CHAPTER III

THE INCARCERATED FEMALE PSYCHE:

MORRISON'S EARLY NOVELS
American customs and the American literary works have persistently underestimated African-American women. Being driven to the periphery, African-American women have been placed in a lower ladder in every respect. The female voice has frequently been silenced and twisted apart by the andocentric society. The pictures of African-Americans have been handled skillfully by the attitude of the society to give structure to its power and to sustain it at the same level. The society is repeatedly giving birth to conventional type of pictures of African-American women. Like wretched mulattoes and mammmies who are loyal to their white masters, the images of African-American women pass through the American criteria and norms. Morrison is seriously conscious of the position actually allocated to black women. She has represented women characters as topics that arise from a crossed situation constantly searching for survival. She looks keenly at the lives of African-Americans and particularly examines the impact of American customs on the African-American women. The female voice of the enslaved group which is neglected by the rest
Black movement of the sixties, is taken up by Morrison as a challenge opposing the production of an unreasonable, already united, systematic and secured self.

Morrison’s first Novel, The Bluest Eye (1970) makes one of the most powerful attacks on the relationship between western standards of female beauty and psychological oppression of black women. The control of blacks by the existing standards of beauty: blue eyes, blond hair and white skin are the main idea in the novel. People coming close to it get everything but people who do not achieve it remain unfulfilled, relegated self. Morrison views earthly beauty as one of the inarticulate and destructive aspects of the modern world. It feeds on jealousy and insecurity and breeds dejection and disappointment. The disillusionment of the black women in acquiring white ideas encircling them because of the perfect pictures of feminine beauty is dealt within the novels of Morrison.

The gloomy life of the central character of the novel, Pecola, who lives in Loraine, Ohio, in 1941 brings to our mind Eliot’s The Wasteland. The novel shows the hapless condition of a black girl aspiring for white beauty. Living amongst a family suffering from negation in life, Pecola longs for blue eyes, the standard of beauty as “White American prescription for beauty include blonde hair, white skin and above all blue eyes” (Alphy J. Plakkoottam 1990: 17-18).
Pecola prays for blue eyes thinking it a miracle that would save her. She considers the blue eyes to be everything in her life that she can aspire for. Being conscious of her ugliness, she tries to go beyond the limits, as she becomes small below the ‘mantle’ ‘shroud’, ‘mark’ of ugliness. “Her failures to find other than in fantasy is Morrison’s indictment of society which deprives her any sense of self-worth” (Dorothy H. Lee, 1984: 348).

Pecola yearns for blue eyes and hence her feminist struggle not to be rejected by her parents, her friends, her school- teachers and others. Innocence has no role to play in the present society, which contradicts itself as Pecola’s Godfather whom she believes turns out to be dishonest. Having lost her sense of sight and failing to see through the matter, her mind is full of misperception about herself. The tragedy in Pecola’s life is brought about by Pauline who rejects her, Cholly who rapes her and makes her degeneration complete. Being raped by her own father, the male violation of female, she becomes a tragic heroine like that of Ovid’s Philomela and Homer’s Persephone. Madonna M. Miner maintains: “‘I’ and ‘You’ are one and same. Tragically even, when combined, this ‘I’ and ‘You’ do not compose one whole being” (Conjuring: Black Women Fiction and Literary Tradition 180-181).
Knowing very well that her typical appearance does not suit up to the level of white beauty Pecola examines herself: "Long hours she sat looking at the mirror trying to discover the secret of her ugliness" (54). Her experience that she is ugly and disowned at home as well as at school brings forth her feminist appeal to God for "Pretty eyes, pretty blue eyes..." (34). In her discussion with American writers Morrison herself says:

I began to write about a girl who wanted blue eyes... and also about the whole business of what is physical beauty and the pain of that yearning... all females who were peripheral in other people's lives (Conversation with American Writers 218).

Explaining the reason why she wrote such a novel, Morrison replied: "I wrote Sula and The Bluest Eye because they were books I had wanted to read. No one had written them yet, so I wrote them" (Claudia Tate 1983: 60).

Morrison wrote about a girl longing for blue eyes and wanting to be somebody else. The pain of that yearning and the disastrous result that she faced made her to paint Pecola not like Cindrella, worthy of any Prince charming but as a pathetic heroine languishing in her self-isolation.

Pecola's failure to merge into perfect beauty as presented by the American standard like that of Shirley Temple and Mary Jane justifies her feminine yearning for not just blue eyes, but the Bluest Eye. She
considers herself responsible for her family problems particularly its poverty and frustrated love. It is her feminist struggle for blue eyes and self-hatredness, which gradually develops her psychic disintegration. The Shirley Temple cup from which she drinks three quarts of milk a day shows her obsession with blue eyes. “She was a long time with the milk and gazed fondly at the silhouette of Shirley Temple’s dimpled face” (19). It is the Shirley Temple cup, which is symbolic of her need to get somebody to love her particularly her parents. Her obsession with blue eyes makes her desire to be united with that of Shirley Temple’s eyes. However she is not blessed with blue eyes. On the other hand, the blue eyes seem to posses her, which destroys her self-confidence and finally, she retreats into her mad world to enjoy her blue eyes.

The white ideological influence on Pecola is seen in her desire to eat Mary Jane Candy. Each Candy having a yellow wrapper with the picture of Mary Jane enchants Pecola:

Smiling white face. Blond hair in gentle disarray, blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort. The eyes are petulant, mischievous. To Pecola they are simply pretty... To cut the candy is to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane (43).

Eating Candy in her imagination, she is transformed to some sort of victory over Mary Jane and her desire to be something different. Satirically, however her fanciful desire has the defect of being what
can’t be possessed and it only negates her values and presence. It is her false belief that she has come to possess blue eyes in place of dark eyes, which wraps her virtue, destroys her confidence, her individualism and drives her into madness. The eyes of Shirley Temple and Mary Jane, controlling images invented by Non-African-American commercialism, consume her subjectivity and identity. Contrary to Pecola’s dream of a life full of affection, caring and peace, she is raped and made pregnant by her father who is ignorant of any positive way of expressing his paternal love for his daughter. Soaphead Church draws a finale to Pecola’s young life by ‘playing God’ and giving her the impossible blue eyes. Following Soaphead’s advice that she should poison his landlady’s dog, Pecola acquires her blue eyes in imagination, which makes her mental disintegration complete.

Pecola is the central scapegoat of the novel. She is not only made a scapegoat by her parents but also by the black people in general. Junior, a black boy, makes her the scapegoat for his own pain. She is hated by a group of black boys because they make the helpless Pecola responsible for their anguish, which is due to their poverty. Morrison indicates that their back biting, “Black e mo Black e mo Ya daddy
who also sleep naked, how could they make up such a story? May be
the boys’ malicious harassment was “their contempt for their own
blackness that gave the first insult its teeth” (55). Pecola is sacrificed
for her people as she is an ‘ugly’ girl, is having a father who is
irresponsible, alcoholic and has put his family outdoors, which is “the
real terror of life” (17), and an unsociable mother who finds it difficult
to adjust herself to urban industrial life having come from the rural
south.

Claudia, the narrator of the novel as well as Pecola’s friend attempts
to recover Pecola opposing the impulse to make Pecola a scapegoat.
She inherently observes that there is vast invisible white cultural force
that destroys black presence. Though she considers Pecola partially
responsible for her unfulfilled life, still she is sympathetic towards
Pecola and her baby: After the baby came too soon and died-she was
so sad to see gram people looked away. Children, those who were not
frightened by her, laughed outright (158).

But there is no hope of revival for Pecola. Even the Marigolds planted
by Claudia fail to bloom indicating the utter hopelessness of the
situation. Pecola never had a chance to survive in the hostile
environment nor would she in future. The marigold dies and so does
Pecola's baby. Claudia remarks:

The land of the entire country was hostile to marigolds that year. The soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruits it will not bear, and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had no light to live. We are wrong of course, but it doesn't matter. It's too late. At least on the edge of my town, among the garbage and the sunflowers of my town, it's much, much, much too late (160).

Claudia discerns the necessity of protecting Pecola and also challenges conventional values and standards, which shows Morrison's eagerness to struggle for the survival of African Americans. Unlike Pecola, Claudia is able to witness the hegemony of whiteness created by the media through the idealized characters. It is the white force that rejects African-American values and force African Americans to suffer unnecessarily from inferiority and self-hatred. This is what drives Claudia to hate anything associated with white standards of beauty. While Pecola cuddles the images of blue-eyed and blond-haired girls that dominate her world, Claudia rejects them all including those blue-eyed dolls, which she always destroys. Without any remorse, she is able to say: "I destroyed white baby dolls" (21). With Claudia, the white influence forces her to self-discovery:

The secret of the magic they [whites] weaved on others. What made people look at them and say, 'Awwww; but not for me'. The eye slides of black women as they approached them on the street, and the possessive gentleness of their touch as they handled them (22).
Claudia’s personal Christmas wishes show her preference for African-American folk culture and for nature over commercialized materialistic commodities: “I want to sit on the low stool in Big Mamma’s kitchen with my lap full of lilacs and listen to big Papa play his violin for me alone” (21).

Claudia is intelligent enough to know that it is the mainstream society that makes the black people accepts Maureen Peal, a “high-yellow dream child with long brown hair” (52). Morrison clearly states that it is the society that dominates the concept of desirability through mass media such as billboards and movies. However Claudia’s natural ability to oppose an idea is not strong enough and she recalls how she modified herself towards the norm: “I learned much later to worship her (Shirley Temple), just as I learned to delight in cleanliness, knowing, even as I learned, that the change was adjustment without improvement” (22). A black girl belonging to the lowest social class is forced to accept cultural dominance and controlling images circulated by the media. Susan Willis maintains:

White cultural domination is far too complex to be addressed only in a retaliatory manner. A simple, straightforward response to cultural domination cannot be mounted, let alone imagined, because domination is bound up with the media and this with commodity gratification. (Black American Literature Forum 175).

Claudia’s materialistic attitude towards life enables her to outlive Pecola. She has discovered that in spite of her rejection of the white
dolls, there is no fulfillment in disinterested violence. That is why, Cynthia Davis points out that Claudia is not fully heroic as she also lives in an ‘Unyielding World’. About Claudia, Cynthia Davis writes: “Claudia does meet her responsibility to see (not just look) to grasp the existence of herself and others without the evasions of Bad Faith, and she acts on what she sees” (Contemporary Literature 323-342).

Pauline Breedlove, mother of Pecola and wife of Cholly, performs neither the role of a mother nor that of a wife. She is a person who goes on changing according to the situations that she passes through, “Holding Cholly as a model of sin and failure, she bore him like a crown of thorns and her children like a cross” (98). Different views have been expressed to define the personality of Pauline that makes her sufferings more and more problematic. When she works for the Fishers, she starts to lose interest in using her aesthetic skill for her own sake: “Here she could arrange, clean things, leave things up in neat rows... Here she found beauty, order, cleanliness and praise” (99). She willingly shows her skill in enhancing the beauty of the Fisher’s house, but she rejects the responsibility of managing her own house and loving her own family. Ironically, Pauline’s ability in decorating the house of her employer is contrasted with the reality of her unfulfilled domestic life and it causes her to hate and despise her family. Her daughter, Pecola whom she names after a movie
character, a mulatto girl hates her mother because she is black and ugly. Ironically, Pauline hates her own daughter, whose appearance hardly meets the aesthetic expectations of the white cinema industry. Pauline’s wish to be incorporated in a cinema world damages her real life. She is fascinated by the fantasies of the cinema world and is unable to accept the reality of her unfulfilled life. Hollywood representations of happy life fraught with materialistic affluence and high fashion makes it difficult for her to accept her careless husband, her poverty and above all her black children. She finds it hard to be nice to Cholly after her experiences of the world of Hollywood picture shows. She quarrels with Cholly because she found Cholly not like the white men that she had seen in the cinema world: “White men taking such good care of the women” (95). Pauline is responsible for Samy, her son, running away from home and Pecola despairing herself: “Into her son she beat a loud desire to run away, and into her daughter she beat a fear of growing up” (100). Further she develops a love for fashion due to the impact of the movies on her and wants to be the best-dressed woman in town: “She merely wanted other women to cast favorable glances at her way” (92). Her tooth, which falls out of her mouth while she is at a movie theatre dressed in an outfit that resembles the movie star, Jean Harlow, suggests the fallacy of her worship of the cinema world. May be after her migration to Ohio she
went to the Fishers’ household and to the movies earlier because she felt lonely while Cholly “had no problem finding other people and other things to occupy him” (92). When she went to the movies she identified herself with the characters on the screen and when she went to the fishers, she developed the desire to reject the black community that had once rejected her. Because now, “the creditors and service people who humiliated her when she went to them on her own behalf respected her, were even intimated by her” (99). But it could be a vengeance not against the blacks but against the whites. A poor black woman controls, dominates and virtually becomes the powerful queen of the Fishers’ household where all depend on her. She has reversed the social order by making the whites virtually her slaves: “If I left her on her own, she’d drown in dirt” (92-93). But Cholly fails to understand Pauline’s revenge on the whites.

Being immature Pecola comes to think that the cause to the frustration of her family lies in its ugliness and if that ugliness is replaced by beauty, things can be set right. By giving the title *The Bluest Eye*, to the novel, the writer seems to suggest that it is a world as ‘seen’ by a girl. Family is the first institution where a child’s interaction with others begins and process of learning starts in its relationship with the mother. The attachment between the mother and the daughter leads to a better understanding of each other’s needs and experiences. The
mother gives emotional support to her daughter at the time of her initiation into womanhood by attaining puberty. The deep bond of love and affection between both helps the daughter to get rid of the tension caused by the passage from childhood to womanhood. But such a close relationship does not exist between Pecola and her mother, Pauline. Pecola addresses her mother as Mrs. Breedlove, the most formal way of addressing one's mother. Pauline tries to accommodate herself to the kind of white values, which her community accepts. Her mind thinks of an image of a 'smart baby' with 'pretty hair', but repulsed by the reality of an ugly black girl that Pecola is. She rejects her own daughter when Pecola accidentally drops the blackberry pie and strikes her, and screams: "Crazy fool...my floor, mess... my floor..." (84-85). But for the Fisher girl she has comforting soothing words: "Hush, baby, hush...don't cry no more..." (85).

Every night, Pecola desperately prays for blue eyes because she is strongly influenced by the white concept of beauty and love. Having seen white children with blue eyes loved and desired, she takes it granted that blue eyes would not only make her beautiful, but also make others love her. If only she had blue eyes, she believes, she wouldn't have to stay with those people who were ugly: "As long as she looked the way she did, as long as she is ugly, she would love to
stay with these people” (39). But despite all her desperate attempts to be loved and to be accepted in all fairness, she becomes an easy prey to everyone’s disdain at school. The society either makes fun of her or gets pleasure from her woeful and hapless condition.

Even Claudia and Frieda maintain a distance from Pecola in her wretched condition when her father rapes her. Apart from Claudia, Pecola and Pauline, Geraldine, a mother of Pecola’s classmates also submits to the white influence. She forbids her son not to play with niggers as “colored people were neat and quiet, naggers were dirty and loud” (71). However, she overlooks the facts that the discrimination directed against niggers also applies to her. She appropriates another white concept of beauty as her own—the concept of cleanliness, the concept of having a clean, orderly house. She decorates her house beautifully, which charms Pecola who lives in a storefront apartment destitute of Geraldine’s house. But what is evident is the lack of warmth in such a house and Geraldine can’t accommodate her own race in it.

Alienated from the society and exposed to the white world, the bitterness of racial hatred deeply affects the mind of dreamy Pauline. All her expectations about her life and herself is destroyed when she lies defenseless, her nakedness exposed to a group of doctors who cruelly treat the patients in the charity ward. She observes these
doctors behaving gently with the white women showing concern with their nice friendly talk. But they humiliated her, as she was a black woman. Not only she is wounded by them physically when they push her legs open and jam rough hands inside her body, but also mentally, by their sharp talk which cuts into her soul: “now these here are women, you don’t have any trouble with. They deliver right away and with no pain. Just like horses” (Gayles 1984: 97). The humiliated and angry Pauline objects to it by saying that she is no horse, but a human being going through the pain of delivering a baby: “By the time Pecola is born Pauline’s process of becoming like generations of Black women before her is complete” (Joyce Pettis 1987: 28). This shows how capitalism, racism and sexism have critically affected the lives and conscience of black women. Pauline now gets consolation in going to Church, not out of any devotion to religion, but out of an eagerness to accuse Cholly. Her way of seeking revenge has presented her as a victim:

A mother’s victimisation does not merely humiliate her. It mutilates the Daughter who watches her for clues as to what it means to be a woman....The mother’s self-hatred and low expectation are the binding rags for the psyche of the daughter (Adrienne Rich 1976: 242).

If Pauline contributes mostly to the ugliness of the family, the contribution of Cholly is no less. “Abandoned on a junk heap” (126) by his mother who “wasn’t right in the head” (105). “rejected for a
crap game by his father” (126) and later by Aunt Jimmy, Cholly has no idea of how to maintain proper relationships with others. Without a father, mother or school where one receives some moral and social instruction, Cholly’s view of life and behavior were decidedly shaped by libertinism. In the absence of a guide his life was free:

Dangerously free. Free to feel whatever he felt—fear, guilt, shame, love, grief, pity. Free to be tender or violent, to whistle or weep. Free to sleep in doorways or between the white sheets of a singing woman. Free to take a job, free to leave it (125).

However his freedom does not allow him to escape from racial humiliation. The flashlight of the white hunters who want him to make love to Darlene as they desire interrupts his first experience of lovemaking. The satisfaction of one of the basic needs of life of a black boy and girl becomes a show for them. The giggle of the white hunters, the racing of the flashlight on their paralyzed bodies, their comments make the blacks reach a climax of insult, humiliation and cruelty. This episode turns Cholly into a “burnt out black man” (127). As a man he has been insulted by both black and white. The insult from the whites against whom, he is helpless, keeps his anger suppressed and this may have erupted on Pecola and Pauline. Never did he once consider directing his hatred toward the white, armed men. He was small, black and helpless. He hated all those who knew about his helpless situation. Aunt Jimmy who knew that he was
rejected by his mother, Darlene who knew his helplessness against the white men, Pauline and Pecola who knew that he is unable to do anything for his family in a racist society were all the target of his hatred. Cholly’s response to all these women is an example of the classic response of black men to their women oppressing black women with the same victimization they themselves are victims of. 

Being dangerously free he is unable to fit into the ‘saneness’ of marriage to Pauline. Coming home drunk, he goes through a mixture of emotions, “revulsion, guilt, pity, then love…” (127). Pauline did not understand this and thinking Cholly to be guilty, she created a lot of pain for ChoEy in his family life: “Holding ChoEy as a mark of her own model of sin and failure, she bore him like a crown of thorns and her children like a cross” (98).

When ChoEy had been fighting against racial victimization, Pauline had been staying at the Fishers’ household enjoying her life. The quarrel between ChoEy and Pauline shows Pauline as ‘manly’ and ChoEy as ‘womanly’:

“He fought her the way a coward fights a man-with feet, the palms of his hands and teeth. She in turn, fought back in a purely feminine way-with frying pans and pokers, and occasionally a flat iron would sail towards his head” (32).

Nancy Chodorow maintains that the male must reject his “primary femaleness”, as the discovery and rejection of this is “important to
men to have a clear sense of gender difference" (*Family Structure and Feminine Personality* 124). In the absence of a strong, healthy relationship with any woman, Cholly floated aimlessly and did "what he felt at that moment" (127). The rape of his own daughter is prompted by his impulsive nature and animal instincts. His love for his daughter had turned into animal passion and lust: "He had joined the animals, was indeed, an old dog, a snake, a ratty nigger" (12). The rape of Pecola is narrated in such a way that both the victimizer and the victim draw the sympathy of the reader. A father's love turning into brutal lust proves that far from being a "tragic hero/victim, he turns into a tragic hero-villain in his daughter's life" (Karla F.C. Holloway 1987: 42).

In her treatment of male-female relationship, Morrison shows that the Breedloves lack the potentiality and fail to respond aggressively to circumvent a life of inauthentic existence. Ironically named, the Breedloves do not give life to love. In fact, they destroy any semblance of it or pervert it, as is seen in the case of Cholly's rape of Pecola. They have developed a deep-rooted conviction about their ugliness and Pecola's ugliness in reality is a legacy of her parents. Like Pecola who was a victim of her failure, the Breedloves were victims of "every billboard, every movie, every-glance" (34).
In contrast to Breedloves, there are the three prostitutes, China, Poland and Miss Marie. They are self-employed people controlling their business and leading an independent life. Though Claudia suspects that the women might not be happy, their lives seem to be more satisfactory than those of Geraldine, Mrs. Mc Tear and certainly Mrs. Breedlove. Discovering at an early age that men would seek pleasure from them, and rejecting the traditional domestic roles played by women, they chose to be compensated for their physical love. They do so almost with a vengeance: “these women hated men, all men, without shame, apology or discrimination” (47). Anger and hate act as creative forces making the women unyielding to the point of insubordination and arrogance. When Pecola asks Miss Marie why her boy friends love her, she says: “What else they gone do? They know I am rich and good looking” (45). Although they like the Breedloves, live in a storefront, they live above the squalor whereas downstairs, Pecola feels breathless in a home of displaced and fragmented lives. Upstairs she finds a holy place amidst the aroma of Miss Marie’s kitchen, the laughter of the women and Poland’s blue song, sung in a voice that is “sweet and hard, like new strawberries” (43). Ironically, it is the only place where Pecola can find genuine love. Unlike Mrs. Breedlove who ignores Pecola and shows preference for the little white Fisher girl, Miss Marie takes almost maternal interest in the
black, ugly girl that is Pecola. She greets her, “Hi, dumplin. Where your socks” (144)?

Being rejected by both her parents, Pecola has therefore no experience of love. Born to parents who constantly quarrel with each other, into a family, which in fact, lives its ‘ugliness’, Pecola believes that obtaining the bluest eyes, the most desirable thing in the world, will allow permanent union with those currently transitory features. Thinking of love, she tries to recollect the picture of her mother and father in bed. Her father made sounds of agony and her mother maintained dead silence. She wanders about such a relationship where love is “chocking sounds and silence” (44). She sincerely believes that the blue eyes will extinguish her position as pariah and give her love and security that she is desperately missing from her life:

“It had occurred to Pecola some times ago that if her eyes... were different... she herself would be different... If she looked different, beautiful may be (her father) would be different, and (her mother) too. May be they’d say, why look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We must n’t do bad things in front of those pretty eyes (34).”

The beautiful eyes of Shirley Temple and Mary Jane presented as perfect beauty shows Pecola’s obsession with blue eyes. Her failure in achieving it destroys her self-confidence. Even her obsession does not allow her to see that those boys who make fun of her are also black. The episodes with Maureen Peal and Geraldine reinforce Pecola’s sense that she is ugly. Maureen Peal, “a high yellow dream child with
long brown hair braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back", offends Pecola, "I am cute I, and you ugly, I, Black and ugly black emos. I am cute" (56). Geraldine humiliates her, "... get out you nasty little black bitch" (42). Pecola has to go through this humiliation with bowed head. "But she could not hold it low enough to avoid fearing the snow flakes falling and dying on the pavement" (72).

Like the falling and dying flakes that characterize her fallen state, she is prey to a world of violent rejection; her innocence is shattered by growing awareness (The Crime of Innocence in the Fiction of Toni Morrison 16).

Much more pathetic is the denial Pecola endures at the Candy shop by the white Mr. Yacobowski who "doesn't see her..." (36) for in his eyes there was "the total absence of human recognition-the glazed separateness" (36). Embarrassed and engulfed by shame, Pecola purchases the candy and leaves. Outside, she compares herself with dandelion weeds she passes. Like her, she thinks they are ugly and unwanted. Although she allows her anger to surface for sometime, she feels ashamed of herself. She takes pleasure in eating the candy, in symbolically digesting the smiling picture of the blue-eyed, blond-haired white girl that adorns the wrapper of the candy. Eating Mary Jane becomes therefore to Pecola’s perverted mind, eating Yacobowski, eating whiteness.
The three versions of the unique opening paragraph of *The Bluest Eye* may be said to be symbolic of the three life styles that Morrison explores in the novel. The first version of the paragraph indicates an alien white world, represented by the Dick-Jane family that intrudes into the lives of the black children. The Second version represents the lifestyle of the MacTeer family, which survives the poverty and racism that encounters in Ohio. The third version represents the ugliness and futility of lifestyle of the Breedloves. Breedloves who have never experienced love, cannot give their children a true sense of love. Their regular fights damaged the psychic wholeness of their children. By portraying the "grotesque violence", Morrison draws our attention to the victimization of children: "...parents do violence to their children everyday" (Samuels and Hudson Weems 1990: 44). It is the atmosphere at home that tempts Sammy again and again to run away from home. But Pecola being a girl is more frightened of her parents than her brother and is unable to escape.

Her bird-like gestures suggest that she attempts to fly away from the problem instead of facing it. Without a proper outlet for her swelling desire, her ego blocks off and rejects reality causing her mental disorder. She escapes from her miserable unfulfilled life and gets pleasure in indulging in daydreaming and fantasizing. In her
imagination she invents a friend to whom she talks obsessively and
nervously about her eyes:

Are they [the blue eyes] really nice?
Yes—very nice.
Just “very nice”?
Really, truly, very nice.
Really, truly, bluely nice (151)?

The blue eyes promise Pecola’s liberation from an unbearable reality,
becoming the mechanism for coping with her trauma, her loneliness,
the rape by her own father and the pregnancy and it is Claudia who
voices the psychic contradiction of the sane:

We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness her
simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us
glow with heal, her awkwardness made her think we had a sense of
humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent.
Her poverty kept us generous... We...our eyes on her, padded our
characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our
strength (159).
If one attempts to understand racism in America, one comes across the indispensability of the sexuality of American racism. Calvin Herton rightly observes:

The sexualisation of racism in the United States is a unique phenomenon in the history of mankind... In fact, there is a sexual involvement, at once real and vicarious, connecting white and black people in America that spans the history of the country from the era of slavery to the present, an involvement, so immaculate and so perverse, so ethereal and so concrete that all race relations tend to be sex relations (Sexism and Racism in America 07).

It is particularly the black women who were driven to a marginal place in the world full of the white women. Separated from white women on the basis of racism and classicism, and separated from black men due to sexism, they were cornered to a boundary place. The black men opposed black women grasping that their movement might weaken the cause of the black race but black women had to fight with them against both racism and sexism. The theorists have been conscious of this problem of black women for a long time but no sincere steps have been taken for finding a solution to the problem. As a revolutionary writer, Morrison is quite aware of this problem. The major problem that she considers in this novel is, therefore, the effect of racism upon black identity formation and the effect of racism and sexism upon the identity formation of the black
woman. In an interview by Colette Dowling, Morrison states: Blacks, if they are to succeed in American society, must leave their native communities and in so doing, cut themselves off from their old lives.

In *Sula*, Morrison captures the way concepts of good and evil are related to societal definitions of woman. For the Bottom, a Black community located in the hills above the fictional town of Medallion, Ohio, that definition has much to do with the status of black people within the larger society, which is the basis for the adventure and rebellion that *Sula* represents.

Morrison also shows how ironical a name can be to reality by naming a black community as ‘Bottom’, although it is geographically located in the hills. Morrison tells it as a joke: “The hill land is called the Bottom, which is named by a white master who was unwilling to give rich fertile valley land, literally, the Bottom, to his slave in spite of his promise”. The master says: “[W]hen God looks down, it’s the bottom. That’s why we call it so. It’s the bottom of heaven-best land there is” (5).

In *Sula*, Morrison creates a black woman heroine, who assumes the role of the Pariah, shattering the image of the traditional black woman conforming to the norm of black community and living within it, having nothing to do with the white world, its people and way of life. The concept of gender with its relation to race and class forms a vital
part of *Sula*, the thrust being on sexism. Like *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* is also a study of the relationship of love and hatred, perseverance and surrender, establishment and displacement and above all, apprehension and assurance.

The author uses the novel as a medium to comment upon the long established customs and norms. *Sula* is fundamentally a feminine novel as it concerns itself with the feeling and affairs of women and the roles they assume, whether by choice or force. The oppression of American women in the United States, particularly in the first quarter of the twentieth century is presented throughout the novel. The manner in which Morrison chooses to explore the nature of woman’s oppression is unique. She creates two female characters, Nel and Sula, one is incomplete without the other. Nel and Sula seek happiness in each other’s company because they share the common bond of being young, black and female in a world designed to meet the designs of nature, white males. Barbara Smith writes the friendship of Nel and Sula is an example of “the necessary bonding that has always taken place between black women for the barest survival. Together the two girls can find the courage to create themselves” (*Towards a Black Feminist Criticism* 165).

The intense relationship between Nel and Sula invariably reminds us of a similar relationship between Rosalind and Celia in Shakespeare’s
As You Like It. Both Nel and Sula are Morrison’s favorite characters as they represent the good and the evil persistently present in the society. Morrison says: “Yet she [Sula] and Nel are very much alike. They compliment each other. They support each other. I suppose the two of them together could have made a wonderful single human being. They are like a Janus’ head” (“An interview Essay”, Visions of Black Women in Literature 253).

The friendship of Nel and Sula was as intense as it was sudden. They found relief in each other’s personality. Although they share a strong bond, they are different from each other in several aspects. Nel seemed to be stronger and more consistent than Sula, who could hardly be counted on to hold any emotion for more than three minutes. Sula is a pariah whose values are mostly opposite of those adopted by the provincial society. Unlike Pecola, Sula lives out her own fantasies, creates her own realities and achieves her own personal objectives being motivated by a sense of ‘Me-ness’. Barbara Smith observes: “Sula is an acutely sensitive, enigmatic and defiant woman whose nonconformity is a living criticism... of the dreadful lives of resignation other woman live” (Black women Studies 168).

As a young girl she so startles the community with such emotional impulses that her development into a strange, strong and independent woman is predictable from the beginning. She holds the view that
“being good to some body is just like being mean to some body. Risky, you don’t get anything for it” (35). Sula’s life as a pariah makes Sula a scapegoat for the people of Bottom. Philip Royster writes:

The folk create the scapegoat by identifying Sula as the cause of the misery, which they identify as evil in their lives. It is undoubtedly easier for the folk to anthropomorphize their misery than to examine the generation of that misery by their relation to the environment. The community’s conviction of Sula’s evil changed them into accountable yet mysterious ways. Once the source of their personal misfortune was identified, they had to leave to protect and love one another. They began to cherish their husbands and wives, protect children, repair their homes and in general band together against the devil in their mids (The Novels Of Toni Morrison 117-118).

She becomes a pariah because of her rejection of those values that aim at conformity and stifle the self. Her willingness to reject them makes her ‘evil’ to those in the community who never express their own freedom of the will. Unlike Nel, Sula does not live totally by the law nor gives up completely to it without questioning anything sometimes. Sula’s rebellious nature shows itself in many ways. Unlike other Medallion women, including Nel, Sula refuses to marry, settle down and have a family. On the contrary she attends their Church functions, picks over their food, tries out and discards their husbands. She has no obligation to please anyone unless she gains pleasure from it. She once confessed to Nel, “I got my mind. And what goes on in it” (43).
She is determined to achieve self-fulfillment to “live in the world” (43). She has no willingness to be trapped in the spider web-like life of the Bottom where she has to “dangle in dry places suspended by [her] own spittle more terrified of the free fall than the snake’s breath blow” (103-104). The reason for Sula showing such disobedience can be looked into her past. Born of a distant mother Hannah, whom she calls as Mrs. Breedlove, Sula never had a proper upbringing in her childhood. Hannah regarded men as objects and sex to her was not an act of love, but a means of physical release, a symbol of carnal satisfaction. When Sula overhears Hannah’s remark, “... I love Sula. I just don’t like her” (57), she turns away from her mother and seeks solace in Nel’s friendship. To her, they are:

Solitary little girls whose loneliness was so profound that it intoxicated them and sent them stumbling into techni-colored visions, which always included a presence, someone, who, quite like the dreamer, shared the delight of the dream (51).

Their friendship was very close, Sula being the mind and Nel the body. Nel’s mind dies when Sula leaves Medallion, but her body continues to perform the routine. Morrison traces the development of Sula’s psyche through the three major events of her life. From her mother she learns, “There was no other that you could count on” (119). The experience of Chicken Little’s death teaches Sula “that there was no self to count on. She had no center, no speck around on
which to grow” (21). She leaves Medallion the day Nel marries Jude. When Sula returns to the Bottom after an absence of ten years, the people associate her abrupt home coming with the plague of dead robins. The people see Sula’s return as a visitation of evil, like the robins and they complain, “You couldn’t go anywhere without stepping in their pearly shit, and it was hard to hang up clothes, pull weeds or just sit on the front porch when robins were flying and dying all around you” (89).

However, Sula’s return has a good effect on the people of Bottom. For example, instead of neglecting him, Teapot’s Mama now takes care of him. Women cherish their husbands after Sula has tried them out and discarded them. Young women take better care of their old people after Sula locks up Eva in an old folk’s home. She returns to Medallion for two reasons, to meet her friend Nel and out of disgust for the urban life. She finds no difference between her native place, a village and all those cities: “Big as all it is. A big Medallion” (99).

After her return Sula finds that “She and Nel were not one and the same thing” (103). She feels she is not the same Nel to whom she had clung for friendship. Having no other alternative but to depend upon her own self, Sula chooses to have an experimental life. She breaks all the rules that restrict and impede individual freedom. She fights for the rights of freedom. Hence she rejects the voice of the black male in
subjugating the black women in enjoying their freedom. Her belief that women of her community had become life-less and social institutions like marriage and family have created havoc in the lives of women has led her to form the view that women should have the privilege to enjoy their own life. They should dream of their lives in their own way, not through their husbands. Her hatred of male-supremacy leads her to reject the advice of settling down and having babies: “I don’t want to make somebody else. I want to make myself” (92). This rebellious nature of Sula is shown in her dealings with men: “She went to bed with men as frequently as she could” (22). She asserts her self through Sex. Her desire to lead an experimental life distances her from her friend. When Sula sleeps with Jude Green, Nel’s husband, the friendship with Nel dies. This has an adverse effect on Sula. Morrison lucidly portrays her uncanny and weird cravings:

In a way, her strangeness, her naiveté, her craving for the other half of her equation was the consequence of an idle imagination. Had she paints, or clay, or known the discipline of the dance, or strings; had she anything to engage her tremendous curiosity and her gift for metaphor, she might have exchanged the restlessness and preoccupation with activity that provided her with all she yearned for. And like any Artist with no art form, she became dangerous (121).

Sula returns to a friendship, paradoxically she destroys. In the midst of Sula’s irresponsible life, Nel remains constantly to provide sanctuary. She becomes a source of security for Sula throughout their
childhood days, especially after Sula overheard her mother’s remark. During their childhood, Nel and Sula were “daughters of distant mothers and incomprehensible fathers” (44). Nel’s mother to escape from her past that included a prostitute mother brought up Nel on principles of obedience and politeness: “Any enthusiasm that little Nel showed was clamed by the mother until she drove her daughter’s imagination underground” (16). Nel recaptures her sense of self and gives up the role her mother had decided for her when after a trip down south, she discovers her mother’s weakness and fear. “I am me”, she whispers: “Me... I’m me... I’m not their daughter. I’m not Nel. I’m me. Me” (124).

For Sula, Nel was the other half of her equation and “they found relief in each other’s personality” (45). But Sula’s life still coupled with the fact that as girls she and Nel had “never quarreled... the way some girl friends did over boys or competed against each other for them” (72) lead Sula to bed with Nel’s husband after she returns to Medallion. Sula’s action leads to the break up of friendship between Sula and Nel.

For Sula there is a difference between sex and friendship—a view that Nel doesn’t share. Sula considers sex, though “pleasant and frequent” (107), as unremarkable, unlike her remarkable friendship with Nel. Sula is unable to see the wrong she has committed. She tells Nel:
“What you mean take him away? I didn’t kill him. I just fucked him. If we were such good friends, how come you couldn’t get over it” (125). Nel’s marriage to Jude, however, had given her an identity that required to forfeit the necessary sense of self that is not known to Sula because Jude’s departure left Nel with “thighs [that] were really empty” (95). As Byerman rightly says: “The loss of Jude is the loss of identity and the loss of life...[Nel] now becomes ‘a woman without a man’ and unable to raise her eyes” (Tradition and Forum in Recent Black Fiction 175). For this change, Nel blames Sula, who without a sense of ownership, can not conceive of Jude as an object to be taken. Nel’s unhappy married life is suggested by a gray dirty ball of fur, “[a] ball of muddy strings, but without weight, fluffy but terrible in its malevolence” (109). When she perceives Jude’s adultery with Sula, the ball starts to hover around her. The failure of her marriage with Jude gradually encloses her into the ball. The breaking of this ball of fur is necessary to make Nel free from the old traditional social code and to restore back freedom and identity, which she had once enjoyed through her friendship with Sula.

It is towards the end of the novel Nel realizes that the great loss she suffered was not because Jude had left her but because she had missed
Sula. When this realization comes to her, she truly understands and accepts Sula’s ways:

’Sula?’ she whispered, gazing at the top of trees.
’Sula?’
Leaves stirred; mud shifted; there was the smell of over-ripe green things. A soft ball of fur broke and scattered like dandelion spores in the breeze.
‘All that time all that time. I thought I was missing Jude’.
And the loss pressed down on her chest and came up into her throat. ‘We was girls together’, she said as though explaining something. ‘O Lord, Sula’, she cried, ‘girl, girl, girlgirlgirl’ (154).

Morrison represents the helplessness of her characters before the uncertainty and inconsistency of their lives. Both Pecola and Sula struggle to established their feminine rights in a world, which does not acknowledge it. The inverted world in which Pecola finds herself does not support her for her fights, the world in which the quality of Sula’s life leads her to death. Sula’s progress as a rebel is from the confines of the black community to the new world black woman. The black community opposed her for her daring and adventurous experiments with life, but deep within their hearts they accepted her ways after her death which proves that they too long for freedom. When Nel is able to understand the loss of her friend Sula as the cause of her unhappy life, she truly appreciates Sula’s heroic action. Sula’s social illegality as a black woman teaches her the essential truth so that she becomes a role model for people. She agrees with the view: “To become a creative artists, it is not enough to be cultivated... Culture must be
apprehended through the free action of a transcendence" (171). K. Sue Jewell says "girl" is "a form of address that transcends age and social class for African-American women" (From Mammy to Miss America and Beyond 79). In the process of remembering her friend she is able to make herself free from the long-term confinement of the fur ball. In accepting Sula’s ways, Nel should be the New World Black Woman that Morrison pictures.
Capitalism, racism and sexism have critically affected the lives and conscience of African-American women. Racism is but a by-product of capitalism. As sexism and racism have been so co-related in the history of America, novelists like Alice Walker, Paule Marshall, Gloria Naylor and Toni Morrison have reflected that relationship in their novels. Just as blacks are relegated to an underclass in America by virtue of their race, so women are relegated to a separate caste by virtue of their sex. So black women novelists like Morrison have continued to analyze the relationship between class, race and gender.

In her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison gives importance on racism. Pecola suffers mainly because she is a black girl, victimized by the western standards of beauty. In *Sula*, importance is on gender. Sula suffers because she is a woman in a male-dominated society. In her third novel, *Song of Solomon* (1977), Morrison makes sexism subordinate to both racism and capitalism, knowing very well that the exploitation of the African woman by the African man is the result of her national and class oppression. As a result, class in relation to race and gender becomes more focus in *Song of Solomon*. The focus in *Song of Solomon* is not on the concept of woman, as in *Sula*, for its protagonist is a man bearing a peculiar but highly symbolic name,
Milkman Dead. Also sexual exploitation of the woman is an issue of prominence in the novel. As his nickname shows, Milkman milks women, emptying their love and giving nothing in return. He has very little idea about women. He is incapable of considering women as human beings, including his mother: "Never had he thought of his mother as a person, a separate individual, with a life apart from allowing or interfering with his own" (75). All the women do everything for Milkman, cooking for him, keeping his house and give importance to him by living their lives around his needs. He takes all this for granted and never tries to find out the sufferings of these women. As Magdalene says:

You’ve been laughing at us all your life... Using us, ordering us, and judging us: how we cook your food; how we keep your house... Our girlhood was spent like a found nickel on you. When you slept, we were quiet; when you were hungry, we cooked; when you wanted to play, we entertained you; and when you got grown enough to know the difference between a woman and a two-tuned Ford, everything in this house stopped for you... And to this day, you never asked one of us if we were tired, or sad, or wanted a cup of coffee (215).

While Hagar’s love for Milkman is genuine, Milkman considers her his ‘private honey pot’, using her whenever he likes. Milkman’s mother, Ruth and his aunt, Pilate are two important women in his life. Brought up after her mother’s death by a loving father Ruth grows up as the daughter of the only black doctor in the community, without having a personal identity. She is reared to an upper middle-class
society totally cut off from life. At sixteen, she is married to Macon
Dead, a ‘Colored man of property’, who by the age of twenty-five
would inherit her father’s place. But Ruth “had never dropped those
expressions of affection that had been so loveable in childhood”
(23)... unlike Sula, who guarded her ‘Me-ness’ and unlike Eva, who
built her own home (that is, life) according to her own specifications
and design, Ruth chooses to accept her father’s home, and it “pressed
[her] into a small package” (123). She does not protest like Nel or her
daughter First Conirthians, which shows her as a ‘small woman’. She
did not have the luck of having a mother to be closed to her through
significant stages of her girlhood and young womanhood like Sula
and Nel, whose mothers, despite their life-styles and personalities,
were there for their daughters. She did not have had the advantage of
growing up with her mother’s milk; her growth is thus artificial, like
Pecola’s, who is forced to drink white milk from a cup. No doubt she
receives her father’s love but she confuses her fathers love, just as
Pecola confuses Cholly’s, and mistakes it for possession, perhaps out
of fear that her father like her mother, might neglect her, abandon her.
Even death does not abate Ruth’s fear of loyalty to her father. She
considers her son as the living evidence of the last time her husband
made love to her. Because of an unwillingness to let go the
relationship that she had with her father, she nurses her son far beyond
infancy for her own satisfaction. It is because of her nourishment to sustain her son's life; he becomes a man physically but symbolically remains a child. Milkman objects: "I know. I'm the youngest one in this family, but I ain't no baby. You treat me like I was a baby" (50).

Both Eva and Ruth sacrifice themselves for their children; but Eva, unlike Ruth, sacrifices her son as well. Ruth's failure to examine her own interest leaves her in a very confined life. The people chosen by her to yield her life return her love with distaste. Her husband hates her denying love relationship with her. Her son who once defended her against her husband, begins to consider her as "Silly, selfish, queer and fairly obscene" (123). Her father had finally chosen death over her love. However, though rejected by her father, husband and son, Ruth does not become insane like Pecola or die like Sula. In fact "She was fierce in the presence of death, heroic even, as she was at no other time. Its threat gave her direction, clarity, audacity" (310).

Pilate, Milkman's aunt and his lifetime adviser is a revolutionary figure leading a much more radical life than Circe. She has been named so from the Christian Scriptures by her father ignoring Circe's explanation that the biblical Pilate is not a pilot but a spiteful man who killed Christ. She has not only a shocking name, but she also has a typical feature as she has no navel. Morrison gave her this
remarkable mark to make her different from other characters. In her conversation with Claudia Tate she mentions:

I was trying to draw the character of a sister to a man, a sister who was different, and part of my visualization of her included that she had no navel. Then it became an enormous thing for her. It also had to come at the beginning of the book, so the reader would know to expect anything of her. It had to be a thing that was very powerful in its absence but of consequence in its presence. It could not be anything grotesque but something to set her apart, to make her literally invent herself (128).

She is rejected by all in the beginning but gradually becomes distinguished from others and gains confidence and respect. Her power of healing, her sympathetic feelings for others and her selfless life show her unrivalled autonomy. Milkman and Guitar had gone to visit Pilate, in search of the truth about her being a social-outcast:

All those unbelievable but entirely possible stories about his father’s sister—the woman his father has forbidden him to go near—had both of them spellbound: Neither wished to live one more day without finding out the truth, and they believed they were the legitimate and natural ones to do so. After all, Guitar already knew her, and Milkman was her nephew (36).

Milkman had come to ask Pilate about her being a scapegoat—a stomach without a navel but he saw himself as a part of the social order:

Milkman took a breath, held it, and said, ‘Hi’. Pilate laughed, “You all must be the dumbest un-hung Negroes on earth. What they telling you in them schools? You say ‘Hi’ to pigs and sheep when you want’ em to move. When you tell a human being ‘Hi’, he ought to get up and knock you down”.
Milkman took a breath, held it, and said, 'Hi'. Pilate laughed, “You all must be the dumbest un-hung Negroes on earth. What they telling you in them schools? You say ‘Hi’ to pigs and sheep when you want’ em to move. When you tell a human being ‘Hi’, he ought to get up and knock you down”.

Shame had flooded him. He had expected to feel it, but not that kind; to be embarrassed, yes, but not that way. She was the one who was ugly, dirty, poor and drunk. He queers aunt whom his sixth-grade schoolmates teased him about and whom he hated because he felt personally responsible for her ugliness, her poverty, her dirt, and her wine. Instead she was making fun of his school, of his teachers, of him (37-38).

It is Pilate’s confrontation, which changes Milkman’s idea about his aunt:

... While she looked as poor as every one said she was, something was missing from her eyes that should have confirmed it. Nor was she dirty; unkempt, yes, but not dirty. The whites of her fingernails were like ivory. And unless he knew absolutely nothing, this woman was definitely not drunk. Of course she was anything but pretty, yet he knew he could have watched her all day: the fingers pulling thread veins from the orange sections, the berry-black lips that made her look as though she wore make-up, the earring... And when she stood up, he all but gasped. She was as tall as his father, head and shoulders taller than himself. Her dress was n’t as long as he thought; it came to just below her calf and now he could see her unlaced men’s shoes and the silvery-brown skin of her ankles (38).

It is this visit that gave Milkman a new appreciation for his family. When Pilate said, “Ain’t but three Deads alive”, Milkman defended his family: “I’m a Dead! My mother’s a Dead! My sisters. You and him ain’t the only ones” (38). His experience of a reversal of expectation enables him to focus on himself:

Even while he was screaming he wondered why he was suddenly so defensive- so possessive about his name. He had always hated
It is Pilate who pilots Milkman’s journey throughout the novel. Even her piloting role developed before Milkman was conceived. As Ruth told Milkman: “I wouldn’t have been able to save you except for Pilate. Pilate was the one brought you here in the first place” (129).

The reason for which Pilate helped Ruth to get pregnant was to insure another generation of the family: “He ought to have a son. Otherwise this be the end of us” (125). Among other things Pilate knew conjuring: “She gave me funny things to do. And some greenish gray grassy looking stuff to put in his food... It worked too” (125). It is Pilate who helped when Macon wanted Ruth to abort the baby: “She saved my life. And yours Macon. She saved yours too. She watched you like you were her own” (26).

When Milkman was born, Pilate came to help Ruth with housework as well as the care of the baby, to whom she sang the Song of Solomon that she had sung the day before his birth. She informs Milkman about his father: “Macon was a nice boy and awful good to me. Be nice if you could have known him then. He would have been a real good friend to you too, like he was to me” (40). From Pilate Milkman learns to appreciate his father’s present world view by sharing in the values and conditions that shaped that world.

Ruth and Pilate, two important women in Milkman’s life are contrasted with each other. If Ruth is a representative of the ideal
southern lady cut off from life, Pilate is a woman completely outside structures of the society. If Ruth is a society lady, Pilate is totally outside society. Morrison compares and contrasts these two women:

They were so different, these two women. One black and the other lemony. One corseted, and the other buck naked under her dress. One well read but ill traveled. The other had read only a geography book, but had been from one end of the country to another. One wholly dependent on money for life, the other indifferent to it. But those were the meaningless things. Their similarities were profound. Both were vitally interested in Macon Dead's son, and both had close and supportive posthumous communication with their fathers (139).

Both the women come together in the novel to save Milkman symbolizing their continuity. Actually both the women become the gauge by which Milkman's class-consciousness is measured. It is Hagar who is exploited mostly. When Hagar and her mother enter the house pulling a basket of black berries.

"When the two had managed to get the basket into the room, the girl stretched her back and turned around, facing them. But Milkman had no need to see her face; he had already fallen in love with her behind" (43).

She genuinely loves Milkman but Milkman regards her as a repository in which to empty his lust. He considers her his 'Private honey pot', hardly taking her anywhere except the movies. The relationship of Milkman with Hagar shows the detrimental effects of male/female relationships. Ironically Hagar's death does not result from the incestuousness of the relationship or her abandonment by Milkman
after he grows tired of her dependence. Although their relationship lasts an unusually long time, Milkman grew bored with her accessibility. Like Sula, who had confused love with possession, Hagar wants to own Milkman, even if she has to kill him. If she had succeeded in killing him, she would have killed a part of herself. Guitar tells Hagar:

You think because he doesn’t love you that you are worthless. You think because he doesn’t want you any more that he is right— that his judgments and opinion are correct. If he throws you out, then you are garbage. You think he belongs to you because you want to belong to him. Hagar, don’t. It’s a bad world, ‘belong’. Especially when you put it with somebody you love. Love shouldn’t be like that... .You can’t own a human being. You can’t lose what you don’t own (309).

Finally, it is Guitar who tells Hagar that if her life “means so little to [her] that [she] can just give it away, hand it to [Milkman], then why should it mean any more to him? He can’t value you more than you value yourself” (310).

It is only after Milkman robs himself of the ruling class’s view of race and class superiority that he comes front to front with women considering them as his equals. It is this feeling which makes him ashamed of his exploitation of Hagar, “Whom he’d thrown away like a wand of chewing gum after the flavor was gone. She had a right to
try to kill him too” (280). He then fully understands the reciprocal nature of human relationships:

She (sweet) put slave on his face. He washed her hair. She sprinkled talcum on his feet. He straddled her behind and massaged her back. She put with hazel on his swollen neck. He made up the bed. She gave him gumbo to eat. He washed the dishes. She washed his clothes and hung them out to dry. He scoured her tub. She ironed his shirt and pants. He gave her fifty dollars. She kissed his mouth. He touched her face. She said please come back. He said I’ll see you tonight (288).

He had used Hagar for his own convenience just as he had treated his mother and his sisters as his maids. When the traumatized Hagar fails to kill Milkman, he sees it as the triumph of masculinity over femininity. But much later, he comes face-to-face with his own guilty feelings and Hagar’s selflessness. His growth as a man is made possible by Hagar’s sacrificial death and Pilate’s wisdom. When he hears the children singing of his great grand-father in Shalimar, Virginia: “he moves into a realm of self-awareness that makes it possible for him to treat anyone-else as he has treated Hagar” (Harris Trudier 1991: 112).

It is Pilate who is responsible for developing Milkman’s consciousness. Milkman saw her sitting with one foot pointing to the east and another to the west. East points to Africa and its culture that is Milkman’s past and west points to the western world and its culture
that is Milkman's present and future. Pilate is the source from which Milkman builds up his race and class-consciousness.

Milkman who believes in the philosophy of his father, has little regard for the masses in the community, he must get rid of dead weight - the mentality of Macon Dead. His relationship with his father is variously distorted. There is an incompatibility between the father and the son regarding the basic perception of life. If Macon Dead has his idealism of keeping himself away from his family, Milkman seeks after the truth and achieves it finally by a process of unification of Macon Dead and Pilate. So there is a steady and knowledgeable growth in the personality of Milkman. The racial myth hoists the world of flying Americans. As Samuel Allen maintains:

> In Ellison's adroit use of Black folklore in Invisible Man, the journey proceeds prototypically from Rural South to Urban North. Morrison reverses the age-old escape route and here she is contemporary to send her hero by stages back into a heritage common to practically all Black families in America, the rural south of fable and legend (University Journal 68).

Morrison uses the folk myth of the blacks in America who flow back to Africa, a myth that is found where Africans were enslaved, as the foundation of this work. There is a streak of functional autonomy in Milkman's attitude towards life as he tells Guitar:

> My family's driving me crazy. Daddy wants me to be like him and hate my mother. My mother wants me to think like her and hate my father. Corinthians won't speak to me; Lena wants me out. And Hagar wants me chained to her bed or dead. Everybody wants something from me. You know what I mean? Something they
think they can’t get anywhere else. Something they think I got. I don’t know what it is. I mean what it is they really want (223).

His consciousness of the racial problem makes him question about the dubious morality of the white race. He tells Guitar:

White man wants us dead or quiet- which is the same thing as dead. White woman, 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 (223-224).

After a sensitive understanding of the Black psyche, he looks sympathetically at the Black mind and Black life. He has to pass through a conflicting stage in his life deciding to be either a financially successful man like Macon Dead or to create a life of his own like Pilate. As Elizabeth House puts it:

At first Milkman Mimics his father, but finally the boy realizes that he should admire his aunt instead. This epiphany comes to him in a forest and his understanding of Pilate’s equilibrium as well as his soloing. The mystery of who his ancestors are, come only when Milkman diverts himself of urban civilization’s trapping all of the material things Macon Prizes so highly (Modern Fiction Studies 40).

In course of Milkman’s search for gold, he goes to the deeper levels of black consciousness. In the course of his search, he patiently traces the history of the Deads going back to a few hundreds of years.
Milkman’s Shalimar hunt is described by Wilfred D. Samuels as a journey of life from confrontation to conformation:

Milkman’s experiences in the Blue Ridge Mountains and Shalimar allows him to finally divest his fostered self, the life that has become a burden like the peacocks’ Vanity, it had weighed him down. Like an African initiate who enters the forest at puberty, symbolically dies through the act of circumcision and returns to his village a man, Milkman enters the woods of his parents and there stripped of his social trappings, complete his site of passage. He leaves the forest a new man, one who has been shaped not solely by the environment but also his distinct, choices and actions: by his decision to live, to walk the earth as self (67).

He realizes the sufferings of the countless Blacks in a white society:

How many dead lives and fading memories were buried in and beneath the names of the places in this country? Under the recorded names were other names like, just as “Macon Dead”, recorded for all time in some dusty file, hid from view the real names of people, places and things (333).

It is this consciousness that makes him one with the Blacks in a white society:

He closed his eyes and thought of the black men in Shalimar, Roanoke, Petersburg, Newport News, Danville, in the Blood Bank, on Darling Street, in the pool halls, the barber shops. Their names (333-334).

In *Song of Solomon*, the women sacrifice themselves-physically, emotionally and spiritually-for the welfare of their men. This is found in the case of Ruth and Macon, Hagar and Milkman, Corinthians and Henry Porter. These men treat their women as machines, which imply use and rejection and behave cruelly, oppressively and violently to them. As Pilate’s house is free of men, it is full of peace and love. The
man- woman relationship in Song of Solomon exists in an uneasy environment, but at the end of the novel, Milkman is a changed man, a man who has faced up to his sins, his omissions and his vast ignorance. It is his class-consciousness, his oneness with Black people that makes Milkman able to see women as his equals. Perhaps the most remarkable evidence of Milkman’s consciousness about women is his commitment to guide Pilate to Shalimar to bury her father’s bones, just as she had guided him to bury the Dead in him. Thus, the name, ‘Milkman’, is transformed to signify that which is positive, not negative. The protagonist becomes the milkman who is capable of carrying the source of life for those in need. If Pilate is responsible for his birth, he in turn enacts the heroic effort in redeeming her supposedly moral guilt. Pilate dies, but Milkman has inherited her mantle of honesty, wisdom and clear-sightedness. Thus Solomon is a very typical example of hope for the future, for freedom and Solomon’s songs are songs of freedom, liberty and search for the African consciousness. And in the end Pilate’s prophecy becomes true: “He don’t know what he loves, but he’ll come around, one of these days” (319).
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