5. AN EXPLORATION OF THE “DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS” OF AFRO-AMERICANS

In the racially divided community, the rules are arbitrarily decided by the power of a dominant group. Racial differences become surcharged with meaning: serving the repository of the unjustified fears of a threatened community. The resultant abnormality becomes the norm for the oppressed and no attempt to correct it can be envisaged; as it becomes a fact of existence.

A good deal of time and intelligence has been invested in the exposure of racism and the horrific results of it. There are constant, if erratic, liberalization efforts going on to legislate these matters. There are also powerful and persuasive attempts to analyze the origin and fabrication of racism itself.

One of the major problems faced by Afro-Americans is the identity crisis. They are torn between two ends of the white regime and black authenticity. Their definite blackness gives them a different position in the society, whereas the majority of the white dominance makes them aware of their depravity. After years of suppression, blacks have come up as achievers but the struggle for a huge majority of blacks still continues. In the present generation, the crisis of recognition is a problem as they are not able to comprehend the true nature of their existence. Who they are and what they should be? Are the questions unconsciously affecting their minds.

The white society dominates through its own parameters, set rules and traditions, whereas the Africans have distinct cultural heritage. No individual could ever leave one’s traditional norms because those traditions are one’s roots, which provide them a definite identity. But the crisis occurs when one is not able to
decide between multi-cultural dimensions. Afro-Americans are in a flux of double consciousness. This is one of the main problem that has been continuously projected in most of the writings of Afro-Americans. The white standards symbolize the glamour of success after which people leave their roots. This racially induced personae constitutes the obligatory mould through which oppressed individuals try to construct a distinctive personality. It is only in so far as they have painfully experienced the illusive protection of racist personae, the oppressed are able to create for themselves and enjoy the complexities of extended; interactive living in others. Although the double consciousness has a process of adaptation, it is far from being always present in the general cases described by Morrison, the racist personae can be perceived at the back of the most intense relationships and in some cases, it is imprinted on the black soul as a destructive brand.

The double is not so much a reflection of the imperfect self as perceived in the mirror of alterity as the reflection produced by the interplay between two different existential projects. The double or kindred relationship in Morrison is an occasion for her characters to practice the absolute imperative never to choose and thus never to exclude, which means once again “seeing” unity in multiplicity and the possibility of “identity” in otherness.¹

This is the case of Pecola who in The Bluest Eye stands as an epitome of the unmitigated humiliation attending the racist projections. She is torn between two self-negating extremes; the unattainable model of white feminity and projections of her nonexistence in the eyes of her white characters with whom she has to deal. For
the two McTeer sisters she represents the crippling contradiction induced by race discrimination - an idealization of oppressor's racial type and rejection of her own.²

In all Morrison's fictionalized and so narratively distanced doubles, whether it is perceived as a block or as a complication, the racist personae becomes a basic component in the dual construction of characters. Thus, in Tar Baby Nel represents a more genteel lifestyle for the more social Sula, while the reverse holds true for Nel who in her excursions into the Peace household experiences the relief from the strict conventions imposed by her mother. It is also made clear in the novel that those opposed family structures reflect the opposition between two opposite types of adaptive behavior to the racial conflict that is always rampant on the outskirts of black community. The experience of distancing oneself from one's own roots and at the same time trying to live up to a variety of roles gives rise to the double experience. ³

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world - a world that yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on it with amused contempt and pity. One feels his two-ness, being an American, and a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled
strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife - this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer-self. In this merging he doesn't wish to loose his older self. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly on his face.

Away back in the days of bondage they thought to see in one divine event the end of all doubts and disappointments; few men ever worshipped Freedom with half such unquestioning faith, as did the American Negro for two centuries. To him, so far as he thought and dreamed, slavery was indeed the sum of all villainies, the cause of all sorrow, the root of all prejudice; Emancipation was the key to a promised land of sweeter beauty ever stretched before the eyes of the wearied Israelites. In song and exhortation swelled one refrain—Liberty; in his tears and curses the God he implored had Freedom in his right hand. At last it came—suddenly, fearfully, like a dream. With one wild carnival of blood and passion came the message in its own plaintive cadences:

Shout, O children!

Shout you're free!
For God has bought your liberty!

The sensation of being “bumped against” by “people of poor vision” expresses the dilemma of self-representation for African Americans. The culture of dominance that initially produced slavery, and later, a racial hierarchy, constructed Black people as a race of bodies valued only for its market value as a commodified physical subject. These tropes of the body substantially influenced the ability of African Americans to represent themselves from the point of view of their own culture that sought to assert the primacy of the totality of subjecthood. These fragmented tropes both fixed within the cultural texts of the Western world, and divided the Black subject into two separate selves, the mind and the body. Racist discourse emphasized the representation of African Americans as material bodies, and delimited the mind as a signifier of Black identity.  

This mind/body binary is grounded in Christianity, since it evolves, first, from the Apostle Paul’s assertion that Christians must mortify the flesh in order to achieve spiritual purity, and later, refined by St. Augustine who, in his Confessions, argues that the body is sinful and must be negated in order to reach spiritual communion with God. This body/spirit binary gives rise to the body/mind one here, since the European Enlightenment, heavily influenced by Christianity, held that the intellect was, in fact, the ability to deny the body, resist its natural carnal nature, and impose the order of human agency on an object that resists such restrictions. Conversely, the balance of mind and body indicated the inability to control the body as material subject; it was perceived as a sign of intellectual weaknesses, cultural backwardness, and savagery. W.E.B. Du Bois, utilizing
double voiced discourse that signifies on the submerged mind/body binary in
nineteenth century American life, expresses the dilemma of self-representation for
African Americans in his seminal text, the Souls of black folk, when he writes:

Between me and the other world there is
ever an unasked question: unasked by some
through feelings of delicacy; by others through the
difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter
round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant
sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately,
and then, instead of saying directly, how does it
feel to be a problem? They say, I know an excellent
colored man in my town; or I fought at Mechanicsville;
or, do not these Southern outrages make
your blood boil?"  

The common thread that runs through the experience of being "bumped
against" by the man's question, and Du Bois's mention of the "unasked question"
by those of the "other world", is the inability of African Americans to represent
themselves from the perspective of their own cultural traditions, or in other words,
in other than mind/body binaries. Surely Du Bois was aware that this was not a
new problem. In 1841, the abolitionist movement published The New England
Anti-Slavery Almanac for 1841, a "how to" book which directed abolitionist
editors of slave narratives to "speak for the slave" and "write for the slave," since
"they [the slaves] can't take care of themselves".  

This perspective toward slaves
as subjects and abolitionist narrators as their authenticating narrative voice both belies the implicit goal of 18th century slave narratives- to justify slavery-and expresses a hegemonic relationship between the silenced slave and empowered narrator. It begins, within African American personality.

There is the inability of African Americans to represent themselves publicly, controversially surrounding the authenticity of Phyllis Wheatley’s poems, and throughout the nineteenth century in its emphasis on the minstrel tradition as an authentic representation of Black life. Indeed, Eric Lott, in Love and Theft, 7 demonstrates admirably both the constructions of “blackness” through the minstrels and the tendency of white working class males to insist that the white minstrels accurately represented African Americans. The performance language created for minstrel characters, dialect, was in fact a way of representing the belief of many whites that African Americans were less intelligent, barely human, and incapable of grasping even the most basic concepts of the English language. Later in the nineteenth century, the Plantation Era attempted to justify slavery through revising tropes of the mind/body binary in which black subjects were represented as black bodies deprived of minds, rational intellects, which actually enjoyed their experience of slavery.

While this cultural assault on the African American personality rendered impotent, their attempts to represent themselves from the point of view of their own cultural traditions, political legislation ensured that they would not gain control of their own social narratives by insisting that the African American was a fractured, incomplete, inauthentic person, less valuable than his/her white counterparts, and
suitable only to be hewers of wood and drawers of water. The underpinnings of both processes were centered in the beliefs, first that African Americans were not citizens, but property, and thus enjoyed only the advantages guaranteed to them which governed property rights, and second, that if African Americans were to exist as free men and women, they could not share the same social, political and economic space as whites, but instead had to be relegated to that space ascribed to them by those who had initially constructed "blackness" to represent the radicalized other.  

In The Souls of Black Folk, Du Bois attempts to represent what he calls "the world with in the veil," the spiritual world of African Americans by articulating, from the perspective of African Americans, an identity that is fixed rather than permeable. His often quoted statement on "double-consciousness," expresses, for Du Bois, the otherness that lies at the core of black identity. Although Du Bois's statement has been criticized for its over-simplistic nature, in that it is primarily a male construct that fails to acknowledge class and gender, this double identity is central to twentieth-century racial discourse, since he also attempts to fix racial identity through the construct of doubleness. Du Bois deconstruct the trope of bodies, derived from the mind/body binary, by fixing black identity in the mind/spirit binary and privileging the spirit. Du Bois locates the problems of self representation in the actual existence of black people, Du Bois finds that in the south, he first locates what Donald Gibson calls their "bodies," their social essence. In a sense, Du Boise locates the "Black essence" through what Paul Gilroy calls
"routes," that is to say, he finds that geographical routes, the black south, allows him to represent African Americans accurately.  

Although his body of writings is large, the place of The Souls of Black Folk is central in the discourse on race. since, in this text, Du Bois identifies a number of cultural markers of racial difference: The African American as a social problem; the problem of the twentieth century is the color line; the African American has a double-consciousness, black and American. He constructs his prophetic critique of racial difference through what he calls the unasked question that represents African Americans as a problematic group within America. In an attempt to establish black people as authentic personalities, Du Bois breaks with the stereotypes of nineteenth-century racial discourse that represented African Americans as a race of physical bodies without minds or spirits; he privileges the black soul in his poetic, albeit analytic narrative in which he articulates what it is like to live within what he calls the veil, or black world. His treatment or racial difference, or a tale twice told has become over nearly the last hundred years, the most often quoted statements on the subject by any twentieth-century intellectual.  

Will and agency to redefine them outside the prevailing norms are a caste discourses. Although many deployed the politics of respectability as a form of resistance, its ideological nature constituted a deliberate concession to mainstream societal values. The self imposed adherence to respectability that permitted representation of African American women's life, as well as of African American culture. It also impacted African American activism and the course of scholarship in African American studies. This strict adherence to what is socially deemed,
respectable has resulted in African scholars confining their scholarship on African American culture, often to the most heroic and the most successful attributes in African American culture. It has also resulted in the proliferation of analysis, which can be characterized as a culturally defensive, patriarchal, heterosexism.

Given the circumstances of racial oppression in the United States it is no surprise that African American scholars used academy as a medium to showcase positive African American achievements. Since the late 19th century Harvard educated William Edward Burghard Du Bois and Cater. Woodson pioneered the professionalization and popularization of African American history and sociology. At his death in 1950, not only was Woodson referred to as the father of African American history, but it was believed that the importance of his work was that it revised American history and provided resources for African Americans to combat negative caricatures. American historians frequently ignored the African American past, and at points denied African American contributions to the development of their nation.

The unacceptance by the society has led the Afro-Americans to a completely different category where they stand confused for their identity. If they are blindly following the white traditions, they are leaving their own black culture whereas if they are following their own traditions they are being segregated in the communally divided society. We could very clearly in Morrison’s novels see the dilemma of self-identity by Afro-Americans. Her female protagonists are in a continuous search for their true self. Few are able to know, but for few the self just flies off.
ENDNOTES

1 Though Morrison’s novels as perceived by most of the critics give emphasis on community, she also stresses the need to understand other communities, as character in her novels freely elect to share each other’s existence and explore their mutual affinities. Thus when Morrison refers to Sula, she deals with a dual relationship between these characters. “I wanted to throw her (Sula’s) relationship with another woman into relief. Those two women — that too is us, those two desires, to have your adventure and safety. So I just cut it up”. (Morrison and Naylor 577). For an elaborate view on this, see Harding, Wendy and Jacky Martin. Eds. “Character and its Double”. A world of Difference. An Inter-Cultural Study of Toni Morrison’s Novels. Greenwood Press West Port, Connecticut: London. 1994. 14

2 Pecola is an example of double-consciousness, as she wants to be completely different to what she is. For an elaborate view on this, see Harding, Wendy and Jacky Martin. Eds. “Character and its Double”. A world of Difference. An Inter-Cultural Study of Toni Morrison’s Novels. 43.

3 Racism becomes the key factor in presenting the narrative of distanced doubles. In addition the relation between gender imposes a further degree of complexity on the racial personae. For more details, see Harding, Wendy and Jacky Martin. Eds. “Character and its Double”. A world of Difference. An Inter-Cultural Study of Toni Morrison’s Novels. 43.

4 Slavery that brought racial hierarchy divided the subjecthood of blacks into two separate selves of mind and body; body for its market value whereas mind to be dominated by the white cultural dominance. To know more about this aspect, see DuBois, W.E.B. The Souls of Black Folk and Contemporary Racial Discourse. Newsletter 2000. N.P.: 1.


6 The major problem that had crippled the identity of Afro-Americans is their inability in making their identity through their cultural legacy. To get more information on this, see The New England Anti-Slavery Almanac. Boston: 1841. N.pag.


8 The deliberately induced white superiority relegated the entire black community to a place from where Afro-Americans were not able to represent their intellectual capacity. To know more about this aspect, see DuBois, W.E.B. The Souls of Black Folk and Contemporary Racial Discourse. Newsletter 2000. N.P.: 1.

9 In a process of solving the problem of an accurate Afro-American representation Du Bois chose black South; on the lines of Donald Gibson’s social essence and Paul Gilroy’s “roots”. For more information, see Gilroy, Paul. The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double consciousness. New York: Oxford UP, 1993.

5.1 AN INDEPTH ANALYSIS OF BELOVED (1987)

Morrison says she came across an article regarding a woman called Margaret Garner who escaped from Kentucky and tried to kill all her four children, but could succeed in killing only one when she was caught:

I just imagined the life of a dead girl which was
the girl that Margaret Garner killed. Morrison
stated and if call her Beloved so that I can filter
all these confrontations and questions that she has[...].
And then to extend her life [...] her search [...] her quest

Beloved deals with the havoc of slavery and its effects after the abolition of slavery on the blacks set in Cincinnati in 1873, after the end of the civil war. Beloved deals with the theme of survival because the characters have been so profoundly affected by the experience of slavery that time cannot separate them from its horror or undo its effects.

It is basically the struggle of Sethe, the central character of the novel, her escape from the bondage and ultimately her drastic step to kill her daughter, so that; as in the words of Margaret – Garner-“No, they are not going to live like that they will not live the way I have lived”. This was the decision, which she took during the time when she was so helpless to do anything more than this. Sethe was not sure about the future and for a little while when she was free after her running away from Sweet Home, she tried to take the decision which could be everlasting that is, no slaves again.
The main plot of Beloved can be seen as a variant on the same tale: a slave commits a crime, but it’s not really a crime because a slave committed it. The system, and not the slave, stands unjustly condemned for the dead that would possess another meaning if committed in freedom. To some extent, a similar moral adjustment has to be made in judging the act of a woman in Sethe’s Position. But there has to be a qualitative difference.

Beloved was set in a small Ohio town following the American Civil War, Sethe and Denver, her surviving daughter are secluded in a house haunted by the ghost of Sethe’s dead child. Their lives are dramatically changed when Paul D, who was a slave in the Kentucky plantation from which Sethe escaped, comes to live with them and exorcises the spirit from their home. The ghost returns in the form of a young woman who takes her name “Beloved” from the gravestone of Sethe’s dead baby. Through the use of flashback, fragmented narration, and multiple points of view, Morrison details the events that led to Sethe’s crime and her refusal to seek expiration from the black community. Beloved eventually gains control of the household and attempts to destroy Sethe, but is overcome.

It is a brave and radical project to center a novel on a dead child ignored by history. Cruelly forgotten along with so much else that had happened to black people due to slavery. A slave baby murdered by its own mother is not a story to pass on. Even the slaves, who know Sethe’s reasons, find them hard to accept it; Paul D is so horrified when he finally learns about her crime that he leaves her for some time. It is beastly to kill a baby yet Sethe asks what is more beastly to kill a baby, and yet Sethe asks further who is the beast? To keep Beloved out of the
hands of the owner who would see her only as an animal, or to be wild yourself, do your own subduing of the human spirit, if killed it must be. Morrison gathers herself together and sings, here for those who didn’t even leave their names, who died before they had a chance to become the sort of people about whom you could tell the real stories.

The novel concretely presents the attempts of blacks to live without the haunted memories of their past. Paul D’s Presence signals an opportunity to share both the positive and negative memories of their lives on one hand; Paul D and Sethe talk fondly of the headless bride back behind Sweet Home and the three share a harmless ghost story of a haunted house. On the other hand they remember Sweet Home as a place, they regard it with an ambivalence and admit that “it wasn’t sweet and sure wasn’t home” (165). The novel problematizes the character’s adversarial relationship to their past, it also explores what it means for them to confront the history of their suffering, and consider additionally, what it means to move beyond the past.

Sethe’s body wears the sign of her greatest ordeal at the Sweet Home Plantation. The story of brutal handling she endured under slavery- the stealing of her breast milk and the beating that ensued – is encoded in the scars on her back. Their symbolic power is evident in the number of times that others attempt to read them. Amy Denver names the scars a chokecherry tree in bloom. For Baby Suggs, the imprints from Sethe’s back looks like roses of blood. And Paul D, Who cannot read the words of the newspaper story about Sethe’s act of the infanticide reads her
back as a price of sculpture: “The decorative work of an ironsmith too passionate for display”. Paul D further reads the suffering on her body his own way:

“He rubbed his cheek on her back and learned that way her sorrow the roots of it; its wide trunk and intricate branches[...]. He would tolerate no peace until he had touched every ridge and leaf of it with his mouth, none of which Sethe could feel because her back skins had become dead for years”. (17)

Human suffering was so intense that it made both the heart and body dead to feel anything. Now there was no difference in pleasure and pain.³

Sethe has exhibited almost superhuman qualities in escaping form slavery in her pregnant conditions; She has also shown uncommon self-possession during slavery when she witnessed the lynching of her mother the lynching of Paul D and numerous other atrocities. None of these incidents have brought insanity. She had remained a functional human being through all her trials and tribulations.⁴

Once again Morrison puts this struggle to survive, without the help of any male. In the novel in a state of willed forgetfulness. Sethe is described running across a field: hurrying across a field running practically, to get to the pump quickly and rinse the chamomile sap from her legs. Nothing else would be on her mind. The picture of men coming to nurse her was as lifeless as the nerves in her back”. (6)

Sethe regards Halle as the ultimate betrayer. When she was being raped he witnessed but did not protest or try to protect her. His absent presence is worse
than mere absence, for it confirms an essential hollowness and dependability of male characters and their love. Yet Halle is not simply a bad guy; again Morrison extends her compassion equally to her male characters. The reader is allowed to see Halle as a deeply wounded child, traumatized by Sethe’s exploitation; Halle literally loses his mind- his selfhood. Paul D observes him later squatting by a churn, with “butter all over his face”. (70)

But in case of Paul D there is for the first time an exception regarding the above point. Paul D has the power to satisfy the craving that fuels the novel, the craving to be “known”, to have one’s existence sanctioned by the emphatic recognition of the other. Morrison bestows this quality on an African-American male character in an interesting and unusual point. A common criticism of black women novelists is that their portrayals of black male are often flat, stereotypic, or un-emphatic. For Morrison the maternal nurturing quality is a form of love that is not restricted by gender; this view expands possibilities and is a liberating factor for her characters. Yet Paul D too is not a totally reliable ‘other’; he temporarily retreats after learning of Sethe’s murder of her child. Like all the other black characters in the novel, he must work out of a condition of psychic fragmentation, his self-hood has been severely impaired, his status as a human subject denied by the slave culture.

Only Denver does not see Paul D as the other women do: for her he does not play the same nurturing role. She sees him only as a threat, as an intruder into her intense and deeply ambivalent, relationship with her mother. Denver is terrified to know Beloved’s murder by Sethe. She has “Monstrous and unmanageable dreams
about Sethe” and is afraid to fall asleep while Sethe braids her hair at night. In her fantasies “she cut my head off every night” (206). For Denver the idealized, saving other is her father Halle whom she calls “Angel Man” (209). Yet the father is significantly incapable of playing the savior role. The “other”- whether represented by mother or father is always untrustworthy in Morrison’s world, rendered thus by the social environment.

Sethe’s collective courage and the guts to escape from Sweet Home to take the ultimate decision was all her own. There was just no masculine hand to help her out, what ever she endured in the Sweet Home made Halle helplessly observed. As when the white boys forcibly take milk from her breast, Halle, stood powerless to come to her rescue. Even when she escaped from Sweet Home he fails to appear. Sethe runs anyway, because she can’t forget that hungry baby who has gone, ahead and because a new one is waiting to be born. Half dead and saved only by the help of a young white girl Trash almost as exiled as her self Sethe gives birth to her baby girl Denver on the banks of Ohio and manages to get them both across and truly home, to Baby Suggs door. This was once again a white girl who helped her not a man.

The house where Sethe lives with Denver is haunted by the ghost of the murdered two years old. This awkward spirit shakes the furniture, puts tiny handprints on the cakes shatters mirror, while Sethe and Denver live stolidly in the chaos, emotionally frozen. As Morrison stated that she wanted to know the life of the dead girl, which was the girl, that Margaret Garner killed. Therefore when Morrison portrays the character of Beloved she is not unaffected by time as when
she finally returns symbolical to the past memory, she is a grownup woman who calls herself “Beloved”, the word she has found on her tombstone. Her return was itself like a re-awakening, a gradual rebirth, as if dead coming to life as if a person with all her spirits diffused is gathering every drop of life to be alive again.

But gradually the strange visitor in elegant clothes and mysteriously unscuffed shoes turns into a fearsome figure, reducing Paul D’s position in order to drag him into the wrong and send him packing, eating all the best food until Sethe and Denver began to starve, ruling the demented household. Symbolically it is the past, which is not easy to dismiss; its evil side represents the horrors of torture during slavery and its return effects the past that can never die. Denver gets surprised that a baby can throw such a powerful spell Sethe answers- “no more powerful then the way I loved her” (2).

Beloved explores the interpersonal and intra-psychic effects of growing up as a black person in such a system, one in which intra-subjectivity is impossible. How can a child see self or mother as subjects when the society denies them the status? The mother is made incapable of recognizing the child, and the child cannot recognize the mother. As a young girl Sethe had to have her mother pointed out to her by another child. When she becomes a mother herself, she is so deprived and depleted that she cannot satisfy the hunger for recognition, the long for ‘looks’ that both her daughters crave. The major characters in the novel are all working out of a deep loss to the self, a profound narcissistic wound that results from a breakdown and distortion of the earliest relations between self and other. In the case of
Beloved the intense desire for recognition involves into enraged narcissistic omnipotence and a terrifying, tyrannical domination.  

Sethe’s eyes, however, are described as “empty”, Paul D thinks of Sethe’s face as “a mask with mercifully punched out eyes […] Even punched out they needed to be covered, lidded, marked with some sign to warn folks of what that emptiness held” (118). Her eyes reflect the psychic loss and denial of self she has experienced on all levels in her life. The face of Sethe’s mother was also mask-like, distorted into a permanent false smile. Sethe’s says that she never saw her mother’s own smile. Sethe’s mother deprived of her authentic selfhood, her status as a human subject, cannot provide recognition and affirmation that her child craves. The cycle is vicious, and thus Sethe’s children, Beloved and Denver, will suffer the same loss. Beloved’s eyes too are remarkable for their emptiness: “deep down in those big black eyes there was no expression at all” (118).

The repetition of the word “mine” (217) in the monologues of Sethe, Denver and Beloved suggests exactly this sort of possession and incorporation of the other as an object. “Mine” is the haunting word that Stamp Paid hears surrounding Sethe’s house in ghostly whispers and is stressed again in a lyrical section following Beloved’s unpunctuated monologue. In this section the voices of Beloved Sethe and Denver are joined (the identity of the speaker in each line is sometimes unclear), while at the same time each voice remains essentially isolated (the voices speak to but not with each other):

Beloved

You are my sister
You are my daughter
You are my face; you are me
I have found you again; you have
come back to me
You are my Beloved
You are mine
You are mine
You are mine.(217)

This form of possessing and objectifying the other, however, cannot satisfy-it
imprisons the self within its own devouring omnipotence, its own narcissism. True
satisfaction or joy, can only be achieved through mutual recognition between self
and other, between two subjects or selves.  

Both sides of the power dynamic, both surrender to and incorporation of the
other are apparent between Sethe and Beloved. Towards the end of the novel Sethe
relinquishes herself completely to the will and desire of Beloved. She neglects to
feed or care for herself and becomes physically drained and emotionally depleted.
Sethe literally shrinks while Beloved literally expands and swells; both are caught
up in a mutually destructive frighteningly boundless narcissism. The prelude to
Sethe's decline is an incident that again stresses lack of recognition at the source of
this narcissistic condition. Sethe has been abandoned once again by Paul D (her
previous abandonment include those by her mother, her husband Halle, baby Suggs
and her two sons) and to cheer herself she takes Denver and Beloved for ice-
skating on the frozen creek. The three are unable to keep their balance as they fall
on the ice; they shriek both with pain and laughter. The scene is redolent of childhood and of child-like and child-like helplessness making a circle or line. The three of them could not stay upright for one whole minute but nobody saw them falling. The phrase “nobody saw them falling” (174) becomes the dominant motif of the scene; the line is repeated four times in the two-page description. Sethe’s laughter turns into uncontrolled tears, and her weeping in the context of the scene ‘refrain’ suggests a child’s aching sense of loss or absence specifically confirming legitimizing gaze of the other. It is asserted that nobody saw her falling that there is no other to confer the reality of her own existence.

Being a woman who could face any tribulations Sethe wants to end the persecutions by calling for the ghost that made their lives hell tried - perhaps a conversation they thought, an exchange of views or something could help. So they hold hands and said, “come on, come on. You may as well just come on”. (2)

Morrison’s novel however is not hopelessly bleak or despairing. Her characters are wounded but not all of them are ruined. Denver and Paul D courageously face the inner terrors - Denver leaves the house even though she expects to be “swallowed up” (119), and Paul D returns to Sethe and her fearful murderous love - are able to salvage out the wreckage a bolstering faith in both -self and other. Paul D tries to pass this faith onto Sethe at the end. He assumes again a maternal nurturing role. He holds Sethe calls her “Baby and gently tells her not to cry” (272). Beloved is gone and Sethe feels bereft and lost, “She was my best thing,” she tells Paul D. While the word thing still suggests a sense of self as
object (an objectification of self) that perhaps no person in the slave culture could ever totally escape.

Beloved demonstrates finally the interconnection of social and intra-psychic reality. The novel plays out the deep psychic reverberation of living in a culture in which domination and objectification of the self have been institutionalized. If from the earliest years on, one's fundamental need to be recognized and affirmed as a human subject is denied, that need can take on fantastic and destructive proportions in the inner world: the intense hunger, the fantasized fear of being swallowed or exploding, can tyrannize one's life even when one is free from the external bonds of oppression. The self cannot experience freedom without first experiencing its own agency or, as Sethe thinks, claiming ownership of itself. The free autonomous self rooted in relationship and dependant at its core on the vital bond of mutual recognition.

Ultimately Denver is able to escape narcissistic vacuum, she is helped not, as she has fantasized, by Halle, but by another maternal figure in the novel, Mrs. Jones. Denver realizes that it was she who had to step off the edge of the world and die because if she didn't "they all would" (247). Excluded from the Beloved-Sethe dyad, Denver is forced into the role of the outside other, assuming that role is salvation, she goes first to her former teacher Lady Jones, an old woman of mixed race who has long struggled with the contempt of the black community and equally with self-contempt. Lady Jones thus has a special "affection for the unpicked children" (247), an empathy with those like who have never been never recognized or picked, who had never had their existence validated or confirmed. After Denver
Iron mask, collar, leg shackles and spurs used to restrict slaves.

asked her for food. Mrs. Jones compassionately croons, “O Baby” (248), and that emphatic recognition of the hungry baby within finally frees Denver from the trap of her infantile needs: Denver looked up at her. She did not know it then, but it was the word ‘baby’ said softly and with such kindness that inaugurated her life in the world as a woman.

With this recognition, Denver for the first time begins to experience the contours of her own separate self. When Nelson Lord, an old school acquaintance affectionately says “Take care of yourself Denver” (252). Denver heard it to know which language it was, and she realizes that “It was a new thought having a self to look out for and preserve” (252). Self-recognition is inextricably tied up self-love and this is precisely the message of the sermons that Baby Suggs preaches to her people in the meeting. In the white society that does not recognize or love you, she tells them you must fight to recognize and love yourself.

In Beloved Morrison is at pains to show us how much strength her people have. But the energy and audacity of her book is in its pain and in ambivalence of its characters towards their memories, their forgetting. As in many folk and fairy tales the witch spirit is the one that prevails is memory and might here. No one who has not been haunted, Sethe thinks knows the downright pleasure of enchantment, of not suspecting but “knowing the things behind the things”. (201)

In Sethe’s mind there was only one crime that of slavery itself. As when Denver accused Beloved of choking Sethe, Beloved insists that she “fixed” Sethe’s neck - “I kissed her neck. I did not choke it” (101), Beloved even adds that, “The circle of iron choked it” (101) and the image recalls the black slaves. Her statement
is thus true — that the slave system has choked off the vital circulation between mother and the child.

The novel does not end however, with the scene between Sethe and Paul D, but with one last by section on Beloved. The refrain of the last two pages is the line, separated these times: “It was not a story to pass on.” The final section records a deep sense of pathos for that unrecognized ravenously infant self that is Beloved.

The next novel Jazz has multi-layered stories, one revealing the other. In this novel where there is also annihilating result due to shift in the urban-life. Once again the maternal bonds are strong but they exhibit a completely different pattern of mother-daughter bonding, with a strong ‘urge’ of ‘survival’.
ENDNOTES

1 In Beloved Sethe's daughter returns from the grave after twenty years. Her search is the search of everyone. Morrison stated. "when I say that Beloved is not about slavery, I mean that the story is not about slavery [...]. I deal with five years of terror in a pathological society. living in Bedlam where nothing makes sense [...]. But these people are living in that situation and they survive it- and they are trying desperately to be parents, husbands and a mother with children". For details, see Woflson, Chloe Anthony, **Toni Morrison. Beloved** CLC vol.55 NP: New York. 1988, 194.

2 Here the feeling of freedom prevailed rather than the feeling of maternal bonds. But this act could be viewed with the same feeling to save the child from slavery. See Rothstein, Mervyn, **Toni Morrison in her New Novel, Defends Women**. The New York Times, 26 Aug 1987, 17.

3 Years of slavery and torture led her kill her own child. now she cannot feel anything; passions in her have dried up. This is symbolically represented through her dead skin. See Smith, Velerie. "Circling the Subject: History and Narrative in Beloved". **Toni Morrison Critical Past and Present** Eds. Henry Louise Gates, Jr. and K A Appiah. Amistad Literary Series. Amistad Press: New York.1993.347.


6 Here the revelation of the true identity of Beloved takes place. Beloved has been denoted by the word 'mine', which shows that she is no other than the left out part of both Sethe and Denver. To get an analytical view, see Schapiro, Barbera. "The Bonds of Love and the Boundaries of Self in Toni Morrison's Beloved". CLC vol.32.no.2. Summer (1991). 194-210. Rep, in CLC Vol.87.Essay: 1991, 304.
5.2 AN EFFORT TO OVERTURN THE PRE–WAR DEFINITIONS
(JAZZ 1992)

Jazz is a novel about the music of life: its changes, halts and continuity. The characters Morrison had depicted in this novel have got similar life as the music of Jazz. The epigraph of Jazz echoes-

I am the name of the sound

and the sound of the name

I am the sign of the letter

and the designation of the division.

It is the story of desires, freedom and survival; Jazz is a love-triangle, a romance. For romance is considered as the right of the whites only and an exchange of relationships between class, beauty and money.

It is also a story of Violet who struggled facing every tribulation of life to achieve what belonged to her. The novel presents a time of overwhelming energy, confusing to some, enlivening to others, a moment in history when blacks, having streamed into New York from the South at the end of the 19th century, called Harlem their own, and their “music has dropped on down, down to places below the rash and the buckled belts” (56), “just hearing it”, one of the book’s characters thinks “was like violating the law” (56). Everyone in the story is moved by Jazz in one way or the other: it is always pouring down from windows or up from night clubs; it inspired Dorcas’s Aunt Alice to raise her niece with the Puritaned strictures that later raise her to rebel into the arms of Joe Trace.
Morrison’s New York embodies the spirit of Jazz. “Free but frightening in its freedom it is a place where the night sky can empty itself of surface, and more like the ocean than the ocean itself go deep, starless” (183).

Jazz after all is a novel about change and continuity, about immigration; the belongings you leave behind and the tied-together suitcase you carry under your arm. It is about coping with arrival in a destination that doesn’t let you stay as the same person.

The ritual discovered in Jazz centers on the music that is referred to in the novel’s title. Jazz music represents an original African American response to the need of the community’s cohesion. Like storytelling, black music making is collective, improvisational and cumulative. In contradiction to the principles of Western myths, Jazz does not claim to be eternal and timeless but instantaneous and ephemeral and therefore unique and inimitable. It does not concern the lives of exceptional heroes but involves the acts of anonymous individuals. It does not consist in homogenizing differences, in making sense of existence in a global pattern, but in expressing and emphasizing difference in collectivity. It is not fixed through written notation but is expressed in an aural form that is always available for response and transformation by the community.

If in Jazz other community functions have eroded, music has become the major factor in community coherence. All the rhythms of community life have their musical accompaniment, from changes in the weather to changes in the mood. Only music can express the complex chemistry of life in the city – people’s appetite for life and their anger at what life denies them. Thus Alice Manfred one
of the righteous women who publicly deplores the blues, grasps the common thread that links the raunchy, “belt-buckle tunes” (59) to the reassuring drums of the fifth Avenue protest marchers. Both offer responses to the racist violence inflicted on the black community. The difference is that marcher’s drums control community anger by focusing it outward, while the blue turns it inward, transmuting it into a longing for violence. Dorcas lives and dies to its sounds; her life is summed up in a song:

listen I don’t know who is
that woman singing but I know the
woman by heart. (193)

The novel begins by describing the nature and extent of black suffering. In particular it focuses on the predicament of one couple - the Traces - whose fight from country to city marks the constant threat of poverty and deprivation. The struggle for freedom, however, is complicated by historical and personal factors. A keen sense of the past and its related traumas invariably surfaces.

As in The Song of Solomon and Beloved what Morrison does in Jazz is to link the inexplicable and the unknowable with the African-American quest for freedom and self-knowledge. In the process she evokes the mysterious inner life of her people and reveals the power and beauty that prevail beneath the suffering and anguish.

Joe and Violet came to New York as refugees and:

However they came when or why, the
minute the leathers of their soles hit the
pavement there was no turning around [...].

Like the others, [Joe and Violet] were
country people, but how soon country
people forget. When they fell in love
with a city, it is forever and it is like
forever... The minute they arrive at the station
or get off the ferry glimpse of the wide
streets and wasteful lamps lighting them, they are
not so much new as themselves: their
stronger, riskier selves [...].(32-33)

Both Joe and Violet become the victims of Urban environment.² They had to
cope with innumerable problems, as Violet tells Dorcas’s girlfriend, “Before I
came North I made sense and so did the world”. “We didn’t have nothing but we
didn’t miss it” (34). Even Joe thinks of the erotic ripeness and sensuousness of his
life in the country and which is lacking in New York:

There is no air in the City but there is breath, and
every morning it races through him like
laughing gas brightening his eyes, his talk,
and his expectations. In no time at all he forgets, little
Pebbly creeks and apple trees so old they
lay their branches along the ground and you have
to reach down or stoop to pick the fruit. He forgets
a sun that used to slide up like the yolk of a good
Country egg, thick and red-orange at the bottom
of the sky, and he doesn’t miss it, doesn’t look up
to see what happened to it or to stars made. Irrelevant
by the light of thrilling, wasteful street Lamps. (34)

The City does offer comforts and conveniences that were missing in the
country. It is a haven from racial persecution, where black residents are “safe from
fays” (10). But the community seems to be composed of isolated individuals whose
lives have lost the coherence that they once enjoyed. In compensation the City
offers a new freedom to individuals to discover “their stronger, riskier selves” (33).
But in consequence “they forget what loving other people was like”. (33)

Jazz tells the story of Joe Trace and violet married for over 20 years,
residents of Harlem in 1996, when all the wars are over and there will never be
another one. Violet works as an unlicensed hairdresser doing ladies hair in their
own homes and Joe sells Cleopatra cosmetics door to door. As the narrator says,
“may be she thought she could solve the mystery of love that way” (165). In Jazz,
Joe Trace, long married and deeply attached to violet through shared history and
experiences strays. The object of his attention is Dorcas, a vain fickle teenager who
later throws him for Acton, a boy whom she loves for being young and good
looking. When the novel opens, Joe has shot his 18 years old lover Dorcas. Joe,
who was not caught, is in mourning, crying all day in his darkened apartment.
Violet attempts to strip Dorcas’s body in her casket. Accordingly, Violet’s attack
on the dead Dorcas does not only suggest a psychological breakdown, something
of her assertiveness comes through. Thus apart from being a despairing attempt to
obliterate the face of the woman, the image of the mother, her violence may also be read as a protest against the subjugation and degradation of a woman. The traditional masculine reduction of woman to physical attributes associated with appearance and age has no doubt ensured the success of Joe’s cosmetic products and helped Violet’s career as a hairdresser. But male patronage is exactly what she seems to challenge as she tries to desecrate the looks by which a woman is judged. In so doing she also seems to vituperate her own complicity. For her intention of slashing the face of the dead girl counters her work as a hairdresser, concerned with enhancing the appearance of women.³

Violet tells Dorcas’s aunt, Alice Manfred: “I wasn’t born with a knife” (85). She had simply picked one up and attempted to use it. The two women recognize this act to be part of the struggle of the new generation of Black women which is no longer defenceless as Alice reflects:

Black women are armed; black women
were dangerous and the less money they had
the deadlier the weapon they chose. (77)

Joe and Violet typify displaced individuals, cut off from community and faced with the problem of integrating themselves into a new form of black life. Cut off from the formative influence of their ancestors, these orphaned adults disrupt their individual lives and their community.

We could look back at the childhood of violet and Joe Trace, to know what nurtured them, what made them and if the spirits they have to fight could be traced back to their past. Violet, whose mother Rose Dear, threw herself into the well,
was raised by her grand mother. True Belle, a former slave who moved to Baltimore (leaving Rose Dear behind) when her owner, Vera Louise, moved there to have the baby she had conceived with a black man. Joe has been haunted all his life by thoughts of his mother. He has grown up thinking her dead, but discovered at 18 that she is the wild woman who lives alone in the woods.

At the center of jazz, therefore, is the strange, desolated yet arresting figure of a wild woman, a mother, who lives naked, hiding in the woods, a sinister reminder of the past, but a dreadful warning of the present as well. This is Joe’s mother a wild abandoned woman who has in turn abandoned her child at birth. The maternal role has clearly become a tragic perpetuation of Black suffering. The mother is womb and tomb. In her encapsulated plight of the black race. 4

The poignant image of the mother further reveals other aspects of black affliction. Exploitation and abuse often result in total surrender. This constitutes the double burden of the race. Mothers in the novel constantly attempt suicide or withdrawal in submission to their predicament. But capitulation can also involve a more subtle yet no less ignominious response. For there is often self-consciousness accompanied by an attraction to whiteness that is the underside of oppression and prejudice. The desires to break free of the past, to forge ahead, while it is intensified by prevailing conditions, as also partly prompted by a desire to blend with the white population, to look and live like the white man. This frequently expresses itself in socio-economic terms, so that even a wild woman living all alone in the woods has her own secret hoard of ‘white treasures’—a rocking chair without an arm, a set of silver brushes and a silver cigar case, a pair of man’s
trousers "with buttons of bone," and a "silk shirt carefully folded" (184). Nonetheless, the Black self also embodies exciting and portentous vitality. This Wild woman even being a victim and an outcast presents a powerful image of sensuous beauty and mystery. 

Projective phenomenon such as visions, hallucinations and grotesque behaviors become in her case expressions of a wretched condition bordering on insanity, rather than on mechanism of adaptation. In the course of the novel violet struggles to rescue herself from this condition. First she makes futile attempts at compensation, consuming malted milkshakes in order to achieve the fullness - the (maternal) hips she imagines she had before coming to the City. But by the end of the novel after befriending first Dorcas’s aunt and then her companion Felice, Violet comes to terms with what she lacks. She discovers the source of her inner hollowness in the stories that her grandmother told about “a little blond child” (208) who came to inhabit her mind. 

Retrospectively, we come to understand why the force is threatening the coherence of Violet’s world, which is dichotomized in her consciousness in terms of light and dark. This image duplicating the nonsymmetrical opposition imposed by a racist society reflects the dysfunction in Violet’s projections.

The attempt to mutilate her corps is seen at the end of the novel, as an effort to exercise this destructive other-Violet-who inhabits her consciousness:

“How did you get rid of her?”

“Killed her. Then I killed the me that killed her.”
“Who’s left?”

“Me.” (209)

Violet even after having the most horrible stroke of her life tries to stabilize herself. Joe’s affair with Dorcas shatters Violet’s heart and Violet’s despair sends her on a rampage that ends with her bird’s death. The parrot is shown going out of the window edge, but since it can’t fly it stays there looking in. This is once again symbolical to the helplessness of Violet, who cannot do anything about her husband’s betrayal. Days after days he squawks “Love you” (3) through the windowpane until he topples off and dies. There is a sharp grief symbolically depicted through the fall of the parrot as the fall of the world.  

Vanishing creams, hair dyes and hair pressed straight reveal the unspoken anxieties of the African-Americans. For years Violet has nursed a secret fascination with the image of a blonde baby, Golden Gray, whom her grandmother had looked after in a white woman’s home. Joe, on his part seems to have a liking for fairer women; Dorcas, the girl he shot in an apparent fit of jealousy, had “high-yellow skin” (97) unlike Violet who is “black as soot” (75). The deep awareness of whiteness deflates and ruptures the sense of self. The City completes the devastation, for in New York there is no freedom only an endless effort to keep up.

Joe, also like Violet, is deprived of motherly love. Joe’s search for his mother, wild from the age of fourteen was peremptory. It was first a need to belong and perhaps to know his roots. But it was also an affirmation of his bereft state, for Joe was exploited, often unemployed, and forced to lead a make shift kind of life. His description of his mother’s situation to some extent fits his own circumstances:
She was powerless, invisible, wastefully
daft, everywhere and nowhere. (179)

For twenty years after the Traces shifted to New York Joe seemed to abandon
the search for his mother. He was busy building a new life and constantly seeking
opportunities for advancement. But, at the age of fifty-three Joe sought the
company of a young girl, Dorcas, and with her he revived the memory of his
mother, something he never did with Violet during the twenty years when they
were together. Deeper sources began to take over from the surface life of tough
competition and hard earned success. On one hand Dorcas embodied the “young
loving” (120) that he had missed in the mad scramble for jobs and better prospects,
on the other side she became an extension of the mother he never found. Joe makes
no distinction between the two women:

When I find her, I know – I bet my life – she
won’t be holed up with one of them. His clothes
won’t be all mixed up with hers. Not her.

Not Dorcas. She’ll be alone. Hardheaded.

Wild even. But alone. (182)

Joe’s preoccupation with his mother is not just a neurotic fixation. It seems, in
part, to signal a sensitivity that derives from a certain ardour and vivacity. For very
often the image of his mother is evoked in an atmosphere of wonder and beauty.

Like most of the germinated characters we have studied so far, Wild and
Dorcas superficially appear as complete opposites. At first glance, Wild seems to
represent the appeal of regression and a return to nature, while Dorcas stands for
progression and the lure of the City. In a citation of the last appearance of Beloved, Wild too in Jazz emerges from the woods, a heavily pregnant, “naked berry-black woman” (144) and confronts a white man driving a horse and carriage. This evocation of Beloved suggest that like her, Wild can be viewed as the memory of the original homeland, the lost African mother and the despoilment of a whole people under slavery, as well as the witness to the exploitation and violation to which a young black woman was subjected in the post- Civil War of the South in 1880's. Dorcas on the other hand seems to represent here and now, the refusal of ancestral memory, and the wholesale acceptance of white American values attested by her food of choice Dorcas and Wild the two women are associated from the first in Joe’s consciousness and both evoke conflicted emotions in him. Wild, it turns out, is not only a mother, but also a motherless child like Dorcas. Hunter thinks back to the time “when his house was full of motherlessness and the chief unmothering was Wild’s” (167). The young woman who refuses her infant seems to be an orphan like Dorcas. Joe supposes that Wild is his mother but this could equally be fantasy that focalizes his feeling of lack for his mother.

In the characterization of Violet in particular, Jazz focuses on the exploration of the limits of projection and the return to wholeness. Dramatizing the individuals need to repair the cracks between the hollowed out inner self and its various projections, Violet’s obsession serve as an example of failed projections. Violet dissociates into herself and “that other Violet” (89) - Violet and Violent- She is both Violet and Violent, because of her sense of extreme deprivation in her family life. She has lost both her mother and the possibility of motherhood, so that at the
time when Joe notices Dorcas. She is already immersed in a destructive and solitary kind of mourning.

Violet had a history of unsteady and unhealthy childhood as her mother committed suicide and her grand mother was not loyal to her. Throughout the novel we find a thirst for a mother’s love, which leads every character’s unconscious mind, even Dorcas the teenager girlfriend watches her mother burn alive in her house in East St. Jude Vocational Training Institute, merely five days after her father’s murder. Dorcas never said a word about her double orphaning until she meets Joe Trace and they made their painful stories in the twilight privacy of a rented room.

Violet the third of the five children of a woman, who drowned herself in a well, suppresses the terrors of life in her vigorous determination to survive in the city. But neither she nor Joe wants children. Yet the maternal hunger that assailed her at the age of fifty after numerous miscarriages is an instinctive need. The doll she slept with suggests not only her demented state but also her regressive psychopathic retreat into childlike make-believe world. More significantly, it is in part a compulsive re-enactment of a mother about whom she felt both guilt and grief. Violet became a fearful daughter, a neglected wife, and a childless mother. They have good memories too, a grandmother who laughed in the face of disaster and a friend called Victory, who listened.

The two women are at the same time appealing and threatening because they are mirrors of black peoples assigned status in the racial order. Paradoxically, the menace these women represent is not the result of their own malevolence but of
their status as victims. Both are linked with destructive conflagrations ignited by white racists. Wild is imagined inhaling the flames as “Vesper County burns” (174). Dorcas is pictured swallowing a hot cinder from the “blazing home” (60). The two women represent the terrible impulse towards destruction implanted in the black community by the constant menace of white violence and subsequently internalized by black individuals so that they cannot imagine living without pain. Wild and Dorcas in their different ways come to represent all the violence and loss suffered by the black race.

Similarly, nothing seems more unlikely than the friendship between the wife of Dorcas’s killer and the girl’s Aunt. The narrator dramatizes the woman’s difference by focusing on the extremes of Violet’s character in contrast to Alice Manfred’s restraint: “The woman who avoided the streets let into her living room the woman who sat down in the middle of one” (73). Yet the extreme differences between these paired women served to dramatize their shared deprivation. The two older women are both childless and together they mourn this lack, sharpened for both by Dorcas’s death. In addition, both of them have been betrayed by their husbands. Their friendship becomes a way to explore buried feelings, so that when Violet comes to visit, Alice finds that “something opened up” (83). As Violet speaks of her rage, Alice feels once again the violence, the craving for blood, and the terrible sense of loss that she had known thirty years earlier. The two younger women have both been deprived of their parents.

The narrator of Jazz says “a newspaper can turn your mind” (74). But Alice Manfred, the character she is worried about, seems to have her mind fairly straight.
Alice reads about the violence in the world, and also, between the lines, finds an energy resistance to it.

Every week [...] a paper laid bare the bones of some broken woman. Man kills wife.

Eight accused of rape dismissed.

Women and girl victims of [...] Woman committed suicide [...] white attacker indicted [...] Five women caught [...] woman says man beats [...] In jealous rage man [...]. (74)

Are these women broken women, “mere victims”? Natural Prey? Easy picking?” (75) I don’t think so Alice repeats, “some are, no doubt” (75) and the novel tells us, the story of one of them Alice’s niece Dorcas, a girl who likes to push people into ‘something scary’ and who when shot by a man she has driven too far allows herself to die. But other black women in Jazz are arming themselves, physically and mentally. 9

The city where Joe and Violet had come to stay with dreams lost themselves among the city’s enchantments, their happiness trickles away into aging; they scarcely speak to each other. Violet begins to think of the children she hasn’t had and the meaning of her mothers long ago suicide. What the narrator calls cracks begin to develop in Violet’s consciousness, “the fissures in the globe of the day” (24), movements, when she looses her words and her meanings.

Talking to Dorcas’s friend Felice some time after the murder of Dorcas, Trace asks “what’s the world for if you can’t make it up the way you want it”
As she talks to Alice Manfred and shares with her woman's life of domestic chores, Violet becomes aware of the possibilities in store for her. Alice, for one, tells her fiercely: "Nobody's asking you to take it. I'm saying make it!" (113) The trick is to do what one can and to do it well even if it means mere housework. To go on. "Not between. Not lost" (113). The laughter that both women share is a sign of their triumph - they have discovered in the most mundane way some secret source of joy. "[...]. It is spring. In the city" (114) - Violet is thus able to look ahead, to hope.¹⁰

Her mother and father died within a few days of each other in a spate of terrible racial violence. And although Felice's parents are still living, their lives have been devoted to their white employers who live far from New York. When she compares her childhood with her friends, Felice feels equally orphaned, specially when she calculates the time she has spent with her parents as: "Less than two years out of seventeen" (200). The novel's paired characters come together not so much in order to experience extended possibilities but to come to terms with personal loss.

Felice a girl character in the novel meets Violet seems threatened by the very pressure that besieges the older women. As a daughter and as a young unmarried girl working in New York Felice is faced with the same challenges that had almost destroyed Violet and her husband. With her detachment and ease and supported by what she has learnt from Violet she depicts the indomitable simplicity and resilience of the Black female self. As the narrator points out near the end of the novel "[...] her speed may be slow, but her tempo is next year's news". (222)
In this respect Felice provides a direct contrast to Dorcas for while she represents hope and change, the other girl’s tragic death looks back to the past and the legacy of the mother. Dorcas is a pathetic symbol of subjugation, a victim of black history. Dorcas’s involvement into one affair after another was an attempt to avoid marriage and motherhood. For her the ghost of the mother prevailed in the person of her Aunt Alice, a wife, a “mother” (to the orphaned Dorcas), abandoned and alone. What Dorcas Failed to understand is that Alice, though fearful of joining the black woman’s protests, is far from helpless. She has found strength and pride in her womanly skills and has managed to lead an independent life on the income she derives from her sewing.  

The final trio of Jazz – Joe, Violet and Felice – assembles in this spirit. Felice is different from her friend in that she will not consent to be a victim or the victimizer. The adulterous triangle of this novel’s opening pages turns into a family triangle at the end as Joe and Violet welcome this family member of the new black generation into their home. The three come together because of an experience of loss, they continue because of what they can bring to each other. So Violet offers to trim Felice’s hair, Felice to bring records, and Joe to buy a Victrola. Joe and Violet become a harmonious and loving pair, dancing, whispering to each other under the covers, living a kind of domestic idylls.

Finally, Jazz rejects the consolation of double living that we have seen explored in the earlier novels and makes the claim for the integrated self. The double has to be destroyed mourned and finally forgotten so that a newly coherent self can be formed. This is how we can understand Violet’s confession to Felice.
about "having another you inside that isn't anything like you" (208). Violet is speaking here of the double personality imposed on the minority group in a racist society; Golden and later Dorcas are the others that remind her of the alterity of her blackness.

Felice saved the couple in this rediscovery forming a new community from the survivors of the violence that caused the initial rupture. Joe and Violet accede to ancestor status in the end. They become a nucleus that attracts Felice, representative of a new generation of blacks. Felice embodies a New Hope for the black community. She expresses the individuality, modernity, and originality of the City dwellers, yet she maintains her connection to preceding generations. Inspite of the older people's misgivings, Felice's record represents a new way for blacks to make sense of their surroundings. Inspite of the narrator's initial conviction that people were doomed to repeat cycles of violence and misery: that the past was an absurd record with no choice but to repeat itself at the cracks" (220), the characters in Jazz discover new patterns for survival. So, at the end of the novel, the narrator introduces the notion of "the snapping fingers, the clicking and the shades" (227), which seems to be an expression of the dynamism of the new community.

Morrison's efforts are in the novel to provide the characters with a 'will' so that they could survive the very oppressions and jolts that life offers them. At the end of the novel Morrison resorts to the most heavy-handed device to liberate her characters from predictability. As the readers thought that Dorcas's murder would be followed by another act of violence but Morrison instead staged a manipulative act for the face of the plot: as Joe and Violet end up living happily ever after a new
and calm intimacy born from their troubles. The reference to music and sunlight bring to mind Joe’s enraptured responses and serve once again to evoke a sense of the mysterious. Then over time jazzed resentments are soothed; the business of human interaction returns to something like normal.

Empowered by such insights Violet and Joe are able to start again, this time taking care not to let the city take control of their lives. Still working hard they keep a comfortable pace, taking time off to let their secret selves shape their marriage. Violet thus frees herself from the double yoke of black womanhood while Joe now has the chance to be his own man, a new man, unafraid and content.

In this particular novel Morrison ends the story with a new start for both Violet and Joe. Here both male and female have survived. They have found meaning in their lives; now they know their desires; their true-self. Violet tried real hard to push herself out from mental break-up and to our surprise in the end she emerges as a winner, a survivor, and an achiever.

2 The narrator, a garrulous, intelligent, unnamed Harlem local, has the same wide-eyed view of the excitement of the City as Joe and Violet has. She likes the way as it allows people to become “not so much new as themselves: their stronger, riskier selves. To know more on this, see Dorris, Michael. “Singing the Big City Blues”. Chicago Tribune Books. 19 April (1992). I-5. Rept, in CLC Vol.81.1992, 242.

3 Here once again the desire to look different prevails, as Violet tries to make Dorcas look different. For an analytical view, see Ping, Tang Soo Dr. “Recreating the Black Self: The Hidden Text in Toni Morrison’s Jazz”. N.P: 9 Nov 2001, 6.

4 Exploitation of black women and her progeny is clearly shown through the character of the wild woman. The social unacceptance had marginalized her place in the woods. The affictions inflicted on blacks in terms of white parameters have resulted in the orphaned position of Joe and Violet. For more discussion on motherhood, see Ping, Tang Soo Dr. “Recreating the Black Self: The Hidden Text in Toni Morrison's Jazz”. N.P: 9 Nov 2001, 3.

5 The possessions of Wild woman once again recall the character of Pecola in The Bluest Eye. Pecola used to have things, which were a symbol of white culture, their way of life. For a critical view, see Ping, Tang Soo Dr. “Recreating the Black Self: The Hidden Text in Toni Morrison's Jazz”. N.P: 9 Nov 2001, 3.

6 The fissures that developed when Joe and Violet stepped in the City became wider. These cracks projected the hollowness in their lives. Violet drowns herself in despair. Her desire of motherhood intensifies with the realization that now she cannot become a mother. For more on this, see Hardin, Wendy and Jacky Martin. “Projection of Self”. A World of Difference: An Inter-Cultural Study of Toni Morrison's Novels. Greenwood Press: London. 1994.73.


8 Violet's past gives a proof of an orphaned, un-nurtured and unhealthy past. She had nothing to count on still has the spirit to live life by overcoming every horror that makes life miserable. For a detailed view, see Morrison, Toni. “Morrison’s Treatment of African American life in Jazz”. Rev. of Jazz by Jane Miller. CLC Vol.81. May 1992, 246.

9 It is an indignation that is glimpsed in new forms of protests and political organizations and heard in the freedom and sadness and hunger of Jazz.

Though for centuries women have been an object of oppression but most of the time their being victimized makes themselves responsible; one such character is Dorcas. There are others who have armed themselves for their defense. To analyze this aspect, see Morrison, Toni. “Life Studies”. Rev of Jazz by Michael Wood. The New York Review of Books. Vol.39.no.19. 19 Nov, 1992, 225.

10 Friendship with Alice makes Violet aware of her potentials as a woman. This realization revitalizes her giving her strength and courage not simply to “make it” in this world but to live life at its full. For more on this, see Morrison, Toni. “Life Studies”. Rev. of Jazz by Michael Wood. The New York Review of Books. Vol.39.no.19. 19 Nov, 1992, 255.

11 Morrison has given hope through Felice; she stands as a symbol of new awakening. Where Dorcas perceived a wrong impression of her aunt Alice's life, Felice depicts the indomitable simplicity and resiliency of black female self. It was her misinterpretation, which developed a misconception of female potentials. For a critical view, see Ping, Tang Soo Dr. “Recreating the Black Self: The Hidden Text in Toni Morrison's Jazz”. N.P: 9 Nov 2001, 3.