit sown within black individuals was very vibrant and strong. This is clearer from the lines of Black Declaration of Independence which reads:

[. . .] unless we receive full Redress and Relief from these

Inhumanities we will move to renounce all Allegiance to this Nation,

and will refuse, in every way, to cooperate with the Evil which is Perpetrated upon ourselves and our Communities. (qtd. in Hunt 443)

Rise of consciousness among black people helped to raise voice against injustice and atrocities in 60s. The Black Power movement helped blacks to redefine and reclaim their history, culture and need to unite. It also gave them self determination, recognition and realization of power within themselves. The “1967 Pentagon March . . . made their individual voices heard in protest against the war” (Hoffman 115). Black revolutionist, like Malcolm X, in his powerful public speech inveighs “Blacks died for other people’s right, yet did not have those rights in their own land” (Smith 15). Similarly Carmichael voiced –“we should be fighting in South Carolina rather than in South Vietnam . . . why give your life for the yellow man’s freedom when you don’t have your own?” (Smith 23). This kind of conscious among blacks helped them to unite and fight for common cause. Another reason for the increase of anti war sentiment was the burden of financing various military campaigns in different parts of the world which caused America a huge loss—both human and economic. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. interpreted this conflict as “the white man’s war, the black man’s fight” (Lister N.pag.) to draw attention to the disproportionate number of African-Americans fighting and dying in Vietnam. The whites would encourage blacks for war but blacks were the only ones in the front lines while fighting.

The typical song collected by John Jacob Neils from Negro troops in First World War that goes:

Jined de army fur to git free clothes-
 Lordy, turn your face on me-
 What we’ve fightin’ ’bout, nobody knows-
 Lordy, turn your face on me. (Levine 197)

This was the condition of the majority of the blacks who were badly stricken by poverty and dilemmas of the war situation. War ruined the life of Plum Peace. It also prevented the relationship between Eva, who was abandoned by her husband Boy Boy and sergeant stationed “twenty miles down river from Medallion [. . .]” (*Sula* 165) to develop and blossom because he was called and their affair got withered.

The futility of war is clearer when one veteran recalls, “the only one thing that they told us about the Vietnamese was that they were gooks; they were to be killed. Nobody sits around and gives youth historical and cultural background. They’re the enemy. Kill, kill, kill” (qtd. in Campbell 253). What the war is in the end for? The rationale and cause of fighting was not made clear to soldiers and citizens. This ultimately, resulted to huge loss and humiliated defeat. Therefore the fate of the war veterans in *Sula* and the veterans of Vietnam was alike. Both were not well informed about the reasons of war. Because of this veteran were frustrated, depressed, and addicted to drugs, alienated, despised and ravaged with bonanzas of crises.

If we look at African American culture and family, communal bond is very strong. Most of them try to live in a joint family as long as possible, but due to war, families were torn apart and fragmented. Alienation among families of black community was high and Plum was not exception. Eva Peace, the mother of Plum loved him very much. He went to war in 1917 and managed to return to Medallion by 1920 with hair neither cut nor combed and without socks. He was into drug addiction, excessive drinking and stealing even from his own mother and sister. He was also fond of sleeping for days in the room with the record player going (*Sula* 45). Eva seeing Plum’s neurosis and heroin addiction dreams that he was trying to climb back into her womb. This type of postwar abnormality was common in majority of the veterans.

Though she has for years coped grimly with her own sufferings she cannot bear her son's. Therefore, Eva unable to sleep goes to her son's room and pours kerosene over his body, imagining it as 'baptism' (Christian ritual of ordinance, a symbol of rebirth and new life) and blessing. Here, Eva is symbolically presented as divine figure who could rescue Plum from his agonies and afflictions forever by baptism, followed by fire which is an extreme mystical Christian belief—the 'baptism of fire' is believed to be ordained by Holy Spirit alone, preceding water baptism. Baptism is one of the mystery and symbol of ones entrance from one realm of life into the other—earthly to heavenly.

When we go through the socio-political and cultural aspects of America and if viewed from the point of view of medical ethics, we can justify and defend the act of Eva as euthanasia—a medical practice of killing without pain, especially when there is no hope for recovery—whose son was suffering from the traumas of devastating war and lost his selfhood. She envisions her son's suffering both physically and mentally unrecoverable. As a mother she could not remain aloof and thereby bound to take harsh decision even to the point of ending the life of her beloved son. After she sets her son on fire, she immediately runs (*Sula* 48), this is because she could not visualize her son's final death as a mother.

We can notice the 'fierce love' of Eva and how she managed to take care of her three children and protected them from oppression, poverty and mere survival, when deserted without any resources by her irresponsible husband Boy Boy. There were different rumors about Eva's lost leg. Some said she got struck under a train and then was paid compensation others said she sold her leg to the hospital (*Sula* 31). No matter what exactly Eva did, she has demonstrated her ruthless love by mutilating herself. We can assert that the mother who didn't hesitate to sacrifice her body parts

for the wellbeing of her offspring and accede to remain handicapped couldn't see her own son's mental handicapped situation. She was not worried about herself but much concerned about her son's condition and manhood.

During infancy while Plum stopped having bowel movements, Eva tried her best to comfort and soothe him in the middle of the night. Ultimately she resolved the problem and he could relieve his stool (*Sula* 34, 70). From this description we find Eva as a responsible mother. Actually for her, children were lifeblood and she couldn't imagine living without them even for a second.

She managed to build a house which was open to cousins who were passing by, stray folks, newly married couples and many more (*Sula* 37) so Eva is associated with "the mother of all living" (*The Holy Bible*, Gen. 3:20). In the Bible the first created woman Eve, is named 'mother of all.' So Eva is a protector of the disenfranchised, offers a heavenly environment for ostracized and defenseless population of the community. Unparented children were reared and sponsored for schooling by her. So, how can this kind of broad hearted mother think of killing her own son if she had not enough reasons?

When Nel Wright, as part of her charitable work visited Eva in Sunnyside—a home for aged—they had some discussions and Eva asked her how she killed a little boy. Nel was quick to defend herself saying that it was Sula, who threw the boy into the river and not her. "You. Sula. What's the difference? You was there. You watched didn't you? Me, I never would've watched" (*Sula* 168) Eva argued. Though Nel was not directly involved in the death of Chicken Little she felt convicted. Symbolically by this Morrison claims that one is equally responsible and a culprit even if s/he is not directly involved in killing. She retorts that Eva is not only responsible for Plum's death and blamed. Authorities are equally responsible as Eva, since they send youths

to perennial wars for their petty political interest, where youths become casualties of the war and even if they do return they are ruined by the post war traumatic disorders, which is in itself a kind of death in life. This is to say that both observer and actor (murderer) are equally responsible because the former could have acted to stop the incident. Metaphorically this is an attack to the state mechanism which is mere spectator to the plight of hundreds of black soldiers.

Morrison vindicates the act of murder by Eva when Hannah, Plum's sister and daughter of Eva asked her if she ever loved them, Eva replies: "You settin' here with your healthy-ass self and ax me did I love you? (*Sula* 68). Being unconvinced about her love, Hannah further asks, whether she ever played with them. Eva clarifies referring back to the days of 1890s and informs that those times were really bad and "Niggers were dying like flies" (*Sula* 68) and it was big thing just to survive during those years.

Hannah, unsatisfied with the response of her mother and confused, again asks if she loved Plum, than, why she killed him? Eva explains that she had done her best when he was inside her womb and born him alive. She had hoped that her son Plum would be her anchor. But when he returned from war, a broken man, Eva recalls, he was "helpless and thinking baby thoughts and dreaming baby dreams and messing up his pants again and smiling all the time. I had room enough in my heart . . . *she goes on*, "but not in my womb . . . I birthed him once. I couldn't do it again [. . .]" (*Sula* 71 italics mine). Envisioning Plum— who was victim of post war mental disorder— trying to creep in her bed and part her legs to crawl back into her womb, Eva concludes:

One night it wouldn't be no dream. It'd be true and I would have done it, would have let him if I'd've had the room but a big man can't be a

baby all wrapped up inside his mamma no more; he suffocate. I done everything I could to make him leave me and go live and be man but he wouldn't and I had to keep him out so I just thought of a way he could die like a man not all scrunched up inside my womb, but like a man. (*Sula* 72)

Obviously, what Eva opines was rational. Naturally it is impossible for a grown up man to reenter into mother's womb. Her son's act has haunted her a lot. She thinks that even if she manages to wrap him inside her womb, he would suffocate and die anyway. Therefore, she adds that she had done everything to make him independent and be a man and preserve his manhood but finally she had to kill him so that he could die a death like a man, rather than observe his detrimental condition everyday. But still her act was inspired by love as Morrison in one of her interview states "[. . .] people do all sorts of things, under its guise. The violence is a distortion of what, perhaps, we want to do. With the best intentions in the world we can do enormous harm [. . .]" (Otten 652). Morrison believes that though it was an act of violence it was for best purpose—an extraordinary expression of love. She loved him in the worst of all possible ways because she couldn't do it normally and it has ended in murder.

Before killing Plum, she "gathered him into her arms" (*Sula* 46), rocks him back and forth, gradually tears began to roll down Eva's cheeks. When she describes the reason behind Plum's killing, her eyes were filled with tears and finally she said, "I held him close first. Real close, Sweet Plum [. . .]" (*Sula* 72). This depicts that she very much loved her son and tried to hold him close as possible but she doesn't dote about her son and considers him as a grown-up responsible adult and discloses his reality showing complete compassion with him.

As Guth states:

Eva's killing of Plum is accompanied by passionate conviction: having fought so hard to save and bring him up, she cannot countenance his own surrender in the face of life. The action she takes may well be terrible, but her horror and inability to accept his passive disintegration are both real and compelling. (578)

Eva was never one to hide the faults of her children as some mothers do. She has a God like arrogance who cannot just forgive sin. In Christianity God the Father had to send his son Jesus to die on cross for the sin of the world because he hated sin so much. Eva also hates the evil embedded inside her son but not him. Her wish for her children was, to be bold enough and face the world by any means as she has done never succumbing but fighting. Eva ultimately decides to end Plum's life when his life was not worth living and death was painless than living.

A parade of a group of twenty people including Shadrack hoped and were "convinced that some magic 'government' was going to lift up, out and away from the dirt, those beans and those wars" (*Sula* 160). This dream symbolizes not just the dream of Shadrack, a war victim and Medallion dwellers but of the whole U.S. denizens who were frustrated from meaningless perennial wars that their government was fighting in the 60s. The custom of celebrating National Suicide Day initiated by Shadrack is very ironic. His idea behind the celebration was that "death is frightful, and if he could set aside one day a year for death, people could "get it out of the way" and not have to think about it for the rest of the year" (Nigro 731-32). This manifests the paranoid psyche of the general publics in the 60s concerning war.

When Nel meets with Eva at old people home, she finds her talking. So she asks her whom she was talking to? Eva replied— "Plum. Sweet Plum. He tells me

things.” (*Sula* 169). Even though physically her son is no more with her, she still is able to converse with him. Africans believe that the “demise of the body is not the end of being” (Otten 659). They have the religio-cultural belief of communicating with the dead soul (spirit) so “[. . .] Sula thinks of Nel as she passes from this life and enters the next [. . .]” (Fulton 75) there is a concept of ‘rebirth’ (lifecycle) because their world view is different from that of Western Christian linear history where eschatology— judgment day— plays a vital role. For the Africans there is neither heaven nor hell and person’s soul hovers and moves all around the world and assists the living. For Morrison the inscription like PEACE 1895-1921 were not dead people (*Sula* 171), people don’t die instead continue the cycle of life and death. This concept tilts towards the belief of Thomas More’s Utopians where the dead “move about among the living and are witnesses of their words and actions” (Greenblatt 50).

Morrison narrates that, “[. . .] Eva knew what she was doing. Always had” (*Sula* 171). This also strengthens the point that Eva acted out of her mind not just heart. She defends Eva from the psyche of Nel as well, who narrates Eva’s act of her refusal to attend the funeral of Sula was not due to “pride but her unwillingness to see the swallowing of her own flesh into the dirt, a determination not to let her eyes see what the heart could not hold” (*Sula* 171). By this, Morrison asserts that how can a grandma who thinks Sula as her own flesh and cannot dare to see her burial can kill her own blood son, if there was no enough cause behind it?

Eventually we can agree with Otten who asserts that in Morrison’s “fictional world monstrous deeds can become expressions of compassion; violent deeds can lead to the restoration of love . . . infanticide, murder become “signifiers” of love disguised in frightening acts . . . ‘horrific love’ bear witness to such truth” (Otten 664)

where despite its guise, love remains untrammelled and no force of this world can stop a mother from loving.

We can say that motherhood and war are hostile to each other. War destroys familial bond. Therefore by killing her son Eva has removed him from his possible participation in the war. Another instance of Sula's hesitancy for marriage and tendency of making love alone is also the means to prevent war because if she gets married and has children their destiny will also not be different than that of war veterans. Morrison wants to give the message that black people are peace-loving.

Signifyin(g): Inversion of Conventional Perceptions

Signifyin(g) has its root in the African trickster tales of 'the Signifying Monkey.' In the tale there are three stock characters— the Monkey, the Lion, and the Elephant. Monkey-a trickster figure, who is full of guile, who tells lies, and who is a rhetorical genius-is intent on demystifying the Lion's self-imposed status as King of the Jungle. The Monkey, clearly, is no match for the Lion's physical prowess; the Elephant is, however. The Monkey's task is to trick the Lion into tangling with the Elephant, who is the true King of the Jungle. This the Monkey does with a "rhetorical trick, a trick of mediation" (Gates 56). Monkey engages the Lion by repeating insults purportedly said by the Elephant. Lion flushed with anger rushes off helter-skelter and challenges the Elephant but loses; finally, the Lion returns to the Monkey and engages the Monkey. Though the Monkey slips from his protective branch manage to escapes certain defeat by tricking the Lion again. From this tricker tales as Gates defines, "Signifyin(g) *as a sign of rule in the kingdom of Signification: neither the Lion nor the Elephant-both Signifieds, those Signified upon-is the King of the Jungle; rather, the Monkey is King, the Monkey as Signifier*" (62 italics added).

According to African American critics Signifyin(g) is a Negro term which has its origin since the time of slavery. So, Signifyin(g) is an African American theoretical trope that has several definitions and meanings. It can mean “making fun of a person or situation [. . .]” (Gates 54), a “ritual insult”, mode of “baiting” is black person’s symbolic aggression, enacted in . . . the play of language” (Gates 68) etc. According to J. L. Dillard, Signifyin(g) is “a familiar discourse device from the inner city, [which] tends to mean ‘communicating (often an obscene or ridiculing message) by indirection” (Gates 70). The *Psychology of Black Language and Dictionary of American Slang* in its glossary interpret ‘to signify’ as “to berate, degrade” (Gates 71). In the thought of H. Rap Brown, signifyin(g) is a “way of expressing *ones* own feelings [. . .]” (Gates 72 italics mine).

Therefore, we can say Sethe’s act of homicide is like a tricky thing that the monkey does to powerful Elephant, she does to powerful master who thought her to be acquiescent and non-resistant. It is an expression of her love to her beloved daughter, her action was driven more out of the concern of safety issues where she claims: “[. . .] I put my babies where they would be safe” (*Beloved* 164). Here, Sethe overturns the white myths about slaves like passive, docile, weak etc. The mother’s act manifests the defiance of corrupted oppressive culture, it’s racial past and present from personal level both psychologically and physically. The conventional ‘signifiers’ of brutal forces like cruelty and evil defined by whites are transformed to extraordinary ‘love’ which compels mothers to “break rules” (Sanna 26). Wu also concurs to this view and points out Morrison “transforms and resignifies what we mean by love” (Wu 794).

Gates in *The Signifying Monkey* writes “the signifier . . . wreaks havoc on the signified” (52) as in the tradition of Monkey. The tricker tales as claimed by Levine

“consists of confrontation in which the weak use their wits to evade the strong . . . the weak learn the brutal ways of the more powerful” (106). We can say Sethe might have been inspired by white masters brutalities inflicted upon her and her children so with the same tool she hits back. Morrison also through ironic inversion and reconstruction in Afro-American literature co-opts the given signifiers of the oppressive culture to gain empowerment and freedom. Therefore, Sethe’s murder of her daughter can also be seen as a courageous act to “withstand the travails of bondage” (Campbell and Kean 116) and presenting her different identity beyond the identity of “slave,” the identity imposed on blacks by whites. Afterward unnamed daughter gets the identity of ‘Beloved’ who had a red “scar on the throat” (*Beloved* 239) as a sign of new identity.

Sethe’s acts are the manifestation of a culture corrupted by slavery in past as well present. Signifyin(g) has the power to transform conventional “signifiers” of crime, cruelty, unethical and evil are gestures of extraordinary love. Here infanticide and murder articulated to date as vile, immoral and condemned by the dominant culture gets inverse through the act of Signifyin(g). Now homicide is defined and interpreted as profound complex love. Morrison vindicates the acts of Sethe as just. So, Sethe is Signifyin(g) an act of retaliation for not being allowed to love. She is against the culture of long oppressive institutionalized slavery that devalued blacks as possessions and incomplete humans. This also signifies the extreme measures a person would take to escape what anti-slavery lawyer Jolliffe terms the “seething hell of American slavery” and Douglass as “hell of our Christian Slavery” (Rushdy 147). Her murder of her daughter is a heroic venture for freedom.

Morrison is not just a novelist but at the same time an artist, critic and intellectual of African American studies. Therefore her personal experiences of being

an African American female author definitely influence her works either be they be imaginative or critical ones. Wallace is also close to this view and writes “she writes of a reconstruction of a world . . . [and] exploration of an interior life that was not written and to the revelation of a kind of truth” (Campel and Kean 84). As narrator of *Beloved* remarks “definitions belong to the definers— not the defined” (190) Morrison subverts this notion. Neither her characters nor she remain silent to the dominant culture which was hitherto dictated, represented and invented by whites. Morrison, through signifyin(g), gives discontinuity to this long prevailing and practiced tradition “[. . .] employing not only available accounts in slave narratives . . . but also disengaging the materials from historical documents in order to revitalize them as lived experience” (Otten 657). Morrison re-positions the African American discourse by “form of counter memory” (Campel and Kean 84) examining their history.

In one of her interview Morrison says—“sometimes good looks like evil and sometimes evil looks like good-you never really know what it is. It depends what use you put it to [. . .]” (Mayberry 532). According to Morrison good or bad depends on the perspective how we view things because a person is implicated by many factors. She inverts conventional moral categories and defines homicide as one dimension of love but a changed form. What is ‘right,’ natural and ‘normal’ are matters of definitions. Otten agreeing with Morrison affirms, “In a world warped and distorted by brutish oppression, innocence can assume a criminal nature, and evil can become a regenerative force . . . Morrison explores the dimensions of love in many manifestations” (Otten 664). With less analysis we regard Plum’s murder by Eva as evil but for her it was the best remaining option.

As Thomas March writes:

It would be inaccurate to reduce Morrison's work to a discussion of simple equality or equivalence. It represents an expansion of the narrative space available for the African-American to occupy in the American consciousness . . . Morrison *writes* in conclusion of *Playing in the Dark*: "My project is an effort to avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served. (60 italics mine)

From the above excerpt it is clear that Morrison is not just seeking equality and space. She is determined to establish African as well as her own identity in the mainline canon by means of effective work of art challenging the conventional constructions. We can conclude that her works has role in countering negative representations of black people and promoting black consciousness. As Greenblatt believes the role of aesthetic in transforming culture, Morrison also believes that her work will certainly empower and inform her recipients to know the grim ground reality of African-American society in which they live and work consciously and collectively for improvisation, knowing their roots. Through the act of progeny homicide Morrison is Signifyin(g) — making fun and exposing the hypocrisy of the world's most democratic superpower nation (U.S.A.).

Role of Discourses in the Construction of so-called Reality

A discourse is a "social language created by particular cultural conditions at a particular time and place, and it expresses a particular way of understanding human experience [. . .]" (Tyson 285). Discourses "organize statements, define texts, promote meanings, representations and stories, position subjects . . . construct our sense of

what is right and wrong, normal and abnormal, important or not worthy [. . .].]”(Campbell and Kean 13). It “transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and make it possible to thwart it” (qtd. in Mills 55). Therefore discourse is a system which structures the way that we perceive reality or a practice that we impose on them.

What is right, natural and normal are matters of definition. As Foucault also suggests “all definitions of “insanity,” “crime” . . . are social constructs by means of which ruling powers maintain their control” (Tyson 285-86) so, the act of progeny homicide shouldn't be dealt as ‘bizarre’ and ‘crime’, for nothing exists in vacuum without first cause. There is relation between the work of art and literature and there are various histories and contexts behind the text. Literary works cannot be seen as separate or separable from the lives and histories that are involved in their production and reception. Greenblatt also claims, “[. . .] literature is not entirely separable from either interest or ideology [. . .]” (Greenblatt 6). So definitely there are prejudices in the creation and one totally can't be bias-free and objective from the culture and context s/he lives in. Therefore, any innovative writer generates ‘co-texts’ or ‘stories’ by ‘contexts’ and fictionalizes the history. Moreover, sometimes the so-called fiction proves to be truer than the mainline canonical history.

According to Campbell and Kean, “social processes’ can be ‘read’, interpreted and contested as texts” (12). Literary texts are cultural artifacts that can tell us about the “interplay of discourses, the web of social meanings, operating in the time and place in which the texts were written” (Tyson 286-87). There is inseparability of literary and non-literary texts. That is why we cannot claim history as fixed objective and factual and separate it totally from literature with which it interacts because literature is the vehicle and tool to represent history so they are interdependent.

Greenblatt also claims that “there are no transcendent and absolute rules about what belongs in the zone of literary and in the zone of the nonliterary” (Greenblatt 5) but treats both with equal values. To claim non-literary texts as objective and believe it as presenting hundred percent realities is a big mistake. We can’t really know exactly what happened at any given point in history, but we can know what the people involved believed happened [. . .]” (Tyson 294). They are also just representations, which are ideological products or cultural construct of a particular era.

Therefore, slavery itself is a discourse. Many so-called realities were invented by people in power, the privileged group. They were the ones who define others as “other”, different and inferior. This kind of discourse is clearly seen in one of the proslavery pamphlet of 1836 by William Drayton which mentions:

Personal observation must convince every candid man, that the Negro is constitutionally indolent and prone to vice; that his mind is heavy, dull, and unambitious; and that the doom that has made the African in all ages and countries, a slave— is the natural consequence of the inferiority of his character. (Bulmer 81)

These kinds of biased and illogical arguments were propagated in the society to support inhuman institution of slavery. Blacks were supposed to be inferior created to serve the master race (whites) and cannot be compared to whites. They were little above animals, savage, uncivilized, barbaric, parasite, passive, lazy, powerless, and voiceless without knowledge and were therefore suited for slavery. Those stereotypes implied and imposed upon blacks made them the victims of vicious racial injustices.

After the use of various discourses religious discourse was used to substantiate and inferiorize blacks. The religion defined and controlled by whites was used as a protective shield to authenticate and justify slavery. The New Testament’s favorable

portions like —“Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ [. . .]” (*The Holy Bible*, Eph. 6:5) were used but the remaining other section “And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them [. . .]” (*The Holy Bible*, Eph. 6:9) was avoided. In church services some reverends taught, “It is devil who tells you to try and be free” (Levine 44). Slaves were only expected to be obedient in all things fearing God. Those who were sympathetic to slaves were ridiculed as “fit for a room in the Lunatic Asylum” (Levine 47).

According to Foucault “power flows every where.” So, even the margin, subjects can challenge center. There is not always one person or authority’s power rather there are fluxes in everything. As Foucault sates, “where there is power there is resistance” (qtd. in Mills 40) human beings are never mere victims of an oppressive society, for they can find various ways to oppose authority in their personal and public life. According to James Scott “Black American slaves might obey their white masters and smile in their presence, among themselves they would critique that power in folktales, gossip, songs and in actions such as poaching, petty pilfering, foot-dragging [. . .]” (Mills 40) but Sethe’s action can be seen as direct reprisal and resistance that gave a heavy blow to the white masters and their conventional discourses.

The discourse of ‘manhood’ was strong until 1960s but the wave of feminism and women liberation movement in 70s and 80s attacked, questioned and challenged the ‘myths’ constructed about women by patriarchy with counter discourses. The discourses like women have less intellect and are capable of writing only sentimental novels was challenged by Morrison. Instead Morrison introduces and brings complex highly philosophical socio-cultural human issues in her novels. In *Sula* Eva by her

bold endeavor of taking the life of her mentally paralyzed son who was a victim of society challenges the discourses of patriarchy directed towards females which considered women as passive, inferior and weak and expected them to be obedient. Eva subverts the discourse of patriarchy: woman as ‘mysterious’, and reasons that it is not woman who is mysterious but an inability of patriarchy to understand female burdens and experiences by means of this tragic incident. Morrison defends Eva’s acts as her last hope and compulsion. She was made victim by the society through perennial wars threatening her motherhood.

As there is a maxim that ‘one who inspires to sin is guilty than who commits sin’ it is tempter who tempts others to improper acts, so we cannot accuse Eva for the murder of her beloved son. State mechanism is the tempter and responsible for killing. If the government has rights to kill millions of people through heinous absurd wars, it has its obligation and responsibility to take care of its individuals as well. So, Eva is not only responsible for her acts but the authority and society are equally responsible and should share the burden of the killing.

As Foucault raises question about convicting an individual of crime and asks “can one condemn to death a person one doesn’t know?” (qtd. in Mills 73). His logic is that in the legal process judge needs to be able to assess whether the culprit’s action is determined by pathology or undertaken with intentionality. Therefore in *Beloved* and *Sula* also progeny homicide issue might have something to do with depression, “monomania — disease in which sufferers become mad for a short period and then completely recover their rationality” (McHoul and Grace 20)—upshot of oppression of slavery, racism and war. Without knowing this and examining the causes by close reading we cannot make any kind of accusations against mothers.

Chapter III: Conclusion: Redemptive Act, Acted out of Instinctual Maternal Love

History is never written from the perspective and vantage point of loser or periphery, rather is the construction of center which is influenced by power relations. So Morrison revisits and re-writes the unexplored and forgotten darker aspect of American history which, in most case was neglected, misrepresented and disremembered from the position of marginalized black survivors' of slavery, racism and war in *Beloved* and *Sula*. She is successful in presenting different version of alternative American history which was ignored for a long time, through the canvas of various interesting images, anecdotes and incidents that happened and is happening at manifest and latent level in the lives of the African Americans in her novels.

Though Sethe escaped from slavery but is still hunted by its heritage. The virulent institution of slavery compels her to react in that violent manner; it would be crime if it was done in the democratic and free world where all people are treated equally despite their physical traits, creed or color. Being a mother she cannot remain mute when she was challenged overtly and deprived of her maternal rights and love. It was her only option and possible course of action in the very context of dehumanizing severity of slavery.

Blacks had nothing to own, nothing to be proud of their own even the claim of their family members, so in one way Sethe is claiming her right over her children for she bore them with great risk of her own life both from outside (whites) and within, in safe delivery of child which is a matter of life and death for majority of mothers.

We can say that as Newton's third law of motion claims 'to every action there is equal but opposite reaction,' Sethe wouldn't have taken the life of her daughter if she was impressed with slavery; it was her reaction to the inhuman actions of master.

She finds greater dignity in death rather than live a life of servitude— a kind of hellish death in life.

She had already been the victim of institutionalized slavery so she doesn't want her children to live the same kind of life as her forefathers and she herself has lived and endured. Sethe's infanticide paradoxically is to protect and save her beloved daughter from horrific degrading inhuman bondage of slavery. She wants to initiate a new kind of dignified life where humans are treated as humans.

Morrison is in favor of flux and she doesn't uphold any culture or system forever. In *Beloved* she is standing for transformation, through the act of her character Sethe, who by killing her own daughter, breaks the tradition and doesn't compromise and yield to the will of master, which is a clear hint that she is against slaveocracy— slaveholding regime— and revolted against injustice and oppression.

Killing of Sethe can be interpreted as the outcome of post slavery Afro-American consciousness as well. Sethe's act is not limited to her alone but it attests the fierce love of the slave mother for her child in every slave holding society. She overturns the white myth of compliant childlike slave. This gives a message that slave mothers are against slaveocracy and can revolt against subjugation, injustice and bondage for manumission.

Morrison heavily criticizes and detests war. From *Sula's* incident, ironically, she is hinting to government's apathy towards war and plight of black soldiers. Eva becomes Morrison's mouthpiece and argues that, either direct involvement in killing or watching from a distance is of equal degree to that of homicide. Here, both are involved one way or the other in destroying precious human life which is not different from direct involvement in murder. Government has to be accountable for the murder of innocent soldiers.

When Eva visualizes no dignified future and knows the painful pathetic condition of her son consumed by mental illness on his return from war, his failure to live up to the ideal notion of a responsible man she gathers up her courage to set him on fire. Here Eva to some extent seems to be ruthless in her acts but ultimately, she does justice to her blood and womb. Eva immolates Plum not because of her cruelty, but with conscious and great understanding of reality. There is no decline in Eva's impassion and love towards her son nor she is trying to get rid of her nature assigned motherly duty but she is forced to burn the instinct of evils within him. She is a good mother, loving, kind enough and willing to save her children at all costs, even to the point of sticking her leg under a train or to save it. As a mother she is bold enough to create and destroy. As God the creator has power over his creation so does the mother. She can take as well as create it, if she desires.

In both tragic incidents mothers' motive for killing their daughter and son is desperate love. Their reactions (killings) are acts of protest that compels the government to evaluate and rework their policies and plans, to change their discriminative attitudes and treat all citizens equally with equity. America is no more a 'melting pot' where everybody has to bear the same characters as that of the majority of the whites and dilute, but a 'bowl of salad' where everything is mixed, yet have its individual identity and existence.

In each novel the mothers take such drastic steps out of motherly love. We can conclude that due to traumatic dehumanizing experiences of slavery and disastrous affect of war though the mothers' love their children much are compelled to end their offspring lives when they were about to be overpowered with worse circumstances and remaining alternatives were also worse than death. Therefore the mothers cherish and foresee more dignified life in death than living a life as a corpse. So, mothers

cannot be stigmatized because their circumstances have to be taken into consideration. They are not perpetrators but victims of slavery, racism and war. It is a satire and iconoclasm on American dream, religiosity and its hypocrisy where promised life of equality, liberty and pursuit of happiness were far removed from reality. The ideal preaching at church: all men are created equal, human life as holy etc. never came outside the gates of church.

Mothering compels both the mothers to progeny homicide. There is no point to question and argue much about mothers' acts over their children. If the authorities and judges in the name of establishing rule of law and execution of justice could decide who should live and who should die why can't the mothers? Their acts are inspired by desperate love which are in a way symbolic expression of protest—margin challenging center.

Mothers' acts signify an indirect way of expressing anger towards whites for their dual character, ill-treatment of their ancestors, them and their offspring. Though physically their children are gone forever, back to God they are never forgotten by mothers. Finally, as a concluding remark we can say that progeny homicide in Morrison's *Beloved* and *Sula* is a way to redemption from brutish enslavement of slavery, racism and wretchedness of interminable war, instigated and performed truly out of motherly love.

Works Cited

- Barnett, Pamela E. "Figurations of Rape and the Supernatural in *Beloved*." *PMLA*.
 Modern Language Association. 112. 3. (May, 1997): 418-427. JSTOR. 27 Oct.
 2010 < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/462950> >
- Baym, Nina, ed. "Toni Morrison." *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. 5th
 ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Vol. II, 1979. 2077-2092.
- Brannigan, John. "History Power and Politics in the Literary Artifact: New
 Historicism." *Introducing Literary Theories: A Guide & Glossary*. ed. Julian
 Wolfreys. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 2005. 169-84.
- Bulmer, Martin and John Solomos, eds. *Oxford Readers: Racism*. Oxford: Oxford
 University Press, 1999.
- Campbell, Neil and Alasdair Kean. "Cultural Politics/Cultural Studies." Introduction.
American Cultural Studies: An Introduction to American Culture. London:
 Routledge, 1997. 1-17.
- Fulton, Lorie Watkins. "A Direction of One's Own: Alienation in *Mrs. Dalloway* and
Sula." *African American Review*. St. Louis University. 40. 1. Spring (2006):
 67-77. JSTOR. 1 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40027032>>
- Gates, Henry Louis Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American
 Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1989. 12 Apr. 2011
 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=94390994>>
- Gates, Henry Louis Jr., and Nellie McKay eds. "Toni Morrison." *The Norton
 Anthology of African American Literature*. New York: W.W. Norton &
 Company, 1997. 2094-2180.

- Gourdine, Angeletta Km. "Hearing Reading and Being "Read" by Beloved." *NWSA Journal*. Johns Hopkins University Press. 10. 2. Summer (1998): 13-31. JSTOR. 27 Oct. 2010 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4316576>>
- Gray, Laura. *York Notes: Beloved*. London: York Press, 1999.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. Introduction. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. 1980. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005. 1-9.
- Greenblatt and Gunn. Introduction. *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*. Eds. Stephen Greenblatt and Guiles Gunn. New York: MLA, 1992. 1-11.
- Guth, Deborah. "A Blessing and a Burden: The Relation to the Past in *Sula*, *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved*." *Modern Fiction Studies*. Johns Hopkins University Press. 39. 3 & 4. Fall/Winter (1993): 575-596. Project Muse. 27 Sept. 2010 <<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/mfs/summary/v039/39.3-4.guth.html>>
- Henderson, Carol E. *Scarring the Body: Race Redemption in African American Literature*. University of Missouri Press, 2002. 83. 28 Sept. 2010 <<http://www.books.google.com.np/books?>>
- Hoffman, Daniel. *Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing*. 1979. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Hunt, Patricia. "War and Peace: Transfigured Categories and the Politics of *Sula*." *African American Review*. Indiana State University. 27. 3. Women's Culture Issue (Autumn, 1993): 443-59. JSTOR. 27 Oct. 2010 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3041934>>
- Lee, Rachel. "Missing Peace in Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *Beloved*." *African American Review*. Indiana State University. 28. 4. Winter (1994): 571-583. JSTOR. 29 Oct. 2010 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3042219>>

- Levine, Lawrence W. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Lister, Rachel. "Literary Contexts in Novels: Toni Morrison's *Sula*." *Literary Reference Center*. Great Neck Publishing, 2007. 1, 1p. EBSCO. 13 Sept. 2010
<<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lfh&AN=27264901&site=lrc-live>>
- March, Thomas. "Filling in the Gaps: The Fictional World of Toni Morrison." *Blooms BioCritiques: Toni Morrison*. ed. Harold Bloom. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002. 39-60.
- Mayberry, Susan Neal. "Something Other than a Family Quarrel: The Beautiful Boys in Morrison's *Sula*." *African American Review*. St. Louis University. Vol. 37. No. 4. Winter (2003): 517-533. JSTOR. 1 Feb. 2011
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1512384>>
- McBride, Dwight A. "Speaking the Unspeakable: On Toni Morrison, African American Intellectuals and the Uses of Essentialist Rhetoric." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*. Johns Hopkins University Press. 39. 3 & 4, Fall/Winter (1993): 756-776. Project Muse. 25 Jan. 2011
<http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/modern_fiction_studies/v039/39.3-4.mcbride.html>
- McHoul, Alec and Wendy Grace. *A Foucault Primer: Discourse, Power and the Subject*. New York: New York University Press, 1997.
- Mills, Sara. *Michel Foucault*. London: Routledge. 2003. Rpt. in India. Noida: Brijbasi Art Press, 2007.

- Montrose, Louis. "New Historicisms." *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*. Eds. Stephen Greenblatt and Guiles Gunn. New York: MLA, 1992. 392- 418.
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. 1987. London: Vintage, 1997.
- . *Sula*. 1973. London: Vintage Books, 2005.
- Nigro, Marie. "In Search of Self: Frustration and Denial in Toni Morrison's *Sula*." *Journal of Black Studies*. Sage Publications, 1998. Vol. 28. 6. (July, 1998): 724-737. JSTOR. 1 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2784814>>
- Okonkwo, Christopher N. "A Critical Divination: Reading *Sula* as Ogbanje-Abiku." *African American Review*. St. Louis University. 38. 4. Winter (2004): 651-668. JSTOR. 27 Sept. 2010 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4134423>>
- Otten, Terry. "Horrorific Love in Toni Morrison's Fiction." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*. Johns Hopkins University Press. 39. 3 & 4, Fall/Winter (1993): 651-667. Project Muse. 25 Jan. 2011 <<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/mfs/summary/v039/39.3-4.otten.html>>
- Padley, Steve. *Key Concepts in Contemporary Literature*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. 171-174.
- Pal, Sunanda. "From Periphery to Centre: Toni Morrison's Self Affirming Fiction." *Economic and Political Weekly*. 29. 37 (Sep. 10, 1994): 2439-2443. JSTOR. 27 Oct. 2010 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4401756>>
- Peach, Linden ed. Introduction. *New Casebooks: Toni Morrison*. By Peach. London: Macmillan Press, 1998. 1-26.
- Perkins, Barbara eds., et al. *Women's Work: Anthology of American Literature*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994. 1069.
- Robson, Mark. *Stephen Greenblatt*. London: Routledge, 2008.

- Rushdy, Ashraf H. A. "Daughters Signifyin(g) History: The Example of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." *New Casebooks: Toni Morrison*. ed. Linden Peach. London: Macmillan Press, 1998. 140-53.
- Sanna, Ellyn. "Biography of Toni Morrison." *Blooms BioCritiques: Toni Morrison*. ed. Harold Bloom. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002. 3-38.
- Sitter, Deborah Ayer. "The Making of a Man: Dialogic Meaning in *Beloved*." *African American Review*. Indiana State University. 26. 1. Women Writers Issue, Spring (1992): 17-29. JSTOR. 28 Oct. 2010
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3042073>>
- Smith, Arthur L. *rhetoric of Black Revolution*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1969.
- The Holy Bible, New International Version*. Michigan: ZONDERVAN, 1984. 1072.
- Tyson, Lois. *critical theory today*. 2nd ed., New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Wu, Yung-Hsing. "Doing Things with Ethics: *Beloved*, *Sula*, and the Reading of Judgment." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*. 49. 4 (2003): 780-805. Project Muse. 27 Jan. 2011
<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/modern_fiction_studies/v049/49.4wu.html>