CHAPTER TWO

SILENCE AND VOICE IN TONI MORRISON

I had found my tongue.

Toni Morrison.

Carol Gilligan is of the view that the power of voice, the freedom to speak one's mind and act on one's feelings, emerges from "a specific relational context," a context of "real" or "authentic" relationships. Also personal power for women according to her, emerges only from those relationships that are mutual. That is, she argues that personal power is born in social circumstances devoid of unequal power struggles. False relationships are those "in which people cannot speak or are heard" because the power imbalance is too great. Pecola Breedlove in The Bluest Eye (henceforth BE), embodies Gilligan's idea.

It is precisely because of this lopsided balance that Pecola freezes and is unable to act when she enters Yacobowski's Fresh Vegetable, Meat and Sundries Store to purchase her favourite Mary Jane candies.

...The grey head of Mr. Yacobowski looms up over the counter. He urges his eyes out of his thoughts to encounter her. Blue eyes. Blear-dropped. Slowly, like Indian summer moving imperceptibly toward fall, he looks toward her. Somewhere between retina and object, between vision and view, his eyes drew back, hesitate and hover. At some fixed point in time and space he senses that he need not waste the effort of a glance. He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see. How can a fifty-two-year-old white immigrant shopkeeper...see a little black girl? Nothing in his
life even suggested that the feat was possible, not to say desirable or necessary.

"Yeah?"

She looks up at him and sees the vacuum where curiosity ought to lodge. And something more. The total absence of human recognition - the glazed separateness. She does not know because he is grown, or a man, and she a little girl. But she has seen interest, disgust, even anger in grown male eyes. Yet this vacuum is not new to her. It has an edge; somewhere in the bottom lid is the distaste... She points her fingers at the Mary Janes... The quietly inoffensive assertion of a black child's attempt to communicate with a white adult. "Them". The word is more sigh than sense. "What? These? These?" Phlegm and impatience mingle in his voice.

She shakes her head...

"Christ. Kantcha talk?"

...

She nods.

"Well, why'nt you say so? One? How many?"

Pecola unfolds her fist, showing the three pennies. He scoots three Mary Janes towards her....not wanting to touch her hand. (BE 36-37)

When the young child Pecola looks up, she finds in the shop owner's eyes what she has seen "lurking in the eyes of all white people". She immediately realises that the "distaste must be for her, her blackness. All this in her are flux and anticipation. But her blackness is static and dread. And it is the blackness that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes" (36,37).
The moment Pecola identifies the despised look in Yacobowski's eyes; she is embarrassed and engulfed by shame. She purchases her candies and leaves the store quickly. Outside the store where she passes by, Pecola sees "Dandelions". On seeing them a "dart of affection leaps out from her to them" (37). She equates herself with the dandelion weeds she passes. Like her, she thinks, "They are ugly" and therefore unwanted. Although she allows her anger to surface for a couple of seconds, Pecola is overpowered by a tremendous sense of shame. The anger that wells up are dowsed in minutes when realises that there is reason for Yacobowski to behave in that manner. She is ugly. So she takes solace in eating her favourite candies. "She eats the candy, and its sweetness is good. To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane" (38).

In another instance, Pecola becomes an object of ridicule while returning from school. A group of boys from her school start harassing her. Dancing a "macabre ballet," they sing a verse made up of two insults: one concerning the colour of Pecola's skin and the other, speculations on the sleeping habits of an adult.

Black e mo Black e mo Ya daddy sleeps naked.
Stch ta ta stch ta ta.
Stch ta ta ta ta ta.

On hearing them gloat over her ugliness, Pecola "dropped her notebook, and covered her eyes with her hands" (50).

Thirdly, in the scene with Maureen Peal, Pecola is demoralized when Maureen accuses her of seeing "her old black daddy" naked. Pecola becomes mute when Maureen begins to scoff her: "I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I am cute" (56). Pecola is stupefied on hearing Maureen's hideous remarks about her father. She feels so degraded in front of her friends, that she becomes dull and listless. She makes no
effort to strike back but simply yields to Maureen’s claims. "Pecola tucked her head in— a funny, sad, helpless movement. A kind of hunching of the shoulders, pulling in of the neck, as though she wanted to cover her ears" (56).

The most damaging insult of all that Pecola experiences revolves around her encounter with an adult named Geraldine. Geraldine’s life according to Wilfred D. Samuels, is “defined by her efforts to escape the ’Funk’ she and particular blacks of not so dark a hue and a specific orientation—associates with blackness” (12).

Wherever it erupts, this Funk, they wipe it away; where it crusts, they dissolve it; wherever it drips, flowers, or clings they find it and fight it until it dies. (64)

Though not as dark as Pecola or as light as Maureen Peal in complexion, "these sugar-brown Mobile girls”(64) live to "escape and deny evidence of their black selves”(Samuels 12).

They wash themselves with orange-colored Lifebuoy soap, dust themselves with Cashmere Bouquet tale, clean their teeth with salt on a piece of rag, soften their skin with Jergens lotion. They smell like wood, newspapers, and vanilla. They straighten their hair with Dixie Peach, and part it on the side. At night they curl it in paper from brown bags, tie a print scarf across their heads, and sleep with hands folded across their stomachs. (BE 64)

When Geraldine’s son, Louis Junior invites Pecola to his home, she is unaware of what is in store for her. Junior, who is deprived of mother’s love, decides to strike back by making Pecola “the brunt of a cruel hoax.” He invites her to see the kittens in his house, so that Pecola can have one. The prospect of owning a real kitten tempts Pecola, and she follows him cautiously inside. The minute she steps in, Junior throws a big black cat
right in her face. She is horrified to see the sudden change in Junior. More than the pain she experiences as a result of the scratches from a frightened cat, Pecola is startled by the manner in which Junior behaves.

Junior was laughing and running around the room clutching his stomach delightedly. Pecola touched the scratched place on her face and felt tears coming. When she started toward the doorway, Junior leaped in front of her.

"You can't get out. You're my prisoner," he said. His eyes were merry but hard.

"You let me go."

"No!" He pushed her down, ran out the door that separated the rooms, and held it shut with his hands. Pecola's banging on the door increased his gasping, high-pitched laughter.

Unable to free herself from the clutches of Junior, and realising that she is helpless in the presence of a raving lunatic, Pecola finds solace in the company of the kitten that winds itself in between her legs. But Junior is enraged on seeing the cat stretching its head and flattening its eyes. He grabs the cat by one of its hind legs and begins to "swing it around his head in a circle." In a moment, he let goes of the cat, which falls right into the radiator behind the sofa. In a fraction of a second, the cat dies. It is at this moment that Geraldine enters the house. Junior seizes the opportunity and begins to accuse Pecola of killing his mother's favourite object- the cat.

"She killed our cat," said Junior. "Look." He pointed to the radiator, where the cat lay, its blue eyes closed, leaving only an empty, black, and helpless face.

Disgruntled by the injury done to the cat, but more by the presence of a little black girl with "dirty torn dress," "...plaits sticking out on her head," "...muddy shoes with the wad of gum peeping out from between the cheap soles," "...soiled socks," and a "...safety pin holding the hem of the dress
up," Geraldine expels the innocent girl from her house with words that cut deeper than the cat’s claws. She screams, "Get out... You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house" (72). Pecola becomes tongue-tied at the moment and when she runs out of the house, "the March wind blew into the rip in her dress," making her all the more frigid (72).

What is interesting to note here is that, Geraldine in her desire to repress and deny "the funk," in her desire to exhibit "none of the characteristically or stereotypically Afro-American qualities" such as "thick lips, nappy edges" and "rounded enunciation," does not allow for herself the pleasure of loving either her husband, whose sexual advances are "unsatisfying inconveniences," or her son, whose emotional needs "she meets with an affection- less efficiency" (Awkward 193). To get rid of the funkiness is for Geraldine, "is to get rid of blackness." In this way we can conceptualize Geraldine’s efforts as an attempt "to exorcise the shadow of her own blackness" (193).

So when she encounters Pecola (who "represents for the entire community the literal embodiment of the shadow of blackness") for the first time in her house, and learns that the object of all her affection- her cat, and not her son- is dead, Geraldine becomes infuriated. The text tells us-

She had seen this little girl all her life. Hanging out of windows over saloons in Mobile, crawling over the porches of shotgun houses on the edge of town, sitting in bus stations holding paper bags and crying to mothers who kept saying "Shut up!" Hair uncombed, dresses falling apart, shoes untied and caked with dirt. They had stared at her with great uncomprehending eyes. Eyes that questioned nothing and asked nothing. Unblinking and unabashed, they stared at her. The end of the world lay in their eyes, and the beginning, and
all the waste in between...Grass wouldn't grow where they lived. Flowers died. Shades fell down...Like flies they hovered; like flies they settled. And this one had settled in her house. (BE 71-72)

So for Geraldine, Pecola represents the "repulsiveness of poverty, the vileness of blackness, the veritable eruption of funk." She equates Pecola with "germ-infested pests, with flies that invade and soil carefully disinfected houses and elaborately prepared picnics." She is, for Geraldine, "funk," shadow, the blackness of blackness. When Geraldine therefore orders Pecola to leave her house, she is also, in a way, "attempting to rid herself of her fears of her own evil, of her own unworthiness, of her shadow of blackness" (Awkward 194).

What makes Pecola Breedlove's life absolutely hopeless is that she lives in a house that is devoid of love and understanding. It is ironical that they are named the Breedloves because they are not capable of love- be it "familial, romantic or personal." In fact, they destroy any semblance of it or pervert it (as in the case of Cholly Breedlove's rape of his own daughter).

Pauline Breedlove, Pecola's mother, disillusioned by her family retreats into a dream world. When her dependence on her husband increases, he begins to neglect her. Unable to experience pleasure in any way, Pauline begins to frequent the movies. This is the only consolation she enjoys in an otherwise lonely and alien land. In the theatre, she allows herself to be enslaved by Jean Harlow, the white skinned beauty. This plays havoc in her life which is already "shredded with quarrels" (92). As pointed out by Wilfred D.Samuels in Toni Morrison: "When loneliness and boredom drive Pauline to frequent the movies, she allows herself to subscribe to the standard of beauty which, promulgated by the white actress Jean Harlow, eventually leads her to collect 'self-contempt by the
heap" (26). Just as Yacobowski's searing look petrifies Pecola, Jean Harlow's "penetrating glance from the silver screen confronts the unpolished, unsophisticated, and partially disabled Pauline, reminding her of her unfinished self" (26). As the text tells us, it was:

Probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought... In equating physical beauty with virtue, she stripped her mind, bound it, and collected self-contempt by the heap... She was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen. (BF 95)

It is because of these two destructive ideas - romantic loves and physical beauty, that Pauline is unable to accept Pecola's appearance. Moreover the remarks that she overhears from the white doctor in the hospital during her labour, compounds to the self-hatred that she already experiences. "When he got to me he said now these here women you don't have any trouble with. They deliver right away and with no pain. Just like horses" (97). This makes Pauline condemn her newly born daughter. She projects onto her undeserving newborn, "her outrage at such facile and prejudicial judgements" (Rubenstein 129). She narrates:

*They give her to me for a nursing. and she liked to pull my nipple off right away. She caught on fast. Not like Sammy... But Pecola look like she knowed right off what to do.... Eyes all soft and wet. A cross between a puppy and a dying man. But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly. (BF 97-98)*

One other reason that widens the gap between the mother and the daughter is Pecola addressing her own mother as Mrs.Breedlove. When Pecola along with the Mc Teer girls, goes to the house where her mother is
a servant and a nanny for a white female child, she accidentally spills the hot "berry cobbler" on the Fisher's clean, white kitchen floor. Mrs. Breedlove reacts instantaneously to this:

In one gallop she was on Pecola and with the back of her hand knocked her to the floor. Pecola slid in the pie juice, one leg folding under her. Mrs. Breedlove yanked her up by the arm, slapped her again, and in a voice thin with anger, abused Pecola directly and Frieda and me by implication. (84)

Rather than tending to her injured daughter, Pauline chides her for dirtying the floor and frightening the little "yellow girl." She uses harsh and bitter words of rejection thereby reinforcing the feeling of unwantedness in Pecola. She says, "'Pick up that wash and get on out of here, so I can get this mess cleaned up'" (85). She shows concern in comforting the "little girl in pink" when she begins to cry, upon seeing her soiled dress. She cajoles her saying, "'Hush, baby, hush. Come here. Oh, Lord, look at your dress. Don't cry no more. Polly will change it'" (85).

Pauline is so preoccupied with her work at the Fisher's household, that she is unable to devote any time to her daughter. She transfers all her interest in looking after her employer's blue-eyed, blond-haired daughter, but neglects Pecola who seeks her warmth and affection. Claudia recollecting what happened in the Fisher's household, remembers that Pauline "spit out words to us like rotten pieces of apple" (85). This image of the spoiled apple suggests "the disintegration of Pauline's natural self," opines Elizabeth B. House (qtd. in "The 'Sweet Life' in Toni Morrison's Fiction" 185). She also points out that, Pauline's relationship with the Fisher's is simply a "business agreement;" she is paid for baking the wonderfully sweet cobblers, and Mr. Fisher thinks of selling them. Yet "she has exchanged the goal of being loved by and nourishing her family for
that of being the Fisher's well-liked cook" (85). She wins the heart of her employers, but fails to make a happy home.

Klotman is of the opinion that "Pauline's action emerges from her affected vision."

Through her mother's blurred vision of the pink, white, and golden world of the Fishers, Pecola learns that she is ugly, unacceptable, and especially unloved. (qtd. in Samuels 27)

Even though critics like Trudier Harris maintain that Pauline Breedlove is like a traditional black mammy whose love for the slave master knows no bounds, critics like Gloria Wade-Gayles opine that Pauline's behaviour "is more creative than destructive." This is quite true because it is only while serving the Fisher's household, that Pauline becomes financially independent, and also earns some peace of mind, which her house is completely devoid of. Working for the Fisher's gives her an opportunity to exercise control over an alien family and to take charge of their household although her own life and household are in shambles. To Wade-Gayles therefore, "In her mind, then, she is not yielding to powerlessness; she is acquiring power" (27).

As a result, the damage becomes profound and destructive. The emotional crippling shared by Cholly and Pauline is thus transferred into the next generation. Thus Pecola becomes a scapegoat.

It is the transference of emotional crippling that D.W. Winnicott speaks of in Playing and Reality. Winnicott has proposed that "the core of what eventually forms as the individual's self-concept begins with the mirroring that occurs between mother and baby. Typically, what the baby sees when it looks in the mother's face is 'himself or herself. In other words, the mother is looking at the baby and what she looks like is related to what she sees there.' In this sense, Pecola's first perception is her mother's reflection of her ugliness...From the seed of that initial negation
grows her subsequent 'fear of growing up, fear of other people, fear of life' " (qtd. in Rubenstein 130).

In a poignant sense, the message that Pecola gets is that everyone in her community including her parents, "view her as a negation of what they are" (130). Rubenstein rightly states:

Her defenseless condition threatens them with the 'static and dread' that they repress within themselves. She is the dark shadow, the Other, that undermines both white and black fantasies of female goodness, beauty, and upward mobility. Her position at the bottom of the bottom symbolizes the regrettable need to pronounce someone inferior in order to defend a fragile sense of self-worth. (130)

Moreover, whenever Pecola witnesses her parent's quarreling in their makeshift home, she prays fervently to God to make her invisible. "'Please, God...Please make me disappear.' She squeezed her eyes shut. Little parts of her body faded away" until "[o]nly her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left" (BE 33). Her attempt at "psychological suicide" says Rubenstein ironically brings to mind the Cheshire Cat of Carroll's Alice in Wonderland, whose smile remains after the rest of its form has vanished; for Pecola it is in the eyes that remain no matter how hard she wills their disappearance" (130).

Pecola's desire to be perceived as a human being, as an individual in society drives her to explore all sorts of possibilities. All her efforts are concentrated in securing a pair of beautiful blue eyes. Through them she wishes to be seen as a real person, someone to be accepted, respected, and loved in society. But unable to achieve what she seeks, she simply exists only in the image reflected by the other eyes/ I's. She is never her own 'I.' In existential terms therefore, she never becomes a subject; she's simply an object.
These situations make Pecola dumb and listless. We can also understand why Pecola fails to act when she is victimized both physically and psychologically. The loss of voice at critical junctures is what Carol Gilligan explicates in her book *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girl's Development*. With the publication of this book, the term "voice" has taken on a broader meaning. More than merely representing a mode of thought, or a moral logic, 'voice' now signifies for Gilligan the ability to express one's feelings and thoughts, to embody "strength, courage, and a healthy resistance to losing voice and relationship." Having a voice enables one to "speak freely of feeling angry, of fighting or open conflict in relationships, ...[to] take difference and disagreement for granted in daily life." Uncertainty about such outspokenness is construed not as a "a different voice" but as a "loss of voice," the result of confusion.

This is precisely what happens to Pecola when she walks into Yacobowski's store to purchase her favourite candies. The scene at the store bears her reification out. On seeing the "distaste" in the shopowner's eyes, Pecola is unable to talk. "Them" is all she says, but the "word is no more than sense" (BE 37). Though Yacobowski feels that "he does not need to waste the effort of a glance" (36), he is so infuriated by her gesture that he bursts out. To him Pecola is nothing but simply an "object" to be perceived.

Samuels observes that Pecola's almost perpetual silence prefigures the condition of hysteria in which she ends up "plucking her way between the tire rims and the sunflowers, between Coke bottles and milkweed, among all the waste and beauty of the world- which is what she herself was" (162). Samuels also says:

Having encountered, so as to speak, the eyes of the Gorgan, Pecola acquiesces; she never glances back or speaks out, but
instead points with her finger at what she wishes, that is, to become acceptable like the little white girl on the candy wrapper. Unlike those who achieved victory by negating Medusa's look, Pecola never dons a menacing mask to deflect and return the neutralizing and petrifying effect of the look.

(19)

In shifting her analysis from speaking about different voices to dichotomizing voice as either present or absent, Gilligan has thus transformed her discussion from one of moral logic to one of self-esteem and agency: girl's struggle to "voice their feelings and thoughts and experiences in relationships with others, and their inability to take action in the world." Loss of voice, or silence, become the cause and result of low self-esteem, poor or inauthentic relationships and inability to take action in the world. In other words, loss of voice is equated with loss of self or at best with an inauthentic or "fraudulent" self. Pecola's silence throughout the novel, broken only in her insane discourse with an imaginary friend who assures her that in fact her eyes are blue and therefore pretty, certainly is intended to represent the muted condition of all women as well as the powerlessness of children in the face of cruelty and neglect, and to indict a dominant culture that values speech over silence and presence over absence. The following quote is a case in point:

...What will we talk about?

_Why, your eyes._

Oh, yes. My eyes. My blue eyes. Let me look again.

_See how pretty they are._

Yes. They get prettier each time I look at them.

_They are the prettiest I've ever seen._

Really?

_Oh, yes._
Prettier than the sky?

*Oh, yes. Much prettier than the sky.*

Prettier than Alice-and-Jerry Storybook eyes?

*Oh, yes. Much prettier than Alice-and-Jerry Storybook eyes.*

And prettier than Joanna's?

*Oh, yes. And bluer too.*

Bluer than Michlena's?

*Yes.*

Are you sure?

*Of course I'm sure.*

...*Yours are bluer.*

I'm glad. *(BE 159-160)*

Pauline Breedlove is also a victim like her daughter. Pecola may be the central character of the novel, but she is far from being the only victim of the blue eyes. Being introduced to the idea of romantic love and physical beauty by the white actress Jean Harlow, Pauline differs from her daughter Pecola only in the sense that the image she believes in comes from the movie screen rather than the milk cup, which Pecola cherishes. Mrs. Mc Teer is in fact annoyed with Pecola because she drinks milk from the Shirley Temple cup at every available opportunity—"Three quarts of milk. That's what was in that icebox yesterday. Three whole quarts. Not they ain't none. Not a drop. I don't mind folks coming in and getting what they want, but three quarts of milk!" *(16).*

Whiteness is goodness believes Pauline, and feels more at home in the white kitchen where she works, than in the "rundown" house she shares with her family. In the chapter narrating her history, we learn that she has compensated for her lameness and putative ugliness by creating order wherever possible. She learns from the movies that a white home is a paragon of order.
.... She became what is known as an ideal servant, for such a role filled practically all of her needs. When she bathed the little Fisher girl, it was in a porcelain tub with silvery taps running infinite quantities of hot, clean water. She dried her in fluffy white towels and put her in cuddly nightclothes. Then she brushed the yellow hair, enjoying the roll and slip of it between her fingers... Here she could arrange things, clean things, line things in neat rows. Her foot flopped around on deep pile carpets, and there was no uneven sound. Here she found beauty, order, cleanliness, and poise. Mr. Fisher said, "I would rather sell her blueberry cobblers than real estate." She reigned over cupboards stacked high with food that would not be eaten for weeks, even months; she was queen of canned vegetables bought by the case... The creditors and service people who humiliated her when she went to them on her own behalf respected her, were even intimidated by her, when she spoke for the Fishers... Power, praise, and luxury were hers in this household. They even gave her what she never had- a nickname- Polly. It was her pleasure to stand in the kitchen at the end of a day and survey her handiwork. (98-99)

Her work in such homes makes possible a control in her life that is impossible in her own existence as a poor black woman with a family suffering under the manipulations of that very white world she loves. As a result-

Pauline kept this order, this beauty, for herself, a private world, and never introduced it into her storefront, or to her children. Them she bent toward respectability, and in so doing taught them fear: fear of being clumsy, fear of being like their father, fear of not being loved by God, fear of madness like
Cholly's mother's. Into her son she beat a loud desire to run away, and into her daughter she beat a fear of growing up, fear of other people, fear of life (100)

She overcomes her tremendous sense of shame and self-righteousness of her religion. To augment this goodness she needs the malignity of her husband Cholly:

She was an active church woman, did not drink, smoke, or carouse, defended herself mightily against Cholly, rose above him in every way, and felt she was fulfilling a mother's role conscientiously when she pointed out their father's faults to keep them from having them, or punished them when they showed any slovenliness, no matter how slight, when she worked twelve to sixteen hours a day to support them. And the world itself agreed with her. (100)

But Cholly upsets Pauline's values. If Pauline overcomes her self-hatred by means of good virtues, Cholly seeks the path of evil to transcend the bitterness and suffering he experiences in the hands of his oppressors. He rapes his own daughter. Besides being crude and unrefined, "his barbarity knows no bounds" when he is fully drunk.

She was washing dishes. Her small back hunches over the sink. Cholly saw her dimly and could not tell what he saw or what he felt. Then he became aware that he was uncomfortable; next he felt discomfort dissolve into pleasure. The sequence of his emotions was revulsion, guilt, pity, and then love. His revulsion was a reaction to her young, helpless, hopeless presence. Her back hunched that way; her head to one side as though crouching from a permanent and unbelievable blow. Why did she have to look so whipped? She was a child- unburdened- why wasn't she happy? The
clear statement of her misery was an accusation. He wanted to 
break her neck- but tenderly. Guilt and impotence rose in a 
bilious duet. What could he do for her-ever? What give her? 
What say to her? What could a burned-out black man say to 
the hunched back of his eleven-year-old-daughter? If he 
looked into her face, he would see those haunted, loving eyes. 
The hauntedness would irritate him- the love would move him 
to fury. How dare she love him? Hadn't she any sense at all? 
Return it? How? What could his heavy arms and befuddled 
brain accomplish that would earn him his own respect, that 
would in turn allow him to accept her love? His hatred of her 
slimed in his stomach and threatened to become vomit. But 
just before the puke moved from anticipation to sensation, she 
shifted her weight and stood on one foot scratching the back 
of her calf with her toe.... The timid, tucked-in look of the 
scratching toe- that was what Pauline was doing the first time 
he saw her in Kentucky. Leaning over a fence staring at 
nothing in particular. The creamy toe of her bare foot 
scratching a velvet leg. It was such a small and simple 
gesture, but it filled him with a wondering softness. Not the 
usual lust to part tight legs with his own, but a tenderness, a 
protectiveness. A desire to cover her foot with his hand and 
gently nibble away the itch from the calf with his teeth. He 
did it then.... He did it now....
The confused mixture of his memories of Pauline and the 
doing of a wild and forbidden thing excited him.... 
Surrounding all of his lust was a border of politeness. He 
wanted to fuck her- tenderly. But the tenderness would not 
hold. (127-128)
Considering his distorted and traumatic past, it is not hard to believe that Cholly is not capable of such an ungodly act. Unhappy events in life thus make him "both anti-and asocial." But Cholly is still able to forge ahead in life much like his wife Pauline, who as Barbara Christian notes, experiences "the loss of center," after her marriage with Cholly (66). Having learned that he is nothing but an object of disgust, he, like Pauline, can do nothing other than objectify Pecola.

Even though "objectification" is a common phenomenon in a large community where the whites see their blacks as a piece of filth, it is up to the individual to transcend discrimination and carry on, rather than become a mute spectator and succumb to circumstances. This is essentially what constitutes the differences between Pecola and the other characters in the novel.

The whores and the McTeer family are a contrast to the Breedloves. Though "diametrically opposed" in terms of values and ambitions in life, both groups offer ways of coping with the pain of experience. They choose to be "outsiders" and adorn the mantle of nonconformist's inspire of their lives being in the fringes of the mainstream society. As Samuels says, "although they are metaphorically 'put out,' they have not, unlike Pecola, been 'put outdoors' " (20). Belonging to different age groups, these women provide clear alternatives that are available to Pecola.

The three prostitutes, China, Poland and Miss Marie (Maginot Line) are middle-aged women whose forte is their spirit of non-compliance. What is significant about them is not the values or questions of morality associated with their lives as "fancy women". They are self-reliant and independent by nature. They run their business effectively even though they are not young and are castaways. They are strong-willed and hardheaded women. They do not appear devastated or squandered at any point of time.
Three merry gargoyles. Three merry harridans. Amused by a long-ago time of ignorance. They did not belong to those generations of prostitutes created in novels, with great and generous hearts, dedicated, because of the horror of circumstances, to ameliorating, the luckless barren life of men, taking money incidentally and humbly for their "understanding." Nor were they from that sensitive breed of young girl, gone wrong at the hands of fate, forced to cultivate an outward brittleness in order to protect her springtime from further shock, but knowing full well she was cut out for better things, and could make the right man happy. Neither were they the sloppy, inadequate whores who, unable to make a living at it alone, turn to drug consumption and traffic or pimps to help complete their scheme of self-destruction, avoiding suicide only to punish the memory of some absent father or to sustain the misery of some silent mother. (BE 42)

Although they were women of easy virtue, they carry on without a sense of guilt. They dislike people who are cunning and deceitful. They specially keep away from dishonest women who pretend they are upright but are in fact unfaithful to their husbands. "Sugar-coated whores" is what they called them (43). They revere people who are open and sincere. Hence they dote on Pecola and truly religious women who they see as having the same honesty and integrity as themselves. The three women choose, upon coming to maturity decide to take vengeance on men. The narrator explains- "these women hated men, all men, without shame, apology, or discrimination" (42-43).

What makes them admirable is their zest for life. Discovering at a very young age that men are attracted to them, they reject the traditional domestic roles that they are expected to play. They do not regret their way
of living and neither do they have qualms about what people think of them. "They looked back on their own youth as a period of ignorance, and regretted that they had not made more of it. They were not young girls in whore's clothing, or whores regretting their loss of innocence. They were whores in whore's clothing, whores who had never been young and had no word for innocence" (43). Even their names- Poland, China, Maginot Line- suggest larger-than-life characters. Each of them entertains Pecola whenever she visits them. Poland is "forever ironing, forever singing." Her songs are blues, which serve less to express personal problems than to entertain through reminders of the nature of the world in which they live. China is adept at verbal duelling. Maginot Line, on the other hand, entertains Pecola with exotic stories of past loves and adventures. She keeps alive the idea of love in her recollections of Dewey Prince, the only man she did not sell herself to. Byerman opines:

These folk arts enable them to transcend the private obsessions of other characters. The world may well be a place of misery and doom, but folk wisdom dictates that one adapts to circumstances rather than resignedly more toward evasion or self-destruction. Blues and folk tales imply that trouble is both personal and communal and that life is a matter of adaptation and survival rather than resignation and death. The whores treat themselves and Pecola with consideration because they neither despair nor hope. (104)

On the other hand, although the McTeer family despises the prostitutes, they eke out a living by working from the same principles. Economically they are of the same status as the Breedloves. But that does not deter them from making a decent life for themselves. Mrs. McTeer provides an asylum for Pecola who is "put outdoors" by her mother, even though taking in an extra member is a strain on her family budget and Mr.
McTeer nearly kills his boarder when he misbehaves with his daughter. Mr. Breedlove on the other hand rapes his own daughter. As pointed out by Byerman, "The Breedloves are so absorbed in variations of self-hatred that they see each other only as objects, whereas the Mc Teers make themselves into a family despite all the economic, psychological, and social forces opposing them" (104).

This is not to say that the McTeers conform to the notion of a perfect family as suggested by the primer Dick-and-Jane family. They are like any other family in the country having problems. The parents whip their children, complain about the burdens of life, and struggle to meet their requirements as much as possible. But they lead their lives without "illusion" and "sentimentality". "Unlike the Breedloves and the light-skinned Geraldine and Maureen, they do not measure their human worth by the symbols of the dominant white culture. Although the Shirley Temple cup belongs to the Mc Teers and although Frieda, Claudia's sister, loves the child actress's movies, no one in the family defines himself or herself by a lack of whiteness. They accept their difference from whites as a given of their existence, not as a deprivation to be evaded or mourned" (104-105).

Moreover, Claudia and Frieda McTeer, Pecola's peers, stand on the threshold of womanhood. "They are further evidence of the strong assertion in the text that people- even children- must consider the direction of their lives," says French (22). Claudia is a stark contrast to Pecola in that she is a "rebel figure," similar to the young Jane Pittman in Ernest Gaines's novel. She is a perfect illustration to D.W. Winnicott's theory," On Communicating and Not Communicating." According to Winnicott, silence can be a form of active protest against intrusion rather than simply a passive, submissive position. To him, silence should not be understood as a condition of "disempowerment," or "being silenced," but something,
which carries with it the potential for strength and resistance. While Pecola surrenders to Western values (that of cuddling the images of blue-eyed and blond-haired girls); Claudia refuses to be tamed into "conventional behaviour" and smashes the Shirley Temple doll, which she receives as a present for Christmas. She almost ritualistically destroys the white doll because-

The other dolls, which were supposed to bring me great pleasure, succeeded in doing quite the opposite. When I took it to bed, its hard unyielding limbs restricted my flesh- the tapered fingertips on those dimpled hands scratched. If, in sleep, I turned, the bone-cold head collided with my own. It was a most uncomfortable, patently aggressive sleeping companion. To hold it was no more rewarding. The starched gauze or lace on the cotton dress irritated any embrace. I had only one desire: to dismember it. To see of what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me, but apparently only me. Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs- all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl treasured.... I could not love it. But I could examine it to see what it was that all the world said was lovable. Break off the tiny fingers, bend the flat feet, loosen the hair, twist the head around, and the thing made one sound- a sound they said was the sweet and plaintive cry- "Mama," but which sounded to me like the bleat of a dying lamb, or more precisely, our icebox door opening on rusty hinges in July. Remove the cold and stupid eyeball, it would bleat still. "Ahhhhhh," take off the head, shake out the sawdust, crack the back against the bumpy bed rail, it would
bleat still. The gauze would split, and I could see the disk with six holes, and the secret of the sound. A mere metal roundedness. (BE 13-14)

By dismantling the doll, Warren French says, Claudia "responds with anger, turning topsy-turvy the negative socialization it represents. In this way, she achieves some sense of fulfillment and authenticity because the dolls are not forthcoming at Christmas." As she herself confesses, "I destroyed white baby dolls...The truly horrifying thing was the transference of the same impulses to little white girls. The difference with which I could have axed them was shaken only by my desire to do so" (15).

It is therefore not surprising that Claudia, the youngest of the McTeer sisters, survives. Her survival is mainly due to her mother who holds out "to her daughter what Demeter held out to Persephone." She provides all her daughters a certain measure of freedom that allows them to be independent and also develop a voice that surfaces during times of crisis. Unlike Pauline Breedlove, Mrs.McTeer is an epitome of love and understanding inspite of the stressful life she leads in a white society. It is through the recollections of Claudia, that we understand this-

Love, thick and dark as Alaga syrup, eased up into that cracked window. I could smell it- taste it- sweet, musty, with the edge of wintergreen in its base- everywhere in that house...It coated my chest, along with the salve, and when the flannel came undone in my sleep, the clear sharp curves of air outlined its presence on my throat. And in the night, when my coughing was dry and tough, feet padded into the room, hands repinned the flannel, readjusted the quilt, and rested a moment on my forehead. So when I think of autumn, I think of somebody with hands who does not want me to die. (BE 7)
Had Pecola experienced such care in Pauline, she would not have lost her sanity. But as Claudia reiterates, it is the resigned attitude of Pecola that cost her dearly. It is at the end of the novel that we realize what Claudia said about Pecola's experience- "The damage done was total" (162), which is not however true of the McTeer girls. It is only when Claudia dismembers the doll, does she learn what is responsible inside the doll to make it utter its programmed voice. Like the doll, she construes, Pecola lacked voice. "...she speaks with a programmed, appropriate voice in her monomaniacal quest for blue eyes, which in its artificiality makes Pecola ugly" (50). When she sees Pecola "fold into herself, like a pleated wing" (57), Claudia is infuriated all the more. She confesses: "Her pain antagonised me. I wanted to open her up, crisp her edges, ram a stick down that hunched and curving spine, force her to stand erect and spit the misery out on the streets. But she held it in where it could lap up into her eyes" (57).

In the end, Claudia recognizes in her friend, a scapegoat.

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

So to Claudia, Pecola is partly responsible for the role in which she is cast and therefore she deserved their contempt. According to Samuels, "It is significant that Claudia recognizes the full ramifications of her lesson. She
learns that there are no absolutes: human beings live in an unyielding world...she realizes that the approach to life she endorses will not be definitive, as had been made evident from personal experience.... (So) softens her judgements of Pecola as a result" (25). She concludes that making a choice does not always offer a solution. Despite her hostility toward the dolls, she fails to find any form of fulfillment. As Cynthia Davis rightly notes, Claudia is not fully heroic because, she, too lives in an "unyielding world." She is, however, in favour of facing the world more courageously. Davis opines that 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" (333).

Frieda, Claudia's sister on the other hand exhibits her prowess in a relatively minor way. When a gang of boys begin to taunt Pecola, Frieda comes to her rescue. She threatens Woodrow Cain in particular, with some information that she has overheard. Scared of being exposed in public as a bed wetter, the boy "slinks" away.

...Frieda, with set lips and Mama's eyes, snatched her coat from her head and threw it on the ground. She ran toward them and brought her books down on Woodrow Cain's head....
"Hey, girl!"
"You cut out, you hear? I had never Frieda's voice so loud and clear.
Maybe because Frieda was taller than he was, maybe because he saw her eyes, maybe because he had lost interest in the game, or maybe because he had a crush on Frieda, in any case Woodrow looked frightened just long enough to give her more courage.
"Leave her 'lone, or I'm gone tell everybody what you did!"
Woodrow did not answer; he just walled his eyes.
Bay Boy piped up, "Go on, gal. Ain't nobody bothering you."
"You shut up, Bullet Head." I had found my tongue.
"Who you calling Bullet Head?"
"I'm calling you Bullet Head, Bullet Head." (BE 50-51)

Therefore if Frieda is also able to speak out with confidence and authority, it is because she is empowered by the power of silence. Well-known sociologist, Joyce A. Ladner calls the pubescent black girl "emotionally precocious" because "she has had either vicarious or personal experience of violence. Having been either a victim or a witness of aggression, she learns the strategies of defending herself more vigorously than someone who has never been so vulnerable. Although these preadolescents have encountered harshness and cruelty, they develop survival skills enabling them to cope with the world" (qtd. in "Seeds in Hard Ground: Black Girlhood in The Bluest Eye" 442).

Thus while Pecola retreats into delusion, those with toughness and resiliency (Claudia, Frieda and the three prostitutes), survive. As Claudia confesses in the novel, "We had defended ourselves since memory against everything and everybody" (BE 150). But how much of this is true needs to be seen in Morrison's next novel, Sula, taken for analysis.

Unlike BE which shows the futility of defining self by another culture's values, Sula (henceforth, S) shows how the group ostracizes the self-assertive individual. Sula, unlike Pecola lives in her own world, creates her own realities, "motivated by a firm sense of her 'Me-ness' " (Samuels 32). But what needs to be seen is, how successful Sula is, in the mean world which bristles against the hostility of the world, reason perhaps why Morrison has clearly established Sula's role as that of a pariah, right from the beginning.
Against the self-assertive Sula are the Wright family members—Nel, Sula's bosom friend and her mother, Helene Wright. Conditioned by fear, Helene leads a very closed and secluded life. Raised under the watchful eyes of her grandmother, Helene is absolutely conventional, being "constantly on guard for any sign of her [own] mother's wild blood" (S 17). Like Geraldine in BE, Helene adopts conservative values in order to submerge "her own funky past" (Bjork 60). She becomes a respected, "impressive woman" in Medallion as a result of "cultivating a puritanical middle-class reserve" (60).

Heavy hair in a bun, dark eyes arched in a perpetual query about other people's manners. A woman who won all social battles with presence and a conviction of the legitimacy of her authority. Since there was no Catholic church in Medallion then, she joined the most conservative black church. And held sway. It was Helene who never turned her head in Church when latecomers arrived; Helene who established the practice of seasonal altar flowers; Helene who introduced the giving of banquets of welcome to returning Negro veterans. (S 18)

That Helene is a respected woman in Medallion indicates that she religiously follows the rules of the community...rules ascribed to all women. Helene is portrayed by Morrison as the typical "middle-class domesticated housewife and mother" (Bjork 60) who inculcates these rigid values in her daughter Nel, hoping that she would be able to suppress her assertive attitude, if at all she had any. "Under Helene's hand the girl became obedient and polite. Any enthusiasms that little Nel showed were calmed by the mother until she drove her daughter's imagination underground" (S 18).

However hard she tries to repress Nel's imagination, Helene cannot entirely "eliminate it" (Bjork 61). Their journey to New Orleans, to attend
Helene's grandmother's funeral, strengthens Nel's resolve to be more assertive in life. Although Helene appears strong and capable, adored by her father and held in awe by the community of Bottom, a white conductor reduces her to "custard". Censured for entering the wrong compartment, Helene poses a sorry plight in front of the black soldiers. Instead of explaining to the ticket master the reason for her entering the compartment meant for the whites, Helene freezes at the sight of him thereby evoking suspicion.

Nel looked away from the flash of pretty teeth to the other passengers. The two black soldiers, who had been watching the scene with what appeared to be indifference, now looked stricken. Behind Nel was the bright and blazing light of her mother's smile; before her the midnight eyes of the soldiers. She saw the muscles of their faces tighten, a movement under the skin from the blood to marble. No change in the expression of the eyes, but a hard wetness that veiled them as they looked at the stretch of her mother's foolish smile. (§ 21-22)

This incident scares Nel. She realises that as long as her mother lives in Bottom, she can live with a certain amount of dignity. But outside the town, she must "divorce herself from the world" if she wanted to retain her dignity (Bjork 61). Helene has absolutely no control outside Bottom and therefore her propriety and conduct prove both "futile and meaningless."

The fact that the white railroad ticketmaster who because of their colour, urinates with her in open fields whenever the train stops, shows how "Helene merely reflects an entire community which itself survives and retains its collective dignity through separation and introjection" (61).

Talking of Helene, Bjork points out: "Helene's repressed upbringing represents a cycle of what Mary Helen Washington in her 'Black-Eyed
Susan's calls 'psychic violence that alienates [black women] from their roots and cuts them off from real contact with their own people and also from a part of themselves' "(231,61). This is why Nel decides not to conform to the rigid rules laid down by her mother. She realises the futility of being mute like her. Morrison uses the image of a street pup kicked out from a butcher's shop, to enforce her idea--of what happens when one is very passive and accepts one's lot in life without questioning. "Like a street pup that wags its tail at the very doorjamb of the butcher's shop he has been kicked away from only moments before, Helene smiled. Smiled dazzlingly and coquettishly at the salmon-colored face of the conductor" (S 21). She musters courage to declare her difference. Her "mirror stage revery" reads: " I'm me. I'm not their daughter. I'm not Nel. I'm me. Me' " (28).

If the trip to New Orleans makes clear Helene's life behind "the physical and emotional veil" (Bjork 61), to Nel it opens up new possibilities. It awakens in her the capacity for awareness and growth. It exposes her to Southern segregation and more importantly, "the distortion and alienation" of her mother's life (61). She is horrified to see her mother turn into "jelly" when accosted by the ticket collector.

In the silence that preceded the train's heave, she looked deeply at the folds of her mother's dress. There in the fall of the heavy brown wool she held her eyes. She could not risk letting them travel upward for fear of seeing that the hooks and eyes in the placket of the dress had come undone and exposed the custard-colored skin underneath. She stared at the hem, wanting to believe in its weight but knowing that custard was all that it hid. If this tall, proud woman, this woman who was very particular about her friends, who slipped into church with unequalled elegance, who could quell a roustabout with a
look, if she were really custard, then there was a chance that Nel was too. (§ 22)

This experience prompts Nel to look outside of herself, "outside of her mother's system of self-denial" (Bjork 62). She takes a firm resolve, not to let anyone demean her the way they did her mother. The text testifies to this: "She wanted to make certain that no man ever looked at her that way. That no midnight eyes or marbled flesh would ever accost her and turn her into jelly" (§ 22).

Nel's resolve gets a further boost when she acquaints herself with the Peace household, especially the youngest of them, Sula. Unlike the Wright's household where "conformity" is the "operative word" (Samuels 44), Peace's household is disorderly- both in terms of housekeeping and way of life. Morrison portrays Eva, the eldest of the Peace woman as an one-legged matriarch ruling the roost. Unlike Helene, Eva does not let the rigid values of the community affect her. She is like Helene; a single woman deserted by her husband Boy Boy one cold November morning. But she survives against all odds through sheer grit and determination. Leaving her children under the care of a neighbour, she sets out "like the traditional black male runner" (Bjork 63), only to return to Medallion after eighteen months with ten thousand dollars and a single leg. Neighbourhood gossip contends that Eva had allowed a train to sever her leg in order to claim the insurance money, but what impresses readers is the self-determination of a black woman as early as 1921. Eva's experience changes her from a "passive victim" to an "active manipulator" (Carman 34).

Compared to Helene Wright who cringes under the very gaze of a white ticket collector, Eva boldly faces oppression. She does not turn custard in order to survive, but maintains "an integrated self- in -relation" with people (Gillespie and Missy Dehn Kubitschek 35). Her motive
shifts from love to hatred: "Knowing that she would hate him long and well filled with pleasant anticipation...it was hating him that kept her alive and happy" (S 36,37). As it is evident from the text, it is this, which strengthens and protects Eva from "routine vulnerabilities" (36).

Bjork in *Sula: The Contradictions of Self and Place* points out: "In some ways then, Eva presents a clear antithesis to the Bottom's ordering principle. Her many-sided characteristics, her disrupted and mutilated life, and the spontaneity of her household all typify a kind of angularity in her life, what Zora Neale Hurston in her *The Sanctified Church* defines as the African-American determination "to avoid the straight line" (54). Eva converts her very body into a "dismembered instrument of defiance"- and finance. Baker, Jr. notes that Eva's act is as much an utterance of the *Non Serviam* as that of her slave precursor described by a Works Project Administration interviewee as follows: "I knew a woman who could not be conquered by her mistress, and so her master threatened to sell her to New Orleans Negro traders. She took her right hand, laid it down on a meat block and cut off three fingers, and thus made the sale impossible" (qtd. in "*When Lindbergh Sleeps with Bessie Smith: The Writing of Place in Sula*" 241). Eva refuses to become a "will-less" object of exchange left to die in barren, one-room arrangements of Bottom (241). She absolutely refuses to be bound by traditional middle class definitions, which Helene Wright simply absorbs.

But Eva and Helene share one common trait. They find "no time" for anything in their lives except to "stay alive" to survive and raise their children. Bjork further notes: "...both Helene and Eva are inextricably linked to the ordering principle of the Bottom, and inspite of Eva's outlandish and taboo behavior, neither character genuinely threatens the essential fabric of the neighbourhood; they accept similar conventionalized
values; Helene assumes a rigid, middle-class mind set; Eva presumes an unyielding despotism" (67).

Diane Gillespie and Missy Dehn Kubitschek in "Who Cares? Women-Centered Psychology in Sula" point out that Nancy Chodorow, a woman-centred psychologist recognises "the pre-eminent influence of the mother-daughter relationship," a quality that largely determines the successful development of a girl (28). Carol Gilligan, the foremost among the psychologists, has formulated three stages in women developing an ethic of care. First and foremost, an unsocialised selfishness; second, submersion in others; third, an authenticity in relationships (28).

Helene Wright adopts the second stage of Gilligan's formula. Her strong hold of the middle-class values makes her more vulnerable when compared to Eva whose "unyielding despotism" makes life more meaningful. Her desire to adhere to social convention prevents her from developing a broad outlook of life. Her fear of the "social truths of her past": her used mother, "who never said a word of greeting or affection" (23) prevents her from letting Nel do what she wants to. As a result of constantly acting out of her, she stifles the growth of Nel. Her insistence on clothes-spinning Nel's nose so that it becomes socially acceptable only goes to show Helene's survival is dependent on "the acceptance of others" (Different Voice 79). Gillespie and Kubitschek adds: "In reserving the self, the woman fails to develop her own adult voice" (30).

From the time Nel meets Jude Greene, she "embodies the limitations and paradoxes" of what Gilligan points out in the second stage, selflessly immersing herself for the sake of Other people" ("Who Cares? Women-Centered Psychology in Sula" 28). By marrying Jude, Nel has "unwittingly discarded" that part of herself which would render her "invulnerable" to "the soldier's eyes on the train, the black wreath on the door, the custard pudding she believed lurked under her mother's heavy
dress, the feel of unknown sheets and unknown people" (§ 28). She becomes a "culmination of all [Helene] had been thought or done in this world." Moreover, in matrimony Nel becomes a mirror for her husband, who sees himself "taking shape in her eyes" and who regards her as an extension of himself: "The two of them together would make one Jude" (83). Rather than cultivating an independent self which would enable her to lead a meaningful life, Nel tailors "her thoughts and her behavior to conform to the demands of the larger community" (Munro 152).

What surprises the readers is why Jude chooses to marry Nel, even though plenty of girls of Sula's nature adore him. One obvious reason is because Nel has no desire to make herself. Like so many men in his community, Jude also begins thinking of marriage because he desperately wants to accomplish something of significance, this something being a job at helping to build the New River Road:

It was while he was full of such dreams, his body already feeling the rough work clothes, his hands already curved to the pick handle, that he spoke to Nel about getting married. She seemed receptive but hardly anxious. It was after he stood in lines for six days running and saw the gang boss pick out thin-armed white boys from the Virginia hills and the bull-necked Greeks and Italians and heard over and over, "Nothing else today. Come back tomorrow," that he got the message. So it was rage, rage and a determination to take on a man's role anyhow that made him press Nel about settling down. He needed some of his appetites filled, some posture of adulthood recognised, but mostly he wanted someone to care about his hurt, to care very deeply." (§ 82)

Secondly, Jude likes Nel because she never seemed demanding like the other women. "He chose the girl who had always seemed hell-bent to
marry, who made the whole venture seem like his idea, his conquest" (82-83). As long as she gives him the upper hand, Jude is happy. Jude's concern all along is with himself, not Nel, as he longs for confirmation of manhood, denied him through racist employment restrictions. In "acceding to Jude's urging," Nel joins "the community's valuation of females as significant support, not independent beings" (Carmean 38). Jude uses Nel for his own benefit just like Peter in Margaret Atwood's The Edible Woman. There is no thought of Nel in it. It is assumed that Nel would always be there for him, silent and solid, but always boosting his ego. She doesn't have to speak, it is not required. "Whatever his fortune, whatever the cut of his garment, there would always be the hem- the tuck and fold that hid his raveling edges; a someone sweet, industrious and loyal to shore him up" (S 83).

Nel's lack of desire in making herself something is in keeping with Carol Gilligan's formula. Like her mother Helene, the desire to fulfil the needs of her husband Jude and no one else, drives Nel. Morrison makes clear that Nel's life long search for conformity is the result of her mother's training (qtd. in "Failures of Love: Female Initiation in the Novels of Toni Morrison" 552). Barbara Christian points out- "Jude's reasons for pressing Nel into marriage reinforces our sense of the Bottom's definition of woman. As his helpmate, Nel is a buffer between his desire for his own autonomy and the restrictions the outside world places on him. Her marriage to him will replace the need he so intensely feels to have some impact on the world and thus enable him to accept his state" (163).

All that Nel gains from her marriage to Jude is respectability, a house to keep, children to rear, but "it is doomed both through her own and her husband's lack of self-worth" (Bakeman 552). Bakeman further adds that the union between Nel and Jude is made because Nel is a tool for Jude's ego, his sense of maturity having been denied by society. "...mostly
he wanted someone to care about his hurt, to care very deeply. Deep enough to hold him, deep enough to rock him, deep enough to ask, 'How you feel? You all right? Want some coffee?' And if he were to be a man, that someone could no longer be his mother" (§ 82). Any urge to examine any incentive to leave Bottom, or even rebel against its tradition, leaves with Sula. But in Sula's absence, Nel becomes what the community demands of her: "Nel knows and believes in all the laws of the community," Morrison observes. "She is the community. She believes in its values" (Stepto 476). The need to explore and experiment does not return even when Sula returns to Bottom. Such is her acceptance of the role of wife and mother.

So when Jude deserts Nel, she finds no option other than to play out the conventional role accorded to women in Medallion.

Now Nel was one of them. One of the spiders whose only thought was the next rung of the web, who dangled in dark dry places suspended by their own spittle, more terrified of the free fall than the snake's breath below. Their eyes so intent on the wayward stranger who trips into their net, they were blind to the cobalt on their own backs, the moonshine fighting to pierce their corners. If they were touched by the snake's breath, however fatal, they were merely victims and knew how to behave in that role (just as Nel knew how to behave as the wronged wife). But the free fall, oh no, that required—demanded— invention: a thing to do with the wings, a way of holding the legs and most of all a full surrender to the downward flight if they wished to taste their tongues or stay alive. But alive was what they, and now Nel, belonged to the town and all of its ways. She had given herself over to them, and the flick of their tongues would drive her back into her
little dry corner where she would cling to her spittie high above the break of the snake and the fall. (§ 120)

Just as ten years of absence from Bottom teaches Sula the philosophies of life, ten years with Jude, teaches Nel "to assume the prejudice and proprietary airs "associated with the role of a housewife (Munro 153). Hence, when Jude deserts her, she cannot transcend the role of the wronged wife. She presumes that it is Jude's leaving her that reduces her to a status of the walking dead and not the loss of the complementary bond with Sula.

She convinces herself that her husband deserted her because of Sula. She fails to see that he has left her as a result of his own insecurities. What Morrison points out is that after ten years of living with Nel, Jude must have known how unbearable a future with her would be. Jude's desertion is no surprise because even before the "infidelity," Jude "may have been ripe for leaving a home" which has become intolerable as a result of Nel's oppressive standards (Wessling 293).

With Sula, Nel cultivates and thrives on interdependence, while with Jude, she has a dependent relationship. The lusture and shine fades when she marries Jude because her mother takes utmost care to eliminate her independent bent of mind. As a result, with Jude she contends herself with being needed by another to the point that "even Nel's love for Jude...over the years had spun a steady web around her heart" (§ 95). To use Morrison's term, Nel represents "nesters." Nesters constrict the possibilities for a full life because they are only marginally capable of expressing basic human emotions such as grief, joy, and love (qtd. in "Flying as Symbol and Legend in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye, Sula and Song of Solomon" 129).

Hovet and Barbara Lounsberry contend that the love, which might have lifted Nel up, inverts itself and pushes her to the depth (129). Like
Pauline Breedlove in BE, the young Nel has dreams of being taken away by a fiery prince. Jude certainly comes her way but does not raise her vision, instead presses her into settling down as quickly as possible. So when she marries, she wears a veil "too heavy to allow her to feel the core of the kiss he pressed on her head" (§ 85).

Nel, like Serafina in Tennessee William's play "The Rose Tattoo" indulges in a "defensive retreat" after being deserted by Jude, around whom her whole world revolves. While her "withdrawal and self-absorption" are not as total as are for Serafina, they are "no less debilitating" (Munro 152). Nel's first response upon seeing Jude and Sula together is to protect Jude so that she can continue to live respectably. Inspite of her shock, Nel is concerned "only with propriety and appearances" (Bjork 75) of her husband. To Nel, Jude appears naked and not Sula because it is he whom she loves and around whom her world revolves. "...me wanting her to leave so I could tell you privately that you had forgotten to button your fly because I didn't want to say it in front of her, Jude. And even when you began to talk, I couldn't hear because I was worried about you not knowing that your fly was open..." (§ 106).

She retreats to the small confines of the bathroom when Jude takes leave once and for all. To Nel it is the only place which is "sufficiently small and bright space to contain her grief" (152). Munro says that the fact Nel chose such a place is only indicative of "her unwillingness to confront her own vulnerability head on" (152). Ironically, what she discovers is not the "deeply personal cry for one's own pain" which she had expected, but a "gray ball" hovering just to the right of her vision (§ 108,109). What is tragic is that, rather than forging ahead with what little is left of life, Nel retreats further into a shell: "She spent a whole summer with the gray ball, the little ball of fur and string and hair always floating in the light near her but which she did not see because she never looked" (109).
What she resolves to become in the beginning ("I'm me"), vanishes as a result of her marrying Jude Greene. While Nel is convinced that it is the loss of Jude and the stability which he provided in her life which has left her "adrift" (Munro 152), Morrison provides ample evidence to support the conclusion that it is Nel's own "passive conformity" to social expectations which has left her unable to function as a whole person upon Jude's desertion.

For Nel, sexual awareness also results in the death of self: It leads her to a death of self in her marriage to Jude Greene. Stein notes: "As in the case with others names, Jude's is of ironic import: He will be Judas, betrayal of Nel's hopes (147). Her marriage is described in the imagery of death. Morrison portrays Ajax advising Jude about the psychology of girls: "'Ax em to die for you and they yours for life' " (S 83). The images of married women as portrayed by Morrison, signify the kind of life Nel leads. So in a way, marriage for Nel is a death of Nel's fragile sense of life. "Those with husbands had folded themselves into starched coffins, their sides bursting with other people's skinned dreams and bony regrets.... Those with men had had the sweetness sucked from their breath by ovens and steam kettles" (122). One other image that captures the constricted life of Nel is the image of the web, which signifies Nel's life in a closed, confined, but safe space.

Though Nel's association with Sula ruins her family life, it certainly strips her off the illusion she lives in. With nothing to rely on, Nel is left to fend for herself. From a "physical point of view," we understand that Nel's role has been fashioned solely for the purpose of being "a handmaiden" to Jude or to someone like him (Christian 169). But inspite of losing everybody whom she held in great esteem, Nel "nonetheless longs for those who had crushed her" (169). The text makes this clear: "Here she was in the midst of it, hating it, scared of it, and again she thought of Sula
as though they were still friends and talked things over. That was too much. To lose Jude and not have Sula to talk about it because it was Sula that he had left her for" (S 110).

Sula rips apart a life that she created for herself over a span of ten years, in a matter of few minutes. Rather than make use of what is left and strive to make a living, Nel gives up. She wallows in self-pity; thereby allowing herself to be slowly consumed by the fear of living. Christian is of the view that "Nel's world is dependent on another, the world of her husband or her children. Since these worlds collapse, she is left without a context" (173). But unable to get rid of Sula from her mind, she visits her while she is in the deathbed. Although she deems it a charitable act, it's far from it. The real purpose of her visiting Sula is to accuse her: "How come you did it, Sula?.... I was good to you, Sula..." (S 144). Sula's reply justifies her behaviour to an extent.

"If we were such good friends, how come you couldn't get over it?"

"How you know?" Sula asked.

"Know what?" Nel still wouldn't look at her.

"About who was good. How you know it was you?"

"What you mean?"

"I mean maybe it wasn't you. Maybe it was me. " (145,146)

When Sula beds with Jude there is no malice in it. She does not think of hurting Nel intentionally. "She had no thought at all of causing Nel pain when she bedded down with Jude," the text says (119). Stein in "Toni Morrison's Sula: A Black Woman's Epic" notes: "Through her involvement with Sula, she [Nel] learns about herself, attaining greater openness and emotional capacity" (149). But "grace" for Nel comes from "the most unexpected" source (Wessling 295). As an act of charity again, Nel pays a visit to the ailing Eva Peace. Seeing Nel, Eva demands: "Tell
me how you killed that little boy?" Nel shell-shocked answers: "What? What little boy?" ...."I didn't throw no little boy in the river. That was Sula." But Eva's response brings about a flood of memory in Nel and "an illumination" (Wessling 294).

"You. Sula. What's the difference? You was there. You watched, didn't you? Me, I never would've watched."

"You're confused. Miss Peace. I'm Nel. Sula's dead."

....

"Just alike. Both of you. Never was no difference between you. (S 168,169)

Nel leaves the nursing home finding the whole conversation very annoying. She becomes angry with Eva and considers her mean and spiteful. But outside the hospital, a revelation dawns on her.

What did old Eva mean by you watched? How could she help seeing it? She was right there. But Eva didn't say see, she said watched. "I did not watch it. I just saw it." But it was there anyway, as it had always been, the old feeling and the old question. The good feeling she had had when Chicken's hands slipped. She hadn't wondered about that in years. "Why didn't I feel bad when it happened? How come it felt so good to see him fall?"(170)

Recollecting the events of the day, Nel ponders over the feeling she experienced as she watched Chicken Little drown slowly. She concludes that she felt good, that she did in fact watch as opposed to merely seeing him drown. Hovet and Barbara Lounsberry note that Nel's "cool and controlled response following his death [Chicken Little], had nothing to do with the maturity and centeredness she thought she had attained, but simply sprang from the 'tranquillity that follows a joyful stimulation' " (131). This revelation gives Nel some measure of self-knowledge, which
enables her to interpret Sula's deathbed question about, who was good: "How you know it was you?" (S 146). For the first time in years, she acknowledges her own capacity for evil. She realises how harshly she had treated Sula and how she severed ties with her without realising "her own failure" to confront "her dark impulses" (Stein 149). Her love for Sula fills her self once again and all the pent-up emotion finds expression at this point. Standing in the middle of the road she cries out: "O Lord, Sula,"..."girl, girl, girlgirlgirl" (S 174).

In this scene, the last of the novel, Nel abandons the conventional fiction of her supreme attachment to her husband to mourn her greater losses, Sula's friendship and Sula herself. No longer "oversimplifying her experience" and "denying her feelings," and also her needs, Nel has the potential to "attain moral maturity and enjoy authentic relation to others" (Gillespie and Missy Dehn Kubitschek 34). Repression therefore saps Nel's energy and she is in a state of mind wherein she cannot admit Sula's point-of-view. Preoccupied with her own goodness, Nel glories in being the only woman in town willing to visit the dying Sula and the ailing Eva Peace. But the moment her "self-image" is "shaken," she gets the capacity to attain moral maturity and enjoy authentic relation with others, something that Gilligan refers to.

Nel's cry is ample evidence to show the importance of voicing one's feelings. As long as Nel suppresses her feelings, she lives under the illusion that it was her good-for-nothing husband that she had been missing. But upon unlocking her emotion, she realises that it is her childhood companion Sula that she longs to be with. As she stands alongside Sula's grave moaning, "a soft ball of fur [the gray nest of constricted grief] broke and scattered like dandelion spores in the breeze" (S 174). Hovet and Barbara Lounsberry point out
These signs of affirmation—the gaze turned upward, the voice ascending into the air, the grief finding articulation—which end this novel otherwise characterized by the downward flight image of the free fall are hardly enough to redeem Nel's past, or dispel the novel's mood of negation. Indeed, even the upward direction of Nel's voice is reined in by the poignant truth that her discovery is so late: her cry was "loud and long—but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow." (174, 132)

Sula, on the other hand, lives her life according to her own principles. Her peripheral life makes her an outcast. Raised in a household devoid of rules, Sula lives a lawless life. Unlike Nel who surrenders without questioning anything, Sula is perfectly willing to think the unthinkable and question the unquestionable. Morrison gives Sula license to act as she pleases. As a result, she acts "like a man." She's adventurous and she's not scared, reason why she goes to church without an underwear. Because of this quality in her, she is seen as a "total outrage". As Martin notes: "Sula is to be taken as a model for Black womanhood in so far as she chooses to define herself, as opposed to telling culture to do so, especially since its definitions are negative ones" (qtd. in "Experimental Lives: Meaning and Self in Sula" 36).

Contrary to the Wrights who instil values in Nel, the Peace women-Eva and Hannah bequeath to Sula, a capacity for emotional distance, which allows for the creation of a female self. Morrison juxtaposes the worlds of Nel and Sula to show the importance of practicality and survival. In order to survive, one needs the spirit to explore and be imaginative. Sula is endowed with both these qualities.

In chapter "1922," two scenes underscore Sula's indeterminacy and serve to determine the direction of her remaining life—her confrontation
with the four Irish boys and Chicken Little's Death. Both Nel and Sula are intent on "adventuresomeness" (§ 55). But it is Sula who instigates the adventure. When returning home one day, Sula convinces Nel to take the shortest route home anticipating trouble from four white boys who have been regularly harassing black school children, including Nel. As per her intuition, when the boys accost them, Sula pulls a knife in order to frighten them. On second thoughts, she slashes off the tip of her finger to show them what she is capable of.

Four white boys in their early teens, sons of some newly arrived Irish people, occasionally entertained themselves in the afternoon by harassing black schoolchildren....

....

These particular boys caught Nel once, and pushed her from hand to hand until they grew tired of the frightened helpless face. Because of that incident, Nels' route home from school became elaborate. She, and then Sula, managed to duck themselves for weeks until a chilly day in November when Sula said," Let us go on home the shortest way."

Nel blinked, but acquiesced. They walked up the street until they got to the bend of Carpenter's Road where the boys lounged on a disused well. Spotting their prey, the boys sauntered forward as though they were nothing in the world on their minds but the gray sky. Hardly able to control their grins, they stood like a gate blocking the path. When the girls were three feet in front of the boys, Sula reached into her coat pocket and pulled out Eva's paring knife. The boys stopped short, exchanged looks and dropped all pretense of innocence. This was going to be better than they thought. They were
going to try and fight back, and with a knife. Maybe they could get an arm around one of their waists, or tear...

Sula squatted down in the dirt road.... Holding the knife in her right hand, she pulled the slate toward her and pressed her left forefinger hard on its edge. Her aim was determined but inaccurate. She slashed off only the tip of her finger. The four boys stared open-mouthed at the wound and the scrap of flesh, like a button mushroom, curling in the cherry blood that ran into the corners of the state.

Sula raised her eyes to them. Her voice was quiet. "If I can do that to myself, what you suppose I'll do to you?" (53,54-55)

Like Freida in BE, Sula too is able to cope with the situation, unlike Nel who stands stupefied not knowing what to do. Sula, like Frieda conforms to what sociologist Joyce A.Ladner points out while talking about the "pubescent" black girl (442). Bakerman notes, while in one way, Sula has solved the problem; her reaction is very inappropriate. She has reacted with the violence "which is her family pattern," and she has clearly indicated that while "she can act, she does so irresponsibly" (551). Gillespie and Missy Dehn Kubitschek note that in some ways Eva's withdrawing from her daughter and granddaughter, teach them very few caretaking skills. So the clumsiness of the untrained caretaking impulse is noticeable" in one of the few links between the grandmother and granddaughter (39). Eva sacrifices her leg in order to feed her children and Sula slashes her finger in order to protect her friend. While Eva's "desperate solution is appropriate to desperate circumstances," Sula's is "wildly inappropriate to the threat" (39). Dealing with the situation in a more diplomatic way is not in Sula's blood because she has not experienced "traditional care" (39). Unlike Nel, who has inherited from her
mother what Gilligan terms "the conventional feminine voice" (Different Voice 79), Sula has inherited an unconventional feminine voice.

This may be the reason why she escapes from Bottom when Nel gets married in 1927. She dislikes conformity. The dialogue between Eva and Sula testifies to this.

"...When you gone to get married? You need to have babies. It'll settle you."

"I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself."

"Selfish. Ain't no woman got no business floatin' around without no man."

"You did."

"Not by choice."

"Mamma did."

"Not by choice, I said. It ain't right for you to want to stay off yourself. You need...I'm a tell you what you need."

Sula sat up. "I need you to shut your mouth." (§ 92)

Carmean points out that "Their [Eva and Sula] ensuing argument illustrates deeply opposed ideologies, with Eva maintaining a traditional view of Sula needing a husband and babies to "settle" her and Sula vigorously asserting her right to make herself and not be made by others (92).

Like her mother Hannah, Sula hires men on a day to day basis. Although Hannah makes her men feel complete and does not "antagonize" the women of Bottom, Sula sleeps with them once and discards them (Carmean 39). The difference between the mother and daughter largely stems from the fact that Sula refuses to flatter male egos and takes utmost care to devalue men and by extension, their wives (39). Unlike her mother, Sula's motives are different. Hannah cannot live without some "touching everyday" (§ 44). Sula, on the other hand, does not find sex a pleasurable activity. It breeds only "boredom and despair" (Stein 148). But the sexual
act becomes for Sula a means of "self-exploration" and "affirmation" (Carmean 39). Sex becomes "a free fall into a stinging awareness of the ending of things: and eye of sorrow in the midst of hurricane rage of joy. There in the center of that silence, was not eternity but the death of time and a loneliness so profound the word itself had no meaning" (123). She is able to experience her deepest feelings, deep enough to bring "tears for the deaths of the littlest things" (123). In sex, Sula "knows not her partner but herself" (Christian 166). This makes her more knowledgeable about herself, "more attuned to her own needs and desires" (Carmean 39).

Sula's rejection of matrimony and maternity simply means "an assumption of male freedom" (Hirsch 268). In several interviews, Morrison has admitted fascination with Sula's choice, although it is not acceptable to the community. In her interview with Robert Stepto, Morrison declares: "I guess I'm not supposed to say that. But the fact that they [men] would split in a minute just delights me.... That has always been to me one of the most attractive features about black male life (487). However much Nel tries to change her mind, Sula remains fixed in her own ideas. To Nel, the line of distinction between a man and a woman is pronounced only on account of having children. Eva also advocates a similar idea but she is dethroned and removed to an old age home. To Sula, marriage and children drive a woman to lead an empty life: "Those with men had had the sweetness sucked from their breath by ovens and steam kettles. Their children were like distant but exposed wounds whose aches were no less intimate because separate from their flesh. They had looked at the world and back at the children, back again at the world and back again at the children, and Sula knew that one clear young eye was all that kept the knife away from the throat's curve" (S 122). Until she dies, Sula is haunted by fears of domesticity but for Nel, it comes to mean "an immutable, inescapable, desperate fusion" (Hirsch 268): "They [her
children] were all she would ever know of love. But it was a love that, like a pan of syrup kept too long on the stove, had cooked out, leaving only its odor and a hard, sweet sludge, impossible to scrape off" (S 165).

However when she meets Ajax, Sula's desire to settle in life like Nel becomes very evident. Unlike the relationship between a man and woman where physical attraction plays a predominant role, Ajax's love for Sula solidifies because she appeals to him mentally as well as physically. She is capable of stimulating his imagination unlike other women in town. But gradually Sula desires to possess him for life! Since he dislikes "limitations and ties" like Sula, Ajax rejects her ("The Contemporary Fables" 171).

Sula began to discover what possession was. Not love, perhaps, but possession or at least the desire for it. She was astounded by so new and alien a feeling. First there was the morning of the night before when she actually wondered if Ajax would come by that day. Then there was an afternoon when she stood before the mirror finger-tracing the laugh lines around her mouth and trying to decide whether she was good-looking or not. She ended this deep perusal by tying a green ribbon in her hair... The ribbon-tying was followed by other activity, and when Ajax came that evening, bringing her a reed whistle he had carved that morning, not only was the green ribbon still in her hair, but the bathroom was gleaming, the bed was made, and the table was set for two. ....

... Sula, the green ribbon in her hair.... stood up and arranged herself on the arm of the rocking chair. Putting her fingers deep into the velvet of his hair, she murmured, "Come on. Lean on me."
Ajax blinked. Then he looked swiftly into her face. In her words, in her voice, was a sound he knew well. For the first time he saw the green ribbon. He looked around and saw the gleaming kitchen and the table set for two and detected the scent of the nest. Every hackle on his body rose, and he knew that very soon she would, like all of her sisters before her, put to him the death knell question "Where you been?" His eyes dimmed with a mild and momentary regret. (S 131-132, 133)

Having discovered for herself for the first time what it is to be in love, Sula desires to treasure it. Confusing love for possession, she adorns herself in the traditional manner and whispers to him, "Lean on me;" words that "epitomize" the relationship between Nel and Jude, "words that thrust the concept of dependence" and "possessiveness" into their relationship (Christian 171). Bjork points out that among all the novels of Morrison, the love relationship between Sula and Ajax is "perhaps her mostly perfectly conceived." By its very nature, their relationship evokes Hurston's classic relationship between Janie and Teacake in Their Eyes Were Watching God (77).

In Ajax's absence, Sula like Nel experiences the similar pain of loss and change. Like other discarded women, Sula looks around for "tangible evidence" of Ajax having been with her (S 134). But he leaves behind nothing. His absence is very conspicuous. "She could find nothing, for he had left nothing but his stunning absence" (134). But deep down Sula realises that sooner or later, her relationship with Ajax would have ended because of her nature. In her frenzy to possess him, she comes to realise that she never knew his full name. It's only when she goes through his driving license left behind in the drawer does she realise that he is Albert Jacks and not Ajax. Realising the essential loneliness of her life, she sings,
"There aren't any more new songs and I have sung all the ones there are. I have sung them all. I have sung all the songs there are" (137).

Even in her deathbed, Sula is uninhibited and irrational. She is a "free spirit" who is not fettered by "external mores and values" (Samuels 43). She declares to Nel:

"...Me. I'm going down like one of those redwoods. I sure did live in this world."
"Really? What have you got to show for it?"
"Show? To Who? Girl, I got my mind. And what goes on in it. Which is to say, I got me."
"Lonely, ain't it?"
"Yes. But my lonely is mine." (S 143)

Sula clearly suggests that, unlike Pecola in BE, she is "accountable to" no one else in life but herself (Samuels 43). If she has lost a sense of direction in life it is her responsibility. Her "determination to assume existential responsibility for self" (43) is indicated by her obstreperous declaration: "I got my mind," the "creative assertion that wills what one wishes" (Samuels 43). This is something that cannot be expected from the Breedlove family.

Just as Eva's act of self-mutilation is motivated by a will to survive, so Sula slices off the tip of her fingers "ostensibly" to protect herself and Nel from the four Irish boys thereby effectively using the body to issue a warning (Samuels 26). How far is this means of using the body as language, needs to be examined in Morrison's next novel, Beloved.

When verbal communication is suppressed or when the language used by the majority do not fit the needs of the minority, minority people subvert communication to fit their own needs. In Morrison's fifth novel, many methods of communication which are used by the majority in a negative way are hijacked by the people of the minority to create a
completely new message and a positive form of communication. One of the most important means of communication in Beloved (referred as B hereafter) is through the character's scars caused by physical markings.

Like Sula, Sethe is also an outcast. Because of her act of infanticide, the community has ostracized Sethe. When the novel begins, it has been years since Sethe killed her daughter Beloved. Her mother-in-law has also died and her two sons, Howard and Buglar have run off in fright. Sethe, a survivor of slavery is living alone with her daughter Denver at 124, Bluestone Road.

Through Morrison's description of life at Sweet Home, we understand why Sethe goes on a murdering rampage. With the arrival of her friend Paul D who has been an inmate of the slavery house for many years, and the ghost of her daughter Beloved, Sethe's suppressed past finds an outlet.

At the tender age of thirteen, Sethe is brought to Sweet Home, an idyllic plantation in Kentucky owned by the Garners. Sethe is in fact brought to this slave house to serve "as a sexual mate" to the Sweet Home men. Although Mr. Gardner prides himself on the fact that "his male slaves are men and not 'men-bred slaves,' " Mrs. Garner reveals the truth behind bringing a slave woman to Sweet Home (Samuels 101). The purpose is simply "childbearing" (101). She is a substitute for the aged Baby Suggs who can neither neither work in the field nor reproduce.

By fourteen Sethe marries Halle, Baby Sugg's son. By nineteen she is pregnant with her fourth child. Life in the Garner plantation is smooth until Mr. Garner dies. When Mrs. Garner is down with a dreaded disease, the condition of Sethe and the rest of the Sweet Home inhabitants take a turn for the worse.

Unlike Mr. Garner who is a benign master of Sweet Home, the schoolteacher sees slaves as farm livestock and Sethe as a valuable
"breeder of new slaves" (Bloom 90). He believes in the "legal code" that the "slave is entirely subject to the will of the master" and that the slave has no kith or kin (qtd. in "The Beloved Community in Toni Morrison's Beloved" 182). So as a lawmaker, schoolteacher makes a list of Sethe's animal and human characteristics to define her. His nephews, who come to the farm to work and study under him, do the same. "No, no. That's not the way. I told you to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don't forget to line them up" (B 193). As Perez-Torres mentions: "Sethe's identity, circumscribed by those 'scientific' practices, is subject to the effects of schoolteacher's discourse. As often happens, the treatment she receives as an object of discourse transforms her into an object of violence" (696). Slowly Sethe begins to realise that it is her apparent value as "property that reproduced without cost" that has allowed her to enjoy "the benefit of a pastoral life" at Sweet Home (B 228).

Her decision to flee Sweet Home stems from the increasing humiliation she suffers at the hands of schoolteacher and his nephews. Another important factor is also the welfare of her children. "This is the impetus for Sethe," says Samuels (101). Separated from her children for the first time, especially from her baby girl, Sethe struggles to reach Cincinnati at any cost. She explains the urgency:

All I knew was I had to get my milk to my baby girl. Nobody was going to nurse her like me. Nobody was going to get it to her fast enough, or take it away when she had enough and didn't know it. Nobody knew that she couldn't pass air if you held her up on your shoulder, only if she was lying on my knees. Nobody knew that but me and nobody had her milk but me. (B 16)
But schoolteacher and his nephews track down Sethe. They not only beat her up but also forcibly take away her milk. She is pinned down by one of the boys while the other suckles from her. This act, "like no other experience during her enslavement, haunts Sethe" (Mock 122). Sethe recalls this incident repeatedly during the course of her conversation with Paul D. This shows how much this incident has affected her "physically and psychologically" (122). Paul D does sympathise with her but he can focus only "upon the physical beating" Sethe receives at the hands of the two men (122). But for Sethe, stealing her milk is "the ultimate violation" (122). She insists on drawing Paul D back to the horror she experiences "as a woman and a mother in a violation worse than genital rape" (122). Her anxiety rises as she attempts to make him understand her pain and suffering.

"After I left you, those boys came in there and took my milk. That's what they came in there for. Held me down and took it. I told Mrs. Garner on em...Them boys found out I told on em. Schoolteacher made one open on my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still."

"They used cowhide on you?"

"And they took my milk."

"They beat you and you was pregnant?"

"And they took my milk!" (B 16-17).

The theft of Sethe's milk is a much greater crime than the horrific violation committed upon her body. The taking of Sethe's milk is another form of dehumanization, continuing the motif of the majority treating the minority as property or more specifically life stock.

From the perspective of the schoolteacher and the two boys, beating Sethe is a way to prove they are right. They beat her to cause physical pain; something that Sethe would not be able to forget soon. They leave
permanent scars on her back which will follow her wherever she goes. They leave marks to remind her that they have dismissed her freedom. As Desai rightly points out: "Language, the power to express the Self, is a commodity denied to the slave..." (8). Sethe refers to the mark on her back as a tree because this is what the poor white girl Amy tells her. "It's a tree, Lu. A chokecherry tree. See, here's the trunk- it's red and split wide open, full of sap, and this here's the parting for the branches. Leaves, too, look like, and dern if these ain't blossoms. Tiny little cherry blossoms, just as white. Your back got a whole tree on it. In bloom" (B 79).

Samuels says that by "casting Sethe in the role of nurturer, Morrison returns once again to the now-familiar image of the great mother as embodiment of the feminine principle. Like Eva and Pilate, Sethe is interested in protecting her family, providing sustenance and life" (102). Since Sethe had been nursed by her mother only for a few weeks as a child, "she was emotionally starved of a significant nurturing relationship, of which the nursing milk is symbolic" (Schapiro 198). What is interesting to see is that Morrison juxtaposes the "nurturing and nursing figure" to that of the "concomitant image" of the terrible mother (105). Like Eva who murders her son Plum in order to save his life, Sethe also kills her daughter to save her from the clutches of the schoolteacher. When the brutal overseer comes to reclaim Sethe and her children under the Fugitive Slave law, Sethe sees death as the only alternative that would provide freedom for her children. "I couldn't let all that go back to where it was, and I couldn't let her nor any of em live under schoolteacher" (B 163).

Though her original intention is to kill all her children, she finally manages to slit only Beloved's throat. Samuels points out: "Like the behavior of nesting birds, Sethe's action seems almost instinctive" (105). She could only think of her children's safety. Desperate to protect all of
them at any cost, Sethe takes the extreme measure because "time could not be wasted when immediate actions were required" (105).

And if she thought anything, it was No. No. Nono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where they would be safe. (R 163)

Unlike Pauline Breedlove who hardly cares for her little girl, Sethe is a model mother. She will go to any lengths to ensure the safety and well being of her children, even if it means prostituting herself. Her confessions to Paul D trigger a painful memory. In order to get the engraver to make a tombstone for her dear daughter, Sethe sells her body to him for ten minutes. After eighteen years (while talking to Paul D), she wonders if another ten minutes of pleasure would have got her 'dearly' added to her daughter's name.

Ten minutes, he said. You got ten minutes I'll do it for free.

Ten minutes for seven letters. With another ten could she have gotten "Dearly" too? She had not thought to ask him and it bothered her still that it might have been possible- that for twenty minutes, a half hour, say, she could have had the whole thing, every word she heard the preacher say at the funeral (and all there was to say, surely) engraved on her baby's headstone: Dearly Beloved. (5)

When Paul D accuses Sethe's love of being "too thick" (202) like her milk, Sethe is quick to defend herself. "Too thick?'...Love is or it ain't. Thin love ain't love at all! " (164). In his article "Spitting Out the Seed: Ownership of Mother, Child, Breasts, Milk, and Voice in Toni Morrison's Beloved," Mock agrees to Sethe's remark: "Colostrum, thin, bluish love can sustain for a few days, but no longer. It is milk, thick love
which feeds, nourishes, sustains, and survives" (124). Aware of the inherent power in the milk, Sethe manages to transfer this legacy to her surviving daughter Denver.

Till the end of the novel, Sethe is seen struggling for autonomy. She is constantly tortured with "the thoughts of the theft, the 'taking' of her milk" (124). The incident has imprinted in her mind so clearly that she lives the nightmare everyday of her life. "I am full God damn it of two boys with mossy teeth, one sucking my breast and the other holding me down, their book reading teacher watching and writing it up" (B 70). She chokes at the very thought of her rape, yet she is unable to voice her grievances for the fear of further enslavement. When Paul D repeatedly accuses her of committing a grave crime, Sethe does not retaliate or justify her actions but rationalizes with him. Like Eva (Sula), who rejects the "restrictions and condemnation" aimed at her by Hannah for killing her son Plum, Sethe too shows no interest in what Paul D tells her (Samuels 108).

"Yeah. It didn't work, did it? Did it work?" he asked.

"It worked," she said.

"How? Your boys gone you don't know where. One girl dead, the other won't leave the yard. How did it work?"

"They ain't at Sweet Home. Schoolteacher ain't got em."

"Maybe there's worse."

"It ain't my job to know what's worse. It's my job to know what is and to keep them away from what I know is terrible. I did that."

"What you did was wrong, Sethe." (B 164-165).

What is commendable is the fact that, rather than passively witnessing her children being taken away from her, Sethe finds a way to thwart the schemes of the schoolteacher and his nephews. She confesses: "I wouldn't draw breath without my children" (203). Having lost her mother
at a tender age, Sethe becomes very protective of her children, which ultimately culminates in the murder of her own daughter. Paul D, the voice of patriarchy condemns her by stating "You got two feet Sethe, not four" (165). But Sethe confidently replies: "It's my job to know what is and keep them away from what I know is terrible. I did that" (165).

Sethe is no ordinary woman. When faced with the situation of caring for her daughter Denver with no means, Sethe does not break down. She struggles to find ways to feed Denver. "I pick up a little extra from the restaurant ... " she tells Paul D (67). Paul D's comforting words gives her a sense of being wanted, unlike her husband Halle, whom she believes deserted her at the time of need. She considers him dead because he failed to protect her milk. A husband who fails to protect his wife is no husband at all, according to Sethe.

"I know every bit of that, Sethe...I never mistreated a woman in my life."

"That makes one in the world," Sethe answered.

"Not two?"

"What Halle ever do to you? Halle stood by you. He never left you."

"What'd he leave then if not me?"

"I don't know, but it wasn't you. That's a fact."

"Then he did worse; he left his children."

..."He wasn't there. He wasn't where he said he would be."

"He was there."

"Then why didn't he show himself? Why did I have to pack my babies off and stay behind to look for him?"

"He couldn't get out the loft."
"He saw?"
"He saw."
...
"He saw?"...
...
"He saw them boys do that to me and let them keep on breathing air? He saw? He saw? He saw?"
...
"If he is alive, and saw that, he won't step foot in my door. Not Halle." (68-69)

No amount of consolation pacifies her. Even when Paul D tells her the reason for Halle's disappearance, she refuses to accept his behaviour. She refuses to accept the truth that Halle was mentally if not physically shattered into fragments by the act of brutality towards her.

Through Sethe, Morrison "challenges the concept of a traditional husband; she consciously questions the ideological code of married life and investigates the sensibilities of her protagonist against the rigid interpretations of marital codes" (Adhikari 25). For twenty-eight days, after the harrowing experience of escape, Sethe "remains fragmented" but she gradually begins to mend thereafter (25).

At 124, Bluestone Road, Sethe finds "a sanctuary" established by her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs (Samuels 116). After sixty years of enslavement, her son Halle frees Baby Suggs. She spends her newfound freedom by advising people of her community to lay down their burdens and begin to love themselves once again. Like Sethe she is also a victim of slavery. She has silently borne all the humiliation for sixty years without raising her voice. She confesses that during her stay in Sweet Home, "nobody, nobody knocked her down" even once (3 139). But Sethe's humiliation is of a different nature. The outcome is disastrous.
Her greatest setback is when she is forced to kill her own daughter. She is imprisoned for her crime no doubt. That does not deter Sethe in any way. But it breaks Baby Suggs. She abandons all hope of life and resigns herself to death. But on the other hand, upon her release, Sethe is "not broken but emerges as a determined woman" without a trace of guilt (Adhikari 25).

Thus, Morrison seems to emphasize the idea that women need to reorganize their lives in order "to develop and promote new systems, new attitudes towards the 'woman's question' " (27). In the light of the above statement "Sethe is no longer enslaved" (Mock 125). She and her voice survive as legacy. But Baby Suggs's fails.