CHAPTER-4A

# *BELOVED*

Morrison's fifth novel Beloved probes the effect of slavery on Black race, by way of what she has called "rememorize", deliberately reconstructing what has been forgotten. Beloved, a gothic neo-slave narrative and post-modern romance, speaks in many compelling voices of the historical rape of black women and of concord of sensibilities among the African-American people. The focus is, like her debut novel, again on women as an individual struggling towards freedom and selfhood.

Slavery, the most painful part of African-American heritage, is the focal point around which the novel is woven. The novel documents the destructive implication of slavery and the survival of African people and culture despite it. The dehumanization of blacks as a slave and their movement from slavery to freedom is the central theme of the novel; it represents the past, the whole unchangeable pain and loss of slavery. Historically it explores the most oppressed period of slavery in the history of African people. The novel is set after the Civil War and emancipation during the period of national history known as the reconstruction (1870-90). Much of the characters' pain occurs as they reconstruct themselves their families, and their communities, after the devastation of slavery. They cannot put slavery behind them by a simple act of will. As the novel opens, the past literally

haunts the present. Visible only by a red light, a spitefull ghost harasses the main female character, Sethe, the protagonist, and her daughter Denver. When the main male character, Paul D, expels the ghost, it returns in human form as the character Beloved. The past cannot be exorcized; it demands recognition in the present. The recognition involved in 'rememorise' requires more than work of individuals; it is a continual, communal process.

Beloved deals with the life of a female slave Sethe who kills her own daughter called Beloved, to rescue her from the ancient suffering of slavery. Sethe's is an act of mercy killing, an act performed by a mother out of concern for her own daughter and her community. This inverted story of crucification and passion carries with it seeds of a black scripture. To be black in a world governed by racism and sexism is to invite the wrath of gentiles against a Jesus like figure. The Christian imagery powerfully endorses the predicament of black women in a violent society. All the same, it upholds the triumph of meekness over savage might. In all her earlier novels before it, Morrison demonstrates her keen awareness, concern and dedication to African people in America. As **Mbalia** expresses, it is a almost:

> ***"like a scientist, she uses each work as a laboratory in which to research a hypothesis as to the nature of oppression experienced by African people and to posit a solution 'to it"***[1]

Morrison, proposes in Beloved collective class-struggle against capitalism as the only viable solution possible for the African people in the white dominated American society.

Beloved is Morrison's product of invention. though it is based on a factual story. It shows the historical truth that collective struggle is the only practical solution for African people. The novel is based on a newspaper clipping about a fugitive slave in Ohio who killed her own infant rather than sees her return to bondage in the South. Morrison gets the kernel of her novel from the news article entitled ***"A visit to the slave mother who killed her child".*** It grew out of one of her Random House projects, ***The Black Book (1974)*** a "scrap book" of three hundred years of the ***"folk journey of Black America".*** She places the new clipping in the Black Book which chronicles the life of African people in the United States from slavery through the Civil Rights Movement; the factual story is about a Margaret Garner, fugitive slave from Kentucky:

> **"*I found her with an infant in her arms only a few months old, and observed that it has a large bunch on its forehead. I inquired the cause of injury; she then proceeded to give a detailed account of her attempt to kill her children. She said, that when the officers and slave hunters came to the house in which they were concealed, she caught a shovel and struck two of her children on the head, and then took a knife and cut the throat of the third, and tried to kill the other,…….. That if they had given her time, she***

***would have killed them all…… that with regard to herself, she cared but little, but she was unwilling to have her children suffer as she had done".***[2]

Morrison expands, refines, and shapes this news clip into a "product of invention". Though Beloved in general is about slavery, it is***:***

***"not a call for the abolition of slavery as it is a story narrated to a twentieth century audience"*** [3].

It is mainly a story of a :

***"black female slave who develops awareness about her own sub-human status on the sweet home plantation which ultimately awakens and forces her to develop a quest for meaning and wholeness in slavery and in freedom."***[4]

It records the cruelty, violence, and degradation which make a female slave, Sethe, understand her situation and awaken her from a deep slumber.

Besides continuing with the themes that figure within the earlier themes in her novels, it enlarges the scope of its investigation by exploring each, depicts a group attempt to escape from slavery. Although several people die, Paul D, Sethe, and Sethe's children find their separate ways to freedom. Beloved joins one of the oldest written African-American literary traditions. The slave narrative dealing with slavery, emancipation, and reconstruction, the novel begins what Morrison has planned as a trilogy exploring the African-American history and culture.

Morrison's next novel, Jazz probes the early twentieth century, the historical era immediately following that of Beloved. The title of third novel in the trilogy, Paradise, suggests the scope of Morrison's project by recalling the work of fourteenth-century Italian poet, Dante. In the three volumes of his Divine Comedy, Dante recounts his spiritual journey through hell, purgatory and paradise. Dante's trilogy works on many details of his own time and place. By evoking Dante, Morrison signals that her trilogy will consider such heroic themes in the specific context of African-American experience.

Beloved is a beautiful narrative about the survival of the heritage of slavery on the power of 'rememorize' and the collective memories kept alive through oral tradition. It is also the story of the genesis of a culture and of a people who, living on the edge of life and death, have managed to create that culture and kept their history alive. Morrison's self-conscious interest in the celebration of black women's strength, their values, and beliefs stems from a desire to correct the wrongs that have been historically leveled against black women. She seeks to celebrate the legends of black women like Baby Suggs and Sethe, and weave their dreams into myths that allow us to recover their past. Just as visual space is employed in architecture, so in Beloved Morrison tries to create space for her black protagonist, Sethe through an application of sophisticated techniques such as "rememorize" flashbacks, dramatic voice in narration, stream of consciousness, oral tradition, and magic form of realism, which ***"extend, fill in and complement"[5],*** the matrix of slave autobiographical narratives. In the novel, feminine and historical concerns combine to produce a ***"genuine Black…….book"[6].*** As Morrison calls herself.

She tries to make of Sethe's story "a personal experience" by choosing to narrate the real life and actual experiences of a runaway slave woman, Morrison proves the power of art in demolishing stereotypes, Beloved strikes a different and perplexing note because it deliberately avoids a chronological development of the narrative and linear structure, Beloved's mother, Sethe, is caught in the ambiguities of quest that presents itself as a succession of rememorise. Each recorded incident, act or word further unfolds her story. Sethe's story is presented piece by piece through the act of rememorize, a pattern of revelation of her past, of recognition of the history.

Morrison dedicates the novel to those "anonymous" people whose unwritten life-histories remain buried, unnoticed, unrecognized, and uncared for. She dedicates the novel to ***"sixty million and more"*** of slaves those who lost their lives either in ***"The Middle Passage"*** or during slavery, those who were either ***"unburied or unceremoniously buried".*** Morrison feels that though their histories remain unwritten, no one can deny that their experiences were real and their struggle for freedom was heroic. Hence she undertakes the exhumation of the fragments of these *"unceremoniously buried slaves"* and goes about ***"properly artistically burying them" (p.389)***[7] Morrison's act of rememory gives the dead the opportunity to live again before they got the decent burial they deserved. ***"This burial purpose, it would appear, is to bring them back into living life." (p.56)*** thus Beloved naturally becomes a different kind of slave narrative. Susan Bowers' notes:

***"The struggle of Beloved's characters to confront affects of the brutality and to recover their human dignity, their selves directed by white oppression to transform their experiences into knowledge is presented in the form of slave narrative."*** [8]

The novel is split into three parts of unequal length; with the first part subdivided into eighteen sections, the second into seven, and the third into two and an epilogue. All main parts open with a similar phrase, which draws attention to a progression in the state of events portrayed.

In the beginning, Sethe's home is rocked by Beloved's activities, limited at this point to poltergeist manifestations: '124 were spiteful' (p.30) In the first part we witness the arrival and departure of Paul D, Beloved's appearance in flesh and blood and the awful events in the woodshed, related through the perceptions of a variety of protagonists. Although the narrative proceeds over the course of a year, the body of the text relates the events of the past. Part two starts with the phrase: '124' was blood (p.169). The house is roaring with the voices of the oppressed, the people of the broken necks of fire-cooked blood, and black girls who had lost their ribbons'(p.181) This part contains interior monologue by Beloved, Sethe and Denver; and the later two's acceptance of Beloved's identity as daughter and sister. It ends with Paul D's impassioned questioning of Stamp Paid as to how much suffering he, as a black man, is expected to withstand.

In part three, '124 was quiet' (p.239, 242). This part chronicles Denver's release in to the world outside 124 Bluestone Road, while her mother and sister

continue their battle of love and guilt. The lack of food and exhaustion subdues Beloved, and the house is quite. Beloved disappears and Sethe takes her to bed. It closes with the possibility of a future life as Paul D returns to the house and pledges his commitment to a tomorrow' with Sethe. The shortness of the sentence, containing just noun, verb, and adjective, is significant. It imposes an order on the meandering narrative, the mixture of tenses, periods of time and first-person voices. The three key phrases underline the progression of events in the immediate present of the novel as the house evolves through various stages, acting as a symbol for a similar evolution in the lives of its inhabitants.

The time scale of the novel is anything but linear. The narrative progresses in leaps and bounds, and stories are begun and left off to be resumed again over the course of chapters. An example of this is the story of Denver's birth. It is begun by Denver in part one, section 3, resumed by Denver in section 8, but experienced through the persona of Sethe. The breaking of Sethe's waters has, however, already been alluded to earlier (p 51), and Amy's description of the tree on her back is present in chapter one of the section 1 (p.16). Halfway through part one, section I, the stories continue cataloguing Sethe's arrival at 124 Bluestone Road and Baby Suggs's patient setting to right of the damage done by the journey and the white boys. The same technique is used with the details of Sweet Home, Sethe and Halle's Marriage, Stamp Paid's life or Paul D's experiences, the escape from Sweet Home is slowly pieced together.

As far as 'Morrison's language is concerned, it can be seen in her address which she has delivered as Nobel Laureate. In her Address she relates a story of an

elderly blind woman, famed for her wisdom, which some children attempt to challenge, by presenting her with a bird. They ask her whether it is alive or dead. She answers by telling them that it is in their hands. Toni Morrison goes on to interpret this story as an analogy of a writer and the language she uses. What she says illustrates how fully she appreciates the power inherent in language both as a medium and an instrument. She acknowledges its complex properties and its capacity as a tool for and agent of oppression, but concludes by suggesting that the human capacity to do language and to make meaning may be the measure of our lives: similarly in the preface to her critical work, Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination she comments on her awareness that 'language can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive " otherning" of people and Language.' Beloved is a testimony to Toni Morrison's manipulation of language which is evident, when Paul D looks at Sethe, the word 'bad' took on another meaning (p.7). Words can have different meanings, signs can have different 'signifiers' (to use Saussures phraseology). Sethe uses the word 'nurse' to describe the way she was forced to suckle two grown men, juxtaposing the idea of protection and love with the horror of the situation. A similar in appropriable is found in the incongruous name, Sweet Home , which was neither 'sweet' nor 'home' for the slaves who lived there.

While Denver makes her link to the black community through writing (she goes to lady Jone's House, where she first learned to read, and uses this skill to decipher the notes that are left the with the food that her neighbors give her), non-written modes of communication bolster the narrative: the songs that Paul D sings

as he mends the furniture, or works in the chain-gang, Amy's mother's song, or the song that Sethe has made up to sing to her children, and which Beloved is found singing. Above all, Toni Morrison mines the rich tradition of story-telling that was so much a feature of black culture long before print existed and still is.

The substance of the novel, mediated largely via thoughts and spoken words, rarely takes the form of structured sentences. Instead the narrative is peppered with rhetorical questions, semi-repetitions and half- sentesces: it also jumps without warning from present to past and far past, all of which add verisimilitude and vitality.

Morrison's technique draws attention to the living properties of language but there also exists a negative and deadening aspect of its power, words are the cause of Denver's deafness: in order not to hear the answer that she dreads, she closes herself off from all sound.

Since slaves on their arrival in America came from a variety of ethnic groups and spoke different African languages they were forced to adopt English to communicate. In her speech when she received the Nobel Prize, Toni Morrison dwells on the susceptibility of language to death and erasure. Dead language is a danger that a writer must identify, and use techniques to avoid. Beloved is replete with such techniques.

Morrison's choice of narrative technique is very condensed. The metaphors are self-reflexive, referring to a context and experiences already established by the novel. When describing the pleasure Denver derives from being scrutinized by

Beloved, the metaphor is consonant with Denver's own experiences, and makes no references to the outside world. Her skin grows soft and bright like' the lisle dress that had herms round her mother's waist'(p.118). The reader recognizes these references to the vision that appeared to Denver (p.29), and a series of links are forged within the novel's imagery. Similarly, characters refer to events that are explained much later to the reader: Paul D in section 1, talking to Sethe about Halle, resolves that she need never have known about her husband's dereliction by the butter churn (p.8).

The reference to the appalling scene of Halle by the churn makes no sense to the reader, but is later unpacked and given resonance. (p.69) similarly the reference to Sixo's last laugh (p.41) is later padded out (p.229). This technique creates an intensity that cannot be felt by the reader.

In Beloved Morrison succeeds in plumbing the depth and breadth, the diversity and wonder of the black feminine experience. Morrison's richly textured fiction reflects her special and unique vision- a vision which is neither white nor male. In fact, it is a black woman writer's distinctive feminine vision. Her vision, as ***Jung*** defines in his 'Psychology and Literature' is

> ***"A real experience, it is not something derived or secondary.....it is true symbolic expression..... This is the expression of something existent in its own right".***[9]

It is this "real experience" which has been defined by the Swedish Academy as an essential aspect of American reality in Morrison's fiction. She believes that

continuity between past and present is very crucial because it creates bonds of mutual obligations, and a shared communal history of struggle. In her own article 'Rediscovering Black History' Morrison says:

> ***"There is no need to be nostalgic about "the good old days" because they weren't.....but to recognize and rescue those qualities of resistance, excellence and integrity that were so much a part of our past and so useful to us and to the generations of blacks now growing up".***[10]

Central to the novel is a vision of the continuity between experience and identity, a vision only partly articulated in the juxtaposition of the dedication ("sixty million and more"), with its claim to establish kinship with the unnamed and unremembered who perished in the infamous middle passage together with the epigraph's audacious appropriation of God's voice from Hosea, quoted by Paul in Romans in Chapter-25 he will call them people which were not his people? and her beloved, which was not beloved?'

The epigraph is from the Bible. Taken by itself, this might seem to favour doubt about the extent to which beloved was really loved, or the extent to which Sethe herself was rejected by her own community, but there is more to it than that. The passage is from a chapter in which the Apostle, Paul, ponders over the ways of God towards humanity, in particular the evils and inequities visible everywhere on earth. Paul goes on to talk about the fact that the Gentiles, hitherto despised and outcast have now been redefined as acceptable. The passage proclaims, not

rejection, but reconciliation and hope. It continues: ***"And it shall come to pass,That in the place where it was said unto themYe are not my people,There shall they be called the children of living God".(p.165)***

Laying claim to a past often serves simply to create an ancestry for oneself. The community sought in Beloved involves as its essence a moral and imaginative expansion of oneself, in particular one's capacity to experience. Morrison's conscious focus on collective rather than individual struggle is clarified through her repeated assertions that Beloved is the story of a people rather than of a person. She says:

> ***"The book was not about the institution-slavery with a* capital *S. It was about those anonymous people called slaves. What they do to keep on, how they make a life. What they are willing to risk, however long it lasts, in order to relate to one another- that was incredible to me."*** [11]

Although the novel begins as Sethe's story, it evolves into a story about:

> ***"These people who don't know they are in an era of historical interest. They just know they have to get through the day.....and they are trying desperately to be parents, husbands and a mother with children".*** [12]

Morrison's conscious focus on collective rather than Sethe's personal history becomes further manifest when she says that in the novel:

***"Has to be the interior life of some people, a small group of people and everything they do is impacted on by the horror of slavery, but they are also people".***[13]

The impact of slavery on a people thus involves the way internalization of oppressors' values can distort all intimate human relationships and even subvert the self. Beloved deals not only with the reconstructed memory but also with deconstructed history. Set in post-civil war Ohio, this haunting narrative of slavery and its aftermath traces the life of a young woman Sethe, who has kept a terrible memory at bay only by shutting down part of her mind. Thus Morrison recreates a past, however painful, to undercut the ideological basis upon which it has largely been constructed by whites, employing not only available accounts in slave narratives, but also disengaging the materials from historical documents in order to revitalize them as lived experience.

Beloved contains three formal parts that tell many gradually emerging stories simultaneously. Set in 1873-74, part one covers events from Paul D's arrival at Sethe's home to his departure when he hears that many years before Sethe killed her daughter, Beloved. As the book opens, Paul D and Sethe have not seen each other for eighteen years, since their escape from Sweet Home and slavery in 1856. A beautiful Kentucky plantation, Sweet Home originally houses a white couple, Mr. and Mrs. Garner, and nine slaves: Baby Suggs and her grown son Halle, Six men named Paul A, Paul B, Paul C, Paul D, Paul F and Sixo. Mr. Garner runs an unusual plantation, his male slaves have no legal or social standing as men, but Garner allows them many male privileges. They are allowed to make some

independent income and even to carry weapon. Garner also permits Halle to buy his mother's freedom. To replace Baby Suggs, the Garners buy a fourteen year old girl, Sethe. Two years later Sethe and Halle "marry" (the law does not recognize slaves' marriages) and have children. When Mr. Garner dies and a cruel man called School teacher becomes the master, the slave's attempt a group escape. At least two Pauls and Sixo die. School teacher's nephews brutally abuse Sethe sexually, sucking milk from her breasts and whipping her black body. Halle and Sethe have three children, two sons and a two-year old daughter later known as Beloved reach safely at Baby Suggs' home in Ohio, a free state. Halle is lost; however, Sethe just manages to reach Baby Suggs. On the journey, she gives birth to a daughter whom she names Denver, after the runaway white servant girl, Amy who has helped her in delivering the child.

Aided by a black man named Stam paid, Sethe and Baby Denver come to Baby Suggs' house. By preaching and living love, Baby Suggs ministers to all that is wounded- Sethe's body, Individual's self-images, and her community's sense of its collective worth.

After Sethe and Baby Suggs enjoy twenty-eight days of being a family united in freedom, Baby Suggs gives a party to celebrate. Although the surrounding community enjoys the feast, it also envies Baby Suggs' comparatively whole family and prosperity. Being poor and without most of their own families, the rest of community decides that Baby Suggs' party constitutes bragging by the next day, the community's envy has overwhelmed its loyalty and no one warns Baby Suggs that School teacher and his men were on their way. When they ride

into Baby Suggs yard, Sethe tries to kill herself and her children rather than return to slavery. Under the fugitive Slave Act, School teacher can claim Sethe and her children, even from a free state. Sethe is stopped after she cuts her two year old Beloved's throat with a handsaw. The child dies. The community's betrayal mortally hurts Baby Suggs, who takes to bed and slowly dies.

Sethe receives only a short jail sentence for killing Beloved as she does not agree that she did anything wrong. But she and her remaining three children receive a larger penalty from the black community, a complete social isolation for the next eighteen years. Only one visitor calls on Sethe household, the ghost who drives off the sons, Bugler and Howard. Although Denver at one point attends a school run by Lady Jones, she becomes deaf when the children tease her about her mother's death. She does not hear sound again until the ghost arrives. Paul D enters this static situation and immediately sets events in motion by evicting the ghost.

Like Sethe's experiences, Paul D’s life after Sweet Home is presented in a series of flashbacks. Sethe, and her daughter Denver assume that the ghost is the spirit of Sethe's dead daughter, known only by the incomplete inscription on her tombstone "Beloved". Later, when Sethe, Paul D, and Denver return home to find a mysterious young woman who, the narrator tells, walked fully clothed "out of the water" of a creek behind Sethe's house. Referring this woman as "Beloved", the narrator describes Sethe's first meeting with Beloved in terms that suggest giving of birth, Sethe's body gushes water, a parallel to the breaking of water just before labour. Beloved has both mental and physical peculiarities, parts of her body threaten to fall off; some teeth do fall out, she has scar on her throat. Her

infrequent speech is childish. Though apparently a stranger, she knows intimate things about Sethe, including the lullaby that Sethe sings, for her babies.

The rest of part one revolves around the characters who develop relationship with Beloved. Denver identifies the woman as the returned ghost and welcomes her as a sister, soon she is frightened as she discovers that the spirit is covertly attacking Sethe. While pretending to massage Sethe' neck, Beloved tries to choke her. In the meantime, Paul D dislikes Beloved but finds her supernaturally, irresistibly, sexually attractive under a kind of spell or compulsion, he has sex with her. The ghost's presence thus disrupts every relationship. Stam Paid adds the final destabilizing element to this volatile mix by telling Paul D how Beloved died. When Sethe confirms the truth of the events, if not the common interpretation of them, Paul D reproaches her in a particularly hurtful way that recalls a racist stereotype. Earlier, Sethe had overheard Schoolteacher telling his nephews to make two lists describing her, one for her human traits and one for supernatural traits. Paul D implies the same accusation that Sethe has acted in an animalistic way when he tells her that she has "two legs, not four". Unable to accept Sethe's past and her attitude towards it, he leaves. Sethe has no interest in Paul D's accusatory remark about her crime; clearly, her intention here is not denial but rationalization, based on conviction. Sethe is nevertheless held accountable, not only by Paul D but also by the community, Denver, Beloved and ultimately herself.

Part two explores several characters' states of mind. This part depicts the shocking happenings in the present that connect to the painful past. Sethe's household is living entirely in a past-controlled present, with no thoughts of the

future. Caring less about her adult responsibilities, Sethe plays with Denver and Beloved like a child. To examine this unusual household, part two sequentially explores the minds of all three women employing the technique of stream of consciousness.

The household focuses intensely inward as boundaries between individual members dissolve. Beloved yearns to "join with Sethe in what she terms ***"a hot thing" (p.213.)*** a merging state in which she is not separate from her : there is no place where I stop her face is my own and I want to be there in the place where her face is and to be looking at it ***"too" (p.210)***. Within this new acknowledgement, Sethe, Denver, and Beloved are engaged in alternate romance. The idea of romance forms one of the various strands of the novel. Beloved does not offer ideas in a logical order but in associative order. One idea reminds the character of another because of that character's individual experiences. Denver's and Sethe's minds are not difficult to follow. They exult in Beloved's return, feeling that part of them has come back. Beloved's mind presents a challenge because her consciousness jumps from topic to topic. Further, she thinks about experiences far removed from the reader, Beloved remembers her separation from Sethe when she died and joined many other bodies under water. She also remembers things that don't seem to belong to baby Beloved's experience, for example being on board the ships. Presumably, these are the ships that brought enslaved Africans to the United States. The thoughts and images in Beloved's consciousness may be interpreted in several different ways.

Part three opens with Sethe's household in desperate trouble and ends with a reunion between Sethe and Paul D. To make this reconciliation possible both need to come to terms with the past, symbolically the ghost must leave. As the section opens, Sethe, Denver, and Beloved are starving because Sethe has lost her job which she does not seem to mind much. With her two year old understanding of her own death, Beloved berates Sethe for having left her. Sethe tries to explain that she loved Beloved and never intended to abandon her. As Beloved assumes more and more authority, Sethe acts like a scared child: ***"It was Beloved who made demands. Anything she wanted she got, and when Sethe ran out of things to give her, Beloved invented desire.....the mood changed and arguments began.....she took the best of everything first". (p.240-41)***

Beloved knows only desire. She knows only what she lacks. But she cannot be satisfied, her unbalanced self consisting only of desire is in exhaustibly hungry. Sethe is driven by the guilt of past, by the memory of what she did to her daughter, which causes her to focus obsessively on Beloved and neglected all other aspects of her personality. and her life: ***"Sethe pleaded forgiveness, counting, listing again and again her reasons, that Beloved was more important, meant more to her that her own life. That she would trade places any day, give up her life, every minute and hour of it, to take back just one of beloved's tears". (p.241-42)***

Sethe's obsessive focus is as unbalanced as Beloved's desire. She attempts to erase the past, by taking the place of Beloved herself. Neither Beloved nor Sethe take any notice of Denver. In this crisis, Denver gathers courage to ask her old School teacher, Lady Jones for help. To reach Lady Jones, she must leave the yard

alone for the first time in years. Even as she feels terrified and hesitant, she hears Baby Suggs' voice reminding her of her ancestors' courage.

Denver's venture secures help from the community in two ways. Acting on Lady Jones's information that Sethe is unwell, their neighbors start leaving food in the yard, re-establishing the community's first contact with Sethe in eighteen years. Through Lady Jones, Denver gets a job with an elderly white family, The Bodwins who had been abolitionists. Denver thus manages to take on her the adult role of supporting her family. Another of the Bodwins who had been abolitionists. Denever thus manages to take on her the adult of supporting her family. Another of the Bodwins, domestic workers learns about the exact nature of the state of affairs in Sethe's home and informs the community. Remembering how circumstances had forced them to act in the past, the women of the community move beyond judging Sethe for Beloved's death. They gather at Sethe's gate, determined to defend her.

This climactic scene resolves several thematic tensions such as Sethe's relationship to her community, Sethe's ability to change, and the proper relationship between past and present. From the gate, the assembled women see Sethe and the pregnant Beloved standing in doorway. Some begin to pray, and then a leader Ella, "hollers". The others join, neither singing nor speaking but making a wordless sound of terrific spiritual power. Just then, Denver's employer Mr. Bodwins rides up. Psychically frozen in time since she killed Beloved, Sethe cannot distinguish between Mr. Bodwin in the present and the School teacher in the past. She sees only that a man is riding on a horse and entering into her yard.

Determined to do something which she could not before, she protects her children by attacking the man with an ice pick. Fortunately, the women pull her away before she damages him. Misunderstanding Sethe's action, Beloved thinks that her mother has once again abandoned her. She leaves, and a boy reports having seen a woman with fish in her hair walking towards the creek from which Beloved had emerged months before.

With the ghost out of house, Paul D returns. He finds Sethe crushed by grief because she has lost Beloved again. Sethe seems to be unconsciously responding to overwhelming sorrow in the same way as Baby Suggs, by taking to bed and making no effort to live . Paul D offers not only love but wisdom. In the last scene, Sethe mourns that she has lost her children, her best things. Paul D comforts: ***"Sethe," he says, "me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow".....you your best things, Sethe. You are." (p.273)***

The novel concludes with a two–page meditation by the narrator on the story of Beloved. Sethe's community, symbolically, the black American culture decides that ***"It was not a story to pass on" (p.274),*** a line that is repeated. They are the narrator says, who eventually forgot her, and comments, ***"this is not a story to pass on" (p.275).*** Still behind Sethe's house. ***"Beloved's footprints come and go, come and go" (p.275).*** the narrator's present-tense verbs imply that Beloved still exists, and the novel's last paragraph consists of one word: "Beloved"

Sethe's experience is treated with many ironic overtones that point to certain paradoxes and many fundamental complexities of her quest for freedom. On a socio-psychological level, Beloved is the story of Sethe's, Suggs' quest for social

freedom and psychological wholeness. She struggles with the haunting memory of her slave-past and retribution of Beloved, the ghost of the infant daughter whom she has killed in order to save her from the living death of slavery.

On a legendary and mythic level, Beloved is a ghost story that frames embedded narratives of the impact of class, race and sex on the capacity for love, faith, and community of black families, especially of black women, during the reconstruction period. Set in post-civil war Cincinnati Beloved, is a womanish neo-slave narrative of double consciousness, a postmodern romance that speaks in many compelling voices and on several levels of the historical rape of black American women and of the resilient spirit of blacks in surviving as a people.

The title of the novel 'Beloved' establishes both her thematic and technical skill to show her authorial genius. She told P. B's host Charlie Rose that one of the questions that prompted her novel was 'Who is the Beloved?, Several literary critics have devoted their attention to asking, who is beloved? is the ghostly child a supernatural succubus, or vampire, or a real person who appears and chooses to accept the identity that Sethe is determined to foist upon her? The name Beloved is inscribed on the Baby's grave, but not on Sethe's own daughter. It is used both at funerals and weddings, thus signifying both past and future. Beloved can also be seen as the embodiment of slavery itself. Though, in the novel, Beloved has several incarnations. First, she is the two-year-old daughter whom Sethe kills when Schoolteacher enters Baby Suggs' yard. Next, she is angry spirit who haunts Sethe's household for years, driving off Howard and Bugler. When Paul D drives her out, she returns in the body of a young woman. Although beloved's body is

subjected to change, her character does not. For, she personifies the past and no one can change past events or develop them. Beloved always remains a two-year-old, with a two-year old understanding; After all, she has no consciousness of doing wrong in trying to fulfill her own needs. She remains unaware of other's needs. Thus, she tries to monopolize her mother's attention, even attempting to kill her own so that they will be dead together. Her first step is to separate Sethe from Paul D and Denver. She uses her sexuality magically to make Paul D impregnate her, but this pregnancy cannot come to terms because of the confusion regarding her identity. The past creates the present, but it cannot give birth to it and would change both Beloved (the past) and the present. The past is past; it has created the present but cannot change the present.

Beloved sees only the past when she looks at the present. She cannot comprehend Sethe's attack on Mr. Bodwin as protective of her and Denver. Instead, she understands it as a repetition of what she experienced as maternal abandonment, the separation that occurred when Beloved died and Sethe kept living. Although she is mistaken about Sethe's motivation for attacking Bodwin, Beloved's mistake leads to her acceptance of a permanent separation between herself and her mother. When Beloved leaves Sethe's house, the past has assumed its proper role, not completely gone, but no longer dominating the present.

Character development is inextricably linked with the central theme of Beloved, the movement from slavery to freedom. The stasis of one character, Beloved, contrasts with the development of three main characters Sethe, Paul D, and Denver. They illustrate the possibilities of the present as they evolve from

slave into free men and women. Sethe, as a black slave faces many insults. She is brought to Sweet Home Plantation, (which is neither Sweet nor Home) to replace Baby Suggs, another breeding black woman: ***"Sethe was thirteen when she came to Sweet Home and already Irion-eyed. She was a timely present for Mrs. Garner who had lost Baby Suggs to her husband's high principal". (p.12)***

By the time she is nineteen. Sethe is pregnant for the fourth time. When life at Sweet Home deteriorates, Sethe shows enormous strength in trying for a better life for her children. Despite being nine months pregnant, losing track of her husband Halle, and suffering rape from schoolteacher's nephews, she manages to get to a free state. Her maternal urge is beautifully illustrated in the following passage: ***"I had milk.....I was pregnant with Denver but I had milk for my baby girl.....I knew I had to get my milk to my baby girl. Nobody was going to get it to her fast enough, or take it away when she had enough and did not know it.....Nobody knew but me and nobody had her milk but me".(p.19-20).***

Paradoxically, it is Sethe's commitment to her children's welfare which prompts her to kill one of them. Beloved is to avoid returning them and herself to slavery. By killing her own daughter with a handsaw, Sethe commits infanticide but retains her dignity as a human being. Sethe's mother, Ma'am,a field worker on a large plantation, is hanged for taking part in rebellion. From her mother's friend Sethe learns about Ma'am's history and grounds her personality in mother-love. Sethe's commitment to her children remains unshakable. She trades sex to a stonecutter in exchange for a word on dead child's grave stone, "Beloved". She wanted "Dearly Beloved", from the funeral service, but had only enough strength

to pay for one word. Payment was ten minutes of sex with tombstone engraver. This act, which is recounted early in the novel, is a keynote for the whole book in the world of slavery and poverty where human beings are reduced to merchandise, everything has its price and the price is tyrannical.

Sethe's ferocious pride and independence isolated her from her neighbours, who expect her to express romorse for her children's action. She is further isolated by her mother-in law's death and the malicious ghost. Time stops for Sethe. To move forward, Sethe must accept Halle's absence, greater distance from Beloved and now love from Paul D. All these depend in turn on whether Sethe can develop a new self-definition that honours motherhood but does not make it the only measure of her worth. Paul D establishes a relationship with Sethe after a long separation. After his escape from Sweet Home and the chain gang, he develops a too-foul strategy for survival. First, he limits his emotional involvement; second, he shuts away difficult memories. Morrison symbolizes this repression by imaging his heart as a rusted-shut tobacco tin in his chest. Paul D has led an unsatisfying, vagabond life and wishes to establish permanent family ties with Sethe and her daughter, Denver. To do so, he must first come to terms with his past and Sethe's. He leaves after learning about Beloved, but later returns to love and affirm Sethe. The only partially sympathetic white character, sixteen-year-old Amy is herself escaping when she meets Sethe fleeing the Sweet Home where Amy's mother had been an indentured servant. Her mother's employer exploits Amy, makes her pay her dead mother's debt. With her spirit not yet broken, she comes to experience pleasure and as a result she escapes. Though the calls Sethe a "nigger", she does

her best to offer aid. She massages Sethe's torn and bleeding foot back to feeling and more importantly, helps Sethe give birth to a daughter. Amy's soul evolves from a stranger to nurse, midwife and finally to a friend.

Through the person of Denver, Morrison wants to show the differences of white and black life. Amy stands in sharp contrast to Sethe. Though both women are fugitives and poor, they are racially different. Though both are the same age, Sethe is already a mother of four and Amy is without any encumbrances. One is running for safety and the other to buy a luxury item like velvet. One covers the distance by creeping and crawling like an inferior creature of the earth and the other walks upright keeping up human dignity. One trebles by night herding and sneaking for fear of being caught and the other travels by broad daylight with no notions of fear. The contrast is too loud to go unnoticed by projecting a white woman as a foil to the black woman. Morrison succeeds in drawing the difference between the two women based on racism. Morrison also succeeds in convincing that her intention in writing the novel is not racial.. Her attack here is on slavery as a dehumanizing system.

Morrison uses a beautiful metaphor to emphasize that black women are much more suited to aggressiveness in the mode that feminists are recommending. Sethe is an embodiment of that image. When Paul D, who had earlier deserted Sethe for her "staggering crime," returns because the "Sweet Home Gal" had made him lose his mind he admits: ***"She is a friend of my mind. She gathers me, man the piece I am, she gathers them and gives them back to me all the right***

***order......"Only this woman Sethe could have left his manhood like that. He wants to put his story next hers". (p.272-273)***

Paul D pays this tribute to Sethe because she has the ability to be "both ship and safe harbor".

Mothering and motherhood were denied, devalued, and obliterated by slavery since black women were regarded as breeding stock. The novel takes us as Christian says:

> ***"in the chaotic space of mother-love and mother-pain in which a mother kills her child in order to save it.***[14]

Beloved pushes at the very boundaries of this chaotic space. When Sethe tells Paul D about how they stole her milk, the horror of what happened is such that it causes him to handle the pouch containing the tobacco tin, fearing it will bring forth everything that he believes he sealed away. Her accounts bring to the fore, uncompromisingly, the bond between mother and child which slavery destroyed: ***"All I know was I had to get my milk to my baby girl. Nobody was going to nurse her like me. nobody was going to get it to her fast enough, or take it away when she had enough and didn't know it" (p.16)***

The song which Amy sings to ease Sethe's pain conflates mother-love with mother-pain, combining its tenderness with vicarious suffering. The memory of the song and of the way in which her mother used to sing to her highlights the absence of her mother yet it is her remembered presence which enables Amy to bind with and heal Sethe, saving her and her child from certain death.

The narrative, which is Sethe's narrative, brings Denver and Beloved together, as Amy's recollection of her mother unites her and Sethe. The denial and obliteration of motherhood and mothering distort the notion of womanhood in Morrison's work which is reclaimed, as best as it can be at several points in the novel by reclamation of the mother child bond from the chaotic space in which it is forced to exist. As Barbara Christian argues,

> ***"it is through their reflections on this precarious role that the female slaves in Beloved are able to try to understand them as women and the concept often proves crucial to the survival of the self."***[15]

The effects of slavery on black women enable Morrison to pursue the consequences of the destruction of the mother-child bond on female identity further than she had in her earlier novels.

The end of Beloved extends the portraits of African-Americans determining how to use their own forms of literacy for their own purposes. In the final pages, the narrator meditates on what later happened to the story of Beloved. Because it was "unwise" to remember her, the community decides that hers "was not a story to pass on", a phrase taken up and twice repeated by the narrator. Like the novel's use of slave narrative convention, these must be repetition with a difference, because Morrison has passed the story on to us in print form.

In the tradition of art form Beloved successfully chronicles incidents in the enslaved mind, providing the reader with insights not only into Sethe's thoughts

and action but also into the structure and workings of the plutocracy that denied her basic human and political rights. Thus, as is true of the more traditional slave narrative, Beloved records the cruelty, violence and degradation in the physical floggings and psychological fragmentation of the black family that often victimized slaves, irrespective of age or gender.

Beloved begins with death and stasis, but ends with life and growth. Throughout, the novel shows love as a power that reconstructs and inspires. The novel deals with many manifestations of love, love for oneself, mother-daughter love, romantic and the love of a community for its individual members. As in the rest of Morrison's books, love's power cannot heal instantaneously or painlessly. Love can neither remake the past nor save every character. Here as in the Bluest Eye, "love is no better than lover", badly damaged by slavery, these lovers express themselves erratically, sometimes withholding their support and lending it at crucial times:

> ***"No completely balanced self or perfect mother or ideal community develops, but the book shows the miracle of love making the cruelest experiences bearable. Beloved shows the tremendous cost of slavery and celebrates the survival of the African-American self, family and community."***[16]

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**CHAPTER-4B**

# *JAZZ*

Morrison published her sixth novel Jazz in 1992, a year before she got the Nobel Prize. If the title of a work points towards the author's preoccupation, Jazz, is in no uncertain terms, a book that deals with the cultural fabric of black society in terms of music. Music becomes a metaphor for Morrison to probe the complexities of African-American culture. If Jazz is music the performer composes, Morrison calls jazz a book that composes itself.

While many black writers have used musicians and music as theme and metaphor for their writing, no one before Morrison has attempted to draw upon jazz as the structuring principle for an entire work of art. Set in Harlem in 1926, so close to the black literary movement known as the New Negro, or Harlem renaissance midway through a decade when the United States was in the throes of 'The Jazz Age ' or 'The Roaring Twenties'. White histories of the period tend to see its creative and cultural ferment as a response to the Armistice of 1919. But Harlem, and the city in general, had different significance for African-Americans and it is this, rather than past war euphoria, which was essentially the part of white history, which Morrison tries to recover in Jazz. In this respect the focus of interest, like her early novels, is on the black communities which exist behind and

which transcend the boundaries drawn up by the whites. To define and contain them, thus Jazz portrays the developing black community through five successive generations with quite an unusual narrative technique. The novel emphasizes the need to invent new ways of understanding black experience, and new forms of art to imagine. The understanding of the development of individual character is intertwined with the development of the community's artistic expression. The very title of the novel, Jazz, reiterates the black folk nature of Morrison's inspiration. The novel depicts such sets of opposites as youth versus old age, sterility versus sex, and the swamps versus the gaudy hubbub of city. The novel tells the pathetic story of Violet and Joe Trace who are married for over twenty years. The narrative glides between the present and past, to the rural Virginia of the 1880's where Joe and Violet met from where they eventually migrated to the magical place they call the city. Like many Jazz pieces, the novel has a fast opening, establishing a dominant note and theme and then breaks into different parts-various stories (passages), and voices (instruments), various motifs, images and relatives themes. As a critic has put it :

> ***"In this novel Morrison adopts various fictional modes like Gothic, supernatural, detective historical and even poetic realism".***[1]

She mainly writes from the perspective of black consciousness. Covering the entire gamut of black experience,

> ***"Her versatility and an immaculate narrative style can be studied in the novel Jazz, in which she has used the mode of Jazz to depict the experience of the black community in the city of New York, during the 1920s a decade itself known as the Jazz Age"*** [2]

Through meticulous use of the Jazz idiom, Morrison relates the story of Joe Trace and his wife Violet, both of whom had, leaving behind in Virginia all the traumas of their past lives, migrated to the city in 1906. Morrison depicts Joe and Violet Trace, the embattled couple as the heart of the novel Jazz. Through each of spouse's individual narrative, Morrison recreates the cycles of Jazz, relying on the musical idiom to trace the character's descents into the haunting territory of their souls, into spiritual hunger that drives physical compulsion and emotional distress. Thus Violet's accounts, her plunge into an aggressive and eccentric egotism upon learning of her husband's betrayal with a teenager is noisy and frantic. Her words, seized from the third- person narrator, veer almost haphazardly into and out of the ongoing narrative. However, as a consequence of returning to her past, she is eventually reborn through the chaos symbolized by the Jazz process. Joe's journey.

> ***"Configured as an immersion into the blues, the heart, of the Jazz, manifests itself as a depression, solitary and torpid, a metaphorical cave within which he has interred himself."*** [3]

His words orderly and falling into tidy quotes, reveal his seeming discipline. Yet they hide the rage at their core. Having murdered his teenaged mistress, he must atone psychologically, working through his guilt, and accepting responsibility for his actions. He must also identify the conflicted maternal longing for the woman who initially rejected him-his cave dwelling, feral mother, whom his tortured consciousness finally confuses with the equally rejecting Dorcas. The Jazz idiom of Morrison's novel is thus central to the recovery of the past, both personal and historical, and re-envisioning of the future.

Jazz is the second novel of Morrison's trilogy corresponding to the three parts of Dante's The Divine comedy: Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso. Beloved depicts the hell of slavery and its immediate aftermath. Paralleling purgatory rather than hell, Jazz depicts much suffering but with a more positive and certain ending. Its title draws attention, first to the world renowned music created by African-Americans in the 1920s, and second, to the book's Jazz likes narrative structure and themes. Beloved, the first in the trilogy, takes place in the 1880s with references to earlier events. Jazz begins where Beloved leaves off. Its two main characters, Joe and Violet Trace, are born in the 1870s, and the main action occurs in the 1920s. Although Jazz and Beloved both concern actual historical events, they develop differently. Much of Beloved presents African-American experience common in its time setting, and social forces such as Fugive Slave Law which certainly affect the plot. By contrast, Jazz broadens the focus to deal directly with large public events such as the great Migration, the East St. Louis riot, and the subsequent NAACP protest march. The difference in the focus may be clearest in

Jazz's presentation of its urban setting. A collective force in itself, the city energizes, terrifies, and inspires the individual characters.

Just as Morrison's Beloved was based on an actual historical event, so too is Jazz. Morrison first came across the story of the star-crossed lovers when she read Camille Billop's manuscript 'The Harlem Book of the Dead' which contains photographs and commentary by the great African- American photographer James Van Der Zee and poems by Owen Dodson. Van Der Zee described to Camille Billop the curious origins of his photographs of a young woman's corpse in this matter:

> ***"She was one I think was shot by her sweetheart at a party with a noiseless gun. She complained of being sick at the party and friend said, "Well, why don't you lie down?" and they had taken her in the room and laid her down. After they undressed her and loosened her cloths, they saw the blood on her dress. They asked her about it and she says, "I'll tell you tomorrow, yes, I'll tell you tomorrow ". She was just trying to give him a chance to get away".***[4]

As she lay dying, the young woman refused to identify the person who shot her. Morrison protected the seedling of this storyline, nurtured it for over a decade until it assumed the shape of Jazz. Like Duke Ellington, Morrison has found a way to create an ensemble of improvised sounds out of a composed music. Jazz is made up of rhythmic paragraphs, subsections, and sections that together composed a

musical score. The novel has a loose fluid non- Aristotelian experimental form- not the tight climactic Frey tag pyramid structure of conventional fiction but the form of Jazz piece. What precisely Morrison seeks to do is to mortalise print. She also uses her language instrument to try out some daring modes and techniques of play and to create the informal, improvisatory patterning of Jazz. Elements of blues, March, rag, spiritual or hymns get fused into the matrix of Jazz. The music produced is a combination of melody, rhyme and harmony with a basic theme or composition which provides for a large scope of improvisation.

What is compelling in Jazz is not the novel's plot, but how the story is 'told'. A disembodied narrator slips easily and guilelessly from third person all-knowingness to first person lyricism without ever relaxing its grip upon our imagination. Morrison has adopted a unique narrative method in which the omniscient narrator addresses the reader, but at times allows other characters to relate their stories from their own point of view. Like Faulkner's As I Lay Dying view, whose arias or speaking consciousness brings forth harmony and contrapuntal texture to the novel. Morrison gives us a multifaceted view of Joe, Violet and Dorcas as well as Violet's mother, True Belly her grandmother Alice Manfred Dorcas' aunt, Action, her boyfriend and Felice, her girlfriend – by the seemingly simple device of letting different voices tell the story, related episodes of the same story. The vision of Morrison's nameless narrator frames the love story, and this anonymous voice slowly draws readers into the rhythm of the city, especially Harlem, which Jazz casts bewitching spells on people's psyches. **Henry Louis** gates puts it:

> ***"It is a sensitive potting narrator, in love with the language of fiction, enraptured with the finest and rarest of arts, the art of telling a good tale, reflecting, as it goes along, upon its responsibility as a composer, and its obligation to the individual characters whose sole destiny is to make this composition come alive, to sting".***[5]

Thus, ***"Jazz becomes a multi-perspective novel in which the male narrator and the characters are like the performer in Jazz band, each, by turn, improvising upon his respective past, and then merging into basic theme or composition."***[6] Just as the musical mode of Jazz uses familiar material to express various sentiments, uniting performer and the audience, the fictional mode of Jazz establishes an instant contact between the characters and the reader. In this way, Morrison avoids what Robert Roth calls "authorial dominance ". Instead of trying to deduce the writers' intention,

> ***"readers are engaged in a productive dialogue in which their own purposes and practices come into play, often taking the foreground."***[7]

This leads to a sharing of control as well as to a breaking down of the adversarial writer-reader relationship. Thus, Jazz represents:

> ***"The culmination of Morrison's fiction, attempts to connect with her readers, to move them beyond sympathy,***

***empathy, and even understanding of what it means to be black in a white America".***[8]

Jazz has ten sections, much more than Morrison's earlier novels. The sections are often subdivided, with extra blank spaces providing a visual gap between parts of the text. The novel begins with the story of Joe and Violet Trace over more than fifty years. Both are born in rural Vesper County, Virginia and orphaned young. Joe's mother abandons him to neighboring family. Joe's name is "Trace" because when he was abandoned down South as a baby his parents "left without a Trace" He is that "Trace" Violet's father must be absent because his political activities are so dangerous. Unable to cope alone with the financial and emotional difficulties of her young family, Violet's mother, Rose Dear goes mad. Violet is aware that she cannot know exactly why her mother, Rose Dear committed suicide. She thinks that death is intimately linked with the responsibility for five children. Violet meets Joe Trace in rural Virginia when they are both field-workers. Joe and Violet marry young. When the nearby town of Vienna is burned by vengeful whites they leave the Virginia countryside for New York City.

***"That was when Vienna burned to the ground. Red fire doing fast what white sheets took too long to finish. Canceling every deed; vacating each and every field; emptying us out of our places so fast we went running from one part of the country to another or now here." (P.126)***[9]

They enjoy the city, their financial status improves and all appears well until, in the late middle age, Violet begins to long for a child. Initially, Violet decides to avoid her mother's fate by never having children for herself. She, therefore, does not mind at that time when she had several miscarriages. In late middle age, she wants a child badly: ***By and by longing became heavier than sex: a panting, unmanageable craving..... Violet was drowning in it ..... mother-hunger had hit her like a hammer. Knocked down and out,. (p.108)***

She substitutes her hunger by buying a baby doll and sleeps with it, as a replacement for an absent child. Her pet parrot, which says "I love you", is also a substitute for a child. Her longing leads to the extension of unconsciously stealing others' babies. Violet's self-awareness is sufficiently clouded that she does not always know her own motivations or expect her own actions. Preoccupied, she often says or does socially inappropriate things. When Violet withdraws emotionally, Joe feels abandoned again. In his opinion his wife Violet "takes better care of her parrot than she does me. Rest of the time, she's cooking pork I can't eat, or pressing hair I can't stand the smell of." He wishes he could remember their young love, coming north from Virginia but had a tough time "trying to catch what it felt like". What Joe wants at the age of fifty is to be free not ***"to break loves or feed the world on a fish. Nor to raise the war dead, but free to do something wild."***

Joe chooses a sixteen year old girl, Dorcas, as his lover. She is the child of the East St. Louis race riots, which consumed her clothespin dolls and her parents. Dorcas's parents are killed in the riot, her father dragged from a steel car and

beaten to death, her mother burnt to death when their house is torched. She is taken by her aunt Alice, who made clothes while hating the city and the "complicated anger" and the "appetite of its dirty, get-on-down-music."

Alice Manfred cares for her orphaned niece Dorcas, tries to raise her to be moral and proper in the midst of what she sees as the wicked city's temptations during the Jazz age. "The children of suicides are hard to please and quick to believe no one loves them because they are not really here." For Dorcas, everything seems to be kaleidoscope of action and a reaction with little beyond, everything appears to her like 'a picture show'. Dorcas apparently wants to participate in the life around her, the vibrant sexuality of jazz and the City. Her interest in Joe is shallow, she responds to him mostly because it would horrify her aunt Alice. After some months, she prefers a boy of her own age to Joe. Joe follows Dorcas to a party and shoots her while she is dancing to Jazz. Refusing to go to a hospital or to reveal Joe's identity Dorcas bleeds to death from a shoulder wound. Her death is a kind of passive suicide. The emotional space in which Dorcas finds herself is confusing and conflicting, located between the demands of action and understanding gaze of Joe. In setting their contradictory exception and views of her in opposition to each other, Dorcas initiates the structural nature of Jazz. Having become increasingly an object of other people's gazes it is appropriate that Dorcas becomes a spectator of her own death. Indeed, Dorcas herself is less worried by the prospect of death than missing something important which she senses is about to happen.

Violet causes a sensation in the funeral home by stabbing Dorcas's corps. Others call this half-familiar self "violent ". Violet tries out some standard reactions to her husband's affair—the knife attack, an attempt to re-acquire her youthfulness, and a brief affair. She recovers some sense of stability and joy through her relationship with two women, Alice Manfred and Felicity. She seeks out Alice, and the two speak frankly about love and women's role. These conversations enable Violet to become clearer regarding her needs and motivations. In Felicity, (Dorcas's friend) Violet finds a surrogate granddaughter. Because they address her own needs, these relationships help Violet reconcile with Joe. As Joe, Violet, and Dorcas's Aunt Alice try to figure out the meanings of these events, the reader learns in piecemeal about much of their past experiences. Violet establishes relationships with Alice and with one of Dorcas's friends, Felicity. Felicity frequently visits Joe and Violet, who re-establish their emotional intimacy.

Jazz presents five generations of traditional human characters and two non-traditional characters- the City and the narrator of the novel. The City and the narrator provide the context for the other characters and the action in the novel's present, 1926. The oldest group of characters, adults during slavery (before 1863) is two generations older than the main characters, Joe and Violet Trace. This grand-parents' generation includes Vera Louise Gray, Henry Lestroy (hunter's hunter), and True Belle. The second generation takes in the son of Vera Louise and Henry, Golden Gray, True Belle's daughter Rose Dear and Wild. Joe, Violet, and Alice Manfred belong to the third generation born in the 1870's. Violet’s mother Rose and her father's name is not specified, though he lives with his family until

racist violence drives him away. Joe's parentage is uncertain, but Wild may be his birth mother. The expected next generation, the fourth is largely absent. Joe and Violet have no children. Alice's younger sister and brother-in-law are killed in a riot, leaving her to care for their child, Dorcas. Dorcas's friend, Felicity, has living parents but they are present only in her report to Joe and Violet. Dorcas and Felicity belong to the fifth and youngest generation born about 1909.

Section one opens with the narrator's gossip about a woman named Violet, who has disrupted the funeral of a young girl knifing the corpe. Later we learn her husband's name as Joe Trace and the girl's name as Dorcas. The attack is only Violet's first vengeful act. She takes a silly revenge on Joe by conducting a brief meaningless affair in their home. Violet's action stems from the long-ago suicide of her mother Rose Dear. Although Violet's grandfather True Belle arrives to rescue her daughter from destitution and loneliness, Rose Dear does not recover from her emotional paralysis. By the end of the first section, the narrator notes some of Violet's oddities. Wanting a child, so much so that she half-consciously kidnaps a baby and when caught immediately indignantly denies it and believes herself to be telling the truth. Violet becomes increasingly inward-focused and less aware of the external world. Once she simply sits in the street to rest and often makes mistakes in choosing words.

Section two shows Joe and Dorcas exchanging information about their lost mother. Joe bonds emotionally with Dorcas, unaware that she remains aloof. To facilitate their love trysts, Joe rents a room from a neighbor, Malvonne. Section three introduces a new character, Alice Manfred, who while watching the July

1917 march protesting the East St. Louis Riot finds that the riot has killed both the parents of her seven-year-old niece, Dorcas. Alice emerges as a repressed woman who fears the energies of the new music, Jazz. In rearing Dorcas, Alice passes on her parent's fear of security. After Dorcas's death Alice ponders over the meaning of womanhood and analyzes why particular women become victims. This section includes Joe's first accidental meeting with Dorcas and Violet's initial visit to Alice after the girl's death. In Violet's presence, Alice remembers for the first time in many years her own violent potential when she was faced with her husband's infidelity.

Section four opens with Violet meditating on herself, feeling split off from the woman who stabbed Dorcas's corpse. To make sense of her experience, she considers her past. Choosing Joe as a husband, she realizes, had something to do with her grandmother's stories of Golden Gray. Naturally, she drifts into thinking about what brought her grandmother, True Belle, into her childhood home. Learning that Violet's mother, Rose Dear, has been left destitute with five children, True Belle arrives with financial and emotional support. She is too late for Rose Dear had by then committed suicide by jumping into a well. Two weeks after her death, her husband returns. Only at this point the reader learns about the reason for his long absence. His work for civil rights has made it too dangerous for him to live openly in Virginia. The teen-aged Violet cannot figure out what made her mother's life unbearable and decides not to have children. Violet's memories continue with a humorous account of her first meeting with Joe, who falls out of a

tree next to her in the cotton field. They marry, and because neither of them wants children, Violet does not mourn her three miscarriages.

In the novel's present, Violet and Alice discuss Violet's options. At one point, an angry Alice forgets to move her hot irons, which burns through the blouse she is about to finish. When Alice swears, she and Violet laugh heartily at her lapse impropriety and Violet is reminded of True Belle's laugh. When True Belle first enters Rose Dear's cabin to survey a room empty except for another and five hungry children, she unexpectedly laughs hard. With that memory, Violet gains sufficient objectivity to laugh at her irrational attempts to cut the already dead Dorcas.

Section five devotes its opening to a description of the city in spring. Joe then sketches his life, nothing that he has recreated himself seven times. His recollection follows major social events such as the 1893 burning of his Virginia home town, his move to the City with Violet in 1906 riots and protest March of 1917, and their personal disaster of 1925 when Violet begins to sleep with a doll. Joe is proud of choosing Dorcas a lover, feeling that this is his first choice because Violet chooses him for a partner.

In section six, the narrator mentions True Belle's attempt to rescue Rose Dear, the segues into True Belle's earlier life in Baltimore. There True Belle lived with the white woman who originally owned her, Vera Louie and Vera Louie's child Golden Grey. When eighteen years of age, Golden Grey comes to know that he was not wholly white but of a mixed race, he sets out to find his black father.

Unsure even of his father's name he looks for "Henry Les Troy". The man is really named Henry Les Troy, and he has the nickname "Hunter's Hunter". On the way, Golden Grey sees a pregnant naked young black woman who knocks herself unconscious fleeing from him. Carrying her in his buggy, he arrives at the empty cabin that belonged to his father.

Section seven continues the narrator's construction of Golden Grey's experiences. Henry Les Troy returns to his cabin to discover for the first time that he has a son. Both men are distracted by the presence of unconscious girl whom Henry christens, "Wild". Wild's baby is born, but she has no mother instincts or training. Although the novel never explicitly states who the baby is the reader can assume it as Joe. The narrative then turns to thirteen-year old Joe, who is looking for his mother amid the chaos of Vienna's burning. He makes two more searches for her in later years, the last after he and Violet have married. These searches lead him to an underground lair that had clearly been inhabited because it contained the remains of a cooking fire and clothing that probably belonged to Golden Grey. The story of Joe's last search for his mother, Wild, is interrupted by a section from Joe's consciousness more that twenty years later when he was tracking down Dorcas to the party where he had shot her. Section eight consists of Dorcas's thought at the party. She is very satisfied with her boyfriend, Acton. When Joe shoots her, she feels no pain, just weakness and a growing distance from the world around her.

Section nine depicts the growth of friendship between Felicity (friend of Dorcas) Violet, and Joe. Felicity makes her visit in search of a ring that Dorcas had borrowed and may have been buried with. Felicity particularly wants the ring

because her mother stole it for her after a jeweler in Trifanny's treated them disrespectfully. Felicity describes her life with her grandmother, who cares for her. Her parents, whose servants were allowed to be with her for only two and a half days in every three weeks. On her second visit, Felicity tells Joe and Violet how Dorcas died. Felicity is angry that Dorcas did not fight dying that she did not ask anyone to call an ambulance. Then felicity reveals Dorcas's last words, which connect to an earlier conversation between Joe and Dorcas. After crying for the first time over her friend's death, a record limitation, Felicity decides that the ring she came looking for is, unimportant as Violet's memory of Golden Grey as a white model. Violet invites Felicity to come for another visit. When Joe offers that their home needed birds, Felicity suggests that they better get a cord player as well.

Section ten opens with the narrator examining her lamination as a story-teller and supplying information on the continuing development of the major characters. Alice Manfred moves from the city. Felicity maintains her attractive independence; Joe and Violet reform their lives, with new jobs and renewed emotional intimacy. ***"That I have loved only you surrendered my whole self reckless to you and nobody else. That I want you to love me back and show it to me. That I love the way hold me, how close you let me be to you..... I have watched your face for long time now and missed your eyes when you went away from me. And talking to you and hearing your answer – that's the kick (p.229)***

Lying peacefully in bed with Violet, Joe sees the image of a wounded shoulder metamorphosing into a red –winged black bird, the bird associated with Wild. The novel ends with the narrator speaking directly to the reader ***".....make me, remake me.....Look where your hands are."*** (p.229) the reader's hands are presumably holding the book, so that the narrator's words are an invitation to make and remake interpretations.

Jazz is set in the Harlem of 1920's and traces how a fifty-year old woman comes to an understanding of the self in her relationships, which are not quite apparent, with other black women. This understanding of self also results in a more harmonious relationship with her husband. It is the identification of the self with the black women that leads Violet to the discovery of the real "me" as she goes out in search of Dorcas's past and encounters Alice.

Violet Trace tries to disfigure Dorcas, her husband Joe's eighteen year old lover's face at the latter's funeral. This "violent" act stuns the entire community, but it is a woman who empathizes with her, just as it is the woman in the community who understands Sethe and comes out to save her. Even a woman like Malvonne, who admits she hates Violet, cannot turn her back on another black woman. "Okay, there's no love lost between Violet and me, but I take her part, not yours" (p.46) she tells Joe. For Violet who has never even met Dorcas, not seen her when alive, a girl's memory is sickness in the house everywhere and nowhere." (p.28)Having to live with her memory, she also realizes that she is falling in love with Dorcas, "When she is not trying to humiliate Joe, she is admiring the dead girl's hair; when she is not cursing Joe.....she is having whispered

conversations with the corpse in her head". (p.15) But Joe mourning for Dorcas drives Violet into wanting to know more about the girl she hates so much.

As Violet starts her journey into the past, she learns more and more about Dorcas, she also learns to associate with her. Violet recognizes that Dorcas could have been the daughter she never had, or rather miscarried, a daughter whose hair she would have liked to dress, Violet, thus, starts to the wonder if Dorcas was "the woman who took the man, or the daughter who fled her womb.(p.102) Thus, Dorcas, the woman who used to "wear" Violet down, becomes a woman Violet learns to admire and love. Violet's relationship with Dorcas becomes an affirmation of love of one woman for another, although Violet starts out with hatred in heart. This affirmation of love and identification with the" other" develops into an understanding of the self in Violet's relationship with Alice Manfred, Dorcas's aunt. Alice Manfred recognizes Violet as "violet ", the woman who had tried to disrupt her niece's funeral and hence, refuses to see her despite Violet's repeated attempts. Alice assumes that Violet wants to see her to seek forgiveness, but when Violet finally meets her it is because she "had to sit down somewhere. I thought I could do it here"(p 82). Alice, thus, becomes the person Violet can sit with, and someone to talk to who will try to understand her.

Alice understands Violet, and Violet (the woman Alice was afraid to meet) becomes the only visitor she ever "looked forward to" Thus, the women's relationship develops and strengthens gradually. Both are, initially, apprehensive of each other, one loved Dorcas,the other despised her. Yet through these contradictions, they come to an understanding of eachother and of the self. Alice

speaks to Violet in a way she never did with other people-" ***"she was in polite. Sudden Frugal."*** (p.83) yet, never does she have to be apologetic or courteous. She could be herself, devoid of any artificiality or facades. Soon, ***"the women..... becomes easy with other talk was n't always necessary*** "(p.112).

Violet makes Alice realize that she, a woman, who had never held a knife to harm others, would definitely fight and kill for her man. This realization leads Alice to an understanding of Violet's "violent act of Dorcas' funeral. Violet, in turn, learns the true meaning of life from Alice. She understands she has been denying herself that it is her life, and she has to make it the way she wants it. Alice teaches Violet to love-" you got any thing left to you to love, any thing at all, do it," she tells her (p.112). More importantly, Alice and Violet learn to laugh and learn that "Laughter is serious. More complicated, more serious than tears." (p.1130)

Alice's friendship helps Violet look into her and view the real "me" inside her. Through her identification with Alice, Violet establishes her own identity, becomes a person even Joe learns to love and admire. Black women's identification, as **Bethel** puts it:

> ***"is most simply the idea of Black women seeking their own identity and defining themselves through bonding on various levels- psychic, intellectual, and emotional, as well as physical -with other Black women".***[10]

It is thus Alice who helps Violet define herself and say confidently to Felice that what she left with was the "me", Felice arrives at the Trace household only to retrieve her lost ring, but she is back not only to discover her own self, but also to understand her relationship with her mother. For the first time, she can talk about her past Violet, just as Beloved makes Sethe confront it. And just, as Denver and the other black women in the community help. Beloved realizes that her mother's act was indeed necessitated by love, by not wanting her daughter to be a slave, Violet makes Felice realize that her mother stole a ring from a shop only" out of spite" (p.203). Violet not only helps Felice review her life, but her relationship with Fellice (and Alice) helps her to understand her mother, Rose and grandmother, True Belle better.

Felice's arrival re-established harmony in the Trace household. Viloet's understanding of the self leads her to a more harmonious relationship with Joe, sharing and talking personal things again. Thus Violet accepts the influence of various Black women on her life. Alice, Fellice, and Dorcas not only lead Violet to self-discovery, but also help for work on her relationship with Joe. Hence, Violet is able to say confidently that what she was left with was "me"

As Fellice, Violet, and Alice come together, as the black women discover their own selves through bonding with other black women, they come to an end of a pilgrimage to know and to be their own true sleves. When each one is coming to this end, each of them not only knows how to live, but also how to dream. Morrison's dedication voices **Zora Neale Hurston's** vision:

***"When I had come to these women, then I would be at the end of my pilgrimages, but not the end of my life. Then I would know peace and love and what goes with these things and not before".***[11]

Thus, Violet reaches an end of her pilgrimage in discovering herself that only puts her on the threshold of a more meaningful life.

Morrison carefully creates space for the possibility of hope at the novel's end by gesturing towards the future. Because her own path to self- discovery was marked, was completed by her lack of family and community, Violet now needs to fulfill her communal obligation by transmitting to the next generation what she has learned in reclaiming her life. As in Beloved with the character of Denver, Felice represents the future in Jazz, Violet cautions Felice that if she does not make the world the way she wants it, then the world will change her and it will be her fault because she had let it. Violet explains, ***"I just ran up and down the streets wishing I was somebody else.....Now I want to be the woman my mother did not stay around long enough to see..... the one she would have liked and the one I used to like before coming to the city"*** (p.108) Violet's tale reiterates how it is the denial of deferment of love due to historical circumstance, love of self, love of family , love of life that Violet finds in the lives of True Belle, Rose Dear, and Violet. In the worlds of Toni Morrison:

> ***"If my work is to be functional to the group then it must bear witness and identify that which is useful from the past and that which ought to be discarded". [12]***

In this novel, Morrison directly deals with southerners who travel north; she provides the opportunity for a generational examination of three southern black women whose lives are shaped and complicated by their racialised and genderized historical circumstances in the south. In this postmodernist work, Morrison offers literary portraitures of Southern Black Women during three significant historical moments of American history- American slavery, Reconstruction, and the Great Migration. **Eusebio Rodrigues** observes in his article "Experiencing Jazz" that the novel

> ***"Jazz gives the history of a people ..... by giving us rapid vivid glimpses of their life in the rural South after emancipation". [13]***

As a cultural and historical conservator, Morrison inscribes her three southern women characters'- True Belle, Rose Dear, and Violet- as the texts of their respective historical moment, American slavery, Reconstruction, the Great Migration. By revealing how their particularized histories inform their lives, Morrison augments her reader's understanding so that they too would ***"know those women".*** (p.1)

Jazz is, quite literally, the textual negotiation of freedom through the grammar of the erotic. The erotic- sexual hunger, romantic love, dangerous desire,

sexual pleasure- drives the narrative. Still, it is never about itself alone. Rather, its extravagance is propelled by the narrative of freedom, the luxury of asserting the right to choose and shape one's destiny, and as Morrison maintains, "to own one's own emotion." Jazz becomes the process by which its protagonists "own" their emotions. It is ritual through which those experiences that inform these emotions are reclaimed and then reincorporated into the psychic fibre of those lives.

Jazz, the product of slavery, segregation, poverty and disenfranchisement is many things, a ***"complicating agar"*** (p.159) It is the carefree indulgence of the now, a marginalized population's assertion of selfhood of cultural vitality and artistic pride and the hope for musical synthesis through conflict. Created in an era of socially sanctioned African-American invisibility and stigmatization:

> ***"it is also the affirmation of individual and group worth and the soul's manifestation, of its love for its complement, the rejected flesh. A tribute to the soul's resilience, it is ultimately one process through which it may heal itself."[14]***

Of the intersection of Jazz music, history, and the erotic, Toni Morrison states:

> ***"At that time, when the exclaves were moving into the city, running away from something that was constricting and killing them and dispossessing them over and over again they were in a very limiting environment. But when you listen to their music the begging of Jazz- you realized that***

***they are talking about something else. They are talking about love, about loss ----It is as though the whole tragedy of choosing somebody, risking love, risking emotions, sensuality, and then losing it all didn't matter, since it was their choice. Exercising choice in who you love was a major thing. And the music reinforced the idea of love as a space where one could negotiate freedom…….. For some black people jazz meant claiming their own bodies, you can imagine what that must have meant for people whose bodies had been owned, who had been slaves as children, or who remembered their parent's being slaves. Blues and Jazz represented owner- ship of one's own emotions".***[15]

Jazz begins and ends in the Harlem of the mid 1920's, but in between the story moves freely in place and time. Winding generally backwards and sideways before coming forward again, the story presents the major characters not only as individuals with private lives but also as representative victims of enormously cruel and powerful racial forces. All the individually named characters have their own stories to tell and all of these stories are thrown into relief by a backdrop of a nation obsessed with skin color. During the half century that Jazz covers, there is apparent progress among the black Americans, since they are shown to move from the wretchedness of plantation slavery to self- sufficiency in the city, from complete dispossession to military participation in World War-I, from example of

suicidal surrender to examples of cultural self-esteem, from lives driven by silent fear to dancing driven by loud Jazz. While there is apparent progress during these years, black Americans are shown continuing to suffer through every kind of cruelty imaginable, from the subtlest insults by whites who think of untouchables to outright burning of living, screaming black flesh. This shameful history affects all the characters in Jazz even while they are shown to be preoccupied with their own personal problems and obsessions. Thus jazz centres around Joe and Violet Trace as they struggle to come to terms with their action and with eachother.

Jazz examines the myriad ways in which love becomes transfigured within interpersonal relationships, effecting concrete change both inside of and between individuals. Through the Violet-Joe-Dorcas trio and its reconfigurations, love is posited as an abstract yet powerful force that can permit either chaos or transcendence. It recreates, from the lives of various characters, the movements of Jazz as performance. The reader as auditor is witness to the virtuoso display, removed yet bound by the very process of reading. However, while the novel recreates the rhythm and configuration of Jazz performance through the dynamic of the trio, it also invites the reader to participate in Jazz on a creative process, an ongoing, ever-evolving endeavor.

Jazz is a novel, which is not only about music, but it is the lives of people during the decade which the music helped to create. Although Jazz obviously influenced the structure and style of the novel, it would be rather limiting not to see the book in the way in which we have approached Morrison's entire novel in this study. Like her other works, Jazz is concerned with aspects of African-American

history and experience which had not previously been articulated. Its experiments with form and language are derived not only from Jazz as a form of music but also from its radical content.

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