Revisiting History: African American Experiences in Toni Morrison's Novels

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By

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Letter of Recommendation

We certify that this dissertation entitled "Revisiting History: African American Experiences in Toni Morrison's Novels" was prepared by Lekha Nath Dhakal under our guidance. We hereby recommend this dissertation for final examinations by the Research Committee of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University, in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this PhD dissertation entitled “REVISTING HISTORY: AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCES IN TONI MORRISON'S NOVELS,” submitted to the Office of the Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University, is entirely my original work prepared under the supervision of my supervisor. I have made due acknowledgements to all ideas and information borrowed from different sources in the course of writing this dissertation. The results of this dissertation have not been presented or submitted anywhere else for the award of any degree or for any purpose. No part of the contents of this dissertation has ever been published in any form before. I shall be solely held responsible for any evidence found against my declaration.

Lekha Nath Dhakal

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Abstract

Toni Morrison is a prominent voice in African American literature. Her writings engage history, community, slavery, love, survival, racial and sexual politics. It is through these universals that she deals with rewriting history, re-assessing cultures, investigating and confronting stereotypes of what it means to be black or white as well as what it means to be man and woman in the United States of America.
She justifies the presence of African community in her novels which address the lives of African American people in different historical periods.

Morrison sees herself as an agent in the empowerment of her people through the rediscovery of their history. Her focus is historic and her goal is the rediscovery of the African past lost through slavery in America. In examining her legacy, she expects to reach a higher level in the understanding of herself. Her themes are no longer specific to herself or to her group, but they have become universal ones. They address disruptive families and challenge modern times. Her novels have a complex relationship to history; they are, in a sense, historical novels in which the characters are images of the people who survived the African-American history in America.

Morrison's work resonates with her interest in recuperating a black American history recording and representing the musical and lived voices of the people. It also explores the relationships of power between the white and black and between men and women. She uses historical moments of joy and importance in black history, many of which have been hidden from the conventional history books which mainly concentrated

on white, male, middle - class histories. Morrison re-interprets past and re-centers it on black experience.

Morrison also looks at other period in black history: the Harlem Renaissance in New York, its roots and the roots of the people in the countryside, the 1930s, in *Jazz*. When the Jazz Age arrived it gave African Americans new opportunities for success. Musical and other talents were recognized enabling to hope, to gain fame and also to move into a more materialistic society. This latter issue is partly what goes wrong with the age. Morrison tackles and explores racism, both overt and covert, the later ignoring people their rights, needs and histories, and silencing them through refusing to give them a voice with the vote, with publication or with reportage in the press. In *Jazz,* murder goes unreported as it happens in black community and the mainstream press finds it unimportant. *Jazz* captures and re-imagines a historical and cultural moment. It restores a largely absent black history and gives different perspectives and scrutinizes everyday African American life. It deals with lies, suffering, male-female relationships and the role of music.

Morrison writes in a predominately realistic mode whose narrative structure posits whites and constructs blacks as “Other” in American society--a society where the question of race is still unanswered. African-American culture in her work is more specific to her position as an African-American mythographer. The past is an integral part to the legacy of African Americans. It links up them to their glorious heritage. The history of America has been written from the perspective of the dominant whites that has

degraded and distorted the presence of blacks in America. The history of America will remain incomplete if the voices of the margins are not heard.

The study answers to the questions: how does Morrison, by taking historical persona (African American victims of racist ideology), reconstruct the dominant presence of blacks in America through her fiction? The objective of this study is to observe how Morrison's novels transform what has been a significant absence in the narrative of American history--the exploitation and denial of black cultural identity--into a powerful presence. It observes how Morrison presents American history from a black perspective creating a voice and identity out of a confrontation with the dominant white American discourse.

This study has used New Historicism as theoretical tools to analyze Morrison's six major novels—*The Bluest Eye, Sula, The Song of Solomon, Beloved, Jazz,* and *Paradise*. The use of New Historicism as theoretical tools is relevant in this study as it considers works of literature as historical texts, and refigures the relationship between texts and the cultural system in which they are produced.

The study has proved that Morrison has given a significant space to African Americans by connecting them to their history and making them articulate boldly their unburied past, powerful present and making the dominant white society to recognize them as an integral part of America. It is qualitative and in embedded form.

Table of Contents

Chapter One

Toni Morrison: An African American Voice

1.1 Legitimizing the Historical Presence of African Americans

Toni Morrison is the first African-American writer to win the Nobel Prize for literature. She has, until date, nine novels to her credit. These are *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula*, (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987), Jazz (1992), *Love* (2003), and *Mercy* (2008). She has witnessed marked changes in civil rights for blacks in America. Her works are remarkable because of the diversity and, the unpredictable nature of her output. With each novel, Morrison has retained the capacity to take them by surprise. The road to the Glittering Prize can be said to have begun when *Sula* was nominated for the National Book Award, but before the publication of *Beloved*, it was *Song of Solomon* which brought her considerable recognition in the form of the Fiction Award of the National Book Critics' Circle.

Morrison's novels have a complex relationship to history. Her literary works have brought significant changes in the lives of black people in America and wider public recognition of African-American women writers. All her novels are "historical novels" in which characters, as Barbara Rigney states, "are both subjects of and subject to history, events in real time, that succession of antagonistic movements that includes slavery, reconstruction, depression, and war" (61). But even though they may appear to be "quasi documentaries that bear historical witness" (62), they posit history as narrative, sometimes deliberately distorted or half-remembered, as fantasy or even as brutal nightmare.

Morrison challenges the political, social, racial and gender hierarchies in American literary discourse, created by the dominant white society. She takes a historical approach in order to reconstruct African American culture and history in slavery. She takes a postmodern stand in altering Euro-American dichotomies by rewriting a history written by main stream historians. She legitimizes the discredited past and presence of marginalized African Americans. She prefers the powerful vivid language of people of color such as the vernacular tradition of African American narratives which has preserved the values and history of its culture and inscribes the received notion of slavery and history from a black perspective. She is committed to reconstructing the history of African Americans who were forbidden access to literacy and were overlooked by mainstream historians. Morrison attempts to establish a space for African Americans advocating the accommodation of the African American literary tradition in the cannon. She transforms political conditions into a rich aesthetics to imply a theory of reinterpreted literature and revised history based on African American folklore and stories. Her characters emerge from the margin looking for ways to center their significance in literary discourse. Macon Dead, in *Song of Solomon*, tries to buy into white middle class values. He owns a big car and rides out formally on important ocaasions. His son Milkman desires to interact with new people and go to new places in order to create his independent.

The postmodernist Linda Hutcheon proposes a system of discourses that are historical and contextual. Such a discourse theory demands a new way of conceptualizing truth and political action that breaks down dualistic categorizations. The

postmodern perception enunciated by Derrida attempts to emphasize difference in terms of multiplicities and pluralities. This provides a new way of talking about feminity, masculinity, and sexuality. One of the major components of postmodernism is the decanonization of all existing master records, conventions, institutions and authorities. Postmodernism assumes different nuances in the hands of men and women writers. There are no essential subjects and objects but only individuals caught in a network of historical and psychological power relationships. The dominant theme of Morrison's novels is the reconstruction of a new history and a private space as a way of grappling with patriarchy. Reconstruction of meanings is brought out for freedom and selfhood.

The theme of split subjectivity is a postmodern feature of Toni Morrison's works. The American blacks are weighed down by a double burden as they are buffeted by two cultures, the Western culture and their black heritage. Their adjustment to the dominant culture is marked by a conflicting pattern of identification and rejection. The self- image of blacks is related to a color-caste system. The black self suffers from conflicting pulls in its desire to conform to mainstream codes and at the same time to reject them. The African Americans live a precarious existence forced to confront images, both positive and negative, which sift through their minds. They peer into mirrors constructed by those who represent power and influence. Du Bois in his work *The Souls of Black Folk* holds that there are "two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, and two warring ideals in one black body" (16-17). This shows that the African Americans have been forced to see themselves through the eyes of dominant society.

Such concepts wreak irreparable havoc on the black psyche. In his book *Dusk and Down* DuBois writes:

> It is as though one, looking out from a dark cave in a side of an impending mountain, sees the world passing and speaks to it;speaks courteously and persuasively, showing them how these entombed souls are hindered in their natural movement, expression, and development; and how their loosening from prison would be a matter not simply of courtesy, sympathy, and help to them but aid to all the world . . . It gradually permeates the mind of the prisoners that the people passing do not hear, that some thick sheet of invisible glass is between them and the world. They get excited, they talk louder, and they gesticulate. Some of the passing world stops in curiosity . . . They still either do not hear at all, or hear but, dimly and even what they hear they do not understand. Then the people within may become hysterical. (130)

The theme of split subjectivity takes the shape and form in Toni Morrison's novels. She is in a position to articulate two cultures – one black and other the white American. By showing this sense of connectedness between cultures, Morrison attempts to transcend the permanent condition of double-consciousness which afflicts her fictional characters. Morrison is essentially a postmodern author since her approach to myth and folklore is re-visionist. She engages in the relationship between the folk and the American culture and proposes a revision of received notions of gender, class and race. Morrison attempts to achieve cultural transformation in three ways – first she tries to fill

the cultural void that she perceives to be existing in the wake of historical transition. The void is in the lives of those black Americans who seem to have lost the oral tradition of storytelling that once sustained a sense of community and enriched their lives. Secondly, she attempts to provide commonplace people, places and stories with the mythic dignity and significance of ritual to redeem neglected cultural values on which it is based. According to Levi Strauss, the mythic impulse incorporates myth as the "shifting reality" (3). Thirdly, she makes narrative a dynamic vehicle for preserving, transmitting, and reshaping the culture in affirmative ways that celebrates the past, give continuity with the present and offer faith in human potential. Thus, she accommodates myth to modern reality.

The Bluest Eye presents the damaging effects of the way white culture prevents African American girls from developing their own identities. Pecola, the daughter of Cholly and Pauline Breedlove infers from her daily experiences that her distinctive features as an African American do not fit the standards of white aesthetics. Her ugliness isolates her at school and at home. The picture of white girls produced by the media make Pecola obsessed with the blue eyes of Shirley Temple and Mary Jane which are presented as perfect beauty by the society. With a critique of mirror and reflection, Jacques Lacan notes that "the image could seem to be the threshold of the visible world" (Lacan 3). He envisages that the mirror stage has a clear function in growth as it gives form to the unclear, disembodied image of the earliest months of life. This image alienates the self or, in the process of recognizing oneself, it enables identification of another as "potentially compatible" (4).

Postmodernism is committed to accommodating the voices of the ex-centric and the marginalized. Herein lies the close connection between feminism and postmodernism. Morrison analyses the workings of patriarchy in all its manifestations, and thinks in terms of pluralities and diversities. She believes in the anxiety black women feel about what their mirrors tell them she holds that girls growing up black and female in a white society often experience the malady of internalizing belief that a pleasing image is what constitutes the necessary precondition for receiving love and security. In *The Bluest Eye,* Pecola suffers from such a split consciousness. She is enraptured with hethe blue eyes of Mary Jane on the candy wrapper. Pecola's mother Pauline Breedlove's mirror reflects to her daughter, her own sense of inferiority, which in turn, Pecola radiates back to her. The reverence for is Pecola's most valued possession. It is passed on to Pauline through the intergenerational mirror by her mother. She tells Pecola: "So when I sees it, it was like looking at a picture of your mama when she was a girl. You knows who she is but she don't look the same" (*The Bluest Eye* 99).

Pauline's mother worked as a maid for a white family. By internalizing its moves, she had allowed herself to be encased in the glass of coffin. The intergenerational mirror has already fractured Pauline's psyche. She has placed herself beyond redemption. Believing that salvation will come from outside, she resists any concept of internal wholeness based on cultural autonomy. Contrary to her dream of a life full of affection, caring, and peace, Pecola is raped and impregnated by her father Cholly, who does not know any more effective way to express familial love toward his daughter. The brutal rape by her own father robs Pecola's existing sense of autonomy by forcing her to

gaze into the same mirror he himself was forced to gaze into during his childhood days. Pecola's acquires her blue eyes in imagination, an experience of mental disintegration which totally segregates her from reality and deprives her of the ability to communicate with others. In her insanity, she escapes from her miserable unfulfilled life, and is convinced into the delusion that she has the bluest eyes. In her imagination, the split self produces her imaginary friend. She tries to see the blue eyes with the support of the imaginary friend and arrives at a blurred sense of reality and consciousness. The blue eyes promise Pecola's liberation from an unbearable reality of her trauma, loneliness, and the rape.

Morrison takes *The Bluest Eye* as a novel "about one's dependency on the world for identification, self-value and feeling of worth" (Gaston 197). In the novel black girlhood assumes tragic tendency when it borrows identity models from the mandates of white cultures and the spiteful parental mirrors. Gilbert and Gubar hold that "To be caught and trapped in the mirror rather than a window . . . is to be driven inward, obsessively studying self images as if seeking a viable self. This inward search is necessitated by a state from which all outward prospects have been removed" (37). Pecola becomes a split subject unable to understand the gap between her reality and imagination. This is a grotesque isolation and fragmentation of Pecola created by an inappropriate mental image of the self.

In *Sula,* Morrison shows how power relations can have a bad effect on the community as a whole. The look of white society freezes the black individual and classifies all blacks as alike. The position of black woman is doubly difficult.

Womanhood, as blackness, is other in this society. Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* is the epitome of the victim in a world that reduces persons to objects and makes them feel inferior as objects. Sula is the one character who asserts herself strongly. She refuses to submerge herself in a role, assigned by family and society. She is free in the sense of being her own creator. She has internalized the look of the community, Bottom, which reveals to her the idea that she is an outsider. Sula returns the look by defying the society. Morrison's novel *Sula* is a detailed study of female subjectivity. Sula is a woman who transcends the limitations imposed by society. She is emotionally isolated from other people. Both Sula and her friend Nel are growing teenagers and solitary little girls. They resemble each other in their isolation from other people. Their isolation from the large society paves the way for Sula's rebellion against the set norms which a woman is supposed to follow in the black community. She defies the role she is supposed to play socially and remains at best a social outsider.

Morrison makes *Sula* take on the hue of a postmodern novel since it subverts the binary opposition like black male/ black female, past/ present, individual/ community and so on. Madhu Dubey observes:

> Rather than merely combining, *Sula* plays feminism and nationalism against each other, staging the encounter of these two ideologies as dynamic contradiction. In difficult double move, the novel assumes a feminist perspective to clarify the limits of nationalist ideology but withdraws from a full development of its own feminist implications. (70).

In Morrison's novels, the black man is seen as the object of racism and the black female is given the subsidiary role of healing the black man's damaged masculinity. Here, the Black Nationalist discourse projects the black man as sufferers and the woman as nurturer. *Sula* subverts this master narrative. The novel fits into what Linda Hutcheon observes as the predominant characteristics of postmodernism:

> […] post modernism in its broadest sense is the name, we give to our culture's 'narcissistic' obsession with its own working—both past and present. In academic and popular circles today, books abound that offer us new social models, new frameworks for our knowledge, new analyses of strategies of power. This phenomenon does betray a loss of faith in what were once the certainties, the master narratives of our liberal humanist culture. But that loss need not be a debilitating one. In postmodern literature, as in architecture, it has meant a new vitality, a new willingness to enter into a dialogue with history on new terms. It has been marked by a move away from fixed products and structures to open cultural processes and events. (23)

Sula opens the space for a new articulation of black masculinity and femininity. It "offers a view of female psychological development that defies traditional male centered interpretations of female development and calls out for an expansion of the woman centered paradigm" (Gillespie 23). Nel-Sula union is a great challenge to black aesthetics which insists on black male-female relationships as necessary for the development of black race. Nel from whom Sula receives security, love and identity,

constitutes Sula's other half. To Sula, Nel is "the closest thing to both an other and a self" (*Sula 119*).

Sula takes on masculine principle. She is adventurous like a male while Nel is cautious and consistent. Nel observes the conventions of the society, Sula ignores them. Sula-Ajax episode points to the "novel's capitulation to heterosexual convention" (Dubey 74). Sexism counts most in Morrison's portrait of Sula. With Ajax, Sula becomes like other black women and takes the role of a nurturer. When Sula seduces Jude, Nel's husband, the friendship between Nel and Sula gets broken. As Sula's seduction of Jude brings out her rebellious nature, her capitulation to Ajax "appears to be a compromise gesture that gives heterosexuality its due" (Dubey 74). When Sula-Ajax relation is broken Sula becomes aware that there are no more new experiences in store for her. She dies a mysterious wasting disease. Her ending is given a twist from the conventional ending. She feels proud that she is different from the other women in the black community.

Sula represents unrestricted and multiple perspectives in the novel. Morrison endows her with a birthmark appearing on the eyelid. It calls attention to Sula's original power of perception. The most noticeable opposition in the novel is between the past and present. Sula's new black femininity upsets this relationship. This seen in the conflict between Bottom, the black community where the novel is set, and Sula. Bottom clings to an absolute. It is the static vision of the past. Sula perceives the present moment as pure possibility. She rejects the community and tries to define for herself a new identity in contradiction to the values of the community. The naming of the Bottom

denotes white man's lack of sympathy and concern for the survival of blacks. The Bottom presents a version of reality that closely resembles a cyclic repetition of the historical injustices carried out upon blacks.

Sula's philosophy is rutted against that of her community. She views 'time' as a medium of ceaseless change and views 'self' as sheer risk and imaginative possibility. She rejects traditional notions of family, marriage, babies and grandparental care. Her return to Bottom after ten years of her absence marks no symbolic reintegration into the community. Her central position within it serves to offset a total inner detachment both from others and from herself. Her role traces a gradual decentering from the role of active participant to that of passive observer. This can be seen in the episode where she actively faces down Nel's tormentors by cutting off her finger through Chicken Little's drowning where she is both initiator, swinging him around and then helpless onlooker as his body flies out over the water. When her mother burns to death, she watches with passive complicity. At her best friend's wedding, she refuses her involvement of the observer, turns her back and leaves Medallion.

Nel and Sula represent the two sides of the coin that stand for the total human personality. They are Morrison's favorite characters since they are symbolic of the good and evil present in the society. Morrison says, "Yet she (Sula) and Nel are very much alike. They complement each other. I suppose the two of them together could have made a wonderful single human being. They are like Janus' head" (qtd. in Parker 253). In *Sula,* Morrison creates a female character who makes individualism supreme over the collective. As Karen Stein says, 'the truest heroism lies not in external battle as in the

wars which destroys the novel's men, but in confrontation with the self" (149). Sula sustains her identity, and does not merge and mingle with Nel.

Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* continues to experiment with traditional Western notions of identity and wholeness. Patricia Waugh observes that the death of the self is characteristic of all postmodern fictions:

> For those marginalized by the dominant culture, a sense of identity as constructed through impersonal and social relations of power rather than a sense of identity as the reflection of an inner essence has been a major aspect of their self- concept long before poststructuralists and postmodernists began to assemble their cultural manifestos. (3)

Song of Solomon is a postmodern novel since Morrison indulges in deconstruction at many levels. She deconstructs the implication of Christianity and the Bible which was used as controlling tool to regulate the behaviors and feelings of the blacks, deconstructs the white man's language and combines the mythic sense of meaning with the situation of the blacks. In the novel, Morrison projects the situation of the blacks in the white America. Through intertextuality and irony as a mode of signifying on the ancient myths, Morrison presents the double-consciousness of the blacks. Christianity was not the native religion of African Americans, but it was imposed upon them as controlling tool to regulate their behavior and feelings. Morrison uses biblical names to illustrate the effect of the Bible on the lives of the black people. The names of the principal women in *Song of Solomon* are biblical, but these names are

ironic counterpoints to the situation of their biblical namesakes. Morrison's Rebecca, instead of being the exemplary wife, never marries and has one lover after another. Magdalena called Lena is not a reformed prostitute. She never takes a boy friend and remains in her father's house. First Corinthians who accepts the love of a working class man, Porter, is scorned by her father, instead being celebrated like the Corinthians in the Bible. The way Macon Dead names his two daughters shows his lack of interest in them without affection. He names the girls Magdalena and first Corinthians by blindly selecting the names from the Bible without considering their implications. The detachment from the father and their displacement from the neighborhood parallel the lack of knowledge of their names. Neither father nor daughters attempt to determine the meaning of their names and understand the African American milieu that constitutes their most significant cultural reality.

Morrison's novels show the machinery of myth the way that meaning can modify experience. She adapts the myth to the black historical context reconciling freedom on both individual and collective levels. *Song of Solomon* uses the image of flight to free the protagonist from a confining encirclement. The story begins with the failure of Robert Smith's attempt to fly from the top of No Mercy Hospital. He is known as black insurance agent and later in the novel turns out to be a member of the Seven Days, the secret radical group which takes violent and merciless revenge on white people. His comrades assert that killing the same number of whites as blacks murdered by whites is the only way to retaliate against racism, but he hesitates to believe in the

dogma of the Seven Days and finally takes his life instead of depriving other innocent people of theirs.

Milkman's birth takes place at the hospital the day following Smith's failed fantasy of flight. From childhood Milkman is fascinated with the dream of flight but he is kept away from the possibility of flight due to his vanity. When Milkman observes a peacock which alights on the roof of a building spreading its tail, he questions Guitar why it cannot fly. The latter replies, "Too much tail, all that jewelry weighs it down. Like vanity. Can't nobody fly with all that shit. Wanna fly, you got to give up the shit that weighs you down" *(Solomon* 179-80). It means that Milkman has to give up his material possessions and arrogance to free his spirit for flight. His quest begins with his separation from his urban community in Michigan and his initiation into rural landscape of Pennsylvania and then of Virginia.

Morrison puts side by side "the African American folklore of a flying African" with the western myth of Icarus to show a racialized connotation of flight which differs from the western concept. Icarus fell fatally because of his pride. Flying is restricted to African American and hence they created the myth of flying hero which is a " fictional strategy that is one step removed from realism in its referential relationship to everyday experience . . . myth rewrites the rules the social order" (Thomas 246). Morrison also rewrites Greek myths. When Milkman arrives in Danville, he meets people and asks for Circe, the midwife who brought Macon and Pilate into the world. Different from Circe of Greek myth who turns the men of Odysseus into swine, Circe in *Song of Solomon* is more like a prophetess. Milkman understands that Circe is like Pilate, a "healer, deliverer

who in another world would have been the head nurse at Mercy" (*Solomon* 246). She directs milkman to the cave that once held his grandfather's remains and tells him that his grandfather's real name was Jack and not Manson. She becomes a spiritual midwife to Milkman.

Milkman is closer to the past and his roots in Shalimar, the birth place of his grandparents. Throughout his stay in Shalimar, Milkman hears children singing .They sing a slightly different but similar version of Pilate's verse "Solomon done fly, Solomon done gone, Solomon cut across the sky, Solomon gone home" (*Solomon* 307). He realizes the mystery of ancestry that Sugarman in Pilate's song : " O Sugarman done fly/ O Sugarman done gone"(*Solomon* 9) is a transfiguration of his great grandfather Solomon by local people. Solomon, an African slave decided to fly away home back to Africa leaving his wife Ryna and twenty children. He tries to take his youngest child Jake with him but drops him soon after he gets in the air. Milkman realizes that "these children were singing a story about his own people" (*Solomon* 304).

Milkman soars from the cliff, embodying the dream of flight of African Americans. His transformation into mythic dimension indicates that he has overcome the difficulties of his actual life expelling his social and cultural limitation. Milkman's flight is portrayed in the image of a fleet and bright lodestar. His flight empowers all African American slaves who ran away from slavery heading for the North following the lodestar. Not only African American slaves but other travelers in different times and other places also relied on that star as a landmark because it indicates the North. The lodestar sustains hope for all human beings. Milkman's realization of flight, his sudden

knowledge that “if you surrender to the air, you could ride it” (*Solomon* 341) also encourages the dream of anybody from any other cultural or racial group.

Beloved is a postmodern novel as it brings out Morrison’s intention to deconstruct slavery, racism, patriarchy, social and historical conventions and even language. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in his book *The Signifying Monkey*: *A Theory of African American Literary Criticism* (1988) speaks of signifying – one text playing upon another – usually repeating it but making significant changes or inverting it. He argues that the signifying of black narrative emerges from the pressing necessity for political, social and economic survival:

> Black people have always been masters of the figurative: saying one thing to mean something quite other has been basic to black survival in oppressive western cultures. Misreading signs could be, indeed often was, fatal. Reading in this sense, was not play; it was an essential aspect of the literacy training of a child. This sort of metaphorical literacy, the learning to decipher codes, is just about the blackest aspect of the black tradition. (6)

Morrison sheds light on an African American incident considered ‘minor’ by white historians. She wrote *Beloved* being inspired by a newspaper crippling about a fugitive slave named Margaret Garner who tried to kill her own children rather than see the child return to bondage in the South. The novel deals not only with reconstructed memory but also deconstructed history. The novel, set in post-civil war Ohio, records the

haunting narratives of slavery and its aftermath. It traces the life of a young woman Sethe who has kept a terrible memory at bay only by shutting down part of her mind. *Beloved* deals with Sethe's former life as a slave on Sweet Home Farm and her escape with her children to what seems a safe haven and tragic events that follow.

The novel centers on the death of Sethe's infant daughter Beloved who mysteriously reappears as a sensuous young woman. Beloved's spirit comes back to claim Sethe's love. Sethe struggles to make Beloved gain full possession of her present and throw off the long dark legacy of her past. In *Beloved*, Morrison addresses the difficulties faced by former slaves in keeping the horrors of their pasts submerged within the subconscious. Snitow says that Morrison "twists and tortures and fractures events until they are little slivers that cut. She moves the lurid material of melodrama into the mind of her people, where it gets sifted sorted lived and relived, until it acquires the enlarging outlines of myth and trauma, dream and obsession" (25).

Morrison uses stream of consciousness technique through the minds of her characters to reconstruct a portrait of the past, both individual and communal. She mirrors the destructive influence of white values imposed on the blacks. Pecola, in *The Bluest Eye*, keeps looking into the mirror dreaming of the blue eyes and the white skin in order to look like one of whites. Morrison also mirrors the values of the dominant group of people and the reflections repress the black women's experience and consciousness in a complicated way.

Beloved shows a picture completely different from the distorted images reflected in the mirror. The novel rearranges the broken pieces of mirror by showing new life and hope. The sorrows and agonies of those slaves who were enslaved and exploited could be transformed into hope for the future. The novel expresses the author's intention to recover the emotional of those who were never recognized in the main stream discourse by reconstituting African American presence. The narrative of *Beloved* deals with Sethe's racial freedom and psychological wholeness, Beloved the devil child, and its ghost story, and the impact of slavery. Sethe kills her child Beloved to escape her being a slave, but Beloved returnsto her mother in the form of a ghost signifying the memory of slavery always lasts with the individuals.

Sethe's remembrances of her painful and haunting past are vivid and dramatic. She is the protagonist conveying traumatic events in direct discourse. As Sethe tells her story her memory is "loaded with the past" (*Beloved* 70). Paul D's visit to Sethe's house 124 initiates Sethe's journey into the past. She remembers the haunted house once 124 had been a cheerful house where Baby Suggs taught black people to love their lives and their flesh because white people despised it. When Sethe arrived with her new born daughter tied to her chest, Baby Suggs welcomed her. She initiated Sethe into the wisdom and beliefs and souls of her people.

Morrison tries to deconstruct the language. She defies the paradigm of "the exploitative nature of logocentric orders" (Byerman 55) which controls the assumption of a fixed relationship between signifier and signified. Morrison is aware of the power structure of the signifier and signified in terms of language under slavery which clearly

draws the line between oppressor and oppressed. In *Beloved* Sixo who is a slave is executed by Schoolteacher. He does not yield to the master's dominance even though he has to risk his life. He refuses to speak English "because there was no future in it" (*Beloved* 25). Sixo defies the language of the dominant group which denies the culture and ideology of the oppressed, imposing their own values. His strong spirit does not die and is passed on to other people of his community.

The engulfing presence of Beloved forces Sethe to emerge from her repressed condition, to come to terms with her past and racist history. The baby ghost, Beloved, is a deconstructing force determined to explode Sethe's household which holds Sethe's and Slavery's unspeakable past. Through the character of Beloved, whose haunting presence makes the boundaries between myth and reality disappear, Morrison explores the possibility of the existence of ghost. Beloved's ghost is a manifestation of Sethe's guilty conscience. She is haunted by waking vision born out of guilt and fear. Morrison explores the psyche of a slave mother who must deal with haunted life on every level. In *Beloved* the roles of mother and daughter are reversed. In the beginning, Denver, the daughter of Sethe, wishes to protect Beloved from Sethe, but finally, she wishes to protect her mother from Beloved.

Sethe's recovery from the trauma of having committed infanticide and from almost getting devoured by Beloved is brought about by the women in her community who sing and pray for her sake. Paul D who has been gradually expelled from the house by Beloved returns to Sethe with words of comfort. By asserting the reconciliation of Sethe and Beloved, individual past and history, repression and relief, Morrison invents a

new voice out of a ghost and dead past. In a poetic chant the memories and minds of Sethe, Denver, and Beloved combine to make a mutual song of possession: “I waited for you You are mine You are mine You are mine” (*Beloved* 267).

Deborah Guth remarks that “Morrison’s novels are themselves acts of repetition both as remembering and as transformation. Her extensive use of myth and folk belief to explore the meaning of the present . . . the oral/ aural narrative voice and communal story telling techniques she deploys, all shows the degree to which she herself draws on the past” (551). On a broader level, the very composition of *Beloved* shows the capacity not to repeat the past but to transform the chaos of history into a fable of love and remembrance. By maintaining tension between past and present, history and its imaginative transformation, Morrison balances the need for return with an awareness of historical distance.

Jazz is concerned with place and displacement and the interrelatedness of past and present. Morrison experiments with narrative strategies and deconstructs the Aristotelian plot line with a beginning, middle and end. The musical mode of jazz is used to structure the novel. Gates points out that “few musical traditions . . . have had more modern masters than has the African American tradition, from the blues to rhythm and blues, from soul to rap, from ragtime to Jazz” (152). Like many Jazz pieces, the novel has a fast opening establishing a dominant note and theme and breaks into different parts. *Jazz* has no numbered chapters and no chapter titles. It is divided into unnumbered, unequal sections separated by blank pages. There are various story strands but they do not assume a plot pattern. The scene shifts from city to the country in the

lives of Joe, Violet, Dorcas and their friends and relations. The novel tells the pathetic story of Violet and Joe Trace who were married over twenty years.the narrative glides between the present and the past to the rural Virginia of the 1880's where Joe and Violet met and they migrated to the magical place they call city. The backdrop of the action is New York of 1926. The black community receives a jolt when Joe Trace kills his eighteen year old girlfriend Dorcas at a party because she has left him for another boy Acton. His crazy wife Violet disfigures the face of the girl with a knife. *Jazz* has several narrators all these stories are told by the simple device of letting different voices tell the stories. "*Jazz* becomes a multiperspective novel in which the main narrator and characters are like the performers in Jazz band, each, by turn, improving upon his respective past and then merging into basic theme or composition" (Shourie 68).

In *jazz,* Morrison's nameless narrator's vision frames the love story and this anonymous voice draws the readers into the rhythm of the city Harlem, where Jazz casts bewitching spells on the psyche of the people. The fictional mode of *Jazz* establishes an instant contact between the characters and the reader. In the novel Morrison avoids authorial dominance. This leads to sharing of control and breaking down of the adversarial writer-reader relationship. This technique initiates the novel's major theme, which is the impact of the migration of Violet and Joe to the city on their psyche. The journey from rural South to the industrial North changes the people totally. Rodrigues observes:

> In order to record and present this continuing process of change in fictional form, Morrison had to use unusual narrative strategies. A totally

> objective narrator would have been too distant, too impersonal; an ordinary first person one too involved, too limited to understand the tribulation of a people. Morrison makes use of number of voices and tellers. These voices blend and change, then shift into view points that switch and slide, then becomes voices again. The process of thinking turns into a point of view, then changes into a voice. A mysterious 'I' enters and speaks for a while, turns objective, disappears, and reenters again and again. Morrison adopts the oral/musical mode of storytelling that relies on listening and memory. (160).

Morrison deals with the split subjectivity in *Jazz*. Violet is a many faceted character and admits to many selves within her. Once in the city, she becomes more concerned with possessions than with love and communication. She thinks of Joe as hers without bothering to communicate with him. She is silent with Joe but is mistakenly thought to be violent. She attempts to show how Violet turns violent and how she recovers her lost self by destroying the violent in herself. As Joe mourns for Dorcas, Violet wants to more about the girl she hates so much. She goes out in search of Dorcas' past. As she learns more and more about her, she also learns to associate herself with her and recognizes that Dorcas could have been the daughter she never had. Violet's relationship with Dorcas becomes an affirmation of love of one woman for another, although Violet starts out with hatred in her heart. Violet's identification of self with the black women like Dorcas leads her to discover the real 'me'. Dorcas too is driven by forces the city sets free in her. Cut off from her mother's nurturing love and strictly

disciplined by her terrified aunt, Dorcas becomes a rebel and a wild creature of the city. Joe kills her because he associates her abandoning him for another man with the fact that his mother abandoned him years before.

As in *Beloved* , Morrison signifies on history. She first came across the story of star-crossed lovers when she read Camille Billops' manuscript *TheHarlem Book of the Dead* which contains photographs and commentary by the great American photographer, James Van Der Zee. He describes to Camille Billops the origin of his photograph of a young woman's corpse:

> She was the one I think was shot by her sweet heart at a party with a noise less gun. She complained of being sick at the party and friends said, "Well, why don't you lay down?" and they taken her in the room and laid her down. After they undressed her and loosen her clothes, they saw the blood on her dress. They asked her about it and she said "I'll tell you tomorrow, yes, I'll tell you tomorrow, yes I'll tell you tomorrow." She was just trying to give him a chance to get away. (qtd. in Gates 53)

Morrison provides a fuller picture of Dorcass as she did of Sethe like her version of Margaret Garner of history in *Beloved*. In both the novels she constructs a narrative that links the past with the present. Morrison uses intertextuality in order to bring out this connection. In *Jazz* she draws on the classical tragedy of Oedipus to inform the story of Golden Gray's quest to his father. Golden Gray is a boy of mixed race who is brought up blind to his origins. He does not know that his father was a Negro slave. Gray is

brought up by white wealthy people who erase his lineage to African blood. When he discovers that his father is a black man, he feels his father has polluted his identity as a white man. His Oedipal angst is driven by the Negro trace that he discovers exists in his own skin.

Fragmentation, shattering mirrors and breaking conventional rules are all the postmodern strategies. They are used in her novels in an attempt to reclaim African American history and culture. Morrison's use of mirrors display the dangerous and destructive influence of white values imposed on African Americans. In *the Bluest Eye,* the controlling images of the white society projected in the mirror leads to Pecola's psychological split. In *Song of Solomon* Hagar is like Pecola, another victim of white aesthetics as reflected in the mirrors. As a result of which she is unable to identify herself as a positive figure. Nel's mother in *Sula* also falls a prey to false image. In *Beloved,* Morrison's perfect work of art, the broken pieces of mirror are rearranged and a new life and hope are displayed.

Morrison's novels give legitimacy to the presence of African Americans by deconstructing the frame of reference and the official history that have constructed falseAfrican American identity in order to subjugate them.Morrison uses the technique of deconstruction to foreground the idea that a literary text is not self-contained but derived its meaning from a network of associations and relationships that can be found between the constituent parts.

1.2 New Historicism as a New Literary Approach

New Historicism is first introduced by Stephen Greenblatt in 1980s as a set practice of cultural poetics. The first appearance of New Historicism; its concepts, themes and procedures were most acknowledged by the scholars of the English Renaissance in the late of 1970s and early of 1980s.They stressed their attention to the literary form of drama, and alert within such texts the voices of the oppressed, the marginalized, and the dispossessed.

New Historicism becomes one of the several theories and approaches in literary theories towards the last decades of the twentieth century. As Hitchcock puts forward in his work *Theory of Classics* that:

> Like so many words in English language, theory comes from the Greek theoria, which means “a viewing” or “spectacle” and offers a way of seeing. In this way, theory serves like a pair of conceptual spectacles that you see to frame and focus on what you’re looking at. It can serve as a tool for discerning, deciphering, and making sense. Alternatively, theory can provide a position from which to engage in a critique of the status quo. (Hitchcock xii)

The connection and its relevancy of interdisciplinary methods or theories provide readers and critics to see that such principal or one basic theory can be no longer appropriate on presenting interpretation. It demands conceptual basic of interdisciplinary approaches and theories. New Historicism provides needs on that incomplete view instead of one ultimate interpretation which is an illusionary exploitation of the unitary work. This exploitation is considerably discriminations between literature and non-literary texts to be construct of one ultimate ideology of discursive formations.

New historicists are mainly influenced by French philosopher Michel Foucault and American cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz. New Historicism considers works of literature as historical texts. It suggests a subjective approach to literature and was practiced mostly in Renaissance studies. According to New Historicism, identity is fashioned by social institutions. Literature is another form of social construct, which is produced by society and in turn is active in reshaping the culture of that society. Literature is a cultural creation constructed by more than one consciousness. Social, political, religious, and economic factors of a given society determine the literature it produces. These elements circulate in society through social energy which is encoded in the works of art, trespasses its historicity and becomes the means to represent the ideology of the culture through texts. New Historicism ventures this through its suggestion of historicity of texts and textuality of history. New Historicism is practiced and developed by critics like Louise Montrose, Catherine Gallagher, and Allan Lui in the United States.

New Historicism centers history as the subject of research, it differs from the old in its understanding of history. While traditional historicism regards history as "universal," New Historicism considers it to be "cultural." According to Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds, New Historicism can be differentiated from the Old Historicism "by its lack of faith in objectivity and permanence and its stress not upon the direct recreation of the past, but rather the process by which the past is constructed or invented" (4). This outlook on history brings about a new point of view on literature and literary criticism. Traditional literary historicism holds that the proper aim of it is to attempt to reconstruct the past objectively, whereas New Historicism suggests that history is knowable in the same sense as literature is through subjective interpretation. The understanding of the past is conducted by the present

consciousness. Louis Montrose, in his “Professing the Renaissance,” lays out that as critics we historically bound and we may only reconstruct the histories through the filter of our consciousness: “Our analyses and our understandings necessarily proceed from our own historically, socially and institutionally shaped vantage points; that the histories we reconstruct are the textual constructs of critics who are, ourselves, historical subjects (23). To Montrose, New Historicism must recognize that “not only the poet but also the critic exists in history” and “our comprehension, representation, interpretation of the texts of the past always proceeds by a mixture of estrangement appropriation.” (24). Montrose suggests that this kind of critical practice constitutes a continuous dialogue between “a poetics and a politics of culture” (24).

In Montrose’s opinion, the complete recovery of meanings in a diverse historical outlook is considered necessary since older historical criticism is illusory. He remarks:

> The practice of a new historical criticism invites rhetorical strategies by which to foreground the constitutive acts of textuality that traditional modes of literary history efface or misrecognize. It also necessitates efforts to historicize the present as well as the past, and to historicize the dialectic between them – those reciprocal historical pressures by which the past has shaped the present and the present reshapes the past. (24-25)

The concern of New Historicism is to refigure the relationship between texts and the cultural system in which they are produced. In term of New Historicism, a literary text can only be evaluated in its social, historical, and political contexts. It announces the formalist conception of literature as an autonomous aesthetic order that transcends the needs and interests of a society. A literary text cannot be imagined apart from the society. It is another

form of social significance which is produced by the society and in return is active in reshaping the culture of that society. New Historicism explains how texts represent both culturally constructed patterns, and produce cultural constructions. New Historicists believe that "it makes no sense to separate literary texts from the social context around them because such texts are the product of complex social exchanges or negotiations" (Booker 138).

New Historicism has a historical method. It has borrowed certain aspects from post structuralism like the doctrine of plurality—that a literary work may have different connotations to different people. The theories that are very close to New Historicism are Marxism, Feminism, and Cultural Materialism in their being skeptical of the formalist view of literature as an autonomous realm of discourse. David Forgacs, in his essay "Marxist Literay Theories," puts forward that regardless of the diversity of Marxist theories, there is one assumption that is final, which is "that literature can only be properly understood within a larger framework of social reality" (167). The definite source of social reality is "found in history, which Marxists see as a series of struggles between antagonistic social classes and the types of economic they engage in" (167). Gallagher in her work "Marxism and New Historicism," points out one major distinction between new historicism and Marxist criticism is that "the new historicist, unlike the Marxist, is under no nominal compulsion to achieve consistency." She even insists that "historical curiosity can develop independently of political concerns" (46).

Another point that separates New Historicism from Marxism and traditional historicism is that, new historicists try to reconstruct the ideology through diverse agents. , The literary atmosphere of the 1980s challenges the traditional order of importance while evaluating the significance of the agents. Catherine Gallagher states:

> The traditionally important economic and political agents and events have been displaced or supplemented by people and phenomena that once seemed wholly insignificant, indeed outside of history: women, criminals, the insane, sexual practices and discourses, fairs, festivals, plays of all kinds. Just as the sixties, the effort in the eighties has been to question and destabilize the distinction between sign systems and things, the representation and the represented, history and text. (43)

For New Historicism, literature is a social and cultural creation constructed by more than one consciousness. It cannot be diminished to a product of a single mind. It is achieved through the lens of culture that produced it. Literature is a specific vision of history and not a distinct category of human activity. As man himself is a social construct, there is no such thing as a universal human nature that surpasses history. No one can rise above their own cultural formations, their own ideological upbringing in order to understand the past in its own terms. It is impossible for a modern reader to appreciate a literary work as its contemporaries experienced it. As a result the best approach to literary criticism is to try to reconstruct the ideology of its culture by taking the text as its basis and by exploring diverse areas of cultural factors.

Flourishing in the 1980s, New Historicism based on Foucault's theories, offers a critique of history. It restores basic concepts concerning literary production and asserts that history cannot be separated from textuality. New Historicism is a part of the postmodern trend in literary history and culture studies. It welcomes the breakdown of genres and invites the analysis of discontinuities, linking anecdotes to the disruption of our understanding of history. History in the post modern era has been regarded as a discourse constructed by

literary imagination and power relations. In this sense, it is ideological and subjective. It is always open to multiple inquiries and re-interpretation. In "Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture," Montrose defends New Historicism as a practice that recognizes "the historicity of texts and the textuality of history" (230). Montrose explains:

> By the textuality of history, I mean to suggest, firstly, that we can have no access to full and authentic past, a lived material existence, unmediated by the surviving textual traces of the society in question – traces whose survival we cannot assume to be merely contingent but must rather presume to be at least partially consequent upon complex and subtle social processes of preservation and effacement. Secondly, that those textual traces are themselves subject to subsequent textual mediations when they are construed as the documents upon which historians ground their own text, called "histories." (20)

New Historicists point to the culturally specific nature of texts as products of particular periods and discursive formations, while viewing reality—history—as itself mediated by linguistic codes which is impossible for the critic or historian to bypass in the reconstruction of past cultures.

New Historicism has become a literary term closely associated with Greenblatt, who is regarded as one of the pioneers of New Historicism. By breaching boundaries between the text and history, and between fiction and reality, New Historicism has come to terms with the decision to set up its priority in a place between textualism and contextualism. Greenblatt emphasizes the relation of language to reality. He explores this connection in his essay "Marlowe and the Will to Absolute Play" in referring to ways in which Christopher Marlowe's characters fashion themselves through language. Language, he implies is

detached from reality, but the characters try to fill the existential void with words. He remarks that “Magnificent words are spoken and disappear into a void,” but their detachment is the condition of their existence as “it is precisely this sense of the void that compels the characters to speak so powerfully, as if to struggle the more intensity against the enveloping silence” (*Self-Fashioning* 200). Language, in this sense, is primary and precedes referent. Greenblatt begins “with the desire to speak with the dead,” he admits, “all I could hear was my own voice” (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 1). He believes that the solution to this impasse lies within himself as an historically situated subject saying “my own voice of the dead, for the dead had contrived to leave textual traces of themselves, and those traces make themselves heard in the voices of the living”(*Shakespearean Negotiations* 2).

New Historicism holds that knowledge of the world is determined by the position of the observer. It advocates a compromised form of discourse in which the indication of subjectivity is no more than one element of a complex rhetoric that struggles after more objective truths. The link to the past is one of the projections of the self onto the past, and not a recovering of the past from within the self. The past may be in us in the language that we use and in the interpretations we bring to old literature in the sense that both of these forms: language and interpretation are evolutionary. But it is not possible to appreciate the exact nature of the past, and to separate it from the present it has given rise to. The Renaissance has enough in common with the postmodern period for the new historicist to project himself onto the past and believe what he sees is an historical image of himself. Allan Lui in his work “The Power of Formalism: The New Historicism” says: “the New Historicism is in effect a profoundly narcissistic method. It applies its own standards to the rhetoric of the past in the

hope of releasing genuine historical truths, but in so doing, always finds a reflection of itself." (746).

Greenblatt in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning,* states that self-fashioning directs attention to the problematic structure of power in representation. He argues that self-fashioning involves not self –creation but submission to an absolute power. It is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile: the "threatening other—heretic, savage, witch, adulteress, traitor, Antichrist" (9), who must be unveiled or invented in order to be marked, attacked, and destroyed. In Greenblatt's reading of Othello, Iago's successful manipulation of Othello serves as an example of the unseen power structure of self-fashioning. Greenblatt writes, "in Othello it is Iago who echoes that last line—'I am not what I am,' the motto of the improviser, the manipulator of signs that bear no resemblance to what they profess to signify" (238). A sole textual analysis of the improvising power relation in Othello is certainly not the task of New Historicism. The reason why Greenblatt highlights the role of Iago is, in effect, to explore how Shakespeare's literary symbolism of self-fashioning operates within its social and cultural symbolic structures. By comparing Iago's improvisation of Othello, to Shakespeare's manipulation of his audiences and social culture, Greeblatt regains "a sense of the complex interactions of meaning in a given culture" (30).

Greenblatt examines the subtle text-context power circulation in respect of self-fashioning in Elizabethan culture. Shifting from textual matrix to the contextual matrix, from the characters to the author, enables Greenblatt to provide an insightful study of the interplay between fiction and history and between selfhood and cultural. Iago's self-fashioning as a improviser in the text unveils how Shakespeare manipulates his audiences' consciousness and culture in his context. Greenblatt demonstrates that Shakespeare's plays are significant

symbolic acts of cultural formation. Shakespeare, for this reason, “remains throughout his career the supreme purveyor of empathy, the fashioner of narrative selves, the master improviser” (253). In Greenblatt’s analysis, the genius of Shakespeare’s art becomes a “limitless talent for entering into the consciousness of another, perceiving its deepest structure as a manipulable fiction, reinscribing it into his own narrative form” (252).

The focus of New Historicism is to relocate the literary text among non-literary “discursive practices” of an age by making use of documents like chronicles, legal reports, pamphlets and by analyzing other forms of art like painting, sculpture, and music. History is not viewed as the cause or source of literature. The relationship of history and literature is seen as dialectic: the literary text is interpreted as product and producer, end and source of history. Greenblatt, in his “The Forms of Power and the Power of Forms in the Renaissance” explains the new historicist effort to establish relations between different discursive practices as an attempt “to develop terms to describe the ways in which material— here official documents, private papers, newspaper clippings and so forth— is transferred from one discursive sphere to another and becomes aesthetic property” (3). Therefore, if the circumstances of a literary text are impossible to recover, the concern of the literary critics should be to recover the ideology that has given birth to the text, and which the text in turn helps to spread within the culture.

Catherine Gallagher in her work, “Marxism and New Historicism,” explains New Historicism as “reading literary and nonliterary texts as constituents of historical discourses that are both inside and outside the texts” (37). Catherine elaborates that the practitioners of New Historicism “generally posit no hierarchy of cause and effect as they trace the connections among texts, discourses, power and the constitution of subjectivity” (37).

Montrose in “Professing the Renaissance” asserts that the focus of this new vein of literary criticism is an attempt to refigure “the socio-cultural field within which canonical renaissance literary and dramatic works were originally produced” and to resituate them “not only in relationship to other genres and modes of discourse but also in relationship to contemporaneous social institutions and non-discursive practices” (17). Montrose further says that the new orientation to history can be characterized as a “reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history” (24). With “the historicity of texts,” Montrose suggests “ the cultural specificity, the social embeddedment, of all modes of writing,” referring both to the critically evaluated texts and to the “ texts in which we study them” (24). With the textuality of history Montrose suggests that we cannot have “access to a full and authentic past,” and we can have access to a “lived material existence, unmediated by the surviving textual traces of the society in question” (20).

Aram Veeser has compiled the chief articles of new historicists with diverse voices in his *The New Historicism.* He manages to bring together certain key assumptions that constantly appear in new historicist theory. Veeser also points out that new historicists developed a method that describes “culture in action” (xi). He points out:

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

Clifford Geertz asserts that "there is no such things as a human nature independent of culture" (51). He does not see culture as "complexes of concrete behavior patterns—acustoms, usages, traditions, habit clusters" (44), but as "a set of control mechanisms—plans, recipes, rules, instructions…for the governing of behavior" (49). As Greenblatt remarks "self-fashioning is in effect the Renaissance version of these control mechanisms, the cultural system of meaning that creates historical embodiment" (*Renaissance* 3). Greenblatt says literature "functions within this system in three interlocking ways: as a manifestation of these concrete behaviors of its particular author, as itself the expression of the codes by which behaviors is shaped, and as a reflection upon those codes" (*Renaissance* 4). The author, social factors, and the text all help us understand the larger picture. New historicist criticism is concerned with these three functions and all three must be the concern of the literary criticism. Greenblatt highlights:

> If interpretation limits itself to the behavior of the author, it becomes literary biography and risks losing a sense of the larger networks of meaning in which both the author and his works participate. If alternatively, literature is viewed exclusively as the expression of the social rules and instructions it risks being absorbed entirely into an ideological superstructure . . .. Finally, if literature is seen only as a detached reflection upon the prevailing behavioral codes, a view from safe distance, we drastically diminish our grasp of art's concrete functions in relation to individuals and to institutions, both of which shrink into an obligatory historical background that adds little to our understanding. We drift back toward a conception of art as addressed to a time less, cultureless, universal human essence or, alternatively as a self-reading,

> autonomous, closed system-- in either case, art as opposed to social life. (*Renaissance* 4)

The anthropological criticism of Greenblatt is in tune with Foucault's *Archaeology of knowledge*, where he asserts that the understanding of a discourse is based on dispersion rather than unity. We should abandon preexisting notions of unity in order to understand the formation and development of discourses. In *Archaeology of Knowledge,* Foucault pleads for a new historiographical project which describes and analyzes the various strata of discourse. Foucault wants to explore the utterances in various disciplines. He postulates the dramatic changes in the history of a certain discourse. Jon Simons, in *Foucault and the Political* provides a penetrating study of Foucault's conceptualization of power, between the poles of unbearable heaviness meaning constraining limitations or domination and unbearable lightness which means limitless freedom or resistance. He also shows how Foucault "resists the magnetism of two poles, riding the tension by adopting unstable positions between them" (3). Simons states:

> On the one hand, thought appears to be constrained by the same conditions as truth, to the extent that someone within a particular system of thought cannot render an account of its limits. Not only is thought absolutely constrained, but without the ability to discern limits resistance is blind. On the other hand, Foucault in his later work suggested that philosophy and reflection itself could be a way to become free of oneself and one's thought. (5)

Like Foucault, Greenblatt believes that all forms of resistance are blind and futile. Power, to Greenblatt, is inevitable and unbearable; it is heavy. In *The History of Sexuality,* Foucault points out: "Where there is power there is resistance; and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (95). In *The Archeology of Knowledge,* Foucault intimates that his methodology should "explore the relation between the discursive formations and the non-discursive practices (162), and he remarks that "what is at stake in every discourse is power because discourse is a commodity which is in dispute in the political sphere" (120). Foucault declares that his main interest lies in analyzing the rules which are within the discourse or at least "on its frontier" (74). *Discipline and Punish* examines the various social forms of discourse about and criminals and their reflections in social institutions like forms of punishment. It also analyzes the ways in which the inmates' bodies become a field upon which various forms of discourse exert their power. But "power is tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself" (86).

Foucault suggests that discourse should be an object of historical analysis; "the history of sexuality … must first be written from the viewpoint of a history of discourses" (69). He argues that power must not be seen as merely negative, refusing and repressive. It is a productive feature. In such discourses, sexuality becomes one of the decisive factor s of human personality. This production of sexuality as an area of knowledge coincides with the production of truth about sexuality. Foucault regards this process as an important part of the emergence of what he calls "bio-power." New Historicism proclaims a return to history, and with it there comes the end of the long

imagined antithesis between history and theory. Their opposition has been a necessary critical fiction of our time.

Greenblatt suggests that during the Renaissance, the fashioning of identity, both in formation and expression is primarily a product of social institutions. The fashioning of identity was less autonomous because in Renaissance "family, state, and religious institutions impose a rigid discipline upon their middle class subjects" (*Renaissance* 1). Identity fashioning is artificial and imposed during early modern period. Greenblatt notes that there is also a "direction enacted by the works of literature in relation to the society: a shift from absorption by community, religious faith, or diplomacy towards the establishment of literacy creation as a profession in own right" (8). Greenblatt evaluates Edmund Spencer, Thomas Wyatt, Christopher Marlowe, and William Shakespeare. These authors know about fashioning since they had to adapt themselves to different identities, as they did not follow the expected pattern. Being sons of middle class families, "they did not inherit their personalities; they had to reinvent them" (8). In *Representing the English Renaissance,* Greenblatt explains his attempt in evaluating the Renaissance texts in a historical emergency. He argues that any form of art is performed in a cultural environment and the production of literature is not a private matter but a social act with its "contests" and "negotiations." He further says that imagination is created in a social environment and is a product of public condition:

> These contests and negotiations are all social; they do not occur in a private chamber of the artist's imagination, for that imagination, in its materials and resources and aspirations is already a social construct. This does not mean that art can be reduced to social structures such as class,

> status, or kinship, any more than it can simply be collapsed into the material basis for its production and consumption. A culture's diverse social constructions are at once interconnected and differentiated, so that if, for example, a culturally dominant conception of social inequality shapes artistic representations, those representations have at the same time the power to constrain, shape, alter, and even resist the conception of social inequality. (viii)

Social construction is twofold: social structures create public imagination and at the same time art which is a social construct itself, helps alter and save the social pattern. History and literature are thus interrelated and they are agents of meaning:

> For history is not simply discovered in the precincts surrounding the literary text or the performance or the image; it is found in the artworks themselves, as enabling condition, shaping force, forger of meaning, censor, community of patronage, and reception. And the work of art is not the passive surface on which this historical experience leaves its stamp but one of the creative agents in the fashioning and re-fashioning. (viii)

Greenblatt, in "Murdering Peasants," highlights that history and art are not constituent but their production requires numerous elements, and the outcome of social and political values are introduced to us through the text: "The production and consumption of such works are not unitary . . . they always involve a multiplicity of interests, however well organized, for the crucial reason that is social and hence presume more than one consciousness." He remarks that "in response to the art of the past, we inevitably register, whether we wish or not, the shifts of value and interests that are

produced in the struggles of social and political life" (14). Greenblatt also asserts that instead of depicting the ordinary operation of law, functioning to defend property, English artists most often narrate events at once more menacing and more socially prestigious events colored by "feudal fantasies in which the sixteenth century gentry dressed their craving for honor. Thus instead of the assizes and a hempen rope, we have tales of mass rebellion and knightly victories" (15). Artists prefer to narrate events that belong to the feudal society, instead of the capitalist relationships.

In *Shakespearean Negotiations*, Greenblatt defines New Historicism as a "turn away from the formal decontextualized analysis," and suggests an embeddedness of cultural objects in the contingencies of history" (271). New Historicism is not inclined to use the word "man" as a general term to refer to all human beings who are not thought as "making concrete choices in given circumstances at particular times" (271). His interest is towards the "particular, contingent cases" when "the selves fashioned and acting according to the generative rules and conflicts of a given culture," since reality is not in the "abstract universal" (272). History is shaped and reshaped through the expectations of the individual's class, gender, religion, race, and national identity. All the elements in the society are an agent from minimalism to marginality. Greenblatt remarks:

> Indeed, if there is any inevitability in the new historicism's vision of history it is this insistence on agency, for even inaction or extreme marginality is understood to possess meaning and therefore to imply intention. Every form of behavior, in this view, is a strategy: taking up arms or taking fight is a significant social action, but so is staying put,

> minding one's business, turning one's face to the wall: Agency is virtually inescapable. (*Shakespearean* 271-72)

Such agency could be multilayered, diversely motivated, and subversive. "Action that appear to single are disclosed as multiple; the apparently isolated power of the individual genius turns out to be bound up with collective social energy." He further says: "a gesture of dissent may be an element in a larger legitimation process, while an attempt to stabilize order of things may turn out to subvert it" (*Shakespearean*275). Greenblatt argues that works of art are actually the products of collective negotiation and exchange even though they may have been produced by the creative intelligence and private obsessions of individuals. This negotiation and exchange pay homage to Foucault's "regularities," both avoiding "the kind of thought for which events, texts, or social formations represent larger, more real formations" (During 200).

In *Shakespearean Negotiations,* Greenblatt holds that literary pleasure and interest is "a collective production" since language as the "heart of literary power" is the "supreme instance of collective creation" (4). Greenblatt compares the function of the Renaissance artists with the Renaissance monarchs. He says that "at some level we know perfectly well that the power of the prince is largely a collective invention" since "the symbolic embodiment of desire, pleasure, and violence of thousands of subjects" and also "the instrumental expression of complex networks of dependency and fear, the agent rather than the maker of social will (4). Greenblatt opines that Shakespearean theater is a product of collective intentions, and the moment of writing is a social moment. The theater compels the audience to a collectivity since Shakespearean theater "depends upon a felt community: there is no dimming of lights, no attempts to isolate

and awaken the sensibilities of each individual member of the audience, no sense of disappearance of the crowd" (5). The textual traces that Greenblatt is interested in New Historicism are "signs of contingent social practices" (5). We could be curious to know how these collective beliefs and experiences were shaped, moved from one medium to another, concentrated in manageable aesthetic form, offered for consumption so that we can examine the boundaries that divide cultural practices appreciated as art forms and other closest forms of expression.

In "Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England," Greenblatt explains that there is a "social energy" that we experience within ourselves, whose "contemporary existence depends upon an irregular chain of historical transactions that leads back to the late sixteen and seventeenth centuries" (6). There is no direct transmission of the aesthetic power from Shakespeare's time to our own as the circumstances are refigured. This does not mean that we are locked into the present, but these refigurations work as the "signs of the inescapability of a historical process, a structured negotiations and exchange" which are "evident in the initial moments of empowerment" (6). There may be no direct link between Shakespeare's and ourselves, but still the life of literary work lingers after the death of the author and the culture it belongs to. This is a historical consequence, and social energy is encoded in these works. For Greenblatt, social energy is traceable and it shapes and organizes collective physical and mental experiences. Social energy has "a minimal predictability, and a minimal range" and it reaches out "beyond a single creator to a number of people." Furthermore, "aesthetic forms of social energy have minimal adaptability, so that they survive certain social and cultural changes" (7). According to Greenblatt, his concept of social energy is similar to

Foucault's concept of "power" which exists as "power, charisma, sexual excitement, collective dreams, desire anxiety, religious awe, free-floating intensities of experience" (12). But unlike Foucault, Greenblatt does not exclude the market in his theory. As During writes for Greenblatt, "social energy itself, the expression of an expansionist, mercantile society, circulates into the theater simultaneously through social (especially economic) and rhetorical channels, which continually displace the intensities through which energy is experienced"(201). But for Foucault, "discourse is not so much something that has to do directly with the mechanics of language, such as found in "grammatical concerns" (*The Chomsky- Foucault Debate* 15).He views discourse in terms of "bodies of knowledge" particularly, in terms of investigating how those "bodies are constituted" (*The Archeology of Knowledge* 21).

The history of knowledge has been dominated by a certain tension between two claims: claims of attribution and claims of truth. The claims of attribution are those which hold that knowledge claims require attribution to someone. The discovery by the subject serves to grant the status of knowledge to a claim or discovery by the subject is a precondition to a claim being the sort of thing that can be entered into discourse. Claims of truth are those sorts of claims that hold that truth is not constituted in history but revealed by history. Proper historical analysis can clarify truth from falsehood. The subject can well represent something that prevents truth from unfolding and being revealed through presentation of myth or prejudice as fact. The subject as a seeker of truth is important. It is the subject that must stand independent of prejudices and myth. One must try to demonstrate how and under what conditions, the understanding of the individual can be "modified without some individual inventor discovering truth and at

the same time how the work of these modifications can produce new knowledge" (*The Chomsky-Foucault Debate 17*).

Discourse becomes something more than a representation of body of knowledge. It also becomes a technique for understanding the constitution of knowledge. It is a way of resolving the dilemma by showing the "historically specific relations between bodies of knowledge, or disciplines, and disciplinary practices (forms of social control and social possibility)." (*A Foucault Primer* 26). Thus one can see Foucault's approach to discourse as a re-reading of historical and social condition that does not look for the unfolding of the truth within those conditions so much as questioning the truth that those conditions have been held to reveal or make manifest. Foucault understands discourse as something that refers to knowledge. This is not 'knowledge-how' in the sense of other school of thought, but rather knowledge of times, ways of thinking and more importantly, what can be said about such knowledge. In any given historical period there are only certain ways in which we are able to cognize and report upon particular concepts. Discourse is that which both constraints and enables us to think and express our thought in the manner which we do. Foucault's discursive project consists in detail the historical specificity of those things that count as knowledge; how that, given a slight change in conditions, what we know with certainty to be true could be could be quite different because "the change in conditions would endanger a change in what could, and could not be said." (*A Foucault Primer* 33)

Foucault's project is to show the limited, rarified nature of bodies of knowledge; how they are products of particular functions that could easily have been otherwise. In analyzing these functions, Foucault turns to specific historical conditions: "a history writ

locally instead of in totality, a history traced through a series of relations of exteriorities instead of an understanding based in terms of timeless transcendental foundation." This leads to a discussion of power or power relations. This is because events do not simply occur, but instead occur in relation to "constraints, rules and conditions of possibility." (*The Archaeology* 125). The fact is that discourse is conditioned by power. Foucault is more concerned with the exercise of power as opposed to its theoretical construction.

Power is not an attribute possessed by a dominant group or individual, but rather a set of techniques and strategies that characterize its use. Foucault understands power not in terms of who possesses it and who does not but rather in terms of the forms that it takes and the relations in which it is held and utilized. Power also includes within it resistance. There are a "multiplicity of points of resistance that exist within any formalization of power."(Smart 77). Thus, power exists not as any one thing or relation, but as a characterization of relations that occur in a variety of forms between a variety of actors. Power is not a right or commodity that can be traded. This also precludes Foucault's acceptance of "a Marxist notion of power that is expressed solely in terms of economic analysis" ("Two lectures" 89). Foucault believes, this is important because "it is difficult to see how an analysis of power that is grounded in politics or economics can clearly pick out the interconnections and interactions between politics and economy" (Smart 78). In order to have a productively encompassing conception of power, we must think in terms of the relations and techniques that have come to be taken to constitute it while keeping in mind that it is nothing beyond those relations and techniques. This is the reason why Foucault chooses to stress the productive aspect of power as something more than other analyses. Foucault is quite willing to admit that it is possible to hold a

productive concept of power where power is understood like a culture or a text. Power inheres in everything, or at least in human relationship.

1.3 Genealogy and New Historicism

Genealogy and New Historicism are close to each other. Genealogy looks at the things through a historical lens and problematizes all that stands as an issue to one as well to the development of humanity. Genealogy is a hermeneutical form of analysis born in the mind of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. In *the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche sees two moralities: master and slave morality. Master morality, as he puts, "experiences itself as a determining values; it does not need approval; it judges what is harmful to me is harmful in itself; it knows itself to be that which first accords honor to things; is value creating" (270). Slave morality adopts "a pessimistic suspicion about the whole condition of man will find expression, perhaps a condemnation of along with his condition," and "essentially a morality of utility" (260). Nietzsche says that "master morality is born from an affirmation of life, of one's environmental background that has provided the ground for existence" (265).

Master morality celebrates the animal vitality of people. Nietzsche is envisioning the organism known as man as another kind of animal which roams freely exerting its strength over other, and not having any types of fundamental resentment of life. Animality of man reflects to his notion of the unconscious, which is aggressive and needs to express itself upon the world. The exertion of strength, proponent of master morality, has been known to dominate other people by capturing them and forcing them under the rule of the masters. Nietzsche calls this creation of societies. Part of this rule of the masters is to be bound by the masters' ideals or what Nietzsche calls "nobler ideals" (*On the Genealogy* 8). These ideals are the expression and the exertion of strength and affirmation of life of the masters over the slaves. *On the Genealogy of Moral*, Nietzsche

explains that the masters did not think that they were doing any actual harm to the slaves in their form of treatment to them. The master thought that they were doing by making the slaves stronger through such harsh treatment so that the slaves might come to affirm the life as masters do. Their ideals would be the bridges for their process of becoming stronger people. In his works, Nietzsche outlines even more the material and psychological conditions for slave morality. Slave morality comes about through resentment and this "resentment is a resentment of life" (15) when the animality of man is denied the ability to express its aggression through an exertion of strength.

Slaves find themselves in need of material necessities that only the master can provide. The slave makes a promise to fulfill a deed towards the master and for the slave to ensure a guarantee towards the master in case of non-payment, the slave puts up something which he/she still has some possession of such as freedom, a wife, a body part, or one's life. This creates a contractual relationship of a creditor and debtor and the early form of justice. According to Nietzsche, the early form of justice was not based upon the modern ideas of morality. "Punishment was not exacted because trouble maker was held responsible for this action, that is, it was not exacted on the assumption that only guilty man was to be punished" (*On the Genealogy* II 5). Instead punished arose from the creditor-debtor relationship as a way of repayment for pain ensued by another.

Throughout history and through and through various cultures this measuring process of pain and punishment has never been stable and constantly changed. Nietzsche tells that this is the point in which the animal known as man develops a memory, thinking, conscience, and a psychology. Man has a short memory much like other animals and in order for a new memory to develop so that a slave may remember his/her

promise to a master, pain is used. On the basis of this, Nietzsche points out that "a memory-a narrative of one's life is formed, as well as the conscience" (19). This conscience forms through memory as one internalizes the experience when one is being punished. One internalizes the master and acts according to the master's rules without having been told or punished which is called responsibility. Thus man becomes a domesticated animals or a trained animal. Nietzsche claims that he backs up saying that science is not the antithesis of religion as it claims or shows itself to be through its work trying to prove the non-existence of god. He explains that religion and science both adhere and complement ascetic ideals that search for an ideal objective world, strive to know its truths, practice self-denial in objectivity, and encourage the people to anesthetize themselves and the world through a set of practices of subjectivity and a use of language.

On *Nietzsche and Genealogy* (1983) by Deleuze, one comes to see an analysis of Nietzsche's genealogy. He focuses more on existential modes of being which he calls "forces." He shows how it is used in relation to those existential modes of being:

> Genealogy means both the value of origin and the origin of values. Genealogy is opposed to absolute values as it is to relative or utilitarian ones. Genealogy signifies the differential element of values from which their value itself derives. Genealogy thus means origin or birth, but also difference or distance in the origin. Genealogy means nobility and baseness, nobility and vulgarity, nobility and decadence in the origin. The noble and the vulgar, the high and the low-this is the truly genealogical and critical element. But, understood in this way, critique is also at its

> most positive. The differential element is both a critique of the value of values and the positive element of a creation. This is why the critique is never conceived by Nietzsche as a reaction but as an action. (2-3)

Deleuze explains Nietzsche's ideas of how a thing attains its sense through "force" (3). It is forces that appropriate, dominate things or express things. This makes us see phenomena not as appearances but as signs or systems "which find meaning in an existing force (5). Deleuze mentions that the history of a thing is created by the differing forces which have appropriated, dominated, and exploited a thing. This is a notion of plurality which shows that there is always more than one force or one meaning in life. "The history of a thing, in general, is the succession of forces which take possession of it and the co-existence of the forces which struggles for possession. The same object, the same phenomenon changes sense depending on the force which appropriate it. History is the variation of senses" (6).

Delueze shows how a thing attains its meaning. He means that a thing or event has multitude meanings that construct a thing or histories of a thing. Deluze tells us that with this myriad of forces and meanings playing a role in the history and meaning of a thing , the idea of essence does not go away. It is not appropriate to think of a thing in the world as existing neutrally but instead a thin will have an affinity to the force in current possession of the thing, thus becoming the expression of a force.

The genealogist must also be a psychologist to understand differing forces and what a force wants. Delueze advises that " the difference in the origin does not appear at the origin" (5) indicating that the uniqueness of a force or thing is not present at its founding or in its conditions of existence but that there is a historical process culminated

in its current essence. It is the plurality of forces that which relates to one another in commanding and obeying roles that directs towards an origin. The role of hierarchy that Nietzsche and Delueze say, is inseparable from genealogy since it gives different identities. Delueze writes:

> The origin is the difference in the origin, difference in ht e origin is the hierarchy, that is to say the relation of a dominant to a dominated force, of an obeyed to an obeying will. Hierarchy is the originary fact, the identity of difference and origin. And so, the meaning or sense of something in its relation or affinity to the possessing force, and the value of something is the hierarchy of forces which are expressed in the thing as a complex phenomenon. (9)

Delueze says that Nietzsche's pluralism of commanding and obeying forces is against the notion of pre-existing negative. The obeying force does not deny the commanding force since it can affirm and enjoy its difference under the command of the dominant force. The negative appears not in the essence of something but as a result of the activity of an active force, of an aggressive existence affirming its difference. Delueze says that "difference is object of practical affirmation inseparable from essence and constitutive of existence" (10). This is what a force or a will wants to affirm its difference. The affirmation results in the obeying forces or slaves to see them in relation to this affirmation and deny it through their sense of insecurity and inferiority as the dominant forces or the masters displaces their sense of stable subjectivity. Delueze exclaims that "the slave only conceives of power as the object of recognition, the content

of a representation, the stake in a competitionand therefore makes it depend, at the end of a fight on a simple attribution of established values" (11).

In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," there are three uses of "historical sense" which create what Foucault calls counter-memory. Counter-memory means a divorce from any anthropological and metaphysical models of history, which are also called memory, and hence a break with traditional history or dialectic. This divorce from dialectic opens up a new conception of time that can account for what the dialectic cannot account for concerning history and time. Foucault asserts that there are uses that historical sense give rise to. These correlate with and oppose the modalities of history suggested by Platonism. The first use is called the parodic. This parodic use refers to the use the history in which the historian offers people the prospect of changing their identities by presenting them individual historical figures as alternatives. This adores past identities and past events.

Foucault mentions that the genealogists know that this method is only a disguise to point to the unreality as symptom does to a disease. The genealogist's response to the historian's pretense will push this cover-up of identities to the breaking point and "prepare the great carnival of time where masks are constantly reappearing ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History" 94). This creates disassociation with identities of the past in regards to the fragile identity and generates an "unrealization through the myriad choice of possible identities from the past" (Foucault 95). This mask gives a new life to the ridiculousness of history and finds a new realm of originality by parodying history by a force interpreting an old mask. Foucault points out that this parodying "monumental

history" (94) in which so called high points in historical development were to be reestablished.

The second use of historical sense is to disassociate and destabilize identity. This historical sense opposes itself to any ideas of stable identity or the rediscovery of a forgotten identity by analyzing history. It is against what Nietzsche calls "Antiquarian history" which tries to create continuities with the past rooting our present to it as Nietzsche says "it tries to converse for prosperity the condition under which we were born" (qtd. in Foucault 95). Nietzsche criticizes this form of history for restricting creativity and instead supporting laws of loyalty to the continuity of past and present.

The third use of historical sense is in regards to the sacrifice of the subject of knowledge. For Foucault, the will to knowledge historically and psychologically is to require a sacrifice. It is this sacrifice which has mutated from a religious sacrifice of bodies to that of knowledge which requires the subject and humanity at large. The way in which the will to knowledge functions then exposes a contradiction within its functionality and structure and re-installs illusions such as truth or objectivity. For Foucault the will to knowledge is to "create a progressive enslavement to its instinctive violence" (96). Genealogy can be applied in different areas of philosophy.

Foucault mentions that genealogy creates a counter-memory which broadens the horizon of experience not only in present but in past and future. This broadening of the horizon of experience through genealogy in the past, present and future delineates paths in which new modes of existence, phenomenology, psychology, expressivity cab be experienced.

New Historicism sheds light on Morrison's writings as it looks at a work's discourse as something which is linked to the society in which the author has created it. The gender codes, the oppressive environment, and complexity of sexuality and love in her novels *Sula, The Bluest Eye, Beloved, Jazz* and *Paradise* can all be recognized as aspects of society of the twenty first century. It is not only familiar to the author, but also to the reader. The reader is also strongly linked to the society, its ideology and belief systems, and will understand a work of literature accordingly. As "the American version of cultural studies," the New Historicism shows "its sympathy for disadvantaged – marginalized – people…" (Griffith 179). Morrison sympathizes for marginalized people through her portrayal of the most vulnerable members of society such as the children and the women. She also draws parallels between the oppression of the blacks in America and oppression within the black communities.

The use of a social and cultural approach is useful when analyzing Morrison because her writing portrays behavior as a social and cultural construct. As Griffith puts it, "In an anthropological sense, culture is the total way of life of a particular society – its language, economy … a collection of codes that everyone in a society shares and allows them to communicate" (179-80). The use of colloquial language that Morrison applies in her discourse is an example of different aspects of black culture, which help make her stories representative of the time and place in which the stories are set. She also uses intertextual references as a part of her discourse such as nursery rhymes, historical references from civil rights era, and iconic figures like Shirley Temple, which help place her characters in a specific environment and a particular time. "Morrison uses particular textual strategies to claim discursive authority" (Ryan, 152).

The culture and society of Cosey's are illustrated through Heed's language which reveals her to be an intruder and an outsider in the family. Both her spoken language and writing skills are poor. Morrison lets the young Christine ridicule Heed's use of language when wanting to set herself above her former friend. "People with power – social, economic . . . use discourse to manipulate other people maintain their own power" (Griffith 180). The examples of how codes of behavior are used to reveal differences in class and power in Morrison's novels are, Helene Wright's social conduct in *Sula,* serves to separate herself and daughter from the common blacks in the bottom, as well as Geraldine's assertion of superiority in her meeting with Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*. Griffith holds: "Power elites can be persons within a society – wealthy persons, politicians, white people, males . . . .Thus, some people are marginalized and made vulnerable to exploitation" (180-181).

Racism, patriarchy, and sexism are part of the ideology in the society that Morrison portrays. By telling the stories of young girls' exposure to sexual harassment and this affects them, Morrison's writing explains human behavior as something which is result of and marked by social and cultural construct. Morrison shows in *The Bluest Eye* how marginalized people like the poor Breedlove along with the prostitutes are made vulnerable by the norms of the society. Raynor and Butler point out that critics examine how Morrison "illustrates the destructive nature of patriarchy both within the mainstream American society and African American communities. Morrison's novels serve as historical narratives by showing the inextricable links between gender, race, and class" (178).

Morrison's works are argued to "give voice to the voiceless and record a history of people, especially those she refers to as ordinary people, who have been ignored or purposely forgotten" (Raynor and Butler 177). Morrison's writing is fictional, but its concern with forgotten individuals can be discussed in terms of being, in part, historical and even biographical. She draws on experiences and memories from her own childhood and uses these as sources of inspiration in her writing. Writing her own family's story as well as recorded historical incidents, such as the story of Sethe in *Beloved* being a recreation of the true story of Margaret Garner, Morrison's stories become more credible. "Like everyone else, authors are subjects manufactured by culture. A culture writes an author who, in turn, transcribes cultural codes and discourses into literary texts" (Griffith 181). To New Historicists, literature should be read as a result of the time in which it is produced: "new historicists … believe that literature must be studied within a cultural context . . . second, new historicists focus on literature as a cultural text . . . Third, . . . scrutinize the relationship of literature to the power structures of society aspire to diminish the injustices of race, class and gender" (Griffith 182).

Morrison's novels are cultural texts that examine the aspects of power structures which surround the people of a community. According to Raynor and Butler, "Her narratives invite readers to construct meaning from what they read" (178). Morrison educates her readers by using her authorial presence. She scrutinizes how certain expression of power, in the form of destructive sexual behavior, can destroy people. She sheds light on society's injustice related to race, class and gender. Gender studies also provide useful perspectives on issues related to the social construction of what is feminine and masculine: "whereas sex is the biological difference between males and

females, gender is the cultural difference . . . Western culture . . . has ruled that certain kinds of behavior are abnormal and unnatural for females to practice" (Griffith 191). The study of gender in a society must look to its culture since "gender is a cultural construct, it is said to be malleable in a way that biology may not be" (Barker 289). Ideas around gender may be altered or controlled by forces or influences in society, whereas biology may not. Gender studies question notions of how men and women relate to one another, as ideas of gender have been constructed to bolster and promote male hegemony. It is important for gender studies to criticize the attributes ascribed to the sexes. Barker holds that "men are commonly to be more naturally domineering, hierarchically oriented and power-hungry, while women are seen as nurturing, child rearing, and domestically inclined" (283-284).

Morrison's writing is based on the ways in which the ideas of the feminine and the masculine are constructed in the society. In *Paradise,* she elucidates the more complex and damaging aspects of patriarchal societies and how these societies destroy the relationship not only between men and women but between women themselves. In her fiction, sexuality is part of the social construction of gender. In *Sula,* women are portrayed in terms of being around home or in the family. Nel and Helene who see sexuality as part of marriage deviate from the conventional norms. Eva desexes matriarch, Hannah fails to form healthy relationships with men and she gives her daughter the love she needs. Sula refuses to act like a good woman and sleeps around by not wanting to settle down and have babies. Morrison uses sexuality as part of the characterization of women figures. In her novels, sexual behavior serves as an indicator

and expression of gender codes. In her narratives, gender is linked to oppression to elucidate the role of the oppressive males who use sexuality as a means to suppress their victims. It is interesting how Morrison manages to portray these individuals as complex human beings, not simply as male monsters as their sexual behavior would suggest. The sexual scene in her narratives thus become a part of larger portrayal of her characters. She wants the reader to use his/her own sexuality to identify and become part of them. As Morrison says in "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation.": "To describe sexual scenes in such way that they are not clinical, not even explicit—so that the reader brings in his own sexuality to the scene and thereby participates in it in a very personal way. And owns it" (200).

Raynor and Butler point out that Morrison's depiction of black women's sexuality is often unconventional. They hold that "many critics explore how Morrison challenges prevailing stereotypes of African American women, especially in the women centered novels like *The Bluest Eye, Sula, Beloved, Paradise,* and *Love*" (179). Raynor and Butler explain how Morrison aims to deconstruct the stereotypes of black female characters by portraying them as "comfortable with their bodies and sexuality" (180). An example of this is how the prostitutes in *The Bluest Eye*, despite being regarded among the lowest of the low in the community, are in the novel portrayed as confident and strong characters. The deconstruction of stereotypes can also be read in the general portrayal of Sula in *Sula,* in the narrator's celebration of the prostitutes of the past.

Gender and sexuality have a cultural and political significance in Morrison's novels. As a social and literary critic of her own as well as of other's writing, she has become a voice in the contemporary literary world. In her essay, "All Necks are on the

Line," Justine Tally discusses how Morrison herself in her essay "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: the Afro-American Presence in American Literature," states that: "what we do as writers and critics is not just important, it is not just informative, it is formative; it is not just interesting, it profoundly shapes the perception of the world as we, and others, come to know it" (qtd. in Tally 1). For Morrison, authors themselves are responsible for the way in which literature presents the world.

Literature is formative; it creates an understanding of the world in the minds of its readers and may affect their outlook. Morrison asserts that "the invocation in literature of a socio-political agenda is not in conflict with its aesthetic worth" (Ryan 151). She effaces the dividing lines between the artistic aspects of literature and its social and political criticism. McBride remarks: "By challenging the boundaries between artist and critic, Morrison creates a legitimate place in critical literary discourse for her own voice" (163). Raynor and Butler argues that "Morrison's novels read as if the narrator is speaking directly to the reader, evoking response" (176), suggesting that Morrison uses the narrator's voice as cultural commentary. In Wall's article about the role of Toni Morrison as an editor and teacher, she claims how her work at Random House "helped to define two decades of African American literary history" (115).

When Morrison talks about how African Americans are portrayed in literature, she uses the term "Africanism" as "a term for designating the unspeakable in discourses about class, sexuality, issues of power and domination" (Wallinger 115). Morrison addresses the reader directly to relate the individual experience of history as seen through the eyes of African American females. In her discourse, she creates a language where the "unspeakable" is put into words. "She rather wants textual encounters to be

encounters of minds" (Ludwig 133), and this may create dialogue between narrator and reader. Morrison sees how ideas in literature, when read, represents more than a simple exchange: "She knows that ideas are not a matter of mere neutral exchange value, but always belong to the person whose ideology they reflect" (Ludwig 133). Morrison makes it clear that there is a political responsibility in the encounter of the reader and writer in the text. As Morrison says in "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation":

> If anything I do, in the way of writing novels (or whatever I write) isn't about the village or the community or about you, then it is not about anything. I am not interested in indulging myself in some private, closed exercise of imagination that fulfils only the obligation of my personal dreams – which is to say yes, the work must be political. (Morrison 202).

Morrison addresses issues related to social and political aspects of society in general and of the African American community in particular. Her stories portray how oppression of different kinds affects the individual being, and in doing so she portrays society and raises questions. She does not close the eyes to oppression whether it is within the society at large or within the African American community. She blames not only the individual oppressor, but society and the community which seem to ignore oppressive behavior.

New Historicism has been a powerful vein of criticism that influenced critics and historians alike. This new outlook on history and literature ventured not only the notion that every single person lives his/her own historicity and following ideology with codes embedded in the society, but also the fact that objective approach to a culture in the past is impossible, as the critic, like the author, is historically bound and cannot escape the

power of his culture and ideology. Text is an agent that helps reshape the society in return. Therefore text can be evaluated not to achieve an objective reconstruction of the past, but to understand the social energy to make sense of the ideology of a given culture.

1.4 Tradition of Black Aesthetics

The Black Aesthetic, an expression of the Black Power movement grew out of frustration and anger of African-American intellectuals due to racist attitudes of white critics that black art work was not to be taken seriously. Advocates of Black Aesthetics appealed to black artists to establish a new standard of judgment and beauty based on African myths, spirituality, belief systems and music in opposition to Western aesthetic. The Black aesthetics as a theoretical concept was developed in 1971 by Gayle's *The Black Aesthetic*. However, ontologically, the Black Aesthetics had the roots in those first creative sounds of black slaves in the form of spirituals, coded singing and signifying, and later in writings. Black aesthetics and Black aesthetic theory in the United States may trace their origins to the "literature of slavery and freedom dating from 1746-1865" (Gates & McKay127). The slave narratives help us understand African-Americans' artistic and academic efforts to show their humanity and critical moments in the development of Black aesthetics. The socio-economic and political conditions created black aesthetic forms that point to social justice.

The Harlem renaissance was an explosion of black cultural awareness that found its voice in various artistic expressions such as poetry, fiction, music, theater, painting, and sculpture. The art of the Harlem Renaissance in terms of poetry, fiction, drama, music, and painting represents an achievement of major proportions and highlights the will of African-Americans to promote an aesthetic that concerns the socio-political experience. Although the Harlem Renaissance was primarily a literary movement, it served as a form of resistance and a social rejection of racism and shaped the socio-political nature of black works of arts. It sparked the possibility of an aesthetic theory

that reflects the social justice conditions and actions of men. Black art work was a reflection of the right or wrong actions of man and offered a critical moment in Black aesthetic history.

The social factor that influenced the emerging Renaissance was massive migration of African-Americans from south to north. The migration was due to both practical and political concerns. It was an integral part of the large industrial and social problems of the democracy of that time. During the 1920s, many blacks migrated to industrial cities in the north. There was a shortage of European immigrant labors during World War I, creating a demand for industrial workers. The north offered plentiful jobs for blacks. Alain Locke states in *The New Negro*, "with each wave of movement, the Negro becomes more and more a mass movement toward a larger and more democratic chance" (6). He relies on notions of the collective consciousness of blacks to develop a concept of nationalism. For him, constructing a theme of nationalism was a means or opening democratic possibilities for Black Americans. He employs art with the specific motivation toward recording the nature of sociopolitical rise and psychological uplift of the Black American. He believes that nationalism could be achieved through cultural pluralism and in the notion of social and cultural reciprocity as well as in understanding the relativity of values. He holds that these ideas can "prosper in an atmosphere of intellectual democracy" (201).

Locke's idea of cultural nationalism can be characterized by an existence of social reciprocity in all values—social, economic, and aesthetic between White Americans and Black Americans. Locke states that "the purpose of the work was to document the New Negro culturally and socially to register the transformations of inner

and outer life of the Negro in America that have so significantly taken place in the last few years" (xv). W. E. B. Dubois asserts that the plays of the real Negro theater must be: "About us. That is that they must have plots which reveal Negro life as it is, by us. That is, they must be written by Negro authors who understand from birth and continual association just what it means to be Negro today, for us; that is, catering mainly to Black audiences and near us—that is, in a Black neighborhood, near the masses of ordinary Negro people" (295)

Dubois advocates a propagandistic approach to Black art. He believes that the best message for black artist to convey is one of uplift.

The Black Arts Movement of 1960s and was a period of literary and artistic development among Black Americans. This stage of Black aesthetics has its history rooted in the political climate of social change in 1960s and 1970s. The Civil Rights Movement was a time of heightened struggle. The notion of equality crossed into every aspect of Black American life. Black aesthetics of 1960s and 1970s expanded the Harlem Renaissance project toward a system of evaluating the artistic works of Black people, which reflected the character of the Black experience. At this time in America, there seemed to be an ideology of European aesthetic judgment that prevailed inside the academy as well as in the commercial or market sphere. European aesthetic judgment was racist, and did not evaluate the artistic works of black people based on the relevance of the black experience. Many black artists voiced against this tradition and embarked on a project to create a system to evaluate black art.

The Black Arts Movement was an attempt to move beyond the overt cultural mission of Harlem Renaissance toward a mission that was explicitly political. Thus, the

Eurocentric gaze in the form of aesthetic judgment caused a psychological blow to the African-American artist, as Locke implies a psychology of inferiority prior to the New Negro Movement when he states “The Negro mind . . . is shaking off the psychology of imitation and implied inferiority” (10). Somewhere during the course of this history, the Black American mind had slipped back into psychological submission and was in need of an epiphany, or the ―psychology of inferiority had not been completely ―shaken off as Locke claims. The Black Arts Movement was another moment when the unjust social and political conditions of the time inspired not only artists but intellectuals as well. The Black Arts Movement made an effort to advance an ideology of Blackness, it proved more often to be an over generalized or essentialized theory of Blackness.

Black aesthetics in the Black Arts Movement was informed by two primary philosophies: Black Cultural Nationalism and Afro-centricism. The 1960s was a time of political and civil turbulence in America. Black Americans were not only in search of civil rights and liberties but also in need of an identity that was autonomous of mainstream perceptions and ideologies. Black intellectuals were in search of more effective means and methods of seizing power. Black writers turned away from the traditional themes and “journeyed toward a Black aesthetic” (Fuller 5). For Fuller, the revolutionary Black author had decided that White racism would no longer exercise its control over his work and that he or she would no longer separate literature from reality. Fuller went on to explain that the problem of irreconcilable conflict between the Black artist and the White critic was the failure to recognize the fundamental truth of American life: “The world of the Black outsider, however much it approximates and parallels and

imitates the world of the White insider, by its very nature is inheritor and generator of values and viewpoints which threaten the insiders" (7).

H. R. Madhubuti advocated for Black art that is directly connected to the daily lives of Black people. He articulated that he was racially and culturally motivated and quite deliberate in his writing, particularly in terms of employing the Afro American language. He argues that black poets deal in the concrete, art for people's sake meant that Black aesthetics should focus on the everyday social and political lives of Black people. He touches on the psychological implications regarding the purpose for Black art. He states "Black art will elevate and enlighten our people and lead them toward awareness of self, i.e., their Blackness" (5). Madhubuti's perspective advocates a Black art work that is openly and purposefully political. He further says that "Black poetry will be political and asserted that ―there is no neutral Black art" (16). This statement adds an important layer to the project of defining Black aesthetics and binds the connection between socially just acts, politics, and art.

Since the 1970s, Black aesthetics has moved to include form and analysis, Afro-centricism, post- structural concepts, Black feminist perspectives, and the interconnected complexity between hip-hop philosophy, culture, and rap music. Hip-hop has emerged as a dominant form of the popular culture of blacks in America that includes music genres, rap, and rhythm-and-blues. The movement of hip-hop culture has played an important role in shaping African-Americans through music, videos, and dance. It has served as an outlet for African-Americans to articulate the problems they have in living in a racist society of America. Through rhythm and poetry, hip-hop has addressed racism, education, sexism, drug use, and spiritual uplift. Black aesthetics has influenced

blues, rock, and gospel both home and outside. Carolyn Fowler discusses on the utility and notion of Black form and focuses her attention on characterizing some of the salient features of Black art that may be consistent in all arts media. In her efforts to typify the Black American aesthetic, she points out the notion of balance rather than symmetry, the core concept of the Euro American tradition as the central concept: "Balance is knowing how far to go and still get back; how far to bend over in the dance without falling, how long to draw out a note without losing musicality, how far to take an improvisation without losing the theme" (16). Fowler reveals that balance comes with knowing how to dress extravagantly, mixing bold colors and many patterns. She invokes the embodiment notion with the facility of celebrative exaggerated body movements, and the balance of histrionic speech patterns, dramatic pauses, and extreme contrasts in high and low pitch in intonation. Fowler gives an analysis of the taken-for-granted ordinary events in Black American life. Balance is in the art forms derived from those speech patterns in Black preaching and jazz. The ―hipster's strut and the tilt of his or her hat is in the domain of balance—knowing how far to go.

Winston Napier, creates a space to critique the philosophy that sustained the Black aesthetic. He argues that, "for a growing number of Black intellectuals, the critical era, also known as the Nationalists movement, was too focused on ideological platforms and establishing political agendas" (2000). Houston Baker's *The Journey Back: Issues in Black Literature and Criticism* is an important critique on the developmental issue of Black aesthetics, putting forth his stance on Black art and Black aesthetic movement, he says, "Our stance was nationalistic; . . . The familiar terms were Black aesthetic, Black Power, and Nation Time. If this working vocabulary was limited, so too, was our

perspective. We assumed we were fighting for survival, and we took Malcolm X‘s words quite literally: we proceeded by any means necessary” (11).

Larry Neal shifted from Black Nationalist philosophy toward structuralism theories to explore what he understood to be systematic elements of Black America‘s expressive culture. His Black Nationalist views have been expressed in *Drama Review*. He asserts that “a main tenet of Black Power is the necessity for Black people to define the world in their own terms and that the Black artist has made the same point in the context of aesthetics” (23). Neal summarizes the rationale and need for a Black Nationalist philosophy:

> It is the natural reaction to an alien sensibility that informs the cultural attitudes of the Black Arts and the Black Power Movement. It is a profound ethical sense that makes Black artist question a society in which art is one thing and the actions of men another. The Black Arts Movement believes that your ethics and your aesthetics are one. That the contradiction between ethics and aesthetics in western society is symptomatic of a dying culture. (39)

Maulana Karenga suggests that Black aesthetics can be defined as a “distinctive mode of artistic expression judged in terms of its creativity and beauty as well as its social relevance” (395). He advances a notion of Black cultural nationalism in the community. He also weighs in as to the purposes of Black art and asserts that “Black art had to be ―functional, collective, and committed to be considered real and relevant” (412). For Karenga, functional art must self-consciously have and urge social purpose. He asserts that “Black art must respond positively to the reality of revolution and that it is

very important that art plays a role in Black survival and not bog itself down in meaningless madness of the Western world wasted" (414). He goes on to say that — "all art must reflect and support Black Revolution and that any art that does not discuss and contribute to the revolution is invalid" (403). Karenga explains that " Black art must be functional, collective, and committing and dismissed the idea of —art for art's sake claiming —there is no such thing as _art for art's sake. And all art reflects the value system from which it comes" (396). For Karenga, art does not "exist in the abstract just as freedom does not exist in the abstract. However, Black art must be an aesthetic translation of our will and struggle for liberation and a higher level of life" (395).

Molefi Asante develops a philosophical concept of Afro- centricity, which he defines as "the standpoint of the agency of African people and the centrality of Africa in its own story" (3). He stated further that Afro- centricity does not merely mean the study of Black people, but a philosophical and cultural approach to the interpretation of the social realities of Black people. Asante's theory advances an idea of Afrocentric aesthetics whereby art is functional and works toward the social and political liberation of Africans across the Diasporas. Asante's work and theory made an impact on public schools. Afrocentric aesthetic directly links the socio-political to the idea of social justice.

Another dimension added to Black aesthetics is Black feminist theory. Toni Cade articulates a feminist thought that argues that "in a capitalist society a man is expected to be an aggressive, uncompromising, factual, lusty, intelligent provider of goods, and the woman, a retiring, gracious, emotional, intuitive, attractive consumer of goods" (*The Sea* Birds 44). In *Gorilla, My Love*, she says that "the the idea of community is a thread that

connects the stories in the collection" (53). Bambara‘s works show her concern with how the wisdom of the community passes from generation to generation or how community manifests itself in the living. In *Black Women Writers at Work*, Bambara characterized *Gorilla* as “on the -block-, in the neighborhood, back glances pieces” (qtd. in Tate 24) that grew out of a concern for insuring space for children.

Although she worked primarily with the short story form and produced in 1977 a second collection of short stories, *The Sea Birds Are Still Alive*, Bambara spoke to the socio-political in other mediums as well. Bambara‘s work is significant in terms of interpreting Black feminist aesthetic as an alternative way to make meaning of what might be perceived as elusive or ambiguous. She highlighted the social and political life world through aesthetic material. She used literature as aesthetic vehicles to challenge and redefine notions of social justice. In *Black Women Writers*, she stated that writing was one of the ways she participates in struggle and that “writing was a legitimate way, an important way, to participate in the empowerment of the community” (qtd. in Evans 42).

Other feminist perspectives include the works of Paula Marshall, June Jordan and Audre Lord. Paula Marshall‘s works examine the social and political struggles of Black immigrant communities as well as explore the themes of the coming of age, the quest for identity, and the centrality of women‘s voices. For example, in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, Black women are central to the story, which addresses the development of a teen-aged girl from an immigrant West Indian family. In the context of social and economic condition of 1930s and 1940s America, the significance of women‘s voices in the family as well as Black culture can be seen in the matriarch character Silla Boyce in

Brown Girl. In other works, such as *Soul Clap Hands and Sing* (1961), Marshall examined American quest for materialism, racism, and exploitation as well as the intersection between African American and African Caribbean cultures. Marshall continued to explore the complexities of constructing female identity within African American and Caribbean cultures in *Daughters*. She used the voices of her American Caribbean grandmothers to challenge conventional notions of gender as well as traditional cultural practices.

The work of June Jordan offers another contemporary Black feminist perspective in Black aesthetics. Creating poetry as well as essays, Jordan‘s work highlights the society and politics. She published poetry collections *Who Look at Me* and *Things that I Do in the Dark* and political essays such as *Many Rivers to Cross, On Call: Political Essays* and *Affirmative Acts* . Jordan employed explicit social and political language in her poetry and essays. For example, she directly challenged how one might think about gender, male dominance, and identity roles in *The Female and the Silence of Man*.

Audre Lorde is known for her poetry and essays that challenge traditional ideas of gender, sexuality, race, and class. She published *From a Land Where Other People Live* and *The Black Unicorn.* She is well known for her book *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches.* Her work highlights an effort to redefine the notion of difference as well as the importance of the marginalized being heard. For Lorde, a feminist perspective broadens the Black aesthetic project by questioning what it means when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of the same patriarchy. Lorde‘s feminist conception not only deconstructs the traditional means and language tools of patriarchy, but also suggests a radical Black feminist language that might help define ambiguous

terms like *social justice*. Lorde‘s question seems to speak to Young‘s definition of social justice, which challenges societal structures that enable oppression and domination in the context of exploitation, marginalization, patriarchy and violence: thus creating a kind of radical language with which to help define or at least critically challenge how one thinks about social justice.

Furthermore, a black feminist aesthetic in America can be seen in the work of Alice Walker, who focused on southern African American women‘s voices. Her work demonstrates a commitment to exploring the lives of Black women, examining such social issues as the lives that could be viewed as restrictive and narrow and including women who were physically and psychologically abused, for example, the two main characters (Margaret and Mem Copeland) in the story *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*). Walker challenged 1960s Black American cultural nationalist perspectives, which idealized Black manhood while rarely acknowledging the oppression of women. For example, her collection of poetry, *Revolutionary Petunias* articulated African American women‘s frustrations and resistance against injustice. Walker‘s narratives descriptively depicted women who suffered from communal alienation as well as characters who effectively persevered through oppression brought on by Black patriarchy as well as the oppression brought by White society in the narrative, for example, in *The Color Purple*. The nuanced social and political views implicit in Walker‘s work serve to challenge the way people think about justice as well as create an aesthetic language through which to understand terms such as *agency* and *social justice*.

Moreover, in *Toward a Black Feminist Criticism,* Barbara Smith stated that, for books to be understood, they must be examined in such a way that the basic intentions of

the writers are at least considered. Smith, as a leading Black feminist scholar, asserted that, when Black women‘s books are dealt with at all, it was usually in the context of Black literature, which largely ignores the implications of sexual politics. Smith articulated another example of Black feminist approach to aesthetics: “A Black feminist approach to literature that embodies the realization that the politics of sex as well the politics of race and class are crucially interlocking factors in the works of Black women writers is an absolute necessity” (132). In this passage, Smith suggested that Black feminist perspectives not only broaden the Black aesthetic project but also create an alternative language that reshapes the politics and tools used to perpetuate racism, classism, and patriarchy as well as the way people think about such ideas as social justice.

The 1980s and 1990s brought the works of Barbara Christian, Patricia Collins, and Joy James and further revealed moments in which Black feminists‘thought informs the Black aesthetic. Black women theorists of this time engaged the issues of race, gender, politics, and sexuality as analytical tools to broaden the examination and interpretation of women‘s experiences. The work of these African American women demonstrates that the incorporation of sexuality and gender expands the analytical tools of politics, race, and action already present in Black aesthetics. Black feminist thought can encourage collective identity by offering Black women and Black aesthetics, more broadly conceived, a different or nuanced view of their world and social justice than that offered by the established order. It should be noted at this point that the Black feminists‘ concepts as well as the language used by Walker, hooks, Lorde, Smith, Collins, and others were in conflict with the Black Nationalist and Afrocentric ideas and language

proposed by some Black male theorists (such as Karenga and Asante). Their explicit Black patriarchal viewpoint on their theories served to further alienate or censure the voices of Black American women. Black feminist language operates as a counter to the language of dominance inherent to some Black Nationalists and Afrocentric theories. The next generation of artist (1980s and 1990s), particularly in music, seemed to have succumbed to sexist and misogynistic qualities as well. This fact notwithstanding, conceptualizations of Black aesthetics, criteria, and work include the concept of hip-hop philosophy and the creation of rap music.

Morrison examines the Black experience and, specifically, the Black female experience within the Black community. Her contributions have become the body of African-American literature through both her fiction and critical essays. Her fictions largely focus on the various problems faced by African-American women. They give clear understanding of black life, society and culture. It is best to sum up the worth of Morrison's works in her own words, she writes:

> If anything I do in the way of writing novels (or whatever I write) isn't about village or the community or about you. Then it is not about anything. I am interested in indulging myself in some private , closed exercise of my imagination that fulfills only the obligation of my personal dreams which is to say yes, the work must be political… it seems to me that the best art is political and you ought to make it unquestionably political and irrevocably beautiful at the same time. (qtd. In Ifran 10)

Morrison presents the non-linear African-American socio-historical reality, where she shows effect and the after effect of the history of slavery. Her works offer a fresh perspective on black life, their history and genealogy. Her major works are slavery and racism, and their psychological and social effects on the blacks over ages. Morrison's novels show the victimization of black people within context of racial social order. The themes of her novels reflect the sense of identity of a black person trying to recover his/her history and culture, which has so far been suppressed due to white narcissism.

The Bluest Eye makes a critique on racism and class stratification. The narrative depicts an adolescent black girl who is preoccupied with White standards of beauty. Ideas of beauty, particularly those that relate to racial characteristics, are a major theme in this narrative. For instance, the title *The Bluest Eyes* refers to the wish of the main character Pecola that her eyes would turn blue. Her social experience teaches her to revere the whiteness, and consequently, she views whiteness as beauty. Further, insults about appearance are often given in racial terms: a light skinned student named Maureen is given favoritism at school. There is an ongoing contrast between the world shown in the media (like the movies) to which Pauline (Pecolas's mother) escapes and the world where she is a servant, as is seen in Morrison's subtle construction of the narrative chapters. Most chapters' titles appear as extracts from an elementary school reading book, which generally presents a happy White family. This kind of family presentation is a direct contrast with Pecola's existence.

In *Sula*, Morrison explores the nature of friendship and critiques the perception that one should conform to the community's expectations. Morrison further challenges

utopian concepts of social justice in *Paradise* (1998). In brief, this story might be understood as an examination of justice and agency, interpreting the process of social justice as communal. The *Paradise* narrative addresses issues of agency and the necessity for building coalition in an oppressive patriarchal society. This story further complicates the dominant liberal and modern conceptualizations of social justice, particularly in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement.

Morrison‘s aesthetic is an example of literary material that constructs a Black feminist language to craft a black feminist meaning of the term social justice. Such narratives as *The Bluest Eye, Sula*, and *Paradise* illustrate that justice is understood as inseparable from sociohistorical context, thereby highlighting social justice concepts as an aesthetic reflection of sociopolitical injustices historically experienced by blacks or any oppressed.

Chapter One entitled “Toni Morrison: A Powerful African American Voice” makes a detailed discussion into four subtitles: Legitimizing the Historical Presence of African Americans; New Historicism as a New Literary Approach; Genealogy and New Historicism, and Tradition of Black Aesthetics. Chapter Two, under the title “A Journey into African American History,” also contains four subtitles: Reconstructing History, Rethinking History and Memory; Blackness, Art and History, and History and Supernatural. Chapter Three entitled “Revisiting the History through Morrison’s Trilogy” makes textual analysis in embedded form under the subtitles: *Beloved*: Racial History and Interior Life of Slavery; *Jazz*: A Crucial Moment in Black History, and *Paradise*: Remembering the Historical Past. Chapter Four entitled “Resistance and Self-Affirmation” highlights under the subtitles: War and Politics, and History, Community,

and Female Subjectivity in Blacks. Chapter Five entitled "Revival of African American History" through Morrison's Works makes interpretation of the study.

Chapter Two

A Journey into African American History

2.1 Reconstructing History

Toni Morrison's novels reinterpret American history written from the viewpoint of dominant white culture. She breaks the hierarchy of master historical narratives and raises by its side a "real" African-American history. She sees herself as a creative historiographer who reconstructs, while deconstructing "official history." She rewrites American history from a black perspective; forging a voice and identity out of a confrontation with dominant discourse. Although her novels have many of the characteristics of postmodern novel--crossing of styles, genre, and narrative perspectives--unlike many postmodern texts, they do not value linguistic play for their own sake. Because Morrison challenges the dominant versions of American history, her novels despite their postmodern characteristics, evoke a pre-modern epic structure and sense of purpose.

In "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation"Morrison says, "if we don't keep in touch with the past . . . we are, in fact, lost" (344). Keeping in touch with the past, she adds, is the work of a reconstructive history: "Past is a form of willed creation. It is not an effort to find out the way it was--that is research. The point is to dwell on the way it appeared and why it appeared in that particular way" (344). This concern with the past is the overall trajectory of her revisionary project. Eventually her work, she states, must "bear witness and identify that which is useful from the past and that which ought to be discarded" (344). It must avoid that part of the past which has been constructed out of a dominant ideology and reconstruct that part which will serve the present.

By taking historical personae—African American victims of racist ideology—and constructing them as a presence in a contemporary setting, Morrison offers them life. She gives voice to the victims of a racist world in order to criticize that world. She does not present, as Deborah McDowell says some writers do, "the orthodoxy of victimage" (70), nor does she reduce her narrative to anything resembling what Henry Louis Gates Jr. has called a "master plot of victim and victimizer" (16). She, like Ralph Ellison, returns to history to find "something subjective, willful, and complexly and compellingly human" (53)—to find something for her art. She does so, moreover, by doing what Hortense Spillers claims Ishmael Reed does with slavery in his *Flight to Canada*: "constructing and reconstructing repertoires of usage out of the most painful human/historical experience" (52). In reconstructing black voice in her fiction, what Morrison does is create stories signifying history.

In an interview with Bonnie Angelo, Morrison says that her novels are not about slavery as an institution; they are "about those anonymous people called slaves." Her desire to remember is enacted in her stories and their characters. She invokes all those people who are "unburied, or at least unceremoniously buried," and go about "properly, artistically, burying them." However, this burial's purpose, it would appear, is to bring them back into "living life" (68). This desire to revive the past exists in both the author and her narrative. We might better understand this fact by attending to Morrison's construction of the scenes of inspiration leading her to write one of her novels, *Beloved*.

Morrison, in "A Conversation with Gloria Naylor" says that the idea of *Beloved* was inspired by "two or three little fragments of stories" that she has "heard from different places" (580). The first was the story of Margaret Garner, a slave who in

January 1856 escaped from her owner Archibald K. Gaines of Kentucky, crossed the Ohio River, and attempted to find refuge in Cincinnati. She was pursued by Gaines and a group of officers. They surrounded the house where she, her husband Robert, and their four children were taking shelter. When the officers battered down the door and rushed in, Robert shot at them and wounded one of the officers before being overpowered. According to Levi Coffin, "at this moment, Margaret Garner, seeing that their hopes of freedom were vain, seized a butcher knife that lay on the table, and with one stroke cut the throat of her little daughter, whom she probably loved the best. She then attempted to take the life of the other children and to kill herself, but she was overpowered and hampered before she could complete her desperate work" (557). Margaret Garner chose death for both herself and her most beloved rather than accept being forced to return to slavery. The story of Margaret Garner eventually became the historical analogue of the plot of *Beloved*.

Morrison says what this story makes her realize is that "the best thing that is in us is also the thing that makes us sabotage ourselves" ("A Conversation" 585). The story of Margaret Garner stays with her, representing something about feminine selflessness. It takes another story to clarify more precisely what Margaret Garner and her story means. Likewise, her another novel *Sula* is a representation of the story of a dead slave girl lying in her coffin. Morrison has been concerned with making the dead articulate. When the heroin, Sula, dies, she feels her face smiling: "'Well, I'll be damned,' she thought, 'it didn't even hurt. Wait'll I tell Nell'" (*Sula* 149).

Morrison's history-making also becomes a healing process for the characters, the reader, and the author. For instance, in *Beloved*, Morrison constructs a parallel between

the individual processes of psychological recovery and a historical process. Sethe, the central character in the novel, describes the relationship between the individual and the historical unconscious:

> If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place--the picture of it--stays, and not just in my memory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened. (*Beloved* 36)

Sethe's memory exists as an individual memory. Morrison reproduces her recollection of it on a historical level. Thus, Sethe's process of learning to live with her past is the part of black people's own past who collectively learnt to live during slavery.

Arnold Rampersad, in his discussion of W.E.B.Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, also describes the recovery of history as both a national and a personal necessity:

> Du Bois's point of view is clear. Admitting and exploring the reality of slavery is necessarily painful for a black American, but only by doing so can he or she begin to understand himself or herself and American and afro-American culture in general. The normal price of the evasion of the fact of slavery is intellectual and spiritual death. Only by grappling with the meaning and legacy of slavery can the imagination, recognizing finally the temporality of the institution, begin to transcend it. (123)

In Rampersad's description, the repression of the historical past is as psychologically damaging as the repression of personal trauma. In her novels, like Du Bois in *The Souls*, Morrison presents the history of slavery as a national trauma, and as a personal trauma as

well. Her work challenges the notion that the end of institutional slavery brings about freedom by depicting the scars of slavery as well as the persistence of racism. And like Du Bois, Morrison too looks into the stories and souls of black folk to make the historical memories as tools of strength and healing.

Among various cultural elements, Morrison also uses myth, folklore, and ritual as a representation of black history in her novels. These elements function as events in which symbolic representations--such as dance, song, story, and other activities--are endowed with the power to display history. The stories of her characters parallel the personal and historical past. Morrison also introduces in her novels oral narrative techniques--repetition, the blending of voices, a shifting narrative voice, and an episodic framework. In many oral traditions, storytelling and poetry are inseparable from ritual since they are events with consequences. Morrison uses Modernist and oral techniques in conjunction with African-American cultural referents, both historical and symbolic, to create a distinctly African-American voice and vision.

Sula, for example, intertwines the mythic, folkloric, and poetic threads of an oral literature with the rhetorical and discursive courses of a postmodern literary landscape. *Sula*, *Beloved*, *Tar Baby*, and other novels that emerge from multicultural histories diverge from classically postmodern texts in their relation to socio-historical realities. Henry Louis Gates has, for instance, discussed the theoretical basis of black literature. His work has placed in a new light a tired issue: what distinguishes black literary production in America from other literary works? He positions the question thusly:

> The problem, for us, can perhaps be usefully stated in the irony implicit in the attempt to posit a “black self” in the very Western languages in which

> blackness itself is a figure of absence, a negation. Ethnocentrism and "logocentrism" are profoundly interrelated in Western discourse as old as the *Phaedrus* of Plato, in which one finds one of the earliest figures of blackness as absence, a figure of negation. (7)

The question from this view becomes not only how African-American literary production distinguishes itself from other forms, but how the literature manages to speak at all. Gate's work finally comes to argue that black writers should use language to write about their own "blackness" as a source of identity. They have to digest both Western and non-Western forms of literary production. Out of this process they can create a literary discourse that transforms notions of blackness. This blackness of black literary texts, historically read to signify a lack in Western discourse, becomes in Morrison's hands an important thread to fasten together politics and aesthetic.

Morrison writes from a double perspective: criticizing the past and caring for the future. She claims that this double perspective is the perspective of a "Black woman writer," that is, "one who looks at things in an unforgiving/loving way . . ., writing to repossess, re-name, re-own." In her novels, this perspective is described as "the glare of an outside thing that embraces while it accuses" (127). It is precisely this issue of a duel vision that she marks the distinction between black men's writing and black women's: "what I found so lacking in most black writing by men that seems to be present in a lot of black women's writing is a sense of joy, in addition to oppression and being women or black or whatever" (Stepto 225).

To conclude, Morrison writes out of dual perspective in order to re-possess, as I have suggested above, by remembering the ancestor. This is not only an aesthetic act but

an act of historical recovery: “roots are less a matter of geography than sense of shared history; less to do with place, than with inner space” (Stepto 226). Each act of writing a novel is for her an act of discovering deep within herself some relationship to a “collective memory.” Memory itself, write Mary Frances Berry and John Blassingame, is for African-Americans “an instrument of survival” (118). It is an instrument that can be traced back to an African heritage.

2.2 Rethinking History and Memory

According to James Baldwin, "History was someone you touched, you know, on Sunday mornings or in the barbershop. It's all around you. It's in the music, it's in the way you talk, it's in the way you cry, it's in the way you make love. Because you are denied your official history, you are forced to excavate your real history even though you can never say that's what you are doing" (150). Historical narrative is an integral part of Toni Morrison's aesthetic. In her earlier novels *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved*, she presents a slice of African American experience centered on the use of memory. Memory is a part of what defines the human consciousness. According to the French historian Pierre Nora "Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name," he argues, "It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting , unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived." Conversely, history "is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete of what is no longer" (285). The problem with history is its need for accuracy or reconstruction, a need that shunned by memory. Nancy J.Peterson argues that Morrison's notion of history is unconventional, attributable to her "improvisational exploration of alternative concepts and forms for reconstructing African-American history" (202).

Nora argues that in our modern times what we call memory is actually history. The kind of environment in which real memory operates has been dislodged, he states, "under the pressure of a fundamentally historical sensibility" (284). The emergence of several voices or group, silenced by hegemonic history, and the occurrence of radically

transformative world events, have created an age where in what is remembered is not left to chance and spontaneity. The expression "Never again," commonly tied to the Jewish Holocaust which becomes an injunction for the group, indeed the world, to engrave this particular event in memory. What is remembered assumes orderliness, and specificity that bring memory under the province of history. Thus, a singular historical becomes a site of memory "where memory crystallizes and secretes itself at particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn – but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of history in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists" (284).

The Middle Passage and the plantation slavery influence African American political and cultural consciousness which remains a traumatic historical event. The will to remember that period continues black racial memory. Morrison transforms memory into literary metaphor that conveys the unique position and experience of the African American. In this sense, memory is not an art as Frances A. Yates's *The Art of Memory* suggests, but "an eruptive force that the African American writer harnesses to present a counter American narrative" (205). It is more important to refer to the kind of memory present in African- American narrative as "counter – memory," which George Lipsitz defines as "looking to the past for the hidden histories of those excluded from the dominant narratives"(162).

Morrison's conceptualization of memory manifests itself in oral histories, that is, histories that her characters assume responsibility for telling. In his study of social

memory, Paul Connerton notes that oral histories by an oppressed group produce a different type of history that runs counter to the structure of the dominant narrative. He states, “the oral history of subordinate groups will produce another type of history: one in which not only will most of the details be different, but in which the very construction of meaningful shapes will obey a different principle. Different details will emerge because they are inserted, as it were, into a different kind of narrative home” (190).The narrative principle that informs Morrison’s novels is oral. The stories she tells are so composed within a different frame of memory that her coinage “re- memory,” which is featured in Beloved, becomes a conscious attempt to distinguish her own conceptualization. Sethe explains re- memory to her daughter Denver as a phenomenon that has a life of its own outside of events , places, and people:

> Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. Something going. So clear. And you think it’s you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It’s when you bump into a re-memory that belongs to somebody else. Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It is never going away. Even if the whole farm- every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what’s more, if you go there –you who never was there – if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. (36)

In *Beloved* Sethe’s escape from Sweet Home does not exorcise the ghost of harrowing life at plantation, but stands as an experience that assumes a physicality with

the appearance of Beloved. Sethe's life with Paul D, at Sweet Home is relived and meaningful. April Lindinsky discusses the collectivity of rememory in *Beloved*. Paul D and Sethe make through their common experience, Lidinsky notes that communal rememory also "dissolves power's vertical compartmentalization of knowledge temporality and identities" (207). In her essay, "Memory, Creation and Writing", Morrison highlights the act of memory as living tissue in the community's sense of being. It points toward an important aspect of her conceptualization: remembering as a conscious act. To dwell on a past that the dominant narrative has tried to erase through contrived history is both an act of resistance and a process of communal validation. Amiable Twagilimana states that "rememory is an activation of the past, to the time of stories told by mothers and grandmothers, to the middle passage, and even to Africa, the land of origins" (103). His statement proves Morrison's position. She establishes rememory as the mediation between the oral storytelling practices of the ancestral land and New World black experience.

Memory is a weapon for an oppressed community to dislodge the lineal and exclusionary narrative of the dominant agent. The history of Solomon and his family regenerates Milkman, and derives its force from the conscious effort of ancestor's children to preserve his existence in their memory. Even when Pilate sings disembodied and mutilated part of the narrative without much meaning, as agent, Smith contemplates a suicide dive. The song is a site of memory because the novel makes a case that a marginalized group preserves its identity through the agency of memory and folkloric tradition.

The oral transmission and preservation of a community's history has its pitfalls. *Paradis*e interrogates the neutrality of memory in fashioning the narrative of the community's past that serves to continue a patriarchal order. *Paradise* refuses to accept the affirming value of orality at face value. The novel presents a conflict between one group's "duty – memory" (Nora 292), that is, the group's resolve to remember their past in a certain way as a matter of duty, and another group's determination to experience that past in a liberating manner. The conflict between older men and their children runs in the novel's focus on the lives of the women at the Convent in the present. The inter play between history, fiction, and memory is at the heart of any literary work that purports to recover or re- create the past. It is the evocation of the past that turns memories into literature.

With the publication of *Paradis*e in 1998, Toni Morrison completed a trilogy of historical novels that began with *Beloved* (1987) and *Jazz* (1992). The trilogy is concerned with remembering the historical past for herself, for African - Americans, and for America as a whole. *Beloved* considers the periods of Emancipation and Reconstruction; Jazz reconsiders the Harlem Renaissance and *Paradise* is concerned with the Vietnam and civil rights era of the 1960s and 1970s. An important element in the trilogy is the use value of narrative. Storytelling is historiography in her fiction, and in each novel, she carefully examines the role of narrative in the reconstruction of both the individual self and the society at large. But Morrison's method and focus for her project have evolved and widened over the course of trilogy, *Beloved* and *Jazz* are concerned with the process of the individual reconstitution of the self.

In *Paradise*, Morrison is interested in assessing the role of narrative in the community as a whole. The protagonist of *Paradise* is in the community of Ruby, Oklahoma including the rag- tag band of Convent women who live on its fringes. The Ruby centered narratives of the novel focuses on patriarchy and emphasizes a rigidly controlled communal historiography. It predicts on the subordination of the individual to the group. Ruby's recognized leaders like Steward and Deacon, employ, enforce, and defend this communal narrative. The "Patricia section" of the novel offers a complex reading of Ruby's patriarchal historiography. It shows how the town as a whole narratively responds to the Convent massacre, and how that event impacts the patriarchal structure of the town.

Beloved re-conceptualizes American history and reconstructs it through the acts and consciousness of African-American slaves rather than through the perspective of the dominant white social classes. In the novel, Morrison constructs a parallel between the individual processes of psychological recovery and a historical process. Sethe describes the relationship between the individual and the historical unconscious: "If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place-the picture of it-stays, and not just in my memory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, saw is still out there. Right in the place here it happened". (36)

Sethe's memories exist as fragments of a historical memory. The individual process of recollection or re-memory can be reproduced on a historical level. Sethe's process of learning to live her past ,is a model for all the African-Americans who must confront

Sethe's past as part of their own past , a collective past that lives right there where they live. Arnold Rampersad states the recovery of history as both a national and personal necessity:

> Admitting and exploring the reality of slavery is necessarily painful for a black American, but only by doing so can he or she begin to understand himself or herself and American and Afro-American culture in general .The normal price evasion of the fact of slavery is intellectual and spiritual death. Only by grappling with the meaning and legacy of slavery can the imagination, recognizing finally the temporality of the institution, begin to transcend it. (123)

The repression of the historical past is as psychologically damaging as repression of personal trauma. In *Beloved*, Morrison negotiates the legacy of slavery as a national trauma, and as an intensely personal trauma as well .The novel challenges the notion that the end of institutional slavery brings about the freedom by depicting the emotional and psychological scars of slavery as well as persistence of racism. Morrison delves into the stories and souls of black folk to tap resources of memory and imagination as tools of strength and healing.

For Morrison, ritual is a model for the healing process. Rituals function as formal events in which symbolic representations such as dance, song, story, and other activities are spiritually and communally endowed with the power to shape real relations in the world. In *Beloved*, *Morrison* uses history to create a distinctly African-American voice

and vision which invoke the spiritual and imaginative power to teach to heal. The central ritual of healing Sethe's rememory of and confrontation with her past corresponds to the three sections of the novel. In part one the arrival of Paul D then of Beloved forces Sethe to confront her past in her incompatible roles as a slave and as a mother .Moving from the fall of 1873 to the winter ,the second part describes Sethe's period of atonement ,during which she is enveloped by the past ,isolated in her house with Beloved , who forces her to suffer over and over again all the pain and shame of the past .Finally ,part three is Sethe's rituals "clearing" in which the women of the community aid her in casting out the voracious *Beloved* , and Sethe experiences a repetition of her scene of trauma with a difference- this time she aims her murderous hand at the white man who threatens her child .

These three phases clearly show the history of slavery. Stories of slavery are accumulated through fragmented recollections, culminating in the revelation of Sethe's murder of her child. Morrison presents the internal voices of Sethe, Denver, and Beloved in a ritual chant of possession, while Paul D and Stamp Paid are also overwhelmed by the legacy of slavery. The novel concludes, with Denver's emergence as the new teacher providing a model for a pedagogy and the opportunity for the reconstruction of slave history from a black woman's perspective.

Through storytelling, African-Americans reconnect themselves with their ancestors. This is the process what Karla F.C. Holloway calls "remembering history – the life saving antidote to an historical and historiographical dis –remembering" (179-82).

Morrison suggests that looking for a lost generation we don't get a polite, manageable ghost, we get "Sixty million and more" (v) of the "disremembered and uncounted for" (274). These about ghosts, ancestors, history and narrative are affirmed in a straight forward way by the novel's epigraph: "I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, I which was not beloved" (vii).

Morrison says that reclaiming an individual also means reclaiming an entire race, or cultural group. This communal reclaiming is exactly what happens when Beloved returns to 124 Bluestone Road: "Looking for their beloved, Sethe and Denver get their people, too. All sixty million of them" (*Beloved* 150). Morrison articulates her effort expressly rooted in American culture, to contest Western culture's veneration of individuality:

> The cotemporary autobiography tends to be how I got over – look at me alone – let show you how I did it. It is inimical, I think, to some of the characteristics of Black artistic expression and influence . . . . I want to point out the dangers, to show that nice thing don't always happen to the totally self – reliant if there is no conscious historical connection. To say, see – this is what will happen. (Rootedness 339-44)

Morrison lays down her evidence before her book which begins with her dedication of the novels to "sixty million or more". In an interview with Walter Clemons, Morrison explains this figure as "the best educated guess at number of black Africans who never even made it into slavery those who died either as captives in Africa or on slave

ship"(75). Those who want to teach the history of African – American atrocity are often forced to guess: "Sixty Million and more". Morrison describes the absence from the American cultural record of slavery's full story: "I went to the slave museums, but they weren't much help: little handcraft Things slaves had made. No chains or restraining devices. In Brazil, though, they've kept everything. I got a lot of help down there" (qtd. In Clemons 75). The list of gaps and forgetting might go on. Even media, schools, or the history books cannot record all this things. People seem to suffer from partial or total loss of memory about what may well be the ugliest part of the past; *Beloved*, the novel reminds this.

What is true for the novel as a whole, and particularly for *Belove*d's interior monologue, turns out to be true. It bears re-reading. Having traced some of the relationships in the novel among ghosts, history, literature, and politics, we can return to those brief lines from Romans, which has been mentioned in the novel's epigraph, and wring from them some surprising and disturbing meanings. Morrison relates it to a central issue of the novel and of contemporary African – American cultural work: the struggle to reclaim one's history even while others distort, suppress, and deny it.

Both a historical novel and a ghost story, *Beloved* addresses the historical period of Reconstruction. It tells of the ways in which the master discourse has repressed the history of the oppressed, those "left voiceless by the history books and heavy accounts, such as slave narratives, that obeyed the fixed rules of a genre and erased the other's point of view" (Morrison 88). The whole process of making history with the tools of master reading/writing is reflected in the character of Schoolteacher who represents

scientific racism. The white slave master who stands for the normative white male system, the creation of knowledge from a racist hypothesis and its link to power. Schoolteacher writes books in which this knowledge becomes truth, then that is passed down to later generations. Milking Sethe like a cow, taking her baby's milk, is both an application of the lesson and an abrupt literalization of the fact that slaves used to nurse the white children. It shows the horrors of slavery and the rape of Sethe's milk is a story of the historical position of the slave women in a racist economy. The statement, "the nephew, the one who had nursed her" (150) underscores how power deprives the slaves of any agency.

From the perspectives of slaves, official history is pushed to the margins. The Civil War, does not make sense: "The War had been over four or five years then, but nobody white or black seemed to know it"(52). Slaves were used as a manual labor. History is also redefined as the history of consciousness of those who took part in every-day tasks. In her numerous interviews Morrison explains how she has used documents to ground the narrative in historical reality. The bit, the shackles, the collar, the whip, the chain gang – all these elements derive from identifiable historical sources. Their fictionalization is an attempt to imagine the context, both material and psychological in which these traces can be relocated. Morrison asserts that "memory (the deliberate act of remembering) is a form of willed creation" (MCW 385). The bit, for instance, is worn by Paul D when Halle witnesses the rape of Sethe, a detail withheld from Sethe until Paul D owns up to it : "I had a bit in my mouth "(69). It is one of the reasons why he does not intervene. The bit, is also brought into the metaphoric exploration of the face. "Sethe's

mother had worn it to such an extent that she wore permanent smile: “when she was not smiling she smiled” (203). In the same way, the evocation of the slave marriage – which was forbidden – yields the image of the making and the unmaking of the wedding dress as a metaphor for the resourcefulness of the slaves and the self- reflexively explains the aesthetics of the novel. The history of slavery Morrison chronicles is real, although the master discourse could carry on without ever acknowledging it. Invisibility is born when the text stresses how loss can only be the expression of subjectivity: “She [Beloved] can be lost because no one is looking for her” (*Beloved* 274).

Morrison makes master – slave relationship on plantation complex by portraying Garner as benevolent slave master who wants his slaves to be “men” (*Beloved* 10).The inherent contradiction between his assertion and the impossibility of its accomplishment is clear in Paul D’s realization that “definitions belonged to the definers” (*Beloved* 190). Baby Suggs’s freedom is bought by her son Halle, who is used as labor to pay for her, when she is too old for it to mean anything. The white mistress Lillian Garner is also kind like her husband who gives Sethe earrings for wedding that the latter cannot wear but steals away, sewn in seam of her dress. Her muteness and growth on her neck at the end of her life translate the inner corruption of the system and echo Paul D’s forced voicelesssness through wearing of bit.

The unvoiced and disremembered historical – cultural memory of the Middle Passage is cultivated in *Beloved* along genealogical lines. It goes back three generations from Beloved to Sethe and to Sethe’s mother, who is the link to African reality. While the history of Middle Passage is handed down by Nan, Beloved as African daughter is

recreated in the middle section where she is the girl-child on slave ship. After Sethe's and Denver's monologues, the novel reproduces the gradual coming to language of the slave girl in increasingly more grammatical sentences. She moves from timelessness of an eternal present "All of it is now" (*Beloved* 210), to the loss of the mother "she goes in the water" (*Beloved* 212), and to her final desire for fusion "I am looking for the join" (*Beloved* 213). Now the novel points out toward the construction of history from primary sources, such as newspapers and affects a critique of historicism.

The novel illustrates the contradictions inherent in remembering a traumatic experience. The characters move from refusal to acknowledge the past to confrontation and to reconciliation with the pain made bearable through retelling. Sethe and Paul D illustrate that position. Remembering and making peace takes love. Denver is temporarily spared the trauma of the past. However, she will have to face it. It catches up with her in shape of Beloved. The first memory of Sweet Home- "the picture of the *men coming to nurse her" (Beloved 6) –arises even when* Sethe is not directly connected by an olfactory stimulus, such as "scent of ink": "She worked hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe. Unfortunately her brain was devious" (*Beloved* 6). The splash of water and the size of her shoes and stockings are enough to be reactive of the past. The flow of memory cannot be blocked since it works through the unconscious.

Memory is kept alive by storytelling, and untold stories must be told for repressed memories to emerge. Morrison's novels fuse the characters' memories, for instance, in her novel *Beloved*, she juxtaposes Sethe's and Paul D's memories after they make love by shifting focalization as the characters physically shift and turn over. Sethe crosses and

uncrosses her ankles. She remembers the first time she made love with Halle in the cornfield. Looking at Paul D's back, she recalls corn stalks breaking over Halle's back. The novel moves from her consciousness to Paul D's through the mediation of Paul D's thinking of Halle making love to Sethe. The unmediated shift from one focalizer to the other leads to a meshing of memories that concludes in the poetics and an erotics of corn shucking: "How loose the silk. How quick the jailed – up flavor run free" (*Beloved* 27). Remembering is an act of gathering the pieces as the body parts to be held together, collected. When Sethe agrees to be bathed by Paul D, he remembers his friend Sixo's words about the woman he loved: "She is a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am" (*Beloved* 272).

The characters are "forced to tell the story: they don't want to remember, they don't want to say it, because they are afraid of it which is human" (CTM 248). They make comment on the effects of narrative technique: "Sethe learned the profound satisfaction that Beloved got from storytelling" (58). Denver loves to hear the story of her birth from her mother because she is present in it, unlike the stories in which she is displaced by Beloved. The word "bridge" is crucial to Morrison's worldview: "The gap between Africa and Afro- America and the gap between the living and the dead and the gap between the present and the past does not exist. It is bridged for us by assuming responsibility for people no one's ever assumed responsibility for" (CTM 247). Beloved remembers the bridge of the slave ship: "other than that, the clearest memory she had, the one she repeated, was the bridge – standing on the bridge, looking down" (Beloved

119)., Morrison reworks African American history weaving its varied threads to recreate the moving texture of memory.

Amy Denver tells Sethe that “anything dead coming back to life hurts” (*Beloved* 35). Beloved makes this saying literal as the physical manifestation of suppressed memories. Beloved is both the pain and the cure and an embodiment of the repressed past. Countering traumatic repression, she makes the characters accept their past, and their own hearts as beloved. Beloved is Sethe’s most painful memories. She kills her own daughter to protect from slavery. She is Sethe’s ghost, the return of her repressed past, and she forces Sethe to confront the gap between her mother’s love and the realities of motherhood in slavery. But Beloved is also everyone’s ghost as she functions as an urge to Paul D’s and Denver’s repressed pasts, forcing Paul D to confront the shame and the pain of the powerlessness of man in slavery. She enables Denver to deal with her mother’s history as a slave. She comes to represent the repressed memories of slavery. She catalyzes Sethe’s memories as the novel *Beloved* catalyzes historical memories. Denver’s favorite story is the history of slavery and the story of her birth, in which Sethe bears her between freedom and slavery.

Born on the river that divides free and slave land in the midst of Sethe’s flight from slavery, the dual inheritance of freedom and slavery tears Denver apart. When schoolteacher comes to take Sethe and her children back to Sweet Home as slaves, Denver drinks the blood of her murdered sister with her mother’s milk, and she goes to jail with Sethe. A mirror image of her mother’s repressed past; Denver goes deaf when she is asked about her time in prison. From then on, Denver lives in seclusion, with only

Sethe, Baby Suggs, and the baby ghost as companions. Denver is trapped by Sethe's past and her inability to psychological freedom. Her position corresponds her historic relation to her mother's past.

Toni Morrison's novels are a hunting history of African-Americans' painful reality. In her novels, she brings together the African – American oral and literary tradition to create a powerful personal representation of slavery in America. She indirectly critiques historical and pedagogical methods prevalent in the United States. She counters a fact- based objective system with a ritual method based in healing rituals, in which the acquisition of knowledge is a subjective and spiritual experience. Through the conceptualization of knowledge, she suggests a reconstruction of history to combat the prevailing intellectual and spiritual oppression of African-Americans.

Denver is the historian with her roots in African- American history and culture, who has a relationship with her ancestors. Sixo chooses another course by rejecting Halle's offer to be taught English, as Denver recalls: "One of them with a number for a name said it would change his mind- make him forget things he shouldn't and memorize things he shouldn't and he didn't want his mind messed up. But my daddy said, if you can't count they can cheat you. If you can't read they can beat you" (*Beloved* 208). The white man could beat and cheat them whether or not they were literate. However, Denver advocates literacy in order to take over the task of African- American history- making.

Morrison situates her characters' act within the historical and personal context of slavery. *Beloved* depicts a healing ritual for Sethe, whose inability to confront her

painful memories of slavery, and her guilt for killing her child, keeps her emotionally enslaved despite eighteen years of freedom. The process of the novel corresponds to Sethe's healing ritual, in which the unspoken incident is her most repressed memory. Its recollection and recreation are essential to her recovery. It is a part of the inarticulate and irrational unconscious like an inner ghost plaguing and controlling Sethe's life.

Morrison's novels reconstruct slave history in a way that official history cannot. By inscribing history as a trickster spirit, she has recreated African- Americans' relationship to history. Through the character Beloved, we are led through a painful healing process, leaving us with pains and shames of slavery. Morrison says, "This is not a story to pass on" (*Beloved* 275). This recapitulates tension between repression and rememory. The questions about history and memory are complex in nature. Memory is not an exact recollection of the past like history except the traumatic past. The roles of memory and history have changed in modern time. Jenny Edkins argues that "memory is sacred, history is profane. Memory is alive, evolving, negotiated and belongs to the present and to particular groups; history is a reconstruction of the past that has to be analytical and detached" (31). For Edkins, memory and history are two different things, but memories of trauma are located in history. Memory and history are always subject to play different roles in any literary work.

2.3 Blackness, Art and History

Morrison links aesthetics to history and power. Her novels can be read as a drama of her contending ideas about blackness and art. She constructs blackness not as a form of judgment or standards but as a history, a rhetoric, an ethics, a way of seeing and knowing the world, and as an aesthetics that encompasses all these things. Morrison explores blackness to show that all African- Americans are implicated in the construction of blackness and to propose ways that black art can reveal and transform those constructions. The word 'Black' became popular in the wake of Civil Rights movement, and during the de- colonization and nationalistic struggles. Black was created as a political category amidst the Civil Rights and Black Nationalist Movements of the 1960s. It was created as a consequence of certain symbolic and ideological struggles. In that very struggle is a "change of consciousness, a change of self recognition, a new process of identification, the emergence into visibility of a new subject. A subject that was always there, but emerging, historically" (Hall, 41-68).

Morrison writes, "I simply wanted to write literature that was irrevocably, indisputably Black, not because its characters were, or because I was, but because it took as its creative task and sought as its credentials those recognized and verifiable principles of Black art" (Memory 389). Morrison does not construct black aesthetics as a choice between European or African and African- American traditions; as Jablon argues, *Tar Baby* "asserts the impossibility of disengaging African American culture from western culture" *(Black Metafiction* 97). Morrison's black aesthetic does not designate and categorize right or wrong formal approaches. It is not inherent in all African

Americans, nor is it exclusive to black Americans, but its philosophical roots in black culture as well as in the perspective of the oppressed make it more obvious and available to black people. In her novel *Tar Baby,* the black aesthetic reveals blackness and its meanings. It makes invisible and inescapable ideologies of race visible. Her aesthetics shows the ways in which the struggles over racial meanings have real consequences in the world. The blackness is horrifying, threatening, and liberating.

In her novel, Morrison connects certain aesthetic choices to blackness. She converts traditional representation of blackness into aesthetic choices. Specially, the racialized associations of blackness with absence and excess become rhetorical strategies of her novels which comment and transform the system of representations. She uses blackness to signify many kind of absence – the absence of light, of goodness and purity, of rationality. These inform racial ideologies of white superiority while also contributing to the larger erasures and absences of black people from history and even from humanity. In her novel *Sula,* Morrison evokes the historical association of blackness with absence, and then reverses it. Shadrack finds definition when a potentially shameful moment becomes instead an eye-opener. He looks at his reflection in water of a toilet in a jail cell and sees “a blackness so definite, so unequivocal, it astonished him” (*Sula* 13*).*

The strategies of absence are very familiar in Morrison’s several novels. She draws attentions to absences through the prolonged absence of her central character, through historical allusions and elisions, and through references to secret and untold stories. In *Tar Baby* Michael, the son of Valerian and Margaret never appears. Michael is

figured as sacrificial victim, and his absence is a central motivating and symbolic presence. This reminds Sula's absence in *Sula*, as well as Beloved's role as the historical presence and absence around which *Beloved* focuses. Morrison also alludes to historical events without elaboration in her novels. The examples are references of wars in *Sula*, to Emmet Till's lynching and killing of four girls in a Birmingham church in *Song of Solomon* and to the Middle Passage in *Beloved.* In *Tar Baby*, Morrison alludes to the history of sugar, a story at the center of economic and social relations in Valerian's house and at center of colonization and enslavement in America. In her novels, the marked absence of characters and histories is further emphasized by references to silences surrounding individual lives and collective histories, stories of horror and suffering that have not been told and can hardly be articulated in language. Morrison calls this "Unspeakable thoughts unspoken" (Beloved 199).

In Morrison's novels, blackness has been shown as racialized excess whereas whiteness is posited as the unraced norm. Because of the contradictory nature of racial stereotypes, blackness and black people are simultaneously invisible and hypervisible. They represent as excessive in emotion , dress, and self-expression. By employing blackness, as an aesthetic strategies , Morrison confronts the ways that black people have been both excessively represented and made absent in white literature, history, and ideology.

Morrison's *Tar Baby* is the story of black art. In the novel she uses figures and concepts of blackness as the basis for aesthetic choices to create a specifically black art being engaged with disrupting and constructing representations of blackness. Her

aesthetic choices experiment with the link between blackness and art. The plot of the story of the anonymous black man is a metafiction about the creation of black art and the ways in which fictions participate in the construction of history. In *Tar Baby*, Morrison explores the possible fictionality of the world to create history and meaning. Michael Wood argues that Morrison's novel *Paradise* recreates the reality for the characters:

> The freedom of fiction not only permits the imagining of alternatives to the given world, it infiltrates the world itself, reshapes it. It is true the world to be reshaped is fictional, but then the historical world too has often been alter by powerful fictions – of racial superiority among other notable things. The open intervention of fiction within Morrison's fiction is not floating self-reference but a model for the mind's capacity to change what it sees – its real but not limitless capacity. (120)

Her novel *Paradise* reveals the ways in which fictions work to shape and limit perceptions and thereby to create the world. Similarly, in her novel *Tar Baby*, Morrison makes an inquiry into the ways in which concepts of blackness and fictions of race construct the real world. Morrison dramatizes the history of representations of blackness and struggle for black self representations within white culture. In *Tar Baby*, one of the characters Son, demonstrates role of black art to reveal what is hidden behind white liberal formulations of culture. He reveals the structural inequalities and the relationship of culture to economics and history.

In the novel Morrison shows the conception of the work of art within literary history and the history of colonial and racial domination. The anonymous man is the tar baby. He is connected to tar as a sailor and as a black man whose "skin is blended well with the dark waters, the pitch-black sea" (*Tar Baby* 3-4). The work of black art, the tar baby, is also born into historical and literary contexts. The birth of black art is also set within the history of colonialism, the point of origin of racial constructions of black and white. The ship from which the man leaps is named the HMS *Stor Konigsgaarten*, a name that connects Monarchy and European power with the Edenic myth. "King's Garden" neatly conflates God and King, as did Europeans in justifying colonial conquest and slavery. The black man's arrival on Valerian island portrays the history of black representations and the struggle for black self-representations in white culture. The man's entry into the estate is first described with images of slavery. After a "bracelet of water …tightened around his ankles" the man arrives, "like transported Africans at the end of the world" (*Tar Baby* 4-9).

The man's silent passage through house while the inhabitants sleep and dream represents the ways in which unconscious desires and fears have been projected on to the black man. He first appears to Margaret who, in horror describes him as "Black and disgusting" (*Tar Baby* 79). The man appears next to Valerian, who sees him as an avatar and "forepresence" (*Tar Baby* 143) of his son Michael. The man does not show up again until he appears in Jadine's mirror. Between his appearances in the dining room and in Jadine's room, the man is referred to by Margaret, Jadine, Sydney and Ondine as nigger. The man's subsequent transformation and acceptance into the household stand for the

historical emergence of African American self-expression. Son now has a name and his process of cleaning up is figured suggestively both as a rebirth and as loss of blackness. Showered being wrapped in white towel, Son looks out the window at Yardman's back. The contrast between their situations is too painful for him. Something was leaving him and all he could see was its back. Son's distress reflects the concern of many black people who know when they are put in a position to speak for the folk, they are already set at a distance from them.

Through Son's experiences in Valerian house, Morrison asserts the need to know the history of representations of blackness, because that history shapes the significance of representations whether it is known or not. Neither black art nor any racial representation can be an act of self-expression. All acts of representation carry the burden and implications of this history. While Son dramatizes the history of black art, Valerian's house represents the domain of white culture within which these struggle take place. Valerian and his house represent the aesthetic and philosophical beliefs of white liberal humanism and it shows how those beliefs mask the relationship between culture and power. One meaning of Valerian's name, from the Latin *valeo* is "to be worth" (Traylor 138). Valerian demonstrates the way in which the production and maintenance of economic and cultural value interconnect.

Son represents Morrison's idea about black art. Black art exposes the oppression and suffering hidden beneath front wall of sweetness and light. It articulates the relationship between cultural and economic power. In *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison asserts the desire to make visible what is invisible in representations of race. As a

metaphor for the process of revelation, she describes watching the activity within fishbowl, then suddenly becoming aware of the bowl, "the structure that transparently and invisibly permits the ordered life it contains to exist in the larger world" (17). Son reveals the invisible structures of racial, cultural, and economic power. He makes them visible to upset the standing in Valerian's house. Son's revelation of the unseen also constructs blackness as a way of seeing, an idea reinforced by metaphors of blindness and vision in the novel.

Morrison uses, the commodity sugar to complete the metafiction. Sugar reveals the historical silences. It is the link between economic and cultural values and the aesthetic issues of black art. Sugar is the basis of Valerian's wealth as heir to a candy empire, but the Caribbean laborers who cut the sugar cane and pick the cocoa beans remain invisible to him. Only Son notes their importance and their absence at "Christmas dinner" (*Tar Baby* 202). The setting of the novel in the Caribbean points to the history of sugar and its role in American colonialism, racism, and capitalism. The European desire for sugar was part of what drove colonial exploitation, capture of lands, and exploitation of African laborers. Sugar is a mainstay of the southern United States plantation economy. It was and still is central to the colonial and neocolonial economies of the Caribbean. The history of sugar reveals the racial and economic oppression hidden beneath the white hegemonic culture's professions of decency and fairness.

Sugar also addresses aesthetic concerns about the ways in which authors make aesthetically unspeakable histories. Both Son and Margaret are associated with sugar. Son is briefly connected with sugar when Jadine asks him what she should call him and

he answers, “What about Sugar?” (*Tar Baby* 174). Son’s main connection with sugar is in the revelation of its hidden role in structuring relations of power. Sugar makes visible the connections between economic power and the power of cultural representations. Sugar also defines the challenges for black art in how to reveal what is unspeakable, how to make real the structures and experiences of oppression, how to make readers see history in the landscape and oppression in food we eat.

In her novels, Morrison confronts readers with blackness and illuminates the ways in which blackness has been constructed to support the racial ideologies and inequalities. She compels the readers to struggle with their own interests in constructions of blackness. She suggests the need for African Americans to accept their involvement, immerse themselves in blackness, and learn blackness as way of seeing that might transform racial meanings, relations of power and people’s power.

2.4 History and Supernatural

Toni Morrison reconstructs a history that is less individual than racial and national. Her history is psychic and mythic. It is a feminine subtext. In *The newly Born Woman* Cixous and Clement describe Morrison's works as "a history taken from what is lost within us of oral traditions, of legends and myth--a history arranged the way tale-telling women tell it." (6). Morrison's novels are historical as they bear historical witness. They include slavery, reconstruction, depression, and war. Yet she is also concerned with the interaction of history with art, theory, and even fantasy, in which fact and symbol become inseparable. Morrison moves beyond the recording of the fact, into an area that is at the edge of consciousness and experience.

The way Morrison presents poverty is a historical fact. It is documented by the necessity to "gather coal along railroad tracks, by the tired edgy voices of the adults, by the persistence of mice and roaches, and by the hellish orange glow of steel mills in Lorain, Ohio" (*The Bluest Eye* 12). For Morrison, poverty is also a place, a state of being, and a frame of mind. Its effects are catastrophic which makes human dignity and self respect vulnerable. Pecola's house is an abandoned store, a "gray box" that "does not recede into its background of leaden sky" but "foists itself on the eye of the passerby in a manner that is irritating and melancholy" (*The Bluest Eye* 30). The interior of the house manifests poverty. There is no bathroom, no privacy, no dignity and human energy is depleted on things that do not function. These are the facts on which the novel is based. It is dictated by the time in which it is set.

In Morrison's novels, history is always a matter of time and place. Ohio as a setting frequently occurs in her works. In an interview, Morrison states:

> Ohio is a curious juxtaposition of what was ideal in this country and what was base. It was also a Mecca for Black people; they came to the mills and plants because Ohio offered the possibility of a good life, the possibility of freedom, even though there were some terrible obstacles. Ohio also offers an escape from stereotyped black settings. It is neither plantation nor ghetto. (Tate, 119)

Setting for Morrison is always historically significant whether it is Lorain, Ohio, Milkman's Detroit, Motown of industrial north in *Song of Solomon*; or post slavery Cincinnati in *Beloved,* where life for black people moves around the pig yards*:*

> Cincinnati was still pig port in the minds of Ohioans. Its main job was to receive, slaughter and ship up the river the hogs that Northerners did not want to live without …The craving for pork was growing into a mania in every city in the country. Pig farmers were cashing in, provided they could raise enough and get them sold farther away. And the Germans who flooded southern Ohio brought and developed swine cooking to its highest form…. (*Beloved* 154-155).

Morrison's locale is Isle des Chevaliers in *Tar Baby,* literally at "the end of the World" (*Tar Baby* 7) from Ohio; here in the Caribbean, color, like life itself, is intense. The island exaggerates everything. There is too much light and too much shadow. As in

Cincinnati and Lorain, even this beautiful place, “the shore of an island that three hundred years ago had struck slaves blind the moment they saw it” (*Tar Baby* 5), is founded on backs of black laborers and the exploitation of human resources by white capitalists. The place is still a forum for racial tension, a link in the chain of black history that is synonymous with oppression.

Morrison’s setting includes a sense of natural world as an indication that the passage of time has significance beyond the conception of recorded history. She juxtaposes the natural order with the failure of human social order. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola exists within and beyond history because of a testament to society’s denial of responsibility and its failure to love what it chooses not to see. *Sula* is also a historical novel. Its events occur within the context of specific years which are very important because they either signify or suggest the reality of war. As Maureen T. Reddy remarks, *Sula* is “ a war novel, or, More precisely, an anti- war novel, and, Peace is not only Sula’s last name but an ironic observation on the historical lack of any such thing” (30). For him, the prologue of the novel recalls the civil war in its legend about the “nigger joke” whose master gives him bottom land at the top of the rocky hills. The section of the novel “1919,” stands for the terrors of the World War I. Shadarck, a soldier is driven mad by the bloodshed he witnesses. His presence pervades the rest of the novel. Another section titled “1941” suggests yet another war and “1965” in the epilogue implies Vietnam War.

Morrison’s characters live in memory and dreams and in the sense of future. Sula recites on her deathbed: “when all the black men fuck all the white ones; when all the

white women kiss all the black ones; when the guards have raped all the jailbirds and after all the whores make love to their grannies . . . when Lindbergh sleeps with Bessie Smith and Norma shearer makes it with Stepin Fetchit" (*Sula* 125). Time in Morrison's novels is subjective. Even death can be transcended. Sula lives on after death to change the lives of her community and manifest herself to Nel years later in the rustling of leaves. Morrison says in an interview with Parker: "She doesn't stop existing after she dies. In fact what she left behind is more powerful after she is dead than when she was alive" (254).

Ghost is both historic and mythic in Morrison's works. They also dominate the actions of all the characters in her novel *Song of Solomon*. All of them resurrect their fathers and seek the meaning of the present in the legends of the past. The quest of Milkman Dead is a quest for gold and for a personal history, a racial identity, which he believes will be realized only in the context of the ancestral fathers. Genevieve Fabre documents, *Song of Solomon* is a literary example of genealogical archaeology:

> Its drifting and uniformed hero is caught in the ambiguities of a quest that presents itself as a succession riddles; each recorded incident, act or word is a new adventure that further complicates the overall puzzle. And the legacy- an ever elusive reality – takes on many serious or trivial forms: a name, a birth mark, a bag of bones, or a song. Each is presented as a possible clue or a new mystery. The deciphering of the enigma is seen as a game in which the character and the reader are jostled from one puzzle to the next. (107)

Fabre also indicates history as science and the serious aspect of knowledge remaining, not in Milkman's rediscovery of a personal history, but the source of which is Solomon and his flight back to Africa. But Pilate's wisdom and her racial memory and African identity suggest that she is literally covered in the quilt of African tradition. Hers is a female way of thinking and interpreting the significance of history. She resolves the quest, and brings Milkman to a ray of enlightenment. *Tar Baby,* Like *Song of Solomon,* is set in a contemporary world. Its focus is historic and its goal is the rediscovery of an African past lost through slavery. Isle des Chevaliers is now a white man's version of paradise. But it was once a two thousand year old rain forest "scheduled for eternity" (*Tar baby* 7). The memory of which is preserved in the reported but undocumented presence of a race of blind horsemen who live there. The descendants of those slaves "went blind the minute they Dominique" (*Tar Baby* 130).

Son, an avatar of the ancient world and a spiritual brother to the mythological horsemen, is as lost and confused in his modern world as Milkman in his. Like Milkman, Son requires a guide into the realm of myth. It is Gideon who tells Son the legend, but it is Therese, the ancient conjure woman, a descendant of the blind slaves who sends him finally to his spiritual kinsmen. Therese, like Pilate in *Song Solomon*, like Eva Peace and Ajax's mother in *Sula*, like healer M'Dear in *The Bluest Eye*, and like Baby Suggs in *Beloved* is the ancestor figure. She is the guide through a history that transcends recorded facts. Son with his haunted past is the son of Africa and of his ancestor. What he needs is the passage Therese provides him. Jadine is an orphan daughter separated from the African history. Therese tells Son "she has forgotten her ancient properties"

(*Tar Baby 263*). Yet the ancestor women manifest themselves in the forms of dream or in any other forms. These are the women who surge from the unconscious are more terrifying than history itself because they represent a lost history and racial identity.

Sethe of *Beloved* does not choose her separation from the African mother. She is also the literal mother removed from her daughter by the historical fact of slavery. Hers is the lost language and the lost heritage which surface from Sethe's unconscious only on occasion in the forms of an image or word. She considers that her unborn baby bucks like an antelope. It is an image she later links with the ancestor figures, shadow dancers in her own foggy past and that of her race: "Oh but when they sang. And oh but when they danced and sometimes they danced the antelope" (*Belove*d 31). Sethe's connection in the present to the ancient myths is through Baby Suggs, a conjurer. To the people who gather to hear call, she gives a history and wisdom that "the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine. That if they not see it, they would not have it" (*Beloved* 88)

Morrison's novels depict realities of history--the disintegration of family, the denial of a mother's right to love her daughter, the greatest horror of the black experience under slavery. The white masters not only violate Sethe in an act comparable to rape but they also violate the sacred state of motherhood and the African spiritual values. According to Holloway and Demetrakopoulos in *New Dimension of Spirituality,* "much of Morrison's work embodies a celebration of African archetypes" (160), the most significant of which is the Great Mother, the giver of both life and wisdom, who is *nommo*, the creative potential and the sacred aspect of nature itself. But only in freedom

can Sethe celebrate her love for her children, her sense of herself as Great Mother: “It felt good. Good and right. I was big… and deep and wide and when I stretched out my arms all my children could get in between” *(Beloved* 162).

Women in Morrison’s novels are like the Great Mother. They are metaphorically linked with images of trees and are thus representative of the power of nature, no matter how subverted those power might be by circumstances or the realities of histories. Sula can change the weather and identifies herself with the redwood tree. Pilate smells like pine trees and can defy gravity and teach men to fly. Sethe manifests power that transcends ordinary nature. Even Baby Suggs is a magic healer, and can salve the chokecherry on Sethe’s back and bind the violated breasts. She is able to conjure a feast for ninety people from two buckets of blackberries. She exercises the miraculous power of the mythic Christ, and summons the spirits that pervade the forest clearing where she calls. Hers is “the heart that pumped out love, the mouth that spoke word” (*Beloved* 180). Pilate also manifests a love that mothers world. Her dying words to Milkman testify to a spirit that negates the atrocities of history: “I wish I’d a knowed more people. I would of loved’em all. If I’d a knowed more, I would aloved more” (*Song of Solomon 340*).

Like nature, the ultimate power is greater than that of history. The African Great Mother can kill as well as create. The Great Mother revolves polarities of creativity and destruction. As Eva Peace embraces her son before she sets him on fire in *Sula*, as Pilate Dead almost loves her granddaughter Hagar to death in *Song of Solomon,* so Sethe in *Beloved* takes a saw to her daughter’s throat because “The best thing she was, was her

children. Whites might dirty her all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing – that part of her that was clean" (*beloved* 151).

Sethe's motherly love is so strong that it can reverse history and resurrect daughter. In the words of Wilfred Cartey "Africa of my grandmother's singing," within the African view of nature, "nothing is dead, no voice is still. An essential continuity is preserved between earth-mother and child" (qtd. in Holloway and Demetrakopoulous. 118). Beloved stands as Sethe's self and of her lost heritage. She is also the incarnation of the "Sixty Million and more." The African Great Mother keeps silence through slavery and the political realities of history, her power relegated to the natural rather than political; and, for Morrison, this is an ambiguous qualification.

Marilyn Sanders Mobley has noted in "A Different Remembering: Memory, History, and Meaning in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," that Sethe has her origin in "real history" (193). Sethe is Morrison's re-inscription of Margaret Garner, a runaway slave from Kentucky whose act of infanticide was subject for abolitionist publications at the time and is still a reminder of the atrocity that was slavery. Mobley also relates that Morrison published *The Black Book* in 1974, a collection of documents including news clippings, bills of sales and other evidence pertaining to African American history, history record which Morrison felt necessary to correct what Mobley calls "a romanticization of both the African past and the American past that threatened to devalue the 300 years of black life … as lived experience" (190). But Morrison herself romanticizes the African past in *Beloved* as in other novels reclaiming it as part of African American identity. But her ethical position in regard to a lost Africa is always

one of ironic qualification. The myth of African Great Mother is used not as an ideal of recovery, but as a reminder that history is the antagonist which has silenced myth and dispossessed the African American of the crucial link with Africa.

Most of Morrison's characters mock the white lynchers and hold the white race as a whole responsible for the historic subjugation of blacks. It is the white farmer who perpetrates the "Nigger joke" in *Sula*. The social workers and church ladies are patronizing in *The Bluest Eye.* The businessmen whom Macon Dead strives to imitate to his own psychic destruction in *Song Solomon*. Most of slave owners, like Mr. Garner in *Beloved* see themselves as benevolent patrons permitting manhood, but denying the expression of it. According to Guitar in Song of Solomon, the action of Seven Days, exacting revenge on whites in retaliation for the crimes perpetrated on blacks, are totally reasonable. He does not kill "people", but "white people," Hitler being "the most natural white man in the world" (156). Morrison fragments African American history into symbols, the color of blood: , the choke- cherry scars on Sethe's back, Stamp Paid's piece of red ribbon, Paul D's loss of "a read, read heart" to tell the story of "the people of the broken necks, of fire- cooked blood and black girls who had lost their ribbon" (*Beloved* 181).

In Morrison's works, history exists as it is recalled in fragments and pieces. Her technique is to render history through the aesthetic image, to accomplish what Kriteva in *Desire in Language* has described as a process of the "desubstantification" of "mythic idealities, reconstructed like crystal from the practice of subjects in history" (103). For Kristeva this is a political act, a technique that challenges the primacy of Western

philosophy. Morrison's works reveal the untold story, the other side of history ,the inscription of both myth and fact. Morrison's purpose is both the style and the subject of her histories. It is not only to invert time and disrupt chronology, but also to shock her reader into a political awareness, to challenge not only attitudes about African Americans but about patterns of thinking and systems of belief in general. She says, "If my work is to confront a reality unlike that received reality of the west, it must centralize and animate information discredited by the west--discredited not because it is not true or useful or even of some racial value, but because it is information described as lore or magic or sentiment" (Evans 388). Of course, there is no sentiment in Morrison's subjects which are often violent, disquieting and unbearable to consider. As her subjects are based on historical fact and have their origin in reality, hers is a voice of political conscience making poverty, slavery, and oppression. When history and the concept of reality become so brutal, so horrific and unnatural, the only "natural" object becomes the supernatural.

"Quiet as it's kept," writes Morrison in *The Bluest Eye*, "there were no marigolds in the fall of 2941" (9). The fact is attributable not to seeds having been planted too deeply or to the quality of the soil, but to supernatural reaction to the unnatural fact. Pecola was having her father's baby and even worse that not a single person in Lorain, Ohio, was able to love or help her. The wound is universal, a cosmically ordained punishment for a community's sin of omission: "the land of the entire community was hostile to marigolds that year. This soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear, and when the land kills of its own

volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live. We are wrong, of course…" (*The Bluest Eye* 160). The plague of robins that accompanies Sula's return to Medallion in 1937 after an absence of ten years is a supernatural phenomenon. It is like the sudden January defrost that follows her death and leads to the deaths of others of the community who, in a mood of mass hysteria enter the abandoned tunnel. It is a historical artifact and testament to the inevitable failure of the white man's promises, where they are drowned, crushed, and entombed.

Evil and its manifestation in supernatural world are an integral part of Morrison's novels. As Morrison writes about *Song of Solomon*, the novel focuses on "the acceptance of the supernatural and a profound rootedness in the real world at the same time with neither taking precedence over the other. It is indicative of cosmology, the way in which Black people looked at the world … superstition and magic are another way of knowing things" (Evans 339). At the end of the novel, Milkman rationalizes, "Juses! have a navel. Since that was true, anything could be, and why not ghosts as well?" (298). Milkman was walking around in the middle of the twentieth century trying to explain what a ghost had done.

Morrison incorporates magic and lore into the realm of reality revising both in the process. Brathes's theories of myth is linked to the African American folk tradition which precedes, echoes, and revises it. Samuels and HudsonWeems state that "Morrison has used folklore and mysticism throughout her novels as matrix of articulating the interlocking nature of past and the present as well as the spiritual and physical worlds" (92). For Son in *Tar Baby* the blind horsemen of Isle des Chevaliers exist as both history

horsemen is a flight into a mythic past, into the conjure world, which paradoxically liberates and annihilates him. Son accepts and that revision of history which is legend. His final flight into the swamp to join the validity of death without any question is a flight into a mythic past, into a conjure world which liberates and at the same times, annihilates him. The same acceptance of manifestations beyond nature is also intrinsic in *Beloved:* "Not a single house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief" (5), says Baby Suggs, who knows that the spirit world is everywhere- in the houses, in the trees, and in the rivers.

For Morrison, writing is a process of undoing the work of death, of conjuring ghosts, of accounting for the disremembered and unaccounted for. She writes a history and a literature. As Otten quotes her as saying, is "irrevocably, indisputably Black"(2).She has also told Claudiia Tate,"when I view the world, perceive it and write about it, it's the world of the black people. It's not that I won't write about white people. I just know that when I'm trying to develop the various themes, I write about the people who best manifest those themes for me are the black people whom I invent" (118). Morrison's racial consciousness provides models for all women writers to conceive of history in a way that as Cixous writes, "unthiks the unifying, regulating history that harmonizes and channels forces, herding contradiction into a single battlefield. In women, personal history blends together with the history of all women, as well as national and world history (313). It seems that Morrison reinscribes history just as she inverts time and western ontology. Women writers have struggled a lot to find

themselves within history in every generation. They have struggled to force a recognition of their historical existence and their value.

2.5 Family and Past

Morrison's novels often look to the past in order to explain a present state of affairs. She calls upon history to illuminate black family life as it exists in its multiplicity of forms. Her novels seek to expose cultural and acculturated underpinnings. In other words, family is historicized in her novels. It is shown to be very much the product of historical circumstances and judged in relative terms only. Some of the family configurations in Morrison's *Sula, Song of Solomon',* and *Beloved* provide an enviable models of family- loving structure which grant their members warmth and emotional security. The novels' insistence upon a retrospective gaze shows the author's preoccupations with the past's bearing on the present.

The past for Morrison is collective in scope. She writes with an awareness of group history and of American society's conceptions and misconceptions about black family life, while her novels are not set in a post 1960s America, they are the unmistakable products of post 1960s consciousness and authorial intent. Her novels speak to the need for collective thought and action. They look to the recent past in ways suggestive of a people, rather than of values in contemporary America. Morrison is conscious about "sixty million and more" to whom she inscribes *Beloved.* It is this awareness which prompts Toni Morrison to ask in *Playing in the Dark*, "What does positing writerly self, in the wholly racialized society that is the United States, as unraced and all others as raced entails? What happens to the writerly imagination of a black auther who is at some level always conscious of representing one's race to, or in spite of, readers that understands itself to be universal or race- free?" (xii).

Morrison is interested in the sorts of domestic behavior engendered by both societal and household oppression. “The horrific love in Morrison’s novels is multifaceted --psychological, social, and historical. It is for the most part the manifestation of a culture corrupted in its racial past and in its present” (Otten, 654). Thus Morrison routinely gives us characters whose love for one another has become so twisted by American racial circumstance that it injures. Morrison’s *Sula* marks the passage of time and gestures toward real-world events. It evokes its social aims more subtle.

Sula comes to an end during the Civil Rights Movement and centers on the newly independent black woman. Her personal past prompts aftershocks in the life those around her. Indeed, Morrison uses the principle of cause and effect as an organizational strategy and a dominant theme. The institution of slavery becomes the implied meta-narrative by which to interpret all subsequent events in the novel. Melissa walker calls it “ the other story that predates and is the precondition for all African American experience” (121). She argues that Morrison uses the “nigger joke”--the local lore of how the Black people in the Bottom were tricked into accepting their useless land as a metaphor for post-bellum African American marginalization. This opening tale is about the good white farmer who used the allure of freedom and some land to seduce his slave and then offered only non- arable land.

The tale works by analogy. It implies that in the years since slavery, and even since Civil Rights Movement, oppressive social conditions for black people in America have persisted “the right to sit in front of the bus, to use public facilities, and even to

hold the keys to the cash register in the dime store were relatively easy to bestow. Equality in seemingly trivial political matters was acceptable; economic parity was something else" (Walker 120). Or as *Sula*'s narrator says, "Freedom was easy--the farmer had no objection to that. But he didn't want to give up any land" (*Sula* 5). This suggestive reference to history leads the narrative to a chronological way, and thereby emphasizing the relationship of time, history, and current events to personal lives. Chapters of the novel begin with dates to "suggest that events which has occurred in the world outside the Bottom, are thoroughly relevant to events which occur in the Bottom, even though its inhabitants show little awareness of contemporary history" (Walker 120). The thing that most affects in *Sula* by history and the passage of time is family.

The two central families of Sula and Nel are mutually contradictory products of the same historical circumstances. Slavery which is called to mind by opening anecdote; World War I, which is called to mind by the veteran status of two minor characters; and the Civil Rights Movement, which is strongly implied by the town's ill-fated "Suicide Day" march of 1941, are implicated as determiners of the black family form and dynamics, even though Nel's family and Sula's family could not be less alike. Nel's mother Helene struggles to maintain a solidly bourgeois nuclear family, whereas Sula's mother Hannah and her grandmother Eva create a boarding house environment that is loose, non-structured, and not nuclear. Whether the black family wishes to adopt the values of white culture or not, it remains marginalized.

Nel's girlhood experience with her mother on the train to New Orleans bears this proposition out. Intersecting with a particular representation of history the narrator of

Sula recounts how Helene and Nel, looking as affluent and respectable as possible, accidently board the wrong car on a Jim Crow train in 1920. The white conductor, in front of black soldiers, humiliates them before allowing them to take their correct seats. Helene, the daughter of a prostitute has a hard working husband, a " lovely house with a brick porch and real lace curtain" (*Sula* 17), and a child who is "obedient and polite" (*Sula* 18). She does not present a convincing portrait of middle class respectability to white representatives of authority. The strategically placed soldiers sitting in the "COLORED ONLY" section of the train further testify to the marginal status allocated to black people who indeed conform to white expectations and will even fight to preserve the American status quo. Helene and Nel suffer the insults of the conductor and try to maintain their dignity in front of the ashamed soldiers. This suggests the futility of black assimilation into white culture, and underscores the relationship of public history to private life.

Nel's mother is belittled by authority onboard a train. Sula's mother is reputed to have thrown her leg in order to subvert authority and the insurance money so that she could build her boarding house. Morrison's novel *Sula* is not about the validity of certain types of family , but about the invalidity of abuse, both societal and household. The narrative treats opposed versions of family in a way that makes them equally unsatisfactory as if to suggest that no types of family can thrive in an oppressive and dehumanizing social order. Eva kills her son Plum because his World War I experience has made him drug-addicted and beyond the reach of love. Here one act appears to cast a kind of curse over subsequent events in Peace family, but there is no peace in this

family. Sula, hurt by an offhand comment of her mother's, carelessly drowns Chicken Little, then Hannah catches fire and burns while Sula looks on. Finally Sula shunts Eva off to a nursing home. This principle of cause and effect undermines even the most open-ended female oriented style of family.

Morrison's treatment of family and woman's position within the family resists simple categorization. Aware of social context, she positions her families in black communities that are in turn positioned on the margins of white society. Likewise, she positions her narrative in the ways that reflect an ironic awareness of white literary tradition. By allowing Sula to live an "uncanonical life" (Sage 179), Morrison defies historically conditioned social and literary expectations of a self sacrificing heroine of either race who prioritises family well-being over personal desire,or who at the very least incorporates family well-being into personal desire. One of the Sula's desires is for her best friend Nel's husband Jude. Because Sula and Nel had always "shared affection of other people" and because "Sula had lived in a house with women who thought all men available" (*Sula* 119).she is unable to fathom the nuclear boundaries within which Nel has established her life with Jude and their children. She seduces Jude shortly after before marrying Nel in 1927. He, like all of the black men in Medallion had been denied meaningful, masculine work with the County Roads Authority. Once again, historical circumstance determines characters, action, and family life: "the war over, a fake prosperity was still around" and Jude goes in search of a wife because he "needed some of his appetites filled, some postures of adulthood recognized" (*Sula* 83). So he starts a family in order to become a "head of household pinned to an unsatisfactory job out of

necessity. The more he thought about marriage, the more attractive he became" (*Sula* 83).

The timelessness of Jude's desire and its occurrence in history signify something beyond itself. Interacting with a particular version of history tells of the exclusion of the black man from manual labor meted out to "bull-necked Greeks and Italians" during "a post period of fake prosperity" (*Sula* 82). Jude's desire is directly motivated by contemporary circumstance. His urgency for a wife and a nuclear family is shown to be historically produced. Sula thrives on her ability to thwart tradition, expectation, and literary history. She exploits Jude's socially and historically determined vulnerability. Morrison looks to the past in order to explain a present state of affairs. In assuming retrospective stances, *Sula* conceives of reality as historically conditioned. It enacts the familiar black adage, "what goes around comes around". Her novels call upon history to illuminate black family life as it exists in its multiplicity of forms. But in doing so she reflects an awareness that all account of history and the past are merely that accounts. Morrison suggests that there is no point in engaging in debate about the present until we have to terms with the past. She also suggests that there is no access to the past without narrative and representation. Her fictions imply that contemporary cultural formations and institutions, such as gender roles and the institution of family, have assumed their present shapes owing to complex socio- historical factors and to the institutions of the past, most importantly, the institution of slavery. Therefore, Morrison's fictions become not just particular representation of the past but metaphors of the present.

Chapter Three

Revisiting History through Morrison's Trilogy

3.1 *Beloved*: Racial History and Interior Life of Slavery

Morrison uses her literary platform to provide true and accurate historical representations of the interior life of blacks in America and stresses the American society not repeating history. Morrison's historical trilogy – *Beloved (1987), Jazz(19920),*and *Paradise (1998)* embody the concept that "there is a profound connection between the laws which govern the process of history and the laws of human behavior and the consequences which flow from human action" (Muhammad 35). Her novels are based upon her intense study of various historical periods. In her novels, one discovers that the characters, the narrator, and the overall plot are also governed by insight of real aspects of human behavior and human interaction, which are based upon the narrative of human history.

Morrison focuses on the black family. Her first novel *Beloved*, of the historical trilogy, demonstrates how Morrison provides a revisionist and prophetic reading of the effects of enslavement and inevitable racism that grows out of it in order to emphasize the importance of contemporary Americans to seek healing from this historically transformative experience and pay homage to the ancestral spirit that lives and still embodies the pain from such a traumatic experience. Her novel *Jazz* is the second novel of her historical trilogy. The novel synthesizes and bears witness to the implication of black life as through participants in the Great Migration from the North to South,who are

living in Harlem, New York, a place imbued with its history and culture. In the novel, Morrison tells the story about the people, city and the liberating music along with effects of slavery and racism. Finally *Paradise* takes place during another significant period for African American people. Set primarily in Oklahoma during and immediately after the Civil Rights struggles of the 1960s, the novel interrogates the concept of utopian societies, playing race and gender against each other in an exploration of the constitution of oppression. Morrison discusses the impetus for the novels'conception.With each novel, the focus changes to a different component of this tightly drawn triangle. No one reasonably doubts the crucial of memory in *Beloved,*nor the emphasis on storytelling in *Jazz*, or even the challenges of establishing true history in *paradise*; but memory and story become mutually dependent, and history must be nurtured in both.

Beloved is an effort to proclaim the importance of a re-examination of the effects of the Middle Passage and the interior life of slavery for black Americans. Morrison pays homage to the horrific past of slavery; especially to a young female slave mother's riveting story. The characters that Morrison creates in the novel serve as the witness bearers, the historical reminders of the experiences of the Middle Passage, the trans-Atlantic slave, and the slavery itself. Morrison creates her characters as historical and psychological representations of how such long-passed traumatic experiences continue to inform contemporary lives. The entire text of the novel is like a collective family flashback. In the novel, Morrison uses the actual historical account of Margaret Garner's story as a focal point. She says:

> The historical Margaret Garner is fascinating, but to a novelist, confining. Too little imaginative space there for my purposes. So I would invent her thoughts, plumb them for a subtext that was historically true in essence, but not strictly factual in order to relate her history to contemporary issues about freedom, responsibility, and women's place. The heroine would represent the unapologetic acceptance of shame and terror; assume the consequences of choosing infanticide; claim her own freedom. The terrain slavery was formidable and pathless. To invite readers (and myself) into a repellant landscape (hidden but not completely; deliberately, but not forgotten) was to pitch a tent in a cemetery inhabited by highly vocal ghosts. (Morrison 17)

This entire novel is bounded by how Sethe's character must strive to beat back a painful past of enslavement. Morrison describes this process in Sethe's life as "working, working, working dough. Nothing better than that to start the days' serious work of beating the past" (*Beloved* 5-6). With every conversation that Sethe's has with others, her past as a slave becomes even clearer as she is forced to remember things that she really wants to forget.

Sethe's character is a fictional representation of the truthful experience of the life of a female slave: Margaret Garner. She often reconnects with her past experiences as a slave, which in part reflects what is known of the real life slave Margaret Garner. The novel introduces the reader to Sethe's whirlwind of private thoughts, in which all thoughts are connected about her life as a slave. She remembers the death and the

spiritual presence of her mother- in –law Baby Suggs; the unseen spiteful ancestral presence of her crawling baby girl; images of lynching bodies hanging from beautiful sycamore trees; the chokeberry tree on her back after she is beaten with cowhide; the men who stole her milk; and finally, her initial arrival as the only female slave on Sweet Home Plantation owned by Mrs. And Mr. Garner. All these moments are the re-memories of an ex-slave. Morrison is warning America about the disorders created by experiences of slavery through the construction of characters; Baby Suggs, Paul D, Denver, Beloved, and Sethe herself. The pain and the interior life of a victimized woman is seen here who tries not to allow her memories to destroy her completely. For Sethe, there is no psychological separation between her present life and her life at Sweet Home. When Paul D arrives on the porch of 124 Blue stone road, he and Sethe instantly resume where they left off the last time they saw each other 18 years ago. In one of the most heart-wrenching scenes of their reunion, Sethe says:

> After I left you those boys came in there and took my milk. That's what they came in there for. Held me down and took it. I told Ms Garner on em. She had that lump and couldn't speak but her eyes rolled out tears…. Schoolteacher made one open on my back and when it close it made a tree. It still grows there still. They used cowhide on you? And they took my milk. They beat you and you was pregnant? And they took my milk. (*Beloved* 19)

Sethe's milk is sucked out by a white man, and not by her baby. Therefore she is unable to restore her own image as a mother. She is mentally scarred from this violent act, Just as her back is physically scarred from the cowhide whip. According to a critic:

> What also comes back through the stories that Paul D shares are fragments of history. Sethe is unprepared for such as the fact that years ago her husband had witnessed the white boys forcibly take milk from her breast, but had been powerless to come to her rescue or stop them…perhaps more importantly, these elements comprise the sign of history that punctuate the text and that disrupt the text of mind, which is both historical and a historical at the same the same time. (Mobley 23)

Morrison confronts her readers with the horrors of the past that are too terrible to relate. Through the conversation between Sethe and Paul D, Morrison offers another re-memory of the proceeding of black life that "too terrible to relate" and "speaks the unspoken." Sethe's character is example of Morrison's method of literary archeology and re-memory: history merges with imagination.

Beloved is a mysterious girl and an important character. She represents a significant historical fact of enslavement. Beloved's arrival is described as real not supernatural: "A fully dressed woman walked out of water. She barely gained dry bank of the stream before she sat down and leaned against the mulberry tree…Nobody saw her emerge or came accidently by. If they had, chances are they would have hesitated before approaching her" (*Beloved* 60). Elizabeth House argues that Beloved is actually a descendant of an African female who was a part of the Middle Passage:

> Such uniform acceptance of this notion (that Beloved is not real but a ghost) is surprising, for evidence throughout the book suggests that that the girl is not a

> supernatural being of any kind but simply a young woman who has herself suffered the horror of slavery… In large part, Morrison's Pulitzer Prize- winning fifth novel is about the atrocities slavery wrought both upon a mother's need to love and care for her children as well as child's deep need for a family…(17)

Beloved is a metaphoric embodiment of these arguments. She is identified as Sethe's long lost daughter. She also has a strong connection to the general horrors of the Middle Passage, which goes beyond the historical narrative of Sethe's life. This dark recovery of horrors of the slave ship can be a kind of racial memory on the part of a slave girl who was viciously abused by her master before he threw her into the upstream from the place where Sethe lives. Not only is Sethe's character confronted with actions from her own past, but Beloved's past is also a true representation of a racist past. It is represented in the physical existence of Beloved. Her ancestral memory is representative of many of the slaves that were a part of the Middle Passage and the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade. Beloved is the atavistic symbol of those slaves whose stories remained unrecorded or forgotten. Morrison uses the dialogue between Beloved and other characters to paint a clear and distinct picture of the historical truths of the past:

> Beloved closed her eyes. In the dark my name is Beloved. Denver scooted a little closer. What's it like over there, where you were before? Can you tell me? Dark," said Beloved. I'm small in that. I'm small in that pace. I'm like this here. She raised her head off the bead, lay down on her side and curled up. Denver covered her lips with her fingers. Were you cold?""Beloved curled tighter and shook her head. Hot. Nothing to breathe down there and no room to move in." (*Beloved* 88)

Morrison further shows the readers the horrors of the slave trade by the way Beloved confronts her body and curls up on her side. This physical gesture actually depicts that how closely together captured Americans had to remain on a journey that took days, even months.

Despite these details from the slave ship, she could have the experiences of the Middle Passage except as a racial memory that is being released from her subconscious. Neither Sethe nor Beloved know their mothers speak to the fragmented existence of slave life and the slave masters regularly separated children from their mothers. Sethe saw her mother only few times and Beloved remembers being snatched away from mother. Sethe believes that Beloved was captured by some white men which parallels her painful experience white men, like when schoolteacher's nephew stole her milk. Both women have been victimized by a white man. Beloved also recalls standing over a bridge; perhaps, she too escaped from the clutches of the white man that once held her hostage by jumping in the river. These two characters present the interior life of the black female slaves. It shows that Morrison's characters "speak the unspoken" and expands the written tradition that documents this aspect of black life which is too terrible to tolerate.

Baby Suggs is a character in Morrison's *Beloved*. She often reflects wisdom and grace that not only sustains her family, but also transcends her family. She serves as historical witness bearer to African tribal history and the life of enslaved. Baby Suggs embodies the role of the speaker prophet, the truth- sayer, the historian and the unofficial record-keeper for her community. She maintains a profound connection with the past

and uses her elder wisdom to provide guidance for the present and future, based on the past. Her paramount role is to be the religious advisor for the slaves. “Like, other preachers, Baby Suggs gave the slave community, a context in which it could place itself and in which it could find refuge and a source of strength” (Peach 113-4).

Clearing is the place where Baby Suggs provides former slave with refuge and sources of strength. She strives to restore the fragmented existence brought on by slave life. She acknowledges that while they are at “The Clearing” there are still obstructions in their lives- i..e, enslavement which prevent them from being whole human beings. Baby Suggs emphasizes that they must love themselves. She provides her followers with the first act of repair, rebirth, and recovery after being abusively shaped by the institution of slavery and by those who chose to oppress them. As slavery violated the law of God, Baby Suggs is trying to redirect the people who have come to see her. Baby Suggs preaches that the only means of survival is self love. She knows that she has to give them the initial steps in overcoming their present existence as slave. Slavery creates the feelings of self negation, self hatred, and self destruction. Therefore Baby Suggs must direct them back to the significance of self. She encourages them to cherish every aspect of their physical reality – their flesh, their eyes, their skin, their back, their hands, their mouth, and their body. She provides them with a counter- argument to how every inch of their bodies and their flesh is exploited by the laborious task given by their slave masters. Their slave masters only see them as property or economic capital.

Baby Suggs also echoes the voices of some black theologians, ministers, and activists. A historical example of such occurred during the 1930’s and 1940’s, the time

of the Great Depression and the New Deal, when President Franklin D Roosevelt was trying to re-energize American citizens. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad was striving to do the same within the black community. He injected self- love into the psyche of blacks while not focusing on the negative impact of being enslaved. By giving black people an alternative way to view themselves, he sought to give black people the initial orientation back to the true value of self. This continues to follow the Black Liberation Theology. The liberation of the oppressed group can occur only through the comprehension and practical application of the principles given in the gospel. This same notion of Black Liberation Theology is the method proven to be transformative by the words declared by Baby Suggs to all men, women, and children in “The Clearing”.

Through the description of “The Clearing” as the spatial existence where recovery can take place for many slave families, Morrison uses her text to American Society about the need for the experience of slavery and the black interior life to be truthfully confronted. America is a country that after 400 years is still in need of a meaningful healing. Morrison shows the ways in which the human condition continues to be intricately linked to the fragmented horrific generational past that must be confronted by all victims. Through her characters, Morrison reminds all of America that the horrors of slavery did not end with the Emancipation Proclamation, but has continued to be presented and will continue in future unless a meaningful dialogue occurs which is then closely followed by meaningful healing.

3.2 *Jazz*: A Crucial Moment in Black History

Jazz is the second novel of Morrison's great trilogy. It reveals a perspective into Morrison's ability to foresee and forewarn American society of its wrongdoings pertaining to the effects of slavery, racism, and the unsettling nature of the black presence in America. The content of this novel embodies words in the essay "The World and the Jug" where "Ralph Ellison's powerful meditation upon the roles of aesthetics and politics in the African American novel are discussed and Ellison makes a distinction: that the novel is 'always a public gesture, though not necessarily a political one'" (qtd in O' Conner ix). In this novel, Morrison's post –slavery critical analysis is an example of the kind of "public gesture" that Ellison is alluding to, for she has selected two major historical time periods of American Culture: The 1920's Great Migration and the Jazz Age. Each historical time period depicts the life after the harrowing experience of enslavement. It was the time where Black people were striving to reconstruct their lives as they once knew them. Some left Southern life of sharecropping or any other kind of manual or field labor with the hope for a better life in the commercialized North. Other found a new means of survival by continuing to express themselves through the artistic medium of music like "The Blues" based on the humble beginnings of slave song or Negro spirituals during plantation life. Amiri Baraka explains, " *Jazz* incorporates blues… as cultural insistence, a feeling matrix… So at its strongest and most intense and indeed most advance, Jazz expresses the highest consciousness of that people (The African American nation) itself, combining its own history" (qtd in Jones 112-25).

In the African American historical moments, “Jazz”is found throughout Morrison’s writings. It is a manifestation of Morrison’s attempt to fill in the gaps and spaces in time that have been historically omitted or left unspoken. Her novel *Jazz*, in part, is based upon a photograph in James Van DerZee’s *Harlem Book of the Dead* (1978), which depicts body of a young girl, shot at by a jealous boyfriend, who died refusing to identify her assailant. About the title of the novel, in an interview with Salman Rushdie, Morrison says:

> I was interested in the concept of jazz, the jazz era, what all of that meant before it became appropriated and re-distributed as music throughout the world. What was jazz when it was just music for people, and what were those people like? That subject is highly contested – its origins, what it means, what the world’s etymology is, and so on. The only thing that’s consistent in the debate is the nature of improvisation – that one works very hard in order to be able to invent. It was that quality in these people’s lives that I wanted to capture, moving from the South on to a city, where there were endless possibilities, of both security and danger. (Brick 33).

The innovative and spontaneous nature of jazz becomes Morrison’s method in telling the stories of the lives of the people who were affected by the infectious nature of the music and its origins, both where they came from and in the city where the music was commercialized. As she places the common folk at the center of the text each character’s story is fused with personal history in way that improvisational changes in jazz are performed. As for example, in critical observation of how people arrived in the

city, the narrator says, “Some were slow about it and traveled from Georgia to Illinois, to the city, back to Georgia out to San Diego and finally shaking their heads, surrendered themselves to the city and no other. They came on a whim because there it was and why not? They came after much and where. They came for a visit and forgot to go back to tall cotton or short” (*Jazz* 32). Here Morrison shows why many people migrated from the South to the North. Some who already had a taste of city life were seduced back to the city. Others arrived in the North because they had family members living there and they needed a change, or they were told about the City made them feel hopeful about their possibilities of a new future.

Jazz provides several narrative accounts of the lives of many characters living in the city. Deborah H. Branes writes:

> We are told for example, that the once- happy Joe and Violet Trace begin their descent into marital discord after a succession of ameliorative moves that take them further and further from their cultural roots. Like so many other real- life (and fictional) African Americans, the Traces reify the ambitions of rural blacks who believed that the urban North was the promised land of opportunity, equality and plenty… Accordingly, in this and other novels, Morrison portrays culture shock as traumatic, yet inevitable, consequence for upwardly mobile, migrating or rootless blacks. (qtd. in Middleton 286)

Although Joe and Violet, like other migrated people, anticipated a better life by “movin’ on up” to live in the Promised Land, they did not expect the trauma or the challenges

they would face. The importance of their life history is critically observed in the essay "Sth, I know that Woman: History, Gender, and the South in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*" where Angelyn Mitchell observe:

> In *Jazz*, Morrison offers literary portraitures of South Black women during three significant historical moments of American history – American slavery, Reconstruction, and the Great Migration…As a cultural and historical conservator, Morrison inscribes her three southern woman characters – True Belle, Rose Dear and Violet- as the texts of their respective historical moment, American slavery, Reconstruction, and the Great Migration. By revealing how their particularized histories inform their lives, Morrison augments her readers' understanding so that they too will "know that woman". (49-60).

Morrison wants her readers to envision the simple but complex lives that she has given rise to through her use of history and literary imagination. Like what is mentioned about the black interior life in narratives of Sethe, Beloved, and Baby Suggs against the key historical moments in black history – Middle Passage, the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade and American slavery in *Beloved*, in *Jazz*, True Belle, Rose Dear, and Violet are epithets of other historical moments in the black interior life that must be revealed or further clarified.

Morrison questions the very premises of history and historical writing particularly as they pertain to African Americans and the representation of African American history. The goal of her fiction is not to recover details of African American history, but to

choose which details are useful for the village or the community in the struggle to create a past that can enable African Americans to have a "livable life" (*Beloved* 198) in the present and future. The unconventional historicity of *Jazz* is directly linked to Morrison's improvisational exploration of alternative concepts and forms for re-constructing African American history. Like *Beloved, Jazz* was inspired by an actual document, here, a James Van Der Zee photograph of a young black woman resting in a satin- lined coffin. The date inscribed on this photograph is 1926, the same year in which Morrison's novel begins. The significance of this photograph first became apparent in Morrison's 1985 conversation with Gloria Naylor. Morrison thought at this time that the story that form the narrative core of *Beloved* and *Jazz* would be told in the same novel and she explained to Naylor that Margaret Garner's decision to kill her children to keep them out of slavery became intertwined for her with the story behind Van Der Zee's funeral photograph. The woman had been shot at a party by her former lover. she did not tell any one of the shooting and the people surrounding her noticed only when she collapsed. There was blood on her body. She refused medical treatment and refused to call the police to let her lover escape, and so she died. Regarding these two stories, Morrison explains to Naylor, "a woman loved something other than herself so much. She had placed all of the value of her life in something outside herself"(207).

As Morrison was very familiar with Van Der Zee's photographs, she wrote the foreword to his 1978 collection of death- portraits called *The Harlem Book of the Dead*. She draws attention to the paradoxical qualities of the death-portraits. The narrative quality, the intimacy, the humanity of the photographs are stunning. Morrison focuses

neither on the aesthetic or composition aspects of these harmonious photographs, rather she emphasizes their narrative quality- their ability to tell a story. Morrison's comments about the photograph are significant in locating the emphasis of her own historical practice, which dwells not on the photograph but on the stories that accompanies it. It is not on the mere facts or documents but on the narrative that makes use of it. The photograph provides a sharp desire for some kind of critical understanding, and so Joe and Violet begin to reach back into the more distant past to recollect the stories that will enable them to realize their present situation.

Joe and Violet have spent most of their lives forgetting, or, as Morrison calls it in *Beloved*, "beating back the past (73). Having left Vesper County, Virginia, in 1906, aboard a train called the Southern Sky heading north, Joe and Violet hoped to leave behind past disappointments and dispossession and begin a new brighter life. Finally, they arrived in Harlem, the promised land for the wave of black people like them, "running from want and violence" (*Jazz* 33). By1926, when the novel opens, Harlem seems to be the site of a new historical epoch.

The narrator describes the feeling in the air, "Here comes the new. Look out. There goes the sad stuff. The bad stuff. The-things-nobody-could-help stuff. The way everybody was then and there. Forget that. History is over, you all, and everything's ahead at last" (*Jazz* 7). "History" in this passage is understood as the bad stuff that has happened in the South in the past. It is something to be gotten over, to be left behind in the Great Migration, to be forgotten like Beloved. Despite the promise of Harlem to be post-historical, Joe and Violet find that past comes along to haunt them that they have to

reckon with “the sad stuff”, “the bad stuff” in order to revive themselves from unconsciousness as individuals and as a couple.

The narration of present events in Morrison’s historical novels is continually interrupted by telling of background stories. The nature of these stories from the past tells us something about Morrison’s definition of “historical.” Neither *Beloved* nor *Jazz* seems to be interested in narrating fictionalized stories of great events. In fact, these novels are to make passing reference to history as this passage from *Beloved* shows:

> No more discussions, stormy or quiet, about the true meaning of the Fugitive Bill, the Settlement Fee, God’s Ways and Negro pews; antislavery, manumission, skin voting, Republicans , Dred Scott, book learning, Sojourner’s high-wheeled buggy, the Colored Ladies of Delaware, Ohio and the other weighty issues that held them in chairs, scraping the floorboard or pacing them in agony or exhilaration.(173).

With this list, Morrison is not dismissing the significance of these public and political issues for African Americans, but she is insisting that a useful black history not be solely concerned with such matters. Morrison continually prompts her readers to consider what does not get recorded about the realities of black life in America, as reflected in Stamp Paid’s internal historicizing:

> “ Eighteen seventy-four and white-folks were still on the loose. Whole towns wiped clean of Negroes; eighty-seven lynching in one year alone in Kentucky ; four colored school burned to the ground; grown men whipped like children;

> children whipped like adults; black women raped by the crew; property taken, necks broken. The skin was one thing, but human blood cooked in a lynch fire was a whole other thing. The stench stank." (*Beloved* 18o).

Jazz also summons up images of racist violence against blacks that goes unmentioned in the mainstream newspapers and hence does not become part of the public record or monumental history. These terrible events remain visible only because of a black collective memory that people like Stamp Paid, Ella and Baby Suggs in *Beloved* or Joe Trace, Felice's father, and Alice Manfred in *Jazz* sustain.

Morrison says, her goal in *Jazz* is to "tell a very simple story about people who do not know that they are living in the jazz age, and to never use the word" ("The Art of Fiction".117). *Jazz* refers to various public events of the time, such as, the July 1917 East St. Louis riots; the much celebrated return of the 369th Regiment (an –black unit) in 1919from World War 1; the vital presence of the clubs, leagues and societies in Harlem during the twenties. The novel conveys a strong sense of Harlem as a mecca, a promised land for African Americans in the twenties. Morrison portrays Harlem as a self-sufficient community of the black people, the largest community of its kind in America and the world in the twenties. Gilbert Osofsky emphasizes this fact:

> Prior to World War I, the neighborhood was already the largest colony of the colored people, in similar limits, in the world- and it continued to expand. By 1920 the section of Harlem bordered approximately by One Hundred and Thirtieth Street on the south. One Hundred and Forty-fifth Street on the north and

> west of Fifth to Eighth Avenue was predominately Negro and inhabited by some 73,000 people. (122-123).

He also observes that Harlem was unique among the various urban areas black migrated to, not only because of its population numbers but also because it was a genteel, elegant place to live. Unlike the slumlike areas blacks were relegated to in other cities, Harlem was the "ideal place" (111) to live in New York. No doubt, these physical surroundings helped to foster the feeling of black pride and historical momentousness that came to be associated with the Harlem Renaissance.

Morrison's novels thus perform an important act of historical recovery by bringing to mind for contemporary readers this exceptional area of African American history. When it seemed, for the first time, blacks would have access to a range of economic, educational and social opportunities that had previously been denied them. In 1969, a landmark exhibit designed to increase public awareness of the history of Harlem opened at the metropolitan museum of Art in New York. Titled "Harlem on My Mind." During the first week and a half it was open, "over seventy-seven thousand visitors saw 'Harlem on My Mind,'" and "every day that the museum was open, long line of museum-goers of all races stretched down Fifth Avenue" (Birt 64). It also marked the rediscovery of James Van Der Zee who was "living in impoverished conditions when Reginald McGhee, following up on a lead about a photographer who had had a well-known studio in Harlem, tracked him down. Van Der Zee became the single largest contributor to the exhibit, and… that launched a belated integration of his work into the history of photography" (Brit 62).

Morrison's *Jazz* contributes to this reawakened historical consciousness of Harlem begun by scholars like Osofsky and Hugins, made popular by exhibits like "Harlem on My Mind." This effort continues in a recent burst of scholarship on Harlem, the Renaissance, and various exhibits of art work from the period, including a national tour of Jacob Lawrence's *Migration* series in 1995. In "Rootedness:The Ancestor as Foundation"(1984), Morrison remarks, "nice things don't always happen to the totally self-reliant if there is no conscious historical connection" (344). It is a comment that anticipates the emphasis of her historical novels.

Jazz consists of individual stories of the past related to Violet and Joe, and Dorcas and Alice Manfred. Violet reckons with her mother's suicide and what it meant to be raised hearing glorious of the light-skinned, fair haired mulatto Golden Gray that her helped raise. Similarly, Joe meditates on his unsuccessful attempts to have Wild acknowledge him as her son. Dorcas sifts through the traumatic memories of her father's and mother's death. Alice faces the intensity of her repressed feelings about her husband's infidelity over thirty years ago. Thus, they recount the stories of their past. Morrison suggests that history is never over and a conscious historical connection is absolutely necessary for the psychological well-being of the individual and community.

This connection is crucial because of the historical era in which *Jazz* is set. This is a time of massive migration from south to north along with a newly conceived image of black selfhood. Joe declares himself a "new Negro." The New Negro is someone who is self- assertive, who refuses a Booker T. Washington conciliatory stance, and who has freed himself from the power of whites to define his life and goals. The Harlem

Renaissance might also be seen as a time breaking, when "newness" became a cultural dominant that marked not only progress but also trauma. Nathan Huggins suggests that the problematic metaphors of "the New Negro" offered a limited and unstable model of assertive manhood. He says:

> Whatever promise the new man has for the future, his name and the necessity for his creation imply some inadequacy in the past. Like the new year's resolution or the 'turning over a new leaf,' the debut of the New Negro announced a dissatisfaction with the Old Negro. And since the New/Old dichotomy is a mere convenience of mind-Afro-Americans were really the same people all along – the so-called Old Negro was merely carried within the bosom of the New as a kind of self- doubt, perhaps self-hate" (65).

In Huggins's analysis, this self-doubt eventually contributed to the bursting inside of the Harlem Renaissance as a movement.

Morrison's novels emphasize historical rememory precisely to move away from passing as the trope that governs contemporary views of the Harlem Renaissance as a historical era. Both Joe and Violet desire for some kind of connection with their previous selves in order to deal with the trauma brought on by migration and urban life. Harlem was the new place for Joe. He cannot even tell his friends, Giston and Stuck, things he would easily have said to his boyhood and near brother, Victory. He says, "I changed once too often. Made myself new one time too many. You could say I have been a new Negro all my life" (*Jazz* 129). Such continual newness and self-renewal prove to be

problematic and painful. Joe urgently needs someone to listen to all of his unspoken dreams and memories. Violet cannot fulfill this role, so Joe puts his awesome neediness on an eighteen year old self absorbed young woman Dorcas, who reminds him vaguely of Wild, who perhaps is his mother. It seems his desire for Dorcas involves not only sex, beauty or youth, more importantly, it may involve his desire to articulate, to narrate memories and stories that might connect the past to the present in a meaningful way.

The necessity to make these kind of connections is also felt by Violet and Alice. Violet suffers ‘‘Public craziness and private cracks” (*Jazz* 22) in Harlem. She fissures in her own self-concept that the novels registers with names signifying her split self: “Violent” and that “Violet.” She begins to heal these fractures by creating a historical narrative for herself. She says to Alice midway through the novel, “everybody I grew up with is down home” (*Jazz* 111) and late in the novel, she remarks “Before I came to North I made sense and so did the world” (*Jazz* 207). Thus she shows her ability to articulate the traumatic effects caused by profound geographic and emotional dislocation which migration entails.

Violet’s healing her ability to talk about herself and her life occurs as a result of the bond she and Alice forms after the death of Dorcas. Violet comes to Alice’s apartment to find out what Dorcas was like in an attempt to understand Joe’s betrayal, but instead finds herself growing attached to the dead girl and to Alice. As Alice stitches up violet’s frayed and torn dress and coat, she listens to her closely and repairs her own tattered sense of self. They understand that sisterhood is necessary between black women to avoid becoming wild, armed, and dangerous.

Each of the major characters in the novel experiences a crisis driven by horrifying memories of racially inflicted trauma and maternal loss: “The unrelenting and destructive influence of racism oppression on the black family is manifested in *Jazz* by the almost total absence of the black family. Even Morrison’s mothers previously incomparable in their strength and endurance; succumb to the social/economic/political forces of history” (Heingze 97). Violet’s mother, Rose Dear, abandoned by her husband and forcibly removed from her home. She commits suicide when she can no longer eke out a living for herself and her children. Violet’s grandmother, True Belle, nurtures her grandchildren but fills violet’s head with stories of a much-adored mixed race child, thereby inculcating in her granddaughter racial self-hatred and an infatuation so severe that Golden Gray “tore up Violet’s girlhood as surely as if they’d been the best of lovers” (*Jazz* 97). Violet later recognizes that her middle-life hopelessness stems from those childhood longings. From her mother, she learned to shun motherhood so that “whatever happened, no small dark foot would rest on another while a hungry mouth said, Mama?”(*Jazz* 102).

Too late Violet’s maternal desires overwhelm her, leading her to more or less kidnap an infant and, when that attempt fails, to sleep with a doll in her arms. Violet comes to realize that from the very beginning of her relationship with Joe, she wished he were Golden Gray, and understands that perhaps Joe also chose Violet instead of an unattainable dream, “which means from the very beginning I was a substitute and so was he” (*Jazz* 97).

By giving such close attention to the traumatic life of the characters, Morrison's novels point to the necessary recovering and creativity of black women in trying to make lives for themselves and their families amid adversities. The novel suggests the pain that is the underside of such achievement. Morrison's novel provides a much different and complicated explanation of the factures and fissures in black families than socio-historical accounts. Individual lives closely make it possible for Morrison to reconstruct a history that remains faithful to the past, but it is not predetermined. The danger of narrating history lies in creating master narratives, in which there is no room to articulate any local narratives that run counter to it. A historical master narrative has a grand resolution whose outcome has already been decided. But individual lives outside such narratives are much more chaotic, contradictory, and unpredictable which creates a necessary space for resistance and counter narratives.

A jazz composition has a set melody. It has the room for improvisation and the spontaneity of performance which create a fluid and shifting text. Jazz as a genre revisits its own past melody to claim what is useful and make possible further development. It is a model of a useful black history. Hence the title of the novel can be read not only as a reference to its historical setting ,but as the model for Morrison's historical reconstructive project. Morrison is able to use her text to musically prophesy to American society to tell the story of the "common folk" that migrated from the South to North, witnessed by and through the narrative voice of this novel, which primarily focuses on The City, The Music, and The People. Jazz, the music, is an art form that tells the story of the lives of everyday black folk. Like the Blues and other art forms that

followed, Jazz was born out of a rich historical time period of the Black experience in America. It is through the creation and presentation of the text that Morrison sheds light on another significant time period of American history that has often been ignored or unspoken of.

Toni Morrison in *Jazz* is like a historian. Her characters talk about their individual lives and the pasts. Felice, Joe, and Violet heal themselves through a collective reciprocal effort to face, tell, and negotiate what has happened to them. Watching their felicitous companionship, the narrators learns that a past of trauma, pain, and unfulfilled longings does not have to continue on into the present or the future if one can arrive at a narrative that will enable reflection and renegotiation. Through the intricate retelling of the past events, *Jazz* emphasizes that history is first of all a story - a set of stories African Americans need to tell and retell in order to create a livable life and a viable future. Morrison's novels align themselves with current trends in postmodern novel, a genre so obsessed with history that theorist Linda Hutcheon defines postmodernism as "historiographic metafiction" (75). Her novel *Jazz* self- consciously represents the past in order to emphasize that historical understanding must be dynamic and constantly reworked if it is to be useful.

In her *The Black Book*, Morrison as the book itself invites the readers to participate in the construction of the story: "If I were able I'd say it. Say make me, remake me. You are free to do it and I'm free to let you because look, look. Look where your hands are now" (229). Book does not literally speak to the readers. She is not able to say, somewhere in the course of the novel, the typical story, the typical history. Here lies an

insight that has repercussions for Morrison's historical reconstruction of black history. History books have no life unless they engage readers and compel them make and remake the story in order to locate something useful for living at present and in the future. Morrison's emphasis is on necessary collective support for counter-narratives in order for them to become something other than marginalized or muted perspectives. In *Jazz,* as in the concept of rememory so central to *Beloved*, Morrison claims the power of engaging and compelling narratives to contest and displace hegemonic narratives in a culture's memory. *Jazz* repairs the dislocations and traumas of the past for African Americans by beginning a collective project of a useful reconstruction of African American history.

3.3 *Paradise*: Remembering the Historical Past.

Morrison' *Paradise,* is another moment in American history revisited and the unveiling of the interior life of Black Americans. Similar to how *Beloved* and *Jazz* are rooted in significant moments of black history, and based upon news clippings of traumatic historical events that were "too terrible to tolerate" or often left "unspoken," *paradise* is another novel in which Morrison employs the method of literary archeology in an exploration of the unmentioned spaces within the landscape of American history. Morrison's trilogy is concerned with remembering the historical past for herself, for African Americans and for America as whole. *Beloved* considers period of Emancipation and Reconstruction, *Jazz* considers the Harlem Renaissance, and *Paradise* is concerned with the Vietnam and Civil Rights era of the 1960s and 1970. One of the most important concerns of the trilogy is the value of narrative. In each novel she examines the role of narrative in the reconstitution of both the individual self and the society at large. Morrison's method and focus of her project have evolved and widened over the course of the trilogy. *Beloved* and *Jazz* are concerned with the process of individual reconstitution of the self, mainly for the characters of Sethe, Paul D, and Violet and Joe Trace. But in *Paradise* Morrison no longer concentrates on the individual process of reconstitution. She is more interested in assessing the role of narrative in the community as a whole.

Paradise revisits time and again in African American history when all-black towns were created after the abolition of slavery. In an Oprah interview, Morrison recalls how she was led to write *paradise*:

> I am interested in a very little known, poorly understood period on African life in history, and that was the creation of all those all-black towns in the West. And then I began to read about how they got started, soliticing people to come, and I got taken with that newspaper column, "Come Prepared or Not At All." And it seemed so reasonable a request that people not out there unprepared with no blood, no money, into virgin territory. But then, I read that some ex-slaves, about 200 of them, had, indeed, c- come there, and they didn't have a thing and they were turned away. That made me think what happened to those people who were turned away? Where did they go? Because that was an extraordinary situation of ex-slaves. (6)

The novel focuses on the Ruby centered narratives and patriarchy. It emphasizes a Individual rigidly controlled communal historiography predicated on the subordination of individual to the group. Steward and Deacon Morgan – Ruby's recognized leaders- employ, enforce, and defend this communal narrative. The "Patricia" section of *Paradise* then offers a complex counter reading of Ruby's patriarchal historiography. The novel presents how the town as a whole narratively responds to the Convent massacre, and how that event impacts the patriarchal structure of the town.

Morrison offers us the story of a small western African American Community, Ruby whose contemporary members understand themselves in relation to a historical narrative of ancestral determination, idealism, and triumph. According to their self narrative, they are the descendants of a group of wandering ex-slaves who, at God's command and after having been rejected a string of already established pioneer

communities, black as well white eventually succeeded in establishing the perfect, all black community of Haven in a far-away place in Oklahoma. Though the community was later removed to another secluded place, still in Oklahoma, where it attained its present name, by1976, the time of the narrative present for most of the novel, it has come to seem the fulfillment of its founding fathers' paradisiacal promise. It now appears "the one all-black town worth pain" (*Paradise* 5).

By 1976, a vast difference has been developed between the community's perfect and stable self-image and its actual conditions and cultural practices. As things now are in Ruby, unwanted children are conceived and aborted, wished for children are born broken and the young have begun to react against the conservative lifestyle and authoritarian politics of the communities leading leaders. At first, the community's patriarchs react to this development by launching a series of angry accusations against its young male lions of failing their ancestral responsibility; the novel culminates in a horrific massacre conducted by these groups of men on a group of unconventional women living in a place called the Convent. Morrison suggests that the price of Ruby's insistence on maintaining a morally superior master narrative may well be sacrifice of that very narrative. Rather than a perfect paradise, Ruby ends up as a conservative, patriarchal, racialized, and violent community.

The novel exposes the competing concepts of communal historiography. The older generation is firmly committed to its existing narrative. To them, the story includes every fact about how the 8-rocks, the founding fathers of Ruby, Oklahoma, got to Haven and the meaning of that suffering. They dislike changing it. Misner and the younger

generation want to rewrite the existing narrative. For them, history is open and dynamic. The debate surrounding the Oven's motto involves not only a question of authority but also the authorship. E.L. Doctorow remarks:

> There is no history except as it is composed. There are no failed revolutions, only lawless conspiracies. All history is contemporary history. However, remote in time events may seem to be, every historical judgment refers to present needs and situarions. That is why , history hast to be written and rewritten from one generation to another. The act of composition can never end. (160-61).

The younger generation of Ruby wants to rewrite history. The real issue for the Morgans is power which the older men will not give up. The youths' motto to "Be" would reinforce the idea that "we are the power," the older men cry blasphemy and Steward Morgan ends the debate with a blunt threat: ''If you, anyone of you, ignore, change, take away, or add to the words in the mouth of that Oven, I will blow your head off just like you was a hood-eye snake" (*Paradise* 87). In the novel every potential threat to the status quo becomes an emergency for the Morgans and their sympathizers. It may be something as commonplace as " a car full of white teenagers whistling at young girls; in this case , the gun toting men of the town surround the offenders and wordlessly bully them into leaving" (*Paradise* 12-13). Older men threatens the younger ones verbally. And as the assault on the Convent demonstrates, to preserve the power, the older men are capable of terrible violence. Walter Benjamin writes:

> The tradition of oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism. One reason why Fascism has a chance is that in the name of progress its opponents treat it as a historical norm.(259).

This reveals the essence of the Morgan mentality. The everlasting "state of emergency" is one of their chief tactics for retaining power. Morgans are not only brute terrorists. Their strategy for maintaining their position can be more subtle. They understand the power of narrative to establish moral authority. This is why communal historiography becomes paramount. It is a tightly control version of the town's history. The Oven debate shows, when anyone challenges the elders' position, the elders offer a recitation of communal history because the community's existing historical narrative recounts a long history of terror and abuse. It is, from horrors of slavery to the modern day migration, known to the residents of Ruby as the Disallowing. This narrative serves as a justification for their "state of emergency." *Paradise* foregrounds this strategy in the opening section:

> The twins have powerful memories. Between them they remember the details of everything that ever happened—things they witnessed and things they have not… And they have never forgotten the message or the specifics of any story; especially the controlling one told to them by their grandfather—the man who put the words in the Oven's black mouth. A

> story that explained why neither the founders of Haven nor their descendents could tolerate anybody but themselves. (*Paradise* 13)

The "controlling" story is the Disallowing. This is the story of how 158 freed black slaves left "Mississippi and two Louisiana parishes" (*Paradise* 13) in 1890 and at every stop were turned away by whites, by Native Americans, and by fellow blacks for being "too poor, too bedraggled-looking"(*Paradise* 14). Morgan historiography is based on memory and oral history. It passes down orally from father to the son. Morrison bears great pains to establish the legitimacy of the "state of emergency" which Ruby believes in. Historically, there is a cause for it. But Morrison refuses to idealize this approach because such kind of militant defensiveness can lead to abuse and corruption.

Even the valid historical reasons for Ruby's defensiveness do not justify quasi-fascistic impulses of men like Steward Morgan who reacts nothing to the Convent assault. For Ruby's elders , this narrative of the Disallowing is an ideology, that allows them any measure of terror or violence so long as defends the town's common interests. sentence of the novel underscores this point: "God at their side, the men take This aim.For Ruby" (*Paradise*18). According to Linda Hutcheon: "Ideology – how a culture represents itself to itself— doxifies or naturalizes narrative representation, making it appear as natural or common- sensical … it presents what is really constructed meaning as something inherent in that which is being represented"(49). Patricia Storace observes that the men of Ruby seek "the perpetual overarching authority of the creator at the moment of creation" (66). Decon and Steward Morgan and other people of their generation want to be the authors of their own history. Their history becomes a closed

book, not a text to be rewritten, or that matter reinterpreted with each generation. The men of Ruby believe in their own constructed history, but the moral basis for this belief has been battered, and the elders now stick to it less for moral reasons than for animal desire to preserve their powerful position at any cost.

One of the central issues of the novel is racial purity. As Kubitschek asserts, the novel "confronts one of the African American culture's most sacred cows, the myth of unity and perfection in black society relieved of white oppression" (179). But for the citizens of Ruby white skin is not only the marker of tyranny; light-skin blacks are equally antipathetic, a hostility stemming from the event that has frozen history for all time for these characters. Confronted by the bloodlust, fueled by Reconstruction, several cluster of families flee the American South for the West, intending to settle in one of the all-Black towns that invited ambitious and respectable former slaves to relocate there. However, they were "too poor, too bedraggled looking" to enter the communities. They comprehend that what prompts their rejection is not their poverty but their "racial purity," their 8-rocks skin, the purely black residents of Ruby. Coming upon one such all-Black town, the wanderers are given food, blankets and money, but they permitted only one night's rest before they are force to move on.

The psychic trauma of this "Disallowing" haunts the descendants of the original pilgrims decades later. The annual Christmas pageant at the school depicts their own forebears on their journey to a new home, turned away, year after year in its reenactment, from the town they had hoped to claim as their own. Matus points out that while the narrative insists on the importance of remembering black history, it also

“ explores how too jealous a remembrance of the past can hold a community in its grip,” and he further claims that Ruby “has memorialized its history in a way that threatens its capacity to adapt and respond to the present” (154). They have been trapped in moment of their collective past. The citizens of Ruby refuse to acknowledge the demand of their own children to participate in the lived experience of the community, precipitating the rebelliousness that leads to the massacre of the Convent.

Just as *Jazz* recounts the Harlem Renaissance from the perspective of those who were not artists, musicians, or writers, so the novel *Paradise* “tells the story of the inner life of events that have become larger than life and have been subsumed under the names of heroes like Martin Luther King and Malcolm X” (Schur 285). Morrison does not allow us forget that African American cannot be viewed monolithically or that values of the vocal revolutionaries were not in all cases unanimously shared. Soane Morgan, confused by the gesture of some of the young, who have adopted names she considers “ugly names. Like not Americans. Like African,” reflects, “She had the same levels of interest in Africans as they had in her: none” (*Paradise* 104). Pat Best concurs telling the Reverend Misner, “I just don’t believe some stupid devotion to a foreign country – and Africa is a foreign country . . . is a solution for these kids” (*Paradise* 210). When Misner attempts to raise money for a legal defense fund for four teenage boys arrested on trumped-up charges during a Civil Rights demonstration, Steward Morgan responds, “Little illegal niggers with guns and no home training need to be in jail” (*Paradise 206).* As Schur remarks, “The tensions in Ruby result from the changing meaning of race in the post-civil rights era,” saying that for men like Steward Morgan, “undoing the racial

rules of Ruby would unravel the meaning of gender and sexuality as well, turning the social order of Ruby upside down" (289).

The convent women become a threat because of their project of challenging conventional meaning of gender in a way that liberates them from the patterns of abuse and self-hatred that have demonized them throughout their lives. Schur continues, "The Convent, the town's double, haunts the community precisely because the fears and psychic wounds that they [the town] brought with them get mapped onto . . . the women of the Convent" (290). The town patriarchs envision a paradise free from the violence and depravity of the outside world, and a world free of racial prejudice. But the town fathers tyrannize members of their own community. They treat Roger Best's wife and Menus Harper's "pretty redbone girl" (*Paradise 278)* as pariahs. Morrison states that traditional ideas of paradise always portray "male enclaves, while the interloper is a woman, defenseless and threatening. When we get ourselves together and powerful is when we are assaulted" (qtd in Matus 157). The Convent never formally constitutes any kind of community but approaches that state by offering its habitants what they need most.

Morrison's concern in Paradise is with the production of history and the ends to which it is pressed into service. Tally cites the "obsessionwith the purity of the race and the absolute prohibition of marrying outside the icons of blackness" and the strictures of a self-sufficient life shut off from the outside (white) world" (*Paradise Reconsidered* 71). The women of Ruby live circumscribed by the male authority. They are often praised for their beauty and their virtue by their husbands. They are expected to

adhere to standards similar to those in enforced upon women like in conservative patriarchal society. Ruby women are frustrated by the restraints imposed upon them in the town. Soane Morgans has sought out Cosolata for years for a herbal anti-depressant necessary for the woman whose life so narrow that she "worked thread like a prisoner: daily, methodically, for a free, producing more lace than could ever be practical" (*Paradise* 53*).* Sweetie Fleetwood worn down from years of tending her four damaged children, can simply walk the seventeen miles in a trance is terrified of the Convent women, yet needing to escape Ruby. Billie Delia takes refuge there after a quarrel in which her mother "the gentlest of soul, missed killing her own daughter by inches" (*Paradise 203).* The novel's feminists insights is articulated by Billie Delia she remarks at Arnette's wedding to K.D., "the real battle was not about an infant life or a bride's reputation but about disobedience, which meant, of course, the stallions were fighting about who controlled the mares and their foals" (*Paradise* 150).

With the condemnation of the forces of patriarchy *Paradise* is seen as Morrison's cultivating a new terrain, the themes of interracial tension and the exploration of an acknowledged Black presence in American history. Agonizing desire for the mother haunts the text. Both in Ruby and in the Convent, characters are marred by a lack of mothering. K.D., for whose mother the town was named, bore "witness to his mother's name painted on signs and written on envelopes was displaced by these sad markings" (*Paradise 15*). Mavis is betrayed by her mother after seeking sanctuary from her violent husband with her. Seneca, abandoned at the age of five by her young single mother in a housing project, must fend for herself for several days until severe hunger forces her to

abandon hope of reunion. Consolata's despair over Mary Magna leaving her is so intense that she uses her magical powers to keep the older woman alive against her will. In death, Consolata experiences reunion with the mother, a fullness and completion that are total. Bouson remarks: " Countering the earlier troubling representations of abandoned and traumatized, or even dead, children, *Paradise* ends with a consoling image of divine maternal love in its depiction of the Black Madonna"(213). Despite its focus on the horrific consequences of racial shaming, the closure of the novel presents the healing and redemptive gesture.

Each of the nine sections of *Paradise* is named for one of the female characters. Character becomes the focalizer for significant parts of the chapter. The novel shares the themes that identify the works as part of Morrison's artistic work. It explores the complexities and dangers of human love, with an acute awareness of the devastation and violence that often go together with fear and respect that love can inspire. *Paradise* captures Morrison's agenda of writing African American's issues into American history. Hence her focus is more on the Harlem Renaissance and Civil Rights movement. The novel reveals a pattern of growing sympathy for women's condition in patriarchal society along with the willingness to critique men for their sense of entitlement and their use of violence as a mechanism of maintaining control.

There are many communities within the fictitious town of Ruby that creates a space which is supposed to be a form of paradise. The Convent is the feminine space that is away from the rest of the town, a place where women can escape from their burdens even though they drift in and out in hopes of gaining an ultimate moment of inner peace

and self-acceptance. Within this all-black town full of people, other communities have developed, based upon critical attitudes where same feelings, beliefs or thoughts are shared. There are some people who question the behavior that goes on at the Convent; other people feel compelled to sustain the town as all-black status and the generation gap that exist between the youth and the elders or the three groups of people who belong to the three different Christian churches within the town. The most controversial sub-community is the body of men that upholds a patriarchal authority. These are the same men who are responsible for shooting the only white girl who visited and lived in the town.

The presence of all these communities and sub-communities seems to suggest that everyone is trying to obtain a moment of paradise, a true utopian society. But no single community achieves paradise in isolation. Morrison revises the notion of how one attains spiritual bliss by provoking a deeper analysis from the characters in the text. Morrison offers a warning in the beginning of the novel that racism and sexism tear up the black community. *Paradise* provocatively begins with “they shoot the white girl first. With the rest they can take their time. No need to hurry out of here. They are seventeen miles from a town which has ninety miles between it and any other. Hiding places will be plentiful in the Convent, but there is time and day has just begun” (*Paradise* 3).

The ongoing dialogues between Patricia and Reverend Misner is one of many that display the tension between men and women, black and white, past and present, youth and elders, the new and the old ways to live life:

> They are better than you think, she said. They are better than they think, he told her. Why are they satisfied with so little? This is their home; mine too. Home is not a little thing. I'm too saying that it is. But you can't even imagine what it must feel like to have a true home? I don't mean heaven. I mean a real earthly home . . . but your home where if you go back past your great-great-grandparents, past theirs and theirs, past the whole Western history, past the beginnings organized religion . . . when God said Good! (213).

Patricia is not concerned with implication of just history without religion. She appreciates the merging of all aspects of life to create a distinct reality. She also recognizes that Ruby is the home of several years of sacrifice which has been made a safe place for all who reside there. But Reverend Misner is not concerned about an earthly home that is linked to the intangible Paradise or Garden of Eden that existed in the early stage of creation when God was pleased with the world. He is consumed with the idea of progress and the socio-political issues that surround blacks in other areas outside Ruby.

In *Paradise* Morrison has uncovered some of the dangers that revolve around the issues of racism and sexism and she is warning against the creation of exclusive communities. The men of the town have realized that their need to sustain patriarchal authority has caused them to commit an ungodly act at the Convent. This is a thorough explanation of reasons why the women of the Convent have been murdered. The town has relinquished its role as a holy all-black town of security and productivity to become a town that has collapsed. Ruby is no longer a Paradise for the black people who had to

flee from Haven to Ruby, for the blood of the Convent women remains on the hands of the entire town, destroying their chance of ever achieving paradise, the state of spiritual bliss. Morrison uses her text to bear witness to warn of social attitudes that have historically caused communal destruction: sexism and racism. As in *Beloved* and *Jazz*, her writings prove that black Community is responsible for its actions against a group of marginalized and disliked people. The things that happen in Ruby, is a more violent version of social conflicts. Morrison has shown the major problems that exist in the world focusing not only on how the black community is marginalized and mistreated because of white prejudice but also on how within the black community in a broader judgment.

Morrison's *Paradise* examines why law and literature remain racialized even after the civil rights movement and an uneasy " home" for raced people. Reverend Misner muses "unbridled by Scripture, defended by the roar of its own history, Ruby , it seemed to him was an unnecessary failure. How exquisitely human was the wish for permanent happiness, and how thin human imagination became trying to achieve it" (*Paradise* 307). Through Misner's voice, Morrison comments on the limitation of how dominant institutions, including law and government incorporate the values and ideals offered by the civil rights movement. *Paradise* revises those ideals on a smaller, more personal scale that encourages individual change as part of greater social change. The building of a paradise, the building of a home, cannot be complete without dealing with the memories of racism and how those memories continue to haunt institutions and

cultural practices. This work requires a personal decolonization and social and legal reform.

In her historical trilogy, Morrison has created *Paradise* to project a message that the state of bliss or peace to exist on the earth, everyone must be willing to purge themselves of the thoughts, beliefs and ideologies that exclude or hurt others and create the unjust attitude of superiority. She is not suggesting that paradise can only be achieved when a person dies, but it can be achieved when all human beings are still in the midst of living life; and willing to learn as well as embrace some of the harder lesson of life.

Chapter Four

Resistance and Self-Affirmation

4.1 War and Politics

Toni Morrison reorients the readers to a new vision which foregrounds African American participation in the history. She realizes her historical project in a language of scriptural reference and figures to create works that are meditations on the interdependence of history and spirituality. She realizes the exclusion of African and African American cultural experience from the hegemonically constructed history of the United States. The experience of African American culture is the experience of this vital link. The Africans who underwent the horrific sea change of the Middle Passage are historical and spiritual presences. African religion and history in the United States were included into and covered in Christian forms and figures and the ancestral histories of the Bible became the site of memory for African Americans. This is the locus of both history and spirit. These notions manifest themselves in Morrison's novels as a claim for parabolic interpretation. The parabolic form is at the heart of the political and the theoretical status of her work.

Morrison's novels foreground socioeconomic survival of the African Americans and the conflicted status of past and present and race and racialized gender in the American culture. She says that "the work of art must be political" ("Rootedness" 344). To label *Sula* as a political text is not to say that it is systematic or its characters exemplify cultural progress. *Sula* lacks a straightforward black and white, and good and

evil plot as it is consistent with the nature of parable. As Deborah McDowell puts it, "we enter a new world in *Sula* that demands a shift from a dialectical either/ or orientation to one that is dialogical or both/ and, full of shifts and contradictions" (60). These shifts and contradictions are, according to McDowell, part of parabolic form the recognition of Morrison's parabolic technique draws together the major themes of her works: the anti-dualism, the historical specificity and accuracy, and the profound presence of an Africanized Christian theology. Morrison, in the novel, questions the division between war and peace, and good and evil. Nel visits the colored part of the cemetery which contains tombstones bearing the name/ word *Peace*, Sula's family name. Morrison foregrounds a number of ideas in the novel. Peace is the absence of war, and in the context of cemetery, the absence of life. But the absence of war allows for the manifestation of positive forces of growth and life. The PEACE on the tombstones do not signify the end of lives, but the continuing cycle of life and death, of history and spirit connected with complexity to peace. S*ula* shows an African worldview which shows a continuum between living and dead. Morrison envisions a complex cultural universe which requires dismissal of a dualistic philosophical framework.

Morrison's novels are not a divorce from political practice. *Peac*e was a word of considerable political significance at the time of *Sula's* composition during the height of the Vietnam War. *Sula* questions the notion of war in terms of political and social struggles of African Americans. Many of these struggles took place in terms of war related issues. In a sense, the Vietnam War was a testing ground for the demands of equality and the racial oppression. Morrison holds that "*Sula* was begun in 1969 in a

period of extraordinary political activity" (Unspeakable Things 25). Shadrack's sane insanity is his response to the horror of war and death. Shadrack is the central figure of the two sections in *Sula* – "1919," signifying the end of World War I and "1941" signifying the beginning of World War II which frames the text. The novel's epilogue like the last section "1965" matches the year that the United States n regular bombing raids on North Vietnam. It was also the year of the well-known Southern California "race war." Morrison interlaces the themes of war and motherhood and probes these cultural constructs through Shadrack and his connection to Sula.

The characters of Sula and Shadrack examine and invert the societal prescriptions for women and men of mother and warrior. Shadrack "blasted and permanently astonished by the events of 1917" (*Sula* 8), and refuses war's legacy of death. Sula says no to her grandmother's legacy of motherhood: "I don't want to make someday else. I want to make myself." (*Sula* 93). These historical references, secular figures, moral possibilities, and reversals are parts of the novel's structure which give no univocal answer to the cultural situation and political question drawn in Morrison's text.

Morison's novels manifest itself as a theoretical subversion of binary categorization and a particular historical probing of complex relations between war and peace. It is constituted through a radical and complex biblical typology. Sula is at the center. *Sula*'s "deweys" can be seen as a disturbing fulfillment of the mystery of the Trinity - God, Christ, and Holy Spirit. Morrison in *Sula* remarks: "They spoke with one voice, thought with one mind, and maintained an annoying privacy. Stouthearted, surly, and wholly unpredictable, the deweys remained a mystery not only during all of their

lives in the Medallion but after as well" (*Sula* 39). Among Sula's many connections to the Bible is her name. *Sula* is an anagram of *Saul* and the family name Peace echoes the epithet of Jesus, Prince of Peace. Sula's name incorporates and collapses together, both war and peace. Sula Peace is not in the novel to send peace but sword.

As historical construction Morrison's biblical references are the primary way in which she constructs "presence of ancestor" ("Rootedness" 345), in her novels. The Bible, as a tribal genealogical and oral text has served as a typological model for African Americans as they interpret and preserve spiritual traditions and experiences. It has become an important part of African American history and culture. Morrison has said that "Bible wasn't part of my reading; it was part of my life"(qtd in Ruas 22). James Cone writes: "Because white theologians and preachers denied the relationship between the scriptures and our struggle for freedom, we bypassed the classic Western theological tradition and went directly to the scriptures for its word regarding our black struggle." (65). Cone explains that, for African Americans, Scriptures has double meanings. They speak of freedom and emancipation as an earthly possibility. It is not only a reward in the hereafter. In *Sula*, Morrison's project is to deconstruct binarism, and her political subject is African Americans in relation to war and civil rights. The nexus of biblical allusion is her primary component of her language which replicates the history and spirituality of the African American cultural experience.

African Americans have a distinct ethnic culture. They think differently, and it is their difference that makes them distinguished. Reclaiming their heritage, blacks can empower them to compete with white world. It is not the case that the only culture they

know is that of their white masters and oppressors. They brought their traditions from Africa. Levine holds that "Culture is not a fixed condition but a process: the product of the interaction between the past and present" (5). To become Americans, Africans preserved the past, their spirituality and specific religiocultural tradition interlaced with Christianity. Morrison's allusions in *Sula* to Samuel, Genesis, Exodus, the Gospels, and Revelation are part of her presentation of the presence of ancestor. They constitute a facet of "the novel's cultural specificity" (Awkward 76).

. The geography of the Bottom and Medallion, Ohio enhances historical and political understanding. Her novels re-envision the African American and the American experiences and provide a new way of being in the world. Morrison wrote her 1977 novel *Song of Solomon* on the cusp of historic uncertainties. The result of the black political movements of the two previous decades, from the non-violent Civil Rights movement to black power, was in doubt. These movements have seen their leaders harassed, jailed, and murdered. The story of *Song of Solomon* breaks off in the fall of 1963, though written in 1977. The years left blank in the gap between the end of the story and the beginning of the writing were filled historically with the major phase of the black political movements. Morrison sets her story in a segregated black community in Michigan. It is so isolated that it is barely aware of Martin Luther king Jr's sit-ins marches, or boycotts and knows Malcolm X only as that red-headed Negro named X. the political discussions that enliven Tommy Barber-shop do not yet give rise to organized political activity. There is only the Seven Days, a secret organization of seven men who plot random revenge killing of whites to answer for unpunished acts of racial violence

against blacks. There are the barest hints of the massive political learning process that would reach the North in the intervening years and transforms the consciousness of communities like Southside. The missing years between 1963 and 1977 in form the narration. They suffuse it. The story could not have been told before King's movement and his death, before Malcolm X and his death. Morrison seems to be reaching from 1977 to back to 1963 to explore anew the elements of everyday African American life – practices, values, beliefs, and memories which gave the Civil Rights and Black Power movements their underpinnings and their impetus.

Beloved appeared more than one hundred years after the last slave narratives, in the fading shadow of both the Civil Rights and Black power movements, during another post reconstruction resurgence of White racism and amid Afrocentric revivalism. In American political culture, the story of captivity, deliverance, and founding legacy has been especially important. Morrison's novels explore how differently situated Americans have retold the story to authorized claims about right, inequality, membership, history and their meaning. Morrison rethinks all the inherited stories of servitude and emancipation, the moral categories they entail, and the idea of redemption at their core. *Beloved* retells a captivity narratives to theorize about servitude and freedom specially by linking various kinds of imprisonment to the pursuit of imprisonment to the pursuit of redemption. In it the deliverance has been sought by men and whites have who enslaved others. But ex-slaves risk imprisonment in the effort to redeem their past and themselves.

Revisiting the historical era of slavery, the neo-slave narrative rounds back to the origin of African American literary tradition and re-examines the political promise of

literary that fuels this tradition. Novels such as *Beloved* reconsider the dawning of modern legacy from the standpoint of a present moment. Morison affirms "a direct correlation of political rights and literacy" ("Introduction" xxiv), or as a means of nourishing the ideals of American democracy. Her divestment from America is rooted in her sharp awareness of the continuing exclusion of large number of African Americans from the public sphere into national politics and culture. She specially mentions storytelling, Church shouts, and music as forms that allowed for a flawless fusion of individual and collective expression. Morrison locates her own art of writing novels within a sphere she terms "public." It is "a modern sphere constituted by its distance from the organic racial community that folk artist could take for granted" ("Rootedness" 339). The type of novel obtains its political and historical significance as a means of managing the transition from communal to public, folk to modern culture. With the modernization, oral traditions cease to be functional for the African American community. Morrison holds that:

> for a long time, the art form that was healing for black people was music. That music is no longer exclusively ours . . . It is the mode of contemporary music everywhere. So another form has to take that place, it seems to me that the novel is needed by African Americans now in a way that it was not needed before. ("Rootedness" 340).

The social effect of black music is compromised once its audience and sphere of influence expands beyond its racial community of origin, as a consequence of its commercial appropriation and national circulation. As art moves beyond the pitch of folk

community to address a national public, the modernization of oral forms involves a process of extension and dilution. The birth of modern African American novel is dependent on the loss of racially specific oral tradition. Morrison's novels work for African Americans and accomplish strong functions served by oral tradition to supply new information, to enlighten and counsel people in transition and to clarify the problems and conflicts attending modernization.

Morrison affirms the political value of her novels and says: "If anything I do, in the way of writing novels or whatever I write isn't about village or the community or about you, then it's not about anything. . . which is to say yes, the work must be political" ("Rootedness" 345). The political dimension of Morrison's novels rest on the contradiction. The "you" here is parallel to the village or the community can not address. The historical precondition for the emergence of the novel is the unavailability of organic community. The novel can be about the village or the organic community only insofar as it can restore these as fictive constructs that are historically out of the way. By including orality and the supernatural to modify the traditional genre, the politically useful novel must bury and revive the tribe by compensating for the historical loss that occasions the novel in the first place.

Beloved's miraculous resurrection in *Beloved* signals the novel's disaffiliation from modern America and affirms identification with imagined African origins. Morrison suggests that the novel can subsume folk elements and guarantee its racial specificity and political value. In *Beloved,* folk elements are intended to disturb novelistic genre and to disorient the reader from the literate public sphere. In her

discussion of the slave narratives in" The Site of Memory," Morrison points out that the crucial between literacy and political rights for the authors of the slave narratives: "These writers knew that literacy was power. Voting, after all, was inextricably connected to the ability to read; literacy was a way of assuming and proving the humanity that Constitution denied them" (301). Morison has sought to place *Beloved* outside the "formal constricts of the novel." In "Memory, Creation and Writing" she claims that the sources of her fiction are "not the traditional novelistic or readerly ones" but are instead "derived from African American oral culture" (389). Morrison performs a critical gesture common to novelists who strive to represent cultural tradition that have been marginalized by dominant construction of American literary canon. The point of this gesture is to protect the language of one's culture. The folk idiom will be lost with the move from vernacular racial community to literate public sphere.

Beloved's return fulfills a diasporic desire for plenitude and connection that was both inspired and blocked by the history of slavery. For the slave, history is a list of complaints and problems of loss and dislocation, and African origins are barely accessible through language. Sethe's efforts to recall the African American language of her ancestors demands impossible efforts to symbolic interpretation. It's like "picking meaning out of a code she no longer understood" (*Beloved* 63). Given that genealogical and linguistic origins are only fragmentarily available to the slaves through the acts of mediation. Beloved's fleshly return is so welcome to Sethe. It is a complete join between the past and present that seems to undo the history of slavery. An African past is also accomplished at generic level. Beloved's return is orality and the supernatural, both of

which are conceived by Morrison as “unorthodox novelistic characteristics designed to render the novel uniquely Black” (Rootedness 342). The presence of magic in Morrison’s novels animates a pre- and anti-modern form of knowledge grounded in faith rather than reason. It testifies to a shared structure of communal beliefs. By presupposing collective systems of belief which are deemed to be defining of African American folk community, Morrison fictions fosters the impression of addressing a distinct racial community. Beloved’s return would not appear extraordinary, and it also does not arouse any cognitive dissonance because for Morrison supernatural and real elements blend seamlessly within the folk tradition.

Sethe defines freedom as “[n]o notebook for my babies” (*Beloved* 198), and the male slaves at Sweet Home refuse their master’s unusual offers of literacy because “nothing important to them could be put down on paper” (*Beloved* 126). Morrison’s novels transform and humanize possibilities in oral and performative modes of expression. The slaves sang and danced. They “shifted shapes and became something other. Some unchained demanding other” (*Beloved* 31). Baby Suggs summons these possibilities through her sermon in the Clearing as she encourages the slave to sing and dance, to perform their new found freedom by reclaiming their bodies and spirits. Baby Suggs sermon is a performative event that uses sound and movement to conjure a utopian community into being. The sermon constitutes people into a community and calls them beloved. The power of Baby Suggs’s oral imagination is finally disabled by the material power of the law. As long as the Fugitive Slave Law remains in effect and the escaped can be remanded to chattel status, Baby Suggs’s vision of a liberated and

humanized community can only remain a utopian possibility. The fact is that the fugitive Slave Law is what sets off the chain of events leading up to Sethe's infanticide demonstrations which changes at the legal and political levels. They are the preconditions for the material realization of the beloved community.

Beloved's return takes place during the subsequent historical period that follows the legal abolition of slavery. Material conditions for African Americans are scarcely better than they were under slavery. Angela Davis traces the changing ideals of freedom that were voiced in African American oral forms before and after emancipation. She argues that oral forms developed during slave era, such as the spirituals and the work of songs. They expressed "quintessentially collective . . . aspirations for worldly freedom," in particular for the "freedom of slavery" (4-5). Blues emerges out of "vast disappointment that followed emancipation – when economic and political liberation must have seemed more unattainable than ever and represented freedom in more immediate and accessible terms" (Davis 8). The possibilities of actualizing economic and political ideals of freedom are remote for African Americans in the immediate aftermath of slavery. Davis suggests that "post emancipation musical forms emphasized those subjective and sexual dimensions of freedom seemed more firmly within reach" (11).

Similar to the blues, *Beloved* too seems to be born out of a vast disappoint with the likelihood of achieving freedom in the political and public fields. The novel represents freedom as the ability to choose whom to love, to reclaim bodily plentitude and pleasure, and to reconstitute familial structures. It makes perfect sense that Sethe's

first step toward overcoming of history of slavery is initiated when her lost daughter is restored to her in the flesh. This incarnation achieves a perfect join between past and present which is precluded by historical reality.

Morrison's *Sula* remains mundane secular, and historically faithful. It cannot be overstated that her novels are rooted in history. The novel begins with "Shadrack . . . in December, 1917, running with his comrades across a field in France" (*Sula* 7). He wonders why he is not feeling something very strong; instead he notices the purity and whiteness of his breath among the dirty, gray explosions. A heart rending and horrifying passage follows:

> Shadrack saw the face of a soldier near him fly off. Before he could resister shock, the rest of the soldier's head disappeared under the inverted soup bowl of this helmet. But stubbornly, taking no direction from the brain, the body of the headless soldier ran on with energy and grace, ignoring altogether the drip and slide of brain tissue down its back. (*Sula* 9)

African American participated in U.S war from the revolution forward, in a military that remained segregated until after the Korean War. During World War I, about 400,000 black men were drafted, half of them serving in France. The black 359th Infantry were under continuous fire for a recorded of 191 days, for which they own the Croix de Guerre and honor of leading the victorious Allied armies to the Rhine in 1918. In Morrison's *Jazz*, Joe Trace relates that he "walked all the way" in a victory parade "with

the three six nine." He says that "I thought change was the last, it sure was the best because the War had come and gone and the colored troops of the three six nine that fought it made me so proud it split my heart in two" (*Jazz* 130). 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" (Berry 318).

Shadrack , in *Sula* survives the fire of World War I battlefield, but he loses his mind. As the crazy man of Bottom resident, he becomes the "part of the fabric of life up in the Bottom of Medallion, Ohio" (*Sula* 16). The horror and death in the battlefield make the "unexpectedness of it real to Shad" (*Sula* 14). But for African Americans, war was hardly the only situation in which death could be sudden and surprising. John Callahan writes: "The heroism of black regiments is well-known; perhaps less well-known are humiliations and terrors these soldiers faced back home specially in the South." Callahan explains: "with World War I and America's promise to make the world safe for democracy came renewed hopes that long-denied promises would be honored at home. Instead, no parades were hardly over, no troops were home before these hopes were dashed by a decade of reaction epitomized by the resurgence of the Klan" (44).

Black soldiers were reminded that they would no longer be treated as equals. "Returning black soldiers were insulted, stripped of their uniforms, and beaten by white ruffians and police." The years 1919 and 1920 saw extraordinary violence against African Americans in the form of lynching and beating. Of the scores lynched in 1919,

many were veterans still in uniform. “Police in authorities gave no protection to the black citizens” (Berry and Blassingame 319). Morrison refers to such treatment in *Jazz*:

> “Some said the rioters [in the East St. Louis] were disgruntled veterans who have fought in all-colored units, were refused the services of the YMCA, over there and over here, and came home to white violence more intense than when they enlisted and, unlike the battles they fought in Europe, stateside fighting was totally without honor. (*Jazz* 58)

Morrison, in *Sula* foregrounds Shadrack and the World War I experience to show what it was the African Americans were striving against the 1960s. Military service for African American citizens at all historical periods has reflected their status in the culture as a whole, but during the Vietnam era the disparity between the demands placed on the African American soldiers and the rights they were accorded was particularly eye-catching. Shardack wants to institute a “National Suicide Day” so that “the rest of the year would be safe and free” (*Sula* 13). The historical dimensions of Morrison’s project include specific references to the African American experience in relation to war as well as history and politics.

Morrison’s novels carry collective racial aspirations that cannot be represented under the conditions of political or aesthetic practices. She wishes to exercise a collective political power through her fiction and claims that this power inheres in the novel’s ability to restore racial community at an aesthetic level. *Beloved* reveals that the novel cannot lay claim to political power so defined, for it cannot recover bygone time

when the artist could be “genuinely representative of the tribe.” The racial community that cannot be given political form is also impossible to realize at an aesthetic level, as it is clear from the fact that *Beloved* can only manifest racial community as an“impossible object of desire” (Hebdige 50). The tribe has been dispersed as a result of its particular inclusion into national public culture. But Morrison wants to maintain some notion of collective African American interests because participation in national politics and culture is still over determined by race.

Morrison’s novels record intense disappointment with the unfulfilled promises of American democracy. They convey the difficulty of giving form to an African American political collectivity in present. *Beloved’s* basic tensions clarify the narrow space it occupies, between the ideas of unified racial community, which it longs for but cannot revitalize, and the literate public sphere in which it must take part at the cost of compromising its ambition to represent black community. It is greatly telling of the moment in which the novel was written that it vests the political hopes in forms expression that are unavailable to the contemporary novelists. Because of being linguistically inexpressible, they are situated outside the bounds of modern public sphere. The sublime, oral, and magical modes in Morrison’s novels index the political dilemma confronted by African American writers in the post Civil Rights and Black Power decades. The very word “public” seems bankrupt and undiscriminating racial unity seems out of date. In this era, the racial aspirations move beyond the area of political representation and assume the sublime or magical forms they obtain in *Beloved.*

Morrison's *Beloved* marks pessimism about contemporary political prospects as a 1980s novel. It takes as its historical setting the decades following the emancipation, which is believed to be the development of black "counterpublic" sphere. Contemporary narratives about the path of the counterpublic sphere agree that it reached its optimal level of expansion and politicization during the Civil Rights and Black Power decades and has entered a phase of dramatic decline. Dawson drawing on Morrison from "Friday on Potomac" argues that "the concept of a unified black political collectivity appears to be a historical anachronism" and offers "a persuasive account of the economic, political, and social factors responsible for the decline of the black counterpublic sphere since the 1970s" (199). For a variety of economic, political, and social reasons, the idea of a cohesive set of African American political interest seems anachronistic to them in the decades following the Civil Rights and Black Power movements.

4.2 History, Community, and Female Subjectivity in Blacks

Morrison's project is to rewrite the specific bodies and histories of the black Americans whose positive images and stories have been eradicated by commodity culture. She does this by shifting the perspective and point of view to represent black female subjectivity as a complex reality. The disallowance of the specific cultures of African Americans and black women specially is figured in *The Bluest Eye* as a consequence of the more general extinction of the popular forms and images by all-pervasive and menacing mass culture industry. This industry rejects the representation of any image not premised on consumption or the production of normative values favorable to it.

These values are tied to gender and they are race specific to the extent that racial and ethnic differences are not allowed to be represented. Susan Willis observes that "in mass culture many of the social contradictions of capitalism appear to us as if those very contradictions had been resolved" (183). According to Willis, it is because of cultural integrity that the "differences in race or ethnicity and the continued problems for which these differences are a convenient excuse to be erased equal at the level of consumption" (184). Economic, racial and ethnic differences are erased and replaced by an equal ability to consume even though what is consumed is more or less competing version of the same white image.

Morrison's condemnation of the fetishism involved in the fixation on psychological beauty is enlarged by the time frame of her story; the moment the US is

entering a war to fight racist ideology in the imposition of an Aryan "Ideal." World War II is also present in Morrison liking for giving her characters poignant names, her "subtle delight in nominalism" (Baker 90). The grand narrative of history is represented in her designation of the three whores as Maginot Line, China, and Poland which are the significant places during the war.

By giving hints of the distant world events, Morrison emphasizes that it is the individual life stories in the black community that are of interest to her. Gillan remarks that *The Bluest Eye* is an indirect "commentary on the artificial boundaries of citizenship, gender, race, and history" (283). The author points out the importance of Morrison are setting her story during 1940-1941. In that year, the United States was posing as the champion of democracy abroad ignoring its own long standing history of obsession with racial purity and preference for blue eyed and blonde-hair Aryans. "The names China and Poland signify the European and Asian fronts, Maginot Line refers both literally and metaphorically to the tendency to focus on wrong front" (285), which is to project one's guilt onto another. Maginot Line is the name of the powerful defensive line built by France to stop the German invasion. The line was a complete failure. In 1940 Nazi armies invaded northern France by going through neutral Holland and Belgium passing the Maginot Line. On the home front, distraction from the socio-economic collapse and the calamity of war in Europe of the 1930s was provided by Hollywood, a rising Indus try dedicated to creating illusions of wealth and happiness and supporting white notion of beauty. The film stars in the text - Shirley Temple, Jean

Harlow, and Ginger Rogers emphasize on the omnipresence of the white gaze and its influence on the identity formation of the weak characters in the novel.

Morrison uses the narrative technique of inversion to make it clear that the text itself is specifying on a film adaptation of Fannie Hurst's novel *Imitation of Life*1933. Caputi interprets that Morrison provides her heroine Pecola with the role of an "unimpeachable witness against the very system that caused Peola (a very white black girl) to become a household word" (710).Caputi claims that "Pecola's name is an inversion of Peola the mulatta, who hates her black mother in the movie *Imitation of Life*" (711). In *the Bluest Eye*, the black mother hates her own child as a reminder of her hopeless situation and adores the white child she works for. In the novel's 'Afterword' Morrison condemns a racist culture for its worship of white standards of beauty and retorts "against the damaging internalization of assumption of immutable inferiority originating in the outside gaze" (*The Bluest Eye* 210). Michael Awkward says that by taking the basic coverage as an inter-text, Morrison revives and at once subverts "the convention of the authenticating the document usually written by whites to conform a genuine black authorship of the subsequent text" (62). Morrison signifies on the white hegemonic discourse that has nothing to do with the realities of black life. She refuses to accept the definition of African American experience according to white standards.

The inculcation of blackness as a negative signifier in the minds of the black community causes the destruction and madness of Pecola. Raynaud describes *The Bluest Eye* as the "gradual descent into schizophrenia of the young black protagonist" (114). Pecola's lack of self-esteem is generated by her alleged ugliness and also by the neglect ,

abuse, and contempt heaped upon her. She is abused by her own father and mother, made invisible by other adults. She is also the target of ridicule from other children who constantly pick on her. The only appearance of love she experiences comes from the three prostitutes. As a result, she believes all this would change if only she acquired blue eyes. At the end of *The Bluest Eye,* Pecola is raped by her father, lost the baby she was carrying and driven to madness. But she continues her quest for "the bluest eyes," taking with her imaginary friend, her double. She denies a sense of self and a voice to articulate her pain. In the end, an insane Pecola finds not one but two voices.

Morrison sets Claudia as a young and self-confident narrator who voices an alternative to the dominant materialistic discourse. The storytelling comes from Claudia as a nine year old child who reflects on the events as an adult. Pecola is silenced until the end of the novel because of Morrison's decision to show her as a victim of trauma who is unwilling to tell the story of her rape. Claudia narrates and relates the matters about her own childhood experiences. After the "onset of Pecola's schizophrenic double-voicedness, the distinctive narrative voices of *The Bluest Eye* merges into a single voice" (Awkward 93). Claudia possesses information of which earlier she was ignorant. She realizes that the whole community was guilty of the internalization of self-hatred and the related scapegoating of Pecola.

Morrison projects the history of the destruction of a black community and then reconstructs its history chronologically in retrospection. Her novels focus on the specificity and difference, the history of community, nostalgia for the past, the violence done to it, and the consequence of that violence, predicting the future that brings about

the total destruction. In her *Sula,* Morrison continues to deal with black female experience. It spans the period from 1919 to 1965. *Sula* provides the readers "with a pithy statement of the novel's underlying theme, the ravages of time. And misbegotten love" (Munro 150).

About *Sula,* Morrison says that she knew she "was writing a novel, and that it would be about people in a black community not just foregrounded but totally dominant" (Unspeakable Things 23-24). Morrison writes about the black community from the point of view of an outsider, a valley man. White man may remain peripheral in Morrison's novel, with regard to her readership she had to face dilemma of writing for mainstream white culture. The chapter in which the war veteran's story is told is titled "1919" which reflects Morrison's concern with the neglect and humiliation that met the black soldiers who returned shocked and paralyzed from the European front. War is not heroic in the novel. Over 400,000 black men including Shadrack were drafted at that time "The black 369th Infantry were under continuous fire for 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"(Hunt 448). Without questioning the great sacrifice of the black soldiers, Morrison records the flight of the American troops from the enemy instead of a dignified march. She deals with both the physical and psychological damage done to the black soldiers. There are two African American war veterans in *Sula*: Plum and Shadrack . Their war experiences lead Plum to heroin addiction and Shadrack to permanent madness.

Morrison's *Sula* has women's experiences at the center and that of a shell shocked veteran suffering from the post- traumatic effect of World War I. the motif of the double is an element of significance at the thematic levels. Sula has not one but two doubles, shadrack and Nel. Relevant events are also double. There are two murders – one accidental and other intentional; two deaths by fire – Hannah's and Plum's; and two self mutilations – Eva's and Sula's doubling, reversal, and indirection recur in the novel. Sula and Shadrack share painful experience of blackness. The bonding between Sula and Nel is based on their awareness of being "neither white nor male" (*Sula* 152). Shadrack is a probable witness of the accidental murder of Chicken Little and he is the last to see Sula laid out on the table dead.

Sula came out "at a time when the Black Aesthetic movement called for positive representations and role models" (Matus 38). Sula, a young woman without any feelings of responsibility could hardly be expected to receive a favorable welcome. But Morrison was determined to undermine the false idealization of black characters. She admitted that though she did not know anyone like Sula, still took care "not to make her freakish or repulsive or unattractive" (Unspeakable Things 23). Sula is treated within the family in parallel to her friend Nel. Sula lives in "a household of throbbing disorder" (*Sula* 53), but the Wright's home is neat and tidy, a kind of prison. Nel and Sula's relationship is complementary, and many parallels and points of comparison connects them. While Sula is a rebel, Nel is her conventional counterpart, a "dutiful friend, respectful daughter, loyal wife and nurturing mother" (Bergenholtz 92).

About marriage and having children, Sula says: “I don’t want to make somebody else. I want to make myself” (*Sula* 92). She rebels against the role she is assigned to take within the black community. She becomes a transgressor and an outlaw. By focusing on the young women bonding, Morrison undermines the conventional notion of the self and challenges the tradition of creating positive black characters, always consistent with themselves. The Bottom community offers various interpretations of Sula’s eccentric behavior and her birth mark. Sula’s birth mark is seen by various characters as a rose, a rattlesnake over the eye, a copperhead, a tadpole, or her mother’s ashes.

Sula’s and Nel’s meeting was fortunate because it let them use each other to grow on. But Nel’s mother does not approve of their relationship saying that “Sula’s mother was sooty” (*Sula* 30). It suggests that Sula’s mother is not clean or morally pure. It also refers to the fact that she is too black for the mulatto Helene’s taste. In putting up a rebellion against racism and sexism, Sula cuts off the tip of her fingerin defense of Nel when they are confronted by a gang of Irish hoodlums. Morrison shows the damaging effects of history on the life of the blacks. The newly arrived Catholic immigrants are themselves the victims of contemptuous treatment by the white Protestants of the town. They turn into aggressors in order to regain confidence and feel superior. Sula’s reaction is vague. It seems that her act echoes Eva’s loss of her leg. This is her response to a situation of sexiest and racist assault.

Sula and Nel have a special relationship. The game in which they engage at the time of their sexual awakening is crucial for understanding the relationship of the two young women. Even though Nel is the initiator, she disrupts Sula’s joys by starting to

compete with her and destroying the hole they have made together. The game symbolizes the future burial of their friendship. This shows that Nel has little self knowledge and she fears unconventional experimentation. She fails to understand Sula's act of seducing her husband Jude. But Sula values their friendship much more than the casual sex she may have with men. "Nel and Sula appear to be different but they are also similar" (Bergenholtz 92). Nel realizes the true nature of her feelings towards Sula.

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* are historical text with black female experience from childhood to womanhood. Both the novels contrast the alternative responses of resistance and subjugation to sexist and racist oppression. Apart from the stunning imagery, the lyrical and dramatic depiction of violent acts, the hallmark this of Morrison's fiction is death-watch. The characters often witness natural and unnatural death. The fact that invisibility serves as the grounds for racism against blacks accounts for Morrison's preoccupation with violence in terms of the spectacle, the inexorable white gaze. A formal project of Morrison's novels is to rewrite specific stories, histories and bodies of African Americans which are being made invisible in the commodity culture. She acknowledges this project in several ways.

Morrison wrote *The Bluest Eye* because she wanted to read the story it would tell. One of the great virtues of *The Bluest Eye* is its capacity to empathize and allow its readers to something not possible in the absence of history and context. Since this project of representing African Americans focus on the history and the bodies of black women, the novel's alternating perspective reproduces their complicated subjectivity in particular. As she shifts from young girl to older woman, black man to omniscient

narrator, Morrison moves her examination of Pecola's life from the axis of race to that of gender. This process allows her to move through the story as both insider and outsiders in what Henderson calls a "contestorial dialogue" involving "the hegemonic dominant and subdominant or ambiguously (non) hegemonic discourses" (20).

Morrison writes as a black person among other black people speaking to a white audience and as a woman among women speaking to men. The movement between these positions allows Morrison to see the other, but also to see what the other cannot see. These categories cannot be separated artificially. Valerie Smith notes that "the meaning of blackness in this country shapes profoundly the experience of gender, just as the conditions of womanhood affect ineluctably the experience of race" (48). In *The Bluest Eye*, the world is disordered and the values are inverted. The white ideal of beauty symbolized by the blue eyes becomes the yardstick whereby the blacks measure their success and failure. *Sula* too depicts a disordered world where the ideal and real are confused. The quest for physical beauty in *The Bluest Eye* is replaced by a search for self in *Sula*.

Chapter Five

Revival of African American History through Morrison's Works

Toni Morrison's novels take the readers on a journey in to black history. Her themes concern themselves with struggles, alienation, fragmentation self and identity. She explores these themes in the light of the unfulfilled promises of the black migrants' urban experiences. While developing her narrative from novel to novel, Morrison's concerns become more universal and political. Her fictional world marginalizes African Americans, focusing on the sensitive issues of the African American Diaspora. For Morrison each individual is different. Hence, she treats each with the special attention they deserve. She is eloquent on the need to respect and revere the past. She bases her narratives in the historical past of African Americans and through a fantastic modes tries to implant her characters productively in the present.

Morrison's characters are in the flux of the past, the now and the new. The women in her fictional world are both faithful and fluctuating. They bear the brunt of time's meaning and are called upon to represent many measures of time. They stand for the behind and beyond. For the sublime mystery of temporal otherness, Morrison's characters are the token of a far distant past as well as future. Her women characters are the new women, a postmodern cyborg, the new traditionalists and the symbol of flux and continuity. African American characters are anchored in a paradox. They are in a reality which is too complex for them to perceive. Morrison too is weighted under complex choices of existence. The reality that Morrison depicts is harsh, and its starkness often

blinds an observer from perceiving it as it is. She attempts to temper this historical reality with imagination so as to make it comprehensible.

The African Americans were subjected to the dehumanizing act of slavery for more than four hundred years. Only as late as 1865, they were liberated from the bonds of slavery. Brutally uprooted from their native soil, they were brought into alien lands to for the alien people. They were subjected to inhuman treatment for centuries and then suddenly liberated. They were skeptical about their new liberty. They had lost their inner vitality to fight against their oppressors both in racial and sexual terms. Their past was a history of torment and torture. Their new-found freedom in America saw them as individuals, as they were, with their repressions and various kinds of psychological trauma. They were so marginalized that coming to the center was a scaring prospect for them. They were confused by the reality they were asked to perceived and the reality that they actually perceived.

The voices of the African Americans were heard in the blues that they sang to themselves in the fields where they worked. Till about a century later the literature they produced was not so well accepted in the larger society. Their struggle to establish themselves as individuals in their own rights came to light with the writings of Zora Neale Hurston, Ralf Ellion, Richard Wright James Baldwin, Du Bois, Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor, Toni Morrison and many other authors of the African American origin. Her first novel *The Bluest eye* explores the issues of black identity, self-love, and self-hatred in a world in which violence of race, gender, class make it extremely difficult for Pecola and for a lot of other characters to find dignity in their lives. *Sula* focuses on the

inversion of conventional systems of thought and values through oppositions between self and other, good and evil, social approbation and community rejection. Similarly, *Song of Solomon* centers on the same theme of fragmentation, alienation, identity, and the merits and demerits of Western cultural values. It explores cross-generational conflicts in a cross-cultural mythological framework. Morrison further expands her geographical and racial horizon by setting the plot of *Tar Baby* in the Caribbean and including white characters, who are central to the story. In the novel the similar themes of history of the African Americans, divided identities, fragmentation, alienation, materialism and white hegemony are explored.

Beloved is based on the real story of Margaret Garner. Morrison sees no moral justification for Garner's crime of infanticide. She even wonders if it were worse for a mother to give up her children to slavery which is a living death. Set in 1873, about a decade after the Emancipation Proclamation ended slavery, *Beloved* is the story of a former slave Sethe. Eighteen years earlier she had escaped from Kentucky to Ohio. She had taken her three babies away too. On the way she gave birth to her fourth baby, a girl. Tracked to her new home by her slave owner, she decides to kill her children and herself rather than surrender herself to slavery again. She has just cut the throat of her infant daughter and is about to kill the others when she is overpowered and stopped. She is jailed for the destruction of the property, the baby as slave. *Beloved* is the first part of a larger project, the first in Toni Morrison's historical trilogy of black life in America. *Jazz* is the second volume in Morrison's great trilogy. Its characters are the children and grandchildren of Sethe's generation who left the rural areas to search for possibilities,

dreaming of success in the urban America. The action on the novel begins in 1926, in the Jazz age. Joe Trace and his wife Violet like many others of their group, from across the South, ride the train north to Harlem and elsewhere. Seeking escape from poverty and white violence, they run away into the city. But the dreams of the ordinary migrants lose their sparkle. The plot of *Jazz* is based upon a real incident of which Toni Morrison read in James Van Der Zee's *Harlem Book of the Dead*. This book contained the picture of a girl in her coffin. The girl in the picture had done exactly what Dorcas did. She had a relationship with an elderly man and had refused to reveal the name of her lover who was also her killer. In this novel Morrison takes her reader back to the history of African Americans. She also returns to the themes of fragmentation, isolation, alienation, self and identity. *Paradise* is a story about five women; Mavis, Seneca, Gigi, Pallas, and Connie. These women are victims of the politics of an oppressive society. Battered and hurt, they take refuse in a Convent in Oklahoma, sixteen miles from the nearest town. These women are victims of different kind of inhuman oppression. They run away from their tormentors into the isolation and anonymity of the convent.

Morrison picks up stories that have historical reality, treat them to vivid imagination and temper them with fantasy in order to transform them into fictional reality that voice her actual concerns. Her novel does not invent another non-human world. It inverts the elements of this world and recombines their constitutive features in new relations to each other to produce something unfamiliar and apparently new. Morrison's novels stage the dark historical past of the African Americans. Her novels are the narratives of history, slavery, racism and sexism. She is a historicist, a magic realist

and a mythical symbolist. Her writing has been alive with the convention of fabulism and folklore. Morrison's narrative mode participates not only in a historical struggle among subaltern communities but also in forging a new non-hegemonic being and meaning. She gives the past a different. She represents African American experience not simply as it has been measured by dominant norms of a multileveled and differential struggle over meaning and subjectivity since slavery. Morrison involves the reinvention of tradition and dominant language tropes. She does this by making use of African American history and by rearticulating the concept of African American experience around the diversity, and not hegemonies of its historical forms.

History is only recovered time, stratified, and circular. For her tomorrow is a concept too painful to consider: today matters. In her novels, when women live communally without men, they operate outside of history and outside of dominant culture, even outside African American culture. History as a progression has been so antagonistic that they live on a different time scheme. It is without clocks, eating and sleeping, even without schedules according to whim rather than sanctioned custom. In *Paradise*, women do just that. The three whores in *The Bluest Eye* live outside history and distort time itself, turning night into day. Pilate, in *Song of Solomon,* and her daughter and even granddaughters live for the moment. They never think of life in terms of future nor do they plan for it.

Nel in *Sula* prefers the timelessness in Sula's "wooly house", where things went on without any regard for time. Eloe, a small African American village in Florida, in *Tar Baby,* stands still in a bygone conservative era with complete disregard for the progress

of time. In Morrison's novels, time and history as a linear projection is inverted and subverted where history exists in fragments and pieces. Rendering history through an aesthetic image for Morrison is a political act. It is a technique that challenges the primacy of patriarchal western philosophy. By adapting historically true stories into her narrative world, Morrison shows us the other side of history, the untold story reinscribing fact with myth. Thus, she subverts reality and shocks her readers into a political awareness, to challenge not only attitudes about African Americans but also about patterns of thinking and system. According to her: "If my work is to confront a reality unlike that received reality of the West, it must centralize and animate information discredited by the West, discredited not because it is not true or useful or even some of racial value , but because it is information described as love or magic or sentiment" (Evans 389). Morrison's characters are often violent, disquieting, and sometimes almost unbearable to consider. Their repression surfaces with an indefinable force and shatters the reality of the world in which they exist. Morrison's characters are based on the historical facts and have their origin in reality. Her voice is a voice of political conscience as poverty, slavery, oppression become tangible to readers who have never experienced them.

In Morrison's writing, sexuality converges with history and functions as register for the experience of change called historical transition. In *The Bluest Eye*, Polly's remembrance of childhood sensuality coincides with her girlhood in the rural South. Both are metaphorically condensed and juxtaposed with the alienation she experiences as a black emigrant and social lumpen in a Northern industrial city. When Polly

Breedlove reminisces, her present collides with the past and spans her family's migration from hills of Alabama to a small Kentucky town, and her own subsequent journey as the wife of one of the many black men who in the late '30s and already '40s sought factory jobs in the industrial North. The rural homeland is the source of raw material of experience and performance. It is abstracted to colors, tastes, tactile sensations. Ohio is the site of memory where images are produced between past and present.

Much of Morrison's writing represents a return to origin. It is not rooted in nostalgia for the past. It rather represents a process for coming to grips with historical transition. Migration to the North signifies more than one confrontation with the white world. It implies a transition in social class. Throughout Morrison's writing, the white world is equated with the bourgeois class, its ideology and life style. This is true of *Song of Solomon* in which Macon Dead's attitudes toward rents and property make him more white than black. The same can be found in *Tar Baby* in which the notion of bourgeois morality and attitudes concerning the proper education and role of women have created a contemporary "tar baby" a black woman in cultural midpoint. It is made clear in *The Bluest Eye* whose introduction and subsequent chapter headings are drawn from a white middle-class people. In giving voice to the experience of growing up black in the society dominated by white middle-class ideology, Morrison writes against the privatized world of suburban house and nuclear family, whose social and psychological fragmentation does need her authorial intervention, but is portrayed in the language of the reader.

The problem at the center of Morrison's writing is how to maintain an Afro-American cultural heritage once the relationship to the black rural South has been

stretched thin over distance and generations. Due to the dramatic social changes produced by wide-scale migration to the South has transformed much of rural population into wage laborers. These changes also include the development of a black bourgeoisie, and coming into being under late capitalism of a full blown consumer society capable of homogenizing society by recouping cultural difference. Morrison's novels pinpoint strategic moments in the African American history during which social and cultural forms underwent disruption and transformation. Both *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* focus on the '40s, a period of heavy black migration to the cities came into being in relation to towns which had never before had a sizeable black population. *Sula* expands the period of '40s by looking back to the First World War, when blacks as a social group were first built-in in a modern capitalist system as soldiers. *Song of Solomon* focuses on the '60s, when neighborhoods are perceived from the outside and called ghettos. It was a time of urban black political activism and general counter-cultural awareness. *Tar Baby* is best characterized as a novel of the '80s, in which the route back to cultural origins is very long making many individuals cultural exiles.

Morrison develops the social and the psychological aspects which characterize the lived experience of historical transition. For Morrison, alienation is not simply the result of an individual's separation from his or her cultural center. For the black man to be incorporated into the war time labor pool is selling one's labor for the creation of surplus value. It was only half of alienation. The brutal second half was the grim reality of unemployment once war production was no longer necessary. The situation for the black woman was somewhat different. They were usually employed as a maid and only

marginally incorporated as a wage laborer. Her alienation was to strive for white social model in which she worked but did not live, which is itself produced by the system of wage labor under capitalism. As a house maid in a white family, Polly Breedlove lives a form of schizophrenia in which her marginality confronts with a world of Hollywood movies, white sheets and tender blond children. When at work or at the movie, she separates herself from her own kinky hair and decayed tooth. The tragedy of woman's alienation is its effect on her role as mother. Her emotions split when Polly showers tenderness and love on her employer's child and rains violence and contempt on her own.

Morrison emphasizes return to origins as in *Song of Solomon* and *Tar Baby.* She receives historical facts in her novels like *Beloved* and *Jazz*. Yet she never dwells in the past. She connects the past to the present, that is, she does not focus on one area or another but on the connection between the two. Her characters interact with the past but never completely swallowed by the past. They escape. Sethe and Denver in *Beloved* actively interact with the past, but before the past can completely destroy them, they escape into a future with possibilities. *Jazz* shows the redemption of Joe and Violet which is indicative of self-discovery within racial tradition. Morrison is historical, in that ,she seeks the roots of characters in their past. She allows her characters to understand themselves in relation to their past while living a life in the present. Morrison's works reflect a dependence on the past as a reliable source of information. She argues that the African American presence in the canonical American literature has shaped its choice, its language, its structure and its meaning. She has recognized both historical and

cultural importance of placing the American and the African American in intimate dependence on each other. Morrison focuses on the runaway slaves, their families, and their communities, and how they live on after their escape from slavery that Morrison represents not as exceptional but central to their American experience. Her narratives highlight the different experiences of European and African Americans. For Morrison, slavery is an integral part of American history as of African American history. She says that the act of enforcing racelessness in literary discourse is itself a racial act.

Morrison rivets her writings on the relationship between the inner lives of the characters and the world within which they find themselves. In her works, memory is the central aspects of inner life by which we interpret the present as well as remember the past. Even the reader is experiencing reality in terms of the characters' inner lives. Morrison subverts time and place. Her novels defy chronological time and unity of place focusing on the inner lives of African American characters.

Morrison does not want to write about white people to get to the center of canonical American literature. But she wants to stay out on the margin and let the center look for her. This deconstructs concept of the center. In fact she does not write about white people and yet the highest recognition is conferred on her in the form Nobel Prize for literature in 1993. Morrison has shown in her novels that throughout American literature slaves have become surrogate selves for meditation on problems of human freedom, its lure and elusiveness. She says that African American population has offered itself up for reflections on human freedom in terms of human potential and the rights of man. Morrison's novel *Paradise* draws the African American presence from the margin

of imagination to the center of American literature. It subtly questions the problems of human rights and human freedom. Morrison opines that African-Americanism rose from a collective need of whites to allay internal fears and to rationalize external exploitation.

Everything is historical for Morrison. Even objects are embedded in history and are the bearers of the past. For those characters closest to the white bourgeois world, objects contain the residues of repressed and unrealized desires. For Ruth Foster in *Song of Solomon*, the daughter of the town's first black doctor and wife of the slumlord Macon Dead, a water mark on the table is the stubborn and ever present reminder of her husband's remorseless rejection. The bowl of flowers around which their hatred crystallized is no longer present but only its sign remains, a residue written into the table. The past is the past and the significant historical transition evoked is perceived as inaccessible and natural. The past is made more remote when it informs a night time dreams. This is the case for Sydney in *Tar Baby* who every night dreams of his boyhood in Baltimore. It was a tiny dream he had each night that he would never recollect from morning to morning. He never knew what it was that refreshed him.

It is impossible to read Morrison's novels without coming to see the neighborhood as a concept crucial to her understanding of history. It defines a Northern social mode rather than a Southern one because it describes the relationship of an economic satellite closest to a larger metropolis rather than separate, subsistence economies like the Southern rural towns of Shalimar and Eloe. It is a Midwestern phenomenon rather than a northeast big city category because it defines the birth of first generation, Northern working class black communities. It is the mode of '40s and it

evokes the many locally specific black populations in the north before these became assimilated to a larger, more generalized and less regionally specific sense of black culture which is referred to as the black community. The fact that Milkman, in *Song of Solomon,* goes aboard on a quest for his past is itself indicative of the difference between the '40s neighborhood and '60s' community. The black youth of the '40s had no need to uncover the past simply because enough of it was still present. For Milkman the past is riddle. It is a reality locked in the verses of children's song whose meaning is no longer explicit because time has separated the words from their historical content. The way children perceive the world is a figure for a mode of existence prior to the advent of the bourgeois society. In *Song of Solomon,* it coincides with the function of song in all marginal cultures as the unwritten text of history and culture.

The quest of Milkman is a journey through geographic space in which the juxtaposition of the city to the countryside represents the relationship of the present to the past. In tracing his roots from the Detroit ghetto to Danville, Pennsylvania, where his father grew up; and then to Shalimar, West Virginia, where his father was born and children still sing of Solomon, Milkman makes sense of the twin text of history: son and genealogy. In doing so he reconstructs a dialectic of historical transition in which individual genealogy evokes the history of black migration and the chain of economic expropriation from hinterland to village, and village to metropolis. The end point of Milkman's journey is the starting point of his race history called slavery. The confrontation with the reality of slavery coming at the end of Milkman's penetration into historical process is liberation because slavery is not portrayed as the origin of history

and culture. The novel opens out to Africa, the source, and takes flight on the wings of Milkman's great grandfather the original Solomon. Morrison transforms the moment of coming to grips with slavery as an allegory of liberation with the myth of the "flying Africans." The fact that geographic space functions for history is indicative of a time when people's past no longer forms continuity with the present.

Morrison's treatment of history bears some similarities to historiographic metafiction. She acknowledges that history is always fictional, always a representation, yet she is also committed to the project of recording African American in order to heal her readers. Morrison's novels attempt to affect the contemporary world of the real. Her work is recognized as contributing a fresh voice to the debates about postmodern history, a voice that challenges centrism and elitism of much of postmodern theory. Morrison's novel *Beloved* reminds that history is not over for African Americans , who are still struggling to write the genealogies of their people and keep a historical consciousness alive. In her novels, she is more concerned with the origins, cycles, and reconstructing agency than with decadence and self-parody. Both *Beloved* and *Jazz* are set in time periods of birth and regeneration – the age of Reconstruction after the Civil War and the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. The term "Harlem Renaissance" is itself a construction of literary historians. It served to reinvent a past in order to forge a present and a future. This move is strikingly similar to the projects of postmodern historical novelists like Toni Morrison.

Morrison wants to raise real and authentic African American history. She deconstructs while taping the well of African American presence and offers a dialectical,

indeterminate character and a doubleness which is itself a postmodern strategy. Morrison's novels are a passionate quest to fill a gap neglected by historians. They record the everyday lives of the "disremembered and unaccounted for." Rejecting the artificial distinction between fiction and history, Morrison considers artists to be the truest of historians. In "Site of Memory," she describes the project of writing *Beloved* as one of fictional reconstruction or literary archeology of imagining the inner life of the slave woman Margaret Garner, her source for Sethe. While working on "*The Black Book,*" a collection of cultural documents recording African America history as life lived, Morrison discovers a news- paper clipping about Garner, a runaway slave who had murdered her children at the moment of capture. Her efforts to reconstruct the past through storytelling have succeeded in giving blood to the scraps and a heartbeat to what has been merely a historical curio.

The desire to uncover the historical reality of the African American past fuels Morrison's fictional project of fictional archeology. Her journey leads her to a site to see what were left behind and to reconstruct the world where these remains imply. Morrison pursues authenticity in her historical renderings. She sees herself as a creative historian who reconstructs and works to deconstruct master narratives of official history. Her novels are a counter-narrative to the master narrative of white hegemony. The example can be taken from *Beloved*. It is the newspaper account of Margaret Garner's deed that reappears in the novel as a harsh official alternative to Sethe's emotional interpretation of events. In this novel, the appearance of the newspaper clipping is one of the few intrusions of the dominant culture's process of historical documentation. Morrison's

commitment to historical remembering arises from her concern about the ignorance of and even contempt for the past that she sees in both contemporary African American and post modern culture. Morrison says that the past is absent or it is romanticized. This culture does not encourage dwelling on, she rather wants the truth about the past come to terms with. Morrison expresses contempt for the Black Power movement's creation of new myths and their retreat to ancient African myths of the far and "misty past." Morrison bemoans the shallow myths of the black liberation movement's Afrocentrism because children can't use and don't need and certainly reject history as imagined. They deserve better; history as life lived. Which Morrison tries to record.

Morrison offers a different conception of the relationship between history and fiction, acknowledging that all history is imagined and that all knowledge of the past is derived from representations such as *Beloved* itself. She attempts to draw a historical portrait closer to "life lived." Morrison's fictional works offer a different theory of postmodernist history. Her novel *Tar Baby* is postmodern because it offers a displacement of history in which the past is reread and reconstructed in the present. For Morrison, history and historicism are one and the same. She constructs a textual representation of the past just as historians do. When Paul D, in *Beloved*, confronts the newspaper account of Sethe's deed, the reader is made aware that textual documents often fail to capture life exactly as it is experienced. Although he cannot read, Paul D finds the representation of Sethe's face to be inauthentic. When he is wrong in denying the truth of Sethe's infanticide, his reaction to the picture of Sethe makes the reader aware of the difference between a real-live original and any simulation either

photographic or textual. Morrison seems to be revising her previous belief that the documents collected in *The Black Book* could offer authentic history as life lived. She suggests that a fictional account of the interior life of a former slave might be more historically real than actual document, which were often written from the perspective of the dominant culture. Thus Morrison points out the gap between representation and reality to suggest that we can only know the past through discourse.

The Middle Passage was a horrific historical reality. All the lives lost can never be accounted because the access to history is always limited by words and by those who have control of textual production. Morrison grounds her fictional work in historical reality and also questions the possibility of ever finding the historical referent outside of preceding representation. As a novelist, Morrison places a great deal of faith in the power of representation to determine the perception of reality. The character of Beloved has become a piece of living history. Her commitment to resurfacing the dead and paying tribute to African Americans of previous generations has made her works moving. With her novels newly acquired place in the canon of American literature, Morrison's representation has helped to contribute to the historical consciousness of Americas. The popularity of *Beloved* and the healing power of its representation have enlarged African American culture's understanding of black women's history and of the history of the Civil War and Reconstruction era.

Morrison's fiction has much to contribute to a postmodern theoretical debate about history and representation. It suggests that thematic interest in temporality relates to a larger concern about history. Morrison reveals both a desire for authentic history as

life-lived and the new historicist realization that history is a fictional construct. The plot of *Beloved* is marked by a parallel dialectic: the mind's struggle between remembering and forgetting the past. Sethe's ambivalent relationship to her cruel past creates a kind of wavelike narrative effect as memories surface and are repressed. Morrison promotes a delving into the historical past. She realizes that past must be processed and sometimes forgotten in order to function in the present and to pass on to the future. Her novels teach that a historical memory has its cost, resulting often in the reopening rather than healing of old psychic wounds.

Morrison novels do not fill in all the gaps of the historical past. The result of her literary archaeology is not a complete skeleton, but a partial one with pieces deliberately missing or omitted. Because the reconstruction is not total, the reader is engaged in the process of imagining history. Morrison's historical project is to unveil the "unspeakable thoughts unspoken," but many things still remain inaudible and buried in the novel, and these gaps can be read as characteristically postmodern. She continues to try to pin it down throughout her novel *Beloved*. Morrison's narrative technique stresses the fact that freed slaves did not experience time or history as an ordered and linear sequence of events. Her narrative techniques are echoed in *Beloved* by Denver who weaves stories constructing out of the string she had heard all her life a ne t to hold Beloved. Thus Morrison through Denver weaves a porous net with her storytelling and leaves gaps to allow some of the mysterious and unspeakable past to escape narration to flow on through. She recognizes the important healing power of narration and understands the

limits of representation of the storytelling process. Morrison writes an authentic African American history of slavery that reconstructs a stable sense of self for her characters.

The belief that “nothing ever dies” haunts Morrison as she tries to protect her characters from reliving the events of her past. She attempts to subvert this recurring cycle by creating a kind of timeless present where past can no longer hurt. In her essay “The Site of Memory,” Morrison uses the metaphor of archaeological site to refer to memories of the past as if they were a place that one could visit to mine for bits of history. The concept of history in her novels is not flattened but rather takes on extra volume to contain the cultural memories of ancestors, to which we can have access only through imagination. Morrison explores the idea of a more synchronic spatial experience of time. Her sense of time can be viewed as an expression of the temporal experiences of African Americans who are often denied a future and are therefore haunted by or retreat to past. But living only in the present moment is like not living at all because life means caring and looking forward, remembering and looking back.

Toni Morrison, in her novels, revisits African American history and contextualizes the black American experiences. Her novels are an exploration of the meaning of blackness. She talks of her writing as archaeological exploration which is one of her major concerns to rewrite African American history from a black perspective. She explores how the intersection of race, class and gender in American society influences the shaping of black life. Exploring black experience in white America, Morrison in her writing attempts to resolve the contradiction inherent in her African American identity. Conscious of her own marginalization within the context of the

mainstream, she values her peripheral existence because it is deeper and more complex. It has a tension, and it relates to the center. Morrison in her novels records the triumphs and complexities of African America life from the painful past of slavery to the frustrating racist present. Her first novel *The Bluest Eye*, a tragic tale about a young black girl's longing for blue eyes, examines how ideologies brought about by the institutions controlled by dominant group influence the construction of the black woman's self- image. It is the deeply rooted double consciousness which afflicts African American existence.

Morrison wants to show that a Negro is born with a veil and gifted with second sight in the American society. This is a society which yields him no true self consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation of double consciousness. This sense is looking at one's self through the eyes of others. Rewriting the history of those who have been invisible in the existing history, to remember the nameless and the forgotten is a difficult task. Yet they have the claim to be a part of history. They need to be accounted for and this is a task of revisionist historiographer. By reclaiming their past, African Americans are learning to come to terms with that painful period in their history which seemed to them best forgotten. Black history is now being interpreted from the perspective of African Americans as subjects rather than objects. The emphasis is on the subtexts that lie beneath the historical facts which will unravel the interior lives of the slaves.

Morrison feels a highest regard for the lives of those who endured slavery, both its victims and its survivors. Her writing is the saga of tortured internal lives of the

former slaves and she emphasizes on the healing process that returns dignity to a people from whom it had been forcibly stripped. In remembering, recounting, listening to, and accepting their individual and collective pasts does this healing take place. In reclaiming, recreating, and resurrecting the of those who lived through slavery, Morrison writes a new history that enables her characters and African Americans to reconsider the wounds of a shameful past and work for the better future.

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