
4. AN INSIGHT IN MATERNAL BONDS AND SELF-REVELATION

In almost all of Morrison's novels we find a prominent aspect of motherhood. The themes of her novels circulate around some very important bonds. We can trace the problem of psychosis in the characters from the way they have been nurtured. The childhood plays an important role in their present personality.

Morrison has always emphasized on the traditional bonding in an individual's life. Roots have been most important for her, and when her characters try to deny their roots, their identity becomes meaningless. Denying their traditions they deny their own existence. This is what leads to a never-ending search for self-revelation.

In Pecola we find lack of nurturance. Pecola is always in search of love. This novel deals with the absence of maternal bonds, which makes the little Pecola suffer all her life. Pecola's mother wants to throw her out of the spotless kitchen of her white-owners: considering Pecola to be a scar in the white kitchen.

In Sula though the nurturance is there but it lacks love and affection, as Sula hears her mother saying, she does not love her. Her mother's words reveal a complete new picture to Sula; having a mother she feels an orphan, and here the journey of self-gratification starts with devastating results.

Tar Baby gives a completely different picture of maternal bonds. As Jadine wants to be a free dove, she did not believe in traditions. Inspired by a desire to 'make it ' in this world. She wants to be free of every bond. Orphaned in her
childhood, adopted by a white family—she wanted to be the way the whites were. She wanted to leave her cultural rules to be accepted in the white world. It is this aspect of her life, which in turn also mirrors her search for truth.

In Beloved the maternal bonds have both the negative and positive aspects of ‘motherhood’. Sethe kills her daughter to save her from slavery. Though a heinous crime, still it could be justified on the ground of ‘slavery’. Sethe wanted to free her daughter from slavery, which was worse than death itself. Beloved is reborn and comes to punish her mother. There are other aspects related to maternal bonds in the novel. There is this thirst of love for a mother; desire to be a daughter also takes a violent turn in the end.

Jazz has a never-ending search for maternal love. Joe and Violet both have a sad history regarding their mothers. They are always in search of love, which they could identify with maternal love. When Joe falls in love with an eighteen-year-old girl Dorcas, what brings him close to her was the wild similarity with his mother. The charm of ‘motherhood’ makes Joe and Violet search for things similar to it. The maternal bonds which Morrison’s novel illustrate gives a prominent pattern of events which shape up the personalities of the characters.

In the following novel Sula, I found a gradual development at the pace of The Bluest Eye. Sula moves further to break free from the limitations imposed by the society. The character of Nel represents a sharp contrast between Sula’s bold adventurous attitude towards life and herself being the follower of traditions. Sula
also like Pecola is drained off the nurturance and warmth of a mother. Her character develops with every kind of entailment.
In that place, where they tore
the nightshade
and blackberry patches
from their roots to make room
for the Medallion City Golf Course,
there was once a neighborhood.

It stood in the hills above the valley town
of Medallion and spread all the way to
the river. It is called the suburbs now, but when
black people lived there it was called the Bottom.

One road, shaded by beeches, oaks, maples and chestnuts,
connected it to the valley. The beeches are gone now,
and so are the pear trees where children sat and
yelled down through the blossoms to passersby.
4.1 SULA! AND HER ENCOUNTER WITH A FLEETING WHOLE SELF (SULA 1973)

The novel Sula is not only an intense tale of two women’s friendship, but also a forceful drama of contending mythic beliefs. The characters of this novel represent no idealistic philosophy of life but a kind of cynicism about the limits of living. They exhibit only their concept to survive in this world. Sula the female protagonist is similar to the heroes, mostly male in other American novels - the nameless narrator in the Invisible Man, Damon cross in Wright’s The Outsiders. Morrison’s Sula seeks her own individuality as a means of self-fulfillment. But as a woman, her desire to make her position in the society independently goes against the most basic principle of the community struggle to survive. Since Sula does not fit into the image of the predefined category of a woman, the community relegates her to the other category of a woman- that of the witch, the evil conjure woman, who is the part of the evil forces of nature. In spite of their attitude towards Sula, the community does not expel her rather it uses her, for its own sake, as a ‘pariah’.¹

Morrison’s treatment and attitude towards Sula most overtly reveal the patterns of the community. Everyone in someway recapitulates the need for an order, a name. But Sula refuses ordering and naming so for the community she becomes an embodiment of evil. By ignoring or deliberately violating the convictions she threatens the assumption by which life in the bottom is organized and made meaningful. By naming her, they seek to bring her within the framework
of their worldview but they fail to do so. Morrison stabilizes early on the events making Sula’s identity essentially a negative one.

Sula is an allegory about people so paralyzed by the horror of the past and by their demands of just staying alive, that they are unable to embrace the possibility of freedom until the movement for it has passed. Toni Morrison’s extravagantly, beautiful, doomed characters are locked in a world where hope for the future is a foreign commodity, yet they are enormously, achingly alive. And this book is about them and about how their beauty is drained back and frozen. It is a howl of love and rage, playful and funny as well as hard and better. All this comes to light with the free disposition of Sula.

Morrison has portrayed the characters of Sula and Nel in a complementary manner. These women represent their search for fulfillment, making efforts in their own different way. The awareness as being black and female with a restriction of their own community, Nel and Sula are drawn to each other, sharing dreams of freedom and excitement:

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

What they discovered instigated in them a quest to search their true self.²

Sula and Nel are required to construct the role of the father from that assembly that marks the male gauntlet. It is Sula alone who climbs the tree with the boy Chicken Little showing him a world beyond the river. Finally both Sula and Nel are victims of village values that define a "pure" woman as an adoring and possessive holder of her man, a glade bearer of sons, even though the labor required to produce a boy child is exceedingly difficult.

The families of Nel and Sula contrast each other. Nel's tense mother barricades herself against racial humiliation and her own origin behind her exaggerated neatness and suppression of emotions. She rubs away all Nel's spontaneity, negating her quest for self-identity. Sula is spontaneous and her home is disordered but equally negative. It is dominated by the grand mother Eva, who uses hatred "to define [...] strengthen [...] or protect [...]. From routine vulnerabilities" (31). Therefore we could see that both Nel and Sula were nurtured in a completely different environment.³

Sula was distinctly different; she was born with a birthmark over her eye, making her presence felt entirely different. This was the moment when she started being defined by the people of the community in their own way, Each observer read it in such a way as to validate his or her own interpretation of Sula's identity.
When she was a child it was seen as a rose bud. Jude, believing her both threatening and enticing sees it as a snake. Shadark who fishes for a living and who thinks of her as a kindred alien spirit, sees it as a tadpole, The community reads it as ashes symbolizing both her presumed indifference to her mother’s fiery death and her association with hellish forces.⁴

Sula’s character emerges having a color that was not known to the society, though adhering and being effected by everyone around her, Eva’s arrogance and Hannah’s self-indulgence merged in her. Eva begins her life as the victim of white and male dominated society when her husband abandons her and her children. She is left with little food and no money in the middle of the winter. She saves the life of her baby by using the last of her lard to remove the fecal stones from his bowls. Realizing the hopelessness of the situation she leaves her children with a neighbour and disappears for eighteen months. Eva the grand mother of Sula, independent and decidedly a man-lover loves and hates intensely, is strong by her virtue of her wit, will and the strength that is nurtured and sustained by her hatred for Big Boy, the unfaithful father of her three children; a hatred she says keeps her alive and happy. When her daughter Hannah asks her if she ever cuddled her children - Eva’s answer is rightly to the point:

Play? Wasn’t no body playing in 1895 […] what would I look like leapin round that room playin with younglins with three beets to my name? No time, there wasn’t no time[…] if you sleepin quiet I thought, O lord they dead
and put my hand over your mouth to feel if the breath was comin. (68)

Eva lived life her own way. As a mother she was different than the pre-defined role of a mother.  

As a mother she has given life and so when her son Plum returns from the war and attempts to “crawl back into her womb” (71), she acts in her usual decisive manner; she burns him to death” (71-72). Thus Eva both gives life and takes it away. What one might say is that Eva, is scarcely a chaste, helpmate of patriarchy. She is a dismembered black woman who refuses to expire in the backwash of any man’s history. She like Shadrack says, “Uh Uh Nooo” to the given arrangement of things in order to defeat the dreadful course of capitalism’s joke; she subjects herself to dismemberment sacrificing a leg for the sake of insurance so the myth of her loss is told.

The other character of the novel named Hannah; Eva’s second daughter is a lovely character. Widowed young and left with her daughter Sula, she returns to her mother’s house, evidently intent on never marrying again, perhaps because she has inherited from her mother the love of maleness for its own sake. But far from being the seductress traditionally dressed in red, who manipulates men to her own end, Hannah is elegant, making no special efforts to be alluring other than her natural sensuality, setting no demands on the men she knows. She is extremely careful about when she sleeps with, for sleeping with someone implied for her a measure of trust and a definite commitment, so she becomes as Morrison puts it, “a
day light lover”, sex being a part of the ordinary and pleasant activity she does everyday rather than a hidden act at night.

Including other qualities it was man-love that Eva bequeathed to her daughters. The Peace women simply loved maleness for its own sake”, Sula was nurtured with every aspect of Peace women, resulting in something entirely different, Sula’s personality as a whole gets its share from the detached maternal bond when she overhears her mother saying that though she loved her, she didn’t like her; Sula becomes a kind of emotional orphan. Like Pecola Breedlove in The Bluest Eye, Sula lives with her mother’s rejection, Sula becomes a center of negative energy and withheld emotions. When Hannah suffers a horrible death by fire, Sula is mesmerized by the sight of her mother “dancing in flames and watches with interest rather than with pain and running to her aid” (67). Her recollection of that moment is a haunting revelation of her emotional paralysis.

Paralysis- as she phrases years later “I didn’t mean anything, I never meant anything. I stood there watching her burn and was thrilled” (104). The whole episode suggests her distance from emotions that binds family members in affection and loyalty. All such cruel emotions were her own because she was not nurtured with the directions, instructions and traditional norms that could have given her love and affection. 

She- pleasing and searching her true self, did whatever pleased and suited her. At the core of her personality, where the pattern of self-confirmation and ethical sense should develop, is a void:
As willing to feel pain as to give pain, to feel
pleasure as to give pleasure, hers was an
experimental life - The first experience taught
her there was no other that you could count on;
the second that there was no self to count on
either. She had no center, no speck around
which to grow. (102-3)

Maternal speech is sparse in this novel; mothers and daughters never quite succeed in addressing each other directly, mothers fail to communicate the stories they wish to tell. It was the trip to south that makes Nel realize herself: “I’m me”, Nel whispers; “Each time she said the word ‘me’ there was a gathering in her like power, like joy, like fear” (24-25). It was this new sense of me that allowed her to cultivate a friend, with whom she shared her dreams and excitement. 7

Morrison through the revealing contrast of Nel and Sula is able to express the impact of the community on the individual’s quest for self. Both these females illustrate opposing methods of dealing with the daily pain induced by the society for their being ‘Black’ and ‘female’. Sula’s quest for experience is an attempt to fill the empty space, both within and without, and this to confirm her own ego. She wants the total freedom, which she finally identifies as “the free fall” (104), that is to live vitally gratifying and observing her own impulses.

Sula in this novel is not looking for another entity but for another version of herself for a total union. Possible only when each perceives the other as possibly being his or herself, Sula abandons any attempt at union and seeks only herself,
Nel’s transfer of her symbiotic attachment from Sula to Jude severs the bond between the two girls that had supported both of them. From this point they are both ‘partial people, each lacking emotionally what the other originally supplied, in both of them each half of a figurative whole self. Morrison has acknowledged that “there is a little bit of both in each of those two women, and [...] if they have been one person, I suppose they would have been rather a marvelous person. But each lacked something that the other one had”.

Sula emerges as an embodiment of her metaphysical chaos in pursuit of an activity both proper and sufficient to herself. What ever Sula has become, what she is, is a matter of her own choice, often ill-formed and ill-informed including her loneliness which is very much her own.

Part I of the novel ends not with the wedding of Nel and Jude in the year 1927, but their marriage becomes ‘the’ event in the Bottom, bringing together the community in a moment of feasting, revelry and renewal. But as Eva has already told us, and as Hannah’s death clearly illustrates, the dream of wedding, means death. This wedding seems to mean death, not only for Nel and Sula’s girl friendship but also for Jude and Nel’s previous sense of themselves. Jude’s reason for pressing Nel into marriage, reinforce our sense of the bottom’s definition of a woman. Nel realizes her desire for order by making an identity through a man rather than through herself. Two of them together will make on Jude from this point onwards; Nel becomes one of the voices of the community. The last half of the novel is built around her position as one who has some understanding of Sula,
yet who can’t see the world in the same way. She serves them as a character in the middle between the polarities of Sula and the community.9

Despite our misgivings at Sula’s insistence and at the very degree of alienation Morrison accords her, we are prepared to accept her negative, nay saying freedom as a necessary declaration of independence by the black female writer in a pursuit of vocabulary of gesture both verbal and motor that leads us as well as the writer away from the limited repertoire of powerless virtue and sentimental pathos. Sula is neither tragic nor pathetic; she does not amuse or accommodate; for black audience she is not consciousness of the black race personified, nor tragic “mulatto”, nor for white ones, is she “Mamie”, “Negress”, “Coon”, or “Maid”, she is herself and Morrison quite rightly seems little concerned if any of us at this late date of Sula’s appearance in the “house of Fiction” minds her heroin or not.10

As his helpmate Nel is a buffer between Sula’s desire for her own autonomy and the restrictions the outside world places on them, Nel’s life in essence, revolves around Jude’s, her husband, and their three children while Sula leaves Bottom believing that she can create for herself an identity that exists beyond community and social expectations. ”An artist with no art form” (121), Sula uses her life as her medium:

Exploring her own thought and emotions,
giving them full reign, feeling no obligation to
please no body unless their pleasure pleased
her. (118-119)
When Sula returns to bottom Nel feels elated but things were different now as Morrison symbolically conveys the message through the plague of Robins that takes place after her return.

Upon her return to Madillion, Sula takes on an essential community role as a pariah. In mainstream fiction those who deviate radically from the norm generally become social outcasts. By contrast the Pariahs of Morrison’s world are bounded in a relationship with the center, they remain within the boundaries of neighborhood to perform an important function. They may be ostracized for violating the social codes of the community, but they are not expelled. Around Sula the community organizes collective life. With Sula in their midst the people of Bottom make an effort to cherish one another.

While the Bluest Eye focuses on the mythical effects resulting from the pressure of dominant culture, Sula explores much more fully the genesis of collective myths and rituals in the community’s daily existence. As the tally of Sula’s social infraction mounts, a communal grandmother to an institution, trying out and discarding everybody’s husband and slinging the food offered at church suppers, Sula flouts the values that ensure collective cohesion. The community responds by casting her in the role of public witch, taking preventative measures against her malevolence, yet accepting her presence in the community. Far from being confined to one of the poles authentically assigned by Judeo-Christian mythologies, Sula acquires the form of numinous ambivalence. She becomes at the same time a curse and a blessing for Bottom. She reactivates one of the important
function in the mythical world of the black community and instigates a process of purification and revival in its rank.

Rather than following a ritual of expulsion in the Western mode, the collectivity renews itself in response to the negativity they locate in Sula. Once the source of their personal misfortune was identified, they had an option to protect and love one another. They began to "cherish their husbands and protect their children, repair their homes and in general band together against the devil in their midst" (99-102). Their conviction of Sula’s evilness changed them in accountable yet mysterious ways.  

What Sula does for Nel, as has always done in friendship, is to share her experimental knowledge with her; by so doing Sula underscores the illusion on which Nel’s life is based. By sleeping with Jude Sula reveals their (Nel and her) different value systems, as it was not so much an act of passion but more as an, exploratory act. Nel’s life gets finished it was like loosing everything husband, the illusion and in the end ‘friend’. “That was too much. To lose Jude and not have Sula to talk about it because it was Sula that he had left her for” (110). Sula strips Nel of her illusion, leaving her with nothing she can rely on.  

But this experimental life also halts at a place when Sula discovers her desire to be possessive. She finds Ajax, beautifully male and heroic, having similar instincts to fly above the parameters set by the society. They love each other and find another version of themselves in each other; Ajax also finds in her the woman whose life was her own. This women Ajax loved, after his love for airplanes. There was nothing in between. And when he was not sitting enchanted listening to his
mother’s words, he thought of airplanes, and pilots and the deep sky that held them both. Gradually Sula starts knowing the pleasure of the relationship, now she wants to possess it forever and this is what makes Ajax rush off, making her experience the pain of absence she has unwittingly inflicted on her friend Nel. Only a fleeting encounter with a whole self is available then.

Realizing the essential loneliness of her stance in life, she sings—There isn’t any more new song and she has sung all the ones there are. Now she was left all alone to die. Both Nel and Sula die having the same emptiness, never being able to fulfill themselves. Both of them at a certain point come to know that they needed each other. Their search for fulfillment leads them to different paths, making Sula an evil in the eyes of Bottom and Nel good. Sula while dying says:

You think I do not know what your life is like, just because I ain’t living it?
I know what every colored woman in this country is doing.

This illustrates the difference between their philosophies:

What’s that?
Dying Just like me. But the difference is they dying like a stump.
Me, I going down like one of those redwoods. I sure did live in this world,
Ready? What have you got to show for it?
And what goes on in it, which
is to say I got me.
Lonely, ain’t it?
Yes. But my lonely is mine. Now your
lonely is somebody else’s.
Made by somebody else and handed to you.
Ain’t that something? A second-hand lonely. (143)

This is how Sula, toiled, wandered and did whatever to fulfill her quest. Though she did hurt many including Nel in her journey of self-exploration. She could not attain the wholeness, she all her life yearned for. We though cannot justify her acts, could still say that her intentions were not wrong. As Sula herself says in the end.

How you know? “Sula asked” Know what? Nel wouldn’t look at her. About who was good, how you know it was you? What you mean? I mean may be it wasn’t you, May be it was me. (146)

In relationship between Nel and Sula Morrison demonstrates the female’s rites-of passage in their peculiar richness and impoverishment, the fabric of paradoxes-betrays and sympathies, silences, and aggression, advances and sudden retreats transmitted from mother to daughter, female to female by mimetic gesture. What women learn primarily from other women’s strategies of survival and homicide is not new to any one. Indeed this vocabulary of references constitutes the chief revisionist albeit implicit, feature of woman’s liberation efforts. Morrison
is not writing according to a formula, which demands that a female agent should
demonstrate a simple, transparent love between women. In doing so she identified
those meanings of womanhood suppressing the pre-defined public policies.

The women in Medallion are trapped by their own desire for security. They
are unable to perceive their own beauty and potentiality. In contrast to her more
domestic sister, Sula sees herself as “one of the fliers. She has the thrill of the “free
fall” (104), the full surrender to the downward flight” (104). With Sula a new
desire to join with Ajax and create something with him comes the urge to bind him,
she begins to imitate the community values held by Nel. She cleans the unkept
house, for the first time she stands before a mirror, “trying to decide whether she
was good looking or not” (131). This newfound concern with her reflected image
forebodes an adoption of the self-negating standards of feminity. 13

Sula is not the ’other’ as one kind of reading would suggest or perhaps as we
might wish but a figure of the rejected and the vain part of the self- our self- who
through corruption and selfishness can’t speak for us on the lower frequencies-
though she could very well. The importance of this text is that she speaks at all.

In a conversation with Robert Steptro, Toni Morrison confirmed certain
critical conjectures that are made here concerning the character of Sula:

[Sula] was hard for me, very difficult to describe as
a woman who could be used a classic type of evil
force. Other people could use her that way. And at
the same time I did not want to make her freakish or
repulsive or unattractive. I was interested at that
time in doing a very old worn-out idea which was
to do something good and evil but putting it in
different terms. 14

As Morrison goes on to discuss the idea, Sula and Nel to her mind are alterity
of agents—“two sides of the same person or two sides of one extraordinary character”.

If we identify Sula as a kind of counter mythology we are saying that she is no
longer bound by a reject pattern of prediction. Sula’s strategic place as a potential
being might argue that subversion itself is that-law breaking aspect of liberation that
women must confront from its various angles in its different guises; Sula’s outlawry
may not be the best kind but she has the will towards rebellion is itself a stunning
idea.

Toni Morrison’s another novel Tar Baby also exhales the same rebellious spirit
as Sula. Jadine the heroine of this novel wants to live life her own way. The character
of Jadine represents the individual freedom whereas the character of Son represents
one’s traditions. Jadine has proved her potentials in the white world in both
educational and professional fields. She is the one who very clearly proves that she is
not only beautiful but intelligent as well.
1 When a woman tries to step outside the community norms, as a custom she is given a title according to her exposition. Sula in her community is seen as a witch, an evil woman. But after having an insight into her character we find that these titles are contrary to her personality as she is one such female protagonist who is similar to the heroes. Her acts reveal her personality as she wants to live life her own way through self-exploration, see “Community and Nature The Novels of Toni Morrison: The Journal of Ethnic Studies 7,no.4”, Feb. 1980. Rept. in Black Women in Afro-American Literature: Perspective on Black Women Writers. Ed. Barbara Christian.1980, 52.

2 Nel and Sula are presented as two different parts of the same coin. Though different in their perspective they have intimacy for each other. As they found in each other the affection they were looking for. For an elaborate view on this aspect, see Christian, Barbara. “The Contemporary Fables of Toni Morrison, Part-2”. Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present+Eds. Henry, Louise Gates Jr. and K.A Appiah. Amistad Literary Series. Amistad Press: New York.1993, 81.

3 Both Sula and Nel came close and became friends on the basis of intimacy, need for self-recognition and independence. Their families represent such a contrast, which ultimately resulted in negating their lives. It was this negation that served for close bonds between Sula and Nel. For an elaborate view on this topic, see Lee, H. Dorothy. “The Quest for Self Triumph and Failure in the works of Toni Morrison”. Black Women Writers 1905-1980. Ed. Mary Evans.N.P.: n.d.351.

4 In every novel of Toni Morrison ‘Nature’ plays a prominent role. All her main characters arrive with a definite intimation through Nature. Sula is born with a birthmark, which is interpreted differently by everyone. This birthmark indicates the pre-planned denotation by nature that she is going to be different. Shadark’s association of the birthmark with a tadpole links Sula to the river, an image of the flux of life, while Jude’s designation of the mark as a copperhead connects it with the community’s perception of evil. For details, see Byrman, Keith E. “Beyond Realism”. Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present+Eds. Henry, Louise Gates Jr. and K.A Appiah. Amistad Literary Series. Amistad Press: New York.1993, 111.


6 Sula gets drained of her emotions. But at this part of life she is not to be blamed entirely as she was nurtured that way. Rejection breeds in her the negative energy as she watches death with interest but without emotions. For details on this aspect, see Rubenstein, Roberta. “Pariahs and Community”. Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present+Eds. Henry, Louise Gates Jr. and K.A Appiah. Amistad Literary Series. Amistad Press: New York.1993, 133.

7 In Sula Morrison has shown the lack of maternal bonds not only in terms of drifting away from one’s roots but also in terms of lack of nurturance from the maternal side. In Sula mothers have failed to communicate the stories they wish to tell. The self-realization as an individual gradually comes when one day Nel realizes all her potentials. For details regarding this topic, see Christian, Barbara. “The Contemporary Fables of Toni Morrison, Part-2”. Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present+Eds. Henry, Louise Gates Jr. and K.A Appiah. Amistad Literary Series. Amistad Press: New York.1993, 78.

8 Sula implies the idea of the double consciousness, which Morrison refers in her interview when she says that though Nel’s mother forced the creativity out of her, Nel wants that creativity, anyway. This is what makes it possible for her to have a very close friend who is so different from her. Morrison wanted to resonate the cause that attracted Nel for Sula and Sula for Nel. See, Morrison, Toni. “Intimate Things in Place: A Conversation with
Nel illustrates a sharp contrast to Sula’s perspectives. She wants to attain fullness through a man whereas Sula wants to achieve selfhood all by herself. Though both of them do come together due to the born intimacy, but they fail to see the complementary things one lacked while the other had. For details, see Christian, Barbara. “The Contemporary Fables of Toni Morrison, Part-2”. *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* Eds. Henry, Louise Gates Jr. and K.A Appiah. Amistad Literary Series. Amistad Press: New York. 1993, 82-83.


11 At one part where Sula’s self-exploratory methods shatter the social infrastructure, the other part does highlight the deformities in social bonds. The resultant effect gives a new life to the whole community, as people started strengthening the bonds, they started cherishing the relationships. For an elaborate view on this, see Harding, Wendy and Jacky Martin. Eds. “Gender and Survival”. *A world of Difference, An Inter-Cultural Study of Toni Morrison’s Novels*, Greenwood Press West Port, Connecticut: London. 1994, 118.

12 Sula highlighted the false image of communal bonds, which Nel thinks will give her support and security. Though Sula did commit mistakes, such mistakes were in the form of self-revelation. Sula comes as a daring woman who could live life the way she wanted. She does reflect the same qualities of the whores in The Bluest Eye, China, Poland and Maginot. Though whores by profession, they are honest. They also project the fragile bonds between a husband and wife. For details, see Christian, Barbara. “The Contemporary Fables of Toni Morrison, Part-2”. *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* Eds. Henry, Louise Gates Jr. and K.A Appiah. Amistad Literary Series. Amistad Press: New York. 1993, 89.

13 Here once again Morrison reflects the black male attitude towards their families. They do not want to stay at one place. Sula comes out as a woman who is able to perceive her beauty and potential. She does get things she wanted to a considerable extent through her potentials yet she doesn’t perceive the importance of roots and is never able to achieve ‘wholeness’. For an elaborate view on this, see Harding, Wendy and Jacky Martin. Eds. “Gender and Survival”. *A world of Difference, An Inter-Cultural Study of Toni Morrison’s Novels*, Greenwood Press West Port, Connecticut: London. 1994, 70.

14 Morrison did succeed in showing the suppressed through the evil. Why Sula’s negativity gets highlighted is due to the fact that she lacked a bond with the other-self, her roots. Still she stands as a woman who has the courage to come out and live life her own way. See, Morrison, Toni. “Intimate Things in Place: A Conversation with Toni Morrison”. Interview with Robert, B. Strepto. Amistad Literary Series: New York. 1993, 380.
4.2 JADINE AND SON: A STUDY OF TRAGIC SELF-ALIENATION
(TAR BABY 1981)

This is a story of the whole community, which is held captive in the present day West. Depicting Jadine the heroine of the novel Morrison illustrates the alienation, which Blacks have attained living in a mirage. They do not realize their roots and cultural bond, which has given them identity. Being self-alienated, they are not able to realize its true nature. Morrison has symbolically retold a folk tale-in which a farmer tries to catch a rabbit, whom he sees as a thief by making a tar baby, virtually attractive, sticky and placing it in the middle of his cabbage patch. In Morrison's version, the folk tale is extended to a contemporary fable as she analyzes the complexities of class, race and sex and how they affect Afro-Americans still held captive in the present day West.

While Morrison was still in a process of writing Tar Baby she delivered the 1979 commencement address at Barnard College in which she expressed the precise thematic concerns of the novel:

I am suggesting that we pay as much attention to our nurturing sensibilities as to our ambition. You are moving in the direction of freedom and the function of freedom is to free somebody else. You are moving towards self-fulfillment and the consequences. Of that fulfillment should be to discover that they are something just as important as you are. In your rainbow journey
journey make choices based only on your security and your
safety [...] let your might and power emanate from the place in
you that is nurturing and caring. ¹

In her version, the farmer is Valerian Street, the owner of the Candy Empire.
The aging candy emperor retires to a Caribbean island, Isle de chevalier, whose
people had produced the sugar and cocoa, from which the candy was made and who
are left with neither Cocoa, sugar nor with money. Valerian’s only concern is the
green house.

He brings with him his much young wife. She thinks about black men in a
complete negative way. She believes that a strange black man would be in a white
woman’s room only because he intends to sexually assault her. Not only do the
whites have this kind of opinion but also the blacks, who are spellbound by the
charms of the white world. They also believe that their cultural heritage is but an
inferior one. Valerian also brings with him his two trustworthy black servants
Sydney and Ondine; Jadine is their orphan niece, who is being brought up by the
money of Valerians. Because of their industriousness they label themselves as
Philadelphia Negroes and see themselves as a cut above their slovenly brethren, in
actuality they are cut off from any community in order to keep their jobs. They see
in Son a threat to the racial respectability that they have achieved. Though they are
servants they have taken on to middle class values and being black they feel
contaminated by anyone of their race who does not uphold the image they have
created.
Valerian the model of Jadine’s pursuit of power was named for an emperor and had a candy bar named after him. The bar pink and white confection was successful only in black neighborhoods, while white boys think its name and color truly homosexual. The family provided Valerian with everything including, a good wife when time came. Deciding that he would not have the same obsession with the company that his relatives had, he used some of his income to purchase Isle des Chevaliers, as a place of retirement and escape. When his first marriage did not work out he divorced Margaret, Miss Maine, whom he loved in large part because her complexion reminded him of his candy bar. Despite flaws in the order, such as Michael’s absence and Margaret’s mental aberrations, Valerian considers himself a successful deity. When Jadine was orphaned, Valerian financed her education and early modeling career as a favour to Sydney and Ondine. He created thus a powerful patriarchal system. ²

This shows that behind the success and status of Valerians lies in the support of the black community. As it were the blacks who bought their candies. This in turn also represents an effort by blacks to have things that are associated with whites – it is to have their things and become them.

Valerian can nominate the Isle des Chevaliers as a relaxed, benevolent, even innocent tyrant because the people who sustain him are divided against each other. So in their first solitary encounter, Jadine projects all the fantasies of white American seeing Son as an ape and a rapist (TB 120), with “Uncivilized reform school hair. Mau Mau, Attica chain gang hair” (97).
In Tar Baby there is always a gap of distortion between the white people’s desires and their acts. They do not act in accordance with their intentions and their motivations are always inscrutable, perhaps nonexistent. They are irremediably split, and the patriarchal system of authority replicates the deficiency at all levels. Reproduction is indeed the key to hierarchy and the principal of its enforcement. And never at any stage is the inherent contradictions clearly acknowledged. It is compound by the illusion accepted by both dominant and dominated to make the system bearable. Thus in Tar Baby once he has established his dominion; Valerian thinks of nothing else but concealing its inherent spuriousness. All the time he had been preoccupied “with the construction of the world and its inhabitants according to his imagined message” a message that “imperceptibly he had made up”(209). When the shattering revelation about his son comes up, he is left helpless. Fascinated by his ideal universe, he had simply shut out reality. At the back of unearned dominion there is a form of inveterate weakness, incapacity to confront reality.³

The return of Son as the very parodic Black Messiah at Christmas time is sufficient to blow up the temple of pretense that the mock Roman emperor Valerian had erected around himself. The Babylon fortress crumbles because of its precarious elevation. In his responsibility Valerian chooses to disregard the rules that he had himself edicted; instead of turning the alleged Negro rapist over to the police, he invites him to his table. In fact, the disrupting conflict arises not from this one act of unpredictability but from Valerian’s very predictable absence of compassion when dealing with a vaguely parodic theft of apples: Satan is invited to
God’s table, but simple mortals are nevertheless forbidden to eat the fruits of His garden.

From that moment Morrison’s ironic universe, the white fortress changes into an unkempt greenhouse overrun with weeds, and Son stands out as the black archangel proclaiming in withering anathema the Apocalypse of the whites dying of their own corruption. Because they had not the dignity of wild animals who did not eat where they defecated but they could defecate some more by tearing up the land and that is why they loved property so much because they had tilled it soiled it defecated on it and they loved more than anything the places where they shit.”(174-5) In spite of the excessive stridency of Son’s words, the dominant race is justly charged with exploitation at the very moment when its representatives are showing signs of compassion: Hasn’t Jadine been educated at the old candy maker’s expanse? Yet just when Son’s self-righteous rage and Jadine’s personal success places them in a better position to cope with the age-old racism, they fail to come to a conclusion between themselves.  

It is an earned moment when Miss Morrison gives Valerian Street the following revelation or benediction:

At some point in life worlds beauty becomes enough.
You don’t need to photograph, paint or even remember it. It is enough. No record of it needs to be kept and you don’t need someone to share it with or tell it to. When that happens- that letting go- you let go because you can. The world will always be there-
when you wake it will be there as well. So you can
sleep and there is reason to wake. A dead hydrangea
is as intricate and lovely as one in bloom. Bleak sky
is as seductive as sunshine, miniature orange trees
without blossom or fruit are not defective; they are
that. So the windows of the greenhouse can be
opened and the weather let in. The latch on the door
can be left unhooked, the muslin removed, for the
soldier ants are beautiful too and whatever they do
will be part of it. (242)

Although Valerian has been largely innocent of the crimes in this novel
visited upon blacks and whites, Miss Morrison concludes:

An innocent man is a sin before God, inhuman
and therefore unworthy. No man should live
without absorbing the sins of his kind, the
foul air of his innocence, even if it did wilt rows
of angle trumpets and cause from them to fall
from their vines. (243)

Morrison gives a definite punishment to characters even for their ignorance,
which caused much pain in the lives of other people.\(^5\)

Sydney and Ondine's niece Jadine who is spending few days on the Isle is
drawn by Morrison to resemble the Afro-American princess beautiful, bright,
educated and ambitious. She has completed a degree in Art History, has been a
successful model in Paris and is wooed by a wealthy Parisian who has proposed marriage. Her major concern is making it. Being comfortable and happy.

In Tar Baby Sydney and Ondine sacrifice personal identity by following their employer to a Caribbean island. Although they speak of returning to Philadelphia, they are confined to Valerian Street’s miniature kingdom and reduced to their role as servants. “Yours for life” as Margaret tells Valerian (24). In the eyes of the island community they are devoid of individuality: “kingship and Beulah” for Margaret (25), “bow-tie” and “machete-hair” for Therese (92). Jadine and Son though at home in their respected communities of Eloie and New-York, have similarly chosen exile and are thereby vulnerable to the resultant depersonalized or rather loss of definition. Away from Eloie, Son “barely remembered his real original name […] the same that called forth the true him” (119). And as she returns to Paris at the end of the novel, Jadine adjusts to the limited but practical existential possibilities of the “soldier ant”. (250-51)

While Jadine is in the process of sorting out the direction for her life, Son a renegade intrudes into the household. His presence little by little throws the entire house into a state of disarray, which exposes the hostilities, lies, secrets and untold narratives that had been concealed under the guise of being "like a family".

In the wake of the chaos that ensues from the revelation about Valerian’s wife Margaret’s abuse of her son, Jadine and Son become lovers and flee from the island. Jadine is warned implicitly and explicitly about the danger of rejecting her cultural heritage - when one happy day Jadine is confronted with an African woman with "skin like Tar" (45) making her feel “lonely and inauthentic". (48)
But Jadine seeks to remake Son into her image of the African prince, which is undoubtedly the only way she could accept him. Both Son and Jadine are different not only in terms of their cultural nourishment, which by luck Son has but also in terms of their psyche. Son is from Eloe an "all black town in Florida" (172), Jadine is from "Baltimore, Philadelphia and Paris" (173) and as Son takes her "she is not from anywhere" (173). While he values the nurturing aspect of home and fraternity, she is rootless and places greater value on what she can own.  

In contrast to Jadine Son is a man who does not belong to the white society for he lives in Eloe, a country of the past. He is a runaway criminal who does not have any future. He refuses to contend with the social forces, which deprive him of fulfillment. What he sees as a solution is to retreat, to run away. He does not care to change what is lacking.

Son is as disgusted with Jade's smug sophistication as she with his uncut diamond image. He even calls her a "White girl" because she has sold herself to white values and attitudes towards beauty and sexuality and money. However the sheer attraction of the opposites temporarily overrides these intellectual resistances. On a picnic they take together, Jade, wearing her Easter white cotton dress- all temptation and dare, falls into a pit of tar patch. In this almost too obviously symbolic scene, Jade's whiteness is literally immersed in blackness.  

Son insists Jadine to go to Eloe, his "home". The women in Eloe represents her familiar past, while the women in the trees, represents historical tradition in that they are the women who mate with the runaway slaves according to Caribbean folk. All these women symbolize Jadine's refusal to define her in terms of familiar
past, historical traditions and cultural heritage. By rejecting these women she rejects the very source that could nurture and teach her and by denying them she both literally and metaphorically denies her own mother. But it is more of as Adrienne Rich describes this denial - "it is metaphobia -rebellion against the imposed female image". 8

All of the mother figures in Jadine's life her own mother, Odine, Margaret, and the collective night women are in some way threatening to her. Parentless, she lacks a model of either positivity or a "daughter". Cultureless she lacks a clear sense of how to achieve authenticity in either black or white world.

Jadine is a cultural orphan who lacks a clear model for either her female sexuality or her cultural history, as a woman she is confronted with the consequences of such inner confusions. When she visits her lover Son's hometown, she stays in his Aunt Pesa's house, where she feels claustrophobically enclosed in a dark, windowless, almost airless box of a room. Working out to "the blackest nothing she had ever seen" (251) and, figuratively, into her own naked soul- she feels over whelmed and defenseless. " May be if she stood there long enough light would come from somewhere and she could see shadows the outline of something a bush a tree a line between earth and sky, a heavier darkness to show where this very house stopped and space began" (251). As the language suggest, Jadine experiences herself in an unbounded space that threatens the carefully defined limits of her complacent daytime self.

Though the relationship between Jadine and son suggests a dialectical tension between opposites, a synthesis is never achieved. In fact such diametrically
opposing values are rarely reconciled except in the symbolic terms of myth and legends, and it is through those that Morrison equivocatingly concludes her narratives. In the folk tale of Tar Baby, Brer Rabbit is enmeshed in the deceptive lure but uses his wits to extricate himself and regain his freedom. In Morrison’s novel Son cites the story to illustrate his contention, that women like Jadine are tar babies-ensnarers of black men, convinced of the necessity for preserving the traditional culture, he regards the tar baby as the white world’s corrupting lure for upwardly mobile black people. Once they are caught by the lure of affluence, they become psychologically and materially enslaved.  

Like the "good colored girls" of the Bluest Eye, who mask their funkiness in order to edge up into the white world’s greater opportunities, Jadine initially wants nothing to do with a man who reminds her of what she is grateful to have left behind. Son’s elemental rawness, alarms her, threatens her sense of civilized restraint. She sees him through the eyes of both sets of her parents, fearing his aggressive eroticism much as Margaret Street does and loathing his unkempt, animal like appearance as Ondine and Sydney do. Yet his crudity not only repels but also attracts her. 

Morrison juxtaposes Son’s romanticized dreamlike version of Eloé. We are given a more closer and qualified view when Son brings Jadine home to visit. Jadine immediately feels the constriction of the rigid lines which divide gender into separate male and female realms, when she cannot “understand (or accept) her being shunted off with Ellen and the children while the men grouped on the porch
Jadine’s unwillingness to adapt to this sex-role segregation and, consequently, her separation from Son are prefigured from the outset:

He woke thinking of a short street of yellow houses with white door which women opened wide and called out, “come on in you honey you”, their laughter sprawling like a quilt over the command.

But nothing sprawling in the woman’s voice.

“I’m never lonely,” it said. Never”. (119-120)

The voice is of course Jadine’s. Son’s efforts to insert his own dreams into her are futile. 10

Even Michael the Son of Valerian admonishes her for abandoning her 'history' and her 'people'. Jadine’s response to this criticism reveals that this judgment of her is essentially valid. As she reflects on her conversation with Michael - she admits – “I know what I was learning [...] But he did make me want to apologize for what I was doing, for what I felt. For liking "Ava Maria" better than gospel music [...]. Picasso is better than an Ithumba Mask (74). The fact that they intrigued him is a proof of his genius, not the mask-makers.

In the above statement Jadine not only reveals her negative, stereotypical attitude towards Afro-Americans and African culture, but she attempts to justify her distance from her culture. Indeed having been raised by her Uncle and her Aunt to mirror rather than question white western values; she rejects what those values reject. 11
In Tar Baby where the relationship between class and race is pivotal, Morrison introduces white characters, the unhealthy Valerian and his wife, as well as non-American blacks Gideon and Therese, who are practically serfs in their Caribbean home. As Morrison creates a body of work her analysis of the society through the creation of diverse characters ask basic questions whether race, caste and sex are separate entities at least in America.

What Son wants in terms of beauty and blackness, Jadine provides even by adding to it and becoming the epitome of femininity proving both the aspects of beauty and brains. To Jadine, Son's community is suffocatingly provincial and his friends are uneducated inferiors, a pack of Neanderthals who think sex is dirty and strange. Yet Jadine associated sexuality with animality and is equally concerned to keep her own eroticism reined in. Son's peers regard Jade as his prize woman, as if: “she was a Cadillac he had won, or stolen or even bought for all they knew” (112). Though this view offends Jade, it is no different an image than the one she consciously cultivates in her life as a model.

The lovers ecstatic but doomed connection symbolized a kind of radical division between the educated and the uneducated; between power and powerlessness, between urbanity, material well-being, rationality and privilege on the one hand and emotional intensity, provincial values, and spiritual well-being, on the other. Both protagonist and antagonist struggle to identify within and against these competing claims. Son is not so much beyond class as much as he is perceived a part of an underclass - totally alienated from the world he moves in. He finally moves in the realm of myth.
Jadine’s dreams reveal her lack of secure place and confused sense of identity. In sleep she is frightened by large beautiful 'hats' that "shamble and repelled" (44) her. hats like that which we later learn she associates with her mother’s funeral. Waking, she is reminded of the incidents, which triggered her flight from Paris to the island, and encounter with the African women who spat contempt at Jade.

The women of Jadine’s dream symbolize Jadine’s refusal to define herself in terms of familiar past, historical tradition and cultural heritage. A refusal whose tragic consequences are represented in Jadine’s divided consciousness and troubled psyche. The fact that those images haunt her suggests that psychic wholeness will continue to elude her until she bridges the gulf between what they represent and who she is. ¹³

Alienated from her race by her western education, Jadine sees these night visitors as opposed to her personal destiny, although they are significantly deprived of speech, they seemed some how in agreement which each other about her and were all out to get her, tie her and bind her. Ondine criticizes her niece’s selfishness observing that if a girl:

Never learns how to be a daughter, she

can never know how to be a woman [...] You
don't need your natural mother to be a daughter.

All you need is a certain careful way about
people older than you are [...] A daughter, a woman
that cares about where she comes from and takes
Jadine's failure as a daughter stems in part from anger she still feels towards her dead mother -"You left me, you died you didn't care enough about me to stay alive" (145).

But if we go into the depths we could see that the mistake was not hers, she was not nurtured the way as to know the real worth of her cultural heritage. What Jadine wanted was independence, which means looking out for her true self. Morrison depicted Jadine, who uses her belief in herself as a woman, as a rational for "making it" (126), in this world. Being black and at the same time a woman should not barricade all that you deserve, therefore her attempt from the very beginning in the novel is not only to 'make it' but to 'make it' in such a way which is smooth and completely comfortable.

In the love story of Jadine and Son, Morrison develops the most compelling relationship between a man and a woman. Jadine's values are not so much that of the ideal southern lady as they are of the white male world. She does not wish to be a lady dependent on her husband's wealth and status. She wants parity exclusively based on her own potentials.

To Jadine independence for a woman means looking out for herself - she is not concerned with any community or with justice for anyone. In developing Jadine, who has a belief in herself as a woman, Morrison suggests that class concerns are now more critical than racial bonds, but women, in their search for autonomy may be taking the aspect of the patriarchal values that makes them the
owners of their own lives. Now they want to live life in their own way without being dictated by their male counterparts.

Morrison’s description of Africans deserves attention for a number of reasons. One recognizes in her, a typical blend of the wondrous with realistic and validating detail. The imagery creates unforgettable pictures, and the mythic overtones that recur in her work are there as when she says:

This woman is a vision extraordinarily tall,

skin like tar against the canary yellow dress [...]

walking as though her many colored sandals

were pressing gold tracks on the floor [...] two

upside down V’s scored each of her cheeks [....]

Her hair wrapped in a glee as yellow as her dress. (45)

In Tar Baby, the survival imperative is strictly dichotomized in terms of gender. Jadine represents the dynamic emancipation solution: as she is the “soldier ant” ready to reduce existential possibilities in order to further her social destiny- a veiled allegory, in Morrison’s own terms, of a certain reductive conception of feminism. By contrast Son though related to Morrison’s dispossessed wanderer, has abdicated the wild, rootless freedom that distinguishes them. In its place he cherishes a regressive fantasy of a return to nature. As he travels the world, the black women occupy a central place in his imagination as undemanding conservators of tradition and community principles. Imprisoned in their limited conceptions, Jadine and Son could view each other with only distorted lenses. In
fact, when the narrative is focalized through the consciousness of any of the characters, it reproduces the clichés of the racist and sexist prejudices.  

The way Morrison puts these characters it seems each wanted things in its own way. No one's fault was there as:

Son thought he was rescuing her from

Valerian, meaning the allies, the people

who in a mere three hundred years had

lived a world million of years old[...]. Each

was putting the other away from the maw of hell.(269)

All wanted to be true to what they saw, they understood and believed. In fact they were being true to themselves.

Their difference in every form sprang out of their desires, whatever those characters did, whatever they wished to do. It becomes very clear that through this novel Morrison illustrates the changed scenario of the modern black society, as the later generation is free to move, to think, to do whatever they want to do.

Again as the main theme moves regarding the positions of blacks in the white society we find a clear distinction, as Sydney and Ondine are servants of Valerians, whereas Jadine is free as a dove. Morrison brings Jadine as a made thing—a renounced, educated model. She has proved herself by elevating women's degraded position in society. Though she denies history but her denial stems from her fear of being the so-called "slave class". The fact is she sees the part defined by the whites without having an insight in her own rich cultural heritage—of a fighter tribe, close to nature with their resemblance to earth.
In my opinion Jadine should not be blamed though she definitely has committed a flaw by ignoring her roots but Son is no less an achiever. Similar to Jadine Son is also a loser. By following the blackness he goes to Therese, thinking she will help him get back Jadine. She on the contrary wants him to get free of her. She decisively sends him off on the part of the island inhibited by blind horsemen:

The man the man are waiting for you,

fearful and unable to see he stumbles over

the rocks first and goes into the domain

of the true black men. (306)

In Therese we find a very different blindness, one that is both literal and magical. Repeatedly she and other characters refer to her failing eyesight, but this is compensated for, by her ability to see what other’s cannot. For example, she knows of Son’s presence days before Margaret finds him. She names him chocolate eater and thus predicts his ultimate commitment to his color rather than Valerian’s. She sees the past as well as the present and future. She is said to be one of the blind race, after whom the Isle des Chevaliers is named:

Son asked who was the blind race so Gideon told
him a story about a race of blind people descended
from some slaves who went blind the minute they
saw Dominique [...]. Their ship foundered and sank
with Frenchmen, horses and slaves aboard. The blinded
slaves could not see how or where to swam so they were
at the mercy of the current and the tide. They floated
and trod water and ended up on that island and along
with the horses that had swum ashore. Some of them
were only partially blinded and were rescued later by the
French and returned to queen of France and indenture.
The others totally blind hid. The ones who came back had
children, who as they got on into middle age, went blind too.
What they saw, they saw with the eye of the mind and that of
course, was not to be trusted. Therese, he said was one
such [...]. They ride those horses all over the hills. They
learned to ride through the rain forest avoiding all sorts
of trees and things. (152)

Therese believes Son to be one such race; what she does not see is that he must
be enslaved before he can become one of the blind and free.15

What Morrison wants to project is that we are more secure when we are in a
community:

And there was this life-giving very Strong
sustenance that people got from the neighborhood [...] 
and legal responsibilities, all the responsibilities
that agencies now have, were the responsibilities
of the neighborhood. So that people were taken care of,
or locked up or whatever. If they were sick other
people took care of them; if they needed something
to eat, other people took care of them; if they were old, other people took care of them [...]. 16

Jadine and Son have no problems as far as men and women are concerned. They know exactly what to do. But they had a problem about what work to do, when and where to do, where to live. Those things hinged on what they felt about, who they were, and what their responsibilities were for being blacks. The question for each was whether he or she was really a member of the tribe. It was not because he was a man and she was a woman that conflict arose between them. Her problems as a woman were easily solved. She solved them in Paris, as she proved her abilities through her career as a model. Therefore the restriction as a woman had no barrier.

Son sees black Americans with the keen sense of an observer. What he saw compelled him to run not alone but with Jadine as he did not see a happy life of women in the city - "the black girls in New York city were crying out and their men were looking neither to the right nor to the left. Not because they were heedless or intent on what was before them but because they did not wish to see them crying" (111). Son therefore takes Jadine to his North Florida hometown, but Jadine is bored and repulsed.

But in the end Jadine returns to Paris possibly to have a rich white man's child. While Son searches for her on Isle de Chevaliers - headed by the search, losing himself in a powerfully superstitious island culture, radically different from the culture of the black America.
After Tar Baby it is evident that white power is founded on a double imposture- an inherent contradiction aggravated by self-delusion. The dominant order appears to be ripe for destruction.

Tar Baby represents something of an exception in the Morrisonion corpus. At the same time as it interrogates binary oppositions, the novel reproduces them. To produce African-American culture in opposition to dominant values, South and North are dramatically contrasted as Eloé and New York, the demands of community are not against men and women are locked in the struggle for existence. 17

The novel serves both as a remembrance of a cultural tradition of nurturing and as a cautionary tale, for those like Jadine who define themselves against their own community and their cultural past in the interest of self-fulfillment. Although such characters including Ondine and Sydney speak of their return to Philadelphia, they are confined to Valerian's Isle de Chaveliers.

Tar Baby debunks the myth regarding the position of women in society though there are other aspects as well in the novel. As Jadine bravely concludes - "A grown woman did not need safety or its dreams, she was safety she longed for". (250)

We could therefore see the element of rebelliousness which paralyses a person by making him or her ignorant of one's own identity due to the denial of one's own culture. But on the contrary it also projects the spirit, the power of believing in oneself, and showing the world that black women are the pillars of the world. This conclusion is the result of their proved status.
This aspect of rebelliousness, of denial has resulted in a confused psyche especially amongst the Afro-Americans. They are confused about their true-identity. The myth regarding the ‘inferiority’ of their culture cordons them from accepting it, whereas white culture doesn’t accept them completely. The previous chapter as well as this chapter has dealt with the same problem of double consciousness, as Afro-Americans are confused in choosing the right path. The following chapter illustrates this problem in detail.
1 According to Marlin, the double-voiced nature of this speech presents the dilemma between 'I' symbolic to the individual freedom and 'you' symbolical to the historical past, one's roots. The novel thus represents a struggle between the two aspects, because Jadine wants to fulfill her dreams. For details see, Mobley, Marlin Sanders. “Narrative Dilemma: Jadine as Cultural orphan in Tar Baby”. Toni Morrison: Critical Perspective Past and Present. Eds. Henry Louise Gates, Jr. and K.A. Appiah. Amistad Literary Series.: New York. 1993, 286.

2 The character of Valerian clearly presents the colonization of Isle-de-Chevaliers by the whites. Where Valerian considers himself a deity. But the fact of his success lies in the support of the blacks that inhabited the island. His wife referred to as "the principle beauty of Maine"; Margaret Lenore comes closest to embodying bourgeois reification; with the revelation of her crime we come to know that she developed from the hysteria as a result of the discontinuity between their past and present. For detail, see Byeran, Keith E. “Beyond Realism”. Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present. Eds. Henry Louise Gates, Jr. and K.A Appiah. Amistad Press: New York.1993, 120.

3 It is just not a matter of making something it is also a matter of accepting what you are shown and given. The dominant 'makes' it and the dominated 'accepts' it. And the dominant gets into such a habit of doing what he likes that when the reality gets uncovered, he is not able to believe it. This is what happens with Valerian. For an elaborate view on this, see Harding, Wendy and Jacky Martin. Eds. “From Division to Reconciliation”. A world of Difference, An Inter-Cultural Study of Toni Morrison’s Novels. Greenwood Press West Port, Connecticut: London.1994, 132-33.

4 Though it is a fact that Jadine is educated at the expense of Valerian but this cannot compensate the annihilation done at the expense of making them the 'dominated race'. As far as Jadine and Son are concerned, they are in a position to combine their aspects of culture and education in a manner to solve the problem, but they fail to do so. For an elaborate view on this, see Harding, Wendy and Jacky Martin. Eds. “From Division to Reconciliation”. A world of Difference, An Inter-Cultural Study of Toni Morrison’s Novels, 132-33.


6 In an interview in the July 1981 issue of Essence, Morrison has indicated her belief in the compatibility of 'nurturing' and 'building'. The problem is not paying attention to the ancient properties-which for me means the ability to be the 'ship' and the 'safe harbor'. Our history as black women is the history of women who could build a house and have some children, and there was no problem.


7 At a very tender age Jadine resolved not to be broken at the hands of a man, therefore when she sees Son she tries to control herself but both of them fall in love despite of their totally different strong expositions. For details on this aspect, see Rubenstein, Roberta. “Pariahs and Community”. Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present. Eds. Henry Louise Gates, Jr. and K.A. Appiah. Amistad Press: New York.1993, 152-53.

8 The entire novel revolves around two opposing values - culture and individual freedom. I found that what Jadine did was not right, but at one point I agree with her acts, when she tries to break the imposed female image- the image that denies the basic rights of human beings. It is an imposed negative female image that for centuries has given way to shaping up the myth regarding the power and beauty of a black woman. For details see, Mobley, Marlin Sanders. “Narrative


12 There is a constant competition between two opposing values, which constitute the very part of both Jadine and Son. Throughout the novel they struggle hard to prove their points. For more information on this aspect, see Rubenstein, Roberta. “Pariahs and Community”. Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present. Eds. Henry Louise Gates, Jr. and K.A Appiah. Amistad Press: New York.1993, 155.


14 Both Jadine and Son fail to understand the 'cause' of their being different. Therefore they even fail to see the positive points in their diversity. For an elaborate view on this, see Harding, Wendy and Jacky Martin. “Gender and Survival From”. A world of Difference. An Inter-Cultural Study of Toni Morrison's Novels. Greenwood Press West Port, Connecticut: London.1994, 76.


16 Regarding 'neighbourhoods' Morrison has earlier also stated, "There were spaces and places in which a single person could enter and behave as an individual within the context of the community. A small remnant of that you can see in small Black churches where people shout. It is very personal grief and a personal statement done amongst people you trust". (Evans, Mary. “Rootedness”. The Ancestor as Foundation. Black Women Writers 1950-80: A Critical Evaluation .390. For strong points of view on different aspects of this issue, see Intimate Things in Place: A Conversation with Toni Morrison. The Massachusetts Review, autumn 1977, 474.

17 The conflict becomes very prominent as the novel illustrates the fact that both the demands individual freedom and one's roots are correct but there should be such a combination of both that the best of both should come up having pruned all the destructive elements. For an elaborate view on this, see Harding, Wendy and Jacky Martin. “Gender and Survival From”. A world of Difference. An Inter-Cultural Study of Toni Morrison's Novels. Greenwood Press West Port, Connecticut: London.1994, 75.