Each period in the history of Afro-American literature contains its own agenda. Most Afro-American authors have sought to provide at least a glimpse into their diverse experiences of each of these periods. A glance at the breadth of Afro-American literature reveals two facts: First, Afro-American experiences have varied widely from the point that Africans were forcibly brought to the Americas: Second, these experiences are bound by the eternal desires of Afro-Americans to continue surviving and thriving in the Americas. Strangely, this desire stems from the long and extremely difficult period of indentured servitude and chattel slavery, the systems under which most African Americans lived and struggled until the abolition of slavery in the U.S in 1865 after the Civil War.
The first two centuries of the African diasporas sojourn in the US were marked by the dominance of the Slave Narrative and African American Folklore, both of which continued to influence Afro-American literature and politics long after the end of slavery. These two creative forms represent the totality of Afro-American experience presented by Toni Morrison. The two were incorporated into the magic realist fiction of Morrison using her individualistic and innovative narrative technique and special use of language. This chapter therefore has its focus on her narrative methodology and her powerful use of language.

Morrison is a painstaking wordsmith who rewrites over and over again. Her concern with the accuracy of language is not a private indulgence in wordplay but an effort to restore and validate the oratory of the black community. Restoring that language is not about dropping g’s or adding i’s. It’s about respecting the rhythm and the sound of the art of storytelling, about enlarging the meaning and sounds of words, about leaving open spaces in the dialogue so that her reader can hear the language and participate in the interpretation.

Her first novel, The Bluest Eye, has a narrative structure that defies the norm in canonical literature. She brings in an internal clash of competing voices by giving us a preface in the form of an American Primer which is followed by the
story of Pecola Breedlove, a young black girl who longs to have beautiful blue eyes. The implication is that Dick and Jane described in the primer stand for the whites who are guilty of marginalizing the wide spectrum of poor blacks of America of whom Pecola is just a representative. The preface is first spaced wide, then closer and finally running together without any spacing. This technique in typing is employed by the writer to establish how the primer story has been taught mechanically to generations of black children.

The black children naturally look upon the lives of white children as the norm. The narrator-cum-friend of Pecola is Claudia Mac Teer. While taking the reader into confidence as she talks about Pecola, her narrative voice is convincing and authentic. When the same narrator talks poignantly about the past of Pauline Breedlove or Cholly Breedlove, the reader just cannot understand how a teenager is able to know the dire effects of alienation from a larger society. The mediating voice of the narrator in this novel has been commented upon by many critics. Some say that the duality of these voices represents the duality of black consciousness - of how blacks must see themselves on their own terms and through the eyes of others. Valerie Smith comments upon this practice of Morrison in letting the protagonists' lives intermingle with the haunting account of the past lives of the minor characters as well:
“Occasionally their characters reminisce in their own voices in mid conversation. But more often than not an omniscient voice interrupts the narrative present to tell and interpret a character’s personal history. These frequent forays into the past import to Morrison’s novels a kaleidoscopic quality, a temporal density, and an extraordinary breadth of focus.” (Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative 122).

Futuristic narration is Morrison’s special forte. She announces forthcoming events beforehand. There are several examples for this in Sula. For instance, when Nel sees Sula walking off after her wedding, Morrison remarks that it will be ten years, later that they will meet again. Instead of the usual chapter-wise divisions, Morrison gives us different years as chapter headings. This devise is a boon to the reader, as the different milestones in the three-generation Peace family can be seen as links that run through the novel. Though specific years are given as chapter headings, there are two periods about which the reader is not given any idea as such. One is when Eva leaves Medallion for eighteen months together and returns with an amputated leg. The second is when Sula leaves her community for ten years soon after Nel’s marriage with Jude Greene. No explanation is given to the
reader about these blanks in time. Barbara Hill Rigney interprets this as a special narrative technique of Morrison:

"Reverberation is that quality which characterizes all of Morrison's fictions—what is left unsaid is equally as important as what is stated, and specified, what is felt is as significant as what is experienced; what is dreamed is as valid as what transpires in the world of 'fact'. And none of these conditions of being is rendered as opposite, there are no polarities between and mysticism, between real and fantastic." (The Voices of Toni Morrison 26)

Fragmentary and elliptical narration becomes Morrison's favorite method of narration. This is seen again in Song of Solomon where different accounts of the same incident are narrated by different characters so that a clear picture of the incident finally emerges to the reader:

"The same story... is picked up in different places, retold and expanded into further complexity. For example, Milkman's father, Macon Dead, explains the tension between himself and Milkman's mother, Ruth, to Milkman, alleging that Ruth had an unhealthy fixation for her father and he for her which culminated in Macon finding Ruth in bed with her deceased
father... Ruth's own version portrays herself as a lonely person who needed the support of her father... Each retelling of a story in the novel, as here raises new questions suggesting that any one version of anything inevitably generates fresh interpretations. (Toni Morrison 58-59).

**Tar Baby** does not cover a broad period of time as the other novels of Morrison. It is set precisely in the period of time starting from autumn 1979 to autumn 1980. However, it falls within the category of the mythic narrative. De Weever who has studied the reclamation of myth by African-American writers claims that the mythic narrative: "...establishes lines to a world that is not only beyond the real world but that, at the same time, transforms it." (Mythmaking and Metaphor in Black Women's Fiction 4).

The American vernacular tales of Brer Rabbit and Tar Baby are adapted by Morrison in this novel. Just as in these black oral tales of the plantations, Morrison wants to let the world know how white culture identifies Negroes with animals. Similarly Gideon, the black servant in **Tar Baby** outwits his master just like Brer Rabbit who is able to survive the cruelty of the white farmer. Later on, the mythical figure of Brer Rabbit is merged with the trickster figure in Son who brings havoc into the household of Valerian Street. Linden Peach remarks:
“Changing his name several times, like the trickster figure, Son has assumed different identities among different peoples – William Green, Herbert Robinson, Louis Stover – and, in keeping with the trickster tradition, the reader never learns his true name.” (Toni Morrison 82).

Morrison thus infuses the mythical elements into her narration in Tar Baby with the hope of enlisting the powerful influences on the African-American psyche. Through the narration of Son, she also wants to uphold a traditional African identity in an increasingly capitalist world.

Toni Morrison’s fifth novel, Beloved takes the reader to a strange world where mysterious life teems with the energy of the living beings of this world. She doesn’t talk about any isolated country/region while presenting this intensely alive other orders of being that relate with human beings. Instead, she grounds the story of Beloved in history. Her intention is to present the horrors of slavery in America. She sketches the story of a slave woman – Sethe, who runs off from Sweet Home, a plantation in Kentucky to Cincinnati, only to find that her bold step to save herself and her children from the white master has made her house – an abode of the angry spirit of her slain child. The novel thus functions as a
fantasy. Joseph Campbell clarifies this feature: "The division between the two distinct realms of ordinary and faery reality blurs... so that faeries experience our world and we experience theirs." (A Fairy Tale Reader 9)

Susan Bowers assigns to Beloved the status of African - American apocalyptic writing:

"Morrison’s novel maps a new direction for the African - American apocalyptic tradition which is both more instructive and potentially more powerful than the end-of-the-world versions of the sixties. She has relocated the arena of racial battle from the streets to African-American psyche from where the racial memories of Black people have been taken heritage". (The Journal of Ethnic Studies 18.1 (1990) 59).

Accordingly, Denver, the only child left with Sethe by 1873, tries to shoo away Paul D whom she looks upon as an intruder, by talking about the presence of the ghost in 124. She tells him the ghost is there, it is her dead sister’s ghost and that she has died in that house. Paul D doesn’t find that scary. Instead, he starts joking about the headless spirit of a bride that used to roam about in the woods behind Sweet Home. Sethe too remembers the story and therefore doesn’t question the
authenticity of the tale. Such stories about departed souls are part of their racial consciousness.

Bowers maintains that the present day African Americans have lost contact with their ancestors of the past. That is, they have forgotten the atrocities done to them during the days of slavery. Morrison’s bounden duty is to make them remember it all, through her narration of Beloved. Thus we find Sethe and Denver, her daughter reconciled to the presence of the spirit before Paul D’s arrival. Both were all alone there and they even look upon the house as a spirit: “A person that wept, sighed, trembled and fell into fits.” (Beloved 29). When Baby Suggs, Denver’s grandmother was alive, she too registered the same sentiment: “Not a house in the country ain’t packed to its rafters with some dead Negro’s grief.” (5). Her explanation is that it is only natural that every house in Cincinnati is possessed – the souls of dead Negro slaves have come back to claim retribution, to narrate their woes or to be just near their kin. This casual acknowledgement of the presence of spirits has immediate relevance in Morrison’s narrative technique. She advocates a revisioning of the past as it is filtered through the present. Her aesthetic ideal is based precisely on this activity. The deliberate act of remembering is her form of willed creation. Ashraf H.A. Rushdy comments upon
A revisionist method assists Morrison as she makes the past palatable for a present politic in Beloved. For example, the novel records Denver’s bafflement in seeing Beloved perfectly well-versed with the important happenings in Sethe’s life. The crystal earrings, which Beloved had not seen, are a source of much fascination for her. This perplexes Denver. Sethe has a long story as an answer. The crystal earrings were given to her as a wedding present by Mrs. Garner for whom she worked at Sweet Home. Sethe also remembers that her little child used to be bewitched by those earrings. The reader immediately concludes that Beloved is none other than the spirit of her little child. An explanation to Denver’s confusing queries can be found only if one looks up the whole novel as a fantasy that helps Morrison in her revisionist method:

"Its world of magic is symptomatic of fevers deeply burning in the psyche: permanent presences, desires, fears, ideals, potentialities, that have glowed in the nerves, hummed in the blood, baffled the senses, since the beginning. The one psyche is operative in both the figments of this vision-world and
the deeds of human life. In some manner, then, the latter must stand prefigured in the former.” (A Fairy Tale Reader 89).

The narratorial technique used in Jazz pertains to the omniscient Narrator who does not reveal the identity even at the end of the novel.

“In a dazzling act of jazz-like improvisation, moving seamlessly in and out of past, present and future, a mysterious voice-whose identity is a matter of each reader’s imagination – weaves this brilliant fiction…” (Editorial review of Jazz: Amazon.com.)

Though the narrator professes to know each and every detail about the character of the novel, at times there are open confessions of complete oblivion about their whereabouts. For instance, Violet decides to gather all the information she can get about Dorcas. The narrator’s remark follows: “May be she thought she could solve the mystery of love that way. Good luck and let me know.” (Jazz 5). This in itself is a characteristic of postmodern narrative. So, the arbitrary nature of narratorial voice questions social authority. Robbie. B.H. Goh, who discusses Angela Carter’s magic realist works, asks whether her mode of narration, which is incidentally similar to Morrison’s truly a: “… ‘dialogic’ subversion of the
monologism of early bourgeois society or did it ‘reinforce’ that ideology by offering a pre-political, disordered discourse?” (ARIEL 30.3 (1999)68). As Robbie B.H. Goh, at an earlier part of the same essay, admits that the textual manifestation of postmodernism, for many scholars, is magic realism itself, it can therefore be proved that this narrative technique belongs to the realm of Magic Realism.

Another attempt to transcend the laws of fiction is done by Morrison when she lets her narration jump on to different points in Time without alerting the reader beforehand. An example for this is seen in Jazz where the Narrator hops between a description of Joe’s search for his mother and the account of his frantic hunt for Dorcas. Discovering the gender of the narrator is tough for the reader because the voice reads the extremely typical habits of women with ease: “They are all like that, these women.... They are busy and thinking of ways to be busier because such a space of nothing pressing to do would knock them down.” (16). With the same understanding, the Narrator sympathizes with a young man: “Aw, but he is young, young and he is hurting, so I forgive him his self-deception and his grand fake gestures…”(155). Interventions, explanations and comments are all part of the waywardness in narration that we encounter in Jazz.
As the author of *Paradise*, Morrison unearths the psychological trauma and cultural change experienced by each of her characters. Morrison herself admits: “I’m looking to find and expose the truth about the interior life of people who did not write it.” *(Out There* 302). This is the reason why she resorts to fragmentation in narration in this novel too. An example is seen in the description of Arnette Fleetwood, daughter of Arnold Fleetwood, one among the New Fathers who were bent on guarding their racial purity. Arnette is in love with K.D., the grandson of Rector Morgan who belongs to the same proud Negro stock as Arnold Fleetwood. In fact Rector Morgan and his father, Zechariah Morgan had built the two only black towns of Haven and Ruby. It is in the section called ‘Grace’ that the reader comes to know about the urgent meeting of both the families’ male members. They meet in the presence of Rev. Misner to discuss the atrocious act of K.D.’s slapping Arnette’s face in public. The reader gathers from K.D’s private thoughts that Arnette is pregnant. The meeting of Morgans and the Fleetwoods comes to an end with the decision that K.D should apologize to Arnette. She is to leave for college soon. The next section ‘Seneca’ makes a mention of Arnette who is back home from college. She refuses to leave her bed. This solitary reference to Arnette has an abrupt end in this chapter.
The section entitled ‘Divine’ describes the marriage of K.D and Arnette. Other events follow like the introduction of Pallas, a new addition to the convent. When everyone is asleep at the convent, a girl appears with a piece of wedding cake. Her name is not given by Morrison. Only the single sentence she utters is narrated: “‘I’m married now,’ she said. ‘Where is he? Or was it a she?’” (Paradise 179). Nothing more is mentioned about this girl. Gigi, an inmate of the convent, stamps the girl mad. Mavis feels sad for her. She thinks she should have given her at least a doll. Pallas, the new resident, wants to know why she has come there on her wedding night. Mavis explains that the girl had come to the convent years before. Then Connic had helped her to deliver her child. This is the first time the reader hears about the outcome of Arnette’s pregnancy. Even now, Morrison refers to Arnette as “she” without revealing her identity. The convent women talk of Arnette’s accusation that they had killed her baby. The reader thus gets to know that the child was shunned outright by Arnette soon after the delivery. Thus it is the discussion among the convent women that gives away the identity of this intruder with a wedding cake.

The name of Arnette Fleetwood finds a recording again only in the fifth section called ‘Patricia’ where Patricia Best, daughter of Roger Best and Delia, is charting out a collection of family trees of fifteen families of Ruby. Pat Best
marks the marriage of K.D. and Arnette in her book. She starts thinking of the latest piece of news—the baby of K.D. and Arnette that will be born in March' 75. Other genealogies of families are then examined by her. Suddenly she scribbles a new piece of information about Arnette on the K.D. pages’ margin: “Somebody beat up Arnette. The convent women, as folks say? Or, quiet as it’s kept, K.D.?”, (195-196) The reader thus is able to interpret the psychological crises of Arnette Fleetwood as the result of the pure breed community’s practice of fostering its ethical code. It became worse when K.D., her lover went after Gigi, a convent woman. Also, cultural transition may have affronted Arnette as she migrated to the city to study in a college. Thus mental harassment and the penetration of a new culture made Arnette the complex personality she is.

A full picture of Arnette can be formed by the reader only if repeated careful reading of the four disjointed pieces of narrative about Arnette in four different sections of the novel is made. Pat Best’s jotting in the margin reveals that the raving mad convent women had attacked an equally mad Arnette who went to the convent on her wedding night to enquire about the baby she had there in her teens. Rachel Blau Du Plessis sees such unconnected narrative as a deliberate measure of women poets who like to trample down cultural hegemony:
“Narrative displacement is like breaking the sentence, because it offers the possibility of speech to female in the case, giving voice to the muted. Narrative degeletimisation ‘breaks the sequence’, a realignment that puts the last first and the first last has always ruptured conventional morality, politics and narrative.” (Writing beyond the Ending 108).

Thus, in the case of Arnette Fleetwood, a fragmentary narrative speaks out her mental derangement and the rigours of having to live as part of a close knit community. Robbie B.H. Goh who traces magic realist elements in the narrative technique of Angela Carter interprets such narration to be “… a feminist critic of patriarchy, or a postmodernist destabilization of received history”. (ARIEL 30.3 (1999)69). This is true of Morrison’s broken narratives too if the reader analyses its subversive and radical ends.

Toni Morrison’s provocative stories “Recitatif” is all about Twyla’s placement as an eight - year - old child in St. Bonaventure, a shelter for neglected children and her reaction to Roberta Fisk, the room mate she is assigned. This is a story about a black woman and a white woman; but readers differ in their opinion about the identity of each. Conventional signifiers of racial difference like skin colour are abandoned by Morrison. In their place come
radically relativistic signifiers like who smells funny to whom. Thus this story makes race an arena for debate by giving us diverse positions. Similarly language becomes a terrain for experiments in the hands of Morrison; she dispenses with traditional signifiers here too.

Her brand of Magic Realism is extended to her language as well. For instance, her description of Nature shows the mix of the familiar and the unfamiliar images. Examples from Paradise are: "Clouds hid the night sky's best jewelry ...." (269) and "Under a metal – hot sky void of even one arrow of birds....." (168). Similarly in Beloved, Autumn is pictured with ".... Its bottles of blood and gold...." (116). The sky is ".... stripped of blue, was white hot at eleven in the morning" (46).

It's not only in her description of Nature that Morrison makes the bold venture of bringing together opposites. Even the various images that stand out in their uniqueness employ this. Examples from Jazz are: "... the seep of rage " (16), "...little children, strung like beads over suitcases..." (107), "...clarinets and lovemaking, fists and the voices of sorrowful women" (7), "... the tips dropped in my palm fast as pecans in November" (128), "In his company forgetfulness fell like pollen" (100) etc. Other startling images from Beloved which yoke together
two extremes are: "... a baby's venom (3), "... the lively spite the house felt for them" (3), "Suspended between the nas-/tiness of life and the meanness of the dead" (3-4), "... life in the raw" (38), "... lighting's jagged tear through a leather sky" (84), "... a cemetery as old as sky..." (155), "... as cold as charity..." (156), "... oil lamp in a cellar was sad..."(218) etc.

The Bluest Eye too abounds in Morrison’s distinctive use of images wherein the serious is yoked with the silly and where conflicting pictures are evoked. These are all reminders to conceive her novel as a fantasy. Images like "a gently wicked dance" (16), "the irritable, unimaginative cleanliness" (21), "a sweet endurable, even cherished irritation" (40), "the thunderous beauty of the funeral" (113), "Nuns go by as quiet as lust"(12), "a productive and fructifying pain"(14) etc. are examples from The Bluest Eye. In Paradise there are several instances for this bringing together of polarities in images: "An oven. Round as head, deep as desire." (6), "...a river of aunts...."(188), "Beyond blossom and death" (304), "The nuns who took the property over had endurance, kerosene and layers of exquisitely made habits".(169), to cite a few examples.

The quaint auditory images she uses also speak of her attempt "...to alter language, simple to free it up, not to repress or confine it, but to open it up"
Examples from Paradise are: "...the faraway cough of cornstalks" (42) and "...the bare feet plopping"... (43).

The potential of language to carry Morrison’s strength in being an Afro American writer is felt by the reader of Jazz: “This is evident in Morrison’s work in what appears to be at times a kind of ‘folk creating’, often employing metaphors derived from the animal and natural world.” (Toni Morrison 130). Examples are: “Defenseless as ducks...” (74), “...trout multiplied like flies” (177), “They hunched like mice near a can fire, not even a stove, on the floor, hungry and irritable” (113) etc.

The dismal and brutal images presented by her are certainly “... metonymic of much larger canvases of horror” (Toni Morrison 129). A few examples can be seen in Jazz: “A lip of skin hangs from her forehead...” (154), “...feelings, like sea trash expelled in a beach – strange and recognizable, stark and murky – returned.” (75), “Daylight starts like a razor cutting the buildings in half” (7) and “Her eyes were round as silver dollars but slit of a sudden too” (83). Examples from Song of Solomon are “... voice swelled like a blister” (202), “…a lightning arc of terror” (64). “A damp greenness lived there ...” (13), etc. Morrison
chooses her images from a woman’s world thereby making them essentially feminist and they fall into Kaplan’s category of bold attempts of women writers:

“...[F]or any new theoretical approach to literature that uses gender differences as an important category involves a profoundly altered view of the relation of both sexes to language, speech, writing and culture”.

(Literature in the Modern World 311).

For example, in The Bluest Eye, the love that Claudia experiences as a child was...thick and dark as Alaga syrup.” (14). Laughter of grownups that Claudia listens to is like “...the throb of a heart made of jelly” (16). Poland has a “...sweet, strawberry voice “ (40). Black women were experts in making biscuits which were “...flaking ovals of innocence” (110). When Claudia talks about the terrified lives of blacks, she says: “...we moved about anyway on the hem of life.” (18).

The construction of femininity in language can be encountered in Jazz too. About Dorcas, she writes: “All those ingredients of pretty and the recipe didn’t work.” (206). Talking about the young blood of the party goers, Joe says: “As though the red wash flying from veins not theirs is facial makeup patented for its glow” (191). Inside a restaurant, Violet finds that “...the scoops of ice cream lose
their ridges and turn to soft, glistening balls like soap bars left in a dishpan full of water” (93). Her use of language thus brings out the quest for the Afro-American woman’s voice, an attempt to create a recycling of typical black and feminist writing.

Her similes and images are often chosen from the world of women. Trinh. T. Minh-ha, therefore can include Morrison in the special category of women writers “...who, despite the threat of rejection, resolutely work toward the unlearning of institutionalized language, while staying alert to every deflection of their body compass needles.” (The post-Colonial Studies Reader 364). Beloved has several examples for this. So the way Baby Suggs died is described as “ soft as cream” (7). Denver has “... the face of an alert doll.”(11). A house’s description goes like this: “...as though a house was little thing – a shirtwaist or sewing basket you could walk off from or give away any old time”(22). Again Mrs. Bodwin, a white woman “... smelled like a roomful of flowers”(28). The snow that Denver was in was “ like the fruit of common flowers”(29). Sethe “... became as colour conscious as a hen.” (39). The ghost’s neck was “... no wider than a parlor-service saucer....” (50). Bits of news “... soaked like dried beans in spring water” (65).
The images of food that she brings in portray a woman’s world as in Paradise “... the Sun, watermelon red looked edible” (37), “the men’s squeaky new shoes glistened like melon seeds” (156) and “... the scraps of her gobble – gobble love” (240).

The use of colour reveals a special blending of various hues with life: “Colours contributes much to the impact of Morrison’s writing and often they are appreciated in a sensual and tactile rather than a purely visual way...”. (Toni Morrison 129). A few examples from Jazz are “... “butter-colored face” (19), green-as-poison curtain”(31), a citysky “... can go purple and keep as orange heart” (36), “... freshening the world’s green and dazzling acres of white cotton against the gash of a ruby horizon...” (105) etc. Again in Beloved, the headstone in the cemetery was “... pink as a fingernail...” (5). It is “... a dawn coloured stone studded with star chips” (5).

Apart from painting images with colour, Morrison also expresses the longing her women characters have for colour. In Beloved, Baby Suggs longs for particular shades of colour when she feels she is exhausted with life: “Bring a little lavender in, if you got any. Pink if you don’t”(4). Similarly, Amy, the white woman who helps Sethe to bring Denver into this world also talks lovingly about
the exact shade of velvet she wants: "The velvet I seen was brown, but in Boston they got all colors Carmine. That means red but when you talk about velvet you go to say 'Carmine'" (33).

In his discussion on women's language, Robin Lakoff points out that women always "... relegated the non-crucial/decisions as a Sop. Deciding whether to name a colour 'lavender' or 'mauve' is one such sop." (The Feminist Critique of language (244-245). Morrison, on the other hand, revels in this special ability of women to have a fascination for different specific shades of colour. In spite of the fundamental uncertainty of survival in a racist world, her women characters are granted at least a freedom of choice when it comes to colours, so believes Morrison. Again, it's her subversive twist that makes this strategy magic realist in nature.

All kinds of semantic derogation associated with Black English are abandoned by Morrison when she uses their characteristic expressions. For instance, newspaper is called "...filthy 'talking sheets'..." in Beloved (52). Sethe's ruminating over her past is described using the word "rememory" (201). The black custom of greeting each other warmly also finds expressions here: "He
said howdy to everybody within twenty feet" (47). Sethe remembers the special language her mother and her Nan spoke and regrets its complete absence now.

In one of her interviews, Morrison had praised Hemingway, Flannery O'Connor, Faulkner and Fitzgerald saying that the stories they wrote could never be written by any other writer: “I don’t mean the subject matter or the narrative but just the way in which they did it - their slant on it is truly unique” (Woman Writers at Work 295). Her own comment is very much true of Morrison herself. There are very few women writers who have wielded gender and racial qualities to advantage as Morrison has done thereby assigning a Morrisonian touch to Magic Realism in her fiction.