CHAPTER IV

THE INCARCERATED FEMALE PSYCHE:

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TAR BABY (1981)

*Tar Baby,* a novel vigilant of the black’s desire to create a mythology of his or her own rather than the one constructed by the white man for him. It is also a woman’s novel taking into account a woman’s act and her denial of her need for an impossible man. Whereas Morrison’s first three novels are replete with women–women relationships, Tar Baby is not confined to female bonding at all. Unlike Nel, who has been to Sula “the closest thing to both and other and a self” (*Sula* 103), Claudia who dreams of “Security and warmth of Big Mama’s Kitchen” (*The Bluest Eye* 21), and Pilate who becomes a source of strength for Ruth to stand off Macon, Jadine discovers what she assumes to be her ‘real’ self through her encounter with black women, even though she does not share the same empathetic relationship with them. On the surface, *Tar Baby* is an unsuccessful love-affair between a man and a woman with complete opposite values and lifestyles but
at the deeper level, the novel is about a great difference that Morrison observes between the woman of the past and woman of the present reflected in the character of Jadine. It is a conflict within a black woman, caught between two cultures and Jadine, the female protagonist, becomes an antithesis of black folk and community values.

An orphan, brought up by her uncle Sydney and aunt Ondine, and educated by her white patrons Valerian and Margaret Street, for whom her uncle and aunt work, Jadine becomes a successful, educated young black woman and emerges towards the end as a hard, shallow and materialistic person wanting no connection with her folks. A model by profession, Jadine becomes a 'model' of a white European female. Ironically, it is not the white patrons who educate her, or Son who represents the black culture but black women whom she encounters, lead her to develop a belief that she belongs to the white culture. Her response to Son in the beginning is similar to a white woman's reaction to a black man. As Son enters into her room without knocking, she first rebukes him and then as a white woman starts to believe that he has come to rape her which forces Son to say, "why you little white girls always think somebody's trying to rape you" (21)? Her denial at that point gives her little justice but her consideration of Son as "dark dogs with silver feet" (158) symbolizes
a white control over a black person. The black women at Eloe, the 'night women' with loose breasts drive Jadine to confront a reality, which she fears and therefore rejects. From the time Jadine and Son meet, we know that their relationship is antagonistic because it is hostile, a relationship between the life and humanism of black culture and the deadness and materialism of white culture. Son has everything that Jadine lacks and therefore he considers himself as a redeemer of Jadine. Rightly Samuels and Hudson Weems say, "... he is Africa's son/son the bearer of its culture and values, its black Messiah comes to save Jadine from her street/streets of Babylone" (Toni Morrison 85). Mbalia considers Son as "Christ like figure" (Toni Morrison's developing class consciousness 76) and Pearl K. Bell rightly points out that it is Son who is in "sure possession of ancestral values can only convert Jadine who has sacrificed her tribal soul to white sophistication and learning" (Self-seekers, commentary 57).

Jadine, the successful, educated black woman seems the opposite of Son, the filthy young black man with dreadlocks whom Margaret Street finds in Jadine’s closet. Yet there is also an attraction that draws Jadine to Son and we learn that Son has crept into Jadine’s bed room and tried to infuse her sleep with his dreams of “Yellow houses with white doors which women open and shouted come on in, you honey soul and the fat black ladies in white dresses minding the pie
table in the basement of the church and white wet seeds flapping on a lane, and the sound of a six-string guitar plucked after supper while children scooped walnuts up off the guard and handed them to her” (119). Their relationship develops from this stage into a situation where one cannot live without the other. So they run away to New York and here in New York their love affair reaches its climax, away from the Caribbean island setting of their meeting. They come to realize their need for each other. Son requires Jade to direct him towards material advancement, achievement in love, while Jadine needs him to give her a feeling of security and belonging. With Jadine, Son has a “future, a reason for hauling ass in the morning. No more moment to moment play-it-as-it-comes existence” (219). It seems that Son and Jadine may be able to combine their strengths and, in their relationship, embody positive black folk values of caring, community responsibility and collective effort, as well as the quest for material success in the modern world.

New York is the place where Jade feels that she belongs, amongst all those ‘white’ people for as Son feels in New York, there were only “Black people in white faces playing black people in black faces” (216) and ask himself the question, “if these were the black folks, who was he” (217)? However, Son gives Jadine, an orphan raised by her aunt and uncle, a feeling of security that she never previously had:
“she wondered if she should hold back, keep something in store for him, but he opened the hair on her head with his fingers and drove his tongue through the part... He unorphaned her completely” (229).

Terry Otten rightly says, “Son enters paradise like the biblical serpent, articulates Jadine’s forbidden desires, muted by her counterfeit identity and galvanizes her into action” (Studies in American Fiction 67). It seems to us that their relationship will continue only if one of them is prepared to change. Despite their difference, Jadine representing the interests of the ruling class whereas Son representing the interests of the poor class, Son thinks that he can ‘insert’ a culturally conscious dream into Jadine that she will be able to perceive the vicious nature of capitalism. It appears that Son and Jadine may be able to unite their strengths and stand for positive Black folk values of caring, community responsibility and collective effort but actually Son is so entrapped by the tar baby that he is corrupted by the capitalist lifestyle:

He had it straight before the pie ladies the six-string banjo and then he was seduced, corrupted by cloisonné and new silk and the color of honey and he was willing to change, to love the cloisonné, to abandon the pie ladies and the nickel nick melodeon and Eloe itself (257).

Son finds it impossible to bring forth a new state of awareness in Jadine regarding the African people. Jadine is brought up by the lifestyle, the food, the clothes, the language and the behavioral
patterns of the Streets to such an extent that she has nothing to do with the African people. At Son’s insistence, they leave for Eloe, Florida, his hometown but Eloe changes everything. Eloe, a black small town which Son claims as the source and roots of his being, is in Jadine’s eyes, a “rotten...boring...burnt-out place...[with] no life” (259).

The nightmare vision of the ‘night women’, seen by Jadine in Eloe, while she is awake, makes her decide finally that the town has nothing good about it. The night women, several women met by her in Eloe, the African woman in yellow who plays an important role in developing her ‘white’ self and her aunt Ondine who wanted Jade to have a good life—all crowd into Jadine and Son’s room in Eloe. All these women “seemed somehow in agreement with each other about her, and were all out to get her, tie her, bind her. Grab the person, she had worked hard to become and choke it off with their soft loose tits” (262). To Jade the ‘night women’ are shrewish hags with loose breasts but the problem lies not in the ‘night women’ but in Jadine’s failure to perceive correctly the reality of Eloe, a reality she is afraid of and therefore rejects.

It is because Jadine so blindly accepts the capitalist lifestyle and Son passionately loves her, she becomes the main target for political education. But Jadine resists any attempt on Son’s part to make her
sensitive towards the black culture is considered fruitless in the light of her response to be back in New York, “This is home, she thought with an orphan delight; not Paris, not Baltimore, not Philadelphia. This is home” (107).

The accomplished Jadine epitomizing the best of white culture and the primitive, sensual Son representing the best of black culture cannot resolve their differences. Jadine rejects Son’s binary vision of a world based on racial nature and his view of woman based on male domination and that of black women as his handmaiden. When Son talks of his view of what a black woman should be, Jadine says, “I am going to kill you, for that alone. Just for pulling that black-woman white woman shit on me” (121). Feeling absolutely insecure, she decides that Son should go to school to study law. Son rejects the proposal by saying “I don’t want to know their [white people’s] laws, I want to know mine” (265). For him to know the history of one’s race is to know oneself and one’s own people. His suspicion that she is still influenced by the whites’ ideology and cultural hegemony makes him critical of her and he says:

Go have his children... Fat or Skinny, head rag or wig, cook or model, you take care of white folks’ babies—that is what you do and when you don’t have any white man’s baby to take care of you make one-out of the babies black men give you. You turn little black babies into little white ones, you turn your black brothers into white brothers; turn your men into white men and when a black woman treats me like what I am, what I really am, you say she spoiling me (271).
Jadine, being a modern materialistic black woman rejects son’s world and tells him:

I can’t let you hurt me again. You stay in that medieval slave basket if you want to. You will stay there by yourself. Don’t ask me to do it with you I won’t. There is nothing any of us can do about the past but make our own lives better, that’s all I’ve been trying to help you do. That is the only revenge, for us to get over, way over, but no you want to talk about white babies; you don’t know how to forget the past and do better (274).

Like Sula, she refuses to consider dependence on men folk as a sacred value to women. Rejecting Son’s blind love for the past she says: “I was being educated I was working. I was working something out of my life. I was learning how to make it in this world. The one we live in, not the one in your head, not that dump Eloë; this world” (266-267). Son also asks a similar question:

The truth is that what ever you learned in those colleges that did not include me and shit. What did they teach you about me? ...Did they tell you what I was like; did they tell you what was on my mind, did they describe me to you? Did they tell you what was in my heart? If they didn’t teach you that, then they didn’t teach you nothing, because until you know about me, you don’t know nothing about yourself. And you don’t know anything, anything at all about your children and anything at all about your mama and your papa (267).

Jadine tries to persuade Son not to look back at the past but to look ahead into future. They are African, Americans and their presence is as important as that of their past. But she fails in her attempt to persuade Son. The history of black women is filled with sufferings as racism, sexism and capitalism have greatly affected their lives and
conscience. With the rise of black middle class a few women could avail a chance for modern education and could provide a job for themselves. Unfortunately when a black man makes some progress in education and career, the entire black community stands by him, whereas similar achievement in case of a black woman is opposed and discouraged both by the Black men and Black women. Ironically when a black man leaves his family in search of a fulfillment, he is considered as irresponsible, but when a white man does the same thing he is regarded as a hero. Jadine represents here the version of black womanhood different from that of the traditional womanhood and convinces the old fashioned Ondine who unknowingly helps Jadine develop the self that “there are other ways to be a woman” (284). Morrison considers Jadine as a “contemporary woman”, when she says to Anne Koeman, “This woman in the novel I’m writing, she’s sort of 1976, she’s alert... a woman who is very modern in the sense of she likes herself, she’s interested in fulfilling herself” (*An interview with Toni Morrison* 220).

Though Morrison denied having been influenced by the feminist movement, she has depicted Jadine in a feminist way. It is in Paris that Jadine ambition is thwarted by the sight of a black woman in a canary yellow dress. Being proud of her culture and of herself the black woman looks straight at Jadine and shoots “an arrow of saliva between her teeth down to the pavement and
the hearts below" (43). The confidence of the woman makes Jadine feel “lonely and inauthentic” (45). This event in the supermarket forces Jadine to reconsider the marriage proposal brought by her white boyfriend. She thinks: “I guess the person I want to marry is him, but I wonder if the person he wants to marry is me or a black girl” (11). It is true that after coming across Son, the authentic black man, she gradually falls in love with blackness and starts moving away from whiteness. However, being a modern and materialistic black woman, she finds it difficult to give up her white ideology and culture. The conflict between Jadine and Son is a conflict between the educated and the uneducated, the employed and the unemployed and the urbane and the rustic. There is difference not only between their cultures but also in their choice. As Byerman mentions:

The inability to achieve resolution is fundamentally an insistence by both on an origin that can be made present. Each in effect denies History, Son by believing in the possibility or returning to a pre-white black purity and Jadine by assuming that blackness was merely an aberration from the truth of Euro Centric progress (Tradition and form in Recent Black Fiction 215).

So Jadine keeping her white ideology intact thinks of herself a self-made woman and decides not to be dependent on anyone, “No more shoulders and limitless chests... a grown did not need safety or its dreams. She was the safety she longed for” (292). After leaving Son in New York, she returns to find that there is a great difference of opinion between Ondine and Margaret. Her decision to go back to
Paris, though strengthened by the idea that she can not avoid the “night women”, in reality, it is due to her realization that, “still it would be hard, so very hard to forget the man who fucked like a star” (292). Having been separated from Jadine, Son realizes his attachment to Jadine and returns to the Caribbean searching for her. Unluckily, Theresa misguides him into the wilder part of the island for she thinks that Son is one of the mythical blind horsemen, who should be better off with them, rather than to be with Jadine, who has deserted her ancient properties. His dependence on Theresa shows his inability to guide his own life. However Jadine’s position is better than that of Son. Though Linda James Myers gives the view:

The ending of Tar Baby opens up more than it closes off. Will Jardine ever get away from the night woman? And is her freedom rendered meaningless if it comes at the cost of dreaming? Is Son really free if his life is confined to the briar patch? Morrison uses the thwarted love between Son and Jadine to illuminate the tragic losses, which result from an either/or worldview and from the demand for victory and hierarchy over unit and compromise (Understanding an Afro Centric World View 50).

However Jadine rationalizes and fortifies herself in her selfish, shallow position. When she suspects that Ondine and Sydney want her to be the child, the daughter she never had, she denies doing any such
thing. Ondine advises her:

A girl has to be a daughter first. And if she never learns how to be a daughter, she can’t learn how to be good enough for a child; good enough for a man—good enough even for the respect... A daughter is a woman that cares about where she comes from and takes care of them that took care of her... I don’t want you to care about me for my sake. I want you to care about me for yours (283).

But Jadine who wants to follow the model of a white woman, can neither be the daughter Ondine wants her to be nor the wife that Son wants her to be. She is a tar baby and she fascinates Son, the black man who is trapped by her. By following Jadine, a tar baby, he allows himself to succumb to the white ideology and cultural hegemony. But his walk towards the rain forest makes him escape from the entrapment of Jadine who is his tar baby like Brother Rabbit’s escape into briers’ patch. Dorothy Lee says:

Son, like and yet, unhappily unlike Brother rabbit, is to be seen, at the end of the book running ‘Lucky Split’ down the road but towards the source of his Entrapment, alienated from his home and still ‘stuck on’ Jade (1984: 356).
BELOVED (1987)

Toni Morrison's novel, Beloved, is a very touching feminine text, dealing with the ultimate nuances of an ex-slave and her relations. The most humane things about the book are its refusals to subscribe to stereotypes. The whites are wicked because as slave-owners, they are profiteers, and infact when they are gentle, they are gentle because they know they can exploit the blacks more through gentleness. In this pattern of exploiter-victimiser, sex is not the issue. Between themselves, a stranger black girl and the heroine’s daughter who too is black can have a very shifty, beautiful but also difficult relationship. Beloved, the stranger, has a hold on the heroine, Sethe, and at once a power relationship develops. Then, we are told about another Denver, a white freak, who had saved the heroine while she was in labour pains and also running for life. The most unforgettable and heart-warming scenes in the novel relate to a slave Sixo and his Thirty-Mile girl, another slave, who works thirty four miles away. Sixo and she use their Sundays for running towards each other so that they may be together for a few minutes.

The whole problematics of social relations is summed up in the conduct of a white teacher who used to beat Sixo in spite of the fact that the later was right: “School teacher beat him anyway o show him
that definitions belonged to the definers—no the defined" (190). The definers are the power-wielders and they are pitiable, too, because they do not realise how badly power has distorted them: "It wasn't the jungle blacks brought with them to his place from the other (livable) place. It was the jungle white folks planted in them. And it grew. It spread. It invaded the whites who made it... made them bloody, silly, worse... so scared were they of the jungle they had made" (198-199).

The common point in Morrison, Atwood and Lessing, as also in several other distinguished female novelists, is that they all believe in feminism but do not wish to be reductive or simplistic in their assessment of the human predicament.

In *Beloved*, Morrison's focus is on the unconscious emotional and psychic consequences of slavery. The mother, the child's first vital need, is made unreliable by slavery, which either separates her from her child or so enervates and depletes her that she has no self with which to confer recognition. The impact on the inner life of the child the emotional hunger, the obsessive and terrifying narcissistic fantasies-constitute the underlying psychological drama of the novel.

Set in post-civil war Ohio, the novel traces the life of a young woman, Sethe, who has kept a terrible memory at bay only by shutting down part of her mind, her former life as a slave on Sweet Home Farm, her escape with her children to what seems a shape heaven, and the tragic
events that follow. Morrison's characters attempt to move from nowhere to somewhere. Baby Suggs, for example, moves from Kentucky to Ohio, where her heart beats for the first time. Later Sethe joins her, having run away from the Schoolteacher and his nephews; is on the verge of being recaptured. Her humanity has been so violated by this man that instead of allowing the whites to enslave them, Sethe feels wise to kill her daughter to save her from psychic death. "If I hadn't killed her. She would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her" (200). The novel puts emphasis on the death of Beloved Sethe's baby girl at the age of two in order to save her from life of slavery who, mysteriously reappears as a sensuous young woman to claim Sethe's love. The three women characters—Sethe, Beloved and Denver remove the male presence to demand and possess the female Space and the mother tongue, which strengthens their unity. Like Milkman, Sethe tries to escape from her past and makes effort to achieve wholeness, "To Sethe, the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay" (142). After eighteen years of Sethe’s living in one hundred twenty four Blue Stone Road with her daughter Denver, Paul D. One of the companions of Sethe’s husband indicates the reconstructive process of Sethe’s personality. Sethe, a victim of both sexist and racist oppression, a slave woman brutally treated by white men, had been ‘junk heaped’ twice before; first by her mother
and then by her community was hopeful that Paul D will fill up the vacuum of her life. The morning after his arrival Sethe is distracted by “the two orange squares on Baby Suggs quilt that signaled how barren really was” (49). But he turned out to be like any other man refusing to accept her act of killing her babies, charging her, “You got two feet Sethe, not four... what you did was wrong” (202)? Soon the ghost of Beloved, Sethe’s crawling dead daughter embodied as the young woman Beloved arrives to claim Sethe’s love. The long years of keeping her self in isolation seems to be over when Sethe visits the Carnival with Paul D and Denver. But when her attempt to give a new color to her life is rejected because Paul D’ deserts her, she turns to Beloved and Denver believing “the world is in this room. This here’s all there is and their needs to be” (224). She strives to allow Beloved gain full possession of her presence and throw off the long, dark legacy of her past. But the skating scene shows the instability and uncertainty of their relationship: “Making a circle on a line, the three of them could not stay upright for one whole minute, but nobody saw them falling” (174). The absence of coordination and cohesion of the relationship among the three interpreting the ice as suspension of life
In contrast to the common references to water as a life-giving source, in the ice skating scene the water, though present, is frozen. The creek, a tributary to the river, is dormant, without life—dead in the midst of winter. Thus, in spite of the jubilation, images of death abound (122).

On return, Sethe offers warm milk to both of her daughters, which is not her milk. Sethe repeatedly asserts that the worst aspect of her rape was that the white boys "took my milk" (17). She feels robbed of her essence, of her most precious substance, which is her maternal milk. As a child she was deprived of her own mother's milk; "The little white babies got it first and I got what was left or none. There was no nursing milk to call my own" (200). She was not physically starved as a baby—she did get milk from another nursing slave woman—but she was emotionally starved of a significant nurturing relationship of which the nursing milk is symbolic. That relationship is associated with one's core being or essence; if she has no nursing milk to call her own, she feels without a self to call her own. Even before she was raped by the Schoolmaster's nephews, she was ravaged as an infant, robbed of her milk essence by the white social structure. The memory of Sethe's stolen milk shows the picture of her helplessness and her humiliation. Her community disapproves her brutal act of killing her daughter and deserts her. Paul D leaves 124 because he tells Stamp Paid, he is afraid of "that girl in her house" (234). Beloved, Sethe's
daughter is introduced as “A fully dressed woman walked out of the water” (50). She is no longer an invisible baby poltergeist but in the flesh at the age she would have been had she lived. Paul D struggles against Beloved’s interference who is summoned by Sethe’s need to make it clear to her, to build his new life with Sethe. After Paul D is gone, Sethe experiences that Beloved is her daughter, the chick—the settling of pieces into places designed and made especially for them. The appearance of Beloved in the flesh brings Sethe’s repressed guilt into the open. She has come back to claim her mother’s attention and love which she had been deprived of. Sethe is delighted to make up for what the child has lost and Denver is ashamed to see her mother “serving a girl not much older than her self” (297). But Beloved has also come back to render the Judgement, Sethe has never made against herself, charging her mother of rejection, of not loving ‘too thick’, but of not loving enough, of leaving her behind.

Beloved takes physical possession of Sethe, dressing like her, imitating her gestures and speech, until “it was difficult for Denver to tell who was who” (241). Then Beloved begins to absorb Sethe, she grows taller, her belly swells until she looks pregnant assuming Sethe’s motherhood as Sethe shrinks and becomes “like a chastened child” (250). Beloved’s demands are unlimited. Towards the end of the novel, Sethe relinquishes herself completely to the will and desire
of Beloved. Sethe allows herself to be absorbed though it reverts her back to slavehood. For the first time, Sethe was able to free herself and her children through her own efforts. But this time she was helped out of this abyss by her other daughter Denver. If one of her daughters brings about her deterioration, the other becomes instrumental in her resurrection. Denver's decision "to leave the yard, step off the edge of the world... and go ask somebody for help" (243) initiates the reversals in the life of Sethe. Denver is able to escape the narcissistic vacuum for she realizes that "it was she who had to step off the edge of the world and die because if she didn't, they all would" (239). She finally gives up her identification with her dead sister, her own enslavement to the past, and begins her life independently. She goes to the community to seek help to feed the family. The community, which had withdrawn, from 124 because of its attempt to usurp the 'loaves and fishes' power of God, is eager to establish contact with the people in 124. In 1855, the members of the community helped Sethe to escape from slavery; in 1874, the help of the community is necessary to free Sethe again. The women get together to chase the embodied ghost of Beloved, which allows Paul D, a re-entry into the house. In the last, the narrative voice moves to the point of view of Beloved, who experiences the events not as a reversal but as a repetition; Sethe runs away from her; she is abandoned again.
The craving for mutual recognition propels the central characters in the novel. As a child, Sethe living in isolation is isolated from the circle of her community. The growing misunderstanding between Sethe and Paul D makes Sethe push him outside her circle. The circle standing as a metaphor of avoidance: “circling him the way she was circling the subject round and round, never changing direction, which might have helped his head” (161). Sethe tries to dismiss Paul D and those who were haunting her peace of mind, reflecting on the days when she came to Baby Sugg’s house and was warmly accepted by her community only for a short time. When Sethe feels choked by the ghostly fingers: “Harder, harder, the fingers moved slowly around towards her wind pipe, making little circles on the way” (96). Later when Denver charges Beloved of choke her mother, she denies the charge: “the circle of iron choked it” (101). Sethe and her community were chained by the circle of iron. Beloved evokes the repressed history of Sethe’s ancestors, the enslavement by white masters.

The end of the novel circles back to Paul D’s arrival again at 124 promising a shared future, “his coming is the reverse of his going” (270). His movements through the house unwind the spell by which Beloved had moved him out. Morrison’s novel is not hopelessly bleak or despairing. Her characters are wounded but not all of them are ruined. Denver and Paul D courageously face their inner terrors—
Denver leaves the house even though she expects to be ‘swallowed up’, and Paul D returns to Sethe and her fearful murderous love is able to salvage out of the wreckage a bolstering faith in both self and other. Paul D tries to pass this faith on to Sethe at the end assuming again a maternal, nurturing role. His offer to rub Sethe’s feet undoes his previous characterization of her act as animal. Foot rubbing and bathing re-enact the life-restoring human contacts that marked Sethe’s first escape from slavery. Sethe has escaped again from possession by the past. Denver, Ella and the community bring about the series of reversals by praying and chanting at 124 which releases Sethe from her daughter’s claim and the ghost loses her individual story. Sethe feels bereft and lost after Beloved is gone and tells Paul D: “She was my best thing” (272) to which, he responds by leaning over and taking her hand: “You your best thing, Sethe, you are. His holding fingers are holding hers” (273). She immediately replies, “Me? Me?” (273)—thus turning her attention to the self which she is now ready to define. She is more fortunate than Beloved who “although has claim, is not claimed” (336). She is claimed by Paul D, Denver and her community as a result of which, she is able to reclaim her wholeness. Early in the novel, when Sethe first contemplates leading a new life with Paul D, she envisions the project as a kind of story telling: “Her story was bearable because it was his well-to tell, to refine and tell
again” (99). By the end of the novel Paul D, too, “wants to put his story next to hers” (273). Story telling promotes healing when it helps change to occur. But for the abandoned ghost, there are no reversals; only repetitions and the concepts ‘when things were over’ cannot apply. Beloved story is not a story to pass on as the narrative voice in the end of the novel refers in context to Sethe’s mother also, reinforcing the idea that Beloved incarnates at least three generations of abandoned/abandoning daughter/mother. The relationship between Sethe and Paul D comes closest to a state of mutual recognition and attunement. Paul D touching Sethe’s face recalls the touching faces of the mating turtles, the relationship here is not one of merging or of domination but of resonating ‘likeness’ and empathic understanding. However, in the end it is Beloved who is given more importance than Sethe. Her desperate struggle to know her own story is both the frame and the centre of the novel. Beloved’s struggle is the struggle of Sethe, Denver, Paul D and Baby Sugg. It is a struggle of all black people in a racist society. Beloved demonstrates, finally, the deep psychic reverberations of living in a culture in which domination and objectification of the self have been institutionalized. The free, autonomous self, Beloved teaches, is an inherently social self, rooted in relationship and dependent at its core on the vital bond of mutual recognition. Finally the dead girl, who is never named except by the
single word that appears on her tombstone becomes indistinguishable from the ‘Sixty Million and more’ to whom the novel is dedicated—the forgotten, anonymous, captured black African’s who never even made it into slavery, those who died either in Africa or on slave ships.
In *Jazz*, Morrison portrays the devastating effects of dominant ideology and cultural hegemony on the lives of African-American men and women. Much of the significant criticism about black women writers has debated the issue of what makes their work their own. Black women writers have, for a long period, rejected the distortion of black female experience both by white writers and black male writers. Their literature has been an effort to work against their falsifications and talk about their own experiences. They make an attempt to establish positive definitions of self and blackness for which they have had to resort to bonding at many levels. Female bonding has been accepted by most of these writers as a means of coming to an understanding of the self. During reconstruction, the black woman was separated from her husband who was either sold as a slave or left her when he went in search of a job in the North. So the black women had to depend on the other women in the community. Such women-women relationships are to be found in all the novels of Morrison. However, unlike *Sula* and *Beloved*, Morrison's *Jazz* does not deal with specific women-women relationships. Like Jadine in *Tar Baby* and Sethe in *Beloved*, *Jazz* shows the path to the understanding
of the self of Violet through her relationship with Dorcas, Alice Manfred and Felice. Violet goes out in search of Dorcas’s past and meets her aunt Alice Manfred. Unlike Jadine in Tar Baby who rejects her culture and solidarity with those black women who help her confront reality, Violet accepts the influence of various black women on her life, which ultimately results in a more harmonious relationship with her husband.

Two aspects of human personality is used by Morrison in her earlier novels, like the milder and the aggressive in the characters of Nel and Sula. In *Jazz*, Morrison employs a new technique of telescoping the philosophies into a ‘spilt personality’. Violet, the protagonist of the novel turns violent and she recovers her lost self by destroying the violent self in her.

*Jazz* unfolds the journey of Joe and his wife Violet from South to the North. It tells us about the stark reality of the life of innocent Blacks who are victimized because of want and violence and migrate to the North. They join a steady stream of 1906 and start loving the city with the hope of searching for livelihood and freedom. They have migrated because they are fed on stories of city life that one can fulfil one’s own dream if one is prepared to work hard. They settle down in the city, Joe as a 50-year-old sample-case beauty products salesman and his wife, Violet, a hairdresser living behind all the traumas of their
past. Joe with his Cleopatra products proclaims himself as a trustworthy fellow for women who:

[felt not only safe but kindly in his company because he was the sort women ran to when they thought they were being followed, or watched... He was the man who took you to your door if you missed the trolley and had to work night streets at night, who warned young girls away from hooch joints and the men who lingered there. Women teased him because they trusted him (73).

He is “liked among the women because he made them feel like girls; liked by girls because he made them feel women” (76). However, when he meets Dorcas, a young girl of eighteen years old, he falls in love with her and hires his neighbour, Malvonne’s apartment so that his “private candy box could be opened up for him” (121). To realize his dream of having “some nice female company” (48), he gives her different types of gifts. Their love affair continues for some time but soon Dorcas believes: “Joe did not care what kind of woman [she] was” (190). So she moves away from him and develops relationship with a young boy called Acton. Joe comes to know about it and kills her in a fit of violence and passion, when he finds Dorcas and Acton dancing at a party. And at Dorcas’ funeral, Violet opens the coffin and disfigures the face of the dead girl shot dead by her husband with a knife. This ‘violent’ act no doubt shocks the entire community, but it is the women who empathize with her just as it is the women in the community who came out to save Sethe in *Beloved.*
When a policeman comes to take her away to imprison her, the whole crowd murmurs: "Aw, She's tired, let her rest" (17) and protect her. Even Malvonna, Joe's neighbour confesses that she hates violet but she can not simply go against another black woman and tells Joe: "Okay there's no love lost between Violet and me, but I take her part not yours" (46). Morrison tries to study human relations with regard to an extraordinary situation. She portrays here how one can see and learn more things about a person in a crisis.

Like Hermann Hesse's Steppen Wolf, Violet admits to many slaves within herself. She is described by Felice as being: "herself is very very dark, boot black, the girls at school would say. And I did not expect her to be pretty but she is ... she is what my grandmother calls Pickthin" (206). She experiences exploitive work conditions in New York being an unlicensed hairdresser. She had to be at the beck and call of women who want their hair done and accept lower wages as a result. Violet, once a happy black woman, now understands the difficulties she has to face:

Twenty years after Joe and Violet train-danced on into the city, they were still a couple but barely speaking to each other... convinced that he [Joe] alone remembers those days and wants them back (36).

Once in the city, she becomes more and more concerned with possession than with love and communication. Her childlessness
makes a deep psychological impact on her behaviour and she starts caring for birds, particularly a parrot, who squawks ‘love you’. But as with the parrot, she considers Joe as her property without bothering to communicate with him. Like wild, she maintains silence with Joe: “overtime her silences annoy her husband, then puzzle him and finally depress him” (24). These silences provoke Joe to act crazily, twice shooting off a gun without any meaning. Sometimes Violet becomes so much self-engrossed that Joe believes:

Violet takes better care of her parrot than she does me [Joe]. Rest of the time, she’s cooking pork I can’t eat, or pressing hair I can’t stand the smell of … But the quiet. I can’t take the quiet. She don’t hardly talk anymore, and I aint allowed near her. Any other man be running around stepping out every night…(49).

Violet’s violent act of violating the face of dead Dorcas is an act of projection of her own evil on Dorcas. Interestingly she does not make Joe responsible for his infidelity. On the contrary, she directs her wrath against Dorcas who is already dead.

After a few days she goes to the house of Dorcas to meet Alice Manfred, Dorcas’s aunt, who thinks Violet might have come to ask for forgiveness. However Violet informs Alice that she has come to rest for a minute since she is not able to find a place where she can sit
down. She tells Alice:

I had to sit down somewhere. I thought I could do it here. That you would let me and you did. I know I didn't give Joe much reason to stay out of the street. But I wanted to see what kind of girl he'd rather me be (82).

Violet carries a photograph of Dorcas to her residence just to understand how she looked like and falls in love with her thinking how old her own baby girl might have been if she had survived. She, thus, starts to wonder if Dorcas was “the woman who took the man, or the daughter who fled her womb” (109)? When Violet becomes conscious of the devil in her personality she realizes that as long as the other Violet is at the center of herself, the softer Violet will not be able to achieve wholeness. The photograph of Dorcas has become a ‘sign’ for both Violet and Joe signifying their remorse and repentance. For days together Joe spends restless nights and Violet finds it difficult to get him out of that trauma: “And a dead girl's face has become a necessary thing for their nights...The only living presence in the house” (11). Having to live with her memory, Violet soon falls in love with Dorcas: “When she isn’t trying to humiliate Joe, she is admiring the dead girl’s hair; when she isn’t cursing Joe... she is having whispered conversations with the corpse in her head” (15). The photograph of Dorcas becomes a symbol of her guilt. In Violet’s perverted mind, Dorcas becomes the child she miscarried. Dorcas, the
woman who used to 'wear' Violet down, becomes a woman Violet admires and loves. As Yamini K. Murthy observes: "Violet’s relationship with Dorcas becomes an affirmation of love of one woman for another, although Violet starts out with hatred in her heart" (Gender Solidarity and Discovery of Self in Morrison’s Tar Baby and Jazz 83).

Her love for Dorcas leads Violet to realize that there can not be two selves and two centers in one person and gives her the necessary strength to kill her unwanted self. She is able to get rid of the darker aspect of herself and achieves a genuine centre, which paves the way for her to discover the real 'me'. Felice asks her:

'How did you get rid of her'?
'Killed her. Then I killed her'.
'Who's left'?
'Me' (209).

Violet reminds us of Sethe in Beloved. Sethe kills her daughter to save her from slavery but, later on, she feels guilty of murder, till the dead daughter returns to her in flesh to redeem her mother from her guilty conscience. Similarly, Violet finds herself both loving and hating the girl. She is puzzled by her own inconstancy, which is a sign of split personality:

Morrison’s purpose in Jazz as in Beloved is to draw a picture of a heroine in crisis. And show how the crisis offers the opportunity to
heal the psychic wounds. Sethe cannot be healed of her guilty conscience until she forced to remember the events leading to murder of her daughter, Beloved. In the same manner Violet needs to purge herself of her anger with Joy for his infidelity, of her rage at the dead Dorcas, and of her feelings of remorse for not having any children. However, Joe’s character is not fully developed by Morrison like Violet’s character. His childhood being spent in search of a mother, his love for Violet and Dorcas is nothing but a manifestation of his longing for a mother’s love, which he was deprived of in his childhood. First he tries to compensate the lack of his mother’s love with Violet’s love, “All right, Violet, I’ll marry you, just because I couldn’t see whether a wild woman put out her hand or not” (181). When Violet fails to communicate with him and when he feels that she does not care for him, he looks for a companion in Dorcas, who he feels is willing to share his loneliness and his feelings. Now his love for Dorcas also serves to compensate for a lack of mother’s love in his childhood. When he feels Dorcas has moved away from him, he mercilessly kills her.

The affirmation of love and identification with the ‘other’ develops into an understanding of the self in Violet’s relationship with Alice. She recognizes Violet as ‘violent’ and refuses to see her but when Violet finally meets her to seek forgiveness, she is willing to sit with
her and talk to her. Alice becomes the person Violet can sit with, and talk to someone who will try to understand her. It is due to her relationship with Violet; Alice undergoes a great transformation. And Violet becomes the only visitor, She ever looked forward to. After her relationship with Violet, Alice tries to understand the Predicament of black women. She tells Violet very frankly, “I don’t understand women like you. Women with knives” (85), to which violet responds, “I wasn’t burn with a knife” (85). When Alice condemns her by saying, “No, but you picked one up... You picked up a knife to insult a dead girl” (85). Violet answers back it is better to do so because the harm to Dorcas had already been done there. She also asks Alice, “Wouldn’t you, wouldn’t you fight for your man” (85)? Violet soon makes Alice realize, that she, who has never held a knife to harm others, would certainly fight and kill for her man: “We don’t have children. He’s what I got. He’s what I got” (111). It is their relationship, which helps Violet define herself and view the real ‘me’ inside her. She realizes what she has been denying herself all along and that she has to make the most of it. Through her identification with Alice, Violet establishes her own identity and becomes a person even Joe learns to love and admire. Also it is Alice’s relation with Violet makes her learn the sufferings of black women. She realizes that they are defenseless as ducks, are subdued and broken and are
like Dorcas, an easy prey. However, at the same time, she also perceives: "All over the country black women were armed. That... at least, they had learned... A thorn here, a spike there" (74).

Violet not only helps Alice, but also Felice, Dorcas's girl friend who is able to discover herself. The need for a child to some extent gets fulfilled through Felice who becomes a surrogate to Dorcas. Joe and Violet in their way become surrogate parents to her. Just as Denver and others make Beloved realize that her mother’s act of killing was necessitated by love for her daughter, Violet too makes Felice realize that her mother stole a ring from the shop only "out of spite" (203).

Violet’s relationship with Felice helps her to understand her mother, Rose and her grand mother, True Belle, better. Thus, "as Violet, Alice, and Felice come together as black women, and discover their own self through landing with other black women, they come to an end of a pilgrimage to know and be their own true selves" (Yamini K. Murthi 1993: 83). As Mbola rightly points out, "What violet, Alice, Dorcas and Felice have in common is the need for mamas" (Women Who Run with Wild 634). Fortunately, Felice gets in Violet a 'mama' just in time: "I can see why Mrs. Manfred let [Violet] visit. She doesn’t lie, Mrs. Trace. Nothing she says is a lie the way it is with most older people" (205).
Moreover, Morrison has proved in *Jazz* that all African women benefit from each other's company through bonding. We see towards the end of the novel that Violet whose cultivated silences caused her husband to act crazily, is successful in establishing a communication with Joe: “A lot of the time, though they stay home figuring things out, telling each other those little personal stories they like to hear again and again, or fussing with the bird Violet bought” (223). Alice Manfred goes back to Spring Field after getting rid of her fearlessness for the menfolk: “The cheerful company may be of someone who can provide the necessary things for the night” (222). Felice also because of her communication with other black women develops into a strong woman not to be abused or played again: “She’s nobody’s alibi or hammer or toy” (222).

The critical nature of the subject matter in *Jazz* proves Morrison as a praiseworthy fictional artist. As Mbalia observes:

> Conditions make people wild, bring out the wild in people, make women run wild. What other topic more appropriately expresses the conditions that African people confront today with over 60% of African families headed by women and nearly 70% of these families living in poverty; with the alarming and increasing rate of teen age pregnancy; with crack and new, deadlier chemical drugs being introduced in the African community everyday; with increasing numbers of middle school youth dropping out; with inadequate health care, poor nutrition, and increasing numbers of Africans in their thirties dying from AIDS, cancer, and heart attacks—is it any wonder there are wilds in the African community (*Toni Morrison's Developing Class Consciousness* 23)?
All three characters in *Jazz*, Violet, Joe and Dorcas are beset by doubts and are therefore, destined to suffer. However Morrison succeeds in bring about a solution for the dilemma of all those characters. It is through communication with each other that Morrison’s characters achieve freedom and make themselves free of their offences. Jame Lincoln Collier’s description of a great Jazz musician applies to Morrison as well: “The truly great Jazz musician is great for the same reasons that a great writer or painter is great. He can make a unified whole out of fascinating parts which join in surprising ways. And we can only explain how he does it by saying that he is a genius” (*Inside Jazz* 31).

We recognize Morrison as one of the important novelist who is not distinct from the story she is telling.
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