CHAPTER-V

PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

The narrative matrix of Toni Morrison offers a crisis-cross of opinions and observations. Kay Deaux, a principal contributor to research and theory in the analysis of gender differences incisively commented on the relative utility of three common approaches. Deaux categorizes research into studies that offered gender as a subject variable, as a psychological construct, or as a social category. In all these approaches, gender is considered to be as an individual difference variable. N. Kulkarni writes:

Gender as subject variable takes a more demographic approach and regards biological gender as the individual difference of importance. The second approach takes a more psychological than demographic track. Gender related characteristics, such as masculinity, femininity and androgyny are addressed in a manner similar to personality traits. The gender-role identifications of men and women are assumed to vary along the dimensions of masculinity and femininity and it is the character of those identifications rather than biological gender that determines thought and behavior. (3)

Actually the third kind of approach does not deal with the actual differences between men and women albeit it is based on perceptions of and response to the social categories exemplified by men and women.
Deaux concludes that gender as a biological marker with complex and unspecified connection to psychological characteristics, is too broad and undifferentiated a variable to have much utility as a predictor of human behavior. Truly, biology is not a psychology and neither all men nor all women are similar, thus, the scholars locate the effects of the individual’s level of self-identification and introspection in conventionally masculine or feminine perspective. In order to give a specified meaning to masculinity and femininity Spence and Helmreich suggested a myopic vision of the masculinity as a measure of instrumentality and the felinity as a parameter of expressiveness. The social categorization to gender differences proposes the effects of gender not in terms of what men and women think and do but the most impressive factors, more beliefs, perceptions and expectations what common people keep about members of the social categories of men and women. Moreover, in class-structured society, mode of economy plays a decisive role which also decides the nature of social categories to effect beliefs and other characteristics and behavioral patterns. Sociologically, these categorical assumptions and presumptions affect the reactions and the relationships of male and female characters. Critically, it can be suggested that the choices that individuals offer, from their career to other activities might be affected and influenced by how they relate to gender-relevant paradigms.
The narrative domain of Toni Morrison, talks of cultural and structural explanation of gender variation. A culture is a set of cognitive and evaluative beliefs about what is and what ought to be that is shared by members of a social system. The cultural analysis interprets differences between the behavior of men and women caused by these learned internalized values and beliefs. In fact a structural analysis posits that an individual’s behavior is determined by the position that he or she holds in the social structure. The cultural approach to gender differences would hold that women are socialized differently than men because of traditional expressiveness or communal qualities which are associated with the idea for the welfare of others. In the cultural exploration of gender differences, gender-role socialization is thought to be so pervasive and powerful that behavior in perspectives beyond the traditional roles remains consistent with gender-role socialization. The structural approach emphasizes situational constraints associated with the individual’s role in social structure.

In Toni Morrison’s first novel *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola Breedlove and Claudia MacTeer, two African-American young girls faced with a world that disregards their existence and undermines their sense of self-worth during the adolescent years that are central to healthy identity formation. Unlike Pecola, Claudia survives the damaging impacts of this invisibility. Claudia has her family, which, while challenged by the post
depressing realities of African-American life, man-ages to convey to their daughter the knowledge that her intact survival to adulthood is one of their central concerns. Pecola, having no such reassurance, falls through the cracks created by history, racism, and sexism, and, at the novel’s end, is permanently psychologically fractured.

On the psychological level, whiteness is automatically equated with beauty and culture and blackness with ugliness and slavery. Pecola’s brother, Sammy Breedlove, copes with bleak realities to the family’s life by regularly escaping, running away. Pecola uses the exact opposite strategy and internalizes her feelings, transforming them into self-hatred and an overwhelming longing to disappear. It is this longing that is the source of Pecola’s craving for the blue eyes, for the bluest eyes possible. She believes that if she, like Shirley Temple and Jane, has blue eyes, a central market for beauty in the dominant culture, then she will be loved and her life will be bearable.

Pauline and Cholly’s relationship begins with high expectation and a move north to Lorain, Ohio. In Lorain, Pauline feels excluded by women who see her as country and unsophisticated. Pauline begins to purchase clothes and makeup to bolster her self-esteem, while Cholly begins to drink heavily. The two begin to argue and Pauline turns to motion pictures for comfort. She tries to imitate the appearance of the movie stars until she breaks a front tooth earning candy. Pauline then
gives up on trying imitating the beauty ideals of the dominant culture and settles on adopting the role of wronged wife. This role makes her a perpetual victim and gives her a way to justify and organize her emotional and psychological life.

The ultimate act of brutalization and betrayal for Pecola comes when Cholly, her own father, rapes her. Cholly’s unnatural rape of Pecola could be interpreted:

As a pathetic attempt to return to the heady days of first love when
his very presence essentially created another human being.
(Heinze, 74)

Pecola’s persistent insecurity continues in spite of the fact that she seems to believe that she has at last acquired her much-desired blue eyes. Pecola fears that her eyes are not the blues and will not achieve the love and acceptance she so desperately craves.

The adult Chaudia concludes the novel with her reflections about the situation. Pecola is a casualty of the malignant love of her father, the failures of her mother, the disinterest of her community, and a culture that defines her as disposable, insignificant, and ugly. Claudia recognizes Pecola’s role as scapegoat:

All of us-all who knew her-felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us; her guilt sanctified us, her pain
made us glow with health, and her awkwardness made us think we had a
sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us generous. Even her waking
dreams used-to silence our own nightmares. And she let us and thereby
deserved our contempt. We honed our egos on her, padded our characters
with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength. (163)

_The Bluest Eye_ explores the question of environment, the
atmosphere in which the main characters, Claudia and Pecola, are
nurtured. The unyielding nature of the protagonists’ environments may
refer to their communities, and their culture. Each of these elements is in
some way unyielding and uncompromisingly resistant to the girls’
healthy maturation. Both Claudia and Pecola have to battle against
racism, sexism, poverty, and cultural mythologies in order to protect their
psychological health. Claudia, although struggling with her own issues,
has a more supportive environment than Pecola, and thus is able to work
her way through the unyielding earth while Pecola, like the marigold
seeds, is not. Sometimes mothers put their sons outdoors, and when that
happened, regardless of what the son had done, all sympathy was with
him. [. . .] To be put outdoors by a landlord was one thing [. . .] but to be
slack enough to put oneself outdoors, or heartless enough to put one’s
own kin outdoors – that was criminal. (1994: 17)

Paradoxically, being outdoors denotes the marginalized position of
black people who have been swallowed by predatory white culture. As
Denise observes, that culture “has the power to disenfranchise a child of mother love, to psychically splinter an entire race identity, and to imprison all human beings in static and stagnant relationships” (1993: 15). Through Pecola, Morrison attacks the idealized beauty enjoined by the aesthetics of white culture, which contributes greatly to black people’s degradation and marginalized position in America.

Morrison shows how every segment of the black community is smitten by the aesthetics the dominant culture on blacks through co-modifiable white icons such as Ginger Rogers, Greta Garbo, Jean Harlow and Shirley Temple. The effect of constant circulation of these white movie stars and pin-up girls is to exaggerate romantic love and physical beauty. These spurious mythic images suggest that white women are entitled to be served and worshipped because they are approximately the ideals of physical perfection.

Since Afro-American features are antithetical to this standardized beauty, black women do not deserve the adulation and love reserved for the white women. The black woman has been projected as ugly and subservient, ever eager to satisfy anyone’s sexual hunger. Over the generation she has been made to feel that she is merely a ‘thing’ and not a human being. In an interview with Gloria Naylor, Morrison states that she wrote the novel to portray the psychological devastation caused by the implanted image of the blacks on their minds:
It wasn’t that easy being a little black girl in the country—it was rough. The psychological tricks you have to play in order to get through—and nobody said how it felt to be that … You knew that you were not the person they were looking at. And to know that and to see what you saw in those other people’s eyes was devastating. Some people made it, some didn’t. And I wanted to explore it myself. (199)

Internationalization of negative image of oneself because of one’s blackness and an inherent longing for idealized white beauty result in series psychological depression and deformities. To quote Denise Heinz:

Idealized beauty has the power to disenfranchise a child of mother love, to physically splinter an entire race identity, and to imprison all human beings in static and stagnant relationships. (15)

The victimizing power of such decadent aesthetics made the black woman approximate the standardized cosmetic beauty of white America.

*Sula* (1973) opens with events of displacement, unmitigated violence and unspeakable horror, meandering its way between demons of historical distortion and a burning search for spiritual places. Incapable of locating herself in or in relation to her community, the title character functions as a physical metaphor of psychic deprivation and privation of the local people, thereby epitomizing the dehumanizing and depersonalizing experiences that befell them both in slavery and its aftermath; in effect, she is employed by the author to embody the
displacements and sense of restlessness inflicted on black people under the predatory, racist culture: the physically displaced town; the psychologically uprooted war veteran Shadrack; the body of Chicken Little drifting homeless in the river for three days; and Eva, the matriarch of the Peace family relocated to an old folks’ home by her granddaughter Sula. Traumatized by a marriage marred from the beginning by turmoil and violence, Eva identifies with the paternal World in the Peace family: as Morrison comments, “she kills her son, plays god, names people and [. . .] puts her hand on a child” (Stepto 1994: 16), thereby permanently maiming them psychologically. Evidently, with the phallic matriarch Eva to take the lead, the Peace family damages its own members. The destructive role of unwed motherhood points directly to dysfunctional black life stemming from the system of chattel bondage. It follows logically that the lack of a protective maternal discourse finally brings down the whole community.

Morrison’s idea of surviving ‘whole’ eludes the community Sula, the central character, comes to represent an ideology according to which ‘Pariah’ status is superior to the ‘Parvenu’ existence. Zygmunt Bauman discusses modernity in social and psychological terms, and states that

Both socially and psychologically modernity is incurably self-critical and endless, and the prospect less exercise in self-cancelling and self-invalidating. (71)
The community, as depicted in Sula, appears to be pursuing an unfulfilled but self-cancelling and self invalidating standard. Sula’s appearance on the scene creates a sense of hope and guilt in the community. Out of guilt they declare her ‘Pariah’ and out of hope they start caring for each other and their families. They feel rehabilitated like a ‘Parvenu’, forgetting that their own status is also that of ‘Pariah’ vis-à-vis the larger society. Sula’s presence reminds them about their own identity, the right which has been refused to them. They are still entrapped in the uncertain ties, beyond redemption.

They remain other directed, other monitored, and other evaluated. Nel, Shadrack and others realize after Sula’s death that their life’s philosophy of ‘Never’ and ‘always’ was hollow and captive of the rules set by the others. Nel had taken to the conventions available to her in the community in spite of once having asserted: “I’m me. I’m not their daughter. I’m not Nel. I’m. Me.” (28) But contradictions were easily accepted by her later: “Now Nel belonged to the town and all of its ways” (120). After Sula’s death Nel awakens to her reality: “All that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude” (174).

In contrast to Sula, Nel complies with and conforms completely to the social values. It seems that she is bound by a static ego that makes her follow the societal rules and regulations, while Sula is bound by no such ego. Nel’s behavior in the novel reveals that her sense of individuality has
been repressed from the very beginning. This is evident from her incapability in acting independently outside a defined territory of norms and the codes of conduct. That’s why, in terms of individuality, Nel appears to be no better than a cripple who tends to depend upon external sources like husband and social norms. Nel’s is a traditional family dominated by her mother who controls her attitude. Nel has been bequeathed a split heritage. On the one hand is Nel’s grandmother, a prostitute and on the other hand, her highly puritanical great grandmother emulated by her own mother Helene. But the immediate effect on Nel’s behavior is that of her mother who rears her on the principles of obedience and politeness. Nel’s mother is over cautious and over protective towards her daughter. She is very rigid and proves to be a stern parent: “under Helene’s hand the girl became obedient and polite. Any enthusiasms the little Nel showed were calmed by the mother until she drove her daughter’s imagination underground”. Helene dominates each and every aspect of Nel’s life. As a result, her sense of self does not develop fully and she grows to be a docile, complacent, and submissive woman without any individuality of her own.

Thus, Nel’s unconventional family environment suppresses whatever creative and natural impulses exist in her. Her voice mingles with that of the other community women. Like these women, Nel’s definition of self becomes based on community’s moral categories of
good and bad women. For her goodness for a woman is idealization of the concept of marriage and motherhood, self-abnegation and sexual faithfulness to her husband. Nel adopts a middle class mentality that family with husband and children provides stability and security to a woman’s life. Therefore, Nel marries Jude Green.

Nel’s husband becomes the focal point of her life and she feels that she has no identity or individuality of her own without her husband, Jude. When Jude deserts her, Nel feels herself to be lifeless: “For now her thighs were truly empty and dead too, and it was Sula who had taken the life from them and Jude who smashed her heart and the both of them who left her with no thighs and no heart just her brain raveling away.” (111) When Jude leaves her, Nel feels that she’s lost the axis on which her life was based. Byerman rightly says that for Nel:

The loss of Jude is the loss of identity and loss of life… (45)

Thus, Nel sticks wholly to the conventional values. She is able to achieve motherhood and a family; still she cannot achieve fullness in life. This is so because Nel represses her inner self and cannot be true to her innermost being. On analyzing the mental states of Sula and Nel, it can be said that both are psychologically poles apart.

In the novel Sula, Morrison seems to emphasize a balanced outlook and inner harmony as necessary for survival. Characters, which are mentally imbalanced and lack inner peace and order, are likely to perish.
This fact becomes further evident in the novel when we probe into the mental make-up of two male characters, Shadrack and Plum. Both the characters are initially weak-willed. They are not strong enough to encounter horrors of death and turn neurotic because of their terrifying war experiences. But later on, Plum gets destroyed while Shadrack survives. This is so because Shadrack is able to achieve inner order, while Plum fails to do so.

Eva’s son, Plum, is a man with a weak willpower. The horrifying experience of war turn him psychologically scarred. Plum does not try to act responsibly so as to establish an order and chart a direction for his fragmented life. Rather he starts considering himself helpless like a baby and seeks to escape his independence and sense of responsibility through drugs. Plum becomes dependent on others for his existence. He behaves like an infant: “Being helpless and thinking baby thoughts and dreaming baby dreams and messing up his pants again and smiling all the time.” (71) He wants to return to the maternal care and attention once again. Eva Plum’s mother, feels: “he wanted to crawl back in my womb and well…I ain’t got the room no more even if he could do it.” (71) Plum is gradually diminishing to a mere shadow. Eva can’t bear his self-destructive attitude; therefore, she destroys him.

Shadrack too is weak willed, initially as he is left mentally imbalanced by his terrible war experience. He suffers from having “no
past, no language, and no tribe no source…” Ogunyemi explains the mental state of Shadrack arguing that “Shadrack somehow survives the fire of war but remains a ghost of his former self.” (48)

In contrast to Plum, the mental state of Shadrack does not remain disordered forever. He begins to wish for a synthesis between his unconscious and conscious self. Shadrack plunges into his unconscious, faces and analyses all its lighter and darker aspects. For this purpose he gains strength from his black self which he confronts by looking at his reflection. It astonished him” (13), assures Shadrack of his existence in a strong and stout black body. Therefore he becomes resolute to own and controls his self.

Shadrack’s ability to probe his innermost being frees him from the constricting effects of ego, leaving him without any inhibitions, hopes and ambitions. He is not yet completely without fears and is afraid of the unexpectedness of death: “He knew the smell of death and was terrified of it, for he could not anticipate it.” (14) Shadrack thinks that by devoting one day a year to the thought of death; he would be able to overcome the terror of death for the rest of the year. Thus, in order to transcend his fear of death, Shadrack founds “National Suicide Day.” (14)

Apparently, Shadrack seems to be a lunatic and fragmented man as he does not care for the social prescriptions. He walks about with his penis exposed, drinks in the street and urinates in front of the ladies. But
he has greater control over his inner self than others. Sula is the first person who comes to know about the order in Shadrack’s life. She visits his place and “The neatness, the order startled her, but more surprising was the restfulness. Everything was so tiny, so common and so unthreatening,” (61) the neat and clear arrangement of objects in his house reflects the ordered psyche of Shadrack. He owns his self and possesses inner order. Claudia Tate quotes Morrison,

If you own yourself, you can make some types of choices, take certain kinds of risks. Shadrack neither dominates others nor does he impose his will no others. He lives and guides his own life and his himself is fully responsible for the choices and risks he undertakes during the course of his life. (125)

Both Sula and Shadrack are rebels against society. Shadrack chooses a particular direction for his life and sticks to it. On the contrary, Sula deviates from her personal convictions when she tries to possess Ajax. That’s why, Sula loses centre of her life and dies a pre-mature death while Shadrack survives all the odds and hardships.

Thus in Sula, Morrison presents both, the extreme and moderate aspects of human psychology.

In Song of Solomon Milkman’s post-luminal state, which marks the height of his consciousness is characterized by his initiation into a new society of the Shalimar hunters. Like the pre-luminal and limit stage, this
stage is symbolized by linguistic psychological and physical changes. According to Arnold Van Gennep, one undergoes several imitation rites prior to being incorporated into a new society. First the initiate must be stripped of all that is psychologically and physically associated with his old society. Then, the initiate must be cognizant of the mores monistic theories into practice by participating in the rituals of the new society. In Milkman’s case, he must learn that he cannot exploit the people. He can neither show nor receive gratitude with money, because humanism is a traditional African principle valued more than money and held in esteem more by African masses than by the African petty bourgeois. Small wonder, therefore, that the Shalimar community is offended by Milkman’s capitalist behavior:

They looked at his skin and saw it was as black as theirs, but they knew he had the heart of the white men who came to pick them up in the trucks when they needed anonymous, faceless laborer. (266)

As a result of his initiation into a new society, Milkman accepts the responsibility of adulthood and African hood for “he had stopped evading things, sliding through, over, and around difficulties.” (271) having learned to respect the natural world more than the material world and having gained the ability to laugh at himself, Milkman becomes a psychologically balanced individual:
There was nothing here (on the Shalimar hunt) to help him—not his money, his car, his father’s reputations, his suit, or his shoes. In fact they hampered him…They (the hunters) hooted and laughter all the way back to the car, teasing Milkman, egging him on tell more about how scared he was. And he told them. Laughing too, hard, long and long, really laughing. (277-80)

Pilate’s role in the novel is dialectically related to Milkman’s developing class consciousness. When Milkman first see her, she is sitting with one foot pointing east and one west, east points to Africa and its culture and thus, to Milkman’s present and future. Pilate symbolizes the bridge that connects the two. She is the source, the base from which Milkman must build his race and class-consciousness.

Additional manifestations of Milkman’s low level of consciousness are his overall state of confusion and his association with things behind him. Not knowing his past, he is unsure of the future:

Infinite possibilities and enormous responsibilities stretched out before him, but he was not prepared to take advantage of the former, or accept the burden of the latter. (68)

Unconscious of the fact responsibilities are an integral part of life. Milkman lives the limbo of the living dead, always struggling to make up his mind whether to go forward or to turn back. His face reveals confusion he feels. The confusion will last until he immerses himself in the life of his people. In spite of lack of consciousness, he seems
instinctively aware of the importance of the past, for he is obsessed with things behind him. However, he is not yet prepared to turn his instinctual awareness into a conscious search for his family history.

Milkman’s growth and initiation are firmly grounded in his journey to the South, a journey which conclusively opens his eyes and his mind. During this journey he realizes:

Which two exceptions, everybody was a close to seem to prefer him out of this life. And the two exceptions were both women, both black, both old. From the beginning, his mother and Pilate had fought for his life, and he had never so much as made either of a cup of tea. (331)

With this awakening Milkman’s suddenly realizes that he has been a fool to have never valued what he has had. With self-awakening comes an epiphany. He begins to get an idea of what his womenfolk had gone through for him. He realizes how his growth as a man into mature adulthood has been made possible by Hagar’s sacrificial death and Pilate’s far-seeing wisdom. Once he becomes aware of his own weakness, Milkman is firmly set on the road towards recovery and wisdom. His knowledge liberates him and he begins to respect the poor blacks around him, as well as women who have continuously helped him.

Thus Milkman’s awareness of the racial problem is very central to his quest. He consciously questions the dubious morality of the white
race. He tells Guitar. “Whiteman wants us dead or quiet—which is the same thing as dead. White women are that same thing. They want us, you know, ‘universal’ human, no ‘race consciousness.’ Tame except in bed. They like a little racial loincloth in the bed. But outside the bed, they want us to be individuals,” (222) it is this alienation from the sociological environment that propels Milkman and his quest. His quest takes him with knowledge, conscience and a sensitive understanding of the black psyche.

Toni Morrison articulates in unique ways the pain and struggle of a traumatized self and community. In her novels, the traumatic reality of a black self manifests itself in the characters’ self-loathing and self-contempt, and in the loss of their individual and cultural identity. In her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), this is embodied in the poverty-stricken, despised, love-seeking black girl who trades her sanity in exchange for the bluest eyes because the world, it seems to her, has more affection for girls with blue eyes. This metaphor of the bluest eyes is continued and further developed in Morrison’s fourth novel, *Tar Baby* (1981), in which the black girl, a beautiful, well-loved model with a promising future ahead of her, is endowed with the charm of possessing the bluest eyes. In constructing the intricate power and psychic struggle underlying such a “success” story, Morrison calls the power of blue eyes into question.
Tar Baby portrays the intricate complex of being black. Through her representation of the paradoxical tar baby identity, Morrison explores the ways in which the black subject grapples with the allure of capitalist values, the seduction of white culture, and the legacy of an African heritage. The dilemma facing the dream-driven, trauma-ridden protagonist Jadine Childs demonstrates the pariah status of black people and their struggle with what W. E. B. DuBois calls the double consciousness of black folk in their quest for a self-identity and authenticity. In the process of reconstructing their individual and cultural identity, black subjects must experience and confront the pathological disturbances caused by ideological fantasy and the burden of racial trauma. In the Street family, Valerian spends his life manipulating his wife and emotionally abdicating his son. Margaret’s physical and emotional abuse of her son makes him a stranger in his family.

When marriage involves caring, mutual respect and tenderness, it flowers into understanding float bear. He is willing to overlook her first, sees her riding a winter carnival holding the paw of a polar lower psychic needs of the partner. True union comes if spouses relate with each other’s intrinsic nature. In the absence of these features, the union in merely physical and short lived. The relationship that exists between Valerian and Margaret does not in any way represent a normal, healthy marriage. They are a warring couple directing anger and psychological
violence at each other. There is sufficient textual evidence that the Streets are not even sexually bonded. In any case, sexual contact would not have touched, much less involved, their souls. Morrison scathingly prophesies that the white family is, in essence, defunct and distorted.

Valerian and Margaret are looked in a dead-end marriage. Theirs was a loveless marriage characterized by the lack of emotional warmth and reciprocity of feelings, Margaret, for Valerian was a beautiful showpiece, which could engage the attention of those who thronged his life and business. Valerian chooses Margaret as his wife, twenty years his junior, the way he does other valuable objects for their outward beauty. He decides to marry her because she looked “like the candy that his name his youth lay in the red whiteness, a snowy Valentine Valerian,” With the passage of time, the physical aspect of marriage starts waning and Valerian increasingly finds his wife bereft of social status and grace.

Due to the gulf between their social classes, Valerian starts treating her as though she were a socially embarrassing commodity bearing his name. He expects her to conform endlessly to his commands. When she fails to do so, he sadistically punishes her. Denise Heinze notes the repercussion of Valerian intimidation of Margaret:

Aware that every move is scrutinized by him, Margaret crumbles under the burden of perfection to such an extent that even mealtime turns into a psychological torture. (89)
Margaret’s extraordinary looks isolate her from her parents, and later her husband. She measures this estrangement from her family and husband in terms of steps. Her life was spent homeless as it were on “two concrete steps” of the family’s trailer home, on the “thirty-seven steps at the stadium when she was crowned; and a million wide steps in the house of Valerian Street” (55). When Valerian isolates her from all social contact the domestic sphere, Margaret is left in a social and emotional void.

With no empathic human contact to learn on, Margaret is deeply marred by Valerian’s emotional violence. Her loneliness turns into a psychological malaise exhibited by her peevishness, neurosis and psychotic behavior. Her disposition as a victim and a future victimizer is crystallized in her urge for rebellion. Her reaction to her husband’s intimidation is most extreme. She becomes obsessed with disfiguring her baby’s creamy skin. Heinze reasons that:

In an attempt to punish her husband (Margaret) defile(s) the symbol of his manhood and immortality, his son. (433)

Jadine doesn’t want to follow Ondine’s prescription of daughterhood. She is blissfully oblivious to the value of a matrilineal link. Negating this vital familial function, Jadine declares to Ondine: “I don’t want to learn to bed the kind of woman you’re talking about because I don’t want to be that kind of woman.” (284)
Toni Morrison clearly convicts Jadine’s American education for her loss of that tar quality of being a homemaker and a provider simultaneously. Jadine is one of those modern black youths who are Americanized in their education and attitude. Morrison severely castigates such black youth as are fashioned out of the programmed education system of America producing blacks as carbon copies of whites.

The black youth are churned into one giant cultural ocean in which their African heritage and familial values have been subsumed by whites. They have been criminally shortchanged by the education system of America. Their textbooks have systematically crushed a real heritage by teaching them to ignore and belittle it. The result of such assimilation is the transformation of genetic black youth onto psychological whites ones. To quote Morrison:

Now people choose to be black. They used to be born Black.

That’s not true anymore. You can be black genetically and choose not to be. You just change your mind or your eyes, change anything. (Washington, 236)

Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) was an attack on the slavery system and the racial conflict. It presents a traumatic existence of an Afro-American family under slavery. Michele Mock and Barbara Shapiro throw light on the aspects of *Beloved* with a psychological point of view.
According to them the theme of freedom and race is prominent in Morrison’s Beloved. They concern with the impact of enslavement “particularly the denial of one’s status as a human subject,” (194) have traumatic effects on the individual’s psyche. Barbara also explores “emotional hunger the obsessive and terrifying narcissistic fantasies” (194) the child experiences in the absence of its mother. On the other hand Mock observes that how the forces of slavery disrupts the freedom and that the “natural and complete circle of mother and child,” (118) are also disrupted.

Sethe’s act of infanticide redefines motherhood from the prospective of a slave. For her, death is safer than letting her child suffer the horrendous life of slavery. Infanticide is the only way by which Sethe can own the child that she cannot bear to lose to slavery. Her impulse to murder her two year-old Beloved is in its own context a valid act of family preservation and motherly love. Sought out by the slave catchers and schoolteacher, Sethe refuse to allow her children to be returned to slavery. Confronted by this threat, Sethe goes to the extreme of slitting Beloved’s throat to elude capture. By doing so, she ensures that “no one, nobody on this earth, would list her daughter’s characteristics on the animal side of the paper.” (251) Morrison is not defensive in portraying her black heroine’s unique virtue. Caroline M. Woidat observes that Morrison:
Makes no excuses for abominations such as Beloved’s death because they result from the white institution of slavery. (533)

On a socio-psychological level, Beloved is the story of Sethe Suggs’ quest for social freedom and psychological wholeness. Sethe’s act of ultimately results in the dissolution of tenuous family ties which she so desperately tries to build. The opening lines of the novel establish the real horror of slavery, which is not physical death but psychic death: “124 were spiteful. Full of a baby’s venom” (3) It is to prevent Beloved from such a psychic death that Sethe kills her. But, the slain baby’s ghost diabolically raises its head, assumes human from that almost kills her in retribution. The rage of the baby ghost is a form of frustrated and fatal claim for love which was denied to her by her own mother. The havoc the ghost creates in Sethe’s home prompts Denver to comment: “For a baby she throws a powerful spell” (4)

The power of the baby ghost’s rage is directly linked to Sethe’s maternal love. Schapiro dwells on the reason for the baby ghost’s retributive rage:

If the infant is traumatically frustrated in its first love relationship, if it fails to receive the affirmation and recognition it craves, the intense neediness of the infant’s own love becomes dangerous and threatening. (533)

The baby ghost construes Sethe’s overwhelming desire to protect her daughter from slavery as an act of murder.
Toni Morrison’s novel *Jazz* wrestles with the problem of love and desire. It defines that problem as a struggle for both self-identity and mutuality (mutual recognition). The longing and desire to be known completely as oneself by another who shares this same feeling and intention, the novel declares, is the secret of love. The unnamed narrator of the story, in an impassioned conclusion, describes this condition of love as she looks upon Joe and Violet:

> I envy them their public love... I have longed, aw longed to show it, to be able to say out loud what they have no need to say at all: That I have loved only you, surrendered my whole self reckless to you. (229)

The novel also shows, however, how love and mutual recognition cannot be achieved independently of one’s internal self for one’s social environment. The problem of love is a problem of the unconscious psychological self as well as the external social context. Toni Morrison tells of Violet’s birds and of her behavior at the funeral of Joe’s girlfriend. Joe murdered his girlfriend Dorcas because she did not love him anymore. Furious but unable to be angry at Joe, Violet turns her anger and pain on the dead girl and goes to her funeral, illogically to cut and hurt her.

Violet has had series of slips that make people around her doubt her sanity. Even before Joe’s affair with Dorcas, Violet, one day simply
and inexplicably sits down in the street. Another time Violet is waiting for two women who are late for an appointment when she picks up a baby she is supposed to be watching from its carriage and begins to walk away with it. She thinks that Joe will love the baby. As she walks away, the baby’s sister, who is supposed to be watching the child, begins to scream. Violet says that she was not taking, but walking the baby. Some people in the crowd believe her. Others feel that Violet actually means to take strange events and the impression that Violet makes on those who hear about them.

Joe tries very hard to remember the details about Dorcas because he cannot remember the details of his early love and passion for Violet and the loss of those memories disturbs him greatly. Dorcas was not just a fling for Joe, though, something about the girl made him want to share the deepest parts of himself and his story. He wanted to tell her about his hunts for the mother he never knew, how he thought he saw his mother in a cave, and how desperately he wanted for this imagined meeting to affirm some affection this unknown woman might have had for her son. The couple has motherlessness in common because Dorcas, too, is an orphan. Dorcas’s mother died in a fire. She told Joe about that loss and she cried with him before they made love.

Dorcas has a different experience of the march. She hears the bears as a signal of the promise of her life to come after she escapes from the
over-ardent gaze of her fearful aunt. When Dorcas thinks of the riots, she remembers her house burning and from a child’s perspective, thinks of her paper dolls and imagines how quickly they must have burned. Like the dolls, Dorcas is vulnerable to ignition by any one of the many sparks of the city.

*Paradise* (1998) was Morrison’s first novel after she was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. Set during the Civil Rights era of the 1960s and 1970s, this fiction tells a story of the people preoccupied with building a black utopian community called Ruby, which represents their desire for a nostalgic past. Yet the Ruby-inhabitants marginalize and demonize the women living in the Convent located on the outskirts of Ruby in an effort to establish themselves as subjects. In doing so, they recall white people’s tendency to dehumanize black people, designating them as a symbol of rawness and death under the racist culture.

Mary Magna brings Consolata along with her to her new assignment teaching at a Native American girls’ school. Consolata works as a servant in the school and devotes herself to Mary Magna and God.

When Connie is nearly 40, she has an affair with Deacon Morgan. The two fall completely in love and have an all-consuming relationship that exceeds their ability to control their actions. The affair comes to an end when Consolata, overcome with passion, bites Deacon. Her gesture
frightens him, and he ends their encounter. Although Consolata is desolate, she recovers and resumes her former life.

Paradise reveals the potentially negative impacts of language. An example of the pervasive destruction the abusive language can inflict on a person can be found in the revelation of the character; Mavis is physically abused by her husband Frank for many years during their marriage. Although she recovers from these experiences, the damage done to her spirit takes much longer to heal than the physical wounds that occasionally require medical intervention.

While Mavis remains in her marriage, she is immobilized by indecision and self-hatred. Even after her escape from Frank, her marriage, and her children, Mavis carries with the guilt of her role in the death of her twins. At the Convent, Mavis comes to terms with her children’s death and forgives herself for the incident. In time, Mavis is able to achieve a sense of self-worth once she retrieves her story from the tyranny of her abusive husband and begins to create her own life with her own words.

Slavery and racism are the supreme type of evil in Toni Morrison’s novels. Evil announces its presence through fear, which becomes the subconscious symbol of the African American existence. The Black victim stands in the vicious circle of prejudice, which creates the racially determined terror, the shadow that constantly accompanies the Black
existence. Fear, pain, dehumanization and the feeling of worthlessness are omnipresent in the author’s novels, as monsters influencing the Black past and present. In Toni Morrison’s novels, there are modern and former slaves who do not know who their true selves are and what their future looks like in a racially fragile and complicated existence.
Works Cited


Bauman, Zygmunt. Post modernity.

Byerman, Quoted by Wilfred D Samuels, Experimental Lives: Meaning and Self in Sula, Toni Morrison.

Ogungyemi, Quoted by Wilfred D Samuels, Experimental Lives: Meaning and Self in Sula.

Tate, Claudia. Toni Morrison, Black Women Writers at Work, ed. Claudia Tate, New York: Continuum, 1983.

Washington, Mary Helen. Conversation with Toni Morrison


Woidat, Caroline M. *Talking Back to Schoolteacher: Morrison’s Confrontation with Hawthorne in Beloved*, Modern Fiction Studies, Fall/winter 1993.