CHAPTER ONE

Black Feminism

1.1. Introduction

The approach of this thesis is a comparative method applied at two levels. On one hand, the study explores and analyzes Toni Morrison’s and Gloria Naylor’s novels, in terms of the way the writings of women of colour differ from and at times strike back at white feminism. On the other hand, the research compares the two women novelists to show the variation of black feminism as characterized by the two novelists who respond differently to their common sexist and racist context. Out of this comparative approach, the argument of the thesis is an analytical reading of the divergences of black female writers from their white counterparts as well as the differences within the narrativized feminism among black writers themselves.

Toni Morrison is a literary giant of the 1980s and 1990s and over all famous for being both a woman and an Afro-American. In her works, she has explored the experience and roles of black women in a racist and male dominated society. In the centre of her complex and multilayered narratives, there is unique cultural inheritance of Afro-Americans. Her works also show the influence of Afro-American folklore, songs and women’s gossip. In her attempts to map these oral art forms onto literary modes of representation, Morrison has created a body of work informed by a distinctly black sensibility while drawing a reading audience from across racial boundaries. “Tell us what it is to be a woman so that we may know what it is to be a man. What moves at the margin [?] What it is to have no home in this place. To be set adrift from the one you knew. What it is to live at the edge of towns that cannot bear your company” (Nobel
Lecture, 7 Dec. 1993). Indeed, in her Nobel Lecture, delivered in Stockholm, she eloquently demonstrated the visionary force and poetic import of her novels reflect her worldview and understanding of how language shapes human reality. Through her own use of the spoken and written word, she has created new spaces for readers, to bring their imagination and their intellect to the complex, cultural, political, social and historical issues of our time. Moreover, through her work as an editor and novelist, she has made it possible for the texts of both Afro-American and feminist writers to reshape the contours of what we call American literature.

Morrison’s novels are characterized by carefully crafted prose in which ordinary words are placed in relief, so as to produce lyrical phrases and to elicit sharp emotional responses from her readers. Her extraordinary, mythic characters are driven by their own moral visions to struggle, in order to understand truths which are larger than those held by the individual self. Her themes are broad: good and evil, love and hate, friendship, beauty and ugliness, and death.

Toni Morrison’s novels reflect her desire to draw on the people, places, language, values, cultural traditions and politics that have shaped her own life and that of Afro-American people. In doing so, she offers no solutions to the problems, nor does she simplify the complex realities of the past or present. Instead, out of respect for the cultural knowledge that black people bring to life and living, she uses the power and majesty of her imagination to address them and almost everyone is interested in her stories that have created a permanent place for her among America’s greatest writers.

Gloria Naylor’s novels emphasize the strength of women, especially Afro-American women, and the effects of racism and sexism on the lives of people. Naylor’s important contributions to Afro-American literature include her expansion of narrative technique and
privileging of the supernatural—both approaches similar to those used by Toni Morrison. Her interrelated fictive terrain also resonates with the Yoknapatawpha County of William Faulkner, whose narrative style she has cited as an influence, especially in *Mama Day*. Naylor’s most lasting contribution to literature may well be her vivid portraits of fascinating and fantastic characters.

Fortunately, a creative writing class introduced Gloria Naylor to Toni Morrison. It was an inspirational discovery. Although, Naylor considered herself a poet then, Morrison became a model for rendering one’s own reality and for crafting beautiful language. Naylor began to attend readings conducted by Morrison to hone her own skills as a fiction writer.

*The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), Naylor’s first novel, marked her sudden and intense emergence on the American literary scene. Naylor added her voice to those few black women who write about real Afro-Americans like Paule Marshall, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker. Thus, Naylor writes about characters whose experiences and vernacular more closely resemble those of the majority of black people than those depicted by most earlier black women novelists, both of the nineteenth century and the Harlem Renaissance. Naylor continues the tradition of Zora Neale Hurston, the first Afro-American woman novelist to write without the constrictions of a “double consciousness” to create an art form that explores the richness and complexities of Afro-American life.

Critics recognized the brilliance of Naylor’s first novel, praising her rich prose, her lyrical portrayals of Afro-Americans and her illumination of the meaning of being a black woman in America. Reviews and critical essays on Naylor’s fiction have often pointed out the themes of deferred dreams of love, marriage, respectability and economic stability, while
observing the recurring messages: that poverty breeds violence, that true friendship and affection are not dependent on gender and that women in the black ghettos of America bear their burdens with grace and courage.

1.2. Life and Writing Career

1.2.1. Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison’s original name was Chloe Anthony Wofford, who was born as the second of four children to George and Ramah Wofford on February 18, 1931 in Lorain, Ohio, USA. Both her parents came from sharecropping families who had moved to the North to escape racism and to find better opportunities in the North, in the early 1900s. She grew up in a lively household and was surrounded by songs, fairy tales, ghost stories, myths, music and the language of their Afro-American heritage. A common practice in her family was storytelling; after the adults had shared their stories, the children told their own. The importance of both listening to stories and creating them contributed to Morrison’s profound love of reading. Morrison’s parents encouraged her passion for reading, learning and culture, as well as instil confidence in her own abilities and attributes as a woman. The Woffords were proud of their heritage. While Toni Morrison has led an influential life of her own, two people influenced her outlook on the world a great deal. First, her grandmother, who left her home in the South with seven children at the age of thirty, in fear of sexual violence against her maturing daughters, then, her mother, who worked embarrassing jobs in order to help Morrison go through college and graduate.

In 1949, Morrison entered Howard University to study English. Since many people couldn’t pronounce her first name correctly, she changed it to Toni, a shortened version of her middle name. She joined a repertory company, the Howard University Players, with whom she
made several tours to the South. She was exposed to the lives of the blacks there. Morrison received a BA in English in 1953 and then obtained a Master of Arts in English from Cornell University in 1955, for which she wrote a thesis on “Suicide in the Works of William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf.” After graduation, Morrison became an English instructor at Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas (from 1955-57). In 1957 she returned to Howard University as a member of the faculty (Beaulieu 2003). This was a time of civil rights movement and she met several people who were later active in the struggle.

Toni married a young Jamaican architect, Harold Morrison in 1958 and divorced him in 1964, moving with their two sons to Lorain, Ohio and then to New York where she went to work as a senior editor at Random House. She also began sending her own novel to publishers. Morrison was a member of an informal group of poets and writers at Howard University, who met to discuss their work. She went to one such meeting with a short story about a black girl who longed to have blue eyes. The story later evolved into her first novel, The Bluest Eye (1970). Pecola Breedlove, the central character, believes everything would be all right if only she had beautiful blue eyes. The narrator, Claudia MacTeer, tries to understand the destruction of Pecola. In 2000 it was chosen as a selection for Oprah’s Book Club. In 1973 Morrison’s second novel Sula was published; the novel depicted two black women friends and their community of Medallion, Ohio. It follows the lives of Sula, a free spirit, who is considered a threat against the community and her cherished friend, Nel, from their childhood to maturity and to death. This novel focuses mainly on the struggles of womanhood as faced by Afro-American women within their own communities and white communities as well. This novel was nominated for the National Book Award. From 1976-1977, Morrison was a visiting lecturer at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. Her third novel, Song of Solomon (1977), brought her national
attention. The book was a main selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club. This time she focused on strong black male characters. Written from a male point of view, the story dealt with Milkman Dead’s efforts to recover his “ancient properties,” a cache of gold. Morrison’s insight into the male world came from watching her sons. It won both the National Book Critics Circle Award and the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award. At its 1979 commencement ceremonies, Barnard College awarded her its highest honour, the Barnard Medal of Distinction. In 1981 she published her fourth novel, *Tar Baby*, where she explored the interaction between black and white societies. The same year Morrison became a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Morrison was named the Albert Schweitzer Professor of Humanities at the State University of New York in Albany in 1984. While living in Albany, she started writing her first play, *Dreaming Emmett*. It was based on a true story of a black teenager, Emmett Till, killed by racist whites in 1955 after being accused of whistling at a white woman. The play premiered January 4, 1986 at the Marketplace Theatre in Albany. Morrison’s next novel, *Beloved* (1987), was influenced by a published story about a slave, Margaret Garner, who in 1851 escaped with her children to Ohio from her master in Kentucky. When she was about to be re-captured, she tried to kill her children rather than return them to a life of slavery. Only one of her children died and Margaret was imprisoned for her deed. She refused to show remorse. The protagonist of *Beloved*, Sethe, tries to kill her children but is successful only in murdering the unnamed infant, “Beloved.” The name is written on the child’s tombstone, Sethe did not have enough money to pay for the text of “Dearly Beloved.” Sethe’s house, where she lives with her teenage daughter, Denver, is haunted by the dead baby daughter. Paul D., whom Sethe knew in slavery, comes to visit her and manages to drive the ghost out for a while. “For a used-to-be slave woman to love
anything that much, was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love.
The best thing, he knew, was to love just a little bit; everything, just a little bit, . . . maybe you’d have a little love left over for the next one” (Beloved 54). Time passes and Paul D. is seduced by Beloved, who becomes more violent. Denver leaves the house. Sethe is found at the farm, with the naked body of pregnant Beloved. The spell breaks and Beloved disappears. Paul D. returns to take care of Sethe. In 1988 Morrison’s novel Beloved became a critical success. When the novel failed to win the National Book Award as well as the National Book Critics Circle Award, a number of writers protested the omission. Shortly afterward, it won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. In May 2006, The New York Times Book Review named Beloved the best American novel published in the previous twenty five years.

In 1988, Toni Morrison was named Robert F. Goheen Professor in the Council of Humanities at Princeton University. She became the first black woman writer to hold a named chair at an Ivy League University. She taught creative writing and also took part in the Afro-American studies, American studies and Women’s studies programs. While giving a lecture at Princeton, Morrison was asked by a student “who she wrote for.” She swiftly replied that she wanted to write for people like her, which is to say black people, curious people and demanding people—people who can’t be faked, people who don’t need to be patronized, people who have very, very high criteria. She also started her next novel, Jazz, about life in the 1920’s. The book was published in 1992. In Jazz, Joe, the unfaithful husband of Violet kills Dorcas in a fit of passion. The fragmented narrative follows the causes and consequences of the murder. The sounds in Jazz—a ticking clock or a hand tapping a leg—tied the novel to jazz music and remind readers that while Morrison acknowledged her foremothers, as well as white writers such as Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner, she was also engaged in constant dialogue with her male
counterparts, Ralph Ellison, Albert Murray and others. The narrative’s point of view and characterization in *Jazz* work together, so that multiple voices, past and present, tell their individual as well as collective histories and the city itself becomes a character, as the porch does in Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In 1993 Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. She was the eighth woman and the first black woman to win it.

Shortly afterwards, a fire destroyed Rockland County, Morrison’s New York home. In 1998, Morrison published her next novel, *Paradise*, which takes place in an all-black town called Ruby and describes a violent attack that a group of men make on a small, all-female community at the edge of town. “The book coalesced around the idea of where paradise is, who belongs in it,” Morrison said in an interview *The New York Times* (8 January 1998). “All paradises are described as male enclaves, while the interloper is a woman, defenceless and threatening. When we get ourselves together and get powerful is, when we are assaulted.”

After 1999, Toni Morrison also published a number of children’s books with her son, Slade Morrison who works as a painter and musician and from 1992, lyrics for music by Andre Previn and Richard Danielpour. *The Big Box* was published in 2002. In this book, Morrison does say that parents should not be strict with their children, but rather that parents should let their children explore sometimes because that is the one way to learn. In 2003 she published *Love*, describing life and love during the 1940s and 1950s on a black seaside resort. It portrays Bill Cosey, a charismatic hotel owner, dead for many years but not forgotten, and two women, his widow and his granddaughter, who live in his mansion. Morrison continued to revise the notion of utopia as articulated by Sir Thomas More, the sixteenth-century Catholic martyr and by subsequent American writers. *Paradise* and *Love* show that Morrison remains attentive to the
past, which she believes is infinite, without losing sight of the living, existing communities with which her literature is ultimately concerned.


Although her novels typically concentrate on black women, Morrison does not identify her works as feminist. She has stated that she thinks “it’s off-putting to some readers, who may feel that I’m involved in writing some kind of feminist tract. I don’t subscribe to patriarchy and I don’t think it should be substituted with matriarchy. I think it’s a question of equitable access and opening doors to all sorts of things” (qtd. in Jaffrey).

Morrison feels deeply the losses which Afro-Americans experienced in their migration from the rural South to the urban North, from 1930 to 1950. They lost their sense of community, their connection to their past and their culture. To have roots is to have a shared history. The
individual who does not belong to any community is generally lost. The lack of roots and the
disconnection from the community and the past, cause individuals to become alienated; often her
characters struggle unsuccessfully to identify, let alone fulfil an essential self. Morrison believes
that the presence of the ancestors is one of the characteristics of black writing. Ancestors are
necessary for they provide cultural information, connection with the past, they protect and
instruct.

In her novels, Morrison focuses on the experience of black Americans, particularly
emphasizing black women’s experience in an unjust society and the search for cultural identity.
She uses fantasy and mythic elements along with realistic depiction of racial, gender and class
conflict. Her family talked about their dreams in the same way as they talked about things that
really happened and they accepted visitations as real. Morrison’s style combines these unrealistic
elements with a realistic presentation of life and characters. This has often been labelled
“Magical Realism.” Initially she objected to the label “Magical Realism,” feeling it diminished
her work or even dismissed it. Now, however, she acknowledges that it does identify the
supernatural and unrealistic elements in her writing. In The Bluest Eye the magic appears in the
failure of marigolds to bloom and the belief by some members of the community in Soaphead
Church’s powers.

1.2.2. Gloria Naylor

Born on 25 January 1950 in New York City, Gloria Naylor was the eldest child of
Alberta McAlpin Naylor and Roosevelt Naylor who migrated north to New York City shortly
before Gloria’s birth. Her passion for reading was nurtured by her mother, who remembered her
own experiences with her native Mississippi’s segregated public libraries. Unable to borrow
books, Alberta Naylor had been forced to earn money to buy them, so she encouraged Gloria and her two sisters, Fanny Bernice and Carolyn, to visit the libraries in New York once they were old enough to write their names on their library cards. Reading became a refuge for the shy Naylor, who seldom spoke. Naylor graduated from high school in 1968 during a time of great social upheaval in the United States. The Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. had been assassinated on 4 April in Memphis, Tennessee, that same year and she found herself searching for ways to use her own life to better the conditions of the world. Naylor travelled as a missionary for the Jehovah’s Witnesses in New York, North Carolina, and Florida. She returned to New York after seven years.

After studying nursing at Medgar Evers College, she transferred to Brooklyn College to major in English. In 1980 she entered into a short-lived marriage. It is important to note that she still had never read a novel by a black woman at this time. While she was still an undergraduate student, Naylor began to write about the many black communities to which her parents’ stories and her own travels had brought her. She was conceived in the Deep South in Robinsonville, Mississippi, where her parents laboured as sharecroppers and she considered her writer’s heart to have been conceived there also, given how deeply she was influenced by the region’s language and culture. Deeply influenced by Morrison’s novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Naylor made her own foray into fiction writing in 1979 when she submitted her first short story, “A Life on Beekman Place,” to *Essence* magazine. Encouraged by the magazine, Naylor received a publishing contract for her first novel *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982). She won the American Book Award for Best First Novel, as well as the Distinguished Writer Award from the Mid-Atlantic Writers Association for this novel. In 1983 Naylor received a master’s degree from Yale University in African American Studies, where her second novel, *Linden Hills* (1985),
became her master’s thesis. In addition, she became a writer-in-residence at Cummington Community of the Arts and a visiting lecturer at George Washington University.

Naylor has received numerous awards since the publication of her first novel, including a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship (1985), the Candace Award from the National Coalition of One Hundred Black Women (1986), a Guggenheim fellowship (1988), the Lillian Smith Award (1989), a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship (1991), a Brooklyn College President’s Medal (1993) and the American Book Award (1999). She has served as a visiting professor, lecturer, scholar-in-residence and visiting writer at the University of Pennsylvania (1986), New York University (1986), Princeton (1986), Boston University (1987), Brandeis University (1988), Cornell University (1988) and the University of Kent in Great Britain (1992) (Fields 2006-08). In 1985 she travelled to India as a cultural exchange lecturer, and in 1993 she travelled, lectured and did research in the Seregambian region of Africa as well as in Oslo. In 1988, she published her third novel *Mama Day*. Naylor established One Way Productions, a multiethnic production company, as a vehicle for promoting positive black images in 1990. Inherent in her body of work is the value that lies in preserving and maintaining an Afro-American identity which is Afro-American culture in the face of cultural and social injustice. She reminds her readers that the black experience is as diverse as it is rich in history. It has depth and strength. Her interest in theatre was also fed by a stage reading of her fourth novel, *Bailey’s Café* (1992), at Lincoln Centre, followed by a stage production of *Bailey’s Café* in 1994 by the Hartford Stage Company. She edited the collection *Children of the Night: The Best Short Stories by Black Writers, 1967 to the Present*, in 1995. Naylor returned to Brewster in her fifth novel, 1998’s *The Men of Brewster Place*, a book she wrote for her father who, like many of her lead characters, worked hard all his life to preserve home and family amidst difficult
Naylor has published five novels, each with thematic and geographical connections to the others. In discussing these connections, many critics of Naylor tend to focus on the theological, cultural and feminist implications of her work. Her novels have been translated into more than twelve languages.

Naylor’s creative work was hailed by literary critics for the richness of her language and the depth and variety of her characters. Her themes of hope, survival and personal redemption, articulated in a series of novels and essays, won her popular acclaim. Furthermore, Naylor unflinchingly took the black community to task for its homophobia and colour bias and at times, destructive nature of black male and female relationships.

From the beginning of her work, Naylor has created a sense of place, a sense of community where people interact. According to Naylor, family and class portray her communal history as a black American. She states in an interview with Angels Carabi in 1992, “Our survival today has depended on our nurturing each other; finding resources within ourselves . . . . Community is what I know and what I feel most comfortable with.” She concentrates her attention on the black community, instead of analyzing the effects of racism on black people.

Adding further from her comments in the interview, “we are not Africans; we are Americans of African descent. Therefore, we have to root ourselves in this country and find pride in what happened here. There can be some pride in what happened in Africa, but there’s so much glorious black history here” (Carabi 1992).

The history of black women has been trivialized and misrepresented by a white (both male and female) perspective and in most of her novels Naylor seems intent upon representing, re-visioning and quite simply voicing the multiple perspectives of black women. One of these
women, Mattie Michael, has a dream about the women of Brewster Place tearing down the wall where blood was spilled after a horrific rape. By removing each brick these women are shouting out their stories and moving beyond their silences. Similarly, in Bailey’s Café, Eve’s determination as the plum drips onto the café counter is a symbolic attempt to expose and dig out a story, no matter how painful or messy it is for womanhood.

Naylor uses different spaces to tell the stories of Afro-American women. Each novel is set in a specific place and characters refer to other places in other novels (for example, Brewster Place is close to Linden Hills). This connection helps the reader establish a history, a community and a functional sense of stability in a place where a story, however unconventional, can be told and believed. Indeed, several events occur in these books the reader might be hard-pressed to call believable in the conventional sense. Bailey’s Café does not exist in a specific place; it is as if the café is omniscient, knowing where and when it is most needed. As in Mama Day, Naylor blurs the line between the real and the magic, placing a magical dock behind the real café. Naylor develops the theme of spirituality in Mama Day, which explores the composition of individual belief. The women in this novel live on a remote island called Willow Springs, where the healing powers of Miranda Day and her ancestors are fully accepted by the island’s inhabitants. Willow Springs also provides a space where these women are quite distant from any white dominant culture.

By contrast, Linden Hills shows the effects of a place where human worth seems based on an intricate comparison to and insistent separation from the white middle class. Naylor uses the structure of Dante’s Inferno to portray a middle-class community obsessed with material gain. The rules of Linden Hills are made by a man. The women here do not have names; in fact,
the most significant female character is only known as “Luther’s wife” until nearly the end of the novel. Willa Prescott Nedeed, however, finds the strength to push through invisibility, own and proclaim her name and break through the silencing of all of the Nedeed wives. Literary critics often point out Willa’s actions at the end of the novel as a way of analyzing Naylor’s feminist agenda. Naylor’s novel is not only a critique of materialism but also a feminist story of women’s unwritten history, as Willa, banished to the basement for producing a light-skinned son, garners strength from the dusty testimonies of her predecessors.

Like the novels of Louise Erdrich and William Faulkner, Gloria Naylor’s books work together to reveal multiple perspectives. Each book is a world unto itself while still connecting to and building upon the others. For instance, the people who live in Brewster Place are aware of Linden Hills; one of them, Kiswana Browne, grew up there. Willa Prescott Nedeed from *Linden Hills* is the niece of the indomitable Miranda Day (Mama Day). In *Mama Day*, George mentions Bailey’s Café and it is possible that he is the child named George who was born at the end of *Bailey’s Café*. These connections, both literal and thematic, add to the fluidity of reading the novels in progression. Perhaps it is the reappearance of remnants of other stories and perspectives that lends Naylor’s work an epic and lasting feel.

Like Morrison’s *Beloved*, Naylor’s *Mama Day* also made use of similar strategies to enable multiple perspectives but no single authoritative voice. Both the dead and the living exist—an African philosophy known as “Muntu,” meaning “Man” or “Humanity”—and communicate as though to do so is an ordinary occurrence. This treatment of the supernatural and other fantastic occurrences as commonplace was possibly influenced by Afro-American and West African folk beliefs and practices. Naylor created characters that appeared in more than one
of her interconnected novels. In *Mama Day*, George takes Cocoa to see the place where he was born, which turns out to be Bailey’s Café, the setting of the novel by the same name, published four years after *Mama Day*.

Morrison and Naylor re-tell the stories of their mothers and grandmothers, one of the primary characteristics of black women’s literature. As members of the largest non-white ethnic group in the United States, most Afro-American novelists develop their personal and national identities within and against the distinctive pattern of values, orientations of life and shared ancestral memories they acquired from and contribute to Afro-American culture.

### 1.3. Feminism

Feminist critics claim that earlier criticism has been male-dominated and must be redone to include the feminine consciousness, even if necessary, to the extent of reshaping systems of values. Some feminist critics argue that to be good, both criticism and literature itself must move beyond both sexes into an androgynous point of view. Globally, women are frequent victims of violence and oppression; they are often treated as property or as sources of pleasure for men. In many countries, rape and sexual violence are practised as displays of supremacy. Early feminists blamed men for all the restrictions of women’s role and argued that the relationship between the sexes was one-sided, controlling and oppressive. Some works that have a place in the writings of feminist critics date the 1960s the beginning of feminism and one particularly important name is from considerably earlier: Virginia Wolf [especially *A Room of One’s Own* (1929)]. However, the clear rise of the feminist critical movement begins in the early 1970s. The emphasis on the 1970s is evident in the citations provided by Annis V. Pratt in “The New Feminist Criticisms: Exploring the History of the New Space.” Recent critical works are Sydney Janet Kaplan’s
Feminine Consciousness in the Modern British Novel, Judith Fryser’s The Faces of Eve: Women in the Nineteenth Century American Novel, Ellen Moers’s Literary Women, Arlyn Diamond and Lee Edwards’s The Authority of Experience: Essays in Feminist Criticism and Elaine Showalter’s A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing. The notion that the new movement in feminist criticism will develop ultimately not a new feminine vision, but an androgynous vision may be one of the helpful correctives to come out of the movement. In its simplest form, the call for androgyny is found in comments like that of Josephine C. Donovan, when she states that a “feminine aesthetic will provide for the integration into the critical process of the experiences denoted as ‘feminine’ in our culture” (79). In this context, because her assumption is that our culture has been male-oriented, this would be a movement toward an integration of male and female aesthetic and sensibilities and consequently, an enrichment of our culture, perhaps even its salvation.

1.4. Afro-American Feminism and Literary History

The primary expressions of Black Feminism in the United States are marked by three distinct periods or waves that are directly connected to and grew out of key movements in Afro-American history: The Abolitionist Movement, which culminated with the suffragists’ securing passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, in 1919; The Modern Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, which peaked with the enforcement, during the 1970s, of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; and The Post–Civil Rights Era that helped to usher in the professionalization and institutionalization of feminisms.

First-wave feminism refers to a period of feminist activity during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century in the United States. It focused on inequalities, primarily on gaining
the right of women’s suffrage. The end of first-wave feminism is often linked with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution (1919), granting women the right to vote. This was a major victory of the movement which also included reforms in higher education, in the workplace and professions and in healthcare. Second-wave feminism refers to a period of feminist activity which began during the early 1960s and lasted through the late 1980s. The movement encouraged women to understand aspects of their own personal lives as deeply politicized and reflective of a sexist structure of power. If First-wave feminism focused upon absolute rights such as suffrage, Second-wave feminism was largely concerned with other issues of equality, such as the end to discrimination and oppression. Third-wave feminism deals with issues that seem to limit or oppress women. The roots of the Third-wave began in the mid 1980s.

Consciousness raising activism and widespread education are often the first steps that feminists take toward social change. Issues of race, class and sexuality are central to third-wave feminism. Third-wave feminists work to educate and work with women across political borders, to give them the tools and awareness to make their own decisions.

Black Feminism is the process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to realize a humanistic vision of community. Afro-American women’s experiences with work and family during slavery and after emancipation led them to develop a specific perspective on the relationships between multiple types of oppression. Black women experienced not just racism, but sexism and other forms of oppression. This struggle fostered a broader, more humanistic view of community that encouraged each person to develop his or her own individual, unique human potential. Such a community is based on notions of fairness, equality and justice for all human beings, not just for Afro-American women. Black feminism
encompasses a comprehensive, anti-sexist, anti-racist and anti-elitist perspective on social change.

The legacy of struggle, the search for voice, the interdependence of thought and action and the significance of empowerment in everyday life are core themes in Black Feminism. The legacy of struggle against racism and sexism is a common thread binding Afro-American women regardless of historical era, age, social class or sexual orientation. The struggle against racism and its resulting humanistic vision differentiates black feminism from historical expressions of white feminism in the United States. Black feminists’ central concern has been the transformation of societal relations based on race, class and gender.

The search for voice or the refusal of black women to remain silent constitutes a second core theme of black feminism. In order to exploit black women, dominant groups have developed controlling and stereotyping images by claiming that black women are inferior. Because they justify black women’s oppression, four interrelated controlling images of black women—the mammy, the matriarch, the welfare mother and the jezebel—reflect the dominant group’s interest in maintaining black women’s subordination. Challenging these stereotypes has been an essential part of the search for voice. For Afro-American women, the search for voice emerges from the struggle to reject controlling images and embrace knowledge essential to their survival.

The theme of the interdependence of thought and action stresses the connections between black women’s ideas and their actions. It is this interrelationship between thought and action that allows black women to see the connections among concrete experiences with oppression, to develop a self-defined voice concerning those experiences and to enact the resistance that entails.
Black feminism cannot challenge race, gender and class oppression without empowering black women to become pro-active. Black feminist thought sees black women’s oppression and their resistance to oppression as inextricably linked. Thus, oppression responds to human action. The very existence of black feminism suggests that black women always have a choice and the power to act, no matter how bleak a situation may appear to be. It also shows that although the empowerment of black women is important, only collective action can effectively eradicate long-standing political, social and economic inequalities.

The 1980s and 1990s saw a major growth in black feminist writers. They let their voices be heard in published works and in academia. They critiqued gender, white male supremacist patriarchy and other structures of domination. The Black Feminist Movement grew out of and in response to the Black Liberation Movement and the Women’s Movement. In an effort to meet the needs of black women who felt they were being racially oppressed in the Women’s Movement and sexually oppressed in the Black Liberation Movement, the Black Feminist Movement emerged. All too often, “black” was merely equated with black men and “woman” was equated with white women. As a result, black women were an invisible group whose existence and needs were ignored. The Feminist Movement focused on the problems faced by white women. For instance, earning the power to work outside of the home was not an accomplishment for black feminists; they had been working all along. The purpose of the movement was to develop theory which could adequately address the way race, gender and class were interconnected in their lives and to take action to stop racist, sexist and class discrimination.
1.4.1. Language and The Abolitionist Movement

Afro-American English is essentially as old as any variety of speech in North America. However, that Afro-American English is a variety of English influenced by African languages during the colonial period, rather than a language developed primarily from African languages and later influenced by American English. There is little evidence of African languages spoken during the colonial period. As a result, historical connections among African languages, Afro-American speech and mainstream American English are difficult to prove. The only thing an enslaved African could carry across the Atlantic Ocean was his culture, of which language was a significant component. The linguistic situations of slaves imported directly from Africa and those imported from the West Indies were quite different and the difference played a role in the variety and development of Afro-American speech.

Although black Americans responded to their enslavement and the denial of their humanity in a number of ways, the emergence of Afro-American literature reflects the centrality of writing to the project of seeking freedom and equality in the United States. At first, because of the European Enlightenment’s stress on writing as the most visible sign of the ability to reason, literature presented a way for Africans in America to prove their humanity and demonstrate a capacity for artistic creation and imaginative thought. Later, literature developed into a vehicle through which Afro-Americans could voice not only their rejection of slavery and institutionalized racism, but also their desire for freedom and recognition as full citizens of the United States.

The American Revolution reinforced Enlightenment ideas about the importance of written communication, reading, writing and print were increasingly seen as technologies of
power. The fact that the country had formed itself through one written document, the Declaration of Independence and negotiated the terms of its existence through another, the Constitution, caused writing and publication to become associated with legitimacy in the new nation. In this environment the ability to read and write took on special significance: it became a marker for citizenship.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, free blacks living in urban areas of the North used writing to highlight the disparity between the condition of people of African descent in the USA and the republican principles laid out in the Declaration of Independence. The writers used literature not only to call for the abolition of slavery in the United States, but also to point out the particular needs of the free black population and to voice their demands for full citizenship and equal participation in the life of the republic. In the late 1820s and throughout the 1830s free blacks crafted and distributed literature that was intended to combat charges of racial inferiority, validate their calls for social justice and alert their audience to the disparity between American ideals and racial inequality.

One impediment to studying the poetry and prose that appears in the earliest black newspapers and the abolitionist press is that much of it was published anonymously. As the unsigned broadsides and pamphlets of the Revolutionary era illustrate, recognition of individual authorship was not a priority in the early USA. Furthermore, anonymity and the use of pen names often provided a degree of protection that allowed black writers to speak their minds more freely. This was especially true for black women. Socially imposed constraints of both race and gender would have prohibited black women from engaging in public and political discussion.
1.4.2. Slave Narratives

Slave narratives are autobiographical accounts of the physical and spiritual journey from slavery to freedom. Following the prefatory material, the narratives almost always begin with the phrase, “I was born.” Then, in contrast with the conventions of white autobiography, the slave narrator emphasizes how slavery has denied him specific knowledge of his birth and parentage. The slave narrator goes on to describe the precarious and dehumanizing aspects of slavery, including scenes where slaves are brutally beaten, sold at auction and separated from family members. The antebellum slave narrative moves from south to north, from rural to urban and from slavery to freedom. During a phenomenon known as the Great Migration, hundreds of thousands of black Americans moved from an economically depressed rural South to industrial cities of the North to take advantage of the employment opportunities created by World War I.

The antebellum slave narratives are episodic in structure, melodramatic in tone and didactic in their appeal to commonly held moral values. Slave narrators appealed to the religious and secular values of their white audiences, arguing that slavery dehumanized the masters as well as degraded the slaves. They often noted that the most fervently religious masters were the most brutal. Similarly, the slave narrative appealed to the national values of liberty and equality as stated in the Declaration of Independence. The direct link between literacy and freedom is a thematic matrix that occurs in all of the major antebellum narratives as well. By the nineteenth century, it was generally illegal and was believed to be dangerous to teach a slave to read and write. In the classic slave narrative, the acquisition of literacy is the precondition for the slave’s decision to revolt against his enslavement and literacy becomes the first step toward mental as well as physical freedom.
All slave narratives shared some common characteristics that became fundamental features of slave storytelling, whether orally transmitted or written and printed. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. put it:

Literary works configure into a tradition not because of some mystical collective unconscious determined by the biology of race or gender, but because writers read other writers and based their representations of experience on models of language provided largely by other writers to whom they felt akin. It is through this mode of literary revision, amply evident in the texts themselves, in formal echoes, recast metaphors, even in parody, that a “tradition” emerges and defines itself. (qtd. in Andrews xviii)

Frederick Douglass’s Narrative is best known for the association it makes between literacy and freedom. While living in Baltimore, eight-year-old Douglass learned the basics of reading and writing from Sophia Auld. The lessons marked the beginning of the end of his life as a slave, even though they were short-lived. When Sophia’s husband and Douglass’s master, Hugh Auld, discovered what Sophia was doing he ordered her to stop, claiming that literacy would make the young Douglass unfit for slavery. The moment Hugh Auld made that command, however, Douglass became all the more determined to master reading and writing. Through years of dedicated effort Douglass, the representative self-made man, became a genius of the English language—an orator, writer and thinker known throughout the world. For Douglass, learning to read was a decisively political act; literacy was, in his words, “the pathway from slavery to freedom.” Language was important in Douglass’s autobiography because literacy was tied to eighteenth-century Enlightenment beliefs that to be fully human meant having the
capacity to read and write. Afro-Americans were denied literacy because the founding premise of and justification for slavery was that Africans were not human and, thus fit for bondage. As a result, the classic slave narratives, which appeared as early as the end of the eighteenth century, employed language as a means of refuting racist stereotypes designed to obliterate the humanity of Africans enslaved in the Americas. These narratives, of which Douglass’s 1845 Narrative is a clear example, emphasize the acquisition of language to demonstrate the humanity as well as the morality of the slave narrator. Throughout his Narrative, Douglass shows that he is a moral man suffering from the evils of others. The slave narratives confront and refute the belief that slaves were inhuman. The authenticating documents and author portraits that accompany the narratives of former slaves testify to the humanity of the authors—real people with names and histories, as opposed to nameless chattel.

It is argued that Afro-American slaves were unique in the history of world slavery because they were the only enslaved people to produce a body of writing that testified to their experiences. For many of these authors, writing narratives served a dual purpose: it was a way of publicizing the horrors they had gone through and it was also a method of proving their humanity. One of the common arguments in support of race-based slavery was that blacks were simply an inferior species, incapable of thinking and feeling in the ways whites did. Thus, slave authors were able to display their emotions and their intellects through their narratives.

According to Toni Morrison, slave narratives are both instructive and representative—characteristics that privilege memory (external, verifiable reality) over imagination (personal ruminations). Memory in the slave narrative presents the reader with the past events and facts of slavery; memory itself is rarely the subject of the slave narrative. If the former-slave-turned
writer doubted his or her remembrances of slavery, then pro-slavery advocates were likely to dismiss the narrative as a falsification rather than an authentication of the writer’s existence. Therefore, to authenticate his or her existence beyond doubt, the writer of a slave narrative had to strike an objective rhetorical stance. In terms of rhetoric, slave narratives reflect a delicate balance between outrage and controlled prose. In narrating events “as they really were,” slave authors tend to focus more on slavery, as institution and external reality, than on their particular individual life, which is internal and subjective—thus accounting for the sameness across individual slave narratives.

At the conclusion of *Beloved*, Morrison sums up her retelling of one slave family’s experience: “It was not a story to pass on.” There are certainly logical reasons why the story of slavery might never have been passed on. One, the reason Morrison suggests, was its sheer horror and trauma—those who lived through it may not have wanted to remember their experiences. The second reason is more practical, it was illegal to teach slaves to read and write, which meant that the act of putting a story on paper was generally prohibited to them. But neither of these reasons kept former slaves from passing on their stories and leaving a record about what living as a piece of property had been like. These slave narratives set the standard for the tradition of Afro-American autobiography that continues today.

1.4.3. Women’s Slavery

The development of a distinctly feminist consciousness began during the era of slavery. Slave codes defined black folks as chattel, thereby allowing the “owners” of their bodies to deny them the rights and privileges of citizenship, to physically exploit their labour and to abuse them. As legal “property,” enslaved women were constantly confronted with sexual abuse and lacked
even the limited legal recourse enjoyed by their “free” counterparts. Like their enslaved sisters, “free” women could not escape the harmful consequences of these myths, and as abolitionists, they organized simultaneously against slavery as a legal institution and racially gendered sexual oppression. The abolitionist and liberal reformer, Sojourner Truth, is rightly celebrated as the fountainhead of black feminist thinking in the nineteenth century. Slave status, she preached, denied black women motherhood, protection from exploitation and their innate feminine qualities. Truth’s biblical-based feminism, charged by her riveting personal testimony, called attention to the way slavery stranded black women on the periphery of “becoming a woman.” Although, Truth was not the only black woman of her era—others included Jarena Lee and Marie Stewart—to advocate for women’s rights through an appeal to the Bible, she was often the lonely black voice among a chorus of prominent white feminists. As a pioneering black feminist, Truth’s voice was most influential to contemporary feminists.

The other most noted black woman of the nineteenth century, Harriet Tubman, was the genuine embodiment of a revolutionary abolitionist’s black feminist spirit. Challenging the exploitative system of slavery from the inside, Tubman worked over the course of her life to free herself and many others. Called “Moses” by all who loved and respected her, Tubman’s refusal to be complacent in her own subjugation demonstrates a core feature of black feminism. As a zealous abolitionist, Tubman’s mode of action was linked to a political movement and culture that was in opposition to the violent world and racist discourses that elite southern plantation owners had created to rationalize the institution of slavery.

Slave narratives written by women occupy a special place in the long history of antebellum slave narration because female slaves suffered additional burdens based on gender.
Those qualities of beauty and femininity long honoured in all cultures became a special curse for the female slave, because these attributes often led to sexual abuse by slave owners, overseers and male slaves. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, written by the emancipated slave, Harriet A. Jacobs, and published in 1861, underscores different uses of literacy by male and female slaves. Through the pseudonym and character of Linda Brent, Jacobs’s narrative outlines the particular injustices faced by enslaved black women as well as their strategies of resistance.

Slave narratives, particularly those authored by women, are the life accounts of victims, tales of unendurable suffering and torment that alert the reader to a counterculture present in America. The slave-narrator Olaudah Equiano incorporated dramatic episodes of the mistreatment of women slaves into his work as evidence of the especially brutal treatment they had endured. He describes it thus:

> When I came into the room . . . I was very much affrighted at some things I saw and the more so as I had seen a black woman slave as I came through the house, who was cooking the dinner and the poor creature was cruelly loaded with various kinds of iron machines; she had one particularly on her head, which locked her mouth so fast that she could scarcely speak; and could not eat nor drink. I was much astonished and shocked at this contrivance, which I afterwards learned was called the iron muzzle. (764)

### 1.4.4. Afro-American Women’s Childbirth and Slavery

African gender systems emphasized the importance of motherhood and fertility to women’s social identity and family lineage. Captivity by slave traders brought African social institutions of childbirth into a collision with slavery’s alienating objectification of black
women’s reproduction. Parched, hungry, terrified and often raped by guards and sailors, some African women conceived in the midst of the forced passage from the African hinterlands across the Atlantic. Some miscarried on slave ships, while others gave birth in shackles, only to see their vulnerable infants succumb to disease and deprivation. Survivors of the Middle Passage passed on to their descendants what they knew of indigenous birth rituals and midwifery techniques as they remade black cultures and communities in the Americas. As William Andrews observes:

... [T]he slave mother, or some comparable black maternal figure, more than the female narrator herself, plays the hero’s role in most early black women’s autobiographies. The mother inspires within her daughter the hope of freedom and provides an example of a woman who will not give in to despair. Sometimes the mother furnishes material as well as moral assistance to her daughter when she strikes for freedom. (xxx)

Early in the development of America’s slave codes, seventeenth-century colonial lawmakers established a system of inherited and perpetual slavery that determined a child’s slave or free status according to the condition of the mother. All children of enslaved mothers were, thus by law also enslaved and were treated as the property of their mother’s owner. Slave birth meant wealth for the slave owner. Occasionally, an enslaved woman deliberately ended the life of her newborn rather than raise the child under slavery. Antebellum evidence for both abortion and infanticide is difficult to come by and complicated by planters who blamed slave women for miscarriages and stillbirths that may instead have been brought on by poor health and harsh
labour. Furthermore, infanticide, as Toni Morrison conveyed in her novel *Beloved*, often carried heavy spiritual and psychological costs for enslaved mothers.

**1.4.5. Suffrage Movement and Women’s Writing**

With the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment securing the right to vote for black men, a distinct woman’s suffrage movement emerged that culminated in the years 1890–1920. Black women endeavoured to pursue the right to vote at a time when white men and women alike sought to exclude them from it. This was a time when legal segregation and the theatre of violence that surrounded public lynching kept Afro-Americans under siege and in “their place.” Despite the fact that white suffragists never hesitated to discuss how the vote could seal white supremacy, black feminists pressed for alliances with them. Refusing to desert the suffrage cause, black women organized voters’ leagues and clubs. They believed that black women needed the vote even more than did their white counterparts, because it would enable them to protect their inalienable rights and improve their schools and conditions as wage labourers.

Although Afro-Americans were officially free in the period just after the Civil War known as Reconstruction, the times were not conducive to their literary efforts. Slavery had been abolished, but the place and position of the newly freed slaves and those Afro-Americans who had been free before the Civil War had not been determined. Paradoxically, the dissolution of the promises of Reconstruction marked a significant revival in the production of black literature and literary activity in the black community. At the end of the nineteenth century personal testimonies continued to be powerful tools through which to share the trials and triumphs of black life. *Up from Slavery* (1901) by Booker T. Washington is the classic example of this type of narrative.
During the Progressive Era, roughly spanning 1890 to 1920, the American woman struggled to change the definition of womanhood in profound ways. At issue was the right to vote, to wear bloomers, to be free from corseting, to work outside the home and to have a place in the world beyond the domestic sphere. By 1900 the “new woman” had emerged; these modern women were attending college, getting jobs, agitating for the right to vote, rejecting traditional domesticity, proudly asserting themselves in public and in general, becoming an integral part of American popular culture and invading its literature as well. At the end of the nineteenth century, writers such as Rebecca Harding Davis, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps and Charlotte Perkins Gilman were already writing about women seeking lives outside traditional feminine norms.

The suffrage movement and the involvement of women in surrounding political movements such as socialism and the temperance movement inspired a particular genre of writing that included both creative and political texts which examined the issues and problems facing women at the turn of the century. Through the genres of regionalism and realism, women writers concentrated on the domestic details of women’s lives in order to explore the powerful relationship between women’s development and the society that created them. In regionalism, women established a congruous and sometimes utopistic relationship with the land as their thoughts, feelings and struggles were reflected in the natural world around them. Heroines in realist novels were often set adrift in cityscapes, their fates tied to the whims of capitalism and patriarchal control. Women writers of regionalism and realism commonly used romantic and domestic plots to explicate not only women’s position in the home, but in the world at large.

Writers of realism attempted to depict life in an objective manner and created stories that often focused on the details of everyday life. Edith Wharton’s novels concentrate on upper-class
women confined by the expectations imposed on them by a materialistic and acquisitive society. In her novels *The House of Mirth* (1905), *Custom of the Country* (1913) and *The Age of Innocence* (1920), Wharton portrays wealthy New York City society and how, at the turn of the century, this society created a generation of women, indulged and sheltered, who are disconnected from the world beyond tea parties, balls and dressmakers. Wharton condemns the society for making these women ornamental and useless, while she simultaneously depicts them as sabotaging themselves through an acceptance of the definition of women as decorative objects.

1.4.6. The Harlem Renaissance Writers

Recent critical work by literary historians has revealed the extent to which the term Harlem Renaissance inaccurately describes the literary and cultural phenomenon that took place not only in the area of New York City called Harlem, but nationwide and to some extent, worldwide in the decade between 1919 and 1929. By the 1920s, hundreds of thousands of blacks, looking for better jobs and hoping for better race relations, had moved into major northern cities. New York and particularly Harlem were central to the movement. In part on the strength of newcomers who took part during the Great Migration of black people from the rural South to the urban North, Harlem in the 1920s fostered a sense of racial unity and pride. This environment inspired a new sense of confidence among Afro-American artists and gave rise to a boldly creative period in the history of Afro-American letters. Variously called the “race capital” and the black “cultural capital,” Harlem, was a place of great opportunity for blacks.

The writers of the Harlem Renaissance were determined to focus a lens on their unique experience of American life and culture. Afro-American writers’ work was charged with
different issues than those that preoccupied white writers of the same period. Afro-American writers, though they experimented with narrative form and language like white modernists, were committed to using those techniques to explore black life and black issues. Additionally, a revision of narrative forms and of language allowed black writers to capture the unique rhythms of black language and culture.

Women’s biggest contribution to the Harlem Renaissance came with fiction. Some of these writers, such as Jessie Redmon Fauset and Nella Larsen, wrote about the complexities of race and gender through the framework of the lives of everyday Afro-American women. The Great Depression and the rumblings of World War II signalled the end of modernism and of the Harlem Renaissance as cohesive literary movements. Although, modernists and the writers of the Harlem Renaissance sought to create languages and forms that delineated the modern experience, the world continued to change, necessitating new forms of literature and creating new genres of writing that reflected America’s changing relationship with the categories of race, gender, class and ethnicity.

1.5. Modernist Writers

The marketing of the American family as a perfect unit, began in the 1930s, after the heady 1920s and the beginning of the Great Depression. The promotion of family togetherness became a safety line, enabling Americans to pull through hard times. During World War II the family served as an important reminder of the perfection of American life and was set as a beacon of hope for “our boys” overseas. However, the 1950s were truly the golden age of the family. America, reborn after the scrimp and saving of World War II, was a shiny, plasticized, boomeranged and tail-finned world in which television and advertising packaged the perfect
family alongside gelatine salads and pink refrigerators. Nevertheless, as this myth of familial perfection was being constructed, it was simultaneously being destroyed by women writers who resisted the lie of domesticity and the figurehead of the perfect housewife that stood in the centre of that lie. Writers and activists such as Jo Freeman, Nancy Chodorow, Casey Hayden, Mary King and Caroline Bird all brought the issues of women’s equality to the page, signalling that women were serious about ending the construction of woman as housewife. The literature of Afro-American women reflected a resistance not necessarily to suburban domesticity, but to a culture that often ignored them.

The feminist perspective approach applied to Morrison’s and Naylor’s novels is that of Nancy Chodorow, the founder of object relations theory. Chodorow’s theory, unlike the Freudian and Lacanian feminists, socializes woman’s mothering roles; hence, it provides a space to make an inquiry into the racist and sexist environment in which Morrison’s and Naylor’s mother-figure live. The study shows the impacts of the society on the maternal roles of women. However, Chodorow’s theory is not without its own limitation. It lies in the fact that she sets woman’s maternity only in a hetero-normative angle. She ignores woman’s other relations which initially emanate from a mother-daughter relation. In other words, Chodorow’s theory overlooks woman-woman (lesbian or sisterly) relationship. This point itself contributes to the argument of the thesis regarding the differences between white and black feminism. The research posits this argument and supports it with specific references to the female figures introduced by the two novelists in their works. In addition to this theory, the thesis also takes into its cognizance the well-known theorist, Luce Irigaray’s argument on the mother-daughter relation and sisterhood among women. Irigaray believes that all women have historically been associated with the role of “mother” such that, whether or not a woman is a mother, her identity is always defined
according to that role. The need to alter the mother/daughter relationship is a constant theme in Irigaray’s work: “In our societies, the mother/daughter, daughter/mother relationship constitutes a highly explosive nucleus. Thinking it and changing it, is equivalent to shaking the foundations of the patriarchal order” (Irigaray Reader 50). Women’s social and political situation has to be addressed on a global level and that change begins in individual relationships between women. Women must fight for equal wages and against discrimination in employment and education. Irigaray’s theories are those of a European, white middle-class academician and therefore, there would emerge some inconsistencies between her feminism and that of Morrison and Naylor. Such inconsistencies help to argue on the black and white interface on the issue of feminism. This point should be well elaborated with textual analysis of the novels of the two novelists.

The first decade of the twentieth century was marked by the tumult of technological and industrial innovation. Many Americans hailed these revolutions as the push the country needed to truly come alive as a nation. However, some American artists and writers saw a dark side to this mechanical modernity. For these writers the assembly line, mechanized industrial machinery and the ability to record and play back music and human voices, project images on a screen and traverse huge distances were the result of technological innovations that had the power to permanently disconnect human beings from each other. Indeed, the era between the beginning of World War I in 1914 and the advent of World War II in 1939 has been termed the “Age of Anxiety.” The devastating repercussions of modern warfare employed during World War I left a generation of men overwhelmed with feelings of disillusionment, disappointment and uncertainty towards the world in general. Many women, in contrast, faced changes in the world with enthusiasm.
The genre of writing deemed modernism emphasized a radical redefining of literary style, syntax and subject matter. Modernists sought to unhook language from its traditional meanings and definitions and to push the form of storytelling beyond its traditionally rigid constructions. Because, this new genre demolished traditional cultural hierarchies and artistic assumptions, it allowed women to rise to the fore of literary creation. Long left out of mainstream American culture, women writers anxiously embraced newly emerging forms of poetry and fiction as a way to best capture the unique experience of being a woman in modern America. The stylistic innovations of modernism became the method through which, as the English writer Virginia Woolf expressed it, “a woman’s sentence” was contemplated. This woman’s sentence was not only created through the fresh construction of language, but also through newly discovered subjects. Modernist women wrote of lesbianism and sexual freedom while rejecting domesticity and in the process shattered all traditions in women’s writing. Modernist fiction freed the female character from operating only in this domestic sphere. No longer bound by its constraints, modernist women writers used the newly emerging literary forms to critique directly domesticity, traditional love relationships and the trap capitalism often set for the women who decided that being modern meant being a consumer. Women writing modernist fiction pushed the genre of women’s fiction beyond previously established boundaries. The change was not only in form, but also content. As women in American society were leading increasingly public lives, the size and shape of women’s worlds began to expand. Women’s writing reflected these expansions and writers captured these changes through challenging narratives and the use of inventive language.

Afro-American women at the turn of the twentieth century were also involved in writing about the world around them. Francis Harper’s novel, *Iola Leroy* (1892), delineates the Afro-
American experience through the Civil War and Reconstruction. In 1900 Pauline E. Hopkins published *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*. Though the novel’s framework is based on the traditional tropes of domestic and historical romance, Hopkins provides a startling account of bourgeois Afro-American life and offers the domestic drama, long the staple of white women writers, as a model of resistance to racism. Both of the novelists examined for their readers the condition of and the case for true Afro-American womanhood. Each argued that the site of black womanhood was at the centre of the racially conscious family. This positioning of the black female subject was a direct response to popular ideas in white America about the black woman, who was portrayed variously as the ignorant but loving mammy to her white family, as the tragic mulatto cursed by her skin colour to loveless solitude and as the sexually profligate jezebel, morally corrupt and corrupting.

Gertrude Stein states in her book, *Everybody’s Autobiography* (1937), “In the nineteenth century men were confident, the women were not.” If Stein’s observation is accurate, then it is in the twentieth century in which women gained their confidence. As the writing in the last decades of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century shows, women were no longer content to remain silent about their dissatisfaction with their roles in the world. Political tracts and realistic renderings of New York City society often covertly express women’s desires for sexual equality, social recognition and self-determinism. As America inched closer to World War I, women writers became more experimental in style and subject, thus breaking the last tie to the nineteenth century’s long-suffering “angel of the house.”

The most common response by Afro-American women to sexism in the second wave of feminism, The Women’s Liberation Movement, was to hold the individuals who engaged in it
personally accountable. In a point of departure from previous black feminists, black women at the end of the 1960s began to abandon the approach of individually and to form separate women’s organizations and meeting in “consciousness-raising” groups to address the problems of sexism.

As the twentieth century progresses, the voices of women become louder and more artistically innovative. Women of colour join the chorus, making American stories more vigorous, complex and inventive. In the twentieth century, women’s writing travels a course in which each generation of female characters progresses toward vital and independent lives, free from society’s traditional limitations. From Lily Bart’s death, hastened by her resistance to society’s marital expectations, in Edith Wharton’s *House of Mirth* (1905) to Sethe’s escape from slavery into selfhood in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), women writing fiction in the twentieth century created textual reflections of women’s positions in American culture. The search for voice and the refusal to be silenced pervade the words and actions of a range of women throughout this period. The refusal to be silenced was not confined to women in political movements. Zora Neale Hurston’s work, especially her widely read 1937 novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, aimed to give voice to black women’s thought through fiction. By placing black women’s issues in the centre of their work, other black women writers of this period—including Gwendolyn Brooks in *Maud Martha* (1953) and Lorraine Hansberry in *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959)—explored a black woman’s standpoint as something framed by both blackness and womanhood.

While the focus of many black writers at the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance was on poetry, they increasingly turned their attention to fiction in the second half of the decade. The
last few years of the 1960s and into the 1970s saw a literary market flooded with fiction by black women. The novels of the black women Writers, Nella Larsen, Claude McKay, Jessie Fauset, Wallace Thurman, Langston Hughes, George Schyler and Zora Neale Hurston addressed the limitations imposed by sexuality and class as well as race for their female protagonists. Like that of other female novelists of the time, Hurston’s daring exploration of black female selfhood opened the way for black female writers of the 1970s and 1980s to explore the tangled web of race, sex and class in which black women struggled to know themselves.

1.5.1. Black Movements in Twentieth Century

The most significant socio-cultural events to influence the Afro-American novel during and since the 1960s were the Black Power Movement, the Black Arts Movement and Women’s Rights Movements, which contributed to the successful re-emergence of black women writers. The concept of Black Power expresses the determination of peoples of Sub-Saharan African descent to define and liberate themselves. In “The Black Arts Movement,” black aesthetician Larry Neal tells us that “Black Art is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept. As such, it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America. In order to perform this task, the Black Arts Movement proposes a radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic. It proposes a separate symbolism, mythology, critique and iconology” (1). Because the concepts of Black Art and Black Power are related to the desire of Afro-Americans for self-determination, nationhood and solidarity with colonized people of the Third World, both are nationalistic. “One is concerned with the relationship between art and politics; the other with the art of politics,” says Neal (5). Consequently, he contends, the most
authentic writing of blacks during the 1960s was grounded in the lives of the black masses and “aimed at consolidating the Afro-American personality.”

The term Black Arts Movement refers to the historical period between 1960 and 1975 when Afro-American writers, artists, educators and intellectuals attempted to redefine black cultural identity in the United States by emphasizing the black aesthetic. Participants in the movement viewed the black aesthetic as a serious effort to produce literature or works of art and advance black cultural life through a system of beliefs and theories based on the political, economic, social and cultural history of blacks. A central goal of the movement was to promote the creativity of black artists to the Afro-American community while basing their interpretations of the black experience on an aesthetic observed from this same experience. The emergence of the Black Arts Movement should be seen—at least in part—as a challenge to the modern civil rights movement, as well as a challenge to white legal, social and cultural oppression. The difficulty was to reconstitute the Afro-American side of the dialectal relationship between the races through language, to have language explode into the conversation with the same impact as urban rioting.

We must acknowledge the longevity of race as an open issue in American civil discourse since the mid-1960s. “Civil Rights,” once the label for the struggle by blacks for political equality, remains in our lexicon, but now is taken as an umbrella under which the intersections of black and white civil, civic and cultural life are patrolled from both sides of the fence. Blacks and whites alike monitor the relationships between the races and make the state of the racial nation part of the ongoing national conversation. In large measure, this change came about because of the willingness of black Americans after World War II and then after Brown v. Board
of Education to confront overt racism where they found it. After 1955 black Americans were just as likely to go to jail for what they did in resistance to institutionalized racism as for who they were, which it was the more probable cause between the end of Reconstruction and WW II. By the mid-1970s, with the effective withering away of the Black Arts Movement, Afro-American literature decentred its content, away from the preoccupations of the classic Afro-American narrative that had dominated black letters since the 1830s.

The social and political upheaval of the 1960s was accompanied by a change in the black literary and cultural movement. Seeking equal treatment in the USA, the black freedom movement of the 1960s looked to redefine how black people were seen and how they saw themselves. The writers of the Black Arts Movement wished to create politically engaging expression that would match the charged atmosphere of the period. They turned to the black community for inspiration and defined their goals in broadly collective political and social terms: rather than a movement focused on intellectual exchange between the black elite, the writers of the Black Arts Movement sought to communicate with the masses. According to Addison Gayle, Jr., whose introduction to The Black Aesthetic (1972) serves as a critical and theoretical guide to the Black Arts Movement, the role of the black artist was to “provide us with images based on our own lives” (79). This new generation, represented by writers such as Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), Sonia Sanchez and Larry Neal, welcomed the fact that their work was not accepted by the mainstream. Larry Neal’s “The Black Arts Movement,” published in 1968, the year of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., served as a manifesto for these young writers. They were to look to their African ancestors as a source of inspiration, eschew white, middle-class values, create new themes and shape new forms.
1.5.2. Contemporary Colour Women World

Like black men, black women made major contributions to the Black Arts Movement. Their special concerns and experiences helped to focus community attention on the issues of racism, gender discrimination and class conflict. Many were committed to overcoming the historical oppression of women and to working toward an equal status with males in society. They also emphasized the development of the entire black community: men, women and children. The body of work produced by black women during the movement not only explored the perspectives of black women in the past and present, but also examined possibilities for the future. By 1970 explicit discussions of sexuality had taken centre stage in the women’s movement and black feminists’ efforts to sculpt organizational agendas to address their concerns were too often marginalized or interpreted as divisive. Sexism in the Black Power Movement and racism in The Women’s Liberation Movement pushed black feminists to organize independently. One internal problem for the Black Arts Movement was the charge of misogyny. Some black women associated with the movement in the late 1960s argued that the insistence on “unity” within the movement led to an almost stifling uniformity as well. This was exacerbated by the connection of black cultural nationalism with black masculinity in the day-to-day interactions of the loose group of writers, as well as in their work. By the 1970s women influenced by the movement were ready to produce other versions of a black cultural resistance, although most stayed supportive of the agenda of the movement and of black men in general.

As black feminists experienced tensions with black men and white society at large, a cadre formed to found the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO). When its first conference was held in November 1973, more than 250 women attended. These women
envisioned a multipurpose organization that would address an array of issues, ranging from employment and childcare concerns to sexuality, addiction and black women’s relations to each other and to the women’s movement. White women who attended the conference later wrote that they now saw that before they could build coalitions with black women, they would first need to prove that they were not racist. During the first wave of feminism, black suffragists struggled with the racism of white women, but the second wave required nonracist entry tickets that proved difficult for white women to produce. While white women and all men had access to the large assembly at the conference, they were not admitted into the workshops.

In turning its attention inward to the primacy of the black family and the problems of the black community, black power and black arts discourse subordinated the interests, needs and desires of black women to those of black men and of those of the individual to those of the group. The black masculinist aesthetic, sanctioned by the Black Power and Black Arts Movements, subordinated sexual politics to racial politics and privileged the cultural traditions of common black people. As a result, Afro-American women writers had to reconcile their racial double consciousness with the white middle-class feminist movement.

Facile generalizations about the parallels between the struggle of blacks and women for status ignore the complexity and distinctiveness of the history of black women, from the legacy of their African past and slave experience to their experience with industrialization and modern corporate America. As Toni Cade Bambara notes in her 1970 groundbreaking anthology, *The Black Woman*, a major question for black women of the 1960s and 1970s was how relevant the experiences, priorities, truths and discourses of white women are to the multiple consciousness of black women. Subject to all the restrictions against blacks as well as those against women, the
black woman is for many people, as black folk wisdom and Hurston reminds us, “de mule uh de world.” This means, among other things, that the reality of black womanhood is not dependent on black males first defining their manhood. Triple consciousness rather than double consciousness is frequently stressed by black feminists in their analysis of the interrelationship of race, class and sex in the identity formations of Afro-American women.

The fundamental distinguishing feature of contemporary black feminism is the self-conscious voicing of black feminist perspectives. Increasing social-class stratification among black women made more women available to think about and work on behalf of black feminist concerns. Black women graduated from high schools and colleges in record numbers and they were no longer placed exclusively in domestic service jobs. Afro-American women perceived that neither black organizations nor white feminist groups spoke fully for them. Thus, emerged the need to develop a distinctive black feminist agenda that built on the core themes long guiding black women’s actions yet simultaneously spoke to issues specific to Afro-American women.

1.6. Characteristics of the Novels of Afro-American and European American

The Afro-American novel is the product of social and cultural forces that shape the author’s attitude toward life and fuel the dialectical process between romantic and mimetic narrative impulses. In contrast to the European American novel, the Afro-American novel has its roots in the combined oral and literary traditions of Afro-American culture. Gates reminds us in *The Signifying Monkey* (1988), “the writing of black people in Western languages has, at all points, remained political, implicitly or explicitly, regardless of its intent or its subject” (63). One of the major differences about perceptions of the nature of reality, between American whites and
blacks, centred on the designation of evil in the world. While most blacks satirized the sins of slavery and whites, most whites sentimentalized the slavery of sin and blacks.

In contrast to the search for innocence and the Adamic vision that inform the European American novel, the Manichaean drama of white versus black, the apocalyptic vision of a new world order and the quest to reconcile the double consciousness of Afro-American identity are inscribed in the texts of nineteenth and twentieth century Afro-American novels. Thematically and structurally, the tradition of the Afro-American novel is dominated by the struggle for freedom from all forms of oppression and by the personal odyssey to realize the full potential of one’s complex bicultural identity as an Afro-American. This legendary and mythic journey—deriving its socio-cultural consciousness from the group experience of black Americans and its mythopoetic force from the interplay of Eurocentric and Afrocentric symbolic systems—begins in physical or psychological bondage and ends in some ambiguous forms of deliverance or vision of a new world of mutual respect and justice for all peoples. In short, insofar as there is an Afro-American canonical story, it is the quest, frequently with apocalyptic undertones, for freedom, literacy and wholeness—personal and communal—grounded in social reality and ritualized in symbolic acts of Afro-American speech, music and religion.

1.6.1. Contemporary Black Feminist Writers

The decade of the 1980s was an important time in which a growing number of black women writers and literary critics rigorously theorized about gender and black women as subjects in historical and contemporary contexts. Bell Hooks recognized the significance of black feminists such as Sojourner Truth, whose personal testimonies “validated” the need for a movement. Yet, Hooks encouraged black women to develop a theoretical framework to evaluate
strategies and to challenge and change structures of domination. Many noted black women poets and fiction writers—such as Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor, Toni Cade Bambara, June Jordan and Audre Lorde—were political activists in “the movement” and participated in consciousness-raising liberation groups. Sketching out new ways of thinking about capitalism, sexism, identity formation and black cultures, their work has transformed the “individual” and has given black women multiple voices of inspiration as well as multiple visions of how things ought to be. In essence, black feminists have overcome the academic binary of theory and practice by making use of all the methods—speeches, songs, written text and activism—previously employed by black women to re-read and re-interpret the intellectual, social, political, economic, legal and emotional worlds of black people. With their unique perspectives on the intersection of race, sexuality and class within particular historical moments, the varieties of black feminism attest to the many ways black women have found to take a stand against sexism while remaining in critical solidarity with other political discourses. In Black Women Writers at Work (1983), Bambara told the editor Claudia Tate:

> What has changed about the women’s movement is the way we perceive it, the way black women define the term, the phenomena and our participation in it. . . . We are more inclined to trust our own traditions, whatever name we gave and now give those impulses, those groups, those agendas and are less inclined to think we have to sound like, build like, non-colored groups that identify themselves as feminist or as women’s rights groups or so it seems to me. (57)

This statement not only reveals the heart of the differences that many black women have about the priorities and objectives of the white women’s rights movement, but it also explains in
part why Alice Walker adapted the term *Womanist* from black folk expression to signify a black feminist or feminist of colour, a woman who, among other things, is audaciously committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. More to the point of readings of contemporary Afro-American novels by black women, the above comments provide the necessary context for a better understanding of why black women are primarily concerned with how racism, sexism and class conflict have influenced the nature and function of love, power, autonomy, creativity, manhood and womanhood in the black family and community.

Close identification of “blackness” with masculinity angered some black women writers such that they sought to stake out a literary territory in which issues of gender could be examined. Unlike the “race women” writers of the early twentieth century whose literary job, as they saw it, was to defend the honour of black women and the lives of black men, Afro-American women writers entering the final quarter of the century wanted to redefine black womanhood and had little patience with men, black or white, who got in their way. These women were not “feminists” in the same way white women of the same generation were using the term in its “second” wave, nor did they lose sight of the centrality of race in their construction of a gendered reality.

As illustrated in their fiction, interviews in *Black Women Writers at Work* and the pioneer essays on *Black Feminist Criticism* by Barbara Smith and Deborah E. McDowell, many black women novelists deploy to a greater or lesser degree the following signs and structures: motifs of interlocking racist, sexist and class oppression, black female protagonists, spiritual journey from victimization to the realization of personal autonomy or creativity, centrality of female bonding or networking, shared focus on personal relationships in the family and community, deeper, more
detailed exploration and validation of the epistemological power of the emotions, iconography of women’s clothing, and black female language. While agreeing with Smith that feminist criticism is “a valid and necessary cultural and political enterprise” (46), McDowell questions the imprecision of the current definition of lesbianism by black feminists, the possible reductiveness of a lesbian aesthetic. McDowell advocates that black feminist critics combine a contextual approach with rigorous textual analysis, including a concern for the issue of gender-specific uses of language.

As contemporary Afro-American novelists attempt to displace personal ambivalence and social absurdity with a new order of thinking, feeling and sharing based on self-determination, community, human rights, most, such as John Oliver Killens, John A. Williams, Paule Marshall, Gloria Naylor, Terry McMillan and Pulitzer Prize winner Alice Walker, continue the tradition of social and critical realism.

Ann Shockley’s imaginative reconstruction of a transracial affair between women in Loving Her (1970) was probably the first contemporary black American lesbian novel. Alice Walker’s The Color Purple (1982), however, is the most celebrated Afro-American novel in which a lesbian relationship is central to the development of the narrative. Walker provides a contemporary black womanist’s vision of the lives of black Southerners in her novels: The Third Life of Grange Copeland (1970), Meridian (1976) and The Temple of My Familiar (1989). The best of Walker’s novels is The Color Purple. Less compelling as critical realism than as folk romance, it is more concerned with the politics of sex than the politics of class and race.

Since the publication of Go Tell It on the Mountain (1953), a subtle treatment of black homosexuality and spiritual redemption and the sensitive, sympathetic examination of white gay
relationships in *Giovanni’s Room* (1956), James Baldwin has been and remains the outstanding black gay novelist not only in modern and contemporary Afro-American, but also, for many readers, in Western literature. In black science fiction Samuel R. Delany and Octavia Estelle Butler are the major novelists.

Thematically and structurally, therefore, from Brown and Wilson to Reed, Morrison, Delany and Butler, the dual tradition of Afro-American fiction is dominated by the dialectical tension between oral and literary traditions, by the struggle for freedom from all forms of oppression and by the personal odyssey to realize the full potential of one’s complex biracial and bicultural identity as an Afro-American.

The authors of this period have celebrated the multiplicity and complexity of Afro-American identities. Crucial to this effort has been the recovery work being done by historians and social scientists as well as creative and critical writers. The experience of slavery has been of particular interest to today’s black writers and it has been used as a means of better understanding the present. Notable examples of literature that draw on the slave’s experience include *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971) by Ernest Gaines, *Corregidora* (1975) by Gayl Jones, *Oxherding Tale* (1982) and *Middle Passage* (1990) by Charles R. Johnson, *Song of Solomon* (1977) and *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison, *Dessa Rose* (1986) by Sherley Anne Williams and *Mama Day* (1988) by Gloria Naylor.

The veritable explosion of writing by Afro-American women is the most significant development in Afro-American literature since the 1970s. The relative success of three novels published in 1970—*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* by Alice Walker and *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison—identified the
existence of a market for black women writers. Mining their own experience and the experiences of their ancestors, these and other black women writers changed the direction of Afro-American literature by introducing new themes. The authors’ primary focus on the black community rather than on the relationship between blacks and whites allows them to make inquiries into the parameters of motherhood, the dynamics of class difference among blacks and the ambiguous expectations of sexuality and love. Although in some respects, these women used their fiction to respond to the social and political issues, past and present, their common objective seems to have been an age-old one—representation. A major change in their fiction from that of their precursors was that black women were frequently the main characters and they usually were not white phenotypes. These women often had integrity, strength, wisdom and inner beauty—as had Pilate in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*. Early critics of Morrison’s book expressed concern that a man—Milkman Dead—was at the centre; but later critics showed evidence of Pilate’s centrality. In fact, Milkman was indebted to more than one woman for his very life and it was evident the women in his family were the ones who taught him about his past so he could be free to fly.

Issues of skin colour and standards of beauty did not disappear, but rather were revised, often with a vengeance. Morrison’s first novel *The Bluest Eye* exemplified the trend with its focus on a dysfunctional family, the Breedloves, and the daughter Pecola who wants blue eyes; indeed, she desires the bluest eyes because she needs to escape not only what she feels is her own ugliness, but also the ugliness of the world—a world in which she can be raped by her father, abandoned in favour of a white child by her mother and despised by almost everyone in her community.
Over the years, black women writers began to make their presence felt in literary genres once largely the province of men and white women. “New Directions” as a subtitle might be misleading because black women writers have always been going in new directions or else there would be no tradition to write about. But the need to be concerned about proscriptions that threaten to stifle creativity is all but a thing of the past. As their literary history shows, black women have long been writing their own lives instead of being written about, in other words, imagining themselves, as Toni Morrison has written. Fortunately, the privileging of the voices of black women continues and not to the detriment or exclusion of other voices. These are the women, black women writers have gone in search for and in the process have found their legacy in the preservation of wonderful stories. All that is left to be done is to accept the legacy and, as Toni Cade Bambara has advised, begin “passing it along in the relay.”

What is significant about the work of the cadre of black authors working in English in North America and the Caribbean today is not only its range and sheer size, but also its difference from Afro-American literature of the previous half century. For the most part literary realism and naturalism have faded in appeal to black writers and all the literary allusiveness and heightened irony and tension of modernism—plus the free mixing of genres and sensibilities of magical realism and postmodern aesthetics—carry the day. Gone, too, is the preoccupation with the law and the legal status of the black subject, along with the issue of class. Identity now is as likely to be shaped by gender or sexual preference, by personal history perhaps informed by a racialized past or by one or more addictions of the body or the mind. All of these stories, poems and dramas are played out against the backdrop of white racism and the history of a once subjugated race, but in all of them the Afro-American subject controls the interrogation of that past. Toni Morrison argued, in her groundbreaking consideration of American literary history
*Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1993), that American literature is suffused with the Afro-American presence. By the end of the century she could have noted that Afro-American literature was, in fact, triumphant. It would no longer be possible to refer to “an” American literature without meaning the literature of race and the terms for that discussion had been set by black writers over the course of two centuries.

The mode of investigation in the thesis involves the use of a theoretical posit of different prominent feminist perspectives vis-a-vis each chapter.

### 1.7. Chapterization

The thesis consists of five chapters, each of which focuses on a specific theme or concept. The first chapter, “Introduction,” discusses the literary and biographical notes on Morrison and Naylor, in relation to the feminist perspectives of other theorists. The section also discusses the methodology of the research; it employs the comparative methods to analyze the selected novels of Morrison and Naylor.

The second chapter, “Women’s Solidarity: Female Friendship,” discusses *Sula* and *The Women of Brewster Place*. The main themes focused on here are parental love, wifehood, sisterhood, prostitution, rape, healing and hurting mothers, the importance of spirituality, discovering the meaning of friendship and the creation of a dying community.

The Third Chapter, “Feminist Rendition of Identity,” focuses on the dilemma of female figures in constructing their identities in a racist and sexist society. The issue of race and its influence on women’s identity is a diverging point between women of colour and the white system of thought. It addresses the essential feminist debates of the body, which covers themes
of sex, sexuality, prostitution, gender and its (mis)presented relation with sex as a way to subordinate women. This chapter explores how Morrison and Naylor treat gendered violence in their society. Therefore, black violence can be a point of difference from white perpetration. Also the issue of rape, either by black or white men, can be referred to the conspiracy of men against women. This point reflects the fact that women in a coloured society are doubly oppressed. Accordingly, black feminism is different from white feminism which lacks the question of race. The chapter shows how Morrison and Naylor, in their different ways, respond to this tension through their characters. *The Bluest Eye* and *Bailey’s Café* are the works discussed in this chapter.

The Fourth Chapter, “Feminist Genealogy: History and Hauntology,” deals with a comparative analysis of *Beloved* and *Mama Day* in which women try to rewrite the sexist history from their own perspective. The issue of hauntology and the women’s belief in the presence of ghostly figures create a contrast between white and black feminism, when the latter is fuelled by religious (at time superstitious) beliefs. Hauntology will be well elaborated with reference to these novels. The chapter takes the ghosts in the novels as connectors between the past and the present. Therefore, through the ghosts the novelists recast the history or genealogy of the character or the family.

The Fifth Chapter, “Conclusion,” draws on the findings of the previous chapters. It points out the general similarities and differences between the two novelists. It presents the findings of the interpretation of the selected novels written by Morrison and Naylor in terms of the research topic and the related themes. The chapter will sum up the core points of the study.
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