CHAPTER III

MAGIC AS DYSTOPIA

A study of fantasy as a genre in English and American Literature since 1945 has been conducted by Ann Swinfen. She takes note of the mode of fantasy used by some modern fantasists who are concerned with social and political idealisms. While religious and philosophic fantasists talk of worlds beyond this world, social and political fantasists present idealisms of this world. In order to captivate the contemporary reader, who admires their idealisms, the social and political fantasists limit him within the framework of his daily life, and never do they go far away from primary reality. A discerning reader can see the use of an alternate example in the place of the idealism that has always been implied by the social and political idealist. This counter example is often the result of the realization that a perfect and convincing utopia just cannot be created. The
portrayal of a very unpleasant imaginary world – a dystopia thus becomes the counter example of these fantasists. Ann Swinfen comments:

"Writers usually find it easier to depict a dystopia, as a warning of the undesirable forms which our social and political institutions have taken or may take, and their ideals must be deduced as the converse/of what they deplore". (In defence of Fantasy 190-191).

'Dystopian' was first used as an adjective by J.S. Mill in the late nineteenth century. He wanted the adjective to suggest an imagined state which was not desirable. From then on 'dystopia' refers to nightmare visions of the future. Its best known examples in the nineteenth century are Samuel Butler's Erewhon and Erewhon Revisited. The first striking example was Aldous Huxley's Brave New World. It is about the deadness of a civilization which has come to be dominated by scientific technology. E.M. Foster's tale The Machine Stops has a similar theme. Both are written in reaction against H.G. Wells's optimism about technology. George Orwell's 1984 is a nightmare about twentieth century political totalitarianism. It is grimmer because Orwell brought the date of his anticipated society very close to the time of writing. Similarly Toni Morrison too
intends to give warning of the vicious tendencies of society in her fiction through
the portrayal of dystopias.

The all-women household emerges as a recurring phenomenon in
Morrison's fiction. She lets grim satire colour her portrayal of such households
rather than exemplifying its ideals. Hence the totally alternative life-style tried out
by these households become dystopian in nature. All these households mock
severely the utopian belief that technology and mechanization are indispensable to
progress. Thus in *The Bluest Eye*, her way of creating a dramatic opposition to
the utopian ideal marks a beginning in the only - women home of three prostitutes
- China, Poland and Marie. They live in an apartment above the storefront of the
Breedloves. Though they make a living out of prostitution, they hate men.
Morrison lets these prostitutes find self-sufficiency by 'exploiting' men:

"They abused their visitors with a scorn grown mechanical from use.
Black men, white men, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Jews, Poles, whatever –
all were inadequate and weak, all came under their jaundiced eyes and
were the recipients of their disinterested wrath. They took delight in
cheating them." (*The Bluest Eye* 47-48).
Susan Willis explains this further in her discussion of Southern agrarian economy. It is a non-wage – labour economy and a non-money economy as well. Black men, who are not employed by this economy, resort to marginal endeavors like gambling and bootlegging. On the other hand, the black women of the South, challenge the traditional dependency on this economy, defined by the possession of money, by suggesting alternative possibilities of survival. Willis goes on to say:

"In black women's novels these endeavors are transformed out of the grim reality of marginality and dependency and become instead metaphoric statements of alternative economics not incorporated within capitalism". (Specifying 12).

Morrison does not allow the reader to look down upon the way of living of the three prostitutes. Instead, she talks about their respect for coloured women who look after their families. The younger days of China, Poland and Marie were regretted only because of their negligence in making money, which could have been done if they had taken up wayward living then itself. The real intention of Morrison is to let the reader understand the desperate longing of poor black women to enjoy economic freedom that has always been denied to them. Patricia Hill Collins makes a mention of this: “The linking of economic self-sufficiency
as one critical dimension of self-reliance with the demand for respect permeates
Black feminist thought.” (Black Feminist Thought 110).

Another non-conservative only – women household is encountered in Sula. Eva Peace, the grand mother of Sula is the head of this dystopian home. She survives the battles of life without male assistance or protection:

“The creator and sovereign of this enormous house with the four sickle pear trees in the front yard and the single elm in the backyard was Eva Peace, who sat in a wagon on the third floor directing the lives of her children, friends, strays, and a constant stream of boarders.” (Sula 30).

Continuous reliance on non-capitalistic devises as a means of survival finds several examples in this novel. John Domini, who looks upon Sula as an inverted inferno, enlists these social freedoms gained negatively by the women of this novel:

“.Eva Peace has literally bartered her flesh, sacrificing a leg in order to collect railroad insurance....Sula goes to college on the insurance money from her dead uncle and mother...” (High Plains Literary Review 3.1 (1988) 81).
It is Eva’s practical mindedness which borders on viciousness that makes her bold enough to do the dystopian act – losing her leg was no accident, she did it deliberately. Thus Eva’s act of cutting off her own leg and her decision to end the misery of Plum, her drug-addicted son by burning him to death are thus desperate attempts on her part to carry on with her lonely battle. With Hannah’s suicide, the members of this only-women household with boarders shrink to just two, but insurance money increases. Thus Morrison lets the reader see how a social materialistic view can be projected in an extremely unpleasant form.

Pilate’s three-women household in Song of Solomon discloses another way in which Morrison directly questions the accepted norms of earning a livelihood and running a house. Before Pilate settles down, she leads the life of a nomad. During these days, she has been trying to reach Virginia and so does odd and difficult jobs of a picker, a washerwoman and so on. Once she decides to venture domesticity, she starts making wine and whiskey for a living: “Along with wine-making, cooking whiskey, became the way Pilate began to make her steady living.” (Song of Solomon 150). She is optimistic about carrying on with her wine-making. Once when Hagar, her granddaughter points out that everybody has started buying Four Roses, Pilate confidently replies that her cheap wine will be
bought by people: "Plenty still buy...." (Song of Solomon 48). She has no qualms in selling wine illegally either.

Just as Eva’s house with the constant stream of boarders defies all our preconceived notions about a home, Pilate’s place of dwelling is also queer:

"Pilate lived in a narrow single - story house whose basement seemed to be rising from rather than settling into the ground. She had no electricity because she would not pay for the service. Nor for gas. At night she and her daughter lit the house with candles and kerosene lamps; they warmed themselves and cooked with wood and coal, pumped kitchen water into a dry sink through a pipeline from a well and lived pretty much as though progress was a word that meant walking a little farther on down the road." (Song of Solomon 27).

Everything inside is in total disarray. The big airy room inside looks both plain and crowded at the same time. A moss-green sack is hung from the ceiling. Candles are kept in bottles everywhere. Newspaper articles and magazine pictures are nailed to the walls. There is no furniture other than a rocking chair, two straight-backed chairs, a large table, a sink and a store. Besides, an odour of
pine and fermenting fruit is ever present. Her house has no bathroom. She does not believe in the modern amenities of life – there is no telephone. Her house does not even have a number.

The construction of Pilate’s house is also peculiar. It has just two rooms – a big living room and a bed room. There aren’t any doors or windows that can be locked. There is no back door either. The house has a cellar. Inspite of all these peculiarities, even Ruth, Macon Dead’s wife, who visits the house in anger once, feels that it is “....an inn, a safe harbour.” (Song of Solomon 135).

As for the three women of Pilate’s house, no regular habits ever tie them down to mediocrity. They stir out of the house only for circuses and funerals. Pilate tells time by looking at the Sun. She doesn’t believe in any formality: “‘Floor’s good enough for me,’ said Pilate, and she squatted on her haunches…” (Song of Solomon 44). The food that they eat mark them out:

“...[S]he and her daughter ate like children. Whatever they had a taste for. No meal was ever planned or balanced or served. Nor was there any gathering at the table. Pilate might bake hot bread and each one of them would eat it with butter whenever she felt like it. Or there might be
grapes, left over from the wine making, or peaches for days on end. If one of them bought a gallon of milk, they drank it until it was gone. If another got a half bushel of tomatoes or a dozen ears of corn, they ate them until they were gone too. They ate what they had or come across or had a craving for.” (Song of Solomon 29).

They don’t know how to save money too: “Profits from their wine – selling evaporated like sea water in a hot wind – going for junk jewellery for Hagar, Reba’s gifts to men…” (Song of Solomon 29). They never felt like doing or finishing any household chores: “They didn’t move. They simply stopped singing and Reba went on paring her toenails, Hagar threaded and unthreaded her hair, and Pilate swayed like a willow over her stirring.” (Song of Solomon 31).

Pilate’s economic independence is not the only factor that contributes to her dystopian existence. She displays emotional independence too. She has her own pet theories about the way she should live. These highly individualistic contentions pose a threat to patriarchal value systems. For example, Pilate is careful about the language people use, though she is not formally educated. She explains to Milkman and Guitar, his friend that ‘Hi’ as a salutation is impolite.
When it comes to defining relationships within a family, Pilate is above petty feelings. For her, 'brother' and 'cousin' are the same.

Her method of wine-making is unique. Guitar talks about crushing berries using his feet and Pilate is disgusted: “'Feet? Feet?' Pilate was outraged. 'Who makes wine with they feet?'” (Song of Solomon 47). She believes in all her abilities. She has never felt any compulsion to taste her wine to test its quality.

Susan Willis singles out three central concerns in writing by black women – community, journey and sexuality. According to Willis, black women writers articulate their perspectives on black experience in America through these three concerns. Though Willis does not make use of the term – dystopia, her analysis of black communities is all about their negation of bourgeois social models: “Most often in black women’s writing the notion of community is defined by what it is not, rather than what it is.” (Making a Difference 218). Therefore Pilate’s household, which epitomizes non-accumulation and the economic, independence of cottage industry, defines its own dystopian nature. These two elements of Pilate’s household are nothing but dystopian reworking of the town’s excessive dependence on the city. Pilate thus arms herself with her ingenuous way of living
and leads a perfectly happy life. True to its dystopian nature, her alternative life style is alarming in its uniqueness:

"Once settled in as a small-time bootlegger in the colored section of a town, she had only occasional police or sheriff problems, for she allowed none of the activities that often accompanied wine houses – women, gambling – and she more often than not refused to let her customers drink what they bought from her on the premises. She made and sold liquor. Period. (Song of Solomon 150).

_Tar Baby, the fourth novel of Morrison, does not depict the all-women household pattern, where as _Beloved_, her fifth novel takes up her favourite motif again. Thus, when Sethe reaches 124, Bluestone Road, Cincinnati, all that she wants to do is to lead a peaceful life with Baby Suggs, her mother-in-law and her own children. But this love-enveloped nest is shattered by the dead baby of Sethe that comes back to destroy, haunt and possess 124. The two sons of Sethe-Buglar and Howard run away from home when they understand that a casual glance at a mirror can break it and two very small handprints are seen on a cake. From then on, 124 becomes an only-women household. The bold attempts at survival made by Sethe after Baby Suggs’ death once again prove the dystopian nature of the
home in *Beloved*. Sethe starts supporting herself and Denver, her daughter by working in a restaurant and sewing. She worked at a stone mason’s shop too.

In her study on feminist utopias, Anne Cranny-Francis talks about Moylan’s observation: “Moylan also notes that contemporary utopian thought is the product of what he terms an ‘anti-hegemonic bloc’…” (*Feminist Fiction* 126). Thus Sethe’s courageous act of devising means of sustenance in a hostile world is just an instance of the similar efforts of fugitives who try to be free of the white master. In rebelling against racist power, the run-away slaves build up anti-hegemonic schemes. This is just what is pointed out by Moylan. Since a dystopia is often the fruit of bitter historical experience, Sethe’s acts of resistance are all dystopian.

*Jazz* too portrays a dystopia. However, the only-women houses of *The Bluest Eye, Sula, Song of Solomon,* and *Beloved* are discarded here; instead, the longer canvas of the city is introduced. The black community of the South is the utopia according to Morrison in this novel. She romanticizes the notion of the black community of the South. It’s failure to preserve its pristine goodness in the urban North is behind Morrison’s presentation of the city as a dystopia. Thus Harlem becomes a classic example of a dystopia, where all the glorified charm of the South evaporates. Hence, Harlem gives only nightmarish experiences for the
Southerner. There is no air there, but only stale breath. Deception is the order of the day there. We read of the typical Southerner who has forgotten how easy it was to stoop down to pluck apples and how large, friendly and beautiful the sun used to look near him. In the city, the sky has become the sole informer about the division of time into day and night. There aren’t any thickets in the city, only mowed grass is there. This juxtaposing of the heavenly rural South with the corrupt urban North and fascination for the former and disappointment in the latter are nothing but the determinants of a dystopia. Every dystopia speaks of the modern man’s abject insignificance in the anarchic city. His inability to return to a non-mechanized environment even as a gesture of defiance becomes more poignant if he is subjected to racial exploitation. Anne Cranny-Francis says that this is exactly how a dystopia is generated: “...[D]ystopias are produced at times of political oppression and (consequent) apathy, arising from the despair of the oppressed...” (Feminist Fiction 142).

Paradise, the latest novel of Morrison presents the culmination of her attempt at depicting the all-women household as the complex way in which women can construct and experience a community of their own. In this novel, the only-women house is a Convent. It was originally a baroque fortress built by an embezzler. Within no time the embezzler had been arrested by the northern
lawmen. It was converted into a convent by four teaching sisters who bought it cheap at a sale. Sister Mary Magna brought Consolata, a foundling to Christ the King School for Native Girls. Initially Indian girls were taught there. Later, wayward girls of the State were admitted. There came a time when the Catholic church itself asked the nuns to close down the Convent. Finally only the Mother — Sr. Mary Magna and Consolata remained at the convent. Sargeant Person leases their land for corn and alfalfa. From this point onwards we see the united efforts of the Mother and Consolata to have some control over their utter lack of economic sources. They started making and selling corn relish, rhubarb pie, pecan pie, sauces, jellies and European chickens and pecan.

Anne Cranny-Francis’s theory is that it is a politically conscious writer who resorts to the use of a feminist utopia. Such a writer makes it “....function as a challenge to ...power mechanisms..” (Feminist Fiction 108) which try to control and overpower them. Setting aside Cranny-Francis’s attribution of the term ‘utopia’, it is more accurate to call the world of the Convent women, with its weird patterns of living, a dystopia. The alternate social order created inside the convent thus becomes ample proof for its dystopian nature.
Though the Convent is seventeen miles away from Ruby, the only black-town, customers come there regularly. So Consolata tells Mavis Albright as she steps inside the Convent for the first time. “Somebody always come. Everyday. This morning already I sold forty-eight ears of corn and a whole pound of peppers.” (Paradise 40).

However, the economic independence in this ‘ideal world’ is a poor substitute for the utter lack of warmth, care and concern that one associates with a normal order in a family. For Mavis, this is unbearable on her first visit to the Convent:

“A quiet, secret fire breathing itself and exhaling the sound of its increase: the crack of shells, the tick of nut meat tossed in the bowl, cooking utensils in eternal adjustment, insect whisper, the argue of long grass, the faraway cough of cornstalls.” (Paradise 42).

Thus, the dystopian world inside the convent seems to fit in with a certain type of separatism defined by Sonya Andermahr. Andermahr explains that severe harassment of women by oppressive men can force them to establish their own private haven where men are never allowed to enter. They despise and shun male company forever:
"The second form of separatism, ... characteristic of cultural feminism and the radical feminism of the 1970's, sees separatism not only as a strategy but as a final solution to the problem of women's oppression in male-dominated society. The emphasis is not so much on overthrowing the male system as on withdrawing from it for good. Having disengaged from male society, women will create an all-female world..." (New Lesbian Criticism 134).

The Convent with its most rudimentary facilities becomes a paradise for its women who invent effective strategies of survival. Susan Willis explains this further: "...black women's writing imagines the future in the present. It sees the future born out of the context of oppression." (Specifying 159). With Mavis Albright's decision to stay on in the convent, the convent's slow conversion into a dystopia starts. The convent begins taking in any women who are in trouble. After the death of the Mother, Consolata puts on the mantle of a Matriarch. She encourages each of the battered women, who seeks shelter in the convent on account of inequalities of race, class and gender, to narrate to her their woes. After a period of time, Consolata descends into madness as she becomes a slave to
liquor. All that she remembers about the floating population of the convent is that they had the same pattern in life:

“What she knew of them she had mostly forgotten, and it seemed less and less important to remember any of it, because the timbre of each of their voices told the same tale: disorder, deception and.../drift.” (Paradise 221-222).

What appears as a shelter for marginalized women becomes a fortress of power. If domestic violence and public crimes silenced the women who flew to the convent, inside it they found empowerment. The convent assisted them in establishing control in relationships in which they had been powerless outside the convent. For instance, Pallas Truelove, a sixteen year old girl, who has been forsaken by Carlos, her lover for Dee Dee, her own mother, is found in a hospital by Billie Delia. Billie herself had once been comforted by the women at the convent. So she reassures Pallas as she is taken to the Convent:

“This is a place where you can stay for a while. No questions. I did it once and they were nice to me... Don’t be afraid... Afraid of them, I mean. Don’t see many girls like them out here... /Don’t be surprised if they don’t
have on any clothes...Anyway you can collect yourself there, think things through, with nothing or nobody bothering you all the time.” (Paradise 176–177).

The convent offers a complete antithesis to the demands of family as an institution. Ordinarily, the father figure would warn the children of his home against the evil outside. Instead, there is Consolata or Connie laughing at the extraneous evil. What she fears is the evil inside: “Connie laughed. ‘Scary things not always outside. Most scary things is inside’.” (Paradise 39). Again, the reader sees Connie emphasizing that inside the convent the experienced real is what matters, even if it’s against mores.

The evil in the convent degenerates into diabolic wickedness soon. With the demise of the Mother Superior—Sr. Mary Magna, devotion and piety leave it forever. Connie’s rule allows a kind of paganism to filter in. Graven idols are worshipped now. Connie and the new inmates never enter a church. The fiendish nature of the inhabitants of the convent may have had something to do with a car full of skeletons discovered in the cornfields just two miles away from the convent. Lone DuPres, the midwife of Ruby, who spotted the car, concludes that the family might have died in a blizzard. Buzzards had feasted on them. What
Lone could not understand why the convent women couldn’t rescue the people inside the car:

“I can’t believe a whole family died out there without nobody knowing it. They wasn’t all that far away, know what I’m saying? Can’t nobody tell me they left the road and got themselves lost in a field with a big old house less than two miles away. They would have seen it. Had to.” (Paradise 276).

It is this belief about the presence of satanic forces in the convent that makes Deacon Morgan say that at the convent “…the entrance to hell is wide…” (Paradise 114).

Anne Cranny – Francis’s exploration of Feminist Utopias facilitates the differentiation of utopian to dystopian features: “The essential difference between the utopian and dystopian figure is that the former discursively indicates the real, the latter signifies the real.” (Feminist Fiction 125). Thus it is the rebelliousness deep inside the minds of the convent women that forces them to come out with evil. This evil tramples down the racialized sexism of patriarchy. Outside the convent, they can not indulge in such bohemian habits. Though they
are free to come and go as they please, they stay in the convent even after Connie degenerates into complete madness. As instructed by Connie they lie naked on the cellar floor and she paints their bodies’ silhouette Connie delivers unintelligible speeches. They narrate their lives’ stories to one another. Meanwhile the evil paintings grow in number:

"Yellow barrettes red peonies, a green cross on a field of white. A majestic penis pierced with a cupid’s bow. Rose of Sharon petals, Lorna Doones. A bright orange couple making steady love under a childish sun". (Paradise 265).

All these speak of the viciousness with which the women were treated in their pre-convent days. As Cranny-Francis notes, the dystopia projected by the women exemplify the reality of the above abuse they suffered earlier.

The dystopia outlined by Morrison is certainly an urban one. For example, Seneca, at the age of five, was stranded in a Government housing in Beacon in 1958. She was left all alone in the apartment by Jean, her sister. The little girl manages on her own for six days till a caseworker comes to her. From then on, it had been one foster home after another where she suffered sexual harassment. She
falls into the hands of Mrs Norma Keene Fox who gives her five hundred dollars 
"... for some complicated but quite easy work.." (Paradise 135) that makes Seneca’s degradation complete. Though she cultivates a strong relationship with Eddie Turtle, a prisoner, the little happiness she finds in it vanishes soon. This certainly is an instance of urban subculture leading to deprivation because government housing, case workers and foster homes – all speak of a city’s typical subculture. Liam Kennedy speaks about this link between dystopia and urbanness:

“A utopian/dystopian dialectic operates within and across black city texts, dramatizing the possibility and prohibition for African-American subjects. The city is a space of refuge, recommunalisation and individual agency; but it is also a space of terror, segregation and environmental determinism”.

(Writing and Race 110).

The dystopian atmosphere inside the convent is bared further when the reader learns that the convent women sleep in hammocks and not on beds. Apart from the hammocks, a narrow desk and an end table, there is no furniture. There aren’t any clothes in their closets. They wear unfit dirty dresses. Shoes are also not to be found anywhere there. A 1968 calendar and an astrology chart are all that they have to relate them to Time. After descending into totally abnormal
ways, the convent women are shown to take shelter in rain. They dance away swaying to the rhythm of madness in their veins:

“Gathered in the kitchen door, first they watched, then they stuck out their hands to feel. It was like lotion on their fingers so they entered it and let it pour like balm on their shaved heads and upturned faces. Consolata started it; the rest were quick to join her. There are great rivers in the world and on their banks and the edges of oceans thrill to water. In places where rain is light the thrill is almost erotic. But those sensations bow to the rapture of holy women dancing in hot sweet rain.” (Paradise 283).

In the description of their dance in the rain that follows this account, Morrison narrates the merging of their past, its erasure and a sense of triumph that they experience even in this state of madness. Kathryn Hume’s elaborate theories on Fantasy include such an account of a dystopia. To Hume, it takes a dystopia, to let us know that we as a group can experience happiness only if we do away with the idea of freedom. The Convent women, for instance, are free to cut themselves off from the neurotic centre – Connie. Yet, they never do that. Instead, they relate their stories, with such gusto, to one another that their past becomes a merged whole. Their elation grows. Hume explains:
“All...dystopias struggle with a paradox: individuality is messy, inefficient, harmful to others, and often just as harmful and distressing to its possessor. Freedom is necessary for individuality...[b]ut ensured happiness for the greatest number can only be achieved by abolishing freedom.” (Fantasy and Mimesis 111).

Another manifestation of the dystopia projected by Morrison is madness experienced by her characters who have been subjected to race, class and sexist oppression. Curiously, these characters internalize these forms of oppression due to ideological conquest and indoctrination by the oppressors. This leads to self-doubt and self hatred in the victims and finally results in a dislocated, fractured and inauthentic self. For instance, in The Bluest Eye, Pecola Breedlove’s neurotic obsession with blue eyes is synonymous with her search for the American myth of beauty as self-virtue. The most terrible of her experiences is her violation by her own father. Subsequently, Pecola’s wish causes psychic devastation, splitting of her psyche and splitting of her own self from the world as well. Consequently, the last pages of the novel show her walking on the edge of town, talking to her split self as even her mother looks away on seeing her. In her madness, she believes that she has at last been granted blue eyes and that her
own community's rejection of her stems from their jealousy – she has the bluest
eyes among all of them. T. E. Apter's study of Fantasy includes Freud's
interpretation of the divided self which corresponds to Pecola's predicament as well:

"In his study of melancholia Freud also discovered identification at work.
The self-reproaches characteristic of the melancholic arise from the fact
that the ego has been identified with a lost or relinquished love object (in
defence against the loss) and wishes to be revenged upon the lost or
abandoned object. Since the self is no longer identified with the ego, the
'self' – reproaches are actually directed towards the lost object. Hysterical
symptoms, too, are seen to arise from identification. The symptom shows
the point at which the patient has identified with another, the symptom is
the other's characteristic acquired by the patient; as a version of
synecdoche, it is a means of asserting the identification. (Fantasy Literature
51).

In the dystopian world of Sula, we meet Shadrack, a twenty-two year old
who finds that he has become insane after the J.P. Morgan's war of 1917 in which
he himself had participated. He is not able to remember any details about his
past. Instead of making Shadrack succumb to fatal conformity on account of his madness, Morrison makes his clamour for individuality heard distinctly. Anna Shannon talks about this attempt of Morrison to maintain an identity in the face of racism. According to Shannon, John Oliver Killens and Toni Morrison are black authors who have chosen a separatist stance, emphasizing the schizophrenia of socially and interpersonally dangerous black men and women. They become mad during their struggle to oppose the uneasy accommodation of blacks to the whitewash conventions of the majority culture. Shannon cites the examples of Shadrack in *Sula*:

“In founding National Suicide Day, his idiosyncratic, unintentional parody of Veteran’s Day and other conventional celebrations of individual sacrifice exacted by war, Shadrack issues a mad call to the Bottom to regularize and control murder by devoting one day a year to it... Finally, in the months before Pearl Harbor, he finds followers when a comic procession of members of the community .... troop to icy death in an uncompleted, unstable tunnel.” (*Midwestern Miscellany* 10 (1982) 18).

*Tar Baby* offers no instances of neurosis; but Morrison’s fourth novel — *Song of Solomon* portrays madness again. Hagar goes mad with longing for
Milkman when she realizes that he has ended their relationship once and for all. In a frenzy, Hagar indulges in a shopping spree, trying to turn herself into a light-skinned beauty with copper-coloured hair. Predictably, she comes to a tragic end: She dies heart-broken when her illusions are shattered. Sherine Upot looks upon Hagar’s madness as the direct result of the degeneration the black community undergoes when it allows itself to be engulfed by a larger capitalist society. The utopian black community has given way to a dystopia which is no longer a socially binding force:

“The values and kinship such a community promoted have been destroyed under the impact of a burgeoning capitalism that replaces cultural production with commodity consumption. Pilate’s grand daughter Hagar provides a good example of how it becomes impossible for a woman with no memories of such a nurturing community to come to terms with existence.” (IJAS Vol.23.2 (1993) 78).

Sethe of Beloved, like Morrison’s other female protagonists, is a victim of both sexist and racist oppression. She is a runaway slave woman and a slave mother. Sethe’s alienation is not simply the result of a black woman’s separation
from her family or her cultural centre but also the result of her murdering her own daughter to protect her from living the abject life of a slave. After Beloved’s arrival, Sethe degenerates into a semi-mad state out of her obsessive concern for Beloved. Usha Puri discovers that once Sethe is cut off from the support system of her community, her regression into madness becomes complete:

“Sethe bears with the outrageous behaviour of the place to make peace with the fury of the ghost of her two-year-old baby, Beloved. Sethe is marginally incorporated into the black community... Sethe lives in a state of schizophrenia, in which her marginality is constantly confronted with the outside world.” (“Toni Morrison: Redefining Feminine Space in Beloved” 6).

It is Sethe’s madness that makes real the conversion of the utopian community of blacks into a dystopian one. Thus the dystopian world of Beloved becomes an authentic rendering of slave narrative.

All the major characters of Jazz move to the realm of personality disorders. The three central characters – Joseph Trace, Violet Trace, his wife and Dorcas Manfred, his young lover seem to suffer from instability of self-image,
interpersonal relationships and mood. Shoshana Felman provides a number of revelations about madness in women in her study. One such observation is applicable to the identity disturbance experienced by the characters of Jazz:

"...[Q]uite the opposite of rebellion, madness is the impasse confronting those whom cultural conditioning has deprived of the very means of protest on self-affirmation." (The Feminist Reader 118).

Morrison traces the vulnerability of these three characters to disorganization when they are stressed by harassment in the dystopian world of the white man.

Violet Trace is introduced to us by the Narrator through two instances when she had been unable to keep an equilibrium between her internal drive and the world around. One is when she sat down in the middle of a street. The next is her effort to steal a baby. According to the Narrator, these are two examples of her "...public craziness..." (Jazz 22). These include moments when she sees different activities of the day being done in the light of a globe. In between these activities are cracks into which she is forever falling:
“Sometimes when Violet isn’t paying attention she stumbles onto these cracks, like the time when, instead of putting her left heel forward, she stepped back and folded her legs in order to sit in the street.” (Jazz 23).

There is a pervasive pattern of strange talk in her: “Felt the anything – at all begin in her mouth. Words connected only to themselves pierced an otherwise normal comment.” (Jazz 23). Initially her speech is just peculiar without loosening of associations or incoherence. For instance, she complains about a number and then suddenly wonders who the beautiful girl who stands next to Joe is: “Got a mind to double it with an aught and two or three others just in case who is that pretty girl standing next you?” (Jazz 24). There is slow degeneration of her ability to cope with her husband’s affair with the young girl. Eventually, this forces her to develop transient psychotic reaction. This stage in her is marked by incoherent speech. An example is seen in the reply she gives to a query about an appointment: “Two o’ clock if the hearse is out of the way.” (Jazz 24). There is further regression in her which finally makes her abandon her “… renegade tongue…” (Jazz 24) and take up silence.

One reason why Joe Trace succumbs to mental aberration is because of Violet’s determination to stick on to silence. It irks him so much that he feels
drawn to Dorcas. He complaints about Violet’s pent-up self: “But the quiet. I can’t take the quiet. She don’t hardly talk anymore, and I ain’t allowed near her” (Jazz 49). At another point in the novel, Violet offers an explanation. She is bent upon continuing with the quiet as she is afraid of the powerful feeling of resentment welling up with in her. The suppressed feelings of women who are exploited by a patriarchal set up are echoed by Morrison here. Violet can never forget the appropriation of their property and belongings by the Whites as her father supported a party that was all for the voting of blacks, the bitter struggle of Rose Dear, her mother to make it on her own, Rose Dear’s suicide and her father’s occasional visits which never fooled her. Violet Trace thus takes the most important decision of her life – never to have any children. She is unable to sleep after her mother’s suicide. Later, the intimacy between Joe and Dorcas starts tearing her apart. Thus her silence is her way of rebelling against the dominant discourse. Dale Bauer who observes the implications of gender in Bakhtin’s Carnival says the same:

“The ambivalence toward interpretative community arises from an aggressivity which is often marked by an alteration between a speaking and silenced female subject.” (Feminisms 673).
When Felice, Dorcas’s friend asks her why she has tried to mutilate the deadbody of Dorcas, Violet says: “Killed her. Then I killed the me that killed her.” (Jazz 209). The explanation given by her makes it clear that her disorder oscillates between neurosis and psychosis. Along with impulsive and unpredictable behaviour, she thus has another personality: “It is the unconscious splitting off of some mental processes and behaviour from the normal or conscious awareness of the individual. When extreme, this can lead to multiple personalities.” (Psychiatry 236).

Lack of association between the intellectual processes and actions is carried to its maximum in the case of Joseph Trace. The type of mental disorder that he suffers from is called Schizophrenia. Medical history says that a schizotypal patient has a biologic marker like the “... disorders of smooth pursuit eye movements.” (Psychiatry 236). Joe’s eyes are of two colours: “A sad one that lets you look inside him, and a clean one that looks inside you.” (Jazz 206). He suffers from a crisis of identity. He finds himself cast off by his mother, a Wild Woman. When he finds it impossible to establish links with her, there is an “... inside nothing he traveled with from then on....” (Jazz 37).
As in the case of other major characters, Joe Trace’s self too is puzzling to the reader initially – but the different peeps into the various stages of his life reveal slowly the person he is. Morrison here uses the Jazz tradition as a method which is akin to the rhetorical strategy called signifyin(g) exemplified by Gates:

“Signifyin(g) is a uniquely black theoretical concept, entirely textual or linguistic, by which a second statement or figure repeats, or tropes, or reverses the first.”

(“Figures in Black” 49). Thus we see Joe Trace renewing himself seven times. At first he gives himself a new name – Trace, though he is brought up by Frank Williams. Secondly, he acquires a new self when Hunter’s Hunter chooses him to give training on hunting. In 1893 his third personality change occurs when the country land of Vienna is burned and he is forced to up-root himself. The fourth change comes in 1906 when he takes his wife Violet to Rome, a small place where she was born. His fifth new self saw a life of menial work like cleaning fish at night and toilets during day time. Then, just before the war, Joe and Violet start living in Lenox. The seventh phase of his life began when he became hurt in the riot where white men injured him. By 1925 his downward plunge becomes complete as Violet has started sleeping with a doll.

The dejection that he experiences is kept under control for quite sometime. He continues to be the amiable fellow of the neighbourhood selling Cleopatra
beauty products. The first meeting with Dorcas starts his undoing. His frustration is unleashed and the resultant emotional disorder seems to convince him that Dorcas is best for him. He displays eccentric thinking: "More like blue water and white flowers, and sugar in the air. Indeed to be there, where it was all mixed up together just right, and where that was, was Dorcas." (Jazz 122). He starts meeting her regularly in a hide out. When happiness overcomes them, they yell together. Later, the young girl's adoration of a young man called Acton makes her desert Joe. He moves to a state of paranoia. He discovers a trail that speaks to him as he hunts down Dorcas and kills her.

Dorcas Manfred is the third character in Jazz who suffers from a personality disorder which is characterized by emotional coldness and aloofness. Her utter lack of emotional response can be traced to her parents getting killed in the riots at East St. Louis when two hundred innocent blacks were killed. The clinical precision and care with which her aunt brings her up does further harm to her. Unlike Joe Trace and Violet Trace who have close links with the country and whose inner decay start in the city, Dorcas is brought up in the city and has no kin who is emotionally supportive.

Felice is the only friend Dorcas has. It is through Felice that we piece together the full picture of Dorcas. Felice tells us that Dorcas was never afraid as
a child. She always liked secrecy. At a certain stage in the novel, Joe explains that he is able to have a perfect rapport with Dorcas as both have emptiness within. To him, she: "...knew better than people his own age what that inside / nothing was like. And who filled it for him, just as he filled it for her, because she had it too." (Jazz 37-38). Joe's interpretation of the murder of Dorcas as his inability to know how to love anyone makes his diagnosis clear. Likewise, Dorcas' last message to Joe is also an eye-opener. She speaks of an apple and that must be narrated to Joe, she says to Felice. This pattern of odd thinking is an index of her psychoneurotic disorder. Thus, these three characters of Morrison frequently steps in and out of the realm of the abnormal. Therefore marginalized human beings whose actions border on violence are portrayed as the central figures in this novel. They are peculiar because of their racial subjugation and associated trauma. Hiding beneath the unreal masks of neurosis and schizophrenia, these segregated blacks make us confront the reality of racism and oppression. Thus, the dystopian world of the under privileged blacks in Jazz seems to:

"...blur the edges of realism, dissolving the rigours of plot and characterization in phantasmagorical productions attributed to the disturbed and disturbing psyche of protagonists...[T]hey operate on the basis of a radical disruption of expectations...They burst out of the
conventions of the novel of plausibility into fantasy..." ([Un]like Subjects 84).

Liam Kennedy who links together race, ethnicity and narrative practices in American Literature observes that Jazz, Morrison's sixth novel, has as its themes "... psychological instability and cultural transition." (Writing and Race 111). These same themes are magnified in Paradise. For instance, Mavis Albright in Paradise is obsessed with the fear of her husband, Frank and her daughter, Sally. She imagines that Frank will ask her kids – Sal, Frankie and Billy James to torture her. She keeps on thinking about a trap laid just to kill her. Her psychological instability becomes clear to the reader when her twin babies are allowed to die of suffocation inside her own car by her. After being murdered, however the resurrected Mavis, after long years of stay at the convent, goes back to Maryland where she sees Sally. It is then that Mavis realizes that all along, the abusive husband of hers had been generating peculiar fears in her. Thus, with Mavis, Morrison's intention is to sketch out the harassment a woman can be subjected to in her own home.

Gigi, another inmate of the Convent is a slave to evil practices. She has the habit of taking dope. She does not wear clothes at all. She simply lies about her
being raped. Gigi has a fight with Mavis once, in the convent and a little blood on her lips suddenly brings back her past to her. She remembers an accident scene in California where a little colored boy is hurt. Years later Gigi too gets a chance to meet her Dad. It is after her own murder that she meets Manley Gibson, her father, now let out of prison on reprieve. But apart from a few words of pleasantries no revelation about her past life is given to her. Morrison's deliberate device of making Gigi remember a riot scene certainly is ample evidence of the fact that she is a victim of racial oppression. Likewise, there are a number of other characters – all victims of delusions and madness – all battered women who take shelter in the convent at one time or another. As has been stated earlier in this chapter, Morrison makes use of only women households as portraits of dystopia. Though economic freedom has been attained in an innovative and bold manner by these different women, all these households pathetically cry out the reason why they are constructed so. Racial and sexual harassment have given rise to these dystopias. Similarly, madness to which most of this women succumb, is also used as a carefully constructed device in the hands of Morrison. Their attempt at creating a world of their own requires all their energy. The effort is so Herculean that these women are rendered weak in the process. Sanity leaves them forever and they exhibit various types of personality disorders.