

# **TRAGIC VISION OF CHILDHOOD IN TONI MORRISON'S NOVELS**

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## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the final thesis titled **Tragic Vision of Childhood in Toni Morrison's Novels** submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfillment of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is a record of studies and research carried out by **Sri. Pocker kutty. K.** under my supervision and guidance and that no part of this thesis has been presented earlier for the award of any degree, diploma, or any other similar title

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## **DECLARATION**

I, Pocker kutty. K, hereby declare that the final thesis titled **TRAGIC VISION OF CHILDHOOD IN TONI MORRISON'S NOVELS** submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the qualifying examination for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is an original record of bonafied research carried out by me and that it has not been previously submitted for the award of any degree, diploma or any other similar title.

Calicut  
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## **Foreword**

The present study on the treatment of childhood in the novels of Toni Morrison is the result of a chance encounter of her first novel The Bluest Eye (1970). At the first reading I was shocked to see how a girl's modesty has been violated by her father. Upon reading the subsequent novels that reveal the same tragic conditions, though differently, I had felt the same feeling and I ventured out to explore in detail. During these explorations, many experts in various disciplines have been consulted. As the reading progressed I marvelled at the way Mrs. Morrison handled the theme in order to proclaim to the world that it is an urgent necessity to concentrate upon the plight of children as part of solving human misery to some extent.

The first chapter of the thesis "**Childhood and Literature: An Overview**" deals with the problems of children in general. The theme of childhood has a strategic place in literature and therefore an exploration of various writers from Jane Austen to the present have been presented and discussed and how these writers projected the theme in their great works. Many of them are obsessed with the theme. Some are seeped in their childhood memories and often allow their characters to go back into the realm of heavenly bliss. As literature alone can define the ontology of child but with the help of other disciplines, other approaches and trends have been incorporated into the text. So historical, sociological, and psychological approaches along with the modern literary trends have been adopted. Further Morrison's formative years have been explored to see how far it has influenced the writer in handling the theme. The narrative style and the critical consideration of her novels have been mentioned at this stage.

In the second chapter “**Childhood: American Perspective**” the significance of the theme has been deliberated in an American context projecting Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman. Their naïve vision, mythical concepts and their works appeal to the need for innocence in minimising the corruption of the world. But the modern writers like Henry James, and Mark Twain deal with the problems of children confronting the corrupt world. A detailed discussion regarding the socio-psychological aspects of childhood has been made to develop a psychological insight, particularly of African American Children

The third chapter “**Morrison’s Blighted Children**” fully discusses the tragic condition of childhood in the light of psychological, sociological, and mythological and other related theories. Parental rejection, psychological breakdown, historical and feminist view of childhood along with modern approaches to the study of childhood have been shown.

In the fourth chapter “**The Child is Father of the Man...**” parental and familial factors are shown as nipping the golden phase of life of children treating them as subhuman and inferior creatures. The parents are shown as distanced and incomprehensible fathers and mothers. At the same time, they often show the light of love but have to wrench the necks of children in order to subsist in a racial and poor set-up.

The fifth chapter “**Childhood: Multiple Perspectives**” is wholly devoted to the modern critical perspectives on childhood based on Psychoanalytic, Postmodern, Historicist, Feminist, Marxian criticism and Narrative techniques so that the multi-faceted picture of the tragic condition of childhood can be clearly perceived.

In the concluding chapter, the reason for the real problems faced by African American child has been presented. The racial condition, the negligent parental figures, poverty and crime-ridden society, the intra-colour prejudices, psychological maladjustments, the cross cultural problems and such never ending issues are seen destructive to the Edenic life of children. The present study aims at presenting the world of Toni Morrison who has excelled many great writers in projecting the tragedy of childhood which seems to be an eye opener to the parents who are interested in the future of their progenies and who are trying to avoid a holocaust in the ensuing tragedy of mankind, particularly in the modern times.



## **CONTENTS**

Chapter I	<b>Childhood: An Overview</b>	1-40
Chapter II	<b>Childhood: American Perspective</b>	41-71
Chapter III	<b>Morrison's Blighted Children</b>	72-179
Chapter IV	<b>The Child is Father of the Man</b>	180-253
Chapter V	<b>Childhood: Multiple Perspectives</b>	254-296
Chapter VI	<b>Conclusion</b>	297-316
	<b>Works Cited</b>	317-335

## **A NOTE ON DOCUMENTATION**

In the ongoing discussions the following abbreviations are used **TBE** (The Bluest Eye), **SOS** (Song of Solomon), **TAR** (Tar Baby), and **BVD** (Beloved) but for other novels, the abbreviations remain same as their title. The methodology is based on the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of MLA Handbook for writers of Research Papers by Joseph Gibaldi. For convenience, the writer, Toni Morrison is referred as Morrison.

## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

#### **Childhood and Literature: An Overview**

Heaven lies about in our infancy!  
Shades of prison-house begin to close  
Upon the growing boy,  
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,  
He sees in his joy.

(Wordsworth-Ode: Intimation of Immortality)

The younger generation of the black community of native America experience dislocation and displacement due to the oppressive nature of the slavery system. As a result, the African American children are subjected to psychic disintegration; they are distanced from their self, and develop traumatic feeling, which accelerate the tragic conditions of childhood. The delight and wonder of childhood are nipped away from them, which make them inferior comic objects. These harrowing facts singe the sensibilities of many American writers, particularly the black writers. Even as the blacks are engaged in the desperate struggle against the dehumanising attitude of the whites, perpetrating untellable miseries against their beloved children, the writers protest against the racial onslaught to which the children are subjected to. They give a new lease of life to the sacred values of childhood and depict poignant stories of growing up of children through their literary contributions. Although the children are wrenched from their homes, and are placed in alien settings, the black writers have successfully combined modern and traditional methods of story telling. They provide memorable accounts of young African

American children who are engaged in seeking grace in the wilderness at the most defining moments in their lives. In this context, Toni Morrison, the African American woman writer and Nobel Prize winner in literature (1993) reveals stunning realities of the plight of the children through her internationally acclaimed works. Her works echo the continuous wailing of a universal black mother over the tragic plight of children. In an interview with Charles Ruas, Morrison goes emotionally violent when she speaks about the neglect and contempt shown towards children:

Children are in real danger. Nobody likes them, all children, but particularly African American children...I feel that my generation has done the children a great disservice. I'm talking about the emotional support that is not available to them any more because adults are acting out their childhood... Everywhere, everywhere children are the scorned people of the earth. There may be whole lot of scorned people, but particularly children (Conversation with American Writers 218).

In literary works, the child connotes reality and naivety, simplicity and purity, innocence and joy but due to the disastrous conditions that prevail in the racial world of oppression the African American children are deprived of these ideal conditions and cannot enjoy life but is fated to lead a life of misery. So Morrison faithfully portrays in her works the issues like social ostracism, alienation, identity crisis, and poverty-ridden environment, lack of moral education, struggle for existence, identity quest and the like of the younger generation by exploiting the meaning and nature of childhood. She employs the theme of childhood and exploits the nobility of the child perceptions in her works to bring out the gruelling facts of children. Psychological conflicts, which shape the personality of African American

children, in turn, make them poor comic objects in their behavioural pattern. Sexual abuse, family violence, parental fight, and extreme adoration to their white masters really cripple the growth of African American children. Tendency of the blacks to forget their slavery past and to abandon the noble tradition to cope up with the changing world scenario really plunge them into great misery. Carelessly leading a life of boredom and insecurity with poor or lack of education, these African American children sometimes cause great menace and burden to the thriving black society. These shocking issues wrenched the feelings and sensibility of Toni Morrison. She finds a purging effect through her internationally acclaimed novels while throwing light on the tragic conditions of African American children.

The sweet memories of childhood stick to one's subconscious mind like a pleasant dream. Serenity of that period is like a beautiful daydream. The full moon days of the early life are enriched with honey voices and cajoling, lullabies and humming tunes. Everything a child enjoys creates wonder and variety in the world around him, and he becomes the cynosure of everyone. It is the happiest phase of man's life, and is free from the fret and fury of the world. But to an African American child, recognition of childhood as a golden phase gradually decreases and frighteningly he discovers the intricacies of the adult racial world. African American children, who grow in the ghettos and slums of America and elsewhere, are deprived of the privilege of this delightful period. The innocence and purity of this period and its naïve perception of the world of the child gets dwindled as it grows into the chaotic adult world of racism and sex. He has left his ancestral abode called Africa, and is forced to settle down in America where he is considered alien. This alienation and the nostalgia for his ancestral world as well as the continuous struggle to become a decent citizen of America land him in the confusion of

double consciousness. This dilemma of the child has been the perennial pre-occupation of great African American writers of all time but for Toni Morrison, a towering literary figure in African American literature, it is not only a pre-occupation but a harrowing and haunting experience; and so, her sympathy for the tragic fate of the African American children found expression in her works.

Both timely and timeless, the theme of childhood has established itself a tantalising presence in literature, from its flight from the absolute paradigm of innocence and joy to the extent of its tragic phase. It has a strategic place in the literary works as it is found organically related to the writers' creativity. The writers, when they are confronted with gruesome realities of the world around them, they often use child as a symbol of sensibility and imagination and when the denaturing process set in the social atmosphere, the child image gives them a state of mental equilibrium during their creative moments. Peter Coveney in his Image of Childhood remarks that the child serves as a powerful symbol to the writers while dealing with tension-filled lives. This symbol presents them a serene state of mental equilibrium, a Vedic state of sensibility, and imagination when the denaturing process in the society is at work:

The child could also serve as a symbol of artist's dissatisfaction with the society that is in process of such harsh development around him. In a world given to increasingly utilitarian values and the Machine, the child could become the symbol of Imagination and Sensibility, a symbol of Nature set against the forces abroad in a society actively de-naturing humanity (31).

In the light of this postulate, it is better to have a look at how a child

image helps Morrison to explore the depth and possibilities of the tragic fate of children trapped in the racial problems, as she knows the roots of all tragedies stem from the seeds of her generation. First, she imbibes emotionally and then subjects intellectually the bitter experiences of the character's childhood. She deals with the forces behind the nature of their childhood and the gruesome realities of the external environment. To achieve this purpose, she uses child as a symbol to represent the demeaning conditions of black race as she is dissatisfied with chaotic, boisterous, and mechanic social atmosphere, which have great impact in upbringing African American children.

This quest for innocence is a theme that has found wide significance in modern literature. In the quagmire of modern life, man is in constant search for his lost innocence. In other words, he often looks back into his childhood for a speck of relief. There are situations, which make him forget his surroundings when he is conscious of the essential thing in life. It is something other than the struggle for existence, other than conquering the material things in life but a constant desire for purification, a return to the state of innocence and acquiring life-long peace. In that state of immaculate peace, man seeks a renewal of life—a regeneration, after giving up the undesirable preoccupations. To embark upon the pilgrimage for self-realisation and to explore the nature of joy and happiness is to cast a glance backwards to his bygone days of childhood. And then he tries to retrieve the precious toy lost in the blue distance of time. This process, which involves the re-creation of the ontological reality of childhood, is an integral part of the writer's creative endeavour. It can be seen in almost all the characters of Morrison. They make a pilgrimage to the realm of their childhood in order to find solace but unfortunately, they are reminded of their rootlessness.

Milkman, Seth, Joe Trace, Valerian, Cholly, Hannah, Connie, and Heed are some of them.

The unknown mystery of childhood can be sounded only at the literary level where the writer assumes the essential characteristics of the child in an attempt to re-enact the process of childhood. Because the child's world is inaccessible to the adult, the communication between the two is bound to be vague, inadequate and incomplete. The adult acts in blindness and fails to sense the unknown and the mystery in the child. Even when the child is observed and studied by such disciplines as ontology and psychology the essential being of the child, its underlying mystery defies scientific investigations. Further the literary artist is focussing on the faithful portrayal of nature and art, which can only be done through the eye of a child whose language is the language of truth. This connection between the language of the child and the faithful portrayal of nature opens up new vistas of exploration for the creative artist. And the exploration has assumed new dimension in modern literature with the help of scientific advancement. In other words, the child image helps the writer to express his thoughts and perceptions to the readers more realistically. For this, he finds it convenient to use the child as a positive image against the claims of tradition, because the writer always perceives the world unique in childhood. Graham Greene in his essay, "Young Dickens", speaks about the perception of a sensitive writer: "The creative writer perceives his world one and for all in childhood, and his whole career is an effort to illustrate his private world in terms of the great public world we all share" (63).

Any literary work is the result of continuous friction between the private and the public world of the writer. This friction involves the authors' psychological conflict in relation to the social context. When this friction



occurs, they often present the child as a symbol and childhood as a theme to express their bitter feelings. They use various techniques and literary tools to achieve this aim, for a child possess unique qualities as an experimenter and as a seeker. The remarkable ability of the child to make observations and to find out the causes is well-known. Thus, the child image provides special advantage to the writer in his search for meaning. Morrison also makes use of the child image to achieve this aim. The most distinctive trait of the child is its capability to blend the objects of perception with the original archetypes. The child characters in the novels of Morrison are experimenters or seekers of truth and they blend the objects of perception with the original archetypes of their African origin, for the beautiful world is closed before them as soon as they are born into this world.

The relationship between the writer and the child may be explored in the light of the postulate that the child is the symbol of the self of the character. The child perceives its environment as a whole with independent parts, only in such environment is it possible for the child to familiarize itself and to act with purpose: without it, the child would have no basis on which to build its perception of relationship. The child tries to assimilate its environment and tries to unify its personality. Therefore, childhood provides one's own self-image. This is what has paved the way for Jung's concept of childhood to selfhood. Jung in his Psychology of the Transference states, "The evolution of the child's identity is in a sense the making of the individual self itself" (20). Accordingly, to Jung, selfhood is a psychological fact. He remarks that childhood is the complete picture of the self: "...a characteristic of childhood is that thanks to its naiveté and unconsciousness, it sketches a more complete picture of the self, of the whole man in his pure individuality, than adulthood" (Memories, Dreams, Reflections 272).

Therefore, the writer can find a complete picture of the character's self if he analyses the childhood of his character as it is one's own reflection.

Thus childhood serves as a key to self-realization and an instrument for self-definition. Every human being keeps it in his memory; he bears it all through his life and nurses it when he is confronted with the bitter side of his life. Therefore, childhood is a promise to return to the soul, provides a moment of memories and reflections for our spirits, and a challenge to hold fast to those powers as we grow into the adult world. Owing to these reasons, the writer takes up the theme of childhood to project the individuality of his character in the fullest sense either allowing the character to ruminate on his own childhood or grieves over the loss of it. Sometimes the fantasies about childhood get shattered when the outer world reacts against it. Therefore, one is not able to tell which seed will grow or not. Jenkins argues that: [o]ur grown-up fantasies of childhood as a simple space crumble when we recognize the complexity of the forces shaping our children's lives and defining who they will be, how they will behave, and how they will understand their place in the world. (qtd. in Don Latham 4).

Child is often compared to a writer on the ground that they both live in a world of innocence that prevailed in Eden. In other words, Eden is a state of man before the process of differentiation of the various aspects of his personality took place. It is a state of psychic equilibrium, the most essential part of childhood. So also the writer, whose sensation is glowing, feeling uncontrollable, operates as a unity and he is always in a state of stability. In the pre-lapsarian time, there is no sense of good and evil and no separation of the natural world into different compartments. The writer sees the world as a unity as a child sees it. But this state of stability is shaken when he is confronted with the hostility of his world around. Morrison also is in a state of

constant fuddle as her little children are put in the boiling cauldron of racial injustice of white America, while always reminding them at the back of their mind an Eden called Africa long back in their life.

Morrison's characters struggle for existence; they are subjected to traumatising experiences and psychic disturbances. In such a confusing state, they look back for a speck of solace; meditate on their bygone days for a little relief. Soon they recognise they were not gifted with a blissful period of childhood. They regret over the absence of that heavenly period. Morrison often casts the theme of childhood through memory and re-memory of the characters' historical past, for the African American childhood is the symbolic representation of insecurity and isolation. It is the period of bewilderment and potential violation in her characters' golden phase of life as Peter Coveney states: "In childhood lay the perfect image of insecurity and isolation, of fear and bewilderment, of vulnerability and potential violation" (The Image of Childhood 31-32).

Morrison makes child characters more prominent in her works because of the importance of its literary interest. She weaves the landscape of childhood with such subtleness and decodes its language in an exemplary manner. The contemporary world imposes certain shocking limits on childhood: it forgets the child, which is an inseparable link of the continuously evolving society; instead, it tries to alienate it. She exploits the potential nature of the child in her works in order to represent the reality in its fullest sense. For instance, the child Claudia MacTeer's (TBE) voice assumes greater significance than a philosopher's recitals. The voice of the child is a revelation of the contemporary reality of black parenting. This importance of the language of the child is widely discussed in Suransky's Erosion of Childhood. She advises in her work, to turn back to childhood because it

gives us the mystery and meaning to the study of literature more clearly. She speaks: "... we must now turn, in order to seek possibilities of meaning, another explanatory language that speaks to the landscape of childhood" (39). This explanatory language Suransky finds in such playwrights as Athol Fugard and poets like William Blake and Dylan Thomas. She makes the comment when she speaks about those great writers that they "have best understood through the aesthetic paradigm in which they live and move with acute sensitivity, quintessential attributes that capture the elusive history-making moments of childhood" (38-39). Later, when making an observation on one of the poems of Dylan Thomas, she states:

...[he] depicts the child's sense of freedom embodied in movement, in colour and in space and the transformative nature of that experience; [...]. It is this ontology of childhood that seems so sensitively captured by the aesthetic paradigms which in many ways offer a far more accurate portrayal of the mode of being of childhood than the indifferent technical vocabularies of our modern era (Suransky, 39)

Suransky's observations offer valid reasons to conclude that the treatment of childhood in literature deserves special attention. Morrison exploits the child in order to assert more depth and dimension in the racial issues that pose great menace to the black people. She attempts to re-enact the process of childhood of her race through her novels because childhood provides clearer and realistic picture of her intentions.

When we think critically about the literary works from the singular point of view, how the nature of the child and the condition of childhood are represented through the child characters, we see that the writers from Jane

Austin to Marcel Proust and from William Golding to the present dealt with a wide variety of themes related to childhood. Many literary works have appeared with the childhood characterized as a halcyon or nightmarish period. Sometimes the work reveals subtle autobiographical references to the author's childhood, the child exceptional, proto-heroic or children characterised in the normal range. Often writers employ child characters who are important but never appear in the works. Sometimes the views of childhood represented in novels reflect the characteristic of the age. The main features of their great works are the fictional time setting, the work that evokes comparison to or contrast with any children's books of the same period in its perception of the child and of childhood, and realistic portrayal of a child of the class, society, situation, and time. All these features have influenced Toni Morrison to frame her oeuvre using child characters.

A brief survey of the works of different writers who portrayed children in their works at different points of time in history is necessary for getting a clear picture of Morrison's handling the theme. The writers of the past are very much obsessed with the theme of childhood and deal with wide variety but with a difference, ranging from holistic innocence to its vicious nature. From Jane Austen to the present, they employ and exploit the child personae to understand the becoming and maturing of characters under different social contexts. Rousseau makes a fervent appeal to love childhood, to indulge in its games, its pleasures, and its lovable nature in Emile his treatise on education. At the same time, the literary world gets shocked when the pleasurable nature of childhood is removed from the innocent children. For example, Shakespeare depicts this truth through King Lear and Winter's Tale. In King Lear, Lear's daughter Cordelia suffers great mental agony because her most loving father rejects her as she lacks verbal eloquence, unlike her sisters, in

expressing her love towards her father. Perdita, in Winters Tale, is condemned to perdition since she is caught between parental fight. In Macbeth, Lady Macbeth's cruel nature could have been mellowed if she had a kid with a shining gum. Morrison also gets the same shock as she thinks of the toddlers of her race and finds similar expressions in her works. To establish this maxim, Marie Winn quotes Rousseau in Children without Childhood: "Who has not looked back with regret on an age when laughter is always on the lips and when the spirit is always at peace? Why take away from these little innocents the pleasure of a time so short, which ever escapes?" (92).

Despite Rousseau's nostalgia for the love of childhood, the romantic poets like Wordsworth, Blake, and Coleridge virtually worship the child with exuberant admiration and believe that childhood is superior to all stages of life and it possess divine qualities. They view the child as an embodiment of pure joy and innocence. Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimation of Immortality" sums up the romantic view of childhood that he saw the rest of life as diminution but he still speaks of the impending tragedy in the following lines:

Thou little Child, yet glorious in thy might  
Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height,  
Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke  
The years to bring the inevitable yoke,  
Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife?  
(Intimations of Immortality. 30-34:245)

Blake and Coleridge put forward different visions of childhood. Blake exploits the child's perception of the world to speak against the prevalence of slavery, discrimination and pain, which a child suffers and undergoes the

trauma imposed by white superiority. On the other hand, Coleridge observes that the child's mind is more susceptible to tension—tension due to the quest for identity and innocence and this quality has been very often used in literature to represent a certain quality of sensibility and a mode of insight. He thinks that the artist's duty is to retain this quality of childhood. William Walsh quotes Coleridge, "To carry on the feelings of childhood into the process of manhood is the character and the privilege of genius" (The Use of Imagination, 20).

Blake's Songs of Innocence and Wordsworth's Immortality Ode are considered classic works exploiting the symbol of child. They often express that the child is the extension of God's incarnation whose qualities of innocence resemble the angelic ones in the heaven. They articulate their concern over the sufferings of children and preach that the writer should carry the feelings and sensibility of the child personae. But Morrison focuses her attention on the negligence of society and the subsequent tragedy of the African American children rather than their innocence and angelic qualities. It seems she is closer to Blake than to the views of Wordsworth. Blake's poem "The Black Boy" tells the racial problems and their effect on the African American child, which Morrison handles at large:

My mother bore me in the Southern wild,  
And I am black, but oh my soul is white!  
White as an angel is the English child,  
But I am black, as if bereaved of light.  
(Blake. 15-19: 81)

Though romantics view child as a symbol of innocence, joy and divinity, the Victorian age shifts the focus. They directly or indirectly exploit

the child to speak of the deteriorating condition of the social milieu. The plight of children in the Victorian society makes deep furrows on the psyche of sensitive writers like Dickens and George Eliot. In those days children become the object of cruelty. They are forced to work in factories for hours because they are poor, orphans, vagabonds, or rootless and penniless. To this day, no writer has drawn the attention of the adult world to concentrate on the tragic fate of innocent young ones as Charles Dickens. Almost all the novels of Charles Dickens are filled with the tragic condition of children. Oliver Twist, Little Nell and David Copperfield are the supreme examples of tragic fate of children in Victorian society. Most of the characters of Morrison are more or less like the characters of the Victorian novelists and writers.

Certain writers and their works appeal to the world to look into the problems of innocence in the modern age in a different way. The writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are much more down-to-earth than about their 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century counterparts. They readily accept that the children have greater capacity for evil than the adults around. The vision of childhood, which is characteristically 20<sup>th</sup> century, goes back beyond Rousseau and the Romantics, and has more depressing implications. A Russian novelist, Yerofeev, in his novel Moscow Station describes the picture of two children whose callousness and sadism are beyond limit. When a drunken passenger trips on to the track in Moscow Railway station, and has his both legs cut off by a passing train, the two children jump down on to the track and decorate the top part of the corpse by placing a cigarette in the corner of its mouth.

Similarly Agota Kristof and Jersey Kosinsky, two novelists of 20<sup>th</sup> century, describe children's quest for survival in countries like Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Rumania during Second World War. In The Note Book, Kristof presents children who are forced to lie; cheat and even



murder in order to stay alive in a war-ridden society. They read the Bible and learn several passages by-heart. But, when the priest asks them if they obeyed Ten Commandments, they reply that it would be pointless to behave like that in a world where everybody kills. They then simply ask for more books, not for any religious book but for books including facts, “History books, Geography books, books that tell us true things not invented things” (The Note Book, 31). Although the boys are auto didactics in a world on which life is nasty, brutish and short, they occasionally show a rudimentary brutal sense of morality. The housekeeper of the priest, a woman in the novel, mockingly holds out a piece of bread to a crowd of starving refugees only to push it into her own mouth. Spotting this, the boys are enraged, take one of the live cartridges that they had stolen from an army camp and hides it in the firewood. When the woman lights the stove, it explodes and blinds her.

Kosinski’s novel, The Painted Bird describes that human capacity for violence is clearly placed in the personality of children, not in adults. It portrays a pet six-year-old boy who turns savage and a murderer, which shocks the parents when they return after the war. The boy is dark and olive-skinned, and thus incurs all the hostility, which the peasants feel for any one looking like gypsy or Jew. The impact on him of the events, which he witnesses or in which he is involved is understandably disastrous. When his parents find him again, at the end of the war, he has become a little brute who breaks the arm of his baby brother in a fight over a toy. He has already, in one of the many horrifying scenes, which recur throughout the novel, murders a carpenter who has mistreated him. He then watches the carpenter eaten away by rats. These are the examples of the impact of social break-up on the tender psyches, which results in making them neurotic persons. Both these novelists describe what happens to the child when the normal order in a war-ridden

society breaks down. The novels are often compared to the extent of King Lear or Candida, which have stood the test of time.

Richard Hugh's A High Wind in Jamaica tells us that children are entirely different from the adult moral standards. They live in a world, which is so alien from the moral standards developed by the adults that the writer can only describe their conduct but can never judge it. The novel illustrates that even the children are capable of committing heinous crimes. It is a stirring tale of seven English schoolchildren who are rescued by Captain Jonsen and his crew of pirates during a voyage to England. In the course of their subsequent adventures, one of the girls, Emily (aged 10), is panicked into killing a pirates' victim, a Dutch captain. When they eventually reach England, the children—much to their amazement—are welcomed as heroes and heroines; and it is Emily's hysterical recollection of the murder, which is mistakenly used to indict the pirates. When the case comes up before the court, and when the lawyer questions Emily during the trial, she bluntly lies before the court that it was captain Jonsen and his accomplices of the English ship who deliberately kills the Dutch Captain, and not her. The children are wrongly taken into confidence and approve the innocence, which results in hanging their rescuers in a hurricane. One would wonder how this little child Emily can feign innocence in such a serious murder case. The last part of the novel illustrates this: "Looking at that gentle, happy throng of clean, innocent faces, and soft graceful limbs, and listening to the ceaseless, artless babble of chatter rising; perhaps God could have picked out from among them which is Emily, but I am sure that I couldn't (200). Richard Hugh asserts that the children cannot be accounted for finding the truth; they are not as innocent as the world thinks so. The lawyer, Mathias says that, "he would extract information from the Devil himself than from a child" (A High Wind in

Jamaica, 119). The novel is unusual for its unsentimental portrayal of childhood, it breaks with Victorian conventions of childhood, and for heralding a new realism in the treatment of childhood.

William Golding's novel, The Lord of the Flies, concerns the degeneration of children into savagery. A group of English schoolchildren marooned on a Pacific island after their plane crashes try to impose order on the island. Ralph and Piggy, two of the boys, represent democracy and social order while Jack and Rogers's anarchy and savagery. The novel is a chilling allegory about the savagery of young children lurking beneath the thin veneer of modern civilized life. Golding makes a choice of savage knowledge rather than the blind innocence of children as the conclusion of his story. The readers of the novel are clearly invited to establish a parallel between the failure of children's attempt to impose order and the inability of the adults in the outside world to live in peace and harmony with one another. Golding remarks that, "the genesis of the novel lay in the brutalities during his service at sea in World War II and in his experience in teaching small boys for thirteen years (Wordsworth's Companion to Literature in English 563).

Most of the child characters of Morrison are neither vicious nor sadists but mature into adulthood even in their early childhood, forcing them to lose their golden phase of life forever. They do not have the inherent callousness as explained in Moscow Station nor do they have the boldness to lie before a law of court to escape from a capital punishment as depicted in A High Wind in Jamaica. But somehow, Golding's philosophy might have influenced Morrison, in the sense, that it is the society that holds everyone together; and without these conditions, our ideals, values, and the basics of right and wrong do not exist. Without society's rigid rules, anarchy and savagery can become known. This is what Morrison advocates in her novel Paradise (1993). She

also shows that morals come directly from our surroundings, and if there is no civilization around us, we will lose these values. To achieve this purpose, she selects some of the typical child characters from black surroundings because they are suffering from the terrible disease of being 'human' as Golding does. Golding's own explanation for the breakdown of civilization in The Lord of the Flies is that it is nothing more complex than the inherent nature of the evil in man. Golding, in one of his University lectures, reveals that, "the boys try to construct a civilization on the island; but it breaks down in blood and terror because the boys are suffering from the terrible disease of being human" (Lord of the Flies as Fable 42).

One of the curious features of the twentieth century concept of childhood is that it resembles the way children behave in a pre-Rousseauist view of childhood. In that period, children are capable of all unpleasantness possessed by adults. Writers of this age are much more realistic than their predecessors. They readily accept that children have the capacity for evil, like the adults around them. However, certain writers prefer to go back to their childhood to find great comfort. The remembrance of that holistic period is itself a solace to those writers as twentieth century is an age of tension. Some express it in their autobiographical works while others allow their characters to go back to their tender years to find out their self and identity as in D.H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers, Alain Fournier's Milk of Paradise, the First volume of Marcel Proust's Remembrance of Things Past and Sartre's autobiographical work Words. Memories of that bygone period always give the writer a potential source of creativity as Joseph Campbell explains in his The Hero with a Thousand Faces:

...this realm, as we know from psychoanalysis is precisely the infantile unconscious. It is the realm that we enter in sleep. We

carry it within ourselves forever. [...]. If only a portion of that lost totality could be dredged up with the light of the day, we should experience a marvellous expansion of our power, a vivid renewal of life (13).

Some great writers have expressed the marvellous expansion of their powers during moments of creativity when they nostalgically recollect the tender days of their childhood. In “Combray”, the opening section of Remembrance of Things Past, the narrator is presented in a very tired and depressed condition. He does not look back to manhood or adolescence in his depressed state but to his tender years. He remembers his childhood days every evening. In those sap green tendrils days, when he goes to bed, he grieves over the idea that he will be separated from his mother. He tries to put off his sorrows as long as possible by insisting on her to come and kiss good night. She is reluctant but wants to make him slightly dependant on her, though his father tells his mother to stay in the bedroom for the whole night, which does not take place. When he eats a particular small cake dipped in tea, he is suddenly filled with the joy—the joy of the remembrance of his childhood. He is a little boy then, he ruminates; his aunt would give him the same cake every Sunday morning when he is out to go to church. The childhood memories help Proust to escape from the sordid realities of his later life.

Matters are not so different in Fournier’s Milk of Paradise. Augustine Mealers, in the novel, explains to his friend how and why the magic domain of his early days, which he had come across in his wanderings, continues to exercise such a spell on him. He stresses that, while he is a young boy, everything is in a state of purity, which he knew he would never be able to find again. The autobiographical novel Sons and Lovers by D.H. Lawrence

depicts the brutal way his drunken father treats him while he is a boy. The novelist goes back to his early years and feels that his childhood had been a great tragedy because of his father's attitude. All the bitter feelings of the novelist's childhood find expression in this novel. Jean Paul Sartre is overwhelmed by his bygone days in his autobiographical novel Les Mots (Trans: Words). He thinks that childhood continues to cast great influences on our later period of life, and during that period, emotions are intense; everything is fine and wonderful. However, it is also the period during which human beings' failures start to become obvious as well as inevitable. Sartre writes:

You can get rid of neurosis; you can't be cured of yourself. Worn out, barely legible, humiliated, hidden, passed over in silence, all the features of the child remain alive in the fifty-year-old man. For most of the time, they hide away in corners waiting for their opportunity: the moment I lower my guard, they come back to life, head high, and enter, disguised, into the light of the day (Words 212).

In myths and epics, the theme finds its significance. Paradisiacal period is the early period of cosmic existence. It is considered as the period of absolute innocence, perfect bliss, and happiness, and it is the mythological symbol of childhood. In the paradisiacal period, man is said to possess certain qualities—like the ability to ascend to heaven, easy contact with Gods and friendship with animals. In that period, he is not affected by any sinful acts nor did he have the knowledge of it. He is like a nascent babe born out of heaven and nurtured by angels with his father being God. In due course, such privileges are lost to him due to the primordial event called 'The Fall'. He is then tempted by Satan and fell in the ditch of sin. Soon he is out from heaven

leaving his entire child-qualities. Ever since that expulsion from the angelic qualities, the tragedy of innocence continued to occur. According to Semitic religions, the present state of humanity is the result of this “Fall”. While drifting joyously as the children of God, Adam and Eve—from whom humanity evolved—are expelled from Eden because they disobeyed God. As a result, they have lost their innocence along with their paradisiacal qualities. Ever since that event, the yearning for Paradise is constantly haunting in every man or woman. In other words, his subconscious mind is always longing for returning to the state of childhood bliss. This has been a recurring theme in the history of Man, says Mircea Eliade, “The mystical memory of blessedness, without history, haunts man from the moment he becomes aware of his situation in the cosmos” (73). Thus in myths and religion, the concept of childhood becomes significant.

Morrison employs mythological concepts in her works. It can be found that the yearning for a Paradise or a return to the landscape of childhood is constantly working in Morrison’s heroes and heroines as well. Her child characters are unfortunate ones to lose their innocence. They often become rebellious because they are haunted by the thought of their expulsion from their homeland called Africa. They are subjected to ‘the Fall’-the Fall caused by racial factors. They are seen wandering along; they become runaways, vagabonds, and search for their ancestral roots. In other words, they are constantly yearning for the lost Paradise. In this way, they fulfil the mythological concept of childhood. Hence, Morrison’s characters, in which the mythological characteristics of the child are latent, are filled with the paradisiacal syndrome. It is present in the evolution of humanity in terms of its creativity. When the external environment is not congenial to the poor African American children, it subverts their Paradise syndrome and the

tragedy of innocence starts occurring.

A number of approaches and book-length studies have been developed by a host of scholars on the works of Morrison. Readings like Feminist, Anthropological or Cultural, Marxist, and approaches like Historicist, Psychoanalytic, and Postmodern came to be established in recent years in which her child characters are treated as the signifiers or signifieds. Among them, Postmodern view of childhood plays an important role on the works of Morrison, as no writer could stand aloof from the thought of that glorified period of childhood because the era imposes barrenness, sterility, and emotional stasis. Morrison constructs different texts and different discourses, at the same time, she deconstructs slavery and related issues exploiting child persona in her works, particularly in BVD. She thinks that the identity of children consists of ever so many discrete factors that are interrelated. Contemporary reality of the child is that he is a “General in the Labyrinth” as his innocence is gone forever. He cannot get rid of the stark realities of the worldly problems in which he is caught up. Even then he cannot keep aloof from the bliss of childhood. Philip Thody observes:

We are like the onion peeled like Ibsen’s Peer Gynt, organism whose identity consists solely of the interrelation of the discrete elements composing us so that we cannot stand aloof from the thought of childhood. Everyone nurses it, keeps it, and thinks of it (Magic Realism, Postmodernism & Toni Morrison 249).

Considering other aspects of childhood, Sociological and Psychological advancements have been major resources for writers to study and exploit the nature of childhood. Great changes have to come to pass in the attitude of the society towards children and childhood. During the last



centuries, technological advancement in the field of psychology as well as in scientific parenting gave a new outlook on the concept of childhood. The roles that children would have to take in an increasingly urbanised and bureaucratised society required new kinds of skills, which shall be acquired only through lengthy education. They went to acquire knowledge in the intellectual spheres through reading and doing mathematical computing, but they had to learn new behavioural patterns. However, acquiring knowledge alone did not come naturally to the temperament of the child. Slowly and painfully, children were helped to acquire additional graces like co-operation, tactfulness, social sensitivity, and skills they would need some day in the new kinds of work available to adults in towns and cities. The old way of the society dealing with children prepared them for the life they had to lead in feudal economics but in the modern world, they have to imbibe scientific knowledge for their healthy sustenance.

The changing economic conditions also exert pressure upon the unpolluted minds of children. In feudal society, children were trained in skills that would help them to make the best of their life. Later, the protective attitude that set in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century moulded children into new behaviour patterns that the pre-industrial and industrial economy needed. In the past they were agriculture helpers or as workers in cottage industries or as apprentices to craftsmen. They were treated like adults and engaged in the agrarian works as well as in bread-winning activities. Philip Aries in Centuries of Childhood comments: “Before that, children were not considered to be creatures significantly different from adults; rather they were universally treated as smaller and somewhat inferior versions of adults” (qtd in Marie Winn 87).

A brief survey of historical facts and the point of view of childhood at

different times shall throw light on to the increasing influence on literature. In Western society, says Don Latham, childhood is considered a discrete stage of life, separate and different from adulthood. However, in the historical point of view, childhood is not the way other cultures in other times and places have viewed it. In his classic work Centuries of Childhood, Philippe Ariés examines childhood in seventeenth-century France, and he makes the rather astonishing claim that in medieval society, childhood did not exist; instead, children were considered to be small adults and were depicted as such in the art of the period (33-34, 128). However, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, this view began to change. During this time, two views of childhood emerged, both of which emphasized the child as being different from the adult. One view considered children to be sweet and simple and thus a source of amusement for adults (Ariés 129). The other view considered children to be “fragile creatures of God who needed to be both safeguarded and reformed” (133). In the years since the publication of Centuries of Childhood, Ariés’s work has been largely disowned by medieval and early modern scholars as a misreading of late medieval culture; what Ariés took to be the lack of a concept of childhood is actually a view of childhood radically different from ours (Adams 2-3). Nevertheless, Ariés’s contribution to childhood studies lies not so much in the validity of his thesis as in his recognition of childhood as socially constructed and constantly reconstructed (Adams 2; Jenkins 16). As Henry Jenkins says, “our modern sense of the child is a palimpsest of ideas from different historical contexts,” including medieval, Romantic, Victorian, and modern (15).

In the eighteenth century the concept of childhood is strongly influenced by the writings of John Locke, who held that young children were essentially blank slates on which the tenets of morality and reason could be

inscribed (West 3). With the advent of Romanticism, the idea of the innocent child is resurrected. This view, as propounded by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and William Wordsworth among others, considered the child to be innately good and in need of protection from the corruptions of adult society (West 4). This view of childhood as a time of innocence and goodness exerted a strong influence on child rearing practices at the time and, in many ways, still does today. Several books published in the last twenty years, for example, have invoked the Romantic view of childhood as a time of innocence, and depicted contemporary children as being in dire need of protection. A sampling of titles indicates a common central concern among the writers: The Disappearance of Childhood (Neil Postman), The Erosion of Childhood (Dorothy Suransky), The Rise and Fall of Childhood (John Sommerville), and Saving Childhood (Michael Medved and Diane Medved).

Postman, to take one example, laments the demise of childhood in American culture, blaming the situation on the “electric media” (99). According to Postman, childhood as a distinct stage of life separated from adulthood with the invention of the printing press and the concomitant rise in literacy. In a very short time society began to consider those young children who could not read as being significantly different from those older children and adults who could. Along with this perceived difference came an emphasis on protecting young children from adult because they read “sexual” secrets. Now that reading has been replaced by passive interaction with electronic media, the distinction between childhood and adulthood has become blurred. The disappearance of childhood, of course, means that children are no longer protected from adult secrets. Contemporary society, Postman says, is thus composed of “at one end, infancy; at the other senility. In between there is what we call the adult-child” (99). Suransky, Sommerville, and Medved

identify other threats to childhood, including childcare, sex education, and a general lack of interest in children, but the ultimate message is basically the same: childhood should be a time of innocence, but in our society it is desperately in need of protection. George Bodmer summarizes it nicely, albeit in another context: “. . . childhood is a gift that we give to children. [. . .]. Part of our granting them childhood is our notion of protecting them from certain ‘frightening truths’; we try to control the message of that which we give them” (137). Jenkins elaborates on this view, which he considers to be unrealistic, limiting, and oppressive:

Too often, our culture imagines childhood as a utopian space, separate from adult cares and worries, free from sexuality, outside social divisions, closer to nature and the primitive world, more fluid in its identity and its access to the realms of the imagination, beyond historical change, more just, pure, and innocent, and in the end, waiting to be corrupted or protected by adults. (3-4)

However, another view of childhood has begun to gain credence, one that Eliza Dresang describes as “the-child-as-capable-and-seeking-connection” (Radical Change 57). Such a view sees children as “capably self-reliant, fiercely independent, curious, interactive, and ‘multi-tasking’” (Dresang and McClellan 162). Scholars have begun to recognize and validate this view of the child. For example, in a recent article on children in the workplace, Bartoletti describes the role of children in bringing about child labour reform in the early 1900s. She points out that, although few non-fiction works for children on the subject of child labour acknowledge the important contribution children made to labour reform, a number of primary materials indicate that “just as adults did, children negotiated, protested, and rebelled

against unfair working conditions and challenged dominant authority and institutions” (112). Variations on the theme of resilience have emerged in recent works about the importance of safeguarding the lives of girls and boys, respectively. Mary Pipher’s “Reviving Ophelia”: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls presents a compelling argument that we should help girls develop “emotional toughness and self-protection” and we should create “a society in which all (girls’) gifts can be developed and appreciated” (13). Similarly, in “Raising Cain”: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys, Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson argue that American culture does great harm to boys by encouraging them to suppress “their emotional life in service to rigid ideals of manhood” (xiii). Boys will be more resilient, better equipped to deal with the pressures and vagaries of life, if they have been encouraged to cultivate their emotional life. At first glance, especially with the words “saving” and “protecting” in their titles, these books might seem simply to offer variations on the theme of protecting the innocent. However, it is not the case. Both books emphasize that the potential for resilience and self-reliance is already present in boys and girls. What adults need to do is help girls develop greater toughness and boys, greater sensitivity.

Though children had been under the protective cover of the adults in the past, they were, in medieval times, were not let loose to take care for themselves. Great number of them perished early in life, because of accidents, diseases, faulty nutrition, and inadequate parenting. They were given a separate place from the rest of the society. Their distancing is marked not only by special care but also by special clothing, special cradles, and cribs to sleep in. After the age of six or seven, the helpless stage is over and they were treated as adults to participate in the hurly burly of society after imposing child labour upon them. Children always have to withstand the

worst of the changing society. Now they are more exposed to sex and family vicissitudes. Earlier, the parent acted as a protective cover but now the dictum has changed. Rather than protecting them, parents are busy engaging to make them prepare for their future bright. They educate, teach and give training for surviving to acquire wealth in the materialistic world. Mary Winn remarks, "The age of protection has ended. An age of preparation has set in" (Mary Winn 5). However, the ancient world of adulthood exhibited child-like simplicity, innocence and a readiness to laugh and cry. They laughed and cried in the course of everyday life of the past than in the present day world because they were too innocent. In Homer's Odyssey, seasoned warriors frequently burst into tears of happiness or anguish with no self-consciousness because they were more like innocent children than the adults were. In Anthropological studies of primitive societies, we frequently discover similar child-like traits. Nevertheless, modern adulthood does not exhibit such child-like simplicity nor are any primitive traits of childhood seen in them. They have "no time to stand and stare" at their children because of "sick hurry and palsied heart" of the mechanised world. Under the shadow of these profound changes, Morrison also tries to look in a new direction and finds expression of the tragic state of children in her works, which she deals, taking child characters as her heroes and heroines.

The appearance of personality theories opened new horizons in the study of children in depth. This is a new awareness to the writers. They, therefore, began to go deep into the psychological factors concerning the development of the personality of children. Children are confronted with the problems of growing up, which cause the distortion of their very self-esteem. With the development of psychology and sociology, much light is shed on their personality. Many psychologists like Eric H. Erickson, gave importance

to the sociology of childhood. According to them the milieu and environment are the controlling factors of their personality. They gave different shape to different personality theories, but its roots are found in the views of philosophers like Plato and Aristotle. Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Locke have reconstructed these theories later. The theories put forward by great psychologists like Freud, Jung, Charcot and Janet accelerated the importance of personality theories as a central factor in the study of behavioural pattern. But mainly the personality theorists are concerned with “the role of childhood trauma in adult adjustments, the condition under which mental health could be regained” (Hall and Gardner 4) and with issues that seem central and important to the healthy development of human personality.

Through its perception of the social order, a child identifies itself with the outer world and along with such identification; its idea of self-concept develops. This relationship between the social interaction and the behavioural development of an individual is studied by social psychologists. It provided immense insight into the individual reactions under different social conditions. The conditions vary according to different nations, communities, cultures, institutions, and families. This particular area of psychology deals with the study of attitudes and behavioural patterns, interpersonal integration, aggression and similar problems. Regarding the personality of an individual, definitions are abundant. These definitions suggest that:

Personality is the organisation or pattern that is given to the various discrete responses of the individual [...] an active force within the individual. Personality is that which gives order and congruence to all the different kinds of behaviour in which the individual engages (Hall and Gardner 8)

Various discrete responses constitute an individual's personality. It is an active force within the individual and gives order and congruence to all the different kinds of behaviour in which the individual engages. Freud is the first psychologist to point out that the development of personality is rooted in the experience of early years of childhood. He gave importance to the inborn traits that are the chief determiners of a child's behavioural pattern. Carl Jung proposed the significance of traditionally transmitted inherent memorial patterns too, which are detrimental to the personality trait of an individual. However, Adler, Fromm, Erikson, and Horney argued that the social milieu has very important role in shaping the character of a child. They also stressed that the most conflicting stage in the development process is the period of adolescence. A child is more exposed to the adult experience in this period. More or less, the child personae in the works of Morrison behave like adults with crumbled personalities as they are devoid of the joy and fulfilment of childhood due to the milieu and environment in which they are bred.

Cultural factors and familial atmosphere play a significant role in shaping one's behaviour. Alfred Adler and Karen Horney opposed Freud's emphasis on inherent traits. Adler's concept of behaviour is motivated by social interest, instead of a sexual one. Adler's opinion is that the individual's behaviour is determined by social urges thereby denying Freud's idea of sex and Jung's primordial images. Adler believed that social interest is inborn, and that human beings are social creatures by nature and not by habit. Thus, Adler classifies three categories of children in the light of his theories—the pampered, physically and mentally infirm, and neglected. The first one is self-centred and hesitant to interact with the social world. The second category can overcome their inferiorities, if given proper parental care and social understanding. The third type, if exposed to unfortunate experience



and ill treatment, will be dominated by the urge for revenge and will be unfriendly to society. The child characters in the novels of Morrison can be classified into pampered, neglected, or physically and mentally infirm.

Influence of external circumstances on a child moulds his behaviour and character. According to Karen Horney, the negation and rejection that a child faces, exerts great effects on his personality and behaviour. The child feels a kind of insecurity that produces intense anxiety, which springs from his familial bonds. Horney defines this anxiety as, "...the feeling a child has of being isolated and helpless in a potentially hostile world. A wide range of adverse factors in the environment can produce this insecurity in a child (Our Inner Conflicts 4). These adverse factors include parental domination or lack of concern and care, discrimination, rejection and lack of proper guidance. Because of these conflicts, the children may either become aggressive or revengeful or become overtly submissive and finally unable to counter the malevolence against them. If provided proper protection and love, the child can be restored from such psychological maladjustments.

According to Erikson, a child in its development must form autonomy and consequently develop a stable self-esteem. He further says that lasting sense of shame, guilt, doubt, and insecurity that produce many psychological problems in a child. It is because of its failure to develop autonomy. These psychological feelings are heightened when they reach adolescence, and then they begin to ask questions like 'Who am I?' and 'What is my identity?' The family is the most important socialising agency for the transmission of proper sense of identity, and it forms an integral part in moulding his character. As he grows up, he finds it difficult to cope up with the requirements of the adult society and in the process of social adaptations he confronts social roles as confusing, which may lead to identity crisis. The remarkable trait of

Morrison's heroes and heroines are that they confront social confusions in the course of their day-to-day life. Most of the children in the novels are brought up in the middle of family violence.

Identity crisis leads to the need of resolving the confusion of different roles that an individual should adopt. According to Erikson, if one fails to resolve this confusion, one may develop a negative identity, including bad and violent behaviour. Adolescence is a period of various biological changes and sexual maturity, the period in which the individual has to face many restrictions and inhibitions. When the identity is formed, he assimilates himself into particular community and customs, and thus develops solid convictions and unique ideologies as part of such incorporation. The lack of such solid convictions and unique ideologies lead to mental confusion. In fact, relationship of intimacy and parental love are the most influencing factors that help in reducing an adolescent's confusion, building in him high self-esteem and confidence. Both these factors are absent in the lives of African-American children. However, he is largely dependent on social context. Resolution of identity crisis and formation of personality are determined by the impact of external environment on the individual's psychological needs. In other words, "... a person's adjustment to society usually represents a compromise between inner needs and outer demands. He or she develops a social character in keeping with the requirements of the society" (Hall and Gardner 172).

The process of socialisation includes the learning of attitudes of the social group to which a child belongs and his attempt to attain identification with his environment. For example the Breedloves—the parents of Pecola (TBE)—are very negligent about their daughter, the Bottom community (Sula) is least concerned about Sula, and Macon Dead (SOS) teaches his son Milkman how to earn money. It is the adult's duty to guide the children in the

socialisation process, which we do not come across in the novels of Toni Morrison and therefore, they cannot lead a full cycle of human experience, which Erikson stresses in his work, Youth and Identity: “Beyond childhood, which provides the moral basis of our identity, and beyond the ideology of youth, only an adult ethics can guarantee to the next generation an equal chance to experience the full cycle of humanness” (Erikson 42). In the exploration of literary works, psychoanalytic criticism makes use of these psychological theories. In the light of these personality theories, studies have been made to explain the influence of childhood experience in later life of the characters in literary works, which examine personal and social environment in the development of a person’s concept of his self, producing in him varying degrees of self-esteem.

As far as the children under racial oppression are concerned, false ideas are injected into their cerebral system and inflicting the neurosis of imposed innocence. Under the slavery system, the negative conditions operate so actively all around, and therefore, the child faces serious questions: how to define his own self? How to separate his own self-concept from the concept of himself created by others? His task is to define himself as existentially cognizant human being, his endeavour is to establish his actions, and to justify his very being comes under serious threat. With the psyche fractured and perceptions blocked, he resorts to inculcate in his personality all those qualities, which stand analogues to the state of innocence. In other words, dependency, repression, self-deprecation, internalization of white values and self-alienation become the sign structures signifying the children’s existence.

One of the major symptoms of flawed consciousness of children under slavery is the sense of their psychological dependency. Critics have even used Freudian theory to explain these conditions of dependency experienced by the

oppressed children. According to Freudian psychodynamic developmental chart of oral, anal, phallic and pre-pubertal stages, the initial phase of dependency is the oral stage in which the infant is wholly dependent on the primary caretaker. What Freud calls an “Oral stage” and Erik H. Erikson “Basic trust”, Jacques Lacan conceptualizes these stages as Mirror stage. These mirror stages become the formative stages where the infant experiences foundations through the responses of the (m)other. They become identified with a reflection of themselves through the care of somebody else. Erikson argues that, “the general state of basic trust [...] implies that one has learned to rely on the sameness and continuity of the outer provider” (247). According to Lacan, the mirror stage is the state of absolute dependency because the infant is born without subjectivity, and possesses no identity, no sense of self. During this stage, the elemental signifiers—the voice, the gaze and the like are recorded by the infant in connection with the other (i.e. the primary caretaker).

Powerlessness and inability to wield self-power of the child lead its behavioural pattern to be determined according to the norms of somebody i.e, the primary care taker. In such an existential condition the children seek point of reference not in one’s own self, but in some outer agency. Placed in state of submission and conformity, the child under racial oppression defines the contours of his identity not in relation to himself but in relation to the racial and his value system and gets himself alienated from his true self. Many of Morrison’s child characters define their identity based on the racial system and alienated from their true self. As childhood is a version of true self, they are far removed from the bliss but drift toward its tragedy. They are the spokes persons for many unfortunate African American children who cannot exercise their right to self-assertion and possess “inhibitory” qualities. They

become derivative personalities because they cannot confirm their own self-esteem, self-worth or self-importance in their own terms. This state of dependency often makes the child non-assertive, which involves denial of self and personal rights. The results are often feelings of low self-esteem, loss of self-respect, feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness. The ideological environments under colonialism and slavery force the child to conceal his true self through repressive means. In fact, it is the psychological oppression that causes the malady of repression. Marilyn Frye, in her etymological explanation of the term 'repression' argues:

the root of the word 'repression' is the element 'press'...Presses are used to mold things to flatten them or reduce them in bulk... Something pressed is something caught between or among forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain, restrict or prevent the things' motion or mobility" (qtd in Pathak R.S 21).

The indoctrination or socialization process under slavery drives the child not only to dependency and repression but even to internalization of the dominant group's ideology and value principles. The children, who having been told the lies for centuries together and through long-time maintenance, are forced to believe and finally internalize such values and pass it on to the next generation. So enormous and multifaceted beliefs woven by the dominant society produce Uncle Toms and make them believe in their inferiority as a divinely ordained phenomenon. Thus the behavioural pattern of the children makes unquestioned acceptance of the guidelines of the slavery system. The children, having internalized the image of the racial phenomenon, remain scared of their own freedom. Paulo Freire makes the observation:

The malady of internalization results out of self-hatred and inferiority that the oppressed feels towards him. The personality of the Black Americans is a product of and a response to all of the historical forces of American Society. Racism and white supremacy leave devastating effects on the whole extent of the psychic universe of black persons, they even shape attitudes towards themselves (qtd in Pathak.R.S 21).

In a racist society where the African American children are dehumanized and degraded on account of their Negroid qualities, the black parents, somewhere in their fragile corners of their egoism often feel belittled and inferior and are haunted by a nagging sense of self-rejection. Being dark and Negroid and therefore labelled as inferior subhuman, the parents often crave for the Caucasian standards of superiority in order to make themselves acceptable as human beings. Morrison's debut novel TBE illustrates this point. The attempt to become white intensifies making them ashamed of what they are. A common consensus is that it is this self-hatred and self-rejections that the parents pass on to the children and finally lead them to internalize white ideals. This results in psychic suicide and strangulation of one's own culture. Relinquishing their own cultural traits, rejecting their own people and value structure the children "continually seek self- acceptance through assimilation and accommodation into the culture of dominant society" (Pathak R.S 22). African American literature at large and Morrison's novels in particular, is abundant of characters who, having renounced their black cultural milieu, have affectionately embraced the upper middle-class white bourgeois ideals. For instance, Morrison caricatures Jadine Childs in TAR in this line of thought. In these conditions, one wilfully liquidates one's own individuality, annihilates ones' own presence, and suspends one's own

consciousness. And allows himself to blindly follow the structure of others. The person's complete behavioural pattern reflects nothing but a psychological paralysis. The child characters undergo this psychological paralysis in Morrison's novels.

Morrison child characters suffer the loss of self-consciousness and therefore they are subjected to alienation. The alienation is defined as “ the action of estranging, or state of estrangement in feeling or affection, the action of transferring the ownership of anything to another; the state of being alienated, or held by other than the proper owner (The Oxford English Dictionary). The oppressive environments readily impose severe narrowness and contradiction so that the child's capacity to think, judge and reason is pathetically reduced. It also restricts the cognitive power so that the child becomes separated from the social reality. The estrangement refers to condition where one ceases or remains unable to identify with someone or something. It is the child's inability to participate fully with other objects in the social universe. However, in colonial setup where one's identity and consciousness are suppressed, moulded, distorted through innumerable negative messages, myths and stereotypes, where one is overwhelmed by inexorable social pressures, where one is granted slight significance and little option in control of his destiny, where one feels encapsulated and compartmentalized in a particular degrading rigid role, a child becomes estranged not only to the social realities but even to his true self and his cultural universe. Under such circumstances, the child remains divorced from his own value structures. His identity comes under serious threat. Therefore the loss of identity is alienation; it leads to powerlessness and lack of control over various aspects of the child's existence. In short, all these psychological factors like dependency, repression, internalization, and alienation contribute

to the tragic condition of childhood in Morrison's novels.

Toni Morrison's novels give an opportunity to explore the socio-familial fabric of African American children under the light of the theme of childhood and its tragic phase. In all her novels, the characters struggle to find an identity of their own because they lack a normal childhood and they later transmit the same confusion to their children's psyche. Her characters are seen to be obsessed with their memories of the past, and their childhood plays an important role in their later life. Most of them suffer from a miserable childhood, which moulds their behavioural pattern. Morrison offers psychological insights into her characters' tortured psyche and its devastating effects of a low self-esteem. The child protagonists Pecola Breedlove (TBE), Beloved (BVD), Sula (Sula) are victims of psychological scars presented either by their parents or their community in which they live. Morrison finds that in the lower strata of African American family, children are deprived of the basic needs—love, recognition, affection, and security. Therefore, she tells the tales of woe and recites the poetry of bleeding heart of the African American children to tear off the veil of social injustice.

The African American personalities have been caught up in the snares of the over-burdening impact of racism resulting in psychological trauma and harrowing experiences. Morrison, through her novels, deals with the black identity, its definitions, realisations, and even its distortions. She mostly probes into the experiences of children and women as she finds that area is vast and easily accessible. Being a African American child brought up in a marginalised community from the central stream of American life, which struggled for centuries, she herself had experienced the stresses and strains of growing up. She shows that African American children feel physically revolted and mentally battered under the demeaning conditions of colourism.



TBE is Morrison's debut novel, which shows the trauma of black girl who slowly escapes and lapses into madness. It is followed by Sula, in which the central character Sula leads a wayward life to challenge the norms of the society. It portrays the approach of the black community towards their little toddlers by placing at the centre of the novel, the growing up of two black girls-Sula and Nel. At the end, the novel describes their friendship and its distortion. The unconventional life of Sula is a kind of defence mechanism that she wilfully adopts to reduce her mental alienation. Song of Solomon, the first novel of Morrison with a male-child protagonist Milkman, recounts the complex life of four generations of African American family and his journey in search of his identity, which is related to the myth of Paradisical syndrome.

Tar Baby sketches the confrontation between old and new values, nature, and culture in the life of children represented by Son and Jadine. Jadine's craving for the standards of white world and her polished Western manners produce strong disagreement in her relationship with the unsophisticated Son. Jadine's authentic self is covered by the fancy of white culture in which she is brought up, caused an estrangement from her black identity. Through BVD, Morrison stupendously captures the macabre atmosphere of a haunted house, along with the central theme of slavery. Sethe, the slave woman kills her daughter in order to save her from the mental agony of an enslaved childhood. Sethe does not want her daughter to suffer like her from the cruelty and psychic agitations brought by slavery. This brutal act of Sethe springs out of her sense of inability to provide her child with a happy childhood. Violet in Jazz is a victim of a disturbed childhood, the agitation of which reflects in her actions. Her husband, Joe Trace, has been deserted by his mother, the humiliation of which casts shadows in his

life. The bitterness of unhappy childhood makes Violet to take a decision not to have children, which she regrets later and the inner conflict of which prompts her to the extent of a “child-snatcher”. Paradise presents the characters’ yearning for a Paradise because, in the final stages of life, they confront the problems of intra-racial nature and the founding father’s adherence to strict rules but most of them in their childhood have been subjected to sexual assault or caught up in the skin-colour complex. In Love, child-marriage and its repercussions predominate while most part of the novel’s theme is evolved through childhood memories of the characters. Morrison brings different perspectives and philosophical overtures of love that affect the life of children in the novel.

Morrison shows that society can make or unmake a child’s behaviour. Guitar in Song of Solomon is a victim of white brutality. When his father was killed by the sawmill owner, he had been offered forty dollars and sweets as compensation. When he grows up, the latent rage of this unforgettable event comes forth and he fights against social injustice. Guitar fills his mind with anger and violence and joins a terrorist group. While Guitar adopts destructive methods, Milkman, with a racial conscious, searches for his ancestral roots. Sethe’s brutal murder of her daughter is contrasted with Paul D’s attitude to find social solidarity in BVD. It is the series of agonising experience in their childhood days that produce unnatural behaviours in these blacks.

Psychological trauma affects Morrison characters in different ways. It brings insanity, destructiveness, and implosion in the case of Pecola (TBE), Sethe (BVD), Beloved (BVD), Violet (Jazz), and Cholly (TBE), and Sweetie Flood (Paradise) while it produces balance, understanding, and constructiveness in the behaviour of Paul D (BVD), Milkman (SOS), and

Son (TAR), and Bill Coosey (Love). To love and to be loved is the earnest wish of Morrison's tragic characters, which is denied to them in their very young stages of life, forcing them to a hopeless existence. For her characters' sufferings, Morrison suggests love as the panacea to save from the entangling chains of life and it has been proved in her latest novel Love.

The texts and portrayals of childhood in Morrison's novel present many appalling factors, which badly affect the golden age of childhood- the innocent and carefree age - and; as a result, the children, are slowly drifted into tragic situations. The knowledge of evil, violence, human helplessness, futility, injustice, misery, and death are some of them that corrode the golden age of life. In Morrison's works, parents struggle for economic status and for sexual fulfilment. They engage in brutal conflicts with their children. But they are not least bothered about political situations, nor did they agonise over the depleting natural resources and ecological destruction. They do not tremble at the holocaust of nuclear menace. Parents no longer sequester their children from knowledge and involvement in these complex affairs.

Before exploring the novels in detail, it is better to have a look at the way the great writers of America and elsewhere took this theme in order to speak of the landscape of childhood. Different writers at different times exploited the child for it gave them a naïve vision—a vision of speaking reality embellished by its simplicity. Most of the American writers believe that the European's escape from the old world culture is reborn in the new world as a child of nature and hence the idea of childhood has become a part of American tradition. They assert that children are far from being the limbs of Satan, they are in fact innately superior to adults, closer to nature and hence closer to God. At the same time, the importance of formative years is deeply felt in education, science and theology and they view the child with sympathy

and interest. But the black writers like W.E.B. Du Bois, Richard Wright, James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison are more concerned about the perpetration done to the little toddlers of their race than the perspectives of their American counterparts. They analyse the theme and its complexities on the social, psychological, economic, and political backgrounds, which they think are the causes of stripping away of the innocence and purity of the child. Even more, the sensitive psyche of the internationally famous black woman writer, Toni Morrison, presents a world of African American children whose untellable misery has no end. An exploration of the important authors in American Literature as well as their works will help us to get a clear picture of Morrison's outstanding contribution in the present study.

## **Chapter II**

### **Childhood: American Perspective**

“Childhood, the plain dealer; nothing approached it but upon intimate terms. It is the shades of experience that afford shadows of fear, but the black-and-white of childhood discovers the intimacy of terror”- William Gaddis Jr.

Childhood, in a sense, connotes continuous process of birth and rebirth. Every time this process enacts in almost all the branches of human affairs and knowledge. It also represents the beginning of a new world, a new culture, a new era, sometimes, or a departure from the dead past of the old customs and civilisation. The changing civilisation and culture replace the old, yielding place to new one. Thus, childhood sweeps significance whenever a new change occurs or an old custom dies in any realm of human knowledge. In the light of these perspectives, when one goes through the history of American civilisation, one may find that the theme of childhood is relevant in the American context too. The early dawn of American history is in the process of becoming, and therefore, historically, it is going through its period of childhood when the migrants from Europe and slaves from Africa, after crossing the Atlantic, reach American shores. They can be considered as innocent children in the new world. It is a rebirth for them in the new continent. They called this new world—the American continent—New England because the old one they want to efface from their memory.

The old world civilisation corrupted and exploited those bygone children of nature, but when they slough off their old world culture they become innocent. In other words, through the historical purgation, the settlers

literally become the progenies of nature in a new environment. The newly transformed surroundings force them to acquire new culture and new life style. Thus it is like a rebirth for the settlers in the American continent. Writers like Henry Nash Smith and D.H. Lawrence have demonstrated that the imagination of Americans after 19<sup>th</sup> century is overruled by this conviction that the American West represented a redemptive nature of transformation from the old to the new one, which gave them a spiritual salvation. D.H. Lawrence, in his Studies in Classical American Literature, best represents this myth when he speaks about the Leather stocking novels:

The Leather stocking novels [...] go backwards from old age to golden youth. That is the true myth of America. She starts old, old, wrinkled and writhing in an old skin. And there is a gradual sloughing off the old skin towards, a new youth. It is the myth of America (60)

The American's journey to the West is an effort to escape from the history to live with nature is termed as the myth of American West. The early settlers marched towards the Western parts of America in order to find vast lands and wealth and tried to live in the lap of nature. The man corrupted by civilisation hoped to be reborn in this new world. This conviction that he is made innocent when he abandons the old history is termed as the myth of American Innocence. As long as there is an unsettled area the Americans will continue to dream and believe in the myths that, one day they might escape history to live with nature. These myths provide a redemptive nature and give them spiritual salvation. Hence they are related to childhood theme as they show a departure from the old world order. Further, these myths necessitate a new angle of vision to approach and apprehend a new reality in their works. American writers are convinced of these myths that the Europeans and

Africans are reborn in the new world as the children of nature. This craving for a new baptismal innocence is seen in American culture also. It is born out of certain original colonists and of the revolutionary generation. They assert that, "This new world has to be liberated from the dead hand of the past and become the scene of a new departure in human affairs" (Richard Slotkin, 3).

It is in view of this background that the young generation of American writers, who nurtured on Freud and Gessell, try to think of childhood as the most precious period in the lives of the characters they depicted. The agony of growing up have been faithfully represented in some of the most moving and powerful works in American literature. The plights of children from holy innocence to grave and mature situations are introduced painfully and perhaps tragically in many of the contemporary articles and stories of American renown. The writers rely on childhood experiences and childhood vision of a world already in flux, and seek to define themselves in relation to this moving and dynamic process. Stories of innocence and simplicity, of oppression and survival and of the struggle and triumph of the human spirit can be seen in their portrayal. Salinger, Saroyan, Faulkener, Welty, Porter and Capote have regarded this theme as natural to the present American literary scenario.

Like other aspects of American culture, the idea of childhood has been a part of the American tradition. It really started in the nineteenth century when transcendentalist movement come to be active and try to change the mode of thought in the American context. The romantic imagination has indeed reversed the traditional Puritan order of things. Men like Emerson and Brownson Alcott state that children, far from being limbs of Satan, are in fact innately superior to adults, closer to nature and hence closer to God, more alive to sensuous, emotional, and moral experience. At the same time, importance of formative years comes to be felt in other realms of American

thought. Catherine Beecher, Elizabeth Peabody and Horace Mann in education, Horace Bushnell, in theology and Henry Walton in painting are but some eminent persons who reflect upon the theme of childhood as a major pre-occupation before the Civil War with new sympathy and interest.

The American writing wants to wipe out the old emotions from this new reality. It is an effort to cleanse words of clusters of associations as it may sometimes produce dullness as often supply richness. This passion to discover new access to reality is confirmed by referring to the superior vision of the child in American literature. The vision of the child is put to much more connotations and denotations in American writing than in any other part of the world. A major problem facing the American writers is simply the need to recognise and contain a new continent. They therefore adopted the richness and wonder of the child's view of the world to meet this challenge, towards inclusion and assimilation. The unusual concern for the present has enabled the American writers to make discoveries denied to those who prefer to see the present through the eyes of the past. So the need to hold on to the present situation is the need to overcome the disabling, crippling quality of thought itself. This crippling influence is minimal in the child, and hence the American writers find it convenient to use the child as a positive image against the claims of tradition. Even then, the American society view African American child as the symbol of dirt, of ugliness, of evil, of corruption and death; and, therefore, Morrison and other black writers have cleverly manipulated child characters to represent their innately waging wars against these far-reaching consequences in the society of colour prejudice.

Still, the problems and solutions presented by many American writers like Emerson, Whitman and Thoreau may profitably be approached by considering their penchant for the strategy of the naïve vision of a child, a



vision, which attempts to regard reality with minimum reference to previous familiarity. This is best revealed by Emerson who calls himself “an endless seeker with no past at my back”. He illustrates that he always has the vision of naivety and advises that if a man could retain the primitive simplicity of the vision of a child, the divine power, which pervades the universe, would suddenly become clear to him. In this context, Emerson’s interest in the child’s eye has not been overlaid with the dirt, dust, or habit. So he sees more virtues in the child than in an adult. Emerson speaks of the child’s capacity to see the wonders of nature. He preaches that infancy is the perpetual Messiah who comes into the arms of the fallen men, and who pleads with them to return to Paradise. Emerson endorses this mode of seeing because he believes that the child has the superior vision of reality. He comments on the potential of the child’s ability to view the world: “To speak truly, few adult persons can see Nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and heart of the child” (Complete Works 8).

Here Emerson indicates that man’s eye has been conquered, but that of the child remains unconquered. In this lies the child’s genius: the openness to sensations and the visual abandonment he is capable of. Hence, “we are at our best when we too can gaze like children” Emerson 8). But the experience of the African American child is entirely different. A black and bleak sun appears before the African American child as portrayed in the works of the eminent writers, particularly by Morrison. She seems to subscribe the views of Thoreau, who insists on the need for a child-like mind that can reduce the corruptions of the world and laments on the loss of innocence that has become the hallmark of African Americans living in the ghettos and Harlem streets in America. The African Americans are unable to retreat to the blissful landscape

of childhood at a later age and therefore they thrust at their wards the unforgettable bewildering experience. An African American child's mind is burdened with the harsh realities of life, past memories of bitter emotions. Emerson and Thoreau believe that knowledge and thought cannot ruin such a mind, and an unpolluted mind is required to perceive the reality in a disharmonious and disrupted world.

Whitman cannot resist the nostalgia that left behind the childhood and the nature of the experience of childhood. He sees wonder and variety in every object he met when he is a child. He is amazed at the sight of wonderful creation of nature, his heart bubbles so that his feelings are arrested, and begins to sing ecstatic songs when he thinks of his childhood days. Whitman writes:

Beginning my studies the first step pleas'd me so much,  
The mere fact consciousness, these forms, the power of motion,  
The least insect or animal, the senses, the eyesight, love,  
The first step I saw awed me and pleas'd me so much,  
I have hardly gone and hardly wish'd to go any further,  
But stop and loiter all the time and sing it in ecstatic songs.  
(Whitman. "Beginning My Studies". 1-6:303)

The poet relates the nature of the early childhood. Each time it is noted as a small miracle. The diversity of particular in nature is regarded with awe. The eye travels from the apple blossom to a drunkard with no diminution of wonder, unaccompanied by moral judgement. This is the required facility to live in truth and Whitman thinks the child is gifted with this capacity of seeing truth. His poem "There is a Child went forth" illustrates his conviction:

There was a child went forth everyday,

And the first object he look'd upon, that object he became,  
And that object became part of him for the day or  
a certain part of the day,  
Or for many years or stretching cycles of years.  
(Whitman. "There was a Child Went Forth".1-4: 393)

The country side, the home, the city—whatever the object he come across during his childhood and wherever he goes—they all become the part of the child whose naivety acts as a sort of sponge to the teeming fragments of the real world. This uncritical assimilation of the seen world and the eye wondering and delighting in everything constitute the first great step of the human being. He wishes it is also the last step, because any further movement will only distract him from the truth. However, the transcendentalist trio cannot see the tragedy of the African American children. Though Thoreau advises us that “we should treat our minds as innocent and ingenuous children whose guardians we are—be careful what objects, and what subjects we thrust on their attentions” (Complete Works 290-291), he insists on the need of an innocent mind, and Whitman is concerned with the uncritical assimilation of the real world, the reality of African American childhood Morrison portrays is entirely tragic.

While the transcendentalist trio—Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman—are concerned about the nature and superior vision of childhood, Mark Twain idealised it in two full-length novels, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and The Adventures of Tom Sawyer. He exploits the child personae to speak of the contemporary social disorder and allows the child to escape into a free world from the clutches of the rule-imposing adult society. Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer are the most widely known child-protagonists in the whole world of literature and these novels, in which they reign supreme, are turned

out to be the American epic of childhood. Critics consider Twain's humour and all American humour depicted in the novels are the outlets of repressed filial revolts of children in disguise. The story begins with a summary of Tom Sawyer and explains how Huck has fared since being adopted into the home of Widow Douglas and her sister, Miss Watson. His blackguard father threatens his relative security trying to claim the money that Huck and Tom had recovered from the cave of Injun Joe. Eventually Huck is kidnapped and imprisoned by his father in an isolated cabin. He frees himself by making it appear as if he has been murdered and then flees to Jackson Island. When Huck discovers that his own 'death' has been blamed on Jim, Miss Watson's good-hearted slave, and that a search party is on its way to Jackson's island, the two runaways resolve to travel down the Mississippi on a raft. Jim plans to leave the Mississippi at Cairo (the mouth of Ohio River) and travel up the Ohio to freedom, but they miss Cairo in a dense fog, continue floating down stream, and undergo a series of encounters with feuding clans, murderers, lawless aristocrats and numerous mobs, all of which they survive by luck, wit and determination. And then, Aunt Sally and other parental figures try to 'civilize' the children in the novel on their own way while the determination of an African American child to escape from slavery is reflected in the novel. Higgins and Edward observe that Mark Twain, "retained in his subconscious mind, a dynamic, repressed and undrained emotion of filial revolt, because of his hatred of the Calvinistic Puritanism of his parents" (Edward 33-34).

Mark Twain, through his novels, cherishes a recurrent fantasy that life should begin from old age and regress continuously towards youth and childhood. Twain also advocates Emersonian way—a return to Nature as a protest against the civilised and corrupted world and a regression to past memories. His personal nostalgia mingles with social awareness results in the

selection of the unity of boyhood as the medium of conveying his mental disturbances. In The Ordeal of Mark Twain, Van Wyck Brooks observes:

It is generally understood, therefore, that when people in middle age occupy themselves with their childhood, it is because some central instinct [...] has been blocked by internal or external obstacles. Their consciousness flows backward until it reaches a period in their memory when life still seemed to them open and fluid with possibilities (Coveney, The Image of Childhood 216).

The two novels, Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer reveal the child's revolt against society and his wish to escape to Nature. Peter Coveney writes, "Huckleberry Finn enacts the revolt of 'natural and healthy instinct' against its suppression by a moral society" (Peter Coveney 221). Nature becomes the symbol of a loving and considerate mother in the novels. For Huck, the Mississippi provides all solace than the irritating crowded society of the external world. He enjoys every minute of his life on the raft. Tom's escape to Jackson's Island is far from the haunts of man. This shows that Tom's intense desire to free himself from the clutches of routine life and rest in Nature's lap. Morrison's child characters also exhibit similar traits of escaping to Nature from the disharmonious, disgusted and disrupted world around them either by revolting against their familial set-up or by plunging in the depth of childhood memories as she presents runaways in TBE, Sula, SOS and BVD.

The dilemma of American childhood continues in Henry James's novels. Henry James portrays the child personae in his novels to look into the fate of the innocent when introduced into the complex world of human affairs.

He shows the innocent, candid, outside eye of a child as a strategy subjecting it to a dynamic unprogrammed education by opening up new modes of gaining a holistic vision of reality through the naïve vision of childhood. It leads him to explore a new morality of vision itself. It is worth noting that unlike the calm and serene eye of the child of which Emerson speaks, the innocent eye of James' child character, Maisie, is in a state of constant fuddle. His novel What Maisie Knew depicts the adult world through the outspoken eyes of a child. Maisie, the protagonist of the novel, is a victim of thwarted childhood and filial negligence. Like a shuttlecock, she has to change her position back and forth between her parents every time. The adult world carelessly and unruly bruises the tender heart creating a bewildering world around her, which reveals the dilemma of a contemporary American child who is crushed between divorced parents. James mocks at the morality of society and the artificiality of relationships through the novel. Maisie struggles to establish integrity of innocence in the midst of a mentally depraving environment. In The Turn of the Screw, James shows the conflict between corruption and innocence. The two children of the novel—Miles and Flora—are at the same time corrupt and victims of corruption. Similarly, the innocence of Morrison's world of children is corroded continuously in a world in which they are fated to live with their parents who are least bothered about their children as in TBE , Sula , SOS and TAR.

Morrison puts forward the view that in order get a clear picture of the actuality of the racial conditions she should use the innocent narration of children so that the world would be tempted to believe the reality and sufferings of her poor black people, like Gertrude Stein and Sherwood Anderson have revealed in their works. Stein, in her discussion on Picasso, thinks memory as an inadequate aid to vision. She says that Picasso began his

attempt to express not things felt, not things remembered, not established in relations, but things, which are there really, everything a human being can know at each moment of his existence and not an assembling of all his experience. For him, she asserts, “remembered things are not things seen, therefore they are not things known” (Picasso 35). She goes on to say that remembering is only repetition and it is the only confusion. As the child does not have to remember, as it is unburdened with a memory, it can see reality free from the grime of old emotions. In other words, the child’s mind is the ideal perceiving medium which a writer should possess to establish contact with reality. Anderson, the American novelist and short story writer also has the same view that it is the best medium for perceiving reality. He argues that if one requires understanding the actuality in its fullest sense, one needs child-like qualities and responses. He believed that, a man, if he is any good, never gets over being a boy and expressed interest in the child’s mode of perception in order to understand the full significance of modern American literature. He remarks in his autobiography, Tar: A Mid-West Childhood. : “To say that he seemed most at ease with what he considered to be the child’s manner of assimilating the world is to say something with relevance for a great deal of modern American Literature” (Anderson 166).

The superior vision of childhood changes from holy innocence to tragic vision with the onset of Black Aesthetic Movements. Scores of black writers assembled and discussed the need for radical reflection of the ethnic issues. They want to disengage from the larger world of American literature and to uphold the values of African Americans. The Black Arts Movement opposed any concept that alienated art and artists from society. This aesthetic movement spoke directly of the needs and aspirations of the African American children. Writers like LeRoi Jones, the poet and playwright, John

Oliver Killen, the novelist, and the poet Larry Neal emerged as the chief strategists. They proposed the Black Aesthetic Movement, the definitions of which vary with its various expounders. It, however, is the affirmation of black reality and potential without trying to take away the dreams of the black and paint them white until the differences are found out.

The blacks under slavery, when forced to sail across the Atlantic, from their African roots to the American continent, endure the most dehumanising cruelties at the hands of their white masters. This transmigration produces a double consciousness in them because they are forced to abandon their African culture, at the same time, they reach in an inhospitable land where their dignity is trampled by the slave owners. W.E.B. Du Bois says that after the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mangolian, the Negro child is the seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self consciousness, but only lets him through the revelation of the other world. He is caught between two worlds—one he tries to make his homeland and in the other he is subjected to constant expulsion from becoming the native of America because the natives find it difficult to cope with the alien creatures, as they are physically and culturally different. Du Bois comments on the issue of double consciousness:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (qtd in Louise



Gates Jr. 694).

The Emancipation Proclamation in America is hailed by thousands of blacks for it gives them a sigh of relief because they are toiling under the tyrannical yoke of slavery for centuries. Yet, the proclamation cannot solve any of their basic problems, and still, they are under the complexes of inferiority and low-caste. The blacks, who are subordinated to white superiority, nurture the same feelings and slavish mentality even after many years. This submissiveness produces in their children a feeling of self-hatred, hostility, and aggression, which prevent them from any social interaction. Skin colour prejudices and the concept of the blacks belonging to an inferior race are the important factors that make black subservient to the white. The colour black is always associated with evil and vice, whereas white symbolised virtue and goodness. The African American children, when they become conscious of their skin colour, are frightened and it results in crippling of their self esteem. Charles E. Silberman writes about the horrible plight of African American children when they are suddenly exposed to this terrifying experience: “For the youngster growing up in Harlem or any other Negro slums, the gates of life clang shut at a terrifying early age. For one thing, the children became aware almost from infancy of the opprobrium Americans attach to colour” (Crisis in Black and White 49).

Under these backdrops various movements and institutions came forward to assert the black power and identity. The African Americans struggled hard for their positions and existence under white humiliation and torturing. In the sixties, in an attempt for self-definition, the leaders of African American freedom struggle put forward a powerful watchword —“black is beautiful.” Inspired by this dictum, black writers attempted their hand at new literary reflections. They wrote for black liberation emphasising

that black literature should be an integral part of the community's life style that gives strength to the consciousness of the individual.

The movements of the black race as well as the great personalities like W.E.B Du Bois, Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison greatly influence Toni Morrison. They appear on the literary scene of the African American experience to tell more about the crushing tales of African American children through their powerful output. Du Bois in his outstanding work, Souls of the Black Folk describes the days of the bondage, which is thought the sum of all villainies, the causes of all sorrow, the root of all prejudice of young toddlers. Like Baby Suggs in BVD, Du Bois calls out for a message to stand up to face the challenges:

Shout, O children!

Shout, you are free!

For God has brought you liberty!!

Du Bois speaks with the surge of emotion, the wonder and delight when his first child is born, that he is so thrilled to see the beautiful, olive-tinted flesh and dark gold ringlets, his eyes of mingle blue and brown, his perfect little limbs, and soft voluptuous roll which the blood of Africa has moulded into his features. But he laments that the child is born with a veil—within the veil of a Negro's son. He sees in his child's image the strength of his race stretching through the history, sees the dream of his black fathers staggering to the wild phantasm of the world and hears in his voice, the voice of the prophet that is to rise within the veil. When his son is dead, he sees it not only his sorrow but of the entire race:

The wretched of my race that line the alleys of the nation sit fatherless and unmothered; but Love sat beside his cradle, and

in his ear Wisdom waited to speak. Perhaps now he knows the All-love, and needs not to be wise. Sleep then child—sleep till I sleep and waken to a baby voice and the ceaseless patter of little feet—above the Veil (qtd in Louise Gates Jr. 742).

Du Bois analyses the plight of the African American child as the story of struggles of many long years with life that he might be familiarised with the world and himself. According to him, when an African-American boy is born, no beautiful world awaits him but only the dark and dismal world of temptations loom over him—the temptations of hate, despair and doubt. Above all, he must cross the valleys of humiliation and shadows of death.

Richard Wright, the towering literary figure in The Black Aesthetic Movement, explains that his early life is clouded with the harsh realities of racial onslaught as well as his family surroundings, which are really reflected in his outstanding works. The most significant of Wright's rejections is of his mother, who is a school teacher and who appears in Black Boy (American Hunger) as a sickly, poor, cruel, uneducated if not stupid woman whom the main character will have to support, sharing with her his meager earnings. To be more precise, the narrator accepts his mother only after she has been transformed into a symbol of poverty, ignorance, and helplessness. In Wright's words: "My mother's suffering grew into a symbol in my mind, gathering to itself all the poverty, the ignorance, the helplessness, the painful, baffling, hunger-ridden days and hours, the restless moving, the futile seeking, the uncertainty, the fear, the dread, the meaningless pain and the endless suffering" (Wright Black Boy(American Hunger) 100). In a striking contrast, Wright's dedication of his *Native Son* reads: "To my mother who, when I was a child at her knee, taught me to revere the fanciful and the imaginative." (Callaloo 27.2 (2004): 519)

His collection of short stories (Novellas), Uncle Tom's Children, full-length novel Native Son, and his autobiographical work Black Boy are powerful reflections of how African American children underwent the agony of growing up. Native Son is based partly on boys he met in a Chicago rehabilitation school for Negro, Dead End kids, and partly on the Robert Nixon case. Nixon is a young Negro boy who died in the electric chair in Chicago in August 1938 for killing a white woman with a brick. Native Son is a powerful, intensely gripping story of a Negro boy driven to crime by reason of a Chicago tenement environment and the pressure of racial injustice. The novel is thought to be the most striking novel to appear after The Grapes of Wrath. It is compared to Dostoyevsky's Crime and Punishment, and seems to be parallel with Dreiser's An American Tragedy in pattern and theme. Dreiser's white boy and Wright's black boy are both social misfits; both are victims of the adolescent lure of sex and money; both commit crime not deliberately but accidentally; both are condemned to the electric chair. And the conclusion is the same: that environment is responsible for their crimes—though in the case of Wright's character there is also the frustrating, neurosis-producing effect of racial suppression.

Bigger Thomas, the boy who puts a pillow over the girl's face, and without meaning to, smothers her. Frantic then, he burns her body in the furnace hoping to leave no trace of the crime. He too kills the Negro mistress, Bessie, who knew this crime, to escape from the law. It is not long; however, Bigger is caught while trying to escape over the tenement housetops. During the trial, the lawyer Max's plea becomes a defence of the twelve million Negroes in America without social, economic, or property rights for the blacks. Naturally, no plea can save Bigger. He is sentenced to die. And Bigger, searching for some meaning in his act, some self-justification, tells Max that

when a man kills, it's for something that he does not know that he is really alive in this world until he feels things hard enough to kill. And for the first time in his life, because he has done something the white world really noticed, he feels a sense of freedom and power he had always wanted, in his confused groping way, to belong, to feel equality with other men.

Wright's early childhood is crammed with catastrophic incidents. His father deserts his mother; he suffers intense hunger, and becomes a drunkard begging drinks from black men of the street. His uncle is lynched; he is forced to live with his grandmother who is fanatically religious. He grows in an atmosphere of continuous internal strife. Then he lives in an orphan-asylum observing the suffering of his mother. He is cheated, beaten and kicked off jobs by whites who did not like his ways and finally he becomes a problem-child who rejected his family, and is rejected by them. The result of all his boyhood experiences shown in The Black Boy(American Hunger) posed the surreal image of a black boy "singing lustily as he probes his own grievous wound" (qtd in Louise Gates 1539).

James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison come on the American literary scene, which further boosts black writing with particular importance to African American children's internal suffering in the racial soil of America. Baldwin's Go Tell it on the Mountain deals with a sensitive young Negro boy's struggles for freedom from communal dogmas and family constraints. It is a semi-autobiographical story of a young man's coming-of-age, repressed and choked by his father's religious fundamentalism and its puritanical obsessions. However, in the end, he passionately identifies with his own people. Baldwin sees the Negro quite literally as the "bastard child" of American civilisation. One of the characters of the novel, Gabriel's double involvement with bastardies shows that there is a re-enactment of the white

man's historic crime. Johnny, the innocent and victimised son of Gabriel's hatred, is an archetypal image of the Negro child. By means of an extended metaphor, Baldwin approaches the very essence of Negro experience. That essence is rejection and its most destructive consequence is shame. But God, the heavenly father, does not reject the Negroes utterly. He casts down only to rise up. This psychic drama occurs beneath the surface of the conversion of the African American child John. Rejected by the whites for reasons that he cannot understand, John is afflicted by an overwhelming sense of shame. Something mysterious he feels; something must be wrong with him; that he should be cruelly ostracised. Though it is a semi- autobiographical novel, the protagonist is identified with the archetypal image of Ishmael, the outcast, and a symbol of collective lives of blacks dispossessed within America. Baldwin's knife-edged criticism of the Americans dealing with the blacks is unrelenting and demonstrates a piercing understanding of the place and function of African American children. The world he describes is one in which all the bridles are in the hands of the whites, so that there is no real possibility for the African American children of offering any resistance to a system, which take them where they may go and what they may do or where they can live. Baldwin describes:

And thus black children, supposing, since the world is white and they are black that they must themselves be inferior, grow up in a culture, which confers upon them—as soon as consciousness dawns—a sense of being hopelessly fated to exclusion and alienation. (Black Literature 302).

Baldwin advocates the policy of what the poet Blake had espoused, that the African American child should love the white one. It may succeed in educating his mind and heart into a new maturity and decency. But the love

will not forgive the cruel brutalities perpetrated on the African American children for nearly three hundred years with rope, fire, torture, castration, infanticide, rape, death and humiliation and fear as deep as marrow to the bone. As soon as this policy is on foot, pace of events get accelerated with prodigious rapidity and the result is the African American children, after being taken to local schools by their parents, have been submitted to cruel harassments and intimidations by white schoolmates and their parents.

On the other hand, Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man is full of contradictions and confusions of black American experience. The novel deals with the hero's adventures in the quest for identity and meaning to his life. The unnamed hero wishes to overcome the undermining superiority of the whites. Ellison makes the protagonist invisibility symbolic of the African American's non-existence in a segregated white society. The novel with its astonishing popularity is still regarded as a classic in modern American literature and the concrete black reality is brought out in its sheer verbal richness. The protagonist being 'black', his invisibility and the struggle for visibility make the novel a black epic. Ralph's The Invisible Man and Baldwin's Go Tell it on the Mountain became 'protest novels' which made a detour against the aggressive racialism and social despotism of white America. They create an awareness of black American consciousness and social responsibility. In the demeaning social conditions, these writers project the children as the worst victims of racial cruelty in their outstanding works. Morrison carries out their mission and vision of telling the world that the black toddlers are in danger and if the world is not serious about this problem, the entire generation has to pay for it.

Just like Morrison's predecessors who have undergone a terrible period of childhood in their black soil, which reflects in their works and career, her

novels and works distinctively project African American children who are exposed to untellable miseries and unhappy circumstances that distort the very development of their personality. She considers the need of projecting the plight of African American children as an important social concern as she wants not only to save them from the century long disservice done to them but she knows best that the seedlings of her generation must also be properly trained with an historical consciousness to become the best citizens. She explores the intensity of emotional and physical violence done to African American children. This emotional disturbance in a very early young age only curbs the growth of children's personality, thereby reducing their self-esteem. When they grow up with broken esteem, they will definitely become a problem to African American society. She also makes psychological probe and examines the causes behind the tragic plight of African American children who are put in bizarre atmosphere. She finds them as victims of social, cultural and familial conflicts. The alienation and negative sense of identity of these children are exposed to be the products of the inner dislocation consequent upon the influence of white values on them. The discrimination shown by the whites based on skin colour and the attitude of black adults to their children, giving little attention to them are the causes that Morrison discovers and displays as the psychological scars of African American children in America.

African American children, perceiving the world from between black and white, assume inferiority and grow up in a society that confers upon them a fated sense of helplessness and alienation, which even eliminates the question of their identity and existence. The mindless activities of the adults induce in children certain feelings of anxiety, isolation and depression and their self is determined by the attitudes of the dominant African American



society. During the process of development, the children grow either into aggression, become violent or hostile beings, or passive, dependent and submissive persons. These stark realities of African American childhood singes the mind and soul of Morrison and arouses her artistic sensibilities that she tries to document the failures and sufferings of her people in rearing up their offspring. In this context, it is better to analyse the life and career of the writer to have a glimpse on what she tries to speak of the tragic condition of African American childhood.

Morrison is born on February 18, 1931 in Lorain, Ohio, the second of four children in her family. Both her parents, Ramah(Willis) and George Wofford, comes from Southern families to escape the racial violence and have arrived in Lorain, Ohio, the steel mill town on the banks of Lake Erie from the South. Morrison recollects that Ohio embraced in microcosm the schizophrenic nature of the Union itself. In Ohio, the free states of the North and the slave states of the South were brought together under one umbrella. Ohio stands in her fictions as the background of the pursuit of individual advancement by black people in a white-determined nation and culture to exhibit their black solidarity. Since they belonged to the black community, the South does not give them the peaceful life they have expected and this migration is an escape from white cruelties. Therefore, her family cultivates a constant hatred towards the white. Although there are no black ghettos in Lorain, it is a constant preoccupation in her writings because she has undergone the racial experience in her early tender age in Lorain, Ohio. So the racist home she grew up in Lorain shapes her character and mind in a very early age. Jean Strouse observes in Toni Morrison's Black Magic: "Morrison remembers growing up in a basically racist home that invited her to hold more than a child's share of contemptuous distrust of the white people; she also

remembers the great encouragement she received for building her character and mind” (53-54).

As a child in black community, Morrison imbibes what other children of her race suffer during depression years and it is reflected in her novels. The depression years in America had a great impact, politically, economically and sociologically on the lives of African American children. Morrison is not an exception. She used to dream of eviction in her early childhood and it still haunts her. She has houses in many parts of America now, and when asked why she keeps all these houses, she quips, “I is a child of the depression, and I had bad dreams about eviction” (Paul Gray, 41- 42). She says, “When I wrote my first novel years later, I wanted to capture the same specificity about the nature and feeling of the culture I grew up in” (Strouse 54).

Morrison’s formative years reveal how she is obsessed with the theme of childhood. She heard stories of lynching, of molestation, of killing, of sexual abuses, of child marriage, and of unnatural way of parenting of African American children, from her parents, as they were great storytellers. Though her focus is on black people who live in communities that have not yet been swallowed up by urban sprawl, they are the types of people Morrison met during her childhood in her hometown. She usually observed them with the candid eye of a child, and since then, she had been bearing them in her inner recess. Carmean observes, “Morrison’s fictions are not autobiographical. She goes back to her formative memories only for initial inspiration. Then she frees her imagination to create communities reflecting as fully as possible the essential experience of her tribe” (Toni Morrison’s World of Fictions 13).

The household in which she grew encouraged her imagination in music, folklore, superstitions and rituals. Her parents were gifted storytellers

who impressed on their children the value of their rich black legacy and the vitality of their people's language. The family members of Morrison thrilled their children with ghost stories. All these Morrison absorbed in her tender mind so that when she finally started writing, her rich family heritage and the stories she heard from her childhood days became the background of her novels, which played an inspiring and powerful role in handling the theme of childhood in her novels. The characters in the novels: Pecola Breedlove, Milkman, Sula, Beloved, Denver, Son and Jadine are all product of African American childhood whose vicissitudes in the black soil of America she wanted to assert is the result of her powerful observations in her early life. In an interview with Claudia Tate, she expresses how she is so obsessed with her race:

When I view the world, perceive it and write about it, it's the world of black people. It's not that I won't write about white people. I just know that when I'm trying to develop the various themes I write about, the people who best manifest those themes for me are the black people whom I invent. It's not deliberate or calculated or self-consciously black, because I recognize and despise the artificial black writing some writers do. I feel them slumming among black people (Black Women Writers at Work 118).

While she was working in Harvard University, she became well versed in English literature and is greatly influenced by Jane Austen, Gustav Flaubert, and 19th century Russian novelists. Her voracious reading of great literary sagas gave her ample chance to develop intrinsic qualities as a writer. Her writing career began with a story of a black girl's wish for blue eyes and later it turned out to be the novel, TBE (1970). The debut novel shows how

she is so obsessed with the tragic conditions of African American childhood. It is the first novel to give an African American child the centre stage in literary horizon. Previously, the African American child had been doubly marginalised as a comic object and placed in the peripheral. But Morrison is well aware of their plight, who have nothing to hope for, but are left with impossible dreams, and escape into an imaginative world while all other forces around them are eager to take away their otherwise golden days of life is phase—childhood. Curiously enough, Morrison started her career first by portraying the gruesome tragedy of a black girl child and subsequently she handled different tragic situations of African American children unlike other writers of her time who had tried their hands in portraying the African American children. Linden Peach remarks:

The negative portrayal of black children and black people generally is a familiar theme within white fiction, which poststructuralist and postcolonial literary criticism have increasingly identified. As a device by which one cultural position has been legitimated over another, it is analogous to the portrayal of the Welsh and Irish in English and popular culture (Biographical and Critical Context 7).

In the beginning of her career, she is not acclaimed with the gift of a first-rate novel writer. The Bluest Eye is set in Lorain; the novel distinguishes itself first by putting the experience of a black girl, who is invisible in the world and a victim at home. Unlike the classics like Native Son and Invisible Man, which tell the interracial conflict, the novel projects the inevitability of a black girl-child's tragic end in a racist home. Nevertheless, Sula, her second novel, appeared in 1973 and it had a wider reception than the first. It tells us the life in the Bottom, a black neighbourhood in the hills of the fictional city

of Medallion, Ohio, that has been destroyed in the name of progress before the novel begins. However, it is introduced through a series of deaths and destruction by fire and water, the novel concentrates on the tragedy of black parenting. Even then, the literary circle of her contemporary America does not consider her work as outstanding and many critics do not give a heed to her writing. Nellie Y. MacKay in Critical Essays on Toni Morrison writes: “Still, in the middle of the 1970, Morrison’s name and books were not household words in the conventional dwelling place of significant American writers and contemporary American Literature. And most readers had negative response to this” (4).

Morrison’s reputation from an aspiring novelist to an outstanding African American writer changes with the publication of SOS in 1977. It is the story of black boy’s quest for his ancestral legacy that is never written but preserved in fragments of songs, stories, personal testimonies, jokes and children’s rhymes. It is her first novel with a male hero. While at her Random House service as a Senior Editor, she is influenced by Henry Dumas whose work incorporates surrealism, supernaturalism, magic, astrology, myth and science fiction, all elements to be found in a concentrated form in the novel. The protagonist of the novel, Milkman Dead, is the son of black bourgeoisie, who is brought up within the four walls of his father’s stringent rules and the boy experiences a spiritual death. It is the most widely reviewed of all her books and won several major awards. Further, her fame shot up with the publication of TAR in 1981, which gives her a prominent place among black women writers. The novel’s characters move from the Caribbean to New York City, Paris, and Florida, which account for Son and Jadine’s relationship, but their childhood is clouded and marred. It is arguably Morrison’s most controversial work, but tells how educating an Afro- American child can yield

negative impact on the society. Between SOS and BVD, Morrison published her first play, Dreaming Emmet based on the brutal murder of a black boy called Emmet Till after lynching him for allegedly pelting a stone at a white woman. With these publications, she has now proved, beyond doubt that her main concern is the children of her race in addition to establishing her position as an American writer of international reputation.

Morrison edited The Black Book, known as “Scrape Book” covering 300 years of African American life. It is a compendium of newspaper clippings, anecdotes, songs, personal genealogies and advertisements chronicling the life of African people in the United States from slavery to the civil right movement. While she is editing the book, she is highly interested in researching the history of slave narratives. The heroic journey of a fugitive Kentucky slave, Margaret Garner who tried to kill herself and her children rather than return to slavery, finds expression in her most praised and widely discussed novel, BVD (1987). When she finished her sixth novel Jazz in 1992, she is conferred the highest award, Nobel Prize, for literature in 1993. Other black writers have won the Nobel Prize—Wole Soyinka, the playwright from Nigeria, and Derek Walcott, the poet from the West Indies—but Morrison is the second American woman and the first African American woman to receive such a coveted prize. With this outstanding honour, she has proved beyond doubt that a writer from a body of literature that has been neglected for too long a time can overcome all the struggles and can win the laurels of the world. After all the unimaginable and unspeakable experiences as a black writer, she has been canonised in the literary world. Nancy J. Peterson in Modern Fiction Studies writes, “Now that Toni Morrison has been awarded the 1993 Nobel Prize for literature it has become almost unimaginable or unspeakable to mention the struggles that marked her early

career as a writer” (461).

While she has been under the deluge of congratulations from all over the world, an obscure chapter of 19th century US history shortly after the Civil War and the Westward immigration of the former slaves to Oklahoma and beyond has become the background of her recent novel Paradise. While discussing Paradise, Paul Gray in Time Magazine writes that, “the Nobel Prize changed Toni Morrison’s life but not her art as her new novel proves. Critics and publishers are now in a race to lavish praise upon her” (37). Still she continued to write about American history as the history of rape by the settlers on the original natives of America in her latest novel, Love (2003). And the character’s relationship with the child-bride, Heed, in the latest novel, which reverberates in the story’s other acts of sexual exploitation, is clearly a parodic version of the configuration of America as the innocent virgin despoiled by the all conquering hero. Tessa Roynon in states: “The author thus destabilizes the narrative of American settlement as a kind of glorious sexual assault—a narrative itself informed by classical tradition—that is something of a refrain in the national literature” (“A New Roman Empire” 3).

In additions to the novels, Morrison has written a remarkable and important critical work, Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination, which analyses the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Willa Cather, and Ernest Hemingway. She remarks in this work that she can be free as an African American woman writer in the genderised, sexualised and wholly racialised world. Though the study turns out to be conventional criticism on American Literature, she asserts that the theme of innocence, which is the synonym of childhood, is coupled with the symbols of death and hell. They are the serious concern to a dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence but not to the American Literary traditions. Morrison remarks:

These speculations have led me to wonder whether the major and championed characteristic of our national literature—individualism, masculinity, social engagement versus historical isolation acute and ambiguous moral problematic; the thematic of innocence coupled with an obsession with figurations of death and hell—are not in fact responses to a dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence. (Playing in the Dark 5).

Morrison also edited Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality. These essays amount to an important critical document on race, gender, politics and power structures in America as they have developed during Morrison's career as a writer. She also edited Birth of Nationhood: Gaze, Script, and Spectacle in the O.J.Simpson Case. They also make an important contribution to the understanding of the concepts of black identity in America in a matrix of race politics and institutionalised power structures.

When we glance at how she tells the stories of black people, we realise that she perceives her ideas at first emotionally inspired and then moulded intellectually. When she comes across the stories of racial oppressions her psyche gets troubled, and then, after analysing in the light of racial conditions, the seeds of her stories germinate in an unusually intellectual way. Before, she begins to write, she ruminates on the subject matter and style at great length. She feels free to try all sorts of approaches as she goes along. The result is a style of writing distinguished by an unusual mixing of imaginative range and a firm authority. Critics have been tempted to label her individual style in a number of ways. She has been sometimes called a magical realist, sometimes a mythical symbolist as her novels allow a place in literature to the invisible forces that have powerful place in life—dreams, myth, legend, passion,



obsession, superstition, religion, the overwhelming power of nature and the supernatural. Her writing has been linked with conventions of fabulism and folklore as she borrows many metaphors from African American folklore and exhibits a quest for uncovering the history of black Americans that is never written but is preserved in fragments in the oral tradition: songs, stories, personal testimonies, jokes and children's rhymes.

Some critics compare her with Gothic fiction writers like Edgar Allan Poe and Bronte Sisters because her novels are full of wild, crude and barbarous qualities which writers found it attractive to cultivate in reaction against neoclassicism and usually set in the past. The plots hinge on suspense and mystery involving the fantastic and the supernatural. Traditional critics have called her a kind of black classicist by comparing with W.E.B. Du Bois' The Souls of the Black, Richard Wright's Native Son and Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man. However, the attempt to find such a label is unsatisfactory, even at times, confusing. Karen Carmean observes, "All the labels have an application to Morrison's style, but only in a limited way. In the end, Morrison defies such categorization as her general style is made up of the specific necessities of the narrative at hand" (Toni Morrison's World of Fictions 7).

Apart from the considerations of style, Morrison believes that her strength is her language. When asked what she thought distinguished her fiction from other writers she replied: "the language, only the language that black people spoke to its original power" (Thomas Leclare 26-27). The most striking quality of her language distinguishes her from other writers. It is the 'black language' of her people—a native dialect that black people love so much, the saying of words, holding them on the tongues, and experimenting with them—that she uses in the text. Her language is not poetical, as such, it

does not connote the ornamental, but there is richness in it and uses the pure language of the people of her race. Her language seems to be the language of the innocent African American children as they speak the language of their heart. She thinks that if the words of black language are given back the original meaning, it can be cleaned up and the result will be the polished language in their own sense. She wants her language to do what music used to do. Her language may often appear coarse, but it is a refined one of black culture, that has suffered the mutilation from the long line of bondage at the hands of the whites. She wants to restore the tradition of black language as they often lived in communities, expressed their unique character of unifying beliefs and aspirations through various colloquial words, slang and music of which, the black music is most essential.

Morrison purposely employs black communal music, which becomes an integrating feature of her style. When faced with intense experiences of happiness or pain, her characters often break into folk songs, gospel numbers, and popular tunes or simply whistle or hum as children do. When she writes, she thinks what musicians do while performing. Her novels are the proof of this style; sometimes the narrator's voice goes up and is repeated or resounded in a circular and reverberating way. She purposely complicates the developing patterns or events of inversion, juxtaposition, dissonance and surprising variations of modulations. So all of her works are termed as "Literary Jazzes" (Berret, 267), which has a strong link with the theme of childhood, for in them music induces the memory of childhood of characters and their cultural roots. These backward movements searching for African roots in her novels through songs are nothing but the quest for the lost innocence—the supreme quality of childhood—of the black people and their kids.

Morrison is perceived to be the most elusive of contemporary writers. She escapes all the labels of criticism such as a magical realist, existentialist, feminist, romanticist, or Marxist. Therefore, different critical approaches have been tried. Just to name a few, there are systematic approaches used by psychoanalytical, feminist, historicist, or Marxist beliefs. None of these readings of her work is quite satisfactory in the end. They all seem tortured and strained in their logic. The fact is that she is too complicated and too simple for a rigid critical methodology. In their self-discovery, her characters often retreat to their childhood days to find out what is lost to them as the quest for lost childhood is strongly working in them. She employs different aspects of the theme in her works in order to achieve this purpose. She allows her characters repeatedly to retrace to their African heritage to find their self in their fullest sense. Her works often find African myths and popular wisdom and many of her characters are influenced directly or indirectly by these sources. Nevertheless, she also fuses Western myths and folklore as well as classic fairy tales, fables and nursery rhymes.

She understands that human truth resides in combining myth and stories, and that personal actions and cultural behaviour are affected by these multiple tensions. The thing that interests her most in this area is how these tensions work on a subconscious level in African Americans. So she focuses her novels on African dreams and imaginings, and the collective legends and rituals of Africa, because she believes that together these phenomena will reveal her characters fully. So the quest for roots of African myth symbolises a way to retracing their holiness. This holiness, which is symbolic of childhood, is lost the moment they slough off their African roots, which they once considered their Eden where they roamed in a state of perfect bliss like the children of Nature. In a sense, the Edenic innocence is gone forever when

these Africans were packed off to America and were made slaves, like the expulsion of the primordial parents, Adam and Eve who lost their state of holiness and innocence when they disobeyed their Father, God and who are forced to appear on earth—an earth sans holiness. Therefore, this loss of innocence or the bliss of happiness—the most important traits of childhood of African Americans—always ring in their blood, and can be considered the mythical aspect of childhood.

Morrison is an artist with commitment to her people and their progenies. She feels the tragedy of the children is because of the total neglect by society, by parents, and by all forces working in and out. In an interview with Bill Moyers, Morrison says, “children under 18 are hungry for love and women do extraordinary things for children, for love.” (qtd in IJAS Summer 93.23.2 18). She also adds, “We must do some nurturing for children, to make another person good” (Ogunyemi 354). So her life and works are devoted to proclaim to the world the tragic plight of African American children who have lost their blissful state of childhood due to the peculiar conditions of racial violence and oppression. In the soil of America, they are blighted seeds. She also focuses on how the adults spoiled the innocent state when they confronted white race. So it is necessary to bring up the different issues involved in the tragic plight of these blighted seeds.

## **Chapter III**

### **Morrison's Blighted Children**

Come away, O human child!  
To the waters and the wild  
With a fairy, hand in hand,  
For the world's more full of weeping  
Than you can understand.  
(W.B. Yeast "The Stolen Child" 1-4)

Morrison weaves the wastelandish pictures of tragic situations of African American children in her novels and brings into focus an underground invisibility and barrenness, creates grotesque and surrealist pictures composed of an imaginary cultural dissolution. This imaginary cultural dissolution is weighed down with brutal discrimination of the children of black race, which strains human comprehension and stuns our conscience. The first novel itself confirms that the children grow in a land where the "soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruits it will not bear [...] and the victim had no right to live" (TBE, 160), which signals the ensuing tragedy of childhood. The innocent, young ones of African American community recognise the stunning realities only at a later stage that they are withered, singed, and blighted seeds unable to come up in the wastelandish soil of America, where black-and-white hegemony is prevailing.

An exploration of Morrison's novels envisions tragic situations and miserable conditions of childhood. Inefficiency of parents, lack of love and

recognition, familial conflicts, sexual assault, problem of gender and sex are only some of the factors that try to sabotage the golden phase in the lives of African American children resulting in shattering their cohesive self. Harihar Kulkarni, while discussing her debut novel observes that: “The Bluest Eye is Toni Morrison’s wasteland. Like Eliot, she too in a limited sense presents bleak wastelandish human conditions characterised by grotesque environment, which like the earth of 1941 is unyielding (IJAS Summer23.2 : 1)”. Kulkarni’s observations about TBE extend to almost all her novels, as Morrison depicts the woeful tales of childhood in Sula, SOS, TAR, BVD, Jazz, Paradise, and Love though they fall under different categories of childhood tragedies such as psychological, sociological, familial, moral, and cultural; and above all, these tragic conditions work in the medium of racial prejudices and the black history of American Settlement.

The general picture of all her novels is about the tragic predicament of these “certain seeds” that are the building blocks of African American generations. She exposes the bleak world of African American children in which the human conditions are so pathetic and are constantly under the decaying process of degeneration. On a casual reading, one would find that the promising, blissful world of a cheerful period, childhood is closed before them because of several reasons and many forces working in and out. When they are born, they do not see anything different from other children, but when they grow and begin to dream anything like other American children, slowly and painfully they realise that a wall of segregation is being built between their dreams and their reality. Under the shadow of this wall they writhe with pain and are fated to lead a life of confrontation and misery as Langston Hughes in his poem, “As I Grew Older”, states:

It was a long time ago. / I have almost forgotten my dream. /

[...] And then the wall rose, / Rose between me and my dream.  
[...] / Only the thick wall, / Only the shadow. /My hands! / My  
dark hands! /Break trough the wall!! /Find my dream! / Help  
me to shatter this darkness, / To smash this night, /To break this  
shadow/ Into a thousand lights of sun, /Into a thousand whirling  
dreams/ Of sun! (1-27:35).

Morrison articulates different visions of tragedy for this catastrophic situation. Psychological, sociological, familial and racial factors take part in destroying the idyllic world they are dreaming of. The children are burdened with the tyrannical yoke of racism, and sexism which nip away their promising world. Family and society could not afford them an ample scope for growing up. The adult world tries to hammer their tender psyche. They undergo psychological trauma—rejection, isolation, and humiliation, anxiety, loneliness and bewilderment—grips them. Parental cruelty and negligence surround them. Above all, a double consciousness is haunting them—a consciousness of segregation from their homeland because of racial prejudices, at the same time, a feeling of tension to become decent American children haunts them. As a result, they feel that they are socially outcast stunted selves and unwanted everywhere. These factors force them to lead a life of crumbled personality with a feeling of insecurity and psychological complexes. These ill-effects from within and without produce too many psychological problems like inferiority complexes, lack of self-esteem. Often they land on the verge of insanity and psychic disintegration. In their effort to counter these malevolencies, sometimes, they are turned out to be criminals and pariahs, terrorists and murderers, money-mongers and wanderers. However, at times, some of them show constructiveness and social solidarity. But the reality is that they all crave for love and affection in their inner most

recess. In short, the novels of Morrison expose the miserable and sterile conditions of childhood. Morrison expresses her sorrow of this intriguing problem to Cecil Brown, "One dead child is enough for me. One little child [...] who did not make it. That's plenty for me" (qtd in Mandel 584).

Because of these tragic conditions, the child-characters easily drift into a world of unfavourable and ignominious situation where they are fated to live with a wounded psyche. As a result, when they mature, their sense of being is lost. They try to get a place, recognition, and approval of the society. But in their attempt to get their needs satisfied, they fail and slowly march towards their final doom. Morrison throws light onto these drastic consequences of the contemporary dilemma and the distorted personality of the African American children because she firmly believes that they are deprived of basic human rights. Her portrayal of the child characters like Pecola Breedlove show how humiliation, rejection and inferiority complexes distort the personality of the African American child and how the child resorts to the defence mechanism of escaping from the ugliness and boredom of life. She also shows that when the sufferings weigh too much on the little psyche, the child lapses into madness after breaking its complete self. Sula, the protagonist in Sula, is selected to represent the after-effect of psychic problems that weigh down upon the tender psyche of a young girl due to communal dereliction and rejection. The child character of the novel is an example of transformation of an innocent girl into waywardness and sexual assault due to silly and thoughtless remarks of the elders. Morrison presents how racial and cultural tragedies cause great shock to children, and finally convert them into dangerous criminals like Guitar (SOS), Violet (Jazz) and Mavis in Paradise.

In BVD, Morrison projects a ghost-child to remind the heinous crime



committed on an infant, which results in too many psychological problems to the living children as well as to the adults of her race. Through Lena and Corinthians (SOS), she deftly touches the picture of emotional stasis in African American children. The novel also highlights how a wealthy black boy called Milkman receives his tragic end after being pampered and spoiled beyond limit. Loneliness and feeling of alienation in African American children are further exemplified in the novels like TAR and BVD by selecting Michael and Denver for her thematic representatives. The children—Jadine, Son, Violet, Sula, Gigi, Connie, and Heed—overcome the trauma of childhood to become stoic and meet the challenges of ups-and-downs of life. Joe Trace (Jazz), Billie Delia (Paradise) and Junior (Love) are the products of disapprovals and rejections experienced at the hands of their own mothers. Similarly Frieda and Claudia in TBE are stricken with sorrow after witnessing the tragedy of their playmate and intimate friend Pecola Breedlove. She brings forth Maureen Peel and Louise Junior (TBE) to prove that the psychic wounds being felt by the African American children are very deep by contrasting with other children in the novel. Similarly many of the child versions of characters are found reappearing as adult versions in the later novels. Pecola (TBE), for example, becomes Sweetie Flood (Paradise); Sula (Sula) into Gigi (Paradise); Milkman (SOS) turns out to be Bill Cosey (Love); Nel (Sula) to Denver (BVD); and Helen Wright (Sula) to Pat Best (Paradise), and so on as they show similar traits. It is in this context that a detailed examination of Morrison's novels becomes necessary in order to explore her perception of the tragic dimension of childhood.

TBE (1970) develops its dominant themes through the inter-play of three narratives—Claudia's sorrowful chanting, Pecola's stream of consciousness and the authentic voice of the narrator. All these narratives

heighten the tragedy of childhood. The second represents the weak and less naive consciousness of the novel's central narrator, Claudia MacTeer who, like an adult, remembers the tragedy of her friend. The third provides the social and historical consciousness of an objective narrator who exposes the contrast between the ideal and the real, suggests to the reader that the theme is an important factor in making up this novel. The innocent way of the narration through a child's eye-view also heightens the tragic dilemma of the novel as well as the reality of the problem. The novel, in a sense, is an unpolled lamentation of a child over the tragic fate that befalls on another child.

The opening paragraph of the novel is taken from an American popular primer, prevalent in public schools in 1940s meant for nursery classes. The primer is explicit in its simplicity and clarity and consists of a white American ideal family unit that embraces the Euro-American aesthetics. It deals with the familiar experiences of children—replete with children's pet-dogs, cats, their non-working beloved mother, and a leisure time father. What is taught to the African American children in schools as printed in the primer is in no way related to their reality. Though the primer is intended for chanting and singing in the schools, it actually taunts and hurts the African American children. Though the ironic duality indicates the experiences at school and home, it is rather ominous. So the primer serves as an example for the African American child that he is emotionally detached to his childhood and lives in two impossible worlds—the fairy tale world of lies when he is in contact with the white world, and secondly, the equally incredible and grim world of black life. The world mentioned in the primer is therefore unattainable to the African American children. It “is a fairy tale world, a dream world, child-like in extreme—it is desirable but for man, particularly the black man, it is

unattainable” (Ogunyemi 354).

This primer foreshadows the predicament of Pecola and it is quite ironic in her case. The domestic paradigms like houses, mother, father, brother, sister, dog and cat depicted are indispensable and treasured things in the life of a child. While Jane (white) plays with the cat, her father, mother and brother enjoy it. The complete white family is in a state of ecstasy and enjoyment. Jane has a red dress and wants to play. She approaches all the members of the family. Yet the mother, who has been described as ‘very nice’ laughs at Jane’s proposal to play with her. So does the smiling father. But in the case of Pecola, who yearns for a pair of blue eyes in order to protect her from ugliness, her family behaves quite opposite to it. Pecola’s drunken and incestuous father, Cholly Breedlove violates his daughter’s modesty. Mrs. Breedlove is unaware of her daughter’s presence. Her brother Sammy is a chronic runaway from the family. Even the pets described in the primer are alien to Pecola: the cat mentioned in the primer claws her face; and an old dog dies when she unknowingly poisons. The primer reads:

Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick and Jane live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy. See Jane. She has a red dress. She wants to play [...]. Look, look. Here comes a friend. The friend will play with Jane. They will play a good game. Play, Jane, play (TBE 7).

This prose is immediately repeated two more times, a second time at a more accelerated speed, the words running together without punctuation and a third time it is in a frenzied pace: Hereisthehouse itisgreenandwhiteithasare ddooritisprettydogrunrundog[...].looklookherecomesfriendthefriendwillplayw

ithJaneplayJaneplay” (TBE 8). The presentation of the prose ironically reveals the destiny of Pecola. Her beginning is quite good, but as the novel progresses, she is left out at the family level as well as without friends in society and then breathless with the symptom of insanity. Karen Carmean says about the Dick and Jane story: “The various chapters in the headlines are fragments of the initial paragraph (Dick and Jane story) which serves as subject introductions to particular chapters, have a breathless quality, much like a child’s chant to dispel ugly demons” (29).

As ironically depicted in the primer, Pecola Breedlove is shown as a de-winged dove among the African American children who has been trying to fly in the serene world of childhood but her wings are clipped from the very beginning of her life. She is born into a family of poor blacks living in the fringes of Lorain, Ohio. Her father Cholly Breedlove and mother Pauline Breedlove along with her brother Sammy do not give her psychological balance to her existence. Instead, they present her with sustained mental torture. The Breedlove family is a victim of racism in a class-conscious society, which has forced them to live unnatural lives because they are black and poor, they are considered as ugly and nasty by the white aesthetic standards of the society. The ugliness and poverty make them forget the upbringing of Pecola; instead, offer her a series of psychic wounds. Each of the family members deals with the ugliness differently and sublimates their feeling of inferiority based on their skin colour over others. Mrs. Breedlove takes it as a cine actor does and is pleased to nurse a white child ignoring her own daughter. Sammy uses it as a weapon to cause others pain. He, adjusts to it, chooses his companions based on it but not with his sister. Cholly is a full-time drunkard who puts his daughter outdoors after making her pregnant. Therefore, Pecola is forced to hide behind her ugliness. She is concealed,

veiled and eclipsed by the extreme ugliness. Sometimes she tries to peep out from behind the shroud. Under these 'ugly' and monotonous conditions, Pecola grows up and her obsession with the ugliness is redirected in an unexpected way, dreaming the impossible conditions.

Pecola's young mind drifts into this impossible desire of getting blue eyes and blonde hair is seen as escapism from the ugly and sordid realities of her circumstances. She thinks that her life will be complete if she gets blue eyes and blonde hair, which will bring her good luck and happiness. She thinks that she will have the right kind of recognition from all sides. Her mother will start loving, her father will give protection, the schoolmates will stop taunting and she will have no problem if she goes to the toilet of white children. The teachers would approve her, at least, like any other girls in the class. All the insults heaped on her due to the skin colour and the resultant inferiority complex can be overcome if she gets the blue eyes and blonde hair. Pecola believes, like everyone of her acquaintances, that blue eyes, blonde hair and fair skin, are the symbols of beauty valued everywhere. They are the widely recognised symbols of beauty and are exhibited in romantic novels, movies, magazines, and advertisements. Even the dolls are moulded in white and all the people throng in front of a storefront looking aghast at the white dolls. It intensifies a mad passion for the impossible thing in her tender psyche and consequently creates a deep psychic wound. This wound shatters her dreams to fly like a free bird in her golden days of childhood and her tender, sap-green days are turned out to be tragic. In an interview with Robert Stepto, Toni Morrison, while speaking of her character Pecola, remarks:

.... She was asking for something that is first awful—she wanted to have blue eyes and she wanted to be Shirley Temple (a white doll), I mean, she wanted to do that white trip because

of the society in which she lived and, very importantly because of the black people, who wanted her to be like that (qtd. in Carmean, 12)

The family, society and the world around her also aggravate the tragic plight. Rejection and abuses from parents deepen the traumatic experiences. Pecola is badly in need of love, affection, warmth, and security during her blossoming age. However, the mother role-model shown in the novel is unsuccessful providing these vital needs. Pauline miserably fails to nurture such positive traits in her daughter. Instead, when Pauline rejects her daughter for a white child, she really breaks Pecola's self. Pecola is approaching a crucial stage in her life—a stage of rapid physical and mental changes. She wants a patient listening to her problems, a warm heart to recognise her feelings with sympathy and love but her mother ignores her problems. Nevertheless, Pauline desires to imitate white American film stars and wishes to possess a house like the one owned by the Fishers, a white family, where she is working as a servant. While running after white standards of beauty and order, she almost forgets to rear up her children. She finds pleasure in lavishing all her affection on Fisher's child, keeping in store the jibes and slaps for her hapless girl. As a woman and being devoid of her husband's concern, she should have shown more sympathy and affection towards her daughter but her worship of the white aesthetics outweighs all considerations. She fills her daughter's mind, not with the reassurance and confidence that a child expects from her mother, but with tensions and fears. She injects into her daughter, "a fear of growing up, fear of other people, fear of life" (TBE 102). Mrs. Pauline, hence, fails to give her daughter a maternal perch but showers abuses and rejection upon her.

The scene of spilling fruit juice that Pauline has just prepared to feed

the Fisher child is one of the most poignant scenes of the novel. This scene exemplifies how great the hatred that Pauline shows towards her daughter is. It is enacted in the presence of Claudia and Frieda, the MacTeers children, who are in search of whisky for they think that it may make Frieda fat, who reach the Fishers house where Pecola is helping her mother in the laundry. They are sure that Pecola can serve them whiskey because her father Cholly is a drunkard. Pauline is not feeling well to see Pecola's friends at Fishers house but she hesitantly allows them to enter in "her kitchen". Seeing the children, the Fisher's pink beribboned child, with corn yellow hair, steps into the kitchen. Delighted in seeing her friends in the kitchen, Pecola in a hurry unknowingly touches the hot pie juice. The glass falls on the floor, spreading the contents everywhere. Unable to contain the sight, the enraged Pauline, like a wolf seething with anger, jumps upon her daughter, repeatedly knocks her down to the floor. In the middle of this incident, the Fisher's child starts crying. Pauline soothes the child with soft words and tenderness, "Hush, baby, hush. Come here. Oh, Lord, look at your dress. Don't cry no more, Polly will change it" (TBE 85). Young Claudia narrates this scene with grief and shock: "Pecola slid in the pie juice, one leg folding under her. Mrs. Breedlove yanked her up by the arm, slapped her again and in a voice thin with anger abused Pecola directly and Frieda and me by implication" (TBE 84). Deeply insulted and stricken with sorrow and anguish, Pecola's mind shatters like the pie spilled on the floor. The fury generated in her mother is unforgettable; it creates a feeling of alienation, loss, jealousy and anger in her. And later when Cholly rapes and impregnates her, Pauline does not even raise a finger against this heinous and brutish crime but reserves only contempt for the child. In fact, Pauline justifies her husbands' crime of raping her daughter, "But it isn't bad. Sometimes things isn't all bad" (TBE 100).

Pecola's tragedy is accelerated by her father's sexual assault, which results in an instant breakdown of her tender psyche. Her father sees in his daughter a gratification of his sexual fulfilment but shows no moral or social obligation to his ward. His sexual acts nearly kill his daughter's psychic balance and force her to land into hysteria and madness when she begets her father's child. But Cholly ignores the filial bond and proves to be a creature "crawling on all fours" (TBE 128) on this earth like a beast. Except for Cholly's violation of his daughter, there are no scenes in the novel, which depict any meaningful interaction between Cholly and his daughter. The narrator describes his rape of his daughter as wanting at first to be tender but soon discovering that "the tenderness would not hold" (TBE 128). Pecola's only response to her father's inhuman act is a "hollow suck of air in the back of her throat. Like the rapid loss of air from a circus balloon" (TBE 128). Immediately after this incident, Cholly puts her out and sets fire on his house. It suggests the helplessness of a daughter and the vacuum her father leaves behind. Instead of providing the psychological needs like protection, security, affection, warmth, love and care from her father in the tender age, he makes his daughter a non-existent object. Winnicott observes, "In seduction some external agency exploits the child's instinct and helps to annihilate the child's sense of existing as an autonomous unit" (*Playing and Reality* 52). Pecola's childhood is put in a rudderless situation in which she receives rejection, abuse and insult from her mother and the dehumanising act from her father.

Humiliation, isolation, and taunts by the external agencies such as her friends, teachers and other members of the community accelerate the awful plight. Devoid of friends at school, or in the neighbourhood Pecola experiences a sick feeling, which she always tries to prevent by 'holding in her stomach'. The teachers and her classmates are not a welcome relief. They



taunt her whenever they get a chance, and have humiliated her by asking to sit at the back of the class. She is the only member of her class who is asked to sit alone at a double desk. They never try to look at nor give attention to but ask her only when everyone is required to respond. Pecola feels it deeply that these isolations and insults are based on her skin colour and ugliness. The classmates consider her the symbol of ugliness. When one of the girls wants to insult a boy, the girl will instantly take Pecola as an example of insult, “Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove” (TBE 34) followed by a peal of laughter from the boys and girls together, which, in turn, creates deep furrows in her mind. The inner urge to get out of these insults and isolation, she invents ways of escapism—a redirection of all her instincts to adore whiteness and long for a pair of blue eyes so that she can leave everything behind. Seeing the special privilege being enjoyed by the white girl, Maureen Peal, among her classmates and teachers, Pecola’s adoration for whiteness and blue eyes gets stamped day by day. Morrison contrasts and compares the rich, white dream-girl, Maureen Peal with Pecola:

There was a hint of spring in her [Maureen Peal] sloe green eyes, something summery in her complexion, and rich autumn ripeness in her walk. She enchanted the entire school. When teachers called on her, they smiled encouragingly. Black boys did not trip her in the halls, white boys did not stone her, white girls did not suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partners; black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girl’s toilet (TBE 48).

Pecola befriends Maureen for a while but it does not last but ended with a verbal exchange. During the verbal exchange, Maureen Peal reveals her true colour, and her ego of being white and beautiful is directed towards insulting

Pecola. Maureen Peal screams, “I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos...” (TBE 56). The insult caused by the verbal exchange literally gives a lesson to Pecola—to find the secret behind her ugliness. Not only the white girl but also the black and wealthy boys are no exception to cause her pain and anguish over the issue of her ugliness

Morrison shows that not only the inter-colour prejudices but also the intra-complex nature of racism takes part in the psychic disintegration of this young girl. The shower of abuses followed by a filthy song by a group of sadistic schoolmates illustrates the pain of being black. They encircle Pecola and gaily taunt her when she returns home, “Black e mo Black e mo Ya daddy sleeps nekked/Stcha ta ta stch ta ta (TBE 50) indicating that she has had incestuous relation ship with her father. Though Frieda rescues her from the boys, the scar remains indelible on her mind. On another occasion, while Pecola is crossing the playground Louise Junior, a wealthy black boy, lures her into his house. No sooner does she enter the house than Louise throws a cat on her without any provocation. She is embarrassed, frightened and surprised. The cat claws and wounds her face; tears her dress in an effort to escape. Geraldine, Louise’s mother, spotting the scene, does not console the hapless Pecola but orders her to get out of the house followed by ruthless words “Get out, she said, her voice quiet. You nasty little black bitch” (TBE 72). This confrontation shows that even the wealthy black considers this poor black girl as an inferior version of human seed.

Morrison presents the girl with all the forces in the world rejecting her and even the adults do not spare her. She is fond of drinking milk from Shirley Temple cup and looks it for hours together because the blonde hair and blue eyes are engraved on it thereby she can put aside the feeling of ugliness for a while and redirect it to some other favourite things. She drinks

it too much because the blue eyes are engraved on the cup, but it provokes Mrs. MacTeer. Her constant pursuit of getting blue eyes leads her to Soaphead Church, a spiritual agent of the white folks. He acts in the guise of an agent of God, mockingly prays to Him to grant her blue eyes: “You have to understand that, Lord. You said, ‘Suffer little children to come unto me and harm them not’ [...]. You did not, could not, would not do: I looked at the ugly little black girl, and I loved her...” (TBE 144). He befools, victimises, and psychologically rapes this young girl as her father has done to her physically. In the end, Soaphead Church makes her an instrument to kill a sleeping dog. Again, when Pecola goes to buy some Mary Jane candies, which she likes most, she detects contempt and distaste in the eyes of the shop owner, Yacobowski. The scornful look of the white man wells up from the attitude towards her ugliness. The narrator explains, “The distaste must be for her blackness. All things in her are flux and anticipation. But her blackness is static and dread” (TBE 37). She at first feels indignant at the hateful look of Yacobowski but soon she is overpowered with a tremendous sense of shame and unworthiness. Morrison describes Pecola’s instant feelings: “The anger will not hold; the puppy is too easily surfeited. Its thirst too quickly quenches; it sleeps. The shame wells up again, its muddy rivulets seeping into her eyes” (TBE 38). Now she has the consolation to sit in front of a mirror and trying to discover the secret of her ugliness, “The ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike” (Carmean 25). Instead, like many children, she wishes for transformation but most children would wish to change the external—place, circumstances, and the like. Pecola does not but sees herself as the problem—the problem of ugliness.

In short, parents, family and society reject Pecola. The precious period of her life becomes clouded and has no playmates nor is she able to smile at

least. Her schoolmates and others like Geraldine's boy have proved sadistic. The repeated shocks she receive from the external agencies only help to subdue her ego. Both the implicit racism inherent in the Shirley Temple cups, Mary Jane candies as well as the explicit acts of adults, friends and batter her submissive ego. Racism and the waywardness of her father wreck her self. The psychic annihilation imparted by the parental mirror splinter the cohesiveness of her self, leaving no context of the past or hope for the future. It is at the worst when her father rapes her in the kitchen floor and completes the atrocities when he impregnates her. Therefore, everyone around her make her a de-winged dove with a distorted self-esteem. This twelve-year-old girl seems to fold into her self like a pleated wing, and is raised to fear life. She never challenges the cruel realities of life nor confronts but remains tight-lipped because her self is crumbled. All along, her life lacks the essence necessary "to stand erect and spit the misery out on the street" (TBE 61). The self itself being the symbol of childhood, as Coveney Peter has remarked, and when it is broken, the boons of that innocent stage goes forever. In the final enactment of her tragedy, the damage done to her self is total. Claudia's lamentation about Pecola's tragic plight testifies this; she says:

We saw her sometimes; Frieda and I—after the baby came too soon and died. After the gossip and the slow wagging of heads. [...]. The damage done was total; she spent her days, her tendrils, sap-green days, walking up and down, up and down, her head jerking to the beat of a drummer so distant only she could hear. Elbows bent, hands on shoulders, she flailed her arms like a bird in an eternal, grotesquely futile effort to fly (TBE 162).

Morrison brings forth another child Claudia MacTeer (TBE) to show the intensity of the racial tragedy and the relative psychic effect on the

unpolluted mind by contrast. That is why the writer makes Claudia the narrator of her first novel, seeing that the perception of the young mind is highly sensitive so that the reality of white cruelty can faithfully be projected. In a sense the novel becomes a tragic epic in childhood because Claudia is placed at the centre of things and her lamentation fills everywhere in the novel. She is also a doomed child because her innocence and beauty of childhood are clouded after witnessing the tragedy of children in her race. Her chanting in the novel consists of inverted figures of daddies and mummies of black race. She gets shocked when Cholly molests his daughter and Mrs Cholly denies her child for the Fisher's child. She also goes awry when she learns that Henry, their servant, touches the tiny breast of her sister Frieda, and the misdemeanour of Soaphead Church towards Pecola. When Claudia is presented a big blue-eyed baby doll, her whole revenge comes forth for she thinks that the beauty and the whiteness are the real causes of the tragedy inherent in her community. She does not play with it; instead, she tries to dismantle it. The narrator says, "She (Claudia) is physically revolted by and secretly frightened of those round moronic eyes, the pan cake face, and orangeworms hair" (TBE 20) of the doll. In destroying the doll, Claudia shows her keen revenge towards white values, which is inimical to Claudia's self and accelerates her psychic frustration.

Claudia is introduced to show the intensity of the psychic disintegration being experienced by Pecola so that the readers can measure the depth of the devastating effect on her. Claudia MacTeer showers 'Teer' on the dilemma of her friend often as her name suggests, and her memory remains disturbed because she undergoes the subservience. Claudia makes a comparison of Pecola with other girls of her race and through such relative presentation one can fathom the psychological damage done to the child,

Pecola:

All of us—all who knew her (Pecola) felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorates us; her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, and her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor (TBE 159).

Claudia's narration further shows that Pecola's tragic predicament contaminates her more than any other children in the novel. Instead of a bright world of summer which produces such an ecstatic feeling as in Mark Twain's novels, Morrison shows that even the seasons produce the horror in this African American child. Claudia and her sister has been dreaming and looking forward to get a bicycle. They collect money for the same in summer holidays by selling marigold seeds so that they can the vacation, but what happens is contrary to their expectation. Claudia thinks:

I have only to break into the tightness of a strawberry, and I see summer—its dust and lowering skies. It remains for me a season of storms. The parched days and sticky nights are undistinguished in my mind, but the storms, the violent sudden storms, both frightened and quenched me (TBE 146).

Claudia's mind gets charged with pain and wonder because of the violent storms blowing within and without. The formative years of this black girl become dark and gloomy with the memory of the rape conducted by Cholly on his daughter. As soon as she hears the story of Pecola from elders, her cheerful face gets saddened. The uneasiness caused by Cholly's outrage against his own daughter shall ever remain at the back of her mind. She says

that their astonishment of the incident is short-lived, for it gave way to a curious kind of defensive shame; she is embarrassed for Pecola, hurt for her, finally feels sorry for her. Her sorrows drive out all thoughts of the new bicycle she had been thinking to buy in summer and she believes her sorrow is more intense because nobody else seemed to share it. Claudia laughs at the “love” that imparted to Pecola by her father. She says that Cholly loved Pecola but it is a fatal love—like the love shown by Satan to his own daughter Sin in Milton’s Paradise Lost. When she sees the agony of Pecola she consoles herself in her own way:

Love is never any better than the lover. Wicked People love wickedly, violent people love violently, weak people weakly, stupid people love stupidly but the love of a free man is never safe. There is no gift for the beloved; the lover alone possesses this gift of love. The loved one is shorn, neutralized, frozen in the glare of the lover’s inward eye (TBE 163).

Claudia with this experience becomes more concerned than the adults. She is disgusted and confused with the way the adults behave and their reactions to the story of Pecola. The adults are amused, shocked, outraged or even excited when they listen to the story but no one sympathises with the girl Pecola saying “poor little girl” or “poor little baby”. She observes the adults, their eyes creased with concern but see only their head wagging. They even want Pecola’s baby to die because it is an unnatural birth. Claudia remembers the way of the world—everything white is appreciated and not the blackness. She has already witnessed the horror of adults whose callous nature towards their own daughters as well as the attitudes of her schoolmates gives her an opportunity to understand the world in her own way. She says: “We remembered Mrs. Breedlove knocking Pecola down and soothing the pink

tears of the frozen doll baby that sounded like the door of our icebox. We remembered the knuckled eyes of school children under the gaze of Meringue Pie and the eyes of these same children when they looked at Pecola” (TBE 150).

Claudia’s world is filled with so many do’s and don’ts and these warnings really cripple her mind. The much expected holidays are a welcome relief to her but her parents will not even spare her holidays. She again speaks: “It was lonesome Saturdays. The house smelled of Fels Naphtha and the sharp odor of mustard greens cooking. Saturdays were lonesome, fussy, soapy days. Second in misery only those tight, starchy, cough-drip Sundays, so full of ‘don’ts’ and ‘set’cha’ self downs’ ” (TBE 17). The repeated warning of her mother frustrates the child. Unable to suffer these incorrigible warnings, Claudia lets out her tears:

“My mother’s anger humiliates me; her words chafe at my cheeks, and I am crying. I do not know that she is not angry at me, but at my sickness, I believe she despises my weakness for letting the sickness ‘take holt’. By and by I will not get sick; I will refuse to. But for now I am crying. I know I am making more snot, But I can’t stop” (TBE 7).

Mary Winn points out that the children are helpless and dependent while adults are powerful and independent. It is upon this conviction and belief that adults base much of the authority they exercise over children. But the relative authority and control has significantly diminished now. The reason is that children “became aware that the adults are not always honourable, that they use bad language that they lie, cheat, and behave contrary to the expectation of the child’s world” ( Mary Winn 50). This is



true in the case of Claudia's observations about adults. The adult world fails to prove to be a model before Claudia. She perceives everything at the quickest pace and her sensitive mind bloats whatever those adults do contrary to the social norms. When her parents heap abuses on them, she becomes highly critical; her childhood qualities disappear rather she exhibits more adult-like qualities. Even if anything happens, the adult world takes it for a mistake on the part of these young children.

This has been the approach of black community towards their children. Sensing these realities, Claudia often gives vent to her feelings against the adult world. She registers her protest on the mindless commands heaped on the children. She says that the adults do not talk to them, do not consult or advice them-instead they give them orders and commands, no compassion nor love. When those children accidentally trip and fall, they do not rush for their help but stare at them. When their bruises are cut, catch cold, they scold them. She takes a stance: "we cannot answer them; our illness is treated with contempt, foul Black Draught, and castor oil that blunt our minds" (TBE 6). These observations of Claudia indicate she is more mature than the adults are though she is very young. Claudia observes that the children are easy preys to the abuses of adults. She is well aware of the psychic distortion it produces in them. In the novel her narration always centres on the adults' ignorance of children. She feels sorry when her mother heaps insults on Pecola for having drunk too much milk kept in the Shirley Temple cup. Claudia again thinks, "it is certainly not for us to dispute her (mother). We did not initiate talk with the grown ups; we answered their questions" (TBE 12). Thus Claudia registers her protests and blames the adults because they treat their children as merely as objects and do not care for their sentiments which really make her grieve.

Claudia further expresses her anguish over the partiality shown to the white girls by teachers as well as parents and aunts, which sickens her mind. She carefully watches the glistening eyes of teachers when they encounter the white girls in the class. At the same time, the black girls are not allowed to enjoy the privileges such as love, recognition but only segregation from the teachers. She thinks: “Dolls we could destroy, but we could not destroy the honey voices of parents and aunts, the obedience in the eyes of our peers, the slippery light in the eyes of our teachers when they encountered the Maureen Peals (white girls) of the world” (TBE 57). She is highly indignant about the segregation of people into black and white. She asks again, “what is the secret? What did we lack? Why is it important? But at the same time she praises the shortcomings of ‘blackness’: “ we felt comfortable in our skin, enjoyed the news that our senses released to us, admired our dirt. ....and all the time we know that Maureen Peal is not the enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The thing to fear is the thing that made her (Maureen Peal) beautiful” (TBE 57). Claudia’s philosophical overtones reaches out to the problem of apartheid found everywhere.

Morrison shows us how the adults lie and behave so irrationally before the innocent children through the relative representations of the experiences of Claudia and her sister Frieda. Sexual exploitations by the adults create several ripples in their young minds and worry them very much. Henry’s attempt towards her sister Frieda shocks her tender mind. Claudia finds Frieda crying in the bed and after repeated requests Frieda reveals that it is because of Henry, the servant of their house, who pinched her tiny breasts. He also tried to seduce Frieda by enticing her telling that she is so pretty and finally grabbed her. Frieda had overheard some neighbours saying that she might have been ruined like Poland and China, the whores in the novel, if she makes

company with Henry. Their shock is further increased when they catch sight of the sexual indulgence of Henry with the whores depicted in the novel.

While returning home after school; Henry casually tells Claudia and Frieda to buy some cream from the farthest shop but the girls buy it from a nearby one.

They return so unexpectedly to see Henry indulging in sexual acts with the two women China and Maginot Line. Claudia says, “Showing brown teeth, China seemed to be genuinely enjoying Mr. Henry. The sight of him licking her fingers brought to mind the girlie magazines in his room” (TBE 64).

When the prostitutes are all gone, the children ask Henry if all the cream had gone. Henry lies bluntly to the children that they had come to attend Bible class, and then he tenders his apologies and requests them not to tell their Mama what they had witnessed.

As an African American child, under the suppression of white standards, and as a victim of racism, Claudia directs her anger towards white aristocracy out of her naïve vision. When Rose Mary, a white aristocratic lady is seen sitting in her car eating bread and butter, Claudia tells Frieda not to go near her. They watch her, wanting the bread and butter but more than that, they want to smash the arrogance out of her. With the childish touch Claudia says:

When she comes out of the car we will beat her up, make red marks on her white skin, and she will cry and ask us do we want her to pull her pants down. We will say no. We don't know what we should feel or do if she does; we know she is offering us something precious and that our own pride must be asserted by refusing to accept (TBE 5).

Claudia is so attached to her racial feeling, has been witnessing the dwindling

of the pride and dignity of African American children. This shows that, unlike Pecola who is static in such affairs, Claudia's tendency is to question the attitudes of the white aristocratic ladies in her own childish way. When the self-esteem of the African American children are questioned and hurt, the MacTeer children register their protest with the obstinacy of a child because they grow up with the bruised feelings of their self-pride.

Claudia expresses her anguish over the vanities of children to worship everything white. She does not like white dolls. She cannot pretend to be a white mother, does not like to rock it or fabricate stories while playing with the white dolls. She hates the round moronic eyes of white dolls, the pancake faces and the orange worm hair. In fact, she hates them and wants to tear them limb-by-limb. Even as child, she senses, as Cynthia Davis pointed out, "the force of their cultural images that provoke them. She knows that white 'ideals' deny her reality by forcing it into strange forms of appearances and experiences" (Contemporary Literature 325). Claudia learns to oppose such ideals though she knows that in order to be loved and accepted by the adults, she must conform to white ideals because, as she remembers, "all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll is what every girl child treasured" (TBE 14). And she does not want to flow with the tide. Even while other children like dolls, she wants to break it because her pure and serene mind gets fragmented by the racial problems and by the adult orgies within the community that she has been experiencing, directly and indirectly.

Claudia's equation of her philosophical knowledge is accurate and she is overwhelmed at the thought of the loss and damage done to the Edenic innocence. She, like a matured woman, advises us if we want to cultivate a childhood that is fruitful for the adulthood and the rest of life, the background

of social status must be favourable. The human seed will nurture itself only in such a favourable and fertile condition. She tells us that the soil must be favourable for the nurturance of childhood. She asserts, “And when the land kills of its volition we acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live (TBE 164). This association of marigold and Pecola’s baby is significant as the flowers generally thrive in poor soil and after blooming can reseed for the coming year. Claudia and Frieda sell the marigold seeds to buy a bicycle. They hear that the community’s dictum that Pecola’s baby would be better dead, they sacrifice the two dollars they have earned and plant the unsold seeds as a sign of their earnest prayer for the baby’s survival. Claudia calls this child with “clean black eyes... flared nose, kissing thick lips and the living breathing silk of black skin is infinitely, or desirable than a lifeless doll” (TBE 149). Morrison makes it clear that the world of childhood is continuously being eroded, and makes Claudia the Messiah of the agonising world of childhood:

Quiet as it’s kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941. We thought, at the time, that it was because Pecola was having her father’s baby that the marigolds did not grow. A little examination and much less melancholy would have proved to us that our seeds were not the only ones that did not sprout; nobody’s did” (TBE 4).

The marigold seeds are the symbol of the nurslings of black race, which are planted deep, and, according to Claudia, the holiness of the childhood is buried deep in black dirt and could not sprout up. She finally tells the truth of their inability among the adult’s hard and fast rules. Her glass like mind gets tainted. She cannot bear to see Pecola picking and plucking her way between the tire rims and sunflowers, between coke bottles and

milkweeds, between all the istic and beauty of the world. Claudia, the child, witnesses the tragic disintegration of another childhood of her race with great pain in her mind. She gives an open confession and compares the childhood of themselves and Pecola:

And fantasy it was, for we were not strong, only aggressive; we were not free, merely licensed; we were not compassionate, and we were polite; not good, but well behaved. We courted death in order to call ourselves brave, and hid like thieves from life. We substituted good grammar for intellect; we switched habits to simulate maturity; we rearranged lies and called it truth, seeing in the new pattern of an old idea the Revelation and the Word (TBE 163).

Claudia looks beyond Pecola for the causes of her tragedy and she is so conscious that she is able to understand and interpret the tragic end of Pecola as Patrick Bryce notes: “It is the consciousness on the part of Claudia and the unawareness of Pecola that allow one to survive and pushes the other into madness” (36-37). Claudia thinks that the fault is not on the part of Pecola but on the society. The soil she speaks is that of American black life that will continue to destroy the bliss of African American childhood. By contrasting two girls Morrison reveals how their young girlhood gets soiled in the black community and how both of them meet their tragic end—Claudia by witnessing the plight of her friend and Pecola being the victim of the racial effects.

Sula (1973) expands the theme of childhood but in a different way. The role of community in the novel stands conspicuous in bringing up children as well as shaping their character, which ultimately lends a tragic drift. Further

Morrison focuses on the theme of developing extraordinary friendship between two girls Sula May Peace and Nel Wright, which starts at the age of twelve. Analysing their different households, Morrison brings together the companionship of their lives with a fine sympathy, which, though broken, ultimately leads to a dramatic meaning to the story. She shows that society can mould children either positively or negatively by introducing paired girlhood. This camaraderie, sharing their secrets and defying everything finally plunge into the tragic depth. Unlike the static lives of Breedloves, these characters are experimental, for neither of them conforms to the prevailing social standards and values. They adhere to Morrison's description of what she calls "salt tasters" who express either an effort of the will or a freedom of the will. Claudia Tate, one of the critics of Morrison calls them free people, the dangerously free people. In the end, Sula becomes a pariah and goes astray while the conformist Nel leads a quiet life within the frame of her community. Their childhood would have been joyful but for the society's irresponsible way of bringing them up which creates in them a feeling of alienation and finally the two take different roads of their fate.

The novel unfolds the theme in a chronological order, begins with the year 1919, and proceeds with the chapters 1920, 1922, 1927, 1937 and 1969. Each chapter does not cover an entire year but represents a particular event around which revolves its past, present and future. The theme of identity, love and responsibility, a vivid sense of community, shifting narrative perspectives, rich use of irony and paradoxes all add to the novel's variety. However, apart from these, the theme of childhood, especially paired girlhood as well as growing up is conspicuous in the novel as Deborah E. McDowell maintains: "It defies single authoritative readings in theme and structure mainly because this is a novel about becoming and changing, sometimes in clear process,

sometimes not” ( “The Self and the Other” 80).

Morrison selects Sula Peace (Sula) to represent the repercussions of psychic problems due to communal dereliction upon the gentle psyche, the resultant transformation of her waywardness and sexual assault, which stemmed from her mother’s remark and the family’s way of life. Sula’s life is one of “unlimited experiment” and is neither bound by any social codes of propriety prevalent in the black community nor awed by the matriarch Eva Peace, her grandmother. Like Pecola, Sula too leads a solitary life. Her mother, Hannah, is hardly aware of her daughter’s need for emotional nurturance. Her alienation from the larger society paves the way for Sula’s rebellion against the set norms. She remains at best a social outsider as she defies the role she is supposed to play socially. This rebellious nature isolates her from the Bottom community and from her only friend, Nel Helen Wright.

Sula is shown as an alienated child from the very beginning and lives on the fringes of society. Like Pecola, she is a daughter who suffered rejection at the hands of her mother, community and then from the society, which foreshadows her adult behaviour. She becomes a prostitute in her mother’s ways. The people of Bottom detest her; she is the crust of their discussion and is being watched closely. Women hate her for she traps their husbands and whenever she returns Bottom they consider her that she returns with “a plague of robins”. But one can see that the reason behind all these transformations of this child is, because, she has been in search of her selfhood right from her childhood days. She is born into a family where she does not get the right kind of guidance from the very beginning nor does she get any paternal care or moral direction. Her tender years are not the congenial period for the right kind of schooling. It is universally acknowledged that grandmothers usually love their grandchildren more than their own. This is because of the tendency



on the part of the elders to return to their own lost blissful state. In the novel, it is contrary to the expectation. Eva, Sula's grandmother, reserves only arrogance and contempt for this child. Her mother welters in the company of men but ignores the psychological needs of her daughter. She does not even think of a girl who is approaching puberty needs more attention. Instead, she publicly responds, "I love Sula, I just don't like her. That is the difference" (Sula 56, 57). Sula overhears Hannah's words, which send several tremors down her spine and pierces her heart. Finally, she understands nothing is there to fall back upon; no one is there to depend for solace and comfort. The only grip in this world is her mother, whom she treasures in her recess, who proves to be fraud. The image of her mother remains shattered in her mind.

The novel's central theme is the quest for selfhood of the protagonist, Sula. The search for the self in a way is a longing to return to the land of childhood. This yearning for purity and innocence has been continuously thriving but do not get fulfilled in her life. Her mother's words fragment her self. Now she has only an alternative before her—to forget the frustrations and desperations experienced in the family and community and thereby purge off her pent-up feelings. To achieve this aim, Sula selects her friend Nel to exchange her secret pains and sorrows, determines to forget 'the sting in the eye' caused by her mother's remarks and sets out on her "odyssey". Recognition, affection and love she yearned in her childhood have now become a distant possibility and she feels acute isolation. Gradually, the purity and simplicity, and the unpolluted world of childhood wither away from her. She acts according to her own whims and fancies, which found reflected in her later adult experiences because she has imbibed Eva's arrogance and Hanna's self-indulgence. She starts an experimental life and lives out her days exploring her own thoughts and emotions, giving them full reign, feeling no

obligation to please anybody unless their pleasure pleased her. The narrator describes her childhood:

[...]ever since her mother's remark sent her flying up those stairs, ever since her one major feeling responsibility had been exorcised on the bank of a river with a cleared place in the middle. The first experience taught her there was no other that you could count; the second that there was no self to count on either. She had no centre, no speck around which to grow (Sula 118).

The camaraderie between Sula and Nel helps to contrast and compare how the family backgrounds of African American children cause psychic impact upon them. Even though the colourful period of childhood is marked by beautiful dreams and fantasies, these children take it as a means of escapism from their bitter circumstances. Morrison remarks about these children that they are simultaneously growing teenage girls, "solitary little ones whose loneliness is so profound it intoxicated them and sent them stumbling into techno coloured visions that always included a presence, a some one, who quite like the dreamer, shared the delight of the dream" (Sula 51-52). It is this profound loneliness in the lives of the girls that paved the way for their tragic state.

Nel, the only child of the Wrights, used to sit on the steps of her back porch and dream about things in order to get away from the sordid realities because she is passing through an age of dreams and fantasies. She is surrounded by the high silence of her mother's incredible orderly house. Feeling the neatness of the house pointing at her back, she studies the poplar trees in the courtyard. She falls easily into the picture of herself lying on a

flowerbed, tangled in her own hair as if she is waiting for some fiery prince to turn up. But it never materialises. This excess loneliness in the early life nearly tramples the psyche of Nel and Sula. Nevertheless, for Sula, her loneliness and the dream make her entirely an opposite person. The narrator says: “Sula is also an only child but wedged into a household of throbbing disorder constantly awry with things, people, voices and the slamming of doors, she spent hours in the attic behind a roll of linoleum” (Sula 51). In this throbbing disorder, Sula has to sit for hours together without the attention of any one in the house. Her loneliness is unbearable because nobody cares for her but all of the men enter her house to satisfy their physical pleasures with the company of her mother as it is a “woolly house” for those who come there. It is not the interest in her daughter but the style of life her mother leads by welcoming the steady flow of men that marks the tragedy of her daughter, Sula.

On the other hand, Nel’s god-fearing mother brings her up in a strict way. This incredible strictness receives, not the desired effect in her daughter, but a constant feeling of subdued rebelliousness. Nel’s mother Helen presents a different picture before her daughter. She exhibits a fear of life suggested by her attitude toward sexuality. Having beautiful physical features and as a diminished product of her mother, with her unrelenting attitude towards sexuality, Nel is unfortunate to get an adequate maternal perch. Though Helen manipulates her daughter and husband, and trains her young daughter into an obedient one, she violates Nel and rubs her imagination down to a dull glow much like Pauline in TBE. Thus, Sula and Nel, like Pecola, are the isolated ones from their mother figures who act as the destroyers of their psyche. This distancing from the maternal sides creates an excessive loneliness in them and a feeling of alienation. They finally lead to believe that they are the unwanted

children in their family; their presence is a burden to their mother role models and, therefore, they lose the entire grip as children in the world.

Filial absence, isolation from near and dears cause these girls' lives bitter. Both the girls are daughters of 'incomprehensible fathers' whose absence of filial bonds with their daughters distort their personality. Rekus, Sula's father, is long dead. Nel's father, Wiley Wright's presence is hardly felt in the family, as he is a cook on one of the great Luke's lines. He visits his family only three days out of every sixteen. This proves that Sula and Nel both resemble each other in their emotional and physical isolation from their fathers. Further, these girls have no brothers, sisters, companions, or playmates within easy reach to shape their behaviour or exchange their feelings for bringing them into the mainstream of socialisation process. So they feel a chasm in their emotional level, which is more poignant in childhood. Their quest is to fill the empty spaces of emotional field both without and within. The accidental drowning of their playmate, Chicken Littlehead gave them an additional emotional turbulence. It is a turning point in their life and because of it they suffered acute isolation after the mishap. A sense of guilt haunts both these girls throughout their life, which do not allow them respite. The little boy, Chicken Little head, while playing together on the bank of a river climbs up a tree and tells Sula that he is going to watch the limitless sky beyond. He comes down from the tree, catches Sula and urges her to whirl him round and round, but unfortunately, slips him off from her hand to be thrown into the nearby river, which immediately causes his tragic death. The narrator of the novel describes:

She picked him [...] by his hands and swung him outward then around and around. His knickers ballooned and his shrieks of frightened joy startled the birds and the fat grasshoppers. When

he was slipped from her hands and sailed away out over the water. They could still hear his bubbly laughter. The water darkened and closed quickly over the place where Chicken Little sank (Sula 60 -61).

The two experiences, Hannah's remarks and Chicken Little head's death, teach Sula that: "there is no other that you could count on; [...]" and "[...] there is no self to count on either" (Sula118-119). Her feeling of alienation grows intense as Sula "had no centre, no speck around which to grow" (Sula118-119). She has no common factor like ambition, affection for money, property or things, greed, desire to command attention or compliments or ego to share with other women or men. This shows that her isolation is deeper than expected, which creates in her a kind of resoluteness and obstinacy. This resoluteness forces her to refuse to undergo the usual rite of marriage to become a wife, and a mother. She is outside the ken of the black woman of Bottom, perhaps because she might have understood in her childhood that these rites have no meaning as she had already witnessed married men and women visiting her house for gratifying their physical pleasures. The adult examples have shown her that, with or without marriage, one can enjoy life as her mother or grandmother does. Therefore, the alienation experienced by Sula is more psychological than physical and it is even more reflected in her later adult life. Sula wants to live her life out, wants to make Sula herself. In her quest for self, she realises that: "no one would ever be that version of herself which she sought to reach out to and touch with an ungloved hand" (Sula 121).

The monotony and boredom of modern life in cities and in urban centres aggravate her alienation. Her experiences are vividly described in the novel:

All those cities held the same people, working the same mouths, sweating the same sweat. The men who took her to one or another of those places had merged into one large personality; the same language of love, the same entertainments of love, the same cooling of love. Whenever she introduced her private thoughts into their rubbings or goings, they hooded their eyes. They taught her nothing but love tricks, shared nothing but worry, gave nothing but money (Sula 123).

She finally realizes the drabness in the love making acts, though it begins with great pleasure. She gradually feels that in the middle of sexual acts and silences, there is nothing, but the death of time and loneliness so profound that the word itself has no meaning. After the acts, she wants her partner to turn away and leave her “to the post coital privateness in which she met herself, and joined in matchless harmony” (Sula 123). This isolation culminates in her confession to her best friend Nel. Yet she pursues her own course of freedom and leads an independent life. In doing so, she is destroyed in the eyes of the community. She becomes a pariah who dreads the people around. All her chartings from her girlhood to womanhood is shaped because of the psychological tragedy she experienced in the form of alienation, rejection and loneliness during her childhood.

SOS (1977), Morrison’s most acclaimed novel, describes the story of a young black boy’s quest for his selfhood and becoming. It strongly contributes to the theme and its consequent tragedy of childhood. One would find the dramatisation of the protagonist’s conflicts, his confrontation and the resolution of his process of growing up. In that sense, SOS is closer to Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man but it differs from it, in the sense, the individual seeks cultural roots while the other searches meaning to life in a world which closes

visibility. The novel draws upon several classical Western literary traditions such as the theme of education, journey structure and flight imagery. Morrison blends folklore and fairy tales, magic and root medicines, history and imagination for a distinctive fictional connection. Unlike her earlier works TBE and Sula, it combines the epic quest with the *bildungsroman* motif and the search for Grail Identity theme. Apart from many themes, styles and critical theories, the tragic vision of childhood is recurrent as it is the story of Milkman—a growing boy's search for his meaning (Identity) through the discovery of his familial heritage.

Morrison shifts her focus from girlhood to boyhood and deals with the story of Milkman and his generation in SOS. Unlike her other novels, a boy has been given the centre stage in this novel for the first time. However, all the children in the novel are tragic victims of one force or the other. The novel reminds the loss of holistic innocence through the relative presentations of the identity quest, the quest for selfhood and blindly selecting Biblical names for children. Milkman's journey to Shalimar and the pursuit for his ancestral roots are all vitally connected to the theme. Morrison also strains the imagination of her readers by surprising them that an African could fly. But it seems that the flight of her characters to Africa is related to the myth of childhood and, in a way, it is an escape into the Edenic innocence because the horrible conditions are detrimental to the bliss of childhood.

The novel highlights the saga of a black family of Macon I, Macon II and Milkman but chiefly centres round Milkman. Macon Dead II, is a rich and affluent black whose intention in life is to own things because in his childhood he had undergone the terrible side of poverty. His wife, Ruth Foster Dead, their children Magdalene called Lena, First Corinthians and Macon III (better known as Milkman) lead a subdued life under the control of this

wealthy man. His sister, Pilate and her family consist of her daughter Reba and her granddaughter Hagar. They lead penury-ridden lives by selling and brewing home-made cheap liquor. Though these families are mutually antagonistic in their relations, the protagonist of the novel, Milkman, serves as a connecting link between the two families. However, unlike other boys and girls of Morrison, Milkman is nobly born among the American black aristocrats. The development of his personality and his childhood are shaped by the secondary characters of the novel. They serve him as educators, companions, lovers and guides. Pilate, Guitar, Hagar, Ruth and Macon II mediate, reflect, or interpret the alternative available to the child, Milkman.

As the novel progresses, Milkman's transition from a little boy to the stage of retracing to his ancestral world is made more and more clear and visible. The opening chapter of the novel starts with the birth of Milkman. He is the first black boy privileged to be born in Mercy Hospital on Not Doctor Street. It is on the day of his birth, Robert Smith, a life insurance agent jumps from the roof of Mercy Hospital and dies, where his mother is hospitalised with labour pain. While his mother moans and holds the under side of her stomach, Smith leaps from the cupola of the hospital in the dead of winter. This occurrence shows that the novel ensues a mythical enactment of the coil of death and birth. While Robert Smith leaps, red and velvet rose-petals from the peck box are scattered and carried by the winds on the road below. In the midst of this dilemma, Pilate sings a prophetic song referring to the ancestor Sugarman: "O Sugarman done flyaway...Sugarman gone home" (SOS 5). She tells Ruth, "a little bird'll be here with the morning" (SOS 8). These successive events show that Milkman's birth is a mythical enactment of heroic birth. He is born on the day a black man, Smith, commits suicide. Smith is the symbolic representative of his ancestor, and the inevitability of



his birth is marked by his father's futile attempt to terminate him from the womb itself. When Macon comes to know of the pregnancy, he attempts through various techniques to kill the unborn child because he believes that his wife had an incestuous relationship with her father. The barrenness that existed between Macon Dead and his wife is removed with the 'love potion' prepared by Pilate. It is with the effort of Pilate that Milkman comes into this world; thereby she tries to fill the gap between the ancestral world and the young generation.

Though the boy is born only after thirteen years of parental separation, Milkman's childhood is colourful. He is sheltered and nurtured to the extreme. His mother continued to give him milk beyond infancy so that he earned the name 'Milkman' but he takes it as a daily monotonous chore and attributes a lewd reference to this unpleasant task as his mother enjoys sucking her nipple. The narrator says:

He was too young to be dazzled by the nipples, but was old enough to be bored by the flat taste of mother's milk, so he came reluctantly, as to a chore and lay as he had at least once each day of his life in mother's arms, and tried to pull the thin, faintly sweet milk from her flesh without hurting her with his teeth (SOS 13).

It is curious to observe that Milkman lacks childish interest not only in sucking the milk but also almost in everything at an early age. He senses 'deadness' in the early stage of his life. He exhibits neither interest nor imagination or boldness of a child. At the age of four, he discovers the same thing that Smith had learned earlier that "only birds and aeroplanes could fly—he lost interest in himself. To have to live without that single gift saddened

him and left his imagination so bereft that he appeared dull...”(SOS 9). If anything, Milkman is born into, lives an entirely and unnatural existence; his life is marked from the very beginning by distortion and disaffection. The remaining part of the novel encompasses Milkman’s attempt to overcome his own estrangement, to learn to fly again, and to transcend the unholy inaccuracy surrounding his life. He is reared in a family that is life-denying. As a sign of this, his birth is simultaneous with the suicide of a man who leaps from the roof of the hospital. As he grows up, he acquires the attitudes of his family and friends, but becomes narcissistic, selfish and treats the members of his family with contempt. Milkman is greatly offended when Pilate tells him that only three ‘Deads’ are alive, referring to the names of his family members. He tells Pilate that he is a ‘Dead’; his mother is a ‘Dead’ and his sisters are all ‘Deads’. This signals that his world of childhood is dead and thereby Morrison ironically states that, childhood and parentage are all static in the novel.

The attitudes Milkman acquired and the internal hatred he cultivated towards his father Macon Dead II during his childhood resulted in his psychological deadness. Macon Dead is a passionate worshipper of materialistic wealth and his greediness is in constant conflict with his only boy’s wishes and aspirations. As the boy grows up, his father has taught him not the moral laws required to live in a healthy society but how to own things rather than giving the child the freedom required in that important phase of his life. His father warns him not to go to his aunt Pilate’s house, as she is a “snake”. Macon’s do’s and don’ts distort the boy’s psychic conditions and makes Milkman a rebel. His obstinacy to do anything contrary to his father is given in the following comparison with him and his father:

Macon was clean-shaven; Milkman was desperate for a

moustache. Macon wore bow ties; Milkman wore four-in-hands. Macon did not part his hair; Milkman had a part shaved into his. Macon hated tobacco; Milkman tried to put a cigarette in his mouth every fifteen minutes. Macon hoarded his money; Milkman gave his away (SOS 62-63).

Milkman develops such a defiant attitude not only towards his father but also towards his mother and his sisters as well. Ruth Foster Dead is too a 'distant' mother to him. The disaffection that Milkman experiences in his adult life, in some way, is foreshadowed by his mother's morbid existence. Ruth has lived a life of 'baby doll existence' and her world is entirely different from the world she lives. As Milkman matures, he feels his family is a burden and develops the desire of concentration on things behind him. He has a sense that there is no future. Thus, the cultural deadness, the anger and isolation of his home provide an impetus for liberation. This feeling of liberation takes Milkman to trace his ancestral moorings.

At the age of twelve, Milkman comes into contact with Guitar who directs him to Pilate's house, and there he feels and enjoys the pleasure of being a child. Pilate is a woman his father hates for some materialistic reason. Milkman is initially fascinated with this matriarchal household because of its difference from his patriarchal one, here stories are told, food is tasty and plentiful, and none of the rigidity of his own home is present. Moreover, here he has his sexual initiation. Milkman finds consolation from the teasing of sixth grade schoolmates in Pilate's presence. Pilate becomes a model before him as a woman of strength, confidence, and good humour that Milkman never receives from his family. For him, her presence is magical and mysterious. The smell of wine and fermenting it from her house makes him dizzy. He is in rapt attention when she unfolds the story of his father and his

childhood. As a clever storyteller, Pilate relates events to events and moments to moments, which intercede with a pulsing poetic quality that transforms the historical quality into a felt experience. Not only Pilate but her daughter and grand-daughter treat Milkman with generosity, kindness and love; and he feels, “all of them have a guileless look about them...” Thus, Pilate’s house quenched his natural thirst but his attitudes formed from his childhood remains as natural as his father’s materialistic philosophy and selfishness

His fascination towards his Aunt Pilate’s family is a kind of curiosity of a thwarted childhood and an understanding but later it turns out to be exploitation. This takes place twice in two forms and each time his originality of his attitudes—materialistic and selfishness—is exposed. The first is the behaviour towards his love, Hagar, the grand daughter of Pilate, whom he considers a sexual object to be used at his convenience, but never to be a part of his life with his family’s and his own respectable friends. Finally he decides to break this affair but he chooses to do so by writing a letter that is as equivalent as his father’s eviction notices to his tenants. He wrote her, “Also, I want to thank you. Thank you for all you have meant to me for making me happy all these years. I am signing this letter with love, of course, but more than that, with gratitude” (SOS 99). This letter creates craziness in Hagar and she tries to kill him several times but does not succeed. In the second act of exploitation he conspires with his father to steal a green sack from Pilate, a sack, which he and his father believe, contain gold. Macon tells his son a story that occurred during their childhood, about hiding out with his sister Pilate after their father’s murder, in a cave where they find buried treasure. They are discovered by a white man in the cave whom Macon kills. They flee for their life but in different direction. Macon suspects that Pilate might have returned later and took the gold, which is now suspended in the green sack

under the roof of Pilate's house. Milkman and Guitar, who need money to carry out a killing operation, steal the sack but they find that it contained only human bones. When he tries to steal the sack that hangs from the ceiling of Pilate's house, a sudden remorse grips him. He breaks into a series of conflicting thoughts:

To knock down an old black lady who had cooked him his first perfect egg, who had shown him the sky, the blue of it, which was like her mother's ribbons, so that when then on he looked at it, it had no distance, no remoteness, but was intimate, familiar, like a room that he liked in, a place where he belonged. She had told him stories; sung him songs, fed him bananas, and corn bread and, on the first cold day of the year, hot nut soup[...] (SOS 211).

However these conflicting thoughts overpower his tendency to possess things. He is obsessed with the idea of getting money and thereby power, and, therefore he sets out to find the cave near the old family property. Just as his father distorted the values of his grandfather, by emphasising possession over creation, Milkman distorts his father's values by taking on his greed without any seriousness. So the habit formation from a very early age influences and distorts the personality of Milkman, which marks the tragedy of his nobility of childhood.

Milkman is caught between two ideologies: his father's materialistic philosophy of earning everything and the other is Guitar's vengeance against racist society. Rather than attaching himself to any particular ideology or commitment to any belief and acting from any set of principles, he chooses neither of them. He only reacts. No ideologies, not even the sexual act

between him and Hagar gives him any pleasure. Instead, he always wants to go back to a world where innocence and purity prevailed. The lack of childhood pleasures that he always lacks and covets, force him to retrace the steps to his ancestral world of Shalimar but not towards any ideologies. While he journeys to Shalimar and then to Pennsylvania looking for the gold supposed to be hidden in the cave, he watches the children playing and singing. About eight or nine boys and girls were standing in a circle, a boy in the middle with outstretched arm turns like an aeroplane and while others sing in a chorus. This reminds him of his childhood days and then he grieves that he is not a part of the play:

Milkman watched the children. He'd never played like that as child. As soon as he got up off his knees at the windowsill, grieving because he could not fly, and went off to school, his velvet suit separated him from the other children White and black thought he was a riot and went out of their way to laugh at him and see to it that he had no lunch to eat, nor any crayons, [...] he is never asked to play those circle games, those singing games, to join in anything, [...] (SOS 267).

He begins to decode the children's song and discovers that it is the history of his family that they are singing. It is about the folk tale of the flying African, Solomon, who one day discovered his magical power and used it to fly from slavery back to his African home. He left behind a wife Ryna and twenty one children including Milkman's grand father Jake. Ryna goes crazy and her children are left to the care of Heddy an Indian. These children are supposed to be the African American children including Milkman. This story reminds that children are responsible for sustaining the remnants of the myth of Milkman's ancestor Solomon. Their rendition of the song "Jay the only son

of Solomon...come booba tambee...” makes it a children’s chanting yet it is much more important in the sense it is the song of all children of the black race who lost their childhood bliss and wants to fly back to Africa—the place once symbolised the Eden. Milkman later understands his childhood, because it is different from other children’s, has kept him from learning the song. The song is related to his heritage. He goes to Shalimar and finds that it is Lincolns Heaven, where his father and Aunt Pilate dwelled like free birds in the days of yore. On one level, it may seem that Milkman, the son of an avaricious father, is in search of gold or materialistic wealth due to the attitude he had acquired from his family, but on another level, the quest for his ancestral world is to derive the pleasure he never experienced in his childhood. He is, in a way like Robert Smith, who wanted to fly away like Solomon. Hence, through mythical enactments, songs and play’ Morrison puns on the title of the novel that the SOS is the song of children that is being sung from generation to generation in order to remind the tragic state of African American childhood.

Morrison uses songs and myths as a means to retrace and remember the past world of childhood. When Pilate sings, even her bitter enemy and brother Macon surrenders to the sounds and he feels “himself softening under the weight of memory and music” (SOS 30). When children sing, Milkman is reminded of his childhood and his ancestor Jake. The songs in the novel serves as the umbilicus between these children and the men and women they become. It is through the song that the children receive the archetypal imagery of their race, and it matters not whether a loving mother or a rejecting mother sings these songs, so long as children hear them. Thus, Morrison emphasises that for the nurturance of childhood, memory and music coming from women and children are inevitable. Those songs, including SOS

as the title of the novel suggests, are the lifelines of survival and a means of relaxation for those who have lost their childhood memories. The flight of Milkman to his ancestral heritage is connected with the African myth of flying. Grace Ann Hovet and Barbara think that Milkman's flight is: "A spiritual passage that charts his move from adolescent solipsism and materialism towards a philosophy valuing even more the real treasures of family and heritage" (CLA 27: 120). However, the flight in SOS is an attempt to recapture the lost innocence and wholesomeness that prevailed in the ancestral abode of Milkman's family. His ancestors lived in a state of perfect bliss and constantly in touch with Nature tasting the songs and sounds of nature. This bliss and happiness, the hall mark of childhood, are not endowed in his adult life because it stopped where his materialistic pursuit began. His mind throbs for the paradisiacal innocence, which he never received.

Morrison presents characters like Guitar (SOS), Claudia (TBE) and Violet (Jazz) to show how the racial onslaughts bring psychic distortion in children and thereby land them into eternal troubles. She knew thousands of children perished without being able to counter the malevolence of racial brutality and those who survived grew with bruised mind. The children are the worst victims of tragic situations perpetrated by racial discrimination and their adult life is crowded with vengeance and revengeful attitudes. They are lynched, mutilated, raped or killed. The drastic consequences of these cruelties make them criminals or they are fated to lead a life of submissive ego. Especially when they see that, their intense negative feelings are being geared and engineered by their own parents. In SOS, Morrison illustrates the tragedy inherent in the lives of racially marginalized children through the introduction of Guitar Bains.

Guitar tells the tragic and gruesome stories which he had witnessed



during his childhood days to his intimate friend, Milkman. The childhood memories start with the unforgettable scene of his father's brutal murder by a white mill owner. Ever since this gruesome event, he has been craving for the blood of some whites and vows to take revenge upon them. In order to achieve this goal, he fills his colourful period of childhood with intense emotion to curb any life in the same coin that belongs to the white. He narrates this heart-rending story in broken pieces to Milkman to sooth out the long suppressed feelings. This unforgettable feeling escalates and fragments his psyche with inundating tears when he remembers the way his mother behaved at the time of his father's sliced up body had been brought home:

Her [Guitar's mother] husband was sliced in half and boxed backward. He'd heard how the mill men tell how the two halves, not even fitted together, were placed cut side down, skin side up, in the coffin. Facing each other. [...]. And he had worried then, as a child, that when his father is wakened on the Judgement Day his first sight would not be glory or the magnificent head of God-or even the rainbow. It would be his own other eye (SOS 226).

The terrifying scene of his father's sliced up body appears on and off in his young mind and creates a bewildering effect on his tender psyche. This gruesome and unforgettable event haunts him all his life in a bittersweet twist of his memory. While all other children in the world like candies and sweets, Guitar hates them all because the childhood memory gives him back an unpleasant and tearful situation, which forever smoulders in his chest. After the murder, the mill owner visits and offers Guitar and his sister some candies and four ten- dollar bills to his mother in order to sooth their mind. The candies he did not taste but stuck in his hand for a long time, his heart boiled

thinking who had done this crime. Later when Milkman asks Guitar why he does not like sweets, he unfolds the memory and its association with the candies. This terrifying event altogether changed his life. He explains to Milkman the cluster of associations brought with the candies: “Since I is little. Since my father got sliced up in a saw mill and his boss came by and gave us kids some candy. Divinity. A big sack of divinity. His wife made it special for us. It’s sweet, divinity is. Sweeter than syrup. Real sweet. Sweeter than [...]”(SOS 61). The passage throws light on how the sweetness of Guitar’s childhood was melted away by the white cruelty. The memory of that event that occurred in his childhood days often sends tremor down his spine and shakes him very much. The mill owner sacked guitar’s two sisters and a baby brother after giving them sweets. However, Guitar is not able to efface the sight of the bare bone of his father—white and blood red stick. He held the sweets in his hands until it stuck there. All day he held it. In some sense, he blames the brutal insensitivity of that white boss for causing him the bizarre memory of childhood, which prompts him to become a member of the terrorist group called ‘Seven Days’

Guitar, having lost his father, is not able to draw solace, warmth and love from his maternal side; instead, his mother left the children a vacuum and a perennial question of motherhood. The moment his mother saw his father’s sliced up body, she ran away leaving her children to their fate. Even at the time, when the coffin is brought to the house, his mother did not have any feeling rather she had a willingness to love the white boss who killed her husband. Guitar remembers: “...And he remembered anew how his mother smiled when the white man handed her the four ten-dollar bills. More than gratitude is showing in her eyes. More than that. Not love, but a willingness to love. Her husband is sliced in half and boxed backward” (SOS 226).

The facial expression of his mother towards the white boss imprints in the young and sensitive mind of Guitar and the memory of that brutal incident crushes his psyche. Guitar thinks that all the strings and chords of his life have been broken by his mother's flirtatious smile rather than the brutish murder of his father. In short, Guitar is deprived of his paternal care by the cruelties inflicted by the whites and removed from the maternal bond by the exploitation of sexual attitudes as well as the lewd nature of his mother. Whenever he gets a chance to relate the past memories, he goes emotionally violent. He narrates the wooing tale of his childhood and the story of his bitter experience of early days to his friend Hagar:

You know what, Hagar? Everything I ever loved in my life left me. My father died when I was four. That was the first leaving I knew and the hardest. Then my mother. There were four of us and she just couldn't cut it when my father died. She ran away. Just ran away. My aunt took care of us until my grandmother could get there. Then my grandmother took care of us. Then Uncle Billy came (SOS 311).

Guitar is born as a victim of racist devaluation of black life. Though his dead father's employer offers forty dollars and a handful of sweets as reparation, his childhood could not be compensated for anything in this world but it is uprooted and blown away at the mercy of the outside world. Thus, Guitar born in the most revolting circumstances is forced to develop a disposition of violence and arson from his childhood onwards. He joins the 'Seven Days' group, an organisation that seeks retribution against whites for the deaths of any black. The Seven Days aim at terrorism without looking from left or right and retaliates in the same way as the whites do. Guitar makes it clear:

But when a Negro child, Negro woman or Negro man is killed by whites and nothing is done about it by *their* law and *their* courts, this society selects a similar victim at random, and they execute him or her in a similar manner if they can. If the Negro is hanged, they hang; if a Negro is burnt they burn; raped and murdered, they rape and murder. If they can. If they can't do it precisely in the same manner, they do it any way they can (SOS 155).

The terrorist group, Seven Days, sets up their own justice and courts, want to make the execution balanced and they never care who but how. Guitar says if he kills a white child, he can wipe out five to seven generations because when the whites make every death of an African American child, it is a death of five to seven generations. Guitar explains how much amount of psychological damage he had undergone when he resorted to terrorism: "You can't stop them from killing us, from trying to get rid of us. And each time they succeed, they get rid of five to seven generations. I help to keep the numbers same" (SOS 155). This argument is the result of his mental turmoil rather than reason. Even though he knows that no amount of counter-violence will stop whites from killing blacks, he feels that balance is very important and in feeling so, he is much relieved of his boiling inside. His suffering and mental imbalance is the outcome of white vindictiveness. As a result, Guitar, the African American child, finally becomes the product of his revolting circumstances, which makes him a terrorist instead of a fine young adult. The kind of retaliation he unleashes is not being done without any serious thinking. Karala Holloway remarks, "Because white characters in this novel are less than 'real people' and 'flat' in a literary perspective, the kind of vengeance Guitar wreaks happens without serious or effective questioning"

(107). Guitar represents the deprived children held in bondage, devoid of family life for centuries, stripped of their culture and made to labour for others. These children try to learn the life of the new world in an atmosphere of rejection and hate, which ultimately lend them the negative traits of psychological balance and make them tragic objects.

Morrison caricatures two girls in SOS, Lena and Corinthians, as the exhibits of their aristocratic father who parades them before everybody as a sign of his wealth and pomp. But he forgets to rear them up in his craze to acquire wealth, without caring for their needs and aspirations but presents them a bleak and dismal childhood. These girls become withered flower petals they use to sell and are fated to lead a subdued life without any social exposure. They remain as the tortured selves in their family and their girlhood is spent like “a found nickel” (SOS 216). This is because their father’s viewpoints batter their lives. They have not been able to experience love or any emotional sentiments either from their mother or from their only brother Milkman. One of the reasons is that Macon’s family considers that all men in the community are economically or socially beneath them. Particularly, Macon Deads’ arrogant ways denies them any social contact. They have to live a static life by making artificial flower petals in a huge mansion-like house. In this sense, they themselves are also proving to be the typical members of the ‘Dead’ family who lead an artificial life.

The egocentric parenting mars their growth and halted the delight and wonder of childhood. Lena and Corrie discover this painful reality only at a later stage that they are being kept away as the “distanced children” by their all-powerful father. Lena describes her fathers’ attitude of keeping them aloof from other children and hence denies them any social contact, at the same time, they are treated not as beloved daughters in the family but as mere

objects. Macon Dead asserts his authority to keep “each member of his family awkward with fear” (SOS 101). Hence, they grow under the strict ways of their father who pays little attention to the problems and practical aspect of his daughters. They while away their childhood—the precious period of their life—by making artificial flowers. One day Lena is emotionally charged with Milkman and explains him the real plight of their existence. When they are little girls, before Milkman is born, their father used to take them to the icehouse, drives them in his ambitious Hudson car. The Dead’s children are always kept away from other children. They are dressed up to emphasise their difference from others. Macon Dead seems to take great pleasure in this separation and uses his children as the decoration for the life style he has assumed and exhibits before others. Lena tells Milkman their tragic alienation their father imposed on them. They are all dressed up fine, and they stood there in front of those sweating black men, sucking ice out of their handkerchief, leaning forward a little so as not to drip water on their dresses in front of other children who are barefoot, naked to the waist and dirty thereby showing their father’s vanity and capriciousness. They stand apart, near the car in white stockings with ribbons, and gloves. While Macon talks to the men, he keeps glancing at the children and the car repeatedly, indicating to others that he is a respectable man. Macon takes the children along with him so that the people around can see them, envy them, and envy him. But Macon or anybody in the family never peeps into their tragic plight of childhood.

During these pomp shows, one of the little poor boys comes over to them and puts his hand on Corinthians’ hair. She offers him her piece of ice out of sympathy but before they knew it Macon is running towards them. He knocks the ice out of her hand into the dirt and shoves Lena and Corinthians into the car, lest, he thought, it should contaminate the dirt. Everything,

similar to this event, their father does is not for his daughters' sake but for the sake of his pride and prestige because he wants to be pretentious and snobbish before others. Lena asserts that their father himself cripples their growth and distorts their self-esteem. He is always unmindful of their existence: "First he displayed us, then he splayed us. All our lives were like that: he would parade us like virgins through Babylon, then humiliate us like whores in Babylon. Now he has knocked the ice out of Corinthians' hand again" (SOS 218). Lena finds the responsibility of making them degenerate like the artificial flowers is in the hands of Milkman too because he never cares for them but thinks of himself only for his private ends. Her whole anger wells before him: "You are to blame. You are a sad, pitiful, stupid, selfish, hateful man. I hope your little hog's gut stands you in good stead, and anything else. But I want to give you notice" (SOS 218). Further, the scene—the insurance agent Robert Smith jumps from the Mercy Hospital building, and falls dead—places Corinthians and Lena squarely in the midst of a life-or-death situation. When Mr. Smith falls, they decorate the corpse with rose petals. However, the scattered rose petals show the funeral decorations. This scene, in their childhood, later reminds them of emotional stasis and death and is prophetic of their adult situation. Both of them resent their decorative and ineffectual posture in their family because they come from the "Dead" family and their life is almost filled with morbidity.

But Corinthians tries to get out of this entanglement. She is well educated and her education makes to get out of the subdued life. She learns how to be a good mother and a wife, learns how to civilise her community. But Lena resigns to her solitude. When Corinthians one day wakes up to find herself that she is a forty-two-year-old maker of rose petals, she makes up her mind to escape from the Dead family. She accepts the job of a maid-servant to

a white woman. The work as a maid is not so important that this engagement gives her an opportunity to acquaint with Henry Porter. Milkman is so offended to know that she is so involved with Porter, for he knows that Porter is a member of the Seven Days Group. She loves Porter; not for the love-sake, but for getting away from her infantile existence of making rose petals out of velvet for years together. It is this incident Lena gets the courage to confront Milkman. He becomes a hindrance in the house to thwart the girls' happy growth. Everybody in the house wants these girls to play with the tunes of Milkman. They look after him well but the reciprocity has not been received from him. Lena becomes fiery; she tells Milkman that he has peed on their lives because even the remembrance of their childhood is a nightmare to them. They cannot even go back to a period of intimacy with the things spiritual in their adult life. While she lets loose her anger on him, she suitably focuses her indignation on his maleness. They see that this factor is the reason behind their unadorned existence as the life of the girls is put under darkness. She accuses him of getting superiority in the house because of 'the boy's gut that hangs down between his legs'. Therefore, the two girls in the family does not have a blissful period, not only because of their father's arrogant ways but also because of their childhood is soiled with the appearance of a male child. This disgust finds expression in the following lines:



Our girlhood was spent like found nickel on you. When you slept, we were quiet; when you were hungry, we cooked; when you wanted to play, we entertained you... And to this day, you have never asked one of us if we were tired, or sad, or wanted a cup of coffee. You've never picked up anything heavier than your own feet, or solved a problem harder than fourth-grade Arithmetic. Where do you get the *right* to decide our lives? (SOS 216-217).

TAR (1981) sketches the most poignant stories about a tortured boy who never appears on the scene. The novel is set in the quintessential Paradise, the lush Caribbean island where a retired Philadelphia candy manufacturer, Valerian Street and his wife Margaret, the principal beauty of Maine spend their lives. He leads a self-complacent, sedentary life without bothering anything; sipping brandy and listening to music while his much younger wife, Margaret dreams of her son's return on the upstairs. The black servant-couple Sydney and Ondine (Nanadine) are always vigilant on the affairs of the Valerians and are eager to serve them. Jadine, the beautiful niece of Sydney and Ondine, a fashionable, black Paris model educated at the Sorbonne University with Valerian's money, visits the island. She longs to marry a rich European called Ryke. Morrison constructs this mythical island with the simplicity of men and women who dwell in this far off island like innocent children. Men roam there like children of Nature reminding of the first mythical children Adam and Eve. It is a man-made Eden on the earth. Morrison describes her Paradise: " But High above it were hills and vales so bountiful it made visitors tired to look at them: bougainvillea, avocado, poinsettia, lime, banana, coconut and the last of the rain forest's champion trees" (TAR 8). The Arcadian island reminds Milton's Paradise Lost: Yet

higher than their tops / the verdurous wall of Paradise up sprung/ [...] /earth so lovely seem'd /That Lantship[...] (Bk.IV.II.143-44, 146-153). Morrison by setting up this island asserts, as with Milton, “that Nature reacts when mankind violated and abused her” (Bessie & Audrey 115).

The serenity and tranquillity of this island is suddenly upset by an unexpected alighting of a black, called Son William Green, from North Florida on this Caribbean Island like Satan who appeared in Paradise. Son, who comes for shelter for having murdered his wife, enters into their life like a newborn baby. It is a rebirth for him; in other words, it is the beginning of a new life for Son. He has been wandering and doing all kinds of chores for eight years. The novelist describes his first appearance, which affirms the sloughing of his old way of life and resumption of- his childhood:

His fingernails were long and caked with dirt. He lathered and rinsed twice before he felt as though he'd accomplished anything. The sponge felt good. He had never used one before. Always he had bathed with his own hands. Now he pumped a dollop of bath gel into his palm and soaped his beard (TAR 132).

The rootless Son, flushed out everything of his past life, is reborn in the Eden—the Caribbean Island. Son's enigmatic nature is evident from the first and last episodes, which frame the narrative of the novel. In the prologue of the novel, Son's plunge into the sea suggests not only death by drowning but also a re-birth, “he is yanked into a wide empty tunnel and finds himself whirling in a vortex” (TAR 2). At the end of the novel, he emerges from the sea on to the land in a sequence that mirrors the evolution of life; crawling, standing and eventually walking up right like newborn baby. In both these

episodes son has a mother-guide. In the prologue, “he is kept afloat by the water spirit like the hand of an insistent woman” (TAR 2). Suspending the struggle, he gives into the current; the water lady cups him in the palm of her hand and guides him into the boat Sea Bird II. In other words, a supernatural force, a water spirit as if in the guise of a mother, enables Son to be born again out of the ocean. “And now here he is with the immediate plans of a new born baby” (TAR 139). But when his racial ancestry is confronted and aroused, he escapes the childhood qualities and becomes an agent of racial solidarity.

Jadine is different from many of the female characters of Morrison. She occupies a unique position among them, as she is the only black girl who tried to embrace the white ideals. It seems that Jadine is the mature version of Pecola Breedlove of the first novel. As the niece of Valerian’s black servants, Jadine enjoys an important position and authority in Valerian’s family. Though she is black and is orphaned in her childhood, she has been educated with Valerian’s financial support. Only with the help of her education, she is able to become an Europeanised African, an art history graduate of the Sorbonne University, an expert in cloisonné and a cover model for “Elle” magazine. But the education has forced her to forget her ancestral roots, her foster parents and the persons who ‘unorphaned’ her. She emerges towards the end as a hard, shallow, materialistic person, wanting no connection with her folks. Having shared one of the generations, the black women at Eloë and the “night women” with loose breasts, try to draw Jadine into a kinship with them, for they understand the need for sisterhood. Haunted by these black women, even when she returns to New York, she realises that her self-realisation lay in going back to Paris, and accepting the white man who had loved her. She wilfully forgets that she is an orphan at the tender age; she is

poorly brought up but is taken into the care of black servants Sidney and Ondine (Nanadine), who were his parents. Despite the affection Sydney and Ondine imparted to Jadine, she had proved to be an estranged child to them. Her thoughts and actions betrayed the persons who fostered her. Morrison describes her ingratitude:

After her mother died they were her people—but she never lived with them except summers at Valerian’s house when she was very young. Less and then never, after college. They were family; they had gotten Valerian to pay her tuition while they sent her the rest, having no one else to spend it on. Nanadine and Sidney mattered a lot to her but what they thought did not (TAR 46).

Jadine’s imbibing of Westernised ideals compels her to think that child-parent relation is only a welcome distraction and nothing more. She wanted to overlook her past, her people and her culture but is fond of embracing the Western standards. She only plays ‘the daughter’ before Sydney and Ondine but has no sincerity towards them. Ondine wants Jadine to be “their” child, the daughter they never had because they are a childless couple. Like thousands of black women who depended on their female children for emotional support in the hour of need, Ondine craves on Jadine for the emotional support. When Son emerges as a menacing figure in their household, Ondine is confident of her presence and she even comforts her husband: “Don’t worry yourself. Remember, Jadine’s here. Nothing can happen to us as long as she’s here” (TAR 101). But Ondine goes wrong. She believes that her education would civilise her, she does not anticipate Jadine’s rejection of her own culture and of being a daughter. She fails to induce young Jadine, her community values as well as how to be her daughter.

Further, when the swamp women saw her in the woods, they felt delighted because they thought that they had retrieved a child of their own race. Even the trees in the swamp were swaying as if to show their ecstasy of seeing this child. The narrator says: “The swamp women were delighted when they first saw her, and were thinking that a runaway child had been restored. But upon looking closer they saw differently. This girl is fighting to get away from them” (TAR 184). Son taunts Jadine that she does not belong to any place despite her protests. She boasts that the Valerians have educated her, paid her travel and lodging and that she is looked after by Sydney and Ondine. Son concludes that they take care of her, not as their own kin but as an orphan, therefore she has no right to claim the position of a real daughter. She is as rootless as Son is, and both of them are homeless, wandering children of the black community, argues Son. But Jadine would not heed to his arguments because she is too much immersed in the blitz of white ideals. Hence, Jadine is pictured as an example of ingratitude to the parental figures among Morrison’s characters.

Jadine’s cultivation of her attitude towards her own people is the result of a negative upbringing in her childhood. Remembering her childhood days, when she is in New York waiting for Son to return, she even goes to the extent of cursing her mother because her mama is a poor woman who lived among the poor black in Baltimore. She remembers the plight of her early days with disgust, “Mama how could you be with them. You left me you died you did not care enough about me to stay alive you knew Daddy is gone and you went too” (TAR 263). Perhaps these thoughts are lurking at the back of her mind that she does not belong to anywhere and it seems that she wanted to overcome this inferiority by embracing an alien culture. Jadine is not able to digest the ways of the poor black people at Eloe; she thinks superior to them

and boasts that she is a Sorbonne University product—the most needed Paris model. Seeing the ugly people, the fashionable Jadine is nauseated. She wants to escape from Eloë and their squalid, poor abode as early as possible. Further her uncomplimentary relationship with black women is illustrated in her encounter with the woman in the yellow canary-dress. Jadine is attracted to the woman whom she comes across in the Paris supermarket, the woman who carries herself with dignity, is in love with her ethnicity. Jadine wants to be accepted by her. Yamini K. Murthi says:

This ethnic woman and the ‘night women’ remind Jadine of a past she had wanted to forget, a responsibility she wanted to shirk. Jade forsakes their love and sensitivity and an authentic black identity to be a ‘model’ of European female, a self she feels comfortable with (IJAS Summer23.2 (1993): 82).

Morrison tries to illustrate in her novel TAR that lack of education and poor knowledge accelerate the tragedy of African American children. Jadine is unaware of the plight of poor African American children who are deprived of such basic rights because of their compelling situations. She accuses Son for not having formal education. If Son had been well educated he would not have become a criminal. She boasts that while she is being educated at school, Son is playing piano in the Night Movie Café to get moving his poor life. She implies that, like many of the African American children, Son does not make use of any opportunities for pursuing education and does not look into the how and why of it. She tells Son:

The truth is that while you were driving your car into your wife’s bed I was being educated. While you were hiding from a small town sheriff or some insurance company, hiding from a

rap, a two-bit lawyer could have gotten you out of, I is being educated [...] The one we live in, not the one your head. Not that dump Eloe; this world (TAR 266-67).

But the formal education Jadine received makes her to ridicule the race and forget ancestry, reminding of the futile efforts made by Booker T. Washington, who had established Tuskegee institutions to raise the educational standards of millions of African American children in white America. Morrison, through the presentation of Jadine, stresses that higher education sometimes yields negative results, though lack of education is one of the causes of the poor conditions of the African American children. Jadine's higher education worsens her person, changes her behavioural patterns and she slowly drifts into the elite class of the bourgeois. Doreatha Drummond Mbalia in "Morrison's Developed Class Consciousness" describes:

She is one of the tar babies of the novel, a creation of capitalist America, her behavioural patterns, dress, language, association, and ideology are all those of the ruling class, and as such, demonstrate her hatred of America and all that is associated with it (Peach Linden 94).

Unlike other novels, TAR illustrates and brings forth the cruelty heaped on a white boy, Michael, and proves itself to be the story of the invisibility of this most persecuted boy. The cruelty and persecution experienced by Michael have been revealed through his mother, father and his servants. When they are all hilarious about the appearance of his return on the Christmas Eve, he does not turn up rather he never appears. It seems that the persecution the boy had undergone at the hands of his mother may be the

reason for his absence. He is subjected to excruciating pain when his mother stuck pins on his buttock. She treated him as an object of her sadistic pleasures and his father is ignorant about what is happening to him. He is also instructed not to cry even when he undergoes such affliction. When the pain and anguish crossed the limit, he went to a hiding place under the sink and weeps noiselessly. When he grew up with this bruised feeling, and an occasion came to go to New York for his higher education he readily accepted it. And after that he never returned to his 'beautiful' island.

Morrison's widely acclaimed novel, *BVD* (1987), speaks the horrendous condition of childhood. The novel has been dedicated to "Sixty million and more", which implies that an enormous number of children, while carrying them to American plantations from their African coasts in death ships, were thrown into the waters of Atlantic Ocean along with their slave-parents. *Beloved*, one of the children whom Seth kills resurrects from the waters is a representative of all children who perished during slavery. Perhaps, the novel is the homage paid to the dead African American children of the bygone ages by Morrison. Nicole M. Coonradt observes:

It names the baby's ghost that returns in human form to haunt the inhabitants of "124"—the number that sequentially indicates the *absence* of the number "3" signifying that murdered and missing, third-born child. Perhaps most importantly, as critics have noted, *Beloved* names the "Sixty Million and more" of Morrison's dedication—those Africans and their descendents killed by the inhumane institution of slavery—especially if we read it figuratively as an epitaph that marks their myriad unmarkable graves (3).



The novel begins by describing the macabre atmosphere of a haunted house, created by a child whose ghostly appearance rejuvenates their wilfully forgotten past. When the ghost-child resurrects from the water and appears on the doorstep of the house, the memories of the inmates come to the fore. It reminds the killing of a baby girl is the only solution to escape the tragic condition of children caught in slavery. Sethe, a slave woman and the central character of the novel kills her most beloved daughter Beloved at a very tender age to rid of the mental agony of witnessing an enslaved childhood. The brutal act springs out of Seth's sense of inability to provide her children a comfortable childhood. Her own experience as a child should not have been repeated on her children, particularly on her most beloved daughter. The original story of the Kentucky slave, Margaret Garner is blended into fiction. Margaret Garner undergoes a fugitive-slave trial, and at the close of the proceedings, it fully materialized in a speech given by the abolitionist and feminist, Lucy Stone. After the court had adjourned to await the judge's verdict, Stone addressed the audience as to the evils of slavery and the "depths of a mother's love". Everyone present in the trial already knew too well but refused to admit the dangers of motherly love:

The faded faces of the Negro children tell too plainly to what degradation the female slaves submit. Rather than give her little daughter to that life, she killed it. If in her deep maternal love she felt the impulse to send her child back to God, to save it from coming woe, who shall say she had no right to do so? That desire has its root in the deepest and holiest feelings of our nature—implanted in black and white alike by our common father (Coffin 565).

In that sense, BVD becomes more or less a tragic epic of childhood as

it sweeps through the heart-rending experiences of children caught in racial problems. Morrison weaves the threads from an inspiring story that she had heard in two or three little fragments. The story of Margaret Garner, a slave, who had run away in 1856 to escape from her owner, and who crossed the Ohio River and came to Cincinnati. She is pursued and surrounded in the house where her husband Robert and four children were harboured. Robert fired back the pursuers before being overpowered. At this moment, Margaret Garner, seeing no hope to herself and her children, seized a knife, and with one stroke cut the throat of a little baby whom she probably loved the best. She then tried to kill the other children too. She accepted death for herself and for her most beloved daughter, rather than accepting slavery lest her children should have suffered an institutionalised dehumanisation. But Morrison makes the history of more than three hundred years of untellable cruelties perpetrated on African American children by their slave masters fictitious and ghostly. She is all the more surprised to see a woman so stoic that she even defies guilt, sin and God to save her children from the dangers of slavery. Morrison speaks of these fragmentary stories to Gloria Naylor:

Now what made those stories connect, I can't explain, but I do know that, in both instances something seemed clear to me. A woman loved something other than herself so much. She had placed all of the value of her life in something outside herself. That the woman who killed her children loved her children so much; they were the best part of her and she would not see them sullied (Southern Review 21: 584).

The memories of the childhood days of the characters reflect the slave history, which is clouded by horrible experiences. There are six of them named Paul A, Paul D, Paul F (Paul brothers); Sixo, Halle, Stamp Paid and

the girl Sethe. They lived together in a farm ironically called 'Sweet Home' run by Mrs. Garner enjoying the delights, songs and sounds of that Kentucky plantation. Mrs. Garner treated them as her own children and called them "Garner babies". It is an infantile existence for those children who drank the childhood period to the lees with delight. The Sweet Home is prettier than heaven where "the boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world", later proved to be the most hateful and ironic place. They spent a carefree life in the farm, without knowing that they belonged to an inferior race, until Mrs. Garner's nephew, the schoolteacher arrived as if Satan alights on Eden. He subverted everything, inflicted cruelties on these children of nature and killed their innocence. He robbed their innocence, chased, raped, ironed and treated them like beasts. The schoolteacher, who experiments with new weapons of slavery, destroyed the innocence of the slaves. Kiz's Beloved Project describes this transformation:

Paul D's and Sethe's memories of Sweet Home suggest their own transitions from innocence to experience, from the bliss of Sweet Home under Garner who regarded his slaves as people to the horror of school teacher whose education destroys their innocent state (2).

Beloved is killed at the age of two and has not developed her consciousness of the cruelties of the outer world. So when she appears in the form of an apparition, she behaves occasionally like a two-year old baby with keen revenge and jealousy because she had been denied a beautiful life in this world. Therefore she casts a powerful spell on the members of the home named '124' on the Bluestone Road in Cincinnati and fills her venom of anger and retaliation on the living. The house is once a haven for all those Negroes and their children around; now it is a deserted one. After the heinous murder,

the whole house becomes a hell because of the spite of the dead child, Beloved. The narrator speaks that the inhabitants, Sethe and her youngest daughter Denver, wage a perfunctory battle against the outrageous behaviour of the ghost. No one ever peeps into the house since then. The obstinacy of the murdered child is such that it casts a powerful spell on everything. The house is filled with turned-over jars, smacks on the behind and the gust of soar air. Howard, Sethe's eldest son, leaves home when the ghost begins shattering mirrors. Buglar, the younger, holds on until tiny hand prints appear in the frosting of a cake. Baby Suggs, Sethe's mother-in-law, an all-embracing grandmother of the black community, who preached love and made them raise their hands in protest against racial tyranny, is worn out. She, oblivious to everything but colour, barely notices the boys are gone; dies like run-down battery a few months after they leave. After the death of baby Suggs, Sethe and Denver try to entice the baby ghost to come out in the open. In the opening paragraph of the novel the narrator describes:

124 is spiteful. Full of baby's venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children. For years each put up with the spite in his own way, but by 1873 Sethe and her daughter Denver were its only victims [...]. It is a wonder to her that her grandsons had taken so long to realize that every house isn't like the one on Bluestone Road. Suspended between the nastiness of life and the meanness of the dead (BVD 3-4).

Through the creation of *Beloved*, Morrison achieves greater purpose than what is thought of. She probes deeper into the psychological aspect as well as the social and emotional level on mother-child relationship and the ambivalence it creates under peculiar social condition of slavery. She suggests that such relationship is fundamental to the psychological development of the

mother and the child. The psychological damage done to the mother-child relationship is far greater in slavery than in any other social system. Therefore the intensity of the damage done to both Denver and Beloved were far greater because they spent their childhood when the perpetration of slavery is at its height. They were passing through a very important phase of their life-infancy-during slavery and it is very important in the socialisation process. The integration of the girl's ego depends upon the maternal milk the mother has for them. But these girls do not have the boon of sipping their mother's milk because one is hacked to death and the other's milk is adulterated with the blood of the former. The absence of the parental care through nursing at the tender age has great impact on the individual self as Nancy Chodorow, the psychologist, describes the effect:

The quality of care (offered by the mother) also conditions the growth of self and the infant's basic emotional self image [...] the absence of overwhelming anxiety and the presence of continuity—of holding, feeding and a relatively consistent pattern of interaction—enable the infant to develop what Benedek calls “confidence” and Eric Erikson “basic trust”, constituting, reflexively, a beginning of self or identity (Qtd in Samuels Wilfred & Hudson-Weems 103).

When the quality of the care offered by parental mirrors affects negatively, the emotional behaviour damages the person. This can be seen when Beloved upon entering her mother's home on Bluestone Road as a fully grown up girl of 18 years of age behaves like a two-year -old baby. This is because the damage done to her person and her emotionalism derive out of a sense of rejection. She is being deprived of the symbiotic relationship with her mother and as a response to this rejection she resorts to retribution and

sense of spite for the murder she experienced at the hands of her mother. Despite her resurrection, a kind of rebirth at eighteen, and Beloved's behaviour is for the most part that of a child and at times, of an infant. In the beginning she sleeps most of the day, wakes up for drinking water or to be fed like children are. She seems to have lost her motor skills, much like the child who had not yet gained control over the skills when she is slashed by her mother. Sethe's "already crawling?" baby girl, the adult Beloved, is like a soft and exquisite baby whose movement and actions resemble that of a child as Morrison describes: "moved like a heavier one or an older one, holding on to furniture, resting her head in the palm of her hand as though it is too heavy for a neck alone" (BVD 56).

It is the traumatic separation from her mother that causes Beloved's infantile fragmentation. At this point of separation Beloved had not developed adaptive ego capabilities that would make her more independent from her mother. When she first appears, she shows more dependency on her mother like a "ridiculously dependent child" (BVD 57). The narrator says that Beloved is looking intensely at Sethe. Wherever she turns, Beloved keeps on looking at her without any interruption:

Sethe is licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved's eyes. Like a familiar, she hovered, never leaving the room Sethe is in unless required and told to. She rose early in the dark to be there, waiting, in the kitchen when Sethe came down to make fast bread before she left for work. In lamplight, and over the flames of the cooking stove, their two shadows clashed and crossed on the ceiling like black swords (BVD 57).

Beloved could not take back her eyes as she is so much bonded between

herself and her mother. The selfishness and jealousy during her adolescence period and her sexual instigations are also looked upon as the prolongation of her infantile stage. Jennifer Fitz Gerald in "Psychoanalysis and Discourse in Toni Morrison" analyses Beloved's instigation of her sexual relationship with Paul D as a means to keep this bondage going: "Sex does not initiate her into adult relations but allows her to prolong infantile dependence: by braking Sethe's sexual tie with Paul D, she has found a means of keeping Sethe to herself" (Peach Linden 116).

According to Nancy Chodorow, child's mother acts as an external ego, provides holding and nourishment, in fact, and not experienced by the infant as a separate person at all. When she is murdered, Beloved could not have the experience of finding a central self by moving beyond the stage of her infantile ego because it is damaged at that point. Still stalled in the world of her primary identification-her mother- Beloved does not differentiate herself from Sethe. When she reemerges eighteen years after her death, her world is merged with her mother. This can be understood when Denver asks why she had come back, she replies that she had come to see her mother's face, " She left me alone by myself" ( BVD 75) for Beloved thinks that, to see her mothers face is, in fact, to see her own face. It is interesting to see that until Sethe gives her a name and a form by providing to be engraved on a tombstone, Beloved remains as a spirit with a void ego. Because of this void ego the child reappears to find an ego and a central self.

Again Beloved wants to establish identity, which is evident from her soliloquies. Through the careful usage of stream of consciousness Morrison unearths the fact that Beloved does not distinguish from her mother. Beloved says: "I AM BELOVED and she [Sethe] is mine [...] I am 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 too a hot thing” (BVD 210) and later she thinks in her choked voice and without any punctuation: I want to be the two of us I want the join (BVD 213). Although Beloved is a ghost, she behaves much like a living psychologically scarred child, who has experienced a terrible feat in the early phase between needs and aspirations—both maternal and psychological care, including attention and affection. Chodorow remarks that “such a denial would develop into an all pervasive sense, sustained by enormous anxiety, which something is not right, is lacking in the child” (Hudson-Weems 105). Though an adult, Beloved is not able to enjoy to the fullest of anything a child craves for, “ lullabies, new stitches, the bottom of the cake, the top of the milk. If the hen had only two eggs, she got both” (BVD 240) but Beloved met her demands out of the sense of guilt of her mother: “The best chair, the biggest piece, the prettiest plate, the brightest ribbon for her hair [...]” (BVD 241). Sethe when finally begins to complain, Beloved accuses of her leaving behind, of not being nice to her, not smiling at her and wonders how Sethe could leave her while they were having the same face. In short the depiction of Beloved confirms that a child born in the racial soil has no place, no self, and no ego either, and meets their death at the hands of their own creators in order to escape from a living bondage, which marks the tragic state of childhood. The plight of other children like Denver, who escaped the murder and leads a life of “death in life” condition is no different from the dead ones.

Denver, Sethe’s youngest daughter, is not spared from the stigma of unhappy childhood. Amy Denver, a good white girl, rescues Denver in her birth; she is named after her in order to keep her memory going. From the very beginning of her little life, she has been subjected to gruesome situations. She is forced to suck the blood of her murdered sister together with the breast



milk. When her mother is doing the horrible act she is drinking the maternal milk. Ever since that terrible feat, she leads a life of anxiety and bewilderment because at the back of her mind, there is always the feeling of being killed by her mother like her sister. At the same time, she has been troubled by the presence of the spite of the ghost. So in a ghostly atmosphere, with the thought of being killed, Denver had to while away her childhood days. Though she gets a narrow escape from the handsaw her mother is holding, the childhood left behind is utterly wearisome and lonely because she lives in a haunted house where the fury of the ghost is rampant. Nobody peeps into her house to give her the kind of approval a child needs in her budding days, no playmate but only in the company of the ghost she has to idle away her precious period. She often bursts out her suppressed emotions and expresses the terrible isolation she feels in that house. She tells Sethe: "I can't live here. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I can't live here. Nobody speaks to us. Nobody comes by. Boys don't like me. Girls don't either" (BVD 14). Denver feels a little relief when she comes to know that Paul D has removed the spite of the baby spirit and Paul D advises her mother Sethe that it is hard for a young girl living in a haunted house.

Like Beloved, and being her sister, Denver is an unfortunate child who feels bitter of her filial absence. Unable to suffer the cruelties, her father Halle had already run away from the Sweet Home leaving behind his children and his wife, Sethe. Since then nobody knew his whereabouts. When Paul D remarks to Denver that her face takes after her daddy, she becomes emotionally charged and curious enough. She enquires about her father; and Sethe unfolds the friendship that existed between them. She often overhears the conversation between Sethe and Paul D from which she elicits shockingly that her father's absence is not hers alone. Once her father's absence is a

serious concern for her grandmother and then to her mother and now their conversation asserts it is not her concern. Denver says that, “They were a twosome, saying “your daddy” and “Sweet Home” in a way that made it clear both belonged to them and not to her. That her own father’s absence is not hers” (BVD 13). She painfully thinks that she has been isolated even from the conversations relating to her father’s absence.

Denver builds castle on the sand for her father’s homecoming. She eagerly looks forward to it, which never happens in the novel. The earnest wish of the child to be loved and to be cared by her father never materialises. She fondly caresses the thought that one day her father would turn up, would cajole her or lull her or kiss her. While all others drop the idea that her father would turn up one day she waits for her father’s return and never gives up the hope. She is not in a position to substitute Paul D for her father. She thinks that Paul D has come, not for her, but for her mother. She cherishes the dream that one day her father would turn up in the following lines:

I always knew he was coming. Something was holding him up. He had a problem with the horse. The river flooded; the boat sank and he had to make a new one. Sometimes it was a lynch mob or a windstorm. He was coming and it was a secret (BVD 207).

The terrible feeling of an impending death looms over her. She has been under this nightmarish thought, which nearly crushes her psyche. While she waits for her father, she is highly scared about being killed by her mother because she has witnessed the gruesome murder of her younger sister when she was a little child. It continues to cast a great spell on her. Every single movement of her mother frightens her. She even dreads her mother while she

is braiding her hair. She is always keeping awake for one day what happened to her baby-sister would happen again to her- she always expects it. In her soliloquy, she expresses this terrible situation of the thought of being killed. And therefore, Denver is in a constant fuddle, suspicious of every movements of her mother and scared when someone comes in the house. One of the sections of the novel starts how she is grappled with the fear of swallowing the blood of the hacked Beloved along with her mother's milk.

All the time, I'm afraid the thing that happened that made it all right for my mother to kill my sister could happen again. I don't know what it is, don't know who it is, but maybe there is something else terrible enough to make her do it again. I need to know what that thing might be, but I don't want to (BVD 205).

Denver often looks back to her wee hours of life. She ruminates when she is left alone and a nostalgic feeling creeps into her while Paul D and her mother Sethe make love upstairs. She misses her brothers Buglar and Howard very much and thinks that they would be twenty two or twenty three by now. Although they had been polite to her during peaceful days, she has lost the company of her brothers, which sickens her mind. The absence of the company of her brothers torments her. Now she remembers the pleasurable moments they had together with a tinge of sorrow:

The pleasure they had sitting clustered on the white stairs—she between the knees of Howard or Buglar—while they made up die-witch! stories with proven ways of killing her dead. And Baby Suggs telling her things in the keeping room. She smelled bark in the day and leaves at night, for Denver would not sleep in her old room after her brothers ran away (BVD 19).

Denver reconstructs her memory of childhood and finds solace in chewing those beautiful days because her outside world is cruel. The adults, her mama and others do not bother her. Her brothers as well as playmates had run away. Her father in whom she finds trust would never return; so her life is clouded with the anxieties of racial oppression. Even her teacher Lady Jones of the elementary school does not provide her any solace or affection. Her classmates taunt her by telling that Sethe is a murderous woman, who damages her self-pride. She understands that she had been sidelined by her classmates only because they knew that she is the daughter of murderous woman. Her classmate Nelson Lord's startling remarks send several tremors down her spine. Nelson says that her brothers' flight is because of the fear of their murderous mother. Due to these remarks and taunting, she is compelled to stop attending the school though she got admission on the fourth attempt. Denver's isolation and loneliness is so great that she even selects the company of the baby ghost as last resort. Denver wanted to escape into a paradisiacal world in order to get rid of the painful reality. For this, she often goes to a bower encircled by leaves surrounded by a stream and hidden by post oaks where she gets complete tranquillity:

It began as little girl's house play, but as her desire changed, so did the play. [...]. In that bower, closed off from the hurt of the hurt world, Denver's imagination produced its own hunger and its own food, which she badly needed because loneliness wore her out. Wore her out. Veiled and protected by the live green walls, she felt ripe and clear, and salvation is as easy as a wish (BVD 28-29).

This escape is a yearning for purification and a desire to return to the idyllic period, which is closely related to the myth of childhood. Not alone Denver

but almost all the characters show such syndrome, for their world outside is chaotic. The excessive loneliness, the haunting fear, the absence of paternal care and the company of the ghost makes this little black girl's life tragic.

Rejection and humiliation experienced by African American children are further amplified in the novel Jazz (1992). Jazz age is a rebirth for Violet, Dorcas and Joe. The novel traces, through the familial and social origins, backward to their enslaved parents and grandparents and forward through 1926 to the Harlem Renaissance. Violet and Joe Trace, two African American born in Virginia during Reconstruction, who make the Great Migration North, along with thousands of Negroes, settle in Harlem during the Jazz age. In the novel, the traumatic, familial and societal after-effects of slavery, Reconstruction and the virulent racial oppression that reversed the gains of the Reconstruction period make and unmake the individuals because of their sour experiences of childhood. Both Violet and Joe carry their past, arrive in the city and begin a new life in the newly acquired Jazz culture, which completely denies their true selves as well as their past traumas of slave-life that they had undergone in their homeland. And for a teen aged girl, Dorcas, Jazz music and Jazz culture is a welcome relief into which she jumps from the bitter side of her life, which presents her a new world. Therefore these characters can be treated as the children of the new culture and new experiences.

Jazz presents the story of triangle of passion, jealousy, murder and redemption, of sex and spirituality, of country and city, of being male and female, of African American and above all it scintillates according to the rhythm of Jazz music which sets a trend in black lives, but it is also the story of the personality of the black men and women that distorts in the end. The blacks were drawn towards the bewitching lyric of Jazz, which really sloughs

off their past life and culture forcing them to be reborn again as the children of the new culture irrespective of their ages. O' Brien in "New York Times" states that:

In Morrison's book *Jazz* came to represent three central ideas. It came to represent Dorcas, the innocent girl who fell into the music because of her longing for belonging. It also came to symbolize the city seeping music that begged and challenged each and every day of Violet's life. Finally it represented the dissolution of New Negro era, which had fooled Joe Trace. (2)

This dissolution of new Negro era— they are now the African Americans who left their miserable past in the South and attracted towards the jazz culture—makes Joe, Violet, and Dorcas to see everything in a new perspective. Violet is once the obedient and dutiful wife, who worked in cane fields and slept under walnut trees along with her husband Joe. When they "train danced" into the City, Violet lapses into overtime silence. She neither communicates with him nor makes him a good companion to give him reprieve in his busy city life. Unable to suffer this killing silence Joe hunts for a teen-aged girl for his company. The narrator in the novel informs us that at the time Joe meets Dorcas, his wife sleeps with a doll and talks only to her parrot that chirps, "I love you" (*Jazz* 37). And for Dorcas, she is lured into the ditch of Jazz culture and music as a means of escapism from the strict and stringent ways of her aunt Alice Manfred, and she sublimates her displeasure by falling in love with a man whose age is equal to her father. But the black community of the City is surprised when Joe Trace kills his secret love, the 18 year old, creamy-complexioned girl Dorcas whom he had seen dancing with another lover called Acton. When Joe Trace shoots down Dorcas, Violet's reaction to her husband's illicit love towards the girl is aggressive and

revengeful. She tries to mutilate the dead body of the girl in the coffin itself. The sudden emotional outbursts stem from the inner and outer conflicts of these characters. The aggressiveness, revenge and other undesirable instincts of Joe, Violet and Dorcas can be traced back to their miserable childhood days.

The revenge and aggressiveness explicit in Joe's life is the result of his circumstantial set up of his childhood days. Joe is bereaved of love, affection and recognition from his own parents though he is brought up by another sympathetic family. This quest for love and affection, which he does not get in his early life, is intense and continues to bother him throughout his life. He is born in 1873 but nobody knows his parents and has only a vague idea about his mother. He is raised by his foster-parents, Mrs Rhoda and Frank Williams in Vesper County, Virginia. They bring him up along with six other children in a poverty-ridden condition. Mrs Rhoda names him Joseph after her father, but he is not given a last name. She never pretends that he is her natural child. It is her comment that he is just 'like her child' compels Joe to ask questions about his parents. They reply that his parents disappeared without a "trace", which pains him deeply. It further aggravates when he is admitted to a School. The teacher asks for the two names that she wants to enter in the register on the first day at school. Young Joe simply tells her "Joseph Trace", which he relates, "the first time is when I named own self, since nobody did it for me, since nobody knew what it could or should have been" (Jazz 148). The second time he himself has to name the word 'Trace' that he mistakes for the last name of his original parents. Incidentally, he had been tracing his parents since then. It shows that his childhood is clouded with bitter memories and there are none even to do a baptismal rite for him. The very early phase of his life presents him humiliations and insults from others and cannot enjoy the presence of parental bliss.

Joe Trace ruminates over his pathetic tale of early days. Among other children of the Rhodes, Victory is very close to him. Joe tells Victory with great expectation that his mama and papa would turn up one day but never do they turn up in his life. One day while returning from school, Victory taunts



him that his parents had given him up to Mrs. Rhodes and her husband, which meant his orphaned existence though his parents are alive. Victory again inflicts pain by telling him that his mama is a bitch. These comments break his self and he is forced to have a fight with him. Years later Joe remembers the pain and anguish he had undergone and how his classmate's insulting words pierce his heart: "Victory laughed at me and wrapped his arm around my neck wrassling me to the ground. I don't know what happened to the speck of glass. I never did get it out. And nobody came looking for me either. I never knew my own daddy. And my mother, [...]" (Jazz 149-50).

Joe heard stories people speak of mothers who ran away from their children and gave them up to the care of someone else forever. While working in a hotel, he heard a woman telling her friends the burden they carried due to their children. This accentuates his thought of finding his mother anywhere in this world and feels very sad. The woman stressed that she is bad for her children in the sense that the presence of the mother would bring them only bad luck and nothing good can come to them. She says:

'I don't mean to be, but there is something in me that makes it so. I'm a good mother but they do better away from me; as long as they're by my side nothing good can come to them. The ones that leave seem to flower; the ones that stay have such a hard time. You can imagine how bad I feel knowing that, can't you?' (Jazz 150)

This superficial comment accelerates his thought of being rejected by his mother when he finds her. He could not even remember her shape or had not seen her earlier. The thought of her recognising him puzzled him. Still, the strong desire to find his mother wells up in him off and on and does not stop

or give up tracing his mother. He conducted three solitary journeys to find her. In Vienna, he lived with the fear of her, then the joke of her and finally the obsession followed by her rejection. Nobody could tell Joe that she is his mother. But the advice he gets from his guide Hunter forces him to look out for his mother repeatedly. Joe Trace continues to trace his mother, Wild, who had been hiding in a riverbank under the rock surrounded by hibiscus bush. The thought of finding her almost lands him on the verge of tears, feels shame and often goes violent. The narrator in the novel explains Joe's mental agitations and the conflicts that follow in his search for his mother:

From then on he wrestled with the notion of a wild woman for a mother. Sometimes it shamed him to tears. Other times his anger messed up his aim and he shot wild or hit game in messy inefficient places. A lot of his time was spent denying it, convincing himself he misread Hunter's words and most of all his look. Nevertheless, Wild was always on his mind, and he wasn't going to leave for Palestine without trying to find her one more time (*Jazz* 207).

Joe Trace takes it as a mission and an ambition in his life to poke around for his mother. He searches in the woods but there is no sign of his mother. He thinks that someone near him is breathing and every leaf shift reminds of his mother's presence. Finally he finds her under a hibiscus bush and pleads his mother to give him at least a sign of assent. This would fill his mind with ecstatic joy but he suddenly stumbles on to a "not just crazy but also dirty woman who happened to be his secret mother that Hunter once knew but who orphaned her baby rather than nurse him or coddle him or stay in the house with him" (*Jazz* 210-211). She "who frightened children, made men sharpen knives for which brides left food out (might as well—otherwise

she stole it)” (Jazz 211). Young Joe gets deeply disappointed and gets singled in his little mind for he is forsaken and humiliated by the mother-image he is seeking. This event lingers with him even after twenty years and often remembers these pathetic experiences on the bank of Treason River, behind the hibiscus, and at dusk how he discovers his mother. He describes to his new-found love the excruciating experiences, which he never told his wife:

If she (his mother) decided, that is, to show him it, to listen for once to what he is saying to her and then do it, say some kind of yes, even if it is no, so he would know. And how he is willing to take that chance of being humiliated and grateful at the same time, because the confirmation would mean both (Jazz 50).

The woman would not have to utter the word “mother” to him but at least she had to do is to give him a sign by thrusting her hand through the hibiscus bush. Joe expects that it would be enough for him to say that she knew him- the son she had left fourteen years ago and ran away from, but not too far because she had not completely gone. She is so close enough to scare everybody because she creeps about, hides, touches and laughs a low sweet baby girl laugh in the cane field. Instead of his mother beckoning and embracing him, he saw the two hands of his mother shooing him away. The narrator says that if Joe had been welcomed and accepted by his mother, it would have made him the “happiest boy in Virginia” (Jazz 50), but what happens is contrary to his expectation, which ultimately leads to psychic fragmentation in his life. His mother Wild’s declination to accept him for a son and the resultant quest for Joe’s parental recognition leads him to marry Violet and then to love Dorcas. But the first experience with his mother fails to formulate a consistency in the mother image of women. He loses trust in them, which finally leads him to kill Dorcas because she brings him the image

of his mother with calm face, who betrayed him and rejected him. This betrayal and rejection he countered with utmost rage are explained in the text:

There are boys who have whores for mothers and don't get over it. There are boys whose mothers stagger through town roads when the juke joint slams its door. Mothers who throw their children away or trade them for folding money. He would have chosen any one of them over this indecent speechless lurking insanity (Jazz 211-212).

When one examines Violet's actions and behaviour—the silence, the aggressiveness and revenge, and all that she exhibits in the novel—one can see that they are the consequences of her childhood experiences. Violet's intense longing for a child and her sleeping with a doll are nothing but an attempt to retrace to the landscape of childhood. She had lost the gift of her tender years far back when her mother Rose Dear committed suicide and left her to the care of her grandmother, True Belle. Sitting in the drugstore, playing with a long spoon in a tall glass, and pretending to drink from a cup, she tried to reminiscence her mother. Rose is completely broken and mentally deranged when racial onslaughts took place. Violet did not want to be like her mother sitting on a chair sipping the coffee until the morning. In those days the black families were moving and her mother, it seems, is stricken to move away from her children, belongings and surroundings. This migration caused Rose to develop a kind of unspeakable distress. When the men came in the morning they looted away everything in the house that they owned and hauled away their farm equipments. Then they came inside the house while all the children put one foot on the other and watched. When those men went to the table and tipped the chair she sat in, she landed on the floor and broke her spine. The five children, Violet the third, each of them called their mama out

of their extreme hunger; but Rose only laughed. They never heard her say anything in the days that followed. When, these children huddled in an abandoned shack, they were thoroughly dependent upon the few neighbours left in 1888—the ones who had not moved to anywhere. Neighbours and friends came and consoled Rose Dear. At last when True Belle, Violet's grandmother, came from Baltimore and put everything right back within four years, Violet's mother jumped in a well leaving these children putting on the dock again. Her father is a wanderer and resurrects anytime he wished. The narrator says, "In the midst of the joyful resurrection of this phantom father, taking pleasure in the distribution of his bounty both genuine and fake, Violet never forgot her mother or the place she had thrown her self into a well" (Jazz 124-125). After this painful incident in her childhood, Violet feared that the same fate would befall on her children too. So she took a decision not to have children in her life, "The important thing, the biggest thing Violet got out of that is to never never have children. Whatever happened, no small dark foot would rest on another while a hungry mouth said, Mama?" (Jazz 126).

The experience Violet had undergone and the stories she heard during her childhood days have great impact on her as well as in her adult life. She is a hairdresser by profession, and she accepts this profession only because she had heard hairdressing stories from her grandmother, True Belle, who rescued her in her distressed childhood days. True Belle returned home from Baltimore with stories of a boy who had grey hair and whom she soaped, lathered and dressed. She raised and adored the blonde boy (who is later known as Golden Grey). These stories give Violet sustenance, solace and an inspiration to become a hairdresser. She often looks back on those days with grief, which reminds her of the sufferings she endured with her family. Later Violet regrets for not having a child. Her instant longing for getting a child is

explicitly scattered in the text of the novel. Years later, when Violet is forty, her attitude towards children totally change. She is fascinated by the holiness, the purity, the innocence of children and all that suggest for a child: “She is already staring at infants, hesitating in front of toys displaced at Christmas. Quick to anger when a sharp word is flung at a child or a woman’s hold of a baby seemed awkward or careless” (Jazz 133).

The transition of her mind-set is a welcome change. She tries to correct her ways, which prompts her for self-realisation. She imagines about the babies lost in miscarriage. Might it be a girl, or a boy; she thinks its soft exquisite body, the tender mouth and the lisping sound. So great is the mother-hunger in her that she is forced to snatch a child. Once she goes to a house as part of her hairdressing, where she sees a child left under the charge of a little girl. The girl asked Violet to watch the baby for a while; and no sooner did the girl leave than she took the baby away from the wicker carriage and ran away. Seeing the little baby in her hand, she becomes ecstatic beyond description. The narrator describes the scene:

When the baby is in her arms, she inched its blanket up around the cheeks against the threat of wind to cool for its honey-sweet, butter-colored face. Its big-eyed, noncommittal stare made her smile. Comfort settled itself in her stomach and a kind of skipping, running light traveled her veins (Jazz 31)

The childlessness produces great repercussions in her tension filled life, which the narrator highlights. This instability in her life makes Violet to culture hatred towards her husband. Her mental distraction could considerably be reduced and her husband would not have left her if she had had children. In order to escape the boredom and childlessness, she sleeps with the dolls. This

boredom is transmitted to Joe Trace, which makes him leave her behind to fall into a violent love with a teen-aged girl Dorcas. The narrator says, “overtime her silences annoy her husband, then puzzle him and finally depress him. He is married to a woman who speaks mainly to her birds” (*Jazz* 37). This estrangement leads Joe Trace to fall in love with Dorcas because his wife finds no time to spend with him but finds solace in the company of birds and dolls as a reprieve. Morrison shows that childlessness often causes estrangement and drabness in the life of married couple.

Like Guitar, Dorcas is presented as a victim of racial violence. She grows up as an orphan and therefore she lacks parental guidance. Her childhood witnessed the gruesome tragedy of her parents meeting a brutal death. Her father is neither a veteran nor does he confront anybody in the street and does not take part in any riot. But he is pulled off from a streetcar and stomped to death by a violent mob. Even before this shocking news reached her, the rioters set fire to her house and burned her mother alive in the flame. Many critics equate this tragedy of Dorcas to the tragedy of falling love with a fifty year-old man. Michelle C. Loris points out, from the perspective of child psychology, that “the characters’ loss of their mother and/or father in childhood plays a seminal role in *Jazz*. She indicates that their early loss of parental love, as a result of gender and race-related adversity, is closely related to Joe’s search for Dorcas as his Oedipal mother figure and Dorcas’ positive reaction to Joe as her fantasized father replacement (56)”.

Unlike Guitar who constituted a terrorist group, Dorcas embraced Jazz culture and its attractions as a means of escapism. The Jazz culture is overwhelming; it highly influenced not only the black adults but also the African American children as well. Though Dorcas is given good care and moral instructions by Alice Manfred, who helped her to survive in her lonely

days, everything went to the four winds because slowly she drifted into the whirlwind of Jazz culture. Alice had taught her “how to crawl along the walls of buildings, disappear into doorways, cut across corners in choked traffic—how to do anything, more anywhere to avoid a white boy over the age of eleven” (Jazz 71) because Alice knew the dangers of Jazz culture as well as the sexual greed of the white boys. She is sure that her niece would be caught in the alluring nature of Jazz culture and once it happened it would be very difficult to retrieve her. Alice Manfred’s predictions proved right; as Dorcas grew older, her aunt’s do’s and don’ts were of no use, and she easily fell into the ditch of the new culture. Like Sula Peace, she emerged as a wayward girl. She is then caught up in the hands of a man whose age is equal to her father. The maverick passion and her sexual desires were exploited and it eventually led to the ruin of her life at a tender age.

In Jazz, Morrison shows that the transmigration of black people from the rural South to the urban life makes them rediscover their self. Like other novels, Jazz helps to retrace the horrible past of the characters and their families. The novel takes the reader from South to North, from city to the country. At the starting point of this transmigration the qualities of simplicity, which is a metaphor and symbol of childhood, exist and flourish. But when they reach the destinations all the qualities attributed to childhood die fast. The novel further shows jealous thirst for vengeance that originate from the loss and miscarriages of children. Violet’s sleeping with the doll, and Joe’s tracing his mother are entirely related to the theme. Hence the novel helps to study the theme of childhood and the passion, jealousy, murder and redemption and all the bizarre types of crisis resolution in the lives of African American children. Angela Burton observes, “Her major protagonists resort to bizarre types of crisis resolution including murder, incestuous rape, bestiality



and self-mutilation often within the context of parent- child relationship” (Linden Peach 170).

The novel highlights Jazz music and Harlem culture fostered moral decay among children. Instead of elevating the souls, the impact of Jazz music generated a cultural disillusion in them. Jazz is an art form with a combination of diverse elements of orchestral and vocal music as well as dance. Fused into its matrix are blues, march, rag, spirituals and hymns. The orchestral part mostly comprises saxophone, piano, clarinet, guitar brass, and drums and so on. It is a combination of melody, rhythm and harmony, with a basic theme or composition, which provides for a large scope of improvisation. During these improvisations one could elicit what is hidden in them. The nastiness and the vulgar side of the culture are sometimes represented through the main voice. Sometimes it changes to blues to represent tragic situations. This is further exemplified in the case of women who hold their babies and say nasty songs. This could be heard everywhere and “there is no mistaking what it did to the children under their care - cocking their heads and swaying ridiculous, unformed hips” (Jazz 73). Even the adults were drawn towards the bewitching lyric and its associated cultural impacts. Thus Morrison shows that adult ways of using music in the Jazz age, which should have elevated the souls, is directed to degenerate their offspring. The highly moralised character of the novel, Alice Manfred thinks of the streetwalkers, who when parade along the roads sings lewd music:

And the men, you know, the things they thought nothing of saying out loud to any woman who passed by could not be repeated before children. They did not know for sure, but they suspected that the dances were beyond nasty because the music is getting worse and worse with each passing season the Lord waited to make Himself known (Jazz 72).

The procreation of mixed-race children known as mulatto children first appears in Jazz, which is distinct from other novels of Morrison. White slave owners impregnate or rape slave women without their consent. In plantation societies mixed-race children were often looked upon as white abuse and degeneracy over black bodies. Naturally, the life of such children is tragic under the system of slavery. But in this novel, the order is reversed. This also signifies a fusion of culture of white and black, which Morrison dreams of in her later novels. However, the novel points fingers at the tragic conditions of mixed-race children, and in particular, the ensuing repercussions in the black community. Golden Grey is born of a black man, Lestroy and an unmarried white woman, Vera Louise. Ever since his birth the child is in search of his father and his life is altogether tragic. Morrison draws the classical story of Oedipus, which seems parallel with the story of Golden Greys' quest to meet his father. The myth of Oedipus describes that the archetypal tragic hero whose ignorance and lack of understanding of the human predicament result in personal disaster. Similarly Golden Greys' quest for identity is kept away from his father in Baltimore at birth and is raised blind to his origins literally and culturally. Grey's ignorance of his paternal origins and blindness to the fact that he is not a black has resulted in Oedipal tragedy. Angela Burton states: "Grey's Oedipal tragedy then, is that his adopted white racism has rendered him ontologically 'blind' to the humanity of his father, to the extent

that he cannot psychologically assimilate or 'see' the idea of having a Negro for a father. It is his racism which prevents him from 'recognising' his own father and for this he is culpable" (Linden Peach 178-179). The mother had to go into hiding to give birth to the boy with golden hair and grey eyes. The secret that his father is a Negro slave and his mother is a white woman is kept until he is eighteen. Never told about the identity of his father, but otherwise given a proper bringing up, this lad sets out in search of his father and the resultant experiences of this boy is tragic.

In almost all the novels, Morrison usually puts the child characters on the centre stage but in her last but one novel, Paradise (1998), she does not focus directly on children, but her deep concern towards children is scattered in the pages of the novel. Each and every chapter of Paradise begins with a woman whose childhood is either sexually abused or abandoned; or she has proved to be the crucifier of childhood. After finishing Jazz (1992), Morrison settled on an obscure chapter of American history in Paradise and shows that the children are cruelly suffocated in the firefighting of communities due to intra-racial problems. After the Civil War, groups of former slaves headed into Oklahoma and other thickly populated Western states to set up all-black towns in the wide-open spaces. Accordingly, Ruby is established in 1949 from the remnants of another, once-thriving Oklahoma town called Haven was founded by nine black families in 1890. Disillusioned with the way they were being treated in the post-Reconstruction South, these families: Morgans, Fleets, Best, and Dupresses and the like. had traveled West from Mississippi and Louisiana to Oklahoma, "unwelcome on each grain of soil from Yazoo to Fort Smith" (Paradise 13). Not only were the families turned or chased away by "rich Choctaw and poor whites," they were rejected by other blacks, "too poor, too bedraggled-looking to enter, let alone reside in, the communities that

were soliciting Negro homesteaders" (Paradise 14). Yet, each of these rejections is lighter than the final rebuff, the one that gives the town its ultimate shape—Haven . It comes into existence only after the nine families are denied entry to yet another black town, aptly named Fairly, Oklahoma. Fairly, is peopled by light-skinned, middle-class blacks. Fairly's leaders reject the nine families and their children on the basis of those families' skin colour known as 8-R. 8-R, is an abbreviation for eight-rock, refers to the blue-black colour of the coal found in the deepest level of the coal mines.

This rejection, called "The Disallowing" by Haven families and their offspring, forms the basis of Haven's, and later Ruby's history. The sufferings of these families, naturally the children too, during the migration from South to West are untellable: "Afterwards the people were no longer nine families and some more. They became a tight band of wayfarers bound by the enormity of what had happened to them." As the text makes clear, Fairly's rejection of the 8-rock families is one of numerous refusals that the group experiences on their way to Oklahoma, but it alone has the power to define the town and its children: "Everything anybody wanted to know about the citizens of Haven or Ruby lay in the ramifications of that one rebuff out of many" (Paradise 189). Part of the community's subsequent bond is based in their adherence to a retaliatory "blood rule," which demanded that 8-rocks marry only other 8-rocks rather than introduce any white or part-white genes into their families. In these ramifications and rebuffs, children were looked upon on the basis of blood rule and skin colour.

In this history of Haven, Morrison highlights how intra-racial class and colour discrimination resonates with the problems of children. Morrison's narrative certainly seems to critique the "blue-eyed, gray-eyed yellow men in good suits" who simultaneously value black community and "disallow" blacks

who are impoverished and dark skinned from that community (Paradise 195). Yet this story of Haven's founding is also a reminder of the sufferings of children and child abuse, abortions and infanticide in order to maintain social aloofness; and the cruel and indifferent attitude of mothers who think that their babies are the stumbling block to their unbridled authentic self.

Paradise focuses on an ostensibly isolated, self-sufficient black town; begins with a major traumatic event of killing a white girl first. It is at the heart of the narrative that the men of Ruby, Oklahoma, who bear arms against the women of their community. The novel opens in July 1976, with Ruby's male citizens setting out to kill five women who seek refuge in a former convent on the outskirts of the town. Paradise then shuttles between the killing of women and the events leading up to it, which began in 1890 when Ruby's nine founding families leave Mississippi and Louisiana in order to settle in all-black town of Fairly, Oklahoma. When these coal black, '8-rock' families experience rejection by Fairly's light skinned blacks in order to protect their earthly Paradise, their hard-won male defined standards of racial purity, sexual morality, economic stability, and communal safety, the men of Ruby ultimately wield against the women of their own community by crucifying them. Megan Sweeney observes "Paradise narrates this dynamic by emphasizing the founding fathers' movement from the position of crucified to the position of crucifier" (43). Thus the novel provides a generational transition from the crucified to the crucifying situation and the most crucified are the children because they are innocent and not bothered of blood rules or skin colours.

This is explicit in the narration of the events leading up to the killing of the women in the Convent. The women are proved to be more often crucified than the crucifiers are. An exploration of their childhood shows that they are

introduced either as the victims of sexual abuses in their early life or their parents abusing them during their childhood. These experiences force them to seek an asylum called Convent on the outskirts of Ruby town where they find comfort and solace. The Convent offers the women, from the point of view of one of the characters in the novel, Pallas, “a blessed maleness, like protected domain, free of hunters but exciting too as though she might meet herself here- an unbridled authentic self” (Paradise 177). They landed in the Convent because they were forced to serve as scapegoats for men’s sexual improprieties. For example, Soane Morgan’s, one of the respected ladies of Ruby town, desired miscarriage of her third child in the Convent. Arnold Fleetwood sought shelter in the Convent for her successful attempt to abort foetus because she conceived it out of wedlock. Sweetie Fleetwood’s breakdown “spawned by six years of keeping vigilance over her ‘defective’ babies who threatened the purity of 8-Rock line” (271) finally came to this asylum. So the walls of the Convent silently reverberated the wailing of babies who were not fated to lead an earthly life because their mothers wanted to keep the rule of the community going. It is a tragic paradox that the child coming into the world is thwarted by the divisive agencies of the world. The child, because it lives its childhood, is rather unaware of the fragmentation of his being, which operates otherwise holistically. The child takes this world for an invitation, as a part of his own being. But the ways of the world are too devious to make the child at home anymore and therefore, the mothers of Paradise take the role of crucifiers of their own flesh.

On the other hand, Paradise offers the mythological concepts of childhood. It includes a yearning for Paradise by the characters when they are confronted with bitter experience in life. It is this bitter experience that splinters their childhood qualities. When it leaves them, their self always

craves for paradisiacal world. In Paradise, the characters show an eagerness to return to their own childhood because they confront the resentment with the founding fathers' rules and the intra-racial colour prejudices. As the characteristics of the child remain dormant in the characters, they experience a need to go back; they withdraw to the beginnings of life, a moving away from the world to a more sheltered place. In other words, the novel presents many of the characters moving towards an asylum called Convent in Ruby town for a vivid renewal of life when they experience their splintering of their self. They think that all the secret helpers of their nurseries are there. It is the radical transfer from the external world to the internal world and is a retreat from the desperations of the wasteland to the peace of everlasting realm—the childhood—that is within.

So Paradise expands the theme of childhood by re-scripting the narrative of Christian sacrifice, giving earthly form to the possibility of a world in which healing, redemption and safety are not predicted on child's crucifixion. The Convent serves as the locus for this imaginative possibility, as a space for refuge for those children fleeing from their surroundings, tacitly sanctioned forms of intolerance, exploitation, and wilful blindness to victimisation. As one of Ruby's young child, Billie Delia, describes that the Convent is a place where you can "think things through, with nothing or nobody bothering you all the time. They'll take care of you or leave you alone-whichever way you want it"( Paradise 176).

Connie, the oldest of the Convent's long-term residents, is brought to the Convent when she is very young. Each of the other long-term inmates—Mavis, Gigi, Seneca, and Pallas—come upon the Convent in the process of fleeing a haunting aspect of their past. They finally come to terms with the Convent and forget their painful past but start a new life. While Mavis used

to agree with her abusive husband that she is “the dumbest bitch on the planet” (Paradise 37), she realizes, after three years in the convent, that “the old Mavis is dead” (Paradise 171). Gigi arrives at the Convent wondering, “whether there is anything at all the world had to say for itself (in rock, or tree or water)” (Paradise 68). She eventually recognises that she has not appeared of herself in a long, long time because she abandoned the Civil Rights struggle after realising that it would not be over in a season or two. Seneca, who is abandoned by her mother, sexually abused by her foster brother, and sexually exploited by a woman named Keen Norma Fox who treated her “like a pet you wanted to be with for a while but not to keep. Not love. Not name” (Paradise 137), finally reaches in the Convent. Pallas began reckoning with haunting facts of her mother’s and lover’s betrayals, her rape by strangers, and her expanding womb, whose “revolting flesh producing flesh will not heed her silent shout of her ‘No’ ” (Paradise 249) sought shelter in the Convent. Thus the Convent is a Paradise for the children who are subjected to abandonment, abuses and betrayals. So, Morrison considerably spends a lot of time to excavate the characters’ tragic fate of childhood in the novel.

Consolata known as Connie, who is in the Convent for a pretty long time, is saved by a team of six American nuns from the streets of Brazil. She is brought to the Convent and nursed in the light of love by the Mother Superior. In the language of her childhood, Connie narrates to the other women about times in her life when she had felt locked in either “bones” or “spirit”. The Mother Superior of the Convent taught her, she, explains, that her body was nothing, but her spirit is everything. Once she is an abused child and hungry one in the streets of Brazil—an experience for nine years followed by thirty years of celibacy in the Convent finally breaks up to find an affair with Deek Morgan, when her “flesh so hungry for itself it ate him”



(Paradise 263). When the Mother Superior died, Connie once again felt imprisoned in her body and her biological needs welled up from within the four walls of the Convent. Connie remembers her heydays of childhood in the Convent but before that it is terrible to contemplate the life in the Brazilian streets; but after that, it is a pleasant experience for her while she is in the company of nuns.

Connie remembers her childhood days succinctly. She is picked up by Mary Magna, the Mother Superior, and taken to the hospital. “They stuck needles in her arms to protect her, they said, from diseases. Then the violent illness that followed she remembered as pleasant” (Paradise 224), because while she lay in the children’s ward, a beautiful framed face, the Mother Superior, watched her with a worry that she had never seen in an adult’s face. “At that time she thought that it is worth getting sick, dying, even, to see that kind of concern in an adult’s eye” (Paradise 224). Every now and then Mary Magna would reach over and touch Connie’s forehead with the back of her knuckles or smooth her wet, tangled hair. Connie loved that hands and the unsmiling mouth, which never needed to show its teeth to radiate happiness or welcome. She could see a cool blue light beaming softly under the welcoming smile and it came from her heart. Straight from the hospital they travelled to the Convent where she had plenty of food and loving faces. The remaining years she spent in the pantry of the Convent, scrubbing tiles, feeding chickens, praying, peeling, gardening, canning and laundering in the Convent. She never saw or knew who her parents were but spent a celibate life offering her body and soul to God’s son and His mother completely as if she had taken the veil herself. But the nine years in the streets taught her all the waywardness—in the narrators words “Sha, sha,sha...”- which remained dormant in her mind even while she is floating in the light of love in the

Convent, and which found reflected when she crossed the gates of the Convent on Friday afternoons to fall into the hands of Deek Morgan, one of the respectable man in Ruby.

Paradise presents another character, Patricia (Pallas) as a victim of sexual abuse in childhood at the hands of those who helped her. Carlos, the caretaker of her School, took her in a Toyota car, which she got as a Christmas present, and is subjected to sexual assault. She is lured into the handsomeness of this lover because she did not get the right kind of approval or love from her family. Her father Milton Truelove, being an advocate, could not look into the affairs of his daughter, as he is very busy “with his client’s parties, show case concerts and television deals” (Paradise 166) or her mother Dee Dee (Divine), who left her years back. When Carlos left Patricia, her mind is filled with humiliation and frustration because she is left with a feeling of betrayal. The betrayal of her lover Carlos, the betrayal of her mother, and the busy nature of her father in the spring days of her life finally landed her in the Convent where she received succour and solace.

Similarly, Grace known as Gigi in her childhood had been subjected to sexual violations and the result of it is that she landed in the Convent for abortion, which she conceived in her girlhood. Her past had been clouded with miseries because her mother is “unlocatable” and her father is put behind bars for a life term. She had left her home since she is a child and once she is caught in a fray of Civil Right movement where she witnessed a boy spitting blood into his hands. Ever since that event, she became stoic and kept wandering from one place to another. Like Sula, she is not the crying type; even now, “when she realized she had not approved of herself in a long, long time, her eyes were desert-skull dry” (Paradise 257). Later when she finds her father, Manly Gibson, who left her at the age of thirteen, she does not attach

any emotional sentiments though her father keeps the memory of his daughter alive. As a wandering child she fell in the trap of her lover Mikey and then from K.D, one of the prominent members of Morgan family who founded the Ruby town.

It seems that Morrison's Paradise is filled with too many unfortunate ones whose childhood had been corroded either because of parental rejection or because of the dearth of love which ultimately force them to leave their home and finally become criminals or prostitutes. For example, Billie Delia is the victim of her mother's uncompromising ways. Pat Best, her mother, who had been working as a teacher and had only one aim in her life: to attain dignity in the society but she miserably failed to give her daughter dignity and self esteem. She considered her daughter not an asset but a liability and a cross to bear. When Billie Delia mounted on a horse out of curiosity, and unknowingly pulled down her panties while mounting at the age of three, her mother gave her an unintelligible whipping and a dose of shame it took years to understand the measure of the scar in her mind. Since that incident she is subjected to severe teasing, which impinged her young mind:

That's when the teasing began, more merciless because her mother was the teacher. Suddenly there was a dark light in the eyes of boys who felt comfortable staring at her. Suddenly a curious bracing in the women, a looking-away look in the men. And a permanent watchfulness in her mother (Paradise 151).

But people branded her as a tramp, and they thought that she is the one, who from the beginning not only had any qualms about pressing her nakedness on a horse's back but also preferred it, would drop her drawers again in public on Sunday just to get the thrill of it. In fact, Billie Delia is an

untouched girl, but she got all the blame of it. Although her sister, Arnette, who had sex at fourteen, is in the good records, Billie Delia carried the sting and the burden of it. That particular day onwards, her mother had been beating her mercilessly and each time she had to run to Anna Flood, who gave her shelter in the upstairs. She cried alone for hours in the upstairs, licking her split lip and touching the swelling right under the eye. One day, when she saw a truck from where she is hiding, she slipped down and got into the cabin. Being ashamed of explaining it to the driver Apollo, to his parents and to his twelve brothers, she asked him not to drop her at his residence but drive her out to the Convent.

Morrison describes in Paradise, a lone child, Lone Dupress, seen by the migrants on a doorstep of an abandoned house while its mother's corpse is stinking inside. She is one of the stolen babies whom one of the Dupress family members, Fairy noticed "sitting quite as a rock outside the door of a sod house" (Paradise 190) while they were travelling Westward looking for a shelter. The narrator says, "The sight of the silent child in a filthy shift could have remained just one more lonely picture they came across, except that the desolation about place is unforgiving" (Paradise 190). Fairy and Missy, the two women in the group, went inside to investigate the house to find a stenching dead mother, but not a piece of bread. They then picked up the baby and told the men standing outside to bury the dead mother. But there was a serious discussion about what to do with the child—where to keep her—because the men seemed adamant about avoiding a half-starved child to their own quarter-starved ones. But Fairy put up a fight with the issue, finally won and named the baby 'Lone' because that is how they found her. Fairy raised her and taught her everything she came to know about midwifery. Later Lone Dupress, with the experience from her foster-mother, became a good midwife,

indicating that the circumstantial set up during childhood is an important factor in moulding one's character.

Hence Paradise highlights the picture of the pathetic tales of children, though implicitly, who are caught in the circumstantial set up. They are either sexually abused or abandoned ones. Sometimes they are killed in the womb itself, as the mothers who bear them had to keep social superiority because the community of Ruby never allowed a child to be born out of wedlock, to live out a glorious life the destiny had given them. For example Arnette goes to the Convent to deliver her child she conceived out of wedlock on the day just before her wedding. After being delivered of it she left the place without a trace and the newborn babe is dead because it did not get the timely maternal milk and the maternal presence. "Connie delivered her baby, she did not want it" (Paradise 180) and it shrivelled and died. The women of the Convent describe the scene:

They paused then, seeing it: the turned-away face, hands covering ears so as not to hear that fresh but mournful cry. There would be no nipple, then. Nothing to put in the little mouth. No mother shoulder to snuggle against. None of them wanted to remember or know what had taken place afterward (Paradise 180).

Just as Sethe's murdered child resurrects to remind its mother the seriousness of the crime she had committed in BVD, two children, Merle and Pearl in Paradise, who were charred to death in a burning car, torment their mother throughout her life. Mavis parked the car, locked the windows and left for shopping without minding her children, while they burned in the car. The babies were charred to death only because of their mother's negligence. The

narrator condemns the mother that she had not got the nuts to open the car-door for saving the children from a horrible death in case the fire breaks in the car. "Rattle minded to open a car window so babies could breathe" (Paradise 37). But later the memory of two children writhe her self, though she left her husband and started living in the Convent.

Paradise strongly advocates the intriguing problems of children, which lend the tragic vision of childhood. As in TBE, it reminds and continues to throw light on the children who become victims of their fathers' sexual greed. Sal Albright, when her mother had left her alone in the house with her father, is under constant fear and threat from her father Frank, particularly when he is drunk. The girl is even scared to fall asleep in his presence. Later, when she found her mother, Sal tells her mother, "Daddy is-shit, I don't know how you stood it. He'd get drunk and try to bother me, Ma. [...]. I fought him, though. Told him the next time, he passed out I is gonna cut his throat open; would have too" (Paradise 314). At the same time, this little child is the root cause of her mother's embarrassment. An antagonistic relation existed between them. Mavis and Sal exemplify one particularly dangerous consequence of identification. Mavis is, as Morrison acknowledges during the discussion of Oprah Winfrey Show, an incompetent mother and the victim of abuse from her husband, while Sal appears to be slyly vindictive and cold-hearted. Describing the reactions of her readers to these characters, Morrison remarks:

Somebody was asking me a couple of days ago or—or simply making an observation about this terrible child that Mavis had, her daughter who pinches her—and I kept saying, "Why do you call her terrible?" I said, "Think what it must feel like for an 11-year old girl to have a mother who permits her as a doormat [sic] and you watch this woman get knocked around by the

father. She seems totally incompetent. You're terrified as a kid that that might be you (Aubry 359-60)

Love (2003) is the eighth and last novel by Toni Morrison. In her non-linear style, the lives of several women and their relationships to the late Bill Cosey, a charismatic but a successful Hotel owner, is unfolded. Though it is the story of Bill Cosey, or rather, it is about the people around him, all are affected by his life—even long after his death. The main characters Heed, his widow, Christine, his granddaughter, and secondary characters Junior Viviane and Romen undergo the agony of childhood while adults are floating in the memories of their bygone blissful days. The two—Heed and Christine—are of the same age and used to be friends but some forty years after Cosey's death they are proved to be sworn enemies, and yet share his mansion. Again Morrison use split narrative and jumps back and forth throughout the story, not fully unfolding until the very end. But it is seen that the novel is about the repercussions of child marriage by a lecherous and rich Hotel manager and the strange behaviours of adults even though it gives a kaleidoscopic picture of different perspectives of love. The novel shows the cyclical connection of childhood theme between it and TBE, TAR and BVD.

Similar to the concept of communication between the living and the dead in BVD, Morrison introduces a character named Junior; she is the medium to connect the dead Bill Cosey to the world of the living. And the character's relationship with the child-bride Heed which reverberates in the story's other acts of sexual exploitation. It seems that the novel is clearly a parodic version of the configuration of America as the innocent virgin despoiled by the all-conquering hero. Cosey's marriage to Heed is an exaggerated (and racially transposed) version of Valerian's union with Margaret in TAR. Margaret, though describing herself as a "child-bride," is

at seventeen some six years older on her wedding day than is Cosey's wife on hers. Both girls are implicitly associated with the phenomenon of the American land: Margaret first catches Valerian's eye when marketed in a parade as "the Principal Beauty of Maine", while Heed grows up in a neighbourhood significantly named "the Settlement". The Roman-named, island-conquering Valerian, the empire building Cosey and the sexually voracious Romen are all implicated in Morrison's reassessment of what the critic Eleanor Traylor (in her description of TAR's Isle des Chevaliers) calls a virgin world raped by the machinations of man. Numerous scholars have documented the dominant cultural convention of rape as the sexual exploitation by the Europeans on the American settlement. In a recent interview on BBC Radio, Morrison stated that the image of the violated Pretty-Fay (Gang raped girls) is her starting point in the creation of the novel. In the same programme, she made an observation about conventional literary treatments of rape that gives crucial weight to the argument about her concern with classicism. In response to a question about Cholly's assault on Pecola in TBE, she said:

I've read rape scenes all my life—but they always seemed to have no shame. There is this male pride attached to it, in the language. [My writing] took it out of the realm of the fake, sensational romanticism in which rape is always played. We all say 'Oh my God, rape,' but when you look at the language, it's the language of pride. There is something about it, from the rape of Lucretia all the way on—so I just wanted to sabotage all of that (Beryl Satter 24).

Given the thematic connections between TBE and Love, the rape being conducted by the male chauvinists, and to illustrate her point, she takes not



only the story of Cholly Breedlove in her first novel but Bill Cosey in her last novel Love. Even after forty years of Cosey's death, his story still lingers in the minds of the people as the most influential person of the region called the Settlement. Almost all the major incidents in his life have been revealed through the living characters: Heed, his wife, Christine, his grand daughter and mostly from the childhood memories of Sandler Gibbons and his wife Vida. Bill Cosey is born to a court house informer and a spy, Daniel Robert Cosey (known as Dark) who kept his grey eyes on everybody. Dark is the one police could depend on to get the information about certain coloured boy's hideouts or who sold liquor or who had an eye on what property—all sorts of things Dixie law is interested in are supplied by Dark. He is well paid off, and the whites favoured him for fifty five years for doing the spy work. But the money or job did not give him any comfort in the family, though he worshipped currency and coin. He does not like the best shoes or any decent dress his family enjoyed. When he died he left behind 114,000 resentful dollars.

Like Milkman in SOS, Bill Cosey is against the policies of his father while he was young. He decided to enjoy his share his father left behind, not to throw away but to use it on things his father Dark cursed: good times, good clothes, good food, good music and dancing. One of Cosey's close associates, Sandler Gibbons thinks, "the father is dreaded, the son is a ray of light. The cops paid off the father; the son paid off the cops. What the father corrected, the son celebrated. The father a miser? The son an easy touch" (Love 68). The spy work his father carried out caused great anguish in Cosey's mind. He spoke this pungent occurrence to his childhood-friend Sandler during one of his trips out to sea for fishing. His father asked the young Cosey to watch a person sneaking from the neighbourhood and made him play in the

neighbour's yard to see who came out the back door. Every dawn he was sent to watch and he saw man slipped out one day. The young Cosey innocently reported to his father and that afternoon he saw the man dragged through the street behind a four-horse wagon. Many children ran after the wagon and one of them, a girl, tripped in the horseshit and fell. Spotting the scene, people broke into a peal of laughter at the sight of the girl but not of the terrible sight of the person being dragged. These memories haunted him and wanted to act against the will of his father because he knew well that his father had spied about the man. Cosey amassed huge wealth by attracting the important personalities to his Hotel providing them whatever they needed. His charm and hospitality was the main reason these guests kept coming to his Hotel every year. So it seems that the beaming Bill Cosey, out of his antagonism towards his father's ways, shaped his character just opposite to his father, became an outstanding personality and a big Hotel magnet. His manners excelled more than his Hotel's comfort and his instinctive knowledge about his guests' needs paved the way for his social escalation. The root cause of all his prosperous life is the conflict between the innocence of his childhood and the callousness of his father who betrayed his own people to the pleasure of the white police officers.

But beneath the veneer of dignity, charm and social aloofness, the lewd nature of Cosey is shattered in the text. The nature of love that an old man imparted to an eleven-year-old girl reminds that Morrison continues to deal with the fatal love that had been shown to Pecola Breedlove by her father in TBE and it is completed in her last novel but in the form of a protector. She wanted to assert that sexually abusing a girl is a kind of sadistic pleasure for keeping the male pride. A young girl wedded at an age of eleven, when she does not know what sex is and even before her period started, is the tragic

element in the novel. Cosey reminiscences about Heed that she is not a “frowning woman always on the look out for a slight, a chance to find fault, but a long-legged angel with candle eyes and a smile he couldn’t help but join”( Love148).

Perhaps, Cosey might have been charmed by the innocence of childhood. But more than her innocence, he is attracted to her bodily features. He remembers his ramblings on about the first sight of this young child: “her hips narrow, chest smooth as a plank, skin soft and damp like a lip. Invisible navel above scant, newborn hair. He wanted to raise her and couldn’t watch her grow” (Love 148). The rapturous description of his child-wife brought the picture not of a child but of a fashion model. Although he is fully involved sexually with grown women, the memory of having a child for a bride stirred in him new waves of enthusiasm. What the young Christine witnessed is so frightening that Heed tripped into the lap of Cosey, embarrassing him while she is dancing in the floor of the Hotel. When Heed is very young, her father Johnson brought her into the Hotel and Cosey is delighted to see her wagging her hips which really caused his sexual arousal and later when the dance is over, Christine saw Cosey is touching the nipples of her tiny breast and that is the beginning, “he touches her chin, and then—casually, still smiling—her nipple, or rather the place under her swimsuit where a nipple will be if the circled dot on her chest ever changes” (Love 191). Later Christine noticed Cosey masturbating out of her bedroom window, “his trousers open, his wrist moving with the speed L (the chief cook of the Hotel) used to beat egg whites into unbelievable creaminess” (Love 192). Suddenly Christine started vomiting and the puke she vomited spilled over her skirt. Heed recalls with pleasure that on her wedding night there had been “No penetration. No blood,” and Cosey had lovingly bathed her”. But Cosey gratifies his latent

sexual urge by pretension of love and he achieves his goal by socializing this urge. Tessa Roynon states:

Even Bill Cosey himself finally functions both to critique and transform the paradigm of heroic sexual violence. For while he is unquestionably a morally problematic figure, in that (among other transgressions) he fondles the unmarried Heed's breast and masturbates in Christine's bedroom, Morrison implies that he does not in fact rape Heed (16).

Heed's marriage has a parallel with Margaret's wedding in TAR. Like the rich candy manufacturer caught his eye on young Margaret while she is being paraded in a beauty contest, Cosey, who is more than the age of her father, wedded the little child Heed because her father Johnson is willing to give away his daughter at the cost of two hundred dollars. She had been picked up "knowing she had no schooling, no abilities, no proper rising" (Love 72). At first her mother is against this marriage because of "papa's age and all" and her daddy knew a true romance when he saw it. Even at the age of forty, Mrs. Heed remembers the first time she saw her husband. It is her childhood impression of Cosey at the age of five that leads her to marry him. She can only fancy such love and care in a dream because she never felt it before. With the naïve curiosity, she watched him standing in the sea, holding his first wife Julia in his arms with the utmost tenderness. Heed remembers: "I believed then it is the sunlight that brought those tears to my eyes—not the sight of all the tenderness coming out of the sea. Nine years later, when I heard he is looking for house help I ran all the way to his door" (Love 64). When her marriage took place, she is a very poor girl without a nightgown or a bathing suit, never used two pieces of flatware to eat, and is so inexperienced in everything that she did not know how to separate food from

one plate to another. Before her marriage, she slept on the floor and bathed on Saturdays in a fish tub full of murky waters left by her sisters, never got rid of the canary fish smell, and could not even form a correct sentence. In spite of all these handicaps her papa (Cosey) protected her. Cosey is so loving with full of patience. Even when she threw a glass at him when she is insulted by May, Cosey grabbed her with an old-time grace. He put her arms across his knees and spanked her.

She married Cosey to get out of the troubles of her childhood days. She says why she is compelled to marry him at an early age: “Marriage is chance for me to get out, to learn how to sleep in a real bed, to have somebody ask you what you wanted to eat, then labor over the dish” (Love127). So Heed escaped her childhood distress to embrace a man whose age is more than that of her father. Even after marriage, when she is alone she played with colouring books, picture magazines, and cut paper dolls while Cosey engaged great people in the Hotel. She bought high-heeled shoes, huaraches, shiny bedroom slippers and fishnet hose—everything gave her a fascinating world because her parents never cared about her needs. But sexually, Cosey is not her choice; she had a real time when Sinclair Knox, a young guest who came to the Hotel to collect his brother’s dead body, intending to accompany it on the train back home. He stayed there for six days and it is unforgettable for Heed because “she is stunned to be wanted by a man her own age who found her interesting, intelligent, and desirable. So this is what happy feels like” (Love 172) and not with the company of an old man. So Morrison depicts different perspectives of love—love that is imparted by a perverted man and a child drawn towards it mistaking it for true love. She understands, when looking back, that her childhood had been robbed off. Years later, she admits it to her arch-enemy Christine when they

finally come to terms with, “He took all my childhood away from, girl” (Love 193).

Love presents another character Christine who had been expecting an escape from her childhood sufferings but could not. She is the granddaughter of Cosey and is born to his son and May. Both Heed and Christine are of same age but maintain mutual hatred, and share the same mansion after the death of Cosey. Her impression of childhood is that Maple Valley, where she is educated, Cosey’s Hotel, where she grew up, and Manila’s whore house where she took asylum—all three floated in sexual tension and resentment. All three insisted confinement and in all of them status meant money. Her home life is dangerous, is fed by a dream of privacy, and ultimately of independence from everything. She wished to make rules, choose her friends, earn and control her own money. Most of her childhood is spent in the Hotel but it is not a sanctuary for her because her mother isolated her from the bliss of childhood.

She remembers her sap-green days of childhood and grieves a lot. She is once a little girl with white bows on each of her four plaits. She had all the comforts in her early days- an exclusive bedroom beneath the attic of the Hotel. Sometimes she let her friends in her room and they laughed until they hiccupped under the sheets but one day her mother came to tell her to leave her bedroom and asked her to sleep in a smaller room on another floor. When she questioned this injustice, her mother told her it is for her own protection and there were things a child should not see or hear or know about. On that night she left the Hotel and ran away. For hours she walked along the road but a police officer spotted and took her home. But she cried obstinately to reclaim her lost room. At last her mother relented but looked up in the bedroom during the night. Soon after, “she is sent away from things not to be

seen, heard or known about” (Love 96).

She cried until her eyes got dry, and no one saw her crying except the police officer. She is even more sorrowful by the treacherous world her mother knew. “ She hated her mother for expelling her from her bedroom and, when Chief Buddy brought her back smacking her face so hard Christine’s chin hit her shoulder” (96). The slap she received from her mother again forced her to hide under L’s bed for two days. And finally she is sent to Maple Valley School, where she languished for years. The occasional presence of her mother May did not bring love to her daughter but only annoyance and embarrassment to her as well as to the teachers for her mother belonged to the group of ‘acting-out Negroes’. Her mother used to send letters to her thirteen-year-old daughter thriving to be popular and it contained nothing concerning her daughter’s well-being but only gossip about famous personalities like Franklin Roosevelt, Mussolini or Hitler. Finally she understood that her place in the world is always crumbling and never secure because her mother is an insane widow, overworked and no social satisfaction. What shaped her character—the independent, defiant and obstinate nature of the girl—is the result of her childhood experience. The observation of the narrator of the novel, like Sula, is true: Christine’s own disorganized past is the result of laziness-emotional laziness. “She had always thought of herself as fierce, active, but unlike May, she’d been simply an engine adjusting to whatever gear the driver chose” (Love 100).

Morrison describes the life of another girl in Love, Junior Viviane, in the novel as a “Settlement dog” whose childhood is unbearable—worse than a dog. She is named after her father Ethan Payne Jr. but her mother finally chose her name as Junior Vivian. When she grew up she felt like a dog “swung between short chains and unfettered roaming” (Love 55). As a

Settlement girl, she is not allowed to go to school as a custom for girls prevailed in that area, but each of Junior's uncles, male cousins, and half brothers had spent some time at the school named 'District Ten'. Unlike any one of them, she is seldom truant, she felt chained in her house like a settlement dog - adept at keeping outsiders but at their brilliant best when hunting. Even while she is growing up, she kept longing for her father, like Denver in BVD. When she relentlessly begged her mother to visit him, her mother informed her that he had been in the army and should not expect his return. She further advised her not to "think" of him: "she did, but she kept on looking out for the tall, handsome man who named her after himself to show how he felt about her. She just had to wait" (Love 55) him, but he never turned up.

Junior is bored with her mother and the company of dogs, faster and slyer than her four brothers, afraid of her uncles, and disinterested by their wives; she somehow broke the tethers and welcomed the School only to get away from the Settlement. But isolation and rejection awaited her at the School. Though she excelled in her School, the girls in her class avoided her and the few who tried to make friendship were quickly forced to withdraw because she is untidy and had only one dress. But she adjusted among her friends, and knew better how to consider these girls. She behaved as though the rejection and isolation were her victory, smiling when she saw the one recess friend retreat into her original fold. Finally a boy could succeed at her befriending. The teachers and her classmates thought it is because he gave her lunch since Junior's lunch might have been an apple or a sandwich stuffed in the pocket of the big sweater she wore. But the children thought that it is because she played some dirty games with him after the school hours. But he is a proud and neat boy, son of a rich bottling plant manger and never thought



of anything vicious on his part.

The friendship between the boy, Peter Paul Fortas (usually called Pee Pee), and Junior is a remarkable and unforgettable experience to Junior. They did not have any interest in their bodies but engaged in finding the unknown realms of knowledge outside. She only wanted to know the vats of Coke Syrup and capping machines. He wanted to know if it is true about brown bears on the mountain, and if it is the calves or the smell of milk that attracted snakes. Once, however, he asked her if she is coloured. She answered back that she did not know, but would find out for him because he couldn't invite "Gentiles" to his house. He did not want to hurt her feelings anyway. He pilfered her everything he could find. One Christmas he presented her a jumbo box of crayons while she gave him a cottonmouth—a jarred small snake—that altogether changed this girl's life.

Some of the uncles of Junior knew but did not believe that the jarred snake had been for a class assignment. They asked her to return it to its rightful place lest they threatened her to break her little butt and hand over to Vosh- who liked to walk around with his private parts in his hands singing hymns of praise. The antithetic 'Vosh' is used to scare the little girl; and when she heard the name, she is jolted from the floor and ran away. The uncles followed her but her mother interrupted. She then escaped to the woods, and then crossed a road to be dashed to a truck. Her legs were sprained and were laid up. During her flight she clutched the crayon box to her chest. In silence, Junior watched her toes swell, the crayons were lost, but she held a knife ready for Vosh or for an uncle who chased her or any one stopping her. When a girl leaves, the Settlement version is 'an unpardonable crime'. But she left to "clean away from people who chased her down, ran over her foot, lied about, called her lucky, and who preferred the company of a snake to a girl"

(Love 59). After two years she is “fed, bathed, clothed, educable, and thriving but it is behind the bars of a jail called ‘Correctional’ because she stole a doll from a shop while wandering. There she learned everything: the cunning, the skill and the smartness needed to secure a place for a girl.

During her jail term, no one visited her. At fifteen she is free to leave, purged of the wickedness that had landed her in the jail, and thought of returning to her family. An Exit Conference is arranged to give advice about correcting her ways and leading a decent life. It is scheduled for Friday, and when it changed to Monday, she thought that she would be given a prize or a job offer would be discussed because she is on the good book. She did not want to go home but she longed for Settlement world where she hoped to get a job. The jail Administrator led her to a balcony and praised her conduct and character. He touched her hair, drew her close, and extolled it but she did not like it so she dropped to her knees and “while the Administrator’s hands were busy unbelting his pants, hers went to the back of his knees, upending him over the railings. He fell one story down and died, which is witnessed by the Guardian Councillor who supported the Administrator, and when the trial ended, she is again remanded for three years: this time not as a model student of the Correctional, but as a criminal. Any way killing the Administrator is not on her mind, she tried to stop him, but when he tried to violate her modesty she had to resort to the last. And again after three years, when she left the jail, she straight away went to Cosey’s Hotel to take an appointment as a secretary to Heed. Junior Viviane tried bridge the gap between two inveterate enemies, Christine and Heed, who fought for the wealth that Cosey had left behind when he died. Heed appointed her with the purpose of writing the history of Bill Cosey and his Hotel, and therefore Junior serves as the connecting link between the dead and the living in Love like Beloved in BVD.

The discussions lead us to conclude that the children depicted in the novels of Morrison undergo various types of tragic situations such as psychological, sociological, familial, cultural and historical tragedies. Pecola Breedlove's girlhood is torn apart by shattering her self by the rape of her father and has been traumatised by rejection and abuses from all sides. She has been deceived by her impossible desires because she believed that acquiring white aesthetics would solve all her problems so that she can get over her inferiority complexes as well as repair the damage done to her self. But what happens to this little girl is contrary to her expectations, finally she lapses into madness like a de-winged dove unable to fly in the blue distances of delightful childhood and she slowly drifts into the tragic fate. She has been alienated from family, friends and the black community of Lorain, Ohio. The community of the small black town either pokes fun at or derives sadistic pleasure out of her ruined state.

Sula, Denver and Michael are also affected by the worst tragedy of their persons as they are alienated both physically and mentally, shaking the very foundations of their childhood bliss. Reactions to these experiences produce in them varying degrees of responses and they become distorted personalities. Sula leads a solitary life in her house because her mother is hardly aware of her nurturance but always is interested in the attention of the men who visit there. Sula becomes a pariah defying everything including social standards and returns to her native place with a "plague of robins". She coldly watches her mother burning in the conflagration; indulges in sexual activities with her best friend Nel's husband in an unabashed manner, and finally she keeps out of the domain of society. Denver sublimates her feeling of alienation by escaping to a bower and spending her time with her idle thoughts in order to escape from the spite of her dead sister. Nel and Denver

feel isolated and escape into day-dreaming in order to counter the burning realities. Nel's mother drives her into being an obedient daughter by making her imagination "underground" while Denver's mother indulges her time with her dead ghost as well as sharing memories and sex with Paul D.

Some of the children live with an inferiority feeling while others try to counter it by exhibiting superiority complexes. Pecola idles away her life by the consciousness of her blackness while Sula and Jadine counter it with their defiant nature. Jadine boasts of her education, her beauty and even spits on a yellow-coloured canary woman in the beauty contest. She has only contempt for the poor black servants who rescued and brought up in her crisis. Lena and Corinthians become unadorned artificial flowers and live with a prolonged childhood with neglect and contempt in the eyes of their beloveds. Taunts and abuses make their self-esteem crumble and are put in identity crisis. When Pecola is abused and taunted by her classmates and their yelling of her father sleeping with her failed to resolve her identity. Denver stopped going school when she heard her classmates telling of her mother a murderous woman.

Rejection and humiliation from parents and society are the potential causes for the children's tragic state. Pecola is rejected by her mother for the propitiation of white child. She is humiliated by her father putting her outdoors. Pecola deludes this rejection by thinking that her drunken father had not raped her and this hallucinatory period she shares with an imaginary friend whom, she believes, gives her consolation. Joe Trace is rejected by his mother and his whole life is to invent a mother figure for him but meets a grown up girl in whom he finds the image of his mother. He has to slash her when she betrayed him because he thought it had failed him to achieve his intention. It has stamped his ego and he has lost faith in women . Sula is

rejected by her mother and later by the Bottom community. Her mother's remarks, that she likes her but not love her, shatters her self and the reaction she counters with a keen revenge towards her mother. She makes her retribution towards the community by taking the role of a prostitute. Billie Delia and Pallas are the rejected ones by their mothers and Junior is no different from the other children in the novels

Morrison further shows that the psychological wounds effect human behaviour in different ways. In some children it causes anarchy and destructiveness, revenge, sadism and passivity. Guitar's childhood experiences drive him into madness. He thinks of taking uncompromising revenge for his father's brutal murder and tries to inject the same feelings into his friend, Milkman. Claudia's revenge of destroying white dolls shows even a little child fills her mind with revengeful feeling against the prevailing racial brutalities. Beloved also wants to take revenge on her mother for the infanticide her mother had done, and therefore, she resurrects exactly like a baby girl and disturbs the peace of her mother as well as her sister, the remaining members of her family, and her community. This resurrection makes her mother lapse into the painful and agonising memory of the slavery past. Christine and Heed fight for a long time and Gigi does not heed to her father's sentiment. Maureen Peal and Louise Junior are sadistic and their intervention hurts Pecola very much. Louise hurls a cat at the face of Pecola, which claws her face and tears her dress while Maureen Peal insults her. Lena and Corinthians pass into silence and lead a subdued life. Both Claudia and Frieda almost become mature persons even in their joyful period of childhood because the tragedy of Pecola affects her psyche and her lamentation has no end.

Morrison time and again presents rape and sexual assault in Paradise.

and Love like the one she presented in TBE. Paradise, Sal Albright, the thirteen-year-old girl cannot have wink at night because of her father's outrage. Connie is a sexually assaulted street-child when the nuns retrieved her from the streets of Brazil. Arnette, a fourteen-year-old girl is pregnant by K.D, a decent member of the Morgan family. Pallas is shown as a sexually misused girl by her lover Carlos. Junior has to upend a jail Administrator from the balcony when he tries to molest her. Even Romen is found indulging in the teen-age sex with Junior though he refuses to take part in a gang rape. Christine and Heed are sexually assaulted even before they knew what sex is. Heed is assaulted by Bill Cosey under the coverage of marriage making her a bride at the age of eleven and Christine is found rejected by a social activist Pee Pee Fortas after chewing out her childhood.

Thus Morrison, in depicting the African American children, achieves a greater purpose by pointing at the polarities of psychic effect on these children which she feels if it continues, the society and future generation will suffer the worst of its consequences. She also brings out these blighted seeds of her race to show that the sufferings were so enormous that no human can bear it. When the birth of Denver takes place on the riverbank, Morrison describes the birth by comparing with the spores of blue fern, a plant with silver-blue coloured flowers floating on the water:

Often they are mistook [mistaken] for insects—but they are seeds in which the whole generation sleeps confident of a future. And for a moment it is easy to believe each one has one—will become all of what is contained in the spore: will live out days as planned. This moment of certainty lasts no longer than that; longer, perhaps, than the spore itself. (BVD 84)

She implies that if the confidence in the generation is lost, the spores [children] of the future generation cannot live out their days and they shall slowly drift into a tragic state. In order to bring out the full significance of the tragic fate, it is necessary to analyse the familial, social, cultural and the historical set up of the blighted children which are taken up in the succeeding chapter by highlighting the parental figures depicted in the novels of Morrison as “distanced mothers and incomprehensible fathers”.

## Chapter IV

### “The Child is Father of the Man...”

*As the flower is the forerunner of the fruit,*

*So man's childhood is the promise of his life*

*(The Last Barrier-A Sufi Journey. Reshad Field)*

Morrison throws light on the abusive and negligent parental figures in her novels. Their appearances often take the role of ‘problem parents’. In addition to colour prejudices, racial problems or any social onslaughts against the little toddlers, the parents also play a part in halting the growth of children, speed up tragic state of childhood and they fail to be good role models. They are portrayed as criminals, prostitutes, money mongers, child snatchers or killers of their own generation. In order to heap insult on their young ones, they are seen propitiating white children in the presence of their own ones. Not only is the emotional violence they heap upon them but engage in violating their modesty, thereby causing eternal wounds; they reject, abandon and even nip them from their bud itself. Parents are depicted as if they live to meet their own private ends, only to see that their needs are satisfied, giving no heed to their offspring's basic demands. Often they are proved to be cheaters and liars before their children, and on other occasions, they unabashedly exhibit sexual activities in front of them. Du Bois comment, “the wretched of my race that line the alleys of the nation sit fatherless and unmothered” (qtd in Louise Gates Jr. 742), is absolutely right in this context, as these fathers and mothers are physically alive but emotionally dead. They are “distanced fathers and mothers”, and seem to be the agents of generational degeneration. But, at times, Morrison presents certain mothers and fathers



who fight and die for their children, saving them from the dangers of racial cruelties at the cost of their life.

The Breedloves (TBE) is the supreme example of ‘malignant parents’. They are the victims of racist, class-conscious society, which has forced them to live unnatural lives, and live in an abandoned storefront in a squalid condition with extreme poverty. They represent the stereotypes of migrant black families from the South. According to Patric Bryce, “their lives have been battered by racism’s more tangible effects of extreme poverty and deprivation, the most insidious effects of racism as well as sexism are represented by the maliciousness of stereotypes” (37). So also they transfer their confusion and spite to their daughter Pecola and son Sammy. Sammy, had already run away unable to witness the horrible conditions of parental fights in the family. But Pecola stands as the mute witness to these quarrelsome scenes in her family, where it is a daily chore, though it gave Breedloves sustenance and released their mutual hatred. These morning quarrels cloud her mind and creates a profound impact on her natural growth. She almost becomes a silent girl unable to articulate her suppressed feelings. The novel presents the nature of a typical morning scene by her parents. In the beginning, Pauline, her mother, is seen requesting her drunken, sleeping husband for getting coal for lighting their cold stove. Cholly’s immediate response results in a violent argument replete with punching, kicking and screaming. In this hostile family atmosphere, witnessing these battles, the young girl’s childhood becomes hellish. It produces not only intense effect on her psyche but helps her self to loose its chord. Morrison here affirms that the root cause of the tragedy of childhood is the existence of frustration and fury inherent in the black lives.

The responsibility of Pecola’s sufferings rests initially with her

family's failure to provide her self-esteem and security but it deserves only contempt. The disdainful attitude of her parents spoils the healthy growth and development. The emptiness and negative self-images of Breedloves are responsible for the break-down of their daughter. The abusive and negligent parents cause greater affliction on her than from any other intra-racial prejudices. From the very first of her coming into this world, Pauline Breedlove compares the new-born baby with 'a ball of hair' and not satisfied with the 'ugly' one. This dissatisfaction due to ugliness creates disapproval and distancing of her daughter. Though the poverty-ridden and squalid conditions set the family on the periphery of society, their perception of themselves as ugly segregates them further, making them feel self-contempt. This self-hatred is the main cause of the family's ruin, and therefore, they lack self-love. The narrator in the novel says that not the ugliness but the conviction of ugliness makes them different parental figures:

It was though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, 'You are ugly people.' They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. 'Yes, they had said, 'You are right'. And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it (TBE 28).

Therefore the Breedlove can only fashion a childhood world of limited possibilities. Therefore Pecola struggles for selfhood because she is planted in an infertile soil leading to a sterile existence like the marigold planted by her friend, Claudia.

In TBE, Morrison's main intention is to warn the dangers of emotional as well as physical violence heaped on children by their parents. By portraying the "grotesque violence" done to children, she explains that she is trying to show "the nature and relationship between parental love and violence. "Parents do violence to their children everyday", she asserts. It is equally significant that the physical violence done to Pecola by her parents are themselves confused about their identity. When Cholly rapes his daughter, he unknowingly commits a series of physical, social, psychological and personal violence on himself as well as on his daughter. Pecola's stillborn child stands as a symbol of personal violation as well as the fettered life she has been made to live. Cholly's apparent confusion about parental love and its duties and responsibilities, is explicit in the actual rape itself, which occurs when he mistakes his lustful desire for pity with the love he has for his daughter. The rape, which occurs in spring season ironically, coincides with the spring time of his daughter's childhood. In this season, Cholly presents an indelible scar on her person, not a sense of selfhood to get the courage to stand on her feet, but a negative sense that tears his daughter's self-pride. Samuels and Hudson remarks that it is because of the inability of the parent to provide a "fertile parental soil a child needs to grow and develop a positive sense of self" (14) that makes his daughter's life tragic. Thus, TBE presents a brutally villainous father who becomes the destroyer of his daughter's tender green-sap days.

Although child abuse is a highly publicised topic now, including incest and rape, it is once a socially unmentionable subject that remained unaddressed though secretly known. But Morrison readily explores this subject in her pioneering novel and depicts Cholly to be her thematic representative. According to Freudian concept of Electra complex, father-figure shows a strong filial bond towards his daughter. But Cholly is a

‘Sartrarian Other’ and sees his daughter as an object of sexual fulfilment. He is, “Dangerously free: Free to feel whatever he felt—fear, guilt, shame, love, grief, pity. Free to be tender or violent, to whistle or weep. Free to sleep in doorways or between the white sheets of a singing woman” (TBE 125). He is depicted not as a loving parent but as a brute from the netherworld who behaves like a belligerent animal. He has no such schooling or morality nor any social standard, acts according to his momentary whims as animals do. In the mythical past, such relations were considered as a great tragedy but Morrison wants to assert that the tragic situations continue to exist due to incestuous relations in her community. Mary Winn remarks:

In the mythical past sexual relationship with their parents was the subject of tragedy, as in Sophocles Oedipus Rex. [...], the subject of actual sexual attraction between parents and children has left the confines of pornography to become an acceptable area of concern for childcare experts and parent advisors (Children without Childhood 168).

The reason behind Cholly’s act is that he was brought up in his childhood without any role models before him. His mother had left him in a junk box near a railway line just after his birth, but his aunt, Jimmy rescues and raised him. When he was very young, the painful search for his father lasted for days on end only to find him rejected for a card game. So his childhood provided him a negative sense of filial relation. Cholly’s apparent confusion about parental duties and responsibilities are clearly explicit in the rape itself. Cholly was raised “having no idea of how to raise children, and having never watched any parent raise himself, he could not even comprehend what such a relationship should be” (TBE 126). In his lexicon, pity stands for sexual desire, and this confusion occurs when he rapes his daughter. This is

the only time he makes any meaningful interaction with his daughter in the novel.

Cholly's childhood experiences, the inability of discovering an imaginative means and transforming it to his daughter proves him to be an abusive parent. This can be explored in relation to his sexual encounter with a girl in his teens. In the midst of his first sexual encounter, he was discovered by two white hunters who insist him to go on with the task and complete it with their presence. They shouted: "Get on wid it, nigger... I said, get on wid it. An' make it good, nigger, make it good" (TBE 116). He was paralyzed, poured all the blame on his love Darlene, and not on the white hunters. The same experience he transforms to his daughter. Humiliated and scarred by the experience, Cholly internalises his oppression, develops distaste for his black self and hatred for the black woman—be it his daughter, wife or any women. Of Cholly, the narrator in the novel relates that the pieces of his life could become coherent only in the head of a musician. Without imaginative resources and without a discipline of emotional expression other than violence, Cholly lacks a means of striking balance between the chances of his reality and a reasonable coherence. He takes refuge in alcohol to soothe his suppressed feeling of rage and frustration. The level of his inauthenticity manifests itself in sadistic lovemaking and the violence and brutality of his domestic relationship. Out of his confusing moments, out of his sense of impotence, guilt and stupor he viciously and tragically rapes his daughter.

Mother-daughter relationship in the novel is contrary to the expectation of social standards. In the social spectrum the relation is unwarranted in shaping the character of the daughter. It is inevitable for a young girl as it provides sanctuary of love and everything that a girl- child needs in her growing years. Pecola is in a crucial stage, a stage of rapid physical and

mental changes. She has started her menstrual cycle and is about to enter into the adolescent period—a period that demands much help from her mother—she requires a patient hearing of her problems, a warm heart to recognise her feelings. But her mother, Pauline, does not share any feelings with her daughter. Instead, she engages in enjoying movies and subscribes to the standards of beauty forgetting the shelter her girl is willing to share with.

Pauline Breedlove, as a nurturing mother, falls short, as her shortcomings are the “consequences of stunted selves unable to discover an imaginative means of transforming experience” (Modern Fiction Studies 34). Pauline has “missed without knowing what is missed—paints and crayons”. This suggests that she has missed the imaginative resources and mental discipline. Pauline squeezes her life into a narrow coherence, but in so doing, she spoils her vitality and the vitality of her daughter. Carmean states, “The very pleasures which haunt her dream-life are denied in favour of sterile fabrications, which she then converts for her moral behaviour. The results, therefore, is embodied in their daughter are tragic” (25). Thus, the intimate touch of maternal relationship is totally absent in the text. Pecola addresses her mother in the most formal way, as ‘Mrs. Breedlove’ but Pauline never breeds love towards her daughter. It indicates that how much she has kept away her daughter as if she is somebody’s child. Many psychologists confirm that, if proper mother-daughter relationship is not maintained, the growth of young children will be halted, and will accelerate the tragedy of childhood. Psychologist, Robert Karen observes, “Proper relationship with the mother provides impetus for growth to young children” (qtd in Lakshmi Narasimhayya 8). Pecola’s mother reverses the parental goals and sends her to the abysmal depth of psychic extinction.

Pauline desires to imitate the white American film star, Jean Harlow,

out of her adoration towards the white aesthetics. Not the demeaning, ugly and gloomy face of her daughter, but Harlow's penetrating glance from the silver screen attracts the unpolished, unsophisticated and partially disabled Pauline. As a servant of a white family, she maintains the same attitude. She keeps the Fisher's kitchen clean while she leaves her own dirty; detests her own household, and fancies to possess a house like Fishers'. Mrs Pauline lavishes all her affection on Fisher's child, keeping in store the jibes and slaps for her hapless daughter. Instead of instilling reassurance and confidence, she crams her daughter's head with the darkness of fears. She beats into her, "a fear of growing up, fear of other people, fear of life" (TBE 100). Thus, while running after white standards of beauty and order, she deliberately suppresses her daughters' ego. Mrs. Pauline offers her daughter only the pain—the pain of motherly rejection on the ground that her daughter is black and ugly.

The level of inauthenticity Pauline reaches from her deferred life manifests itself in the contempt and insult she shows towards her daughter. One of the most poignant events in the novel—the scene of spilling hot pie juice on the floor that she has prepared for the pink, beribboned, white child—shows her extreme condescension towards her daughter. Pecola's sudden appearance in the Fisher's kitchen and her touching the hot soup unknowingly aggravates her mother's hatred. The hot soup spills on the floor, splattering the contents everywhere. Immediately the irate Pauline jumps upon and knocks down her own daughter to the floor while she soothes the Fisher's white child. Pecola is further insulted by the presence of her friends, Claudia and Frieda, during the incident. Claudia, stricken with sorrow, narrates this incident: "Pecola slid in the pie juice, one leg folding under her. Mrs. Breedlove yanked her up by the arm, slapped her again and in a thin voice of anger abused Pecola directly and Frieda and me by implication"

(TBE 84).

When the white child started crying, Pauline comforts it with tenderness, washes it, while her own rejected daughter is looking on: “Hush, baby, hush. Come here. Oh Lord, look at your dress. Don’t cry no more, Polly will change it” (TBE 85). Rather than attending to Pecola’s injuries, Pauline scolds her daughter, showing more concern for the white girl, and the clean floor than the well being of her daughter. While cleaning the kitchen floor, she spits out filthy words to her daughter, “Pick out that wash and get on out here, so I can get this mess clean up” (TBE 85). The hot-soup incident damages her daughter’s pride profoundly. Pecola is splintered - like the hot pie that scattered on the floor. The heat generates from Pauline towards her daughter, and the incessant love that flows on the white child prompts Pecola to see her mother in a new angle. It not only creates emotional turbulence but also allows her to think that nothing is there to fall back upon, that she is ugly, unacceptable and unloved in the world. Phyllis Klotman correctly points out that Pauline’s action emerges from her affected vision of white aesthetic standards: “Through her mother’s blurred vision of the pink, white, and golden world of the Fishers, Pecola learns that she is ugly, unacceptable, and especially unloved (124).

Jacqueline de Weaver, one of the critics of Morrison, points out that “the Breedloves are a family that lives together without the structure of a strong relationship or punctuation of loving gestures or deed” (CLA Journal 22.4: 402-414). This is very explicit in the text when the Breedloves are compared and contrasted with the MacTeers and the company of prostitutes. They are the source of comfort and solace for Pecola while all other world despises her. Among the criminal world of adults, The MacTeers, a middle-class poor black family, gives her Graham Crackers on a saucer and some



milk in the blue-and-white Shirley Temple cup, which is an act of love and kindness towards this hapless child. Though Mrs. MacTeer blames Pecola for having drunk too much of milk (“three quarts of milk”), she sympathise with the desolate child. MacTeer laments the plight of Pecola when she is put outdoors:

Ain't nobody even *peeped* in here so to see whether that child has a loaf of bread. Look like they would just *peep* in to see whether I had a loaf of bread to give her. But naw. That thought don't cross they mind. That old trifling Cholly been out of jail *two* whole days and ain't been here *yet* to see if his own child was 'live or dead. She could be *dead* for all he know. And *mama* neither. What kind of something is that? (TBE 17).

MacTeer's voice reflects the indignation of the folkways and how Pecola is virtually 'orphaned' by her parents. The MacTeers are not so much better off economically than the black families in Lorain, but manages to develop a healthy family unit. Their children, Claudia and Frieda have been taught to cultivate positive attitude like love and compassion to others. These children illustrate this in handling a crisis when it befalls their classmate, Pecola. They readily come forward to help her when she starts her first menstruation. When Pecola begins to bleed, Frieda and Claudia think that Pecola has been cut by knife. They slosh down with water the stain on the steps and lead her secretly to a nearby bush. Mrs. MacTeer understands the problem, immediately leads her to the bathroom, and does whatever she could do as to her own children. Pauline keeps aloof on such issues while Mrs. MacTeer provides the care she needed in her most vital occasion. That night, for the first time, when Pecola sleeps with the MacTeers children, she feels a sense of belongingness and a sense of satisfaction. On the other hand, the

Breedloves never extend a warm heart to their daughter, especially in her distress. Claudia's narration gives a general picture of the MacTeers family, who impart their love and concern to their children at the most vital hour:

Love, thick and dark like Alaga syrup, eased into that cracked window. [...] It coated my chest, along with the salve, and when the flannel came undone in my sleep, the clear, sharp curves of air outlined its presence on my throat. And in the night, when my coughing was dry and tough, feet padded into the room, hand repinned the flannel, readjusted the quilt, and rested a moment on my forehead. So when I think of autumn, I think of somebody with hands who does not want me to die" (TBE 7).

Claudia here expresses her mother's deep love and concern when she falls ill. But Pecola has to ask if such sentiments exist at all in the world because she is not familiar with these noble sentiments in her household. She has believed that love is the 'sound and soundlessness' when her parents make sexual intercourse. For the first time in her life, she feels and differentiates between the real love and love-making of her parents when she stays with the MacTeers because her own parents fail to nourish love and cultivate love in the family. The company of whores cannot explain what love is but at least they can provide a hint. Pecola thinks of love, which she can imagine, but she has no idea about love or lovemaking:

'What did love feel like?' She wondered. 'How do grown-ups act when they love each other?' 'Eat fish together?' Into her eyes, came the picture of Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove in bed. Her making sounds as though he were in pain, as though something had him by the throat and wouldn't let go. Terrible as his noises

were, they were not nearly as bad as the no noise at all from her mother. It was as though she was not even there. May be that was love. Choking sounds and silences (TBE 44).

So the MacTeers proved to be far better than her real parents. Morrison's juxtaposition of two families is now clear that she wanted to assert the famous proverbial sentence: 'charity begins at home'. Further she wants to show that even the prostitutes residing upstairs of the Breedlove family treat Pecola as their own child while her parents despise.

The adult examples shown in the novel are thoroughly disheartening. When Pecola enters Yacobowski's Fresh Vegetable, Meat and Sundry store to buy some Mary Jane candies that she loves so much, she detects contempt and distaste in the eyes of the white shop owner, Yacobowski. Morrison describes:

He urges his eyes out of his thoughts to encounter her. Blue eyes. Blear-dropped. Slowly, like Indian summer moving imperceptibly toward fall, he looks toward her. [...]. [...] senses that he need not waste the effort of a glance. How can a fifty-two-year-old white immigrant store keeper [...] a little black girl? Nothing in his life even suggested that the fear was possible, not to say desirable or necessary (TBE 36).

When the young girl looks up, she finds only "the total absence of human recognition—the glazed separateness" (TBE 36) in the shop owner's eyes. The contemptuous look of Yacobowski wells up from the attitude on the ugliness of Pecola. She sees in the eyes of all white people the same look, for: "The distaste must be for her, her blackness. All things in her are flux and anticipation. But her blackness is static and dread. And it is the blackness that accounts for, that creates the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes" (TBE

37). She at first feels indignant at the hateful look of Yacobowski but soon she is overpowered with a tremendous sense of shame and unworthiness.

Morrison comments about this attitude of the white Yacobowski towards ugliness and blackness: “The anger will not hold; the puppy is too easily surfeited. Its thirst too quickly quenched, it sleeps. The shame wells up again, its muddy rivulets seeping into her eyes” (TBE 38). Embarrassed and overwhelmed by shame, Pecola purchases the candy and leaves. Morrison metaphorically identifies Pecola with the dandelion weeds because they are too ugly and unwanted. Later Pecola overcomes her shame, for a brief moment, by eating the Mary Jane candies she bought from the shop because “to eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane, Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane” (TBE 38). She thereby sublimates her feeling of rejection and contempt. But the contemptuous look and the phlegmy voice of the shop owner linger in her mind like the Medusa’s look, which is capable of turning people to stone. Through the look of others, Morrison agrees with Sartrarian approach that Pecola has been reduced to an object. Sartre argues that “the awareness of being seen is not only a way of affirming the existence of the other but of understanding the dynamics of the relationship with the other” (Samuelss & Hudson 17). Pecola is reduced to an ‘other’, an ugly object in the eyes of adults, and not only in the eyes of her parents but in the eyes of the white immigrants.

The intra- black culture of the adults also alienates Pecola. For example, Geraldine, a wealthy black lady plays an important role in giving pain to her. When Pecola enters Geraldine’s home at the invitation of her son and her schoolmate, Louise Junior, she is made the brunt of a cruel hoax. Rather than finding the kittens he has promised, Pecola receives facial scratches from a frightened cat that Junior throws at her. Properly described as

misplaced aggression, Louis's behaviour is retaliatory, for he wishes to strike out at his mother who failed to nurture him during childhood, prevents him from playing with "niggers" and heaps what little love she has to give upon a cat. When Geraldine enters the house, Louise sends the cat flying into the radiator, and accuses Pecola of killing it. Disgruntled by the injury done to the cat, but more by the presence of a little black girl in her home, Geraldine expels the innocent girl with words that cut deeper in her mind than the claws of the cat.

Morrison presents the company of women prostitutes inviting the readers to reflect and measure the inauthenticity that Pecola has been experiencing in her family. Although these women live out of the mainstream of life, they provide Pecola what her parents cannot. They themselves think that they are metaphorically 'put out' not 'put outdoors' like Pecola's parents have done to her. Pecola's mental throes come to a halt when she is in the company of these women living upstairs of her storefront. In spite of being prostitutes, they exhibit supreme quality of childhood, as they are simple in every other respect. They "never deceived their husbands—regularly or irregularly" (TBE 43) nor do they lie before their 'husbands' but they are independent and self-reliant. They do not appear squandered or devastated or do not want to extol white children rejecting their own. They never show any hatred towards any one but engage in their 'businesses'. They are forced to lead the life of social pariahs only because their childhood had been very tragic. It is this tragedy in their heydays of childhood that has pushed them into the 'profession'. The remembrance of their childhood miseries lead them on to the brink of psychological breakdown, still, "they were avoiding suicide only to punish the memory of some absent father or to sustain the misery of some silent mother" (TBE 42). During their spring time of life, vengeance had

welled up in them for all the atrocities made on them. So they approach men with vengeance because the men have discoloured their otherwise golden childhood. The narrator explains: “these women hated men, all men, without shame, apology, or discrimination” ( TBE 42-43).

Although they live in a storefront, like the Breedloves, their life on the upstairs is much above the squalor. Downstairs, Pecola undergoes suffocation under her distanced parents in a home of displaced and fragmented lives. But in the company of whores she finds sanctuary; tasting the scent of aromatic odour of Miss Mary’s kitchen, listening to the blues coming from Poland singing sweetly, and seeing China curling her hair. To Pecola, they are very lovable, and kind-hearted unlike what society thinks about them. While the Breedloves despise and ignore, Pauline cajoles the little white boy and shows preferences to it, Miss. Mary, one of the three prostitutes, expresses her intimate touch of motherhood. She greets Pecola with sweet honey words, “Hi, dumplin’, Where your socks?”(TBE 38). Miss Mary does not complete full words out of her genuine love when she calls her—Chitlin’, Puddin’, Chicken and Honey. All these soft names illustrate her tenderness towards this child. Because of the prostitutes’ gentle attitudes towards Pecola, she feels rejuvenation. She becomes ecstatic and eloquent when she thinks of their love and care. In this company most of her needs are satisfied, which her parents do not care to offer her:

Oh, lots of stuff, pretty dresses, and shoes. I got more shoes than I ever wear. And jewelry and candy and money. They take me to the movies, and once we went to the carnival. China gone take me to Cleveland and to see the square, and Poland gone take me to Chicago to see the Loop. We going everywhere together (TBE 83).

Morrison extends, in her second novel, Sula, the same negligent attitudes of parents, family and society in which Sula has been brought up. While Pecola cherishes her dream, for acceptance in the family and society, Sula protects herself against the mean world with meanness and fights against the hostility of the world. Independent, adventurous, inquisitive, strong-willed, and self-centred Sula offers a welcome attempt from preventing Pecola's unquestioned acceptance and futile pursuit of those values, which lead to her destruction. Living with her mother Hannah and grandmother, Sula initially draws her world view from both women who live in a fictional mid-Western town called Medallion. Sula is spiritually and physically alienated because of her inability to cope up with the domestic roles and her desire to be "distinctly different" (Sula 118), from the established conventions, and finally she moves into tragic depth as "she had no centre, no speck around which to grow" (Sula 103). So her childhood is a continuous struggle for consistency and wholeness in the midst of the isolation created by her parents and the community of Bottom.

It is particularly through the community, the Peace women (mother and grandmother) and through her best friend, Nel Wright, that Morrison depicts Sula's decadence and her vigilance against the destruction of the self. She weaves several anecdotes of the tragic state of childhood in the novel. Annez Michelson in Contemporary Literary Criticism observes, "she expands the theme of pariah by charting her heroine's odyssey from childhood to adulthood" (22:315). When the odyssey starts, she encounters so many hurdles in the family and the society outside. Her values are often diametrically opposites of those adopted by her rural community. Morrison develops Sula much as she developed Pecola through the relation with others or in other words, Sartre's "the Other". She also combines the psychological,

the symbolic and the philosophical concerns in her portrayal of Sula.

Morrison describes the origin of Bottom where Sula is brought up. A white farmer promises his slave freedom and gives a piece of Bottomland if he performs some very difficult chore for him. When the difficult chore is over, the white slave owner rewards his loyal slave with a place that is high up in the hills as if to mock his generation. The narrator describes: “The master said, Oh no! See those hills? That is Bottomland, rich and fertile. But it is high up in the hills, said the slave, High up from us, said the master, but when god looks down, it is the bottom” (Sula 4). The name ‘Bottom’ is ironical as it is not a coastal place but a hilly place in Medallion, a valley town on the bank of Ohio River, where planting is backbreaking. When the rain comes, the soil slid down and the land gets eroded. Not only the land but also the seeds of black community in Bottom struggle for existence. They live in an arid and sterile world where nobody cares for their well-being. It reminds the same wastelandish picture as shown in TBE. The Bottom, as the name of the place suggests, in every respect is at the lowest level for the nurturance of the tiny tots, as it does not help to grow and aspire as healthy children.

Geographically it is isolated by location, race, and economical imbalance. It accepts all evils in a prosaic manner: “They let it run its course, fulfil itself, and never invented ways to alter it, to annihilate or to prevent it to happen it again. So also were they with people” (Sula 89-90). The community of Bottom concentrates on the surface level and the children run their course of life of their own without the attention of the family or society. Hence, the novel exposes the community’s extended neglect of children. Karen Carmean observes:

Indeed the extended neglect of the children throughout the novel is a recurring reminder of communal dereliction. Chicken, the



Dewey's, Ajax, Teapot and Sula herself are allowed to grow with little supervision or care. No wonder the children who survive become self-centred as their adult examples (43).

The communal dereliction of children can be traced out from the adult examples shown in the novel. The girls of Bottom grow up under the 'panther eyes' of the people. When a woman approaches, the old ones tip their hats; the younger ones open and close their thighs indicating a lewd signal, but all of them, whatever their age, watch the little girls retreating view with interest. The community does not concentrate on the upbringing of the girls, rather they enjoy their physical features and look down upon them with lust. Morrison describes the young girls, Nel and Sula, walking under 'this valley of eyes chilled by the wind and heated by the embarrassments of appraising stages' with the adults watching them with sexual interest. The opening chapter of the novel itself is replete with suggestions of sexuality. The words, 'mellow' the ripeness, and 'sinister beauty' indicate the innocent lust of adolescent girls. Morrison's handling of 'ice cream', 'vanilla' and 'lemon' are suggestive of the community's sexual perspective. So adult world around which they grow has really debases the prestige of the girls and viewed them only in a sexual perspective. This shows that the black community of Bottom is too "bottom" than expected and try to tarnish the life of children at a tender age. The narrator of the novel makes the comment about the sexual outlook:

The cream coloured trousers marking with a mere seam the place where the mystery curled. Those smooth vanilla crotches invited them; those lemon yellow gabardines beckoned them [...]. Somewhere beneath all of that daintiness, chambered in all that neatness, lay the thing that clotted their dreams (Sula 51).

The community views Sula as ominous and thinks that she is the cause of all troubles in the society. Sula's status as outsider manifests itself symbolically in a mysterious birthmark that runs from the middle of the lid toward her eyebrow of the right eye. This mark creates in them an awkward feeling when they encounter her. She is blamed for everything even if they themselves commit any folly and for any unpleasant occurrences. For example, when Teapot knocks on Sula's door to ask for empty bottles, he falls off the porch and his mother accuses of Sula of pushing him down. When Mr. Finley dies, Sula again becomes the scapegoat. He is sitting on his porch sucking chicken bones as he had done for thirteen years, and when he chances to see her, he is choked and died. Again, her peripheral life makes her a scapegoat by identifying her as the cause of the misery, which they consider as evil in their eyes. It is undoubtedly easier for the folks to give life to their misery than to examine the source in relation to their environment. They believe that she has performed numerous actions against the citizens on purpose or accidentally. Sula's evil changes them in accountable yet mysterious ways. Once the source of their misery is found out, they are forced to leave her to protect and start to become one unanimous group. "They began to cherish their husbands and wives, protect their children, repair their homes and in general band together against the devil in their midst" (Sula 17-18). Still, they take that she conducts herself all the unpleasant things in an excusable manner, and therefore, do not ostracize her from the community, but do everything to protect themselves and their loved ones from her wrath. Here again the innocence of a child is being thrown out. The community and the circumstances are seen eagerly participating in making the life of a child tragic by ostracising her on the ground of their superstitious belief.

Parental upbringing is the decisive factor in developing a child's attitudes: positively or negatively. Sula develops all the negative attitudes from her mother and grandmother. She is born in a family where the women reign supreme. During her childhood, neither Eva nor Hannah serves as a positive role model who enforces or exhibits a life style of domestic tranquillity or security. In fact, just the opposite appears true, for, neither woman provides Sula with an "intimate knowledge of marriage" (Sula 103). In the Peace house women behave like "all men [were] available", and so they "selected from among them with a care only for their taste" (Sula 103). Contrary to the whores in TBE, their interest in men has to do with pleasure, not money or vengeance. In fact, Eva and Hannah conform to convention by marrying and raising families. But their social convictions stop there. They end their traditional way of life when they get a chance. Although Hannah is once married, she never bothers to remarry after being left as a widow. She gives Sula an unconventional image of woman-hood and motherhood through her "sooty" style of life. She "simply refused to live without the attentions of men, after Reku's [her husband] death, she had a steady sequence of lovers, mostly the husbands of her friends and neighbors" (Sula 36). Moreover, in Hannah's relationship with Eva, she had not found her to be a loving mother. Eva comes up short on the nurturing yardstick. She learns from her mother and the same thing she transfers to her child. Hannah damages Sula's childhood by confessing, although she had the obligatory love of a parent for her child, that she "just don't like her" (49). She admits that she does not like her daughter and sees her as a cross to bear. These remarks and Hannah's ways deeply impinge Sula's young psyche. Morrison tells that Sula's life "is an experimental life—ever since her mother's remarks sent her flying up the stairs" (Sula 118). The impact of the horrible remarks of her mother remains with her throughout her life. Therefore, Sula cannot maintain any affection

and pre-Oedipal relationship with her mother. Being a rejected daughter, Sula watches her mother burn in the conflagration without any emotional disturbance.

Consequently, Sula's lack of interest in domestic ties seems a natural legacy, for like the other Peace women, "she simply loved maleness, for its own sake" (Sula 41). Her mother's remark, however, will have the most lasting impact. And it leads Sula to the independence she strives for with her experimental life" (Sula 102). Indirectly, Hannah has taught her that "there is no other [than self] that [one] could count on" (Sula 102). The self-disparagement of Sula may be partly endorsed to her grandmother, Eva, as well. It is Eva's influence on this young child that forces her to accept the code of ethics practiced in the Peace house, disallowing any guilt over the licentiousness or hint of inferiority, though the community totally regards the Peace women not only merely unethical but socially unacceptable. The people of Bottom, such as Helene Wright expect Sula to have her "mother's slackness" (Sula 29), they are surprised to discover that she does not. When she meets Sula for the first time, Helene's "curdled scorn turned to butter" (Sula 29). Thus Sula follows her mother as well as her grandmother along the way those women once trudged and guided their child.

Sula's family is a "woolly house" for a number of men. They come and go after gratifying their sexual needs. It is in this house that Sula is born. Her mother married a laughing man named Rekus who died when their daughter Sula is three years old. After that, Hannah moved back into her mother's big house prepared to take care of her mother and the house forever. Hannah does not have any intimate relationship with any one nor does she have any intimate concern for any norms of society or any roles prescribed by the society. She does not want to be a wife or to be a lover. She knows how to

lure the males but she made no demands but felt free to sleep with them. It is a measure of trust and a definite commitment. Sula stands as a mute witness to her mother's sexual indulgences. As a budding child, she copies and imitates her mother's ways. Sula learns that "sex is pleasant and frequent, but otherwise unremarkable" (Sula 37-38) from her mother. The narrator in the novel speaks about the indulgence of her mother who shows her daughter that sex is nothing but a pleasant experience:

Seeing her steps so easily into the pantry and emerge looking precisely as she did when she entered, only happier, taught Sula that she was pleasant and frequent but otherwise remarkable. Outside the house, where children giggled about underwear, the message was different. So she watched her mother's face and the face of the men when they opened the pantry door and made up her own mind (Sula 44).

So, at the very early age, Sula watches the men coming out after sexual intercourse with her mother. As a child, she does not realise the implications of her mother's ways and therefore she does not develop hatred towards the habit, instead; she inherits it from her mother. As far as Hannah is concerned, she is not bothered about this 'dangerous union with men' as she has inherited from Eva. In fact, Sula gets an inspiration that there is nothing to fear from her parents, family and society. She also cultivates the same habit and goes astray from the normal social order. Thus she takes a steady sequence of men in her later adult life imitating her mother. Thus "Eva and Hannah act as negative role models to Sula. There is a woman centred universe, and the values of that universe are particularly beneficial to women (Mary Helen 43:1:1 4, 5). These role models have no male counterpart to direct the children for maintaining the healthy standards of society.

Even among the singular characters of the Bottom, the “magnificent” Eva Peace stands out conspicuously in the text. Her magnificence lies in the greatness of her achievement as she keeps her children alive despite the societal odds, the grand scale of her expenditures because she is creator and sovereign of a big house, the glamour of her appearance (her dresses stop at mid calf, so that her one leg is always in view), and the arrogance of her ambition (she chooses death for her son). Her neighbours stand in awe of her; they turn her life into mystery and tales about her lost leg circulate among the community: “Somebody said Eva stuck it under a train and made them pay off. Another said she sold it to a hospital for \$10,000—at which Mr. Reed opened his eyes and asked, ‘Nigger gal legs goin’ for \$10,000 a *piece*?’ as though he could understand \$10,000 a *pair*—but for *one*?” (Sula 31). Not only in the neighborhood legend but in the outhouse easing her child’s pain, and years later in his room releasing him from the adult pain of addiction in a baptism of ire, Eva’s sacrifices defy comprehension. As Hortense Spillers aptly observes, “Eva behaves as though she were herself the sole instrument of divine inscrutable will” (qtd in Wall 1456 ).

Eva is a domineering “Great Mother” as she protects and nourishes the family life, providing sustenance and life. One November Eva’s husband Bay Boy abandons her. Since then, she struggles hard to bring up the children and reaches a stage when it becomes impossible to feed her three children. She leaves the place leaving the children alone in the house, returns after eighteen months with one leg cut off to get an insurance claim, and becomes rich at the cost of her one leg. Now, being a totally changed woman, she has become a sovereign in her home. The children, Deweys, Tar Baby and Plum all, receive her care; but to some extent, they become her victims. Eva rescues these children from their mothers and allows them to play in her house. However,

these Deweys live down to Eva's assessment, therefore she makes their individuality arrested, and their physical and emotional developments come to a halt. Even then, Eva's first and foremost consideration is to meet the needs of her children. When Hannah once asked about her love for her children, she replies that she had no time for recreation but by nature, she is the paragon of love and concern for her children:

No time. They isn't no time. Not none. Soon as I got one day done here comes a night. With you all coughin' and me watchin' so TB wouldn't take you off and if you is sleepin' quiet I thought O Lord, they dead and put my hand over your mouth to feel if the breadth is comin' what you talk 'bout did I love you girl I stayed alive for you can't you get that through your thick head (60).

At the same time, Eva converts her house into an Eden for children and rains love on them. They are allowed to dwell freely in that big house. She has no dichotomy among children and does not show any difference. She calls all of them 'Dewy' but the Bottomites are confused to see that all of them are given the same name. Even the schoolteacher, Mrs. Read, worries about their age and physical features. She says that they all get mixed up in her head and finally she cannot literally believe her eyes because they speak with one voice, think with one mind and maintain an annoying privacy. Stout hearted, surely, and wholly unpredictable, 'Deweys' remain a mystery not only during all of their lives in Medallion but after as well. Madhu Dubey makes the remarks:

The very names of characters like Chicken Little, Boy Boy, and the Deweys evoke an image of black men as frozen in a state of

perpetual, irresponsible childhood. The stunted physical growth of the Deweys, who remain boys forever, is paralleled with Plum's psychological refusal of adulthood (Peach Linden 71).

However, Eva provides comfort and solace to all these boys and cares them with love and affection. Hence Eva acts as the primordial mother, who lavishes all her love towards Deweys but who has also sinned by bringing death to her son, Kashi Nath Ranveer observes, "Eva, like Eve is both taker of life and giver of life. She sacrifices herself and she also sacrifices her son when it is necessary" (IJAS23.2(1993): 37).

As her name suggests, she takes after the archetypal 'Great Mother', Eve, in the sense that she is the saviour as well as the destroyer of her progenies. Her role as a saviour of children is further amplified in an effort to save Hannah, her first born, when she is caught fire. Hannah burns to death in spite of Eva's passionate attempt to save her daughter. Seeing the sight of her daughter struggling for life, she jumps through the window from the upstairs without minding her handicap. Cutting and bleeding herself she lands on the floor twelve feet away from the conflagration in which Hannah is weltering. Stunned, but still conscious she drags herself with one leg to see her daughter dead. Eva can also be seen in the same role in her more successful effort to save her youngest and only one son, Plum. When constipation continues to trouble in his infancy, she unclogs his bowels with fingers lubricated with lard. The narrator describes: "The last bit of food she had in this world... And now that it is over, Eva squatted there [in the outhouse in the middle of the cold winter night] to free his stool, and what is she doing down on her haunches with her beloved baby boy warmed by her body in the almost darkness, her shin and teeth freezing, her nostrils assailed" (Sula 34).



At the same time, she completes the sign of her archetypal cycle by becoming the destroyer of children in the role of a “Terrible Mother”. Eva is inescapably the taker as well as the giver of life. She is, in other words, capable of devouring and destroying that which she has given life to. She both sacrifices herself and her son at the same time. When Plum returns from war he brings with him the undesirable habits, which Eva cannot accept. The war has reduced him to a neurotic-wreck, self-destructive, slovenly, and diminishes to a mere shadow with a sweet, sweet smile indicating his drug addiction. Plum cannot hold to any particular idealism in his community but he becomes a slave to drugs out of his desperation. His infancy state has been removed by serving in the war, develops a defence mechanism to retrieve the lost infancy for which he resorts to heroin addiction more and more strongly. Plum grows up “floated” in a constant “swaddle” of love and affection suggesting his perpetual infancy. Nevertheless, Eva, the all-powerful mother, had to kill her son by setting fire on him. Before executing him, she holds him closer, and begins to rock back and forth as she had done when he was a baby.

Plum seeks to escape through drugs rather than acting responsibly to establish an order, and chart a direction for his fragmented self. His infantile behaviour is symbolic of excessive dependence. He wants to return to the womb, suggesting an act of “Bad Faith” in Sartrean view on his part. Eva says, “He wanted to crawl back into my womb. I ain’t got the room no more even if he could do it...And is crawlin’ back, being helpless and thinking baby thoughts and dreaming baby dreams and messing up his pants again and smiling all the time (Sula 62). As Eva suggests, Plum’s act is not the incestuous cohabitation but an escape through rebirth and childhood. He wanted to return to childhood again, to return to the parental shelter, and to

extricate from the responsibilities thus by restoring the lost infancy. Eva is so much overwhelmed with the thought of Plums plight and his inevitable decay that she decides to kill her own son by engulfing in the fire.

Morrison describes the passage with deft touches and it can be seen that the theme of childhood is embedded in the text with particular references to mythology in an excellent way. Eva's choice of death of her son by fire suggests purification and rebirth particularly with reference to the "wet light" and some kind of "baptism". The death of Plum is an act of purgation—a ritual of purification. The passage is filled with images and symbols of cleansing, renewal and rebirth, which is thought to be the second childhood:

Plum on the rim of a warm light sleep [...].He felt twilight.  
Now there seemed to be some kind of wet light travelling over his legs and stomach with a deep attractive smell. It wound itself—this wet light—all about him, splashing and running into his skin. He opened his eyes and saw what he imagined is the great wing of an eagle pouring a wet lightness over him. Some kind of baptism, some kind of blessing, he thought" (Sula 47).

The images of 'wetness' and 'light' remind the embryonic fluid of the uterus and the reference to 'twilight' signifies rebirth—the dawning of a new day. This is, in fact, more spiritual than physical rebirth. It is suggested by the 'eagle' and the 'wet lightness' that it pours over Plum, which means that Plum's death symbolically leads to new life. The images of warm fire and secure bed imply that of a nurturing womb. In short, Eva provides Plum a rebirth by engulfing in the fire and that is why he remains a 'baby boy'.

Further the passage reveals the traditional belief of African Americans about death and birth. Death is perceived as a significant link in the coil of

death and birth—birth, life, death and rebirth that evolve from the cyclical concept of time. The individuals are remembered when they are dead by the surviving members of their family and gives the notion of the living dead who are part of their daily remembrances. Morrison explores such primordial concepts and beliefs in an Afro-centric perspective to illustrate the multifaceted responses of black parental relationship with their wards. However Plum's burning also reminds Western mythologies of death and birth. Eva is compared to a heron and Plum as a phoenix who burn in the fire and emerges as a new phoenix—a rebirth. In both cases, the mythical aspects of childhood are employed.

Purification and rebirth are closely linked with the theme of childhood. These references indicate a fervent attempt to return to purity, in other words, Eva tries her defied son strip off all the malignancy of the world and retrieve the lost bliss of childhood. Eva misses her son first when he enters in the war, then by addiction to heroin. Karen Carmean argues that “Plum neither rises from his own ashes nor does he emerge from the flame strengthened and sanctified” (35), but it is an attempt on the part of a mother who wants to cleanse the worldly affectations from a ‘lost’ son. Thus it seems that mothers in *Bottom* become the tools of extinction of their own offspring. Moreover, Morrison points out that the drug addiction is one of the defence mechanisms of the African American children to escape from the cruel circumstances around them, and an adjustment towards the loss of purity and simplicity of their bygone days.

The introduction of Helen Wright, Nel's Mother, proves once again that the parenting performed in the novel accelerates the tragedy of childhood. Helene's attitude towards sexuality is revealed while she is travelling with her daughter in a railway compartment to New Orleans. Though Nel is very

young, she can bloat her mother's smile towards a loathsome ticket examiner as a flirtatious appeal for understanding. Her feigned ego dissolves into a brilliant smile. Helen's smile allows her daughter to see her mother in an entirely new context. Though Nel's mother manipulates her daughter and husband, turns her young daughter into an obedient one, she makes her daughter's imagination down to a dull glow. Nel had to grow under the conservative and strict ways of her mother without getting a child's freedom. She dwells in an incredibly neat house with her mother's warnings and commands with a highly religious tone. But beneath the mantle of decency, Nel understands her mother's capriciousness during the trip. Therefore, Nel is not an exception from the isolation and alienation, though not physically, from her mother. Nel's father, Wiley Wright, absents from home frequently which results in physical isolation from her father. She is brought up without having any brothers or any friends to share her feelings. As a means of escapism from the sordid condition of her home, she sits in the back porch dreaming and expecting "some fiery prince" to turn up. Hence, Morrison shows that responsible parenting is lacking in the novel, which Anderson and Nancy Boyd Franklin observe:

The persons who are defined as parents by responsibilities must recognise that parenting is a job requiring skills, if be performed within the context of parental 'love' the prongs of child development is enhanced. However performed in an atmosphere of contempt and rejection the process can be detrimental to development... (McAdoo 95).

Morrison's third novel, SOS, gives a saga of black personalities who fail to nurture their generation but concentrate on acquiring wealth and honour in the society in order to overcome the inferiority complex they were

experiencing in the racially prejudiced America. At the same time, she also presents towering black personalities, who guard their generation, who feed psychological needs to the young ones, and make them conscious of their ancestral pursuits. Like TBE and Sula, it is a novel of growing up, ultimately aims to achieve a total, authentic personality for its hero, Milkman. His childhood is interpreted by placing him in the midst of two families, between his materialistic and all powerful, father Macon Dead and his aunt Pilate. One is sterile, thoroughly westernised, and Euro-centric, and the other is Afro-centric in nature. Therefore, his parental figure fails to form an autonomous self in Milkman. His own family makes up or mends the self-realisation of this black boy on the one hand. His aunt's family, schoolmate Guitar, on the other hand, present him crisis in the make up of his mental balance. As his family supplies him a nauseating environment, Pilate and her family nurture him and meet his physical as well as psychological needs. She leads a life of abject penury but bathes him in love, affection and recognition, which are the building blocks of growing up. The novel, in a sense, is the story of a child's tension between his parental role models who keep two opposite and divergent philosophies in black community.

Macon Dead II is a wealthy blackman whose life-long ambition is to own things. He believes and propagates the gospel: "Own things. And let the things own other things. Then you'll own yourself and other people too" (SOS 55), because he knows well the hardships in his childhood, he has wandered many days and has slept on verandas and doorways during his sap days. Ever since his childhood, he has been thinking of overcoming his shortcomings. He has kept an office in Not Doctor Street, where the wealthy Negroes live; and has married the daughter of a famous coloured doctor of the Mercy Hospital. Through his hard work, he has become rich, has built many buildings, and is

seen walking along the road with a bunch of keys in his hand. He is least bothered about his family members and his approaches toward all others are based on his materialist outlook. His wife and his daughters live in perpetual fear only to see his indignation. They lead a monotonous life in a palace-like home and escape the drabness by selling decorated flower petals. Macon Dead wants his son to follow his ways but Milkman disappoints him by following his aunt, Pilate. However Milkman thinks his father's ownership policy destroys his self, the lives of his mother, and two sisters and therefore he prefers to stay with his aunt.

Contrary to Macon Dead, Pilate lives out her life in a hut where there is no electricity, water or gas but only one window, and is devoid of furniture or any modern facilities. She, her daughter, and her granddaughter distil wine and sell it to make a living. But her family lives and flourishes in love, affection, and mutual care, and nurture unlike her brother's, family. These two families represent two opposite poles. Milkman shuttles down in the world after following his aunt, Pilate and her principle of communal ties. Her family provides him a sanctuary in which he can dwell freely as he thinks. He always finds consolation, comfort and derives the pleasure of his childhood in this little hut than his palace-like home, which is more like a prison. Morrison spends a considerable part of her novel to explain the childhood experiences of Macon Dead II, Pilate and Ruth Foster Dead because she thinks that their failure to nurture their offspring are the outcome of the souring experiences suffered during the period of their growing up.

Macon Dead narrates his childhood stories to Milkman. He tells him that he belongs to the family of Solomon, a legendary figure who had the ability to fly; and who flew back to Africa to escape the drudgery and slavery. Macon Dead's father once lived in Danville, Pennsylvania and worked along

side with his grandfather, Jake. Through his hard work, Jake transformed the piece of land he got from a white farmer into a profitable, fertile farm called 'Lincoln Heaven'. Lincoln Heaven is basically the expression of Jake's hard work, his desire to achieve personal independence. However his dream is never materialised because he is murdered by a predatory white family—the Butlers, who coveted his land. Though Jake is the name of Macon's father he never knew his father's real name. In 1869, when the free and non-free blacks were registered, Jake is very young. He went to register his name before the man behind the desk, a drunken Yankee soldier. When he asked where he is born, Jake said, "Macon". Then he asked who his father is to which he replied that he is "dead". The Yankee in his hangover wrote it all down but in the wrong spaces and finally his official record showed 'Macon Dead'. But Jake is illiterate, so he never found out what he is registered for till his wife told him. He thought it is a new procedure and wanted to wipe out the old. That is how the family got the official name Macon Dead and later known as Dead's family. But From this example, Morrison tells that the originality of the black men's heritage is wiped out by the whites and the African American child is placed out of their domain. The official record gave them a rebirth in newly acquired names and skins, which forced them to forget their past.

Morrison highlights that painful memories of childhood take a person's life to unknown heights or to abysmal depths. Physically Macon became very rich but spiritually he plunged into the lowest level. He viewed wealth as an end to itself, a be-all and end-all to life's ultimate aim. From then on, he began to acquire wealth after wealth. He married Dr. Foster's daughter only because of her father's wealth and the social status her father enjoyed as a doctor from the Negro community. One more reason to cut ties with his sister is that she is a bootlegger, which does not conform to his social

standards. But his wealth and prestige have purchased nothing more than a spiritual death. The reason behind his spiritual death may be traced back to his childhood days. The unexpected death of his father marred those delightful days and consequently he had been put to suffer very much in the days that followed. He wandered and starved for days on end. This experience made him eagerly driven to acquire material wealth in order to counter the tragic plight of his childhood days. Separated from his sister, Macon moved to Detroit and began his quest to recapture his father's dream. From his long years of experience, he learns the lesson—the solution for all worldly problems is to acquire material wealth and this lesson he transfers to his son repeatedly. Macon became obsessed with “gold”, his car Puckard, his property and his houses and buildings being the symbols of his prestige and greed. His obsession with objects robbed him of any affection he might have felt for people. He became his name as Jake's son:

He [Macon] paid homage to his own father's life and death by loving what that father had loved: property, good solid property, the bountifulness of life. He loved these things to excess. Owning buildings, acquiring—that was his life, his future, his present, and all the history he knew. That he distorted life, bent it, for the sake of gain, is a measure of his loss at his father's death (SOS 304).

The childhood experiences instilled different attitude and perspective in the later life of Macon. Ever since Macon Dead II lost his glory of childhood, he replaces bitter experiences with alienation and desperation. In order to counter it, he then develops a material attitude towards owning things and ignores human problems. As a true son of his father, he went on acquiring things; and in that race Macon reduced to a mechanical being. As a



result, Macon's 'loss' affected his family, for his very presence cast blight upon his wife, his two daughters, and his son. Only Pilate knows the Macon of the past; before he became the father of a son, he is the child. Macon becomes cold, objective and calculating. He is said to be a difficult man to approach, a hard man with a manner so cool and he discourages casual and spontaneous conversation. His avariciousness and his treatment of other people reveal his callousness. He becomes unsympathetic not only to his family but also towards his tenants. When Mrs. Bains, a tenant, approaches him to tell that she is not in a position to pay the rent because she has to feed her children, Macon replies that it is well if her children are sent out to feed in the street. He sends her away threatening to put her outdoors. When loneliness drives Porter, another tenant, threatens to suicide, Macon tells him to blow off his head only after paying his rent.

This callousness arises in Macon because of the source of his behaviour and attitudes that he cultivated in his early days. He thinks that he owns the world, believes that he is the boss and final authority in his house and therefore he maltreats Ruth and his daughters. Though Macon and Pilate were the inseparable company during their childhood, he ignores her and even pretends that she does not exist in his glorious days. As he becomes wealthy and lives in a mansion-like house on Not Doctor Street, he is ashamed of her because she is not up to his social status. He thinks that she is poor, a dirty bootlegger, and a street woman, with sailor's cap, without stockings. Therefore he does not like Milkman going to Pilate's house. He warns Milkman not to visit the house of his own sister: "Just listen to what I say. That woman's no good. She's a snake, and can charm you like a snake, but still a snake... Now I mean for you to stay out of that wine house and as far away from Pilate as you can" (SOS 54-55). Thus, Morrison reveals that

parental guidance of their wards depend on their ethics and experiences.

The reminiscence of his childhood reverberates with the sounds and sights of the Montour county farm known as Lincoln's Haven, which echoes Thoreau's Walden Pond, a symbol of Eden. Still then, memories of childhood make him highly sorrowful. Though he blots out nurturance and love from his father as well as delight from the Eden-like farm, the paradisiacal world suddenly ends when his father is brutally killed. The terrible experience of his budding days haunts him because the ghost of his father appears often to remind him of the agony of the departed soul. This Edenic world, whose fertile soil enhanced the bonding between his father and himself, provided the fulfilling experience, that of seeing the product of joint labour and of being one with the earth. Warren French speaks of this filial bond envisaged in American Literature as:

The Emersonian and Thoreauvian lessons of Nature—physical and spiritual, related to the cultivation of the land; and by extension to the owners between tiller and soil—the immediate legacies and profits of the maturing, growing mankind (59).

In one of the purple passages, Morrison describes Lincoln's Haven and the towering image of their father. But after the death of his father, young Macon and his much younger sister Pilate meet series of agonising experiences. Twelve-year-old Pilate and sixteen-year-old Macon, rendered homeless for six days after the murder, and grieving, take shelter in the house of the closest relative they knew, Circe. She is a midwife in the household of their father's murderer. She is with them when their mother died and when Pilate is named. Circe is very happy to see them alive, as she has not known what happened to the children after the killing. They are kept at Circe's house

because she fears that the white folks would kill the children too. However, fed up with the boredom in that house, the two escape from her house. They wander, eat whatever they find, sleep in the open air, during their trudging to Virginia. On their way, they start seeing the apparition of their dead father. Morrison explains the terrible thing they undergo during those nightmarish days:

The cardinals, the grey squirrels, the garden snakes, the butterflies, the ground hogs and rabbits—all the affectionate things that had peopled their lives ever since they were born became ominous signs of a presence that was searching for them, following them. Even the river's babbling sounded like the call of a liquid throat waiting, just waiting for them. That was in the daylight. How much more terrible was the night? (SOS 169).

On the third day, the ghostly figure, it seemed to them; leads them to the mouth of a cave and they rest for the night in the cave. In the morning Macon walks into the cave's interior, and is suddenly threatened by an old white man, who had been sleeping there. In his fear, Macon kills the old man and discovers three bags of gold hidden in a pit. Pilate, however, would not let him take the gold. Seizing a knife, she forces Macon out of the cave. Macon lies in wait for her, but he is frightened by hunters. Two days later, he returns to the cave to find that both his sister and the gold are gone. Since then, Macon has been thinking that Pilate might have taken the gold and left the cave. These thoughts of being betrayed by his sister made him develop a keen revenge upon her and an insatiable thirst for money and wealth.

The ghost of Macon's father appearing at intervals is nothing but the

fragmented psychic reflection of the child Macon. The novelist here presents the plight of innumerable African American children who have lost their parents due to white orgies. Their memories become vague and are often haunted by ghost-like apparitions. The reason for breaking their psychic equilibrium is that they become orphans in the very early stage of their life. Macon hasn't had the adequate parenting due to the conditions that prevailed in racial society where killing of African Americans have become a sport. His reaction to the negative experiences in his early years impels him to resolve in acquiring things, which he thinks can overcome the hazardous life in racial situations and being wealthy means getting respect from whites. He needs to fill his emptiness, so he seeks retribution through acquiring wealth, and wants his son to repeat the same thing. Therefore, he advises his son to acquire the materialistic wealth. But here also Macon fails because his son cannot rise up to expectation. So he feels the bitterness of having a son who behaves just contrary to his expectations:

This disgust and uneasiness with which he regarded his son affected everything he did in that city. If he could have felt sad, simply sad, it would have relieved him. Fifteen years of regret at not having a son had become the bitterness of finally having one in the most revolting circumstances (SOS 15-16).

However, the memories of childhood sometimes give Macon great relief. Macon is dissatisfied in bringing up his son in his own line of thought. He gets a speck of relief only when he remembers his days of early life with his sister Pilate. He had hardly any connection with his sister for many years. Nevertheless, one evening he wanders in the darkness and listens to the music coming out from Pilate's house, he is so enthralled that he feels a mysterious kind of happiness returning; all the psychic complexities drain out of him.

Once again he becomes the child of Lincoln's Heaven. The song from the house of his sister softens him and generates a train of nostalgic feelings of bygone days, which relieves him from all the cares and worries of the present situations.

Like Macon, Pilate also enjoys the immediate and palpable contact with Nature when she is very young. Nature gives her everything in her father's farm 'Lincoln Heaven'. She is like an angel free to follow her own likings in that Montour County with the admiration of her father and brother. She relishes her freedom of roaming over her father's farm surrounded by forests listening to the sights and sounds. She is nostalgic about the early years of her childhood. Morrison describes:

Those twelve years in Montour County, where she had been treated gently by a father and a brother, and where she herself was in a position to help farm animals under her care, had taught her a preferable kind of behaviour. Preferable to that of the men who called her mermaid and the women who swept up her foot prints or put mirrors on her door. (SOS 150).

Like Eva in Sula, Morrison brings forth, Pilate, a stout personality who is the semblance of endurance and the paragon of love. But, when looking back one can see that her childhood was highly tragic, and even at her later years her fate is not different. Already without a family behind, she is rendered rootless and homeless like Macon during her childhood. Though she spends her early life swiftly as free as a butterfly in her Lincoln Heaven, the paradisiacal interlude abruptly ends when the white master shot her father dead. They blew him, "five feet up into the air. He is sitting on his fence waiting for 'em, and they stuck up from behind and blew him five feet into

the air”. So when we left Circe’s big house we did not have no place to go, so we just walked around and lived them woods” (SOS 40). Consequently, Pilate becomes a lonely child and lacks adequate parentage. In her wanderings, her Geography teacher tries to molest her, and is put outdoors. Holding the Geography book, she continued to head for Virginia searching for some relatives. So, isolated and sad, this little girl had to suffer untellable miseries in her childhood. Bharati A.Preekh observes, “motherless from birth and bereft of the loving father since Pilate’s agony of an alienated being marks deep furrow on her psyche. One can well imagine Pilate’s isolation [...] (IJAS 23.2, (Summer 93): 24).

Pilate’s subconscious mind is always preoccupied with the memory of her father and the idyllic days of her childhood. This preoccupation is the only source of courage and inspiration in her sole wanderings in the wide world as a helpless child. During this period, her father’s ghost appears off and on and leads her way. More or less she has the memory of her father Jake, and nothing else, to fall back upon. Her brother has left her, no companion, no lovers and nobody either to care or to give her shelter. In fact, Pilate takes after her father other than in material aspects. She is her father’s incarnation who has fought the whites, planted trees, and worked hard to attain a decent status. The memory of her father sublimates into becoming her father himself. Kashinath Ranveer remarks:

She smells ‘like forest’ is a reminder of Jake’s love for peach trees and his ability to make crops increase and multiply. Her wine making and soft-boiled-egg artistry are echoes of her father’s wild-turkey-cooking wizardry. Her deep reverence for human beings, especially for her daughter and granddaughter, recalls her father’s all-night fishing parties with his cronies and

his profound grief when his wife dies (229).

It reminds one that the mysterious filial bond cannot be done away with the racial cruelty. She carries it to the end of her life, in the form of a green sac, full of her father's bone to sustain the memory of her lost childhood. Holding the sac and dangling a snuffbox in the earlobe for an identity, Pilate aimlessly travelled during her childhood. During these wanderings she acquired worldly experiences and finally reaches the height of a spiritual mother.

Pilate's isolation deepens with the mysteriousness of her birth. She is born without a navel after the death of her mother, and has come struggling out of the womb without the help from throbbing muscles or the swift fluid. As a result, her stomach is as smooth and sturdy as her back, at no place interrupted by a navel. It is the absence of the navel that convinces people that she has not come into the world through natural channels. They even think that she is the child of the devil and sometimes consider her as a mermaid. Macon has witnessed the eyes of the midwife, who saw her mother's legs collapse. The midwife shouted when the baby, Pilate who they had believed is dead, inched its way on steadfast out of a still, silent and indifferent cave of flesh. Pilate drags her own chord and her own accompaniments after birth. Then the umbilical chord shrivelled and in its place only a flat belly could be seen. So her birth itself is an event of tragic mystery.

This tragic mystery continues to bother her. Once, a boy who loved her wants to lay with her but he is horrified to see that she has no navel. On another occasion, a woman asks her to lift up her frock and to her surprise she cannot see a corkscrew-like hole on her stomach. The news of her 'navellessness' flashed across the coloured migrant people who upon hearing it, think that she has some mysterious power, so they oust her out from their

dwelling. Secondly, the women generally dislike her because of her trembling breasts. The jealousy of the women over her breasts and the dislike of men for not having a navel are the serious concerns of her childhood. The absence of navel sends several frowning waves in the community but it also suggests her independence and untrammelled spirit not anchored to any social convictions. Through the creation of navellessness, Morrison wants to tell that an African American girl when ejected into this world without a navel horrifies many existing conventions. An African American child thrown to the mercy of the outside world is severe and horrific. Pearl S. Buck remarks: “for the American child, the adjustment from home to outside life is severe. Having provided a deep emotional life and much seclusive protection up to a certain age, the child is ejected into outside world with an abruptness that would horrify many an old culture”. (Pearl S. Buck 41).

While the absence of navel alienates from the mainstream of life, racism attacks and threatens the very life of this girl as she has witnessed her father Jake’s tragedy. Further, her thirst to quench her sexual desire is never satisfied the way she wants it. She exercises her sexual needs without showing her stomach. She scares men and never wants to be married, even the man who causes Reba’s birth either. She vehemently expresses her view and sexual isolation:

It occurred to her that although men fucked armless women, one-legged women, hunchbacks and blind women, drunken women, [...] they were terrified of fucking her—a woman with no navel. They froze at the sight of that belly that looked like a back; became limp even, or cold, if she happened to undress completely and walked straight toward them, showing them, deliberately, a stomach as blind as a knee (SOS 148-149).



Unlike her brother, the experience of childhood makes her view the world in a new direction and it also helps her to become stoic. Her alienation prepares her as self-reliant and she is well aware of her predicament. When she understands her situations and limitations in the world, she throws away all the social conventions and starts a new way of life. She cuts her hair, and then tackles the problem of trying to decide how she wants to live and what is valuable to her. She stares at people with rudeness. Though she suffers acute isolation and alienation, she never wants to isolate others, and familial and communal ties are central to her social thinking. She is always in high spirits when she meets Milkman whom she treats as her own son and she refuses, for example, the difference between a brother and a cousin. She asks Reba “I mean what is the difference in the way you act toward ’em? Don’t you have to act the same way to both?” (SOS 44).

Morrison wishes to imply that the Bible is a wrong book for an African American girl under racial oppressive condition. Pilate’s father names her blindly by thumbing inadvertently through the Bible. Naming the girl after the killer of Christ is strongly discouraged but her father is adamant. He explains that he has foreseen an individual in Pilate whose sensitivity and strength would lead her to tower above others; Pilate fulfils her father’s prophesy—she stands as a tower and a shelter to all who approaches her including the children. She serves as a symbol of loving mother to the children in the novel. While African American mothers despise and ignore their children like Mrs. Breedlove in TBE or Hannah in Sula, she provides a shelter and a source of pleasure for African American children. Milkman exploits this protective cover maximum from her. However, the community around her does not like children visiting her house. Macon warns Milkman several times not to go to her and compares her to a venomous ‘snake’. She simply attracts the attention

of the children without any selfish motive as Macon thinks of her; in fact, she reconstructs the memory of her childhood through the presence of African American children in her “woolly” house. Her womb-like home provides warmth and love to all tiny tots who visit her hut. Milkman and Guitar feel her presence with intense love. She presents the children with soft-boiled eggs and plenty of juice to drink in addition to the melodious music, which rings the ancestral history of African Americans. The chanting “O Sugarman don’t leave me here [...] Buckra’s arms to yoke me... (SOS 49), soothe the weary spirit of children. In spite of the repeated warning from Macon, Milkman goes to her because he receives true love that he does not receive from anywhere.

Towards the end of the novel, she goes back to the cave where once she spent as a helpless child with her brother Macon. By retracing the holistic period of her bygone days, she is once again able to get the remembrances of her beautiful days. Having eked out her own truths about life after experiencing many hardships in her life, Pilate guides Milkman on his path toward self-realisation. Eva unites the estranged Macon and Ruth by giving some medicinal potion. They unite after a long marital separation. It is this trick that Eva played behind the birth of Milkman and his coming into the world. Later she directs Milkman away from his fruitless, dead existence because she has as much to do with his future as she had with the past. It is from her renderings, Milkman comes to understand his ancestral heritage. However, her ardent love towards children ultimately invites her to the final death scene. Milkman accompanies her to the cave where she becomes the victim of the bullet that Guitar fires on her.

Similarly, other tragedies of childhood follow in the novel but in a different way. Ruth Foster Dead, Milkman’s mother, leads an infantile existence in her family who is always cringing for love. In contrast to Pecola

Breedlove, Morrison presents Ruth Foster Dead as a sexually attached girl with her father. This incestuous relationship reminds of Satan's union with his daughter Sin as described in Milton's Paradise Lost. Instead of nurturing his daughter, the educated African American father-figure exploits her innocence, thus strangling the ecstasy and nobility of her childhood. However, a young woman of manners and culture she seemingly enjoys an elegant childhood with the warmth of her father's illicit love. But the sanctuary of his twelve-room citadel keeps her unknown to the blissful world of childhood. She becomes socially and culturally dead as her name suggests. When the doctor has grown tired of his daughter's "steady beam of love" (SOS 23), he gives in marriage to Macon. But she is forced to live in the memory of her father's incestuous relationship because her husband is callous and indifferent to her. Her father himself kept his daughter isolated from the African American community in his perverted rearing and selfishness. Dr. Foster loved his daughter because:

Fond as she was of his only child, useful as she was in his house since his wife had died, lately he had begun to chafe under her devotion. [...]. At sixteen, she still insisted on having him come to her at night, sit on her bed, exchange a few pleasantries, and plant a kiss on her lips. Perhaps it was the loud silence of his dead wife; perhaps it is Ruth's disturbing resemblance to her mother (SOS 23).

The scene that is enacted in the deathbed of Dr. Foster is shocking experience to Macon Dead. He unexpectedly witnesses his wife licking her father's fingers in the bed. This incident is a constant mental commotion to Macon as well as a lasting contempt towards his wife. Since that incident, she has been portrayed not as a loving mother who simply adored her only son, but as an

obscene child, playing dirty games with her father. Ruth Foster Dead admits and explains to her son the tragedy of her childhood while she compares it with her present plight:

I was pressed small. I lived in a great big house that pressed me into a small package. I had no friends; only schoolmates who wanted to touch my dress and my white silk stockings. But I did not think I'd ever needed a friend because I had him [*her father*]. I is small, but he is big. The only person who ever really cared whether I lived or died, but he cared. Lots of people were *interested* in whether I lived or died. He is not a good man, Macon. (SOS 124).

Like Pilate, she does not have the advantage of a mother to nurture the important stages of her girlhood nor does she have the luck to bloom by drinking breast milk. Her mother is long dead and therefore her growth is artificial. Rejected and alienated from her children and husband, and as such her self is broken; she needs an escape for consolation. So she often visits her father's grave to renew the "cared-for-feeling" and wants to revive the memory of her childhood. In a world of chaos, thinking of her joyful days with her father, she remains a child with meaningless existence. This means that the stagnant quality of her false, hollow virginal life continues to be in an infantile existence. As a result, her life affects her children badly as Turner rightly points out, "sexually frustrated Ruth resorts to behaving incestuously with her father and son. Ruth symbolizes the black woman, whose passionless relationship with her husband permanently scars the life of her child" (367).

In the fourth novel, TAR, parenting takes a new dimension, which is different from other novels. Morrison exposes the attitudes of white

fashionable ladies in her outstanding work that they forget the worthiness and holiness of mothering. The novel presents in the parental role—Mr. Valerian Street and his wife Margaret Lenore—both of them are distanced parents of white community. After leaving Philadelphia, the Valerians lead a primitive life of simplicity and keep isolated from the bustling world. It is the beginning of a new life for them, far from the flurry of modern city life because they lead an unpolished, unpolluted, and unsophisticated life. Outwardly, straightforwardness, simplicity, and innocence prevail among the inmates of the house in which the Valerians sojourn. But Valerian is always ignorant, throughout his adult life, about the physical and psychological abuse done on his child. Instead of seeking help from his wife and searching for his son, Valerian retreats to his green house and to his childhood. Margaret Lenore is closeted upstairs. She always talks fondly about her son Michael but he never turns up in the novel because the mother-son relationship described in the novel is pretentious. Her sadistic, masochist and narcissist tendencies give too much pain to her only child and keep him away from the family forever. The narrator in the novel describes about Margaret “would do things—odd things—to get his attention and keep it. Anything to keep his eyes on her. She’d to make up things, threats to herself, attacks, insults—anything to see him flying into a rage and show how willing he was to defend her” [75]. Thus Morrison builds up two parental characters in TAR who make their only child’s presence non-existent.

Aoi Mori comments:

Regardless of the difference of race, the lack of an encouraging and sustaining mother-child relationship universally causes serious damage to the child. Without any expressive form to release his suppressed fear, embarrassment, and shock, and

without the language to repel his mother's abuse, Michael retreats under the sink and hums a wordless song, which is indecipherable to any body (97).

Valerian, the inspiring force behind Jadine's pursuit of power, is named after an emperor and had a candy bar in his ownership. The bar, a pink and white confection, is successful only in black neighbourhood, while white boys thought its name and colour vaguely homosexual. The family provides Valerian with everything, including a good wife. Deciding that he would not have the same obsession with the company that his relatives have, he uses some of its income to purchase *Isle des Chevaliers* as a place of retirement and escape. When his first marriage does not work out, he discovers Margaret, Miss Maine, whom he loves in large part because her complexion reminded him of his candy bar. When Jadine is orphaned, Valerian financed her education and early modelling career as a favour to Sydney and Ondine. He creates, in effect, a perfect patriarchal system, which everyone creates in his own image. Despite flaws in the order, such as Michael's absence and Margaret's mental aberrations, Valerian considers himself a successful deity.

Valerian Street's impotency and uselessness, apparent in his languid and insipid approach to life are underscored by the fact that his sole contribution to the world is candy. He wilfully forgets the importance of parenting and rearing a child. Still as a head of the family and representative of an established family business, he has effectively appropriated land, house, wife, servants, children, and shapes them to fit his particular life-style. He has acquired the best of everything, island property, the Principal Beauty of Maine, and servants—Philadelphia Negroes—the proudest people in the race (TAR 51). Sydney, Ondine, Jadine and Margaret all take pride in the qualities, make them valuable to Valerian, but because they define themselves

almost exclusively in relation to him, they become less important rather than autonomous human beings. As members of the family or society that establishes priorities for human value, they become hopelessly invested in the hierarchy that defines their worth. Here Valerian fails to get an inheritance because his only son absconds and is not in the picture. Margaret is still a teenager when she is swept away by a man who is willing to overlook her lower-class background, her age, and her ignorance simply because she looked “like the candy that had his name. His youth lay in her red-whiteness, a snowy Valentine Valerian” (TAR 45-46) but never cared to inquire into the sustenance of well-knit marital life and the well-being of his child. In spite of all these credentials, Valerian is proved to be great failure in rearing his child, Michael. To some extent, his ‘Lotus Eater’ nature and his oblivion to adequate parenting really made his child’s life horrible.

Valerian could have averted the danger but he remains oblivious to what is happening in the household. Though Valerian is a distanced father, even then he loves his son in his heart of heart, and the filial love fills in his soliloquies and guilty consciousness. Valerian is embarrassed to hear that his child Michael at his tender age has received great affliction from his mother. He imagines Michael crying noiselessly under the sink and singing a song of loneliness because the boy is not allowed to speak or cry. The boy has no vocabulary for what is happening to him; in fact that picture stays with Valerian all through the night with fitful sleep. He can’t make up his mind nor can he shift his gaze when he learns Margaret’s torture of her son, like a laboratory assistant removing the spleen of a cute but comatose mouse. She says that it is funny, she would be happy to see the ‘mark’ of her torture and be satisfied to hear him cry but somehow she does not believe it hurt all that much. The memories of that incident still remain afresh and when Valerian

recollects that incident, an intense urge wells up in his mind. He becomes so passionate that he wants to see his son at once. “Suddenly he knew exactly what to do; go to him. Go to Michael. Find him, touch him, rub him, hold him in his arms” (TAR 234).

Unlike the earlier parental figures and familial set up, the Streets occupy a house of latent frustration, confusion and anger that accompany self-effacement. The occupants of the house are indulged in a cold war situation. Ondine prepares meals exactly her employers do not appreciate. Mealtime becomes Ondine’s time to inflict damage. Margaret remarks to Valerian: They tell *us* what to eat. Who’s working for who?” (TAR 21). Ondine takes this as a matter of prestige because she thinks how valuable she is, as a competent cook to a man and a woman. In her opinion, the white-couple is good-for-nothing even for making a cup of coffee. They would find it very disagreeable to prepare meals for themselves or a cup of coffee for they have proved they could not make it for the last thirty years. Sydney’s oppositional stance is evident in his verbal exchange with Valerian. Valerian sometimes makes him his confidant otherwise Valerian himself would be isolated from his constituency and Sydney takes this as an opportunity to exploit Valerian. Valerian’s begging, “Don’t antagonize an old man reduced to Postum [a medicinal drink]” (19) shows how Valerian is dependent on Sydney, as he knows that he is the only connecting link in his fiefdom. Sydney is well aware that his boss is weak and vulnerable. While Ondine manipulates Valerian’s health and well-being, Sydney informs his ontology, and Jadine completes their control over him by making him feel happy. She functions as the child who makes him reassured in his old age and fills the gap of his own son. Denise Heinze makes the comment:

Her power over Valerian is emotional; if she repudiates him she



disavows his entire way of life. Because of this he needs her to soothe the floor burn of his soul and make him palatable in the eyes of human decency. In addition Jadine is the child placed between the embittered couple and compelled to arbitrate irreconcilable differences (39).

Morrison brings into focus that the memory of childhood is a panacea and a great relief for an old man when he is put in helpless and distressed conditions. For Valerian, the heydays are over; the tension-filled life has been completed; and no longer have the trails of glory followed. The wealth, the servants and a younger wife were no solution for his present plight. All the 'decorations' of his life have no use but the memory of childhood alone soothes his wearied soul, particularly, when crisis mounts on him. It refreshes, breathes vigour and energy into his soul. During those days he used to visit the washerwoman of his house. She would ask him in polite manners what his father is doing that day. On the day of his father's demise, he answers the woman that his father had died that day as though his father would do another thing on other days. Now he understands that "he is dead today." These insignificant and silly thoughts provide a chance to bloom a smile in his broken spirit. The thought of his bygone idyllic days comes back swarming thick and compares the calm serene days of old with the present turbulent period when he eyes on another washerwoman doing the same chore in his house:

Now another washerwoman came. It wasn't quite the same. No octagon soap, no way gleaming washboard, but he liked looking at it. Though his green house window knowing there is a woman in there doing something difficult but useful in peace. A soothing thought to concentrate on while his own house was

prickly with tension and unanswered questions (TAR 142).

The second important member in the Streets world is the angriest, and consequently, the most subversive and destructive mother-figure, Margaret. From the glory of heights of beauty and as a child having a relatively secure life, she is thrown into a world in which her beauty, previously a bonus to the gift of life that kept her in the limelight, is solidified into an object confined in the large house of Valerian. Reduced to an object, Margaret is expected to perform as the perfect lady, a role forced upon her by an impudent and an impatient husband though lately he turns ignorant of her existence in his big house. Margaret finds very difficult to cope up with the burden of perfection to such an extent that even mealtime turns into psychological torture. Since Margaret is uninitiated in the rites of cooking and fine dining, she views cutlery, cuisine, and china as her enemy, which indicates the dissatisfaction of her life at “Isle des Chevaliers”:

She was usually safe with the soup, anything soft or liquid that required a spoon but she was never sure when the confusion would return: when she would scrape her fork tines along the china trying to pick up the painted blossoms at its centre, [...]. Lobster, corn on the cob-all problematic. It came. It went. And when it left sometimes for a year, she couldn't believe how stupid it is (TAR 61).

Thus the most dissatisfied woman in everything proves not only to be a revengeful wife but a bad mother in nurturing her child. It is a reaction against reducing her as a mere object in the household. She finds ways of retribution to inflict pain on her child because of her peevishness, neuroses, and temper tantrums and thus an “angel in the household falls to satanic depths”.

Margaret dissolves her husband's power and in an attempt to punish him, she has defiled her son—defiled the symbol of his manhood and the chord of generational sustenance by sticking pins at his behind. Ondine, the maid, flies into fury when she inflicts such excruciating pains upon her son: “She did not stick pins in her baby. She stuck em in his baby. Her baby she loved” (TAR 281). When Jadine cannot understand the implication, Ondine, with a matured vision of parenting supplies the answer: “He kept her stupid; kept her idle. That always spells danger.” (TAR 281). Ondine is perfectly right because Valerian has made her a puppet in his big house with his luxury. He did not convince Margaret the importance of mothering in all their wedded life. Morrison reminds us that even if the young ones perish, the older ones should not be oblivious of their duties, “no man should live without absorbing the sins of his kind, the foul air of his innocence, even if it did wilt rows of angel trumpets and cause them to fall from their vines” (TAR 245).

The portrayals of Ondine Childs and Sydney Childs, the faithful servants of the Valerians, are the best example of African American parenting and servitude. Though they are a childless couple they take great care in nurturing and nursing the children, Michael and Jadine. After leaving Philadelphia, they lead a respectable life in the Streets' house looking after the affairs of Valerian and Margaret by cooking and doing laundry works and rearing their children. In fact, Ondine wants Jadine to have a bright future because they themselves had undergone the experience of what it meant to be a “nigger life”. She earnestly believes the same life experience should not befall on her niece Jadine. She tells Sydney, “I stand on my feet thirty years so she wouldn't have to. And did without so she wouldn't have to” (TAR 285). Jadine should not stand like her in a kitchen doing all chores to white masters without any rest or any normal life. Ondine treats Jadine as her own

child, the daughter she never had. She says to Sydney, “Then I take another one in my heart, your brother’s baby girl. Another one not from my womb [...] (TAR 285). Like hundreds of black mothers who depend on their female children for emotional support in the hour of their need, Ondine also looks forward to getting nurturance and emotional support from Jadine. Ondine has great belief and faith in her that she would rescue the black servants from their crisis. When Son alights on the island and upsets the entire household with his menacing appearance, Ondine feels confident and secure because of Jadine’s presence. She reassures Sydney telling him not to worry because Jadine can tackle the problem and protect them from any outside threats.

But Ondine’s expectations from her niece, for bringing up and nursing her all these years, have been betrayed when she realises that she had brought her up in the wrong way. She firmly believes that sending Jadine to college would cultivate the best and desirable thing in her child and finally she would have an educated and highly civilised daughter from her community. But Jadine rejects her own culture as well as repudiates of being daughter to African American couple. On the point of departure to Paris, Jadine tells Ondine to look for other places for doing kitchen work, forgetting the long past obligation to her foster-parents and the house she is brought up. Ondine’s failure is that she forgot to teach the child, Jadine, how to be a good daughter, obey the social norms, and be a “woman that cares about where she comes from and takes care of them that took care of her (TAR 285). Still she reminds Jadine the law of good parenting:

Jadine, a girl has got to be a daughter first. She have to learn that. And if she never learns how to be a daughter, she can never learn how to be a good woman. I mean a real woman: a woman good enough for a child; [...]. You don’t need your own natural

mother to be a daughter. All you need is to feel a certain way, a certain careful way about people older than you are (TAR 283).

Jadine rejects Ondine's advice, telling that she is only the "servant Ondine", not her *mother*. She warns them that they should not demand or expect her nursing them in their old age. They should not ask her to pay for them back for putting her up with. Jadine's startling comment and attitude pains Ondine deeply and she thinks that "her niece, her baby, her crown had put her in the same category as that thing she ran off with" (TAR 284). Sydney comforts her and tells her the way of the world, "Old black people must be a worrisome thing to the young ones these days" (TAR 284).

The reward for looking after a white child is no less different from rearing up her husband's baby-brother-girl, Jadine, but with a difference. She gets only meanness, abuses and disrespect from Michael's mother for looking after her son. Ondine has given nurturance and nursing to Michael, the Valerian's boy as to her own child, and has bestowed him good care and love that his parents failed to supply. She loves Michael so much so that she is unable to bear witness to the malice done to the little boy. Her love for the child forces Ondine to become violent and get the courage to slap Margaret on Christmas Eve. She accuses Margaret of trying to kill Michael by adulterating the apple pie. Margaret tries it several times to make him drink the poisonous juice. Though everybody is waits for Michael's return on that eve, he does not turn up because of his mother's insufferable torture. Once he is a sweet boy, Ondine asserts, but now he is turned out to be a different boy after he went to study in a far-off place. She adds that it is his mother who spoils the child beyond limits by exercising her masochist and sadistic tendencies. Margaret often pierces the boy's tender buttock with a pin and takes delight in making him cry. Little Michael's only relief is to sit under the sink and weep for

hours. On the Eve of Christmas, after slapping her, Ondine is seen in a fitful rage. She accuses Margaret of not belonging to the class of real mothers but compares her to Scythians and Midas who devour their children. She exposes Margaret's true colour:

You white freak! You baby killer! I saw you! I saw you! You think I don't know what that apple pie shit is for. [...]. You cut him up; you cut your baby up, made him bleed for you. For fun you did it. Made him scream [...] she stuck pins in his behind. Burned him with cigarettes (TAR 209).

Ondine explains to Valerian that this heinous act on the part of Margaret occurred when Michael was a very "wee-wee" little boy. She goes on, accompanied by sobbing, that she had to hold him and console him because he was so scared that he wanted to stop so bad this affliction by his mother. Every time Margaret did, she would stop for a while, but would resume the same thing again and again. Then Ondine would see him curled on his side, staring off this frightening scene. He could not cry because it hurt beyond his endurance. On the Christmas day, when Ondine is insulted and offended, she exposes Margaret that she is a fraud who inflicted excruciating pain on her son and feigns waiting him to celebrate the Christmas. Ondine describes that heinous act, "And she wants him home...for Christmas and apple pie. A little boy who she hurt so much he can't even cry" (TAR 210). But later both Margaret and Ondine come to terms and recognise that they are 'childless' mothers though one raises an orphan to be rejected and the other never gets her son home because he has been cruelly tortured.

By casting Sethe and Baby Suggs in BVD in the role of nurturers of children, Morrison returns to the familiar image of 'Great Mothers' as

embodiment of love and affection towards their children. For achieving salvation and wholeness in their life, they even sacrifice their life at the hands of white perpetrators and predators. Sethe surrenders the life of her child in order to escape the brutality of white masters because she herself had experienced untellable miseries in her past. She decides that the same would not be repeated on her girl when she grows up. Like Eva and Pilate, she is interested in protecting her family, providing sustenance and life. She is not only depicted in the role of a mother but also seen as a nurse, symbolised by her full breast and uses it for nursing her babies even while she is pregnant. She says, “I had milk, I is pregnant with Denver but I had milk for my baby [Beloved] girl (BVD 16) and again she “had milk for all” (BVD 100). When the vital food she kept for her daughters has been robbed by the white boys, she determines not to have repeated the same experience on her babies when they grow up, not to put their motherhood on dock. These nursing figures are frequent in Morrison’s novels but differently, for instance, Ruth Foster Dead is seen polluting the primary role by nursing Milkman beyond infancy, suggesting that it gives her sexual gratification. Therese serves as a wet nurse during slavery. She reverts instinctively to it in her desire to take care of Son in TAR. But Sethe here shows her determination to guard her breast milk from the white boys and is ready to fight for the cause even if it meant her death.

In BVD, the symbiotic relationship between Sethe and Beloved provides a deeper psychological network—the nature of mother-child bond, the social and emotional relationship. Morrison seems to suggest that such a bond is essential for the psychological development of both mother and infant. At the same time, she explores this relationship within the context of historical period, social arrangement, slavery and Sethe’s memory. The

psychological damage done on the mother-child relationship under slavery is clearly amplified by projecting Sethe's historical past. When she cut the throat of her baby and thereby stopped this crucial bond, she was in her teens. She has been robbed of the same crucial bond with her own mother. Sethe describes how this vital relation is cut by digging out her pathetic tale of childhood in broken memories.

Hundreds of African American women slaves were caught from the plantations of Africa and shipped to American shores. The crew of the ship unleashed inhuman cruelties on the slaves; they were starved, beaten to death and sexually assaulted. Their babies were thrown to the depth of waters. Nan, a slave woman and a friend of Sethe's mother, relates the harrowing experience of Sethe's escape from being thrown her into the deep sea. Sethe is too young to remember anything of her long past days. Nan is the one she knows best, who is around all day nursing babies, cooking for the slaves. Nan takes little Sethe away while she is searching for her mother from among the pile of dead bodies of African American women who are killed or hanged. Nan and her mother are among them. They are together from the sea. Both are taken up many times by the crew. But Sethe is miraculously rescued from being thrown into the sea. Her mother feared the same bestial cruelties would be done on her children. Nan's stories are forgotten by Sethe because she does not want to remember them. She forgets the language her mother spoke, the language of motherly love, which will never come back. But the message of it—that is and had been there all along. Nan tells Sethe that she too might have been thrown to the waters but for keeping the black man's name:

She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names, she threw them. You she gave the



name of the blackman. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around. Never, never. Telling you, I am telling you, small girl, Sethe (BVD 62).

When Sethe is repeatedly questioned together by her children, about her childhood, she reveals the story with great mental agitation that she has had vague memories about her. She had seen her only a few times working out in the fields and once during work at Indigo. By the time she woke up in the morning, her mother was in the queue of workers. If the moon was bright she worked far into the night by the moonlight. On Sundays she slept like a stick because of fatigue and a whole week's labour. Sethe remembers that she might have been nursed by her mother for two or three weeks—that was the way other slaves did. Then her mother went back but Sethe had to be fed from another whose job was to give breast milk to those starving babies. She knew that her mother did not sleep in the same cabin most nights but slept too far from the place of queue of workers. During the interval, her mother would come back and pick her up, carry her behind the smoke houses and lift her breast. Sethe, while feeding, noticed right on her mother's rib was a circle and a cross-burnt right in the skin. Sensing that the death was impending, her mother once pointed to her breast and said to Sethe, ““this is your ma'am. This, and she pointed, 'I am the only one got this mark now. The rest dead. If something happens to me and you can't tell me by my face, you can know me by this mark' ” (BVD 60-61). Sethe had no information about her mother afterwards. Later when her mother was hanged along with other African American women, Sethe searched her mother among the faceless and nameless dead bodies of innumerable African American mothers by the mark her mother had pointed out.

Having herself been robbed off this crucial bond with her own mother,

Sethe is familiar with the psychological devastation her baby girls would be subjected to without milk. Recalling her own childhood, Sethe becomes sad that she had been given milk only for two or three weeks before she was nursed by a surrogate mother whose “job it is” ( BVD 60) .She has lost access to what language her mama spoke. Thus the crucial bond of maternal perch for Seth lasted only for a few days, which forces her to loose the basic emotional self-image. Sethe feels lack of confidence or basic trust to hold the life of her baby girl because she is devoid of breast milk during her infantile days. Nancy Chodorov describes the effect of the absence of parental care quoting Benedek and Eric H. Erikson:

The quality of care [offered by the mother] also conditions the growth of the self and the infant’s basic emotional self image... the absence of overwhelming anxiety and the presence of community—of holding, feeding, and a relatively consistent pattern of interaction—enable the infant to develop what Benedek calls “confidence” and Eric Erikson “basic trust”, constituting, reflexively, a beginning of self or identity (102).

Morrison caricatures in BVD, the archetypal “terrible mother” along with “great mother” role, whose primary responsibility is caring of her children by becoming a nurturing and nursing figure, like the two sides of the same coin. She has already shown this duality in Eva who kills her son Plum in order to save the life of the child or provides other children new life. Sethe’s original intention is to kill all four of her children, not just one. Upon seeing the slave catcher and school teacher’s hat, Sethe instinctively knew that killing her children is the best alternative than allowing them to suffer the inscrutable in slavery. Morrison describes the act:

Inside, the two boys bled in the saw dust and dirt at the feet of a nigger woman holding a blood-soaked child to her chest with one hand and an infant by the heels in the other. She did not look at them; she simply swung the baby toward the wall planks, missed and tried to connect a second time, when out of nowhere—in the ticking time men spent staring at what there is to stare at—the old nigger boy, still mewling ran through the door behind them and snatched the baby from the arch of its mother's swing (BVD 149).

This act springs from out of her extreme love towards her most beloved child and when it is over, she goes to bury the hacked one. In the churchyard another form of brutality is waiting for her. She has to pay a heavy price for engraving seven-letter word “Beloved” on the headstone of the grave of her dead baby. The engraver hassles her to have sex with her for ten minutes for doing the job. She remembers that nasty scene: “The welcoming cool of unchiseled head stones: the one she selected to lean against on tiptoe, her knees wide open as any grave. Pink as a fingernail it is, and sprinkled with glittering chips. Ten minutes, he said” (BVD 4-5). She thinks its consequences too that, “it would be enough, rutting among the headstones with the engraver [...]. Enough to answer one more preacher, one more abolitionist and a town full of disgust” (5). After the burial, she is very much penitent. She shudders with the killing but her love towards the dead daughter is found overflowing in her soliloquy: “When I put that headstone up I wanted to lay in there with you, put your head on my shoulder and keep you warm, and I would have if Buglar and Howard and Denver did not need me” (BVD 204).

Morrison points out those innumerable slave women under slavery

have undergone same conviction that death is the only panacea for the deliverance of their generation. Sethe thinks that death will ultimately relieve them from all the worldly problems or otherwise they will become slaves again. She cannot tell all that history of torture in the plantation at Kentucky except the brief interlude under Garners supervision, then the appearance of the school teacher with his weapons of destruction, the cruel beatings, the sucking of her breast by the white boys, the torture, and the disappearance of her husband Halle, the final escape and the recapture. So her determination not to send back her children to the same gruelling experience culminated in killing one of them. She decides firmly that she will not allow her children to “go back to where it is, and I couldn’t let her [Beloved] nor any of em live under school teacher. That is out” (BVD 163). Like the behaviour of nesting birds, Sethe’s action is sudden. She can think only of protecting and getting her babies to safety: “And if she thought anything, it was No. No. Nono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. Over there. Outside this place, where they would be safe (BVD 163).

Morrison’s reference to the veil reminds the significant and central soubriquet of W.E.B Du Boise’s The Souls of Black Folk, especially, his use of it in “On the Passing of the first Born”. Saddened by the death of his first-born child, Du Bois celebrates the victory over the death of his infant in the “Land of the Color Line,” from where “the shadow of the Veil” comes—segregation, which the infant had escaped through death. Similarly, Sethe also celebrates the death by delivering her child from the cruelties of slavery. Sethe and Eva show by murdering the children that killing of innocence is not to be perceived as a senseless crime but relieving them from the bondage of painful

life. They raise these children to the rank of Shakespearian heroes who escape after purging of their lives in the final scenes. Hence the significance of Sethe's action runs deeper than it appears on the surface, as the mothers have to nip the flowers of human race in the bud itself. On the one hand, Sethe's intention is to save the children from the psychological scar of childhood, like the one she has borne from her mother's action. Morrison shows that what is impinged in childhood lay waiting in the later years in the subconscious mind. Sethe only applies it, when it comes to a necessity. She wishes to get out of her children from happening anything similar to her own separation from her mother. Her experience in her childhood leaves indelible ink deeper than the mark on her mother's ribs beneath the breast. The following passage reverberates the infamous day of Seth's life.

I wouldn't draw breath without my children... My plan was to take us all to the other side where my own ma'am is... You [Beloved] come right on back like a good girl, like a daughter, which is what I wanted to be and would have been if my ma'am had been able to get out of the rice long enough before they hanged her and let me be one... I wonder what they was doing when they was caught. Running, you think? No, Not that. Because she was my ma'am and nobody's ma'am would run off and leave her daughter would she? (BVD 203).

On the other hand, Sethe proves that she is a mother who would do anything to ensure the safety and welfare of her children, even if it means prostitution by herself like "the Saturday girls" who line up on the day of wage distribution. Sethe also comes very close on it when she is just out of the jail. At the same time she sees her children as her property; each one is a "life she made"; each had all the parts of her" (BVD 163). For Sethe, the

dilemma is embodied in the very question of motherhood, which requires not only that one be, “good enough, alert enough, strong enough, but also that one “stay alive just that much longer” (BVD 132). She concludes that, “mother love was a killer” (BVD 32) and for Sethe, mother love is literally and figuratively a devastating effect. It is because of this extreme love she kills her most beloved daughter. This dilemma emerges from the diametrically opposing views of the relationship that the system of slavery demands and fosters the separation of families, and a sense of caring and protecting the children. In such a system Morrison wants to make it clear that an ideal care of children is not smooth as is shown from the example of the absence of care Sethe received from her childhood. Concerned with its perpetuation, slavery stands in contradiction of Sethe’s ideal care to the protection of her children. Sethe has inherited this from her African-born mother who has resisted the cruelties of slavery by throwing away her children into the bottomless sea from the “death ship”. Repeated rapes and persecutions by the traders and slave owners have degenerated and dehumanised her mother, and Sethe has understood it from Nan, her foster-mother that the only way to resist slavery is to sacrifice her children and herself.

The striking parallels in the abuse and hardship during the childhood of Sethe and Amy Denver, a white fugitive girl, are depicted in the novel. Disappointed in her search, Amy meets Sethe on the running for an escape and she asks her, “You got anything on you, gal, pass for food? I like to die I’m so hungry” (BVD 32). This physical hunger they share, parallels not only in abuse and the hardships endured in fleeing but their other needs as well—specifically, the hunger of their love-starved hearts and a need, not only to be loved but to love others, because it is through giving that one receives the greatest gifts. Amy then reveals how her mother consigns herself to work in

order to pay her passage, which provides further evidence of parallel experience with the allusion to “Middle Passage” of Sethe’s mother. Amy adds, “but then she had me and since she died right after, well, they said I had to work for em to pay it off” (BVD 33), much the way a slave’s children are born into bondage and become the master’s property. It appears obvious that like Sethe, who does not know her father and who lost her mother at a young age, Amy’s familial situation proves strikingly analogous, as noted by Mbalia: “The parallels between [Amy Denver’s] experiences and those of the African [Sethe’s mother] are similar. Her mother is dead and her father, unknown—perhaps the slave master. She shared the same work experience and punishment as those Africans” (95). Indeed, they are both orphaned in their childhood. Ironically, however, it is Sethe who has a mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, waiting for her. She undertakes her first three children: two boys, Howard and Buglar, and Beloved (“crawling already? baby”) Sethe eventually murders. In contrast, Amy, is utterly alone in the world, has no one at her side and no family. As slavery denies families their traditional bonds, this illustrates yet another layer of abuse leveled on its victims. Nicole M. Coonradt observes, “—the dissolution of the nuclear family—certainly one of the central problems in Morrison’s text that again underscores both loss and the need for love to heal” (173). These two young, orphaned women are also close in age, but unlike Amy, Sethe—married at the age of fourteen when she is but a child—has three children and is about to give birth to the fourth. Emphatically, Amy tells Sethe, “I been bleeding for four years but I ain’t having nobody’s baby. Won’t catch me sweating milk” (BVD 83). “Sweating” implies labour, and because of their youthfulness, this emphasizes yet another loss—that of childhood and all its attendant innocence—since both Amy and Sethe know well the bondage from birth.

Unlike Morrison's 'mothers,' Baby Suggs in BVD stands for the welfare of her people. Nevertheless, at 124, Sethe finds a sanctuary established by Baby Suggs, who after sixty years of enslaved life has found her freedom by selling her son, Halle, Sethe's husband. Although her life at Sweet Home has been typical because "nobody knocked her down" (BVD 139), she thinks freedom has lost its meaning at the old age with her legs limping. She even questions the need of it. Once she thought while upon crossing the Ohio River, "that there was nothing like freedom in the world" (BVD 141) but in old age she wonders why her son bothers to buy her freedom and asks, "what can a crippled old woman do with freedom?". But later when she walks through Cincinnati, as a free woman, she cannot believe the enormity of suffering her son undergoes under the slavery without having any freedom, "Halle, who had never drawn one free breath, knew that there was nothing like it in the world" (BVD 141). Most important is that Baby Sugg's freed-days allow her to discover her own heart beat and to occupy her time at 124, "giving advice; passing messages, healing the sick, hiding fugitives, loving, cooking, cooking, loving, preaching, singing, dancing and loving everybody like it was her job and hers alone" (BVD 137). When Sethe appears for the first time at 124, with slavery "busted her legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb and tongue" (BVD 85), she feels "all mashed up and slit open" (BVD 135), but Baby Suggs succeeds in wiping out her sorrows. She heals Sethe from all mental worries. She "bathed her in sections, wrapped her womb, combed her hair, oiled her nipples, stitched her clothes, cleaned her feet, and greased her back" (BVD 98), filling the gap left by her own African mother. An "uncalled, unrobed, and unanointed preacher" (BVD 87) and healer, Baby Suggs offers her great big heart not only to Sethe but also to everyone who comes to her for succour. Thus she proves a benevolent and kind-hearted mother to the children of African Americans.



In this respect she stands unique from the other characters, as she heals the psychic wounds of children—the African Americans. She constantly gives courage and inspiration to all to withstand the racial ostracism and assaults, for she believes that they are her ‘unborn children’. She leads Sethe to the clearing to soothe out what is between Sethe and the community, for she has done an unpardonable crime, infanticide. For sometime, no one peeps into Sethe’s house because it is a haunted house by the spite of the dead child. In this crucial isolation, Baby Suggs consoles Sethe that almost all the African Americans suffer the same loss. She redresses Sethe’s grievance over the issue why people deject them: “Not a house in the country ain’t packed to its rafters with some dead Negro’s grief. We lucky this ghost is a baby [...]. You lucky. You got three left. Three pulling at your skirts and just one raising hell from the other side. Be thankful, why don’t you?” (BVD 5).

In order to serve a catharsis effect and to purge off Sethe’s pent up feelings Baby Suggs alone leads her to the ritual grounds and conducts the rite of cleansing. Robert Stepto explains that the ritual ground offers the exhilarating prospect of community, protection, progress, learning and religion. This holy mother commands the woman at the ritual ground to “Cry... For the living and the dead. Just cry” (BVD 88), because crying out one’s suppressed feelings relieves them. At the heights of this rejuvenating ritual, the women stop crying and dancing, but her words tower above them. Her voice is holy and sacramental for she tells them that the only grace the slaves can have is the grace they can imagine. Above all, she appeals to them to realize and accept the value of self-love as the true vehicle of rebirth; and then she will holler to them: “in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard... More than lungs that have yet to draw free air. More than your life-holding womb

and you life- living parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize” (BVD 88-89). Specifically for Sethe, and for many, her voices are reassuring and encouraging that reprove them to give up their burden. She repeatedly asks Sethe to lay the grief down, “Lay ’em down, Sethe. Sword and shield. Down. Both of ’em down. Down by the riverside. Sword and shield. Don’t study war no more. Lay all that mess down” (BVD 86).

Baby Suggs is one of the most tragic mothers who keep the pain in her hurt-chest for the loss of her children. She says that she has eight children in six fathers but all of them either have run off, or hanged, or are rented out. Her two girls are sold and gone. The third is a boy but he is also sold and all others are taken to slavery except Halle. He is pawned for getting freedom to Baby Suggs from the Garners. She tries to remember their features. She has barely glanced at the last of her children when he is born because it is not worth the trouble to try to learn features at that time. The narrator tells that, “Seven times she had done that: held a little foot; examined the fat fingers with her own-fingers she never saw become the male or female hand a mother would recognize anywhere” (BVD 139). Her heart beats with sorrow when she fondly remembers all of them for she cannot even make up what their permanent features looked like. Slavery has debased and wreaked so much havoc upon these children. All those seven children are gone and dead. When she comes to know the youngest son, Halle, who gained freedom for her, is too dead, she breaks into tears and a cluster of associations about her children fan into her memory:

She did not know to this day what their permanent teeth looked like, or how they held their heads when they walked. Did Patty lose her lisp? What color did Famous’s skin finally take? Was that a cleft in Johnny’s chin or just a dimple that would

disappear soon's his jawbone changed? Four girls, and the last time she saw them there was no hair under their arms. Does Ardelia still love the burned bottom of bread? (BVD 139).

Baby Suggs finally abandons all hope of life and resigns herself to death, contemplating colours as she does, after the ghost-child's visitations in the house become abusive. Morrison by alluding to the colour seems to say that leaving behind the painful and colourless life of slavery, her life after death might be colourful. "The heart that pumped out love, the mouth that spoke the Word" now retraces her earthly journey to take a rebirth. She who has consoled many, healed the wounds of many, finally cannot condemn Seth or approve her rough choice. She becomes one of the paragons of endurance and love, who supported nurturance of millions of hapless African American children under the cruel system of slavery. Towards the end, Baby Suggs, the all-embracing grandmother of black community who has preached love and made them raise their hands in protest against racial tyranny is exhausted and retires to her own fate. She is worn out and oblivious to everything but colour. She barely notices the absence of the boys, Buglar and Howard, because the spite of the Beloved's ghost is beyond their endurance. She dies like run-down battery a few months after they leave. Stamp Paid, one of the slaves of Sweet Home sums up her harrowing and heart-rending stories of slavery who had become a fishbone after serving as a slave for sixty years.

After sixty years of losing children to the people who chewed her life and spit it out like a fish bone; after five years of freedom given to her by her lost child who brought her freedom with his, exchanged it, so to speak, so she could have one whether he did or not- to loose him too; to acquire a daughter and grandchildren and see that daughter slay the children (BVD

177).

Morrison's Paradise deals with the stories of the survivors of childhood sexual trauma. In the early 1980s Americans were shocked to learn that incest and child sexual abuse, formerly believed rare, were widespread. Beryl Satter reports, "mandatory reporting laws were passed. Statistics skyrocketed, with the percentage of American women who were "survivors of childhood sexual trauma" estimated to be between 10 and over 50 percent (426). In 1982 the media reported horrifying allegations by children of a sadistic and possibly satanic child sex ring across the nation. Therapists discovered new techniques to encourage children to talk about their sexual victimization. With the help of empathetic therapists, women too began to remember or "recover" long-forgotten memories of their childhood sexual victimization. The media described the horrors these women had endured as children and the drama of their recovered memories. Celebrities spoke of their own incest experiences. Books about incest and sadistic child abuse flooded the market. Under this backdrop Paradise appears with the stories of childhood sexual abuse undergone by African American women who find asylum in a Convent but are questioned by the locals on the ground of moral issues.

Paradise focuses on the need of parental obligations on the children of African American community and exposes the devious ways of African American mothers. They are supposed to be the protectors of their progenies—their own flesh and blood, the origin of nurturing, and a treasure house of love, and the most vital connecting link between the child and the world. But in the novel, the umbilicus between the mother and the child appears to be cut and proves mothers to be the destroyers of childhood. Mavis, for example, a mother of three children, shows an eagerness to escape from them. She is in a perpetual fear that all the children would kill her at the instigation of her

husband. So, she sets out on a mint green Cadillac, and drives away from her children after allowing two of them to die in a car parked in front of a store. As she gets away from them, she becomes more and more happy, “The happier she became running away from her children (Paradise 33).

When the media comes to interview her, she does not show any signs of grief but coolly answers their questions. They ask her how the awful tragedy takes place—the babies suffocate to death: “Your babies suffocated, Mrs. Albright. In a hot car with the windows closed. No air. It’s hard to see that happening in five minutes” (Paradise 23). Mavis attaches nothing important to this event, only the irritations of slipping a bra’s strap, loose shoe laces, the sticky package of a hotdog (a dairy product), the slippages and leakages that may distract her from the enormity of unruly violence in her life. With her mind elsewhere, thinking of her husband’s demands about dinner, she fails to notice and then refuses to know that her babies are dead. Thus in the Freudian sense she is a bad mother, an irresponsible mother, observes Patricia McKee in “Geographies of Paradise”:

According to the reporter’s social and psychological mapping, Mavis is placed outside the bounds of responsible citizenship. Like a Freudian interpreter, the reporter chases meanings, but she makes no effort to discover the void in which Mavis exists. Instead, she locates Mavis as a familiar fugitive: the bad mother (215).

But back in the Convent, when the women enter into Mavis’ past, she becomes penitent, goes back to the long lost happiness of the presence of her children, the narrator says, “She still heard Merle and Pearl [her dead children], felt their flutter in every room of the Convent. Perhaps she ought to

admit, confess, to Connie that adding the night visits to laughing children and a “mother” who loved her shaped up like a happy family” (Paradise 171).

Paradise again shows how the strict and conservative ways of parents mar the growth of children and make their life tragic one. Pat Best, mother of Billie Delia and a High School teacher who is interested in writing the history of her family tree, is conservative and conforms to the strict blood rule of Ruby’s founding fathers. As a child born out of wedlock, she feels inferiority in the community, and therefore, she works hard to attain a sense of dignity to overcome her complex. But her light-skinned daughter, Billie Delia, she thinks, behaves against the set norms of the community and therefore she considers a liability to her. She can no longer separate “what she had seen from what she feared to see” about the behaviour of daughter. She finds herself longing to smash “the fast girl that lived in the minds of 8-Rocks” (Paradise 204). As a history teacher, she writes files after files of the history of the founding fathers and families, and when she comes to depict her own family, she bites her teeth for she has to write the history of her daughter. Pat is embarrassed to see her daughter’s deportment in the community, which is against her convictions. She cannot put up with the ways of her daughter: “She won’t listen to me [...]. She is lying and I would rather be bit by the serpent himself than have a lying child (Paradise 202), which echoes King Lear’s exhortations of his daughters’ betrayal.

Pat is so shocked and enraged when Billie Delia tells lies about the affair with Poole Boys that she tries to kill her daughter by hurling an electric iron. She never expects such behaviour from her daughter because as a teacher and a strict moralist, she has tried to discipline her daughter. The narrator describes this Ruby’s strict moralist, “She, the gentlest of souls, missed killing her own daughter by inches. She who loves children and

protects them not only from each other but from too stern parents lunges after her own daughter” (Paradise 203). Pat never realises that her daughter is approaching a crucial stage. Neither does she look into her inner recess, nor does she raise a finger against branding her daughter as a tramp by the community. She has already placed her daughter outside her domain, but participates in the community’s gendered sacrifice of her racially unacceptable daughter. She carries the blame on the negative effects of Ruby’s repressed order of racial purity, which is reflected in her violent altercation with her racially impure daughter.

In contrast to Pat Best, Morrison introduces Sweetie Flood in Paradise, another mother who develops ‘heat oppressed’ brain, spends sleepless nights watching her babies, because she thinks that her children will be taken away by the men of Ruby. She is frightened of them because of their strict adherence to the blood rule. The men of Ruby viewed “unadulterated and unadulteried 8-Rock blood held its magic as long it resided in Ruby. That was their recipe for immortality (Paradise 217); they contemplate that the Convent women represent all that threatens to undermine their “family values” though occasionally they sneak into their Convent for sexual gratification. But, when the question of the purity of the blood arises, they change colours. They are more concerned about the purity than the protection of their children. The light-skinned as well as the purity of blood prejudices of the men of Ruby are the reason behind Sweetie Fleetwood’s break down. She has been waiting upon her children relentlessly even while she is asleep because they do not belong to the 8-R. So she spawns by keeping vigilance for six years over her ‘defective babies’, who threaten the purity of the 8-Rock line. It is getting harder and harder to watch and sleep at the same time; she cannot go to sleep and if she could, she feels the safety of her children is

in danger. So, thinking overtime and avoiding sleep for the last six years make her out of mind. This derangement forces her to change her ways and to step into the street she has not entered in six years. Everybody is surprised when they see her on bare foot in the cold for a long time, without bothering the weather, and even an offer from a truck driver she has to refuse. This symptom of mental break down has been with Sweetie Flood since her childhood. When she was very young, and when she can not find her sister, she had spent four nights and five days knocking on every door in her building looking for her sister Jean, and finally she was satisfied with a piece of paper in which her name was written with lipstick by Jean. However, she continued her walking and thinking that an uninvited companion “Sin” was following her. When she reached the Convent she was completely out of her mind. In her hallucinations, she hears a child cry, a cry that gives her exultation, which leads to hysteria:

Somewhere in the house the child continued to cry, filling Sweetie with rapture-she had never heard that sound from her own. Never heard that clear yearning call, sustained, rhythmic. It was like an anthem, a lullaby, or the bracing chords of the decalogue. All her children were silent (Paradise 129-130).

Paradise, explains the traffic of these mothers often revolves round men’s attempts to maintain a sense of racial purity. The men of Ruby are “united through their rejection by whites and by light-skinned blacks” (Paradise 196), and would not let go any tampering in their blood rule. They do their best to vilify and rout out any mother who shows signs of “racial tampering”, who produce a “visible glitch” in the 8-Rock blood line. Devine, Pallas’ mother, known as Dee Dee is one of them. She is a painter who has deserted her lawyer-husband long back and is an “irresponsible, amoral; a slut



if the truth be told” (Paradise 254), does not care her daughter for maintaining the 8-Rock blood rule. Mrs. Eddie Turtle, another example of a mother-figure, does not budge from the strict ways of the blood rule. When Seneca asks her to cash her savings-bond to pay for a lawyer for her son’s release, Mrs Turtle disparages her own son, Eddie, as manipulative and reprehensible. But Mrs. Turtle’s intense grief over her son’s imprisonment and her respect for blood rule contradict each other. As soon as Seneca leaves, Eddie’s mother lets out a “flat-out helpless mother cry—a sound like no other in the world”. Mrs. Turtle had let go her reason, her personality and shrieked the entire world like the “feathered, finned, and hooped whose flesh she never ate—the way a gull, a cow-whale, a mother-wolf might if her young had been snatched away. Her hands had been in her hair, her mouth wide open in a drenched face” (Paradise 134). With the natural images of a gull, a cow-whale, and a mother wolf—all undomesticated animals known for fiercely protecting their offspring, at the same time remaining loyal to their clans, Morrison depicts the African American mothers in different perspectives either the saviours of children or: “...the single, welfare-dependant, African mothers as hyper sexualised agent[s] of destruction, the creator[s] of the pathological black, urban, poor family from which all ills flow” (Lubiano 339).

Jazz and Paradise provide detailed narratives of "unmothered children" whereas the earlier novels consider the disconnections in the mother line and how one can be returned to it. In Morrison’s eighth novel, Love (2003), there is a striking absence of mothering and mothers. Arguing that most early reviews misread Morrison's deliberate "silences and absences" concerning mother love, O'Reilly sees in the novel "the truth and significance of Morrison's maternal theory" (176). With Love, Morrison reflects upon the damage that love can do—particularly on forsaken, misused, ransomed, and

distorted mother love. For however, L, the narrator of Love, knows that those who are not destroyed or damaged by the destruction of the mother line "can survive bad love as an adult" (Love 180). Perhaps, L is like Claudia in TBE, a child who does receive nurturance and is therefore able to bear witness to the "hows," if not the "whys," of other girls' disasters. In one of the interviews Morrison speaks about black parenting:

They are really moving! [...], going from town to town or place to place or looking out and over and beyond and changing and so on—that, it seems to me, are one of the monumental themes in black literature about men. That's what they do. It is the Ulysses theme, the leaving home. And then there's no one place that one settles [...]. Although in sociological terms that is described as a major failing of black men—they do not stay home and take care of their children, they are not there—that has always been to me. One of the most attractive features about black male life [...] the fact that they would split in a minute just delights me. ("Intimate Things" 26)

In short, Morrison writes primarily about the need for family and community to nurture and sustain childhood. But in effect they fail to provide nurturing and nurturance; the most essential factor in the years of growing up. Morrison, by presenting the "distant mothers and incomprehensible fathers" (Sula 52), shows that parents willingly or by the thrust of circumstances peel away the bliss of childhood. Cholly and Pauline Breedlove never breed "love" but even break the self of their daughter and allow their son to flee as they often indulge in family violence. Cholly helps his daughter's mental make-up to disorganise by sexually assaulting her and finally for her psychological break down while Pauline rejects her based on the skin colour.

Geraldine's treatment gives Pecola the pain in the form of rejection, denial and mental torture. In Sula, Morrison further amplifies the rejection and alienation the children met with from their parental roles. It thoroughly fails in Sula because they are the models of waywardness and disrespect in front of their children. Hannah never remarries or conforms to the social standard as she steadily takes the men who visit her. Her attitude towards her daughter is explicit from the beginning and it makes her daughter to defy all the existing social norms, which ultimately leads Sula to become a pariah. Sula is deteriorated to the extent of a 'terrible daughter', who coolly watches her mother burning to death in the conflagration. Nel Helen Wright catches the furtive signal that her mother casts to a white ticket examiner, and therefore, her esteem of her mother is blown to four winds. Sula presents another mother-figure in the black community, Eva, who is both the saviour of children and at the same time, the destroyer of children as she provides sustenance to all children in the households and shows no difference to them but when the need arises she burns her son, Plum. The absence of fathers subverts the system of family set up. Sula's father, Rekus, is long dead and Nel's father, Wright, is a constant absentee who causes the girls department and habit formation entirely different.

SOS also deals with peculiar types of parenting, in which paternal side focuses on material wealth and teach the child the importance of acquiring wealth rather than helping to concentrate on human values. The childhood of Milkman and his sisters become bereft as their father-figure sees his children as a means of raising his status to a wealthy man. Consequently, Milkman escapes from the boredom of his existence and does opposite of all that his father does. His sisters are fated to adorn like artificial flower petals and live out their lives while their mother Ruth Foster idles away her time in the

memory of her incestuous father. Macon Dead and his sister Pilate part their ways only on the ground of their childhood experiences but Pilate becomes more lovable and shows an eagerness to provide the children what their parents could not. This occurs due to their difference of perspectives in their childhood.

In TAR, Morrison offers the unworthiness of mothering, at the same time, she gives us the picture of a white mother who derives the pleasure of sadism by inflicting pains not only on her own child but to herself as retaliation to her husband's carelessness about her. Ondine and Sydney, a childless couple dream about their foster-child but in the end they are disappointed. Margaret also dreams of her son to come again to her household but never has it taken place as the boy had already abandoned the shelter of his mother's 'dangerous love'. In Beloved, a mother kills her baby in order to save from racial cruelty that she had experienced in her hey-days, at the same time, Morrison shifts her focus from 'terrible mother to a great mother' by portraying Baby Suggs who asks her children to become united at the time of adversity. Jazz spins round a mother who does not want to see her child and even rejects him at their first confrontation. Perhaps Jazz is a continuous quest for mother and its failure, which results in the tragedy of the person's whole life that of his failure in developing a positive attitude toward his wife and later his love. Alice Manfred's effort in Jazz, to bring her orphan child Dorcas up, finds fruitless as the girl is caught up in the overwhelming currents of jazz culture. Morrison, thus, blames her parental figures for making their children's lives horrible and advocates through her novels that these parental figures have succeed only in destroying their bright future. Denise Heinze comments:

Morrison reserves her scathing attacks for those black families

[...]; they live a reality that is something quite different, for in their obsession with social acceptance they have succeeded in destroying themselves and their children, and ultimately effecting violence on black culture. These families inevitably include a mother and a father, though the father is either absent, invisible, or abusive and the women's faring no better, are portrayed as distant, frigid, arrogant, perverse, and pathetic, what Morrison calls in *Sula* 'distant mothers and incomprehensible fathers' (68).

## **Chapter V**

### **Childhood: Multiple Perspectives**

The extent of critical interest in Morrison's works is much wider and more varied but it is appropriate to suggest important areas of debate among critics over both the nature of Morrison's writing and the different critical methodologies and how it is related to the tragic situations of childhood figuring in her novels. Henry Louis Gates Jr. is among the first group of literary scholars to question the predominance of socio-political African American critical canon, which the Black Aesthetic movement posited. The appropriateness of critical theories on Morrison put forward by Gates and Robert B. Stepto and such other critics are subjected to severe criticism by the European critical methodologies. They even accused them of obscurantism and of burdening literary scholarship with jargon. There is scepticism as to whether poststructuralist literary theories and critical methodologies developed in the colonial centres are not themselves form oppression and there is American literature being marginalized. There have been few attempts to apply liberal humanitarian methods to Morrison's works in particular and black literature in general. But the difficulty in applying a liberal humanist model to African American writing arises also from the concept that it has been developed within a structure of an imaginary 'other' African over African American.

One of the methods constituting the complex theoretical base on Morrison works is deconstruction. It has been extensively used by African American critics as the language in a text is not limited but derives its meaning from a cluster of association and relationship that exist in between the interdependent parts. This is particularly applicable to Morrison's works

because her fictions are ambivalent and open cyclical and repetitive rather than linear and progressive. Hence many critics of African American literature accept deconstruction as a tool to eschew limitless possibilities of meaning that is found in her works rather than as an absolute critical paradigm. But deconstruction is not concerned with the detailed account of authors' life; historical event or cultural context and therefore many rely upon anthropological or cultural criticism as it draws literary symbolism operating in society. But it is not a powerful tool since it eludes tight description and exemplification. Many of them find working in the sociological background, on symbols and structures, rituals and behaviours of both black and white cultures that appear and reappear in her works. The Black Aesthetic is trying for the past year for the need of to inscribe racial self in literature and art. The African American critical think tanks see race as a soul determinant of being, identity and coherent, and literature has the power to unify and liberate the African American race. The feminist readings eschew gender and races are interrelated. Morrison and other writers are concerned with this cohabitation of race, gender and class in their works. Further other Afro American critics find it convenient to use the Marxist and psychoanalytic readings to interpret and reflect on the issues raised in her texts. Still thousand of critical documentations are flooding in which childhood themes figure as parent-child binaries are manifested in these critical readings.

The parent-child relationship is conspicuously felt in psychoanalytical readings. These readings concentrated on the mind, which expresses the feelings. They range from anxiety and fear to hostility and sexual desire, and they can originate from varied sources such as from the traumas of personal history to the instinct of the body. The unconsciousness is the site of unfulfilled desires, sexual instincts and feelings that are unacceptable by the

conscious mind. Freudian approach asserts that if they are resisted, defended against and banished into the unconscious, psychic problems will crop up in the conscious region. The instinct strives toward satisfaction or release and must find expression. If it is repressed, the struggle between the conscious and the unconscious will take place. They consequently gain disorders in the neurotic field and force the individual to take asylum in dreams, or may pull him into frustration or depression, anxiety, or any psycho neuro-dysfunctions. When Pecola (TBE) understands what she desires of getting blue eyes is not going to be materialised, she lapses into a series of neuro-dysfunctions. This has been illustrated by Morrison in TBE that her child protagonist Pecola indulges in lengthy murmurings and conversations to “an imagined other” in a dozen pages in the concluding chapter of the novel. Witnessing this long babblings, the narrator says, “A little black girl yearns for the blue eyes of a little white girl, and the horror at the heart of her yearning is exceeded by the evil of fulfillment” (TBE 162). The conflict between the conscious ego and the unconscious instincts result in neurosis. Neurosis occurs when anxieties regarding unconscious feeling or instincts so overpower the ego that symptoms form—obsessional or compulsive behaviours and this behaviour is given in the concluding chapter

Sometimes feelings of hostility that cannot be expressed might be turned into their opposite, and the child might perform obsessional rituals of care toward a hated parent, rituals that give no pleasure because they deny feelings. This is clear in the making of artificial flower petals by Lena and Corinthians in SOS as the performance of an obsessional ritual which give them relief from the unadorned existence and a reaction toward the hated parent, Macon. Lena says that their girlhood is spent like “a found nickel” (SOS 216) after observing these rituals of taking care of Milkman and making



the petals. Sula, while she is very young, spends a considerable time in the attic of her house, “of throbbing disorder, constantly awry with things, people, voices and slamming of doors” (SOS51-52) behind a roll of linoleum to escape from the disturbing atmosphere of her house. She dreams, “galloping through her own mind on a gray-and-white horse, tasting sugar and smelling roses in full view of some one who shared both the taste and the speed” (Sula 51-52) because her mother or grandmother do not care for her but attend to the people who come there for satisfying their sexual desire.

But in literature Freudianism is displaced by object relation theory, which focuses on the way relations between parents and children during the development process shape the self. Primary emphasis is given in much of this theory to the relations between mother and child, largely because the mother traditionally served as primary caretaker but also because the relation to the mother’s body is the initial experience for all children. The object theory projects the internalization of relations to others as formative force that creates the self. Jaques Lacan terms this as “the mirror stage” as having a clear function in growth because it gives form(object) to the disembodied image of the earliest months of life. The mirror stage”, formed largely from a duality—a constitutive dialectic of self and other—can never be bridged or unified. In TBE, Pecola is seen sitting long hours in front of a mirror “looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers, and classmates alike( TBE 34). It is not the white beauty alone that she is looking for, but an existential harmony which the white beauty symbolises. Her search is for the security of a correct mirror for its total acceptance, which as Pecola thinks, can easily be found in the pre-Oedipal unity of the mother-daughter symbiosis. For Pecola, an approving mirror is equivalent to an approving

mother. Basing on Lacan's theory, Winnicott notes that the child looking upon the mother's face sees himself or herself that, "the mother is looking at the baby and what she looks like is related to what she sees there" (1971-12). The child, however, loses its sense of worth if it sees the mother mirror governed by "moods or, worse still, the rigidity of her defenses" (Winnicott 12). But in the case of Pauline, she reflects upon her daughter her own sense of inferiority, which in turn radiates back to her daughter. Pauline is looking for her own missing mother as she looks at Pecola. Pauline in her soliloquy thinks about her daughter, "She looked like a black ball of hair [...]. So when I seed it [Pecola at the time of delivery], it was like looking at a picture of your mama when she was a girl. You knows who she is, but she don't look the same (TBE 96-97). By escaping into the world of whites, Pauline believes that she is better off when she has actually been weakened through psychological paralysis. So she reflects what Lacan calls a "Primordial Discord" (Lacan 4) to hr daughter. The image that Pecola returns to her mother is a constant reminder of her blackness, which causes dissatisfaction in Pauline.

An initial symbiotic relationship with parents evolves into relations of mature independence from them, and this occurs through the development of a sense of object constancy, an ability to live in a stable world of objects to which one relates without anxieties about separation or fusion. Once the child has a stable image of a primary caregiver, and then it can tolerate separation from the caregiver more easily and develop an autonomous self. As opposed to Pauline-Pecola relationship, the mirror that MacTeer holds out to her daughter is the one which Demeter held out to Persephone signifying a nurturing ground of love and affection. She provides Claudia enough sustenance and security to develop an autonomous self—a voice that helps to

surface from the crisis of adolescence and blackness. In spite of the stress and tension she encounters with the white world, MacTeer displays “love thick and dark as Alaga syrup [...], sweet, musty with an edge of wintergreen in its base ( TBE 7). The voices of MacTeer’s mirror transform Claudia’s into an authentic self that she can convert any sorrow to an enduring experience. Claudia tells, “ Misery colored by the greens and blues in my mother’s voice took all of the grief out to the words and left me with a conviction that pain was not only enduring, it was sweet ( TBE 18). This mirror MacTeer shows to her daughter helps her daughter to develop a strong sense of daughter-mother relationship as well as internal wholeness. It is this Demeterian mirror that enables Claudia to resist the notion of white superiority and to feel the consciousness of her community in a tender age. This symbiosis with self and community is what Claudia inherited from the positive reflections from her maternal mirror, which Lacan calls a perfect “dialectic synthesis” in the Mirror stage”. In the light of Objective theory, Pecola gets a ‘Damaging Look’ While Claudia receives a Demeterian Look according to Lacan.

The initial imaginary sense of oneness with the mother is succeeded by entry into that network of signifiers which Lacan calls the Symbolic Order of one’s culture and society, that repertoire of names, roles, identities and rules that delineate who we are and how we shall behave. Michael Ryan states that “the original cut that separates the child from the mother inserts a word in place of a thing” (38). For Example, Sethe’s mother Nan tells Sethe before her hanging that, “if something happens to me, and you can’t tell me by my face, you can know me by this mark’s, Sethe’s African mother tells her. And the child Sethe answers, Mark me, too... Mark the mark on me too ( BVD 61). The verbal equivalents of the word “mark” also signify larger than self. Similarly one’s name signifies one’s culture and society. As Morrison has

said, “if you come from Africa, your name is gone. It is particularly problematic because it not just your name but your family, your tribe. When you die how you can connect with your ancestors if you have lost your name. That’s huge psychological scar (Leclair 21). So names or marks are the signifiers of cultural roots, family and identities which are the components of the Symbolic Order. Therefore the relations between characters might be studied for what they disclose about family dynamics and the way such dynamics shape selves. A reading in this line might attend to such themes or issues as separation, loss, boundaries, fusion with others, and the struggle to form a coherent and functioning self out off a damaging context or a traumatic personal history.

Pursuing on this lines, one can see that the world portrayed by Morrison in TBE, is a world of intense poverty in which traumas to the self that breed mental illness take the form of events with social as much as personal origins. The opening chapter of the novel describes a world of desire that might appear similar to Freudian psychoanalytic theories. Like a dream, the opposite binary images shift and juxtapose—nuns and lust, sobriety and drunkenness, quietness and singing in the lobby of the Greek hotel—foreshadows how the ensuing events march towards the tragedy of childhood. A father’s lust and his daughter’s vulnerability, a mother who loves and cares a white child keeps rejection for her own children—both these events prove that a young daughter is not able to counter her helplessness over the power of lust and the drunkenness and sober eyes. It suggests her protector’s aggression over the sobriety of the girl. The social trauma that generates pathologies like alcoholism damages a girl’s life because her father is in a drunken state when he rapes her daughter. The opening chapter not only describes the desire but its blockage also as the social determinants like poverty and ethnicity have

nothing to do with internal psychological damages.

Claudia and Frieda in TBE spot Rosemary Villanuci, sitting in her father's new car eating bread and butter, while they are under intense hunger. In a gesture of class exclusion, the white girl tells them not to come into her car, and the experience of this rejection, combined with that of material deprivation and hunger, produce anger, insult and fantasies of revenge in Claudia. She responds immediately, "We stare at her, wanting her bread, but more than that wanting to poke the arrogance out of her eyes and smash the pride of ownership that curls her chewing mouth (TBE 5). In this context desire and denial are inter-personal and dynamic and "the flows of wilfully mean or destructive energy are inaugurated by extra personal determinants such as ethnic group antagonisms that dictate from sites beyond the individual will or unconscious how a white girl will aggress and a black girl respond" (Ryan 44). This aggression on the ground of ethnicity creates undesirable instincts in children and they purge this repressed feeling by jumping into fantasy and revenge.

In psychoanalysis one reads what is evident to senses for what it conceals and deflects, TBE moves from the pain and pathology to the social causality. Frieda and Claudia live near a steel mill, and as they watch the red hot waste material being poured down a ravine at night, they feel the cold of the dead grass against their feet. The image suggests the alienation and distancing of African American children from the white-dominated economic world, where great heat is expended in making the goods of modern industry. They search for left over coals to heat their frigid houses. The coldness of Claudia's world is also a signifier of parent-child relation that barely nurtures or provides sustenance. Claudia underpins that their house is cold and old, adults do not talk to them and when they catch cold they are the objects of

derision stressing that poverty distracts adults' attention on such basic issues of survival that parents are to nurture care and attention that children need. The failure to provide care disturbs the child's sense of a clear boundary between self and object, internal and external world. Boundary lines weaken and normally discrete realms cross and merge. The instability of parental care translates into an uncertainty about one's self and one's experience. Pecola has been treated in such a way as to diminish her sense of self-importance and she, therefore, locates an object of identification in a blue-white doll. Her desire for blue eyes is a response to an uncaring and unwelcome environment. If the reality is such that it induces pain, then that reality must be tackled and should reject the mind if it is to survive the experience of pain.

Her desire for blue eyes is one way of countering the painful reality and in general all African American girls' exclusion from the world of public praise that accrues to whiteness. The white dolls are praised while the black ones do not exist at all—that is what happens to all African American girls. The desire for blue eyes is the desire for care and love that is denied for her. It runs counter to the logic that defines how care and love distributed between economically secure and weak families can only result in madness. The financially secure children experience the full enjoyment while Pecola's experiences the governing irrationality of the world in which she lives. Her childhood counters these malignancies and places her expectation outside the conceivable rationality of the world. The desire that seeks to break the link between environment and self, impoverished social conditions, and damaged care induced madness in her tender psyche because at this age no simple mind can withstand too much tragic weight upon it.

The metaphor of heat-stove that fails to light every morning describes family's failure both as functioning as social community and as a source of

care for children. Each member of the family is leading a cocooned state that each one of them is in a “cell of consciousness”, which shows both fragmentation and imprisonment. Pauline’s refusal of care to her daughter in order to provide more care to the Fisher’s child and Cholly’s obsession for his own pleasure and impressions that he rapes his daughter are the examples of these fragmentations and imprisonment. The broken window and a porous sofa in the house of Claudia mark the economic mistreatment of African Americans by whites and an opportunity of persistent joylessness that pervade everything in the family’s lives.

The Breedloves fail to provide nurturance and care because each of them is a victim of parental neglect. Left by his own mother, Cholly is raised by an aunt who dies and when he seeks his father, rebuff in his life comes in the form of rejection. Pauline’s lame foot shows her lack of feeling of self-worth. Her feelings of ugliness forced her to seek out compensation in the world of white aesthetic beauty. Her longing for a sense of beauty that is denied in her home life by poverty stems from the obsession of ugliness. The dislike that she exhibits towards his daughter is shaped and determined by this contrast. To love her daughter is to lose what makes her happy and a compensation for the traumas in her life. Cholly’s fragmentation begins from humiliating him from his childhood sexual interaction with a girl of his own community that he abhors the girl and not the whites who insulted him. Like the sofa that breeds joylessness, objects are linked to Cholly’s personal histories as broken and fragmented narrative that Morrison describes him of discordant notes that can only be composed by an expert musician, “Only they would know how to connect the heart of a red watermelon to the asafetida [...] to the flash light on his behind”( TBE 125 ). No one cares for him particularly in his childhood, so he cares for no one, not even his

daughter and his wife because he does not experience a kind of care that might have instilled in him a coherent and consistent sense of self and of self-worth, or that might have allowed him to control his impulses and to map the link between impulse, action, and consequence. Deprived of a coherent sense of self and battered by humiliating and painful traumas, Cholly is full of feelings that have no coherence or logic. The most opposed and contradictory impulses cohabit in his childhood experience. Ryan states:

his [Cholly] psychopathology is defined by this inability to sort out one mode of emotion from another, so that he can experience both himself and the world in a stable and coherent manner. The inability to keep contending emotions apart accounts for his inability to recognize the line of appropriate behaviour that would keep his own sexual desire apart from his daughter. This shows that the failure to be loved properly results in the failure to love properly (49).

Morrison's development and treatment of Shadrack's (Sula) effort to bind the "loose cords" in his mind, she establishes a pattern of action that parallels Jungian ideas related to the definition and function of the psyche and its fundamental components—the self, ego, shadow, anima(female) and animus(male). Most important, she uses the Jungian concepts of the conscious and the unconscious selves, which function in a compensatory manner to maintain an ordering and unifying centre of the tender psyche. Using dreams (Big Dreams) as vehicles, the Collective Unconscious, whose contents include all future things that are taking shape on the individual and will sometime come to Consciousness is continuously engaged in dramatisation, Jung argues, which leads to a harmonious relationship between it and the conscious mind. Its archetypes or the spontaneous symbols provide the pieces



to the puzzle that the individual needs to complete.

It is within this context that the significance of Shadrack's experience during his institutionalisation can be best understood. For, it is the working of his collective unconscious, grouping and regrouping its content in an effort to strike a balance with its conscious mind that provide Shadrack with the dream and specific images and symbols that, when understood by his conscious mind, serve him on the path to transformation and rebirth that result in actualization and wholeness. Shadrack's mind slips into "cave mouths of memory it chooses" (Sula 8). Shadrack plunges into the depth of his collective unconscious in search of self suggested by the narrator by the careful use of language and tropes. Such words as memory and cave can be taken as symbols of the unconscious. Cave is a symbol of unconscious. The window and the rivers he sees are important images. In Jungian concept, the window might very well symbolise the conscious. The river, a body of water, is the commonest symbol of the collective unconscious. Shadrack's dream, then one might assume that he is on the way to seeking harmony between the two important components of the self: Shadrack descends into the collective unconscious, in other words, Morrison use of "re-memory". Thus Shadrack's dream can be taken to represent not only his search for psychological wholeness but also a glowing moment that reveals the very vehicle he needs to achieve it. In the final analysis he realises that he has a place where the window, river and voices are. By descending into the unconscious through his dream, Shadrack is able to emerge—to ascend—experience rebirth from fragmented life and begin to find tangible meaning and order. He continues his infantile existence like Plum because his mind is deranged after participating in the war. When Shadrack makes any comments, Bottomites think about him what he is up to because he is too childish in his nature. In

almost all the works Morrison employs the Jungian concept to dig out the characters' tendency for self-realization.

One of the most popular in literary studies is Marxism, which combines an understanding of the social roots of literature with a sense of its political ramifications. Such ways of thinking Marx called ideology. Ideology or “the ruling ideas of the ruling class” is a way of legitimating or justifying social and economic arrangements that might otherwise appear unjust because they are characterized by inequality. While the slave system was abolished by the Civil War, little was subsequently done to improve the economic status of the former slaves. The era of reconstruction immediately after the war saw some improvements in their political rights, but without property, many very quickly found themselves trapped in a new kind of economic bondage—the tenant farm system. And the gains of Reconstruction were soon turned back by a backlash of white opposition. Most political and civil rights that Africans gained were revoked, and the US Supreme Court went so far as to sanction a system of segregation between races in the South that essentially deprived Africans of equal access to education, employment, and the political system. An informal system of harassment against Africans, whose most savage form was lynching, also was institutionalized in the South and remains in place until the 1960s, when an almost national effort was required to force its end.

Despite having their indigenous cultures and family systems destroyed, and despite centuries of enforced illiteracy, many Africans, even during the era when slavery was in force, acquired education, learned professions, and became successful in American economic life. For many, making one's way meant making one's way out of the South to the North. Immigration mechanisation in the early twentieth century forced them off their farms in the

South and after new industries such as auto-making and steel-making beckoned them North. But African Americans also fled the indignities and the brutalities of racism in the South—the constant denial of their rights of citizenship, the blocking through exclusion and segregation of their attempts to rise out of poverty, and the waves of lynching such as occur after World War I, when over seventy blacks had died in one year alone. But racism was also prevalent among whites in the North, and African Americans once again found their efforts to advance themselves blocked by segregation, by the denial of well-paying jobs, and by being obliged to live in poor housing in cities whose economic vitality disappeared as whites fled to segregated suburbs. Forced to remain in poverty by economic and cultural problems that poverty breeds—family instability, high rates of illness, drug abuse, and crime prevailed in the African American society. Poverty reproduces itself by generating behaviour that precluded escape through economic success. Conservatives, as a result, argue that poverty was the fault of blacks themselves.

African American writers often take as their subject matter this continuing history of combined race and class oppression. For instance, Morrison in TBE looks at poverty from inside the lives and the minds of the poor. The title itself is a sure indication of the oppressive nature that is prevalent in the black families. She shows that the oppressive nature of slavery forces many of the black children to wish for impossible things in their life like the bluest eyes. In TBE, an African American girl born with a black skin undergoes many insults and injustice in the ruling white bourgeois class and countering these injustice and inequality status of her person results in her insanity. Morrison constructs a poverty-ridden set up in TBE by introducing the Breedloves and analyses the socio cultural issues prevail in

the African American society. They are poor and live on the ground floor of an abandoned storefront. The girl Pecola is poorer than the MacTeers who give her asylum when she is put outdoors. The contrast between the MacTeers and the white house where Pauline works is not just a contrast between blacks and whites but between poverty and affluence. Claudia informs the squalid conditions, “our house is old, cold, and green. At night a kerosene lamp lights one large room, the others are braced in darkness, peopled by roaches and mice (TBE 5) and she expresses the fear of being put outdoors. If some one is put outdoors, the little girl thinks, “there is no place to go” and it is the final thing in one’s life. It is this outdoors that a four-year-old Cholly is seen left out by his mother, wrapped in two pieces of blankets and one newspaper. From then on, and particularly during his childhood, all that he confronts is the deprivation of one form of oppression or another. They move up North to overcome this poverty but find futile for both Pauline and Cholly. Cholly’s frustrations are not only due to the tangible effects of racism but beaten by an economic system—a capitalist system—a system interested in commodification. Pauline’s desire to imitate the white actress on the silver screen and her wish to possess a white house are the result of an economic system, which prevented the African American to gain economic stability.

If the Breedloves are the victims of bourgeois class oppression, Sethe in BVD tries to beat the system, which does not allow her or any one even to remember their children’s faces, by attempting to kill her children and succeeds in killing her most beloved child. When the act is being conducted “she did not look at them; she simply swung the baby toward the wall planks, missed and tried to connect a second time” (BVD 183). Her mother, who she cannot even remember the face, was subjected to work in the field until the moon rose and slept like stick indicates how a system exploited the human

labour. Her mother was hanged because the system of slavery had completely exploited the capacity of labour and thrown her like a fishbone. This shows that how the children are distanced from their mothers due to an exploitive economic system. Amy, the poor white girl runs away to Boston as her mother works as a slave in another white house to get a passage, which is a sure indication that the system enforces slavery not only in the plights of Paul D, Sixo and other Sweet Home men but also in poor whites described in the novel who are the victims of economic or capitalist oppression that snuffs out human life, no matter of what colour or sex. It does not discriminate between the oppressed.

When Eva Peace, the all-loving mother in Sula, takes the poor children in and calls them all Deweys, she is focusing on their need and deprivation. She is forced to cut her healthy leg in order to gain an insurance claim to feed her children and grandchildren, all because of her poor economic conditions. She mutilates her leg so that she and her children can survive after her husband's desertion. According to Susan Willis, self mutilation is [a] final metaphor for social otherness. [...]. Unlike lack and deformity, self-mutilation represents the individual's direct confrontation with the oppressive social forces inherent in white domination (322). This discriminatory system inhibits the freedom of an individual like Eva to look after her children and does not allow one to play with them thereby causing deprivation of maternal perch. The Peace Women have to take a "steady sequence of men" only because of the absence of males and the poor economic conditions that cannot support their existence. In a way Plum's psychological devastation, addiction to drugs and the resultant infantile existence and his final doom are the consequences of the oppressive nature of slavery system. The geopolitical representation of Bottom in Sula also shows the domineering nature of the

oppressor. A white gives his land to his African American tenant a sterile hilly place called Bottom, where labour is back-breaking, and towards the end of the novel, it gives way to a tunnel, which overthrows the poor blacks and their properties, the remaining place is transformed into a Golf Course, which symbolises the nature of exploitation of the poor and the oppressive system of slavery. Morrison describes this transformation, “In that place where they tore the nightshade and blackberry patches from their roots to make room for the Medallion City Golf Courses, there was once a neighborhood” (Sula 3).

In TAR, the opulence of Valerian Streets’ house and the lives of poor blacks in the Caribbean Island are contrasted. After exploiting the labour of slaves, he becomes a candy manufacturer and leads a sedentary life while others sweat for him overnight. Jadine and Son live at a hotel in New York in luxurious bed, where they mate in which “the skins of the ninety baby seals sprawled (TAR 91) is exactly same as the one allotted for Jadine in her magnificent house at Valerian’s. But in Eloë from where Son comes, the room they both take for a temporary stay is described as nauseating. So, Son is the product of extreme poverty while Jadine, corrupted by the capitalist world, cannot adjust herself to the turbulent new life and returns to Paris. In Marxist view, she has been drifted to the bourgeois class while Son stands for the proletariat, which shows that both of them act according to the social conditions in which they are bred during their childhood. The orphaned Jadine is adopted by Valerian not because of his humanitarian views but because of his exploitive nature. Without Sydney and Ondine, the Valerians cannot even make a cup coffee and therefore he wants to propitiate the working class by adopting their niece for their existence.

In SOS, Morrison shows the greed for acquiring material wealth, which reduces a person to an object who sees his relations, family, and his

wife and children through material perspectives because his childhood witnesses the terrible side of racial oppression. Lincoln Haven is the product of Macon's father's labour and sweat but when the oppressor appeared in the form of a murderer, the whole land and his father's life are lost. Ever since this gruesome occurrence in his childhood, he continues to explore the ways of gaining wealth. Macon Dead, with his hands "digging" in his pocket for the keys, and curling his fingers around them, letting their bunched solidity calm him" (SOS 17), urges his son Milkman to steal Pilate's sack. It is this representative of society who keeps Macon's intimate relations away. Macon's world "is based on accumulation, Pilate's household is devoted true potlatch fashion to known accumulation "(Gates Jr. and Appiah 318). This materialistic view pollutes the innocence of his son. But it is because of the humanistic approach of Pilate that leads Milkman to seek the human values and the cultural roots.

Jazz represents the movements of African American people from the poverty-ridden South to North for better economic prospects. But in the alluring call to the North, they are caught up in the whirlpool of Jazz culture which heralded another capitalist exploitation. Morrison describes their transmigration that, "the wave of black people running from want and violence crested in the 1870s; the '80s; the '90s but was a steady stream in 1906 when Joe and Violet joined in it" (Jazz 46). Violet and Joe, dreaming of a life that gives them more economic status fall into the ditch of poverty. They have to live in a rented apartment and manage the life with doing sundry jobs, Joe selling beauty products and Violet goes for hair cutting. Perhaps, one of the reasons of their estrangement is the result of this economic deprivation. Finally, they understand the plight of Harlem, "Nobody says it's pretty here; nobody says it's easy either (Jazz 16). The narrator of Jazz explains the

bourgeois class and the exploitation of the working class, I see all over the place: wealthy whites and plain ones too, pile into mansions decorated and redecorated by black women “(Jazz 17). Jazz seems to convey that Morrison’s main concern is the class issue and capitalistic exploitation of the poor. Paradise and Love also reveal the same story of exploitation, class struggle and sexual exploitation. Thus a detour through Morrison’s novels gives a clear perspective of measuring the depth of the tragic condition of childhood under the oppressive nature of slavery system.

Post-Structuralism takes issue with the tendency in Western culture to think of the world in oppositions. It is interested in the complicity of opposites, the way things held in opposition by Western metaphysics can be said to contaminate one another. When Morrison opens the novel TBE by describing, “Nuns [who] go by as quite as lust,” she suggests such a crossing of terms, since nuns usually stand in opposition to sexual desire, much as spirit is opposed to the body. Claudia’s spirit rebels over the sight of the white girl sitting in the car and wants “to poke the arrogance out of her eyes and smash the pride of ownership” (TBE 5) but her flesh willing to get the bread she is holding in her hand. Both these terms mean the opposite-nothing is realized. In BVD, Beloved initiates sexual act with Paul D but Beloved is a spirit and it is not possible to exchange a bodily pleasure from a spirit. Again in Paradise Mother Superior advises that Connie’s body is nothing but her spirit, but Connie exchanges this view of Mother Superior as she has felt locked in either “bones” or “spirit”. Once she was an abused child and hungry one in the streets of Brazil—an experience for nine years followed by thirty years of celibacy in the Convent finally breaks up to find an affair with Deek Morgan, when her “flesh so hungry for itself it ate him” (Paradise 263). The opposition between spirit and body is crucial to metaphysics and to the



metaphysical belief that the clear presence of ideas in the mind—the spirit of truth—precedes and is uncontaminated by representation, imitation, and substitution, all the hallmarks of signification and of writing. One might expect her novels, therefore, to draw attention to the relationship between meaning and signification and to note especially that the former can be the product of the latter.

A post-structuralist reading of Morrison's novels shows that the individual character, in its dialectical relationship with the ever-changing socio-historical process, defies a static structure. Hence parent-child categorisation is resisted. The linguistic, literary, philosophical, historical and sociological insights, which are relevant to the reading of the text, have been brought in for the sake of cross-fertilization of the texts. It can be seen that the parent-child static role construct disappears in the scrutiny of interpersonal relationship. The characteristic of society, civilization and the systems founded and the norms formed are not genetically transmitted down to children or posterity. But it is done through the languages and language structures. Therefore, as cultures are formed and civilization progresses, the myth-making process also becomes necessary for the stronger group's effort in establishing the power structure. This is true of the most important structure of society—the parent-child relationship.

In TBE, Pauline reverses the role of a mother and nurses a white baby while Pecola stands aghast at the sight of the pie juice that has been spilled on the kitchen floor with splintered psyche. This event destructures the mother-daughter relationship. When Cholly rapes his daughter, again this restructuring repeats. Claudia, the nine-year-old girl, becomes prophetic and visionary. She attempts at hurling criticisms at the ways of adults, makes sorrowful chanting when her friend is befallen with the tragedy. In this

structure, child disappears and a mature adult creeps into Claudia's consciousness. Therefore, child-adult relation disappears and the structural patterns collapse in TBE to show that tragedy of childhood is subjected to amplification. The family constructs designed and formulated in the novel, in the form of a primer, readily destructure the very concept of familial paradigm. The linguistic graphological manifestation signals, perhaps, a complete deconstruction at all levels; extending even to the highly deconstructed linguistic manifestation. The highly restructured lines when some order is imposed on it refer to 'the father, the mother, the playmates and the cat, a beautiful white American family construct. But this textual strategy of Morrison signals the family deconstruction where the serious but loving father, a loving mother, and friendly playmates and the cat are displaced and contrasted with Pecola's miserable childhood. The loving father is replaced by a raping father, the loving mother by a rejecting one, friendly and supporting playmates by taunting and hurting and the cat becomes an object of a painful incident in the life of this child. Further, the cat is an important and privileged member of Geraldine's family than her husband, "the cat will always know that he is first in her affections. Even after she bears a child" (TBE 67). The displacement of the husband perhaps is so final that he is not considered to be a member of the family at all. Geraldine spends her time with the cat until four o'clock, when the "intruder" [husband] comes home from work vaguely anxious about what's for dinner (TBE 67). So long as the husband becomes intruder, social structure collapses and the child Louise bears the brunt which he reflects in his behaviours. Aunt Jimmy raises Cholly while his own mother leaves him on the railway track to be run over by the wheels of the train. It is possible for a man to expect his wife to be his mother. Perhaps Cholly expects his mother-love from Pauline after the death of his aunt. This yearning of the grown up man, because all the childhood quality retains with him until his

death, for his lost childhood's motherly love is all the more important, and the nonfulfillment of such an expectation possibly leads to antagonism between wife and the husband, which in turn scuttles the parent-child relation.

Further, the domineering mother figure, Helene Wright (Sula), problematises the secondary position of a mother in a patriarchal structure. The text presents this perception about Helene, "She loved her house and enjoyed manipulating her daughter and her husband" (Sula 18). It further presents her as neither domineering nor timid, and subverts the family structure. Nel, her daughter, seems to understand her in a new angle, and as child she bloats the deportment of her mother "Like a street pup that wags its tail at the very door jamb of the butcher shop he has been kicked away from only minutes before, Helene smiled" (Sula 21). The text thus shows Helene belonging neither to an individual category nor to any moral structure. In the characterisation of Jude, Nel's husband, his expectation out of his marriage is same as that of his childhood—someone has to care and love him very deeply. Sula tells about Jude to Nel: "...mostly he wanted some one to care about his hurt, to care very deeply. Deep enough to hold him deep is also is enough to rock him" (Sula 82). Jude's aspirations problematise the role of a wife. Perhaps, even the label "mother" applied only to women is also problematic. If a husband leaves his wife, the emotional bond is with her children but when a wife leaves her husband does not have anything. When Bay Boy left Eva Peace, at least Eva has her three children but Bay Boy has got nothing. In TAR, Morrison deconstructs the counter-myth by offering multiple readings. By denying a fixed meaning to the counter-myth, Morrison in one of her interviews states:

It's [Tar Baby] a lump of tar shaped like a baby, with dress on and a bonnet. It's a sunny day and the tar is melting, and the

rabbit is getting stuck and more stuck. [...], so I just gave these characters parts, Tar Baby being a black woman and the rabbit a black man. I introduced a white man and remembered the tar [...]. “Tar Baby” is also a racial slur, like “nigger,” and a weapon hostile to the black man. The tragedy of the situation was not that she was a Tar Baby, but that she wasn’t (Ruas 226).

The mention of the word “tar” brings in various notions to the readers’ mind and offers multiple readings. It is a kind of trap but there is no specification as to who will be trapped. The distinction between the creator of the trap and the one meant to be trapped does not exist and whosoever gets into the trap—black or white, male or female, child or parent— does not get trapped. When the sticky quality of the tar changes the notion of a trap gets further deconstructed. Once the tar solidifies the trap does not exist. Hence the word “Tar Baby”, as a “negro slur” gets deconstructed. The colour “black” in the socio-cultural context does not mean a negative sense. “Black” is often associated with the colour of the eyes and hair of beautiful women. As for the colour, black often finds glorified as the colour of gods and goddesses. Hence the concept of colour does not arise in connection with the colour of tar. And, the term “baby” is an endearing term used by affectionate parents but “baby” here means to be the frozen infantile existence of African Americans. Tar is also used against decaying and oxidation. Roads are being built all over the world using tar. In all these cases, it is used in a positive sense. Therefore, Tar Baby, as a myth, lacks a stable structure in order to build up societal structure. And the collapse of mythical structure paves way for the collapse of other societal structures. Thus colour and tar associated with child get deconstructed. Again, Son on arriving in New York thinks about Jadine bearing “his baby”. The text describes, “He smiled at the vigour of his heart-beat at the thought of

her having his baby” (TAR 220). It can be said as Jadine’s baby or their baby. So it is the male dominated language which preserves such patriarchal construct. Perhaps it could be the reverse construct—a fear. It may be the term “his baby” speaks of a fear, a weakness on the part of men being oppressed by a separation causing emotional vacuum in case of the women and children leaving them. If it is so, the patriarchal system is a reversal of weakness, a fear of being changed to power, superiority and dominance. Ondine’s accusation of piercing the flesh of the child Michael making him bleed and scream eludes the definition that his mother, Margaret defies the definition of a woman who should be “good enough for a child”. Valerian seems to be good enough for Michael, far better than Margaret and so one can think of him to be a mother according to the definitions of Ondine. S. Kannammal says, “Some mothers failed to be mothers and some men become better mothers than fathers” (IJAS 23.2 (Summer 1993) :103). Margaret proves to be a biological mother as she hurts her child and the rest of the time shuts up in a room. The biological functions may not have much to do with social roles. Ondine, though she is not the biological mother of Michael, has taken good care of him while Margaret fails to be a mother. So the mother concept in TAR is further problematicised. In Jazz, Joe traces his mother constantly and on the point of meeting her, she rejects him, and again he continues the effort to find a mother figure in Violet and then in Dorcas. But these efforts subvert the text. Dorcas is the product of the deconstructurisation of the racial construct, tries to find a father-figure in Joe more than a lover in him, but meets a man with carnal pleasures in Joe. And finally the very essence of jazz music structure subverts to discordant notes. Similarly in BVD, Paradise and Love, the sociological construct of child changes to different roles.

So the parent-child role structure collapses in all the novels. When

structures collapse, and then leave behind relationships, attitudes and feelings. Hence the post-structural analysis shows that children (the characters) are in a constant state of flux, they are knowable, relational, fluctuating and ever in a flux resisting a positive or negative reading. Hence they give a circularity of experiences and the plurality of roles. The role-shift often destructures the parent-child static role construct and destabilizes the parent-child dichotomy. There are more motherly fathers than motherly mothers, more fatherly mothers than fathers themselves. This interchangeability of roles deconstructs the role structures and thus collapses parental biological segregation in social roles.

She would also not be expected to subscribe to the belief that what blacks are constitutes a reality which gives rise to accurate naming in the process of cultural representation. That would be to capitulate to the position that how her people have been named over time constitutes an accurate representation of a reality that stands outside and before signification (especially racist signification). One would expect her, rather, to have an interest in how reality and the meaning of reality are shaped by signification and in how such signification perspective is, contextually determined, and informed by differences of power. In TAR one would expect William Green to be called as Son, to be attached to the endearment but his childhood qualities vanish when he confronts racial problems. Again he is more “black” rather than “green” which represents nature but he fights for the cause of black. All the blacks in TAR have been named as “Child” by Valerian because in the eyes of whites, blacks are considered as powerless as children. Similarly in SOS, every one of the Macon’s family is known as “Dead” as they are culturally dead and leads a monotonous life. Milkman acquires the name because of his extended feeding, which his mother longs for getting sexual

gratification. When Connie in Paradise gets excited or painful she utters “Sha, sha, ...” (226). But in the case of Joe Trace, he is continuously tracing his mother. Breedloves in TBE never breeds “love” with each other and with their children. Pauline changes “Polly” for the white construction of subordination; the Breedlove’s sofa generates the poverty inherent in the black. The “outdoors” means the end of everything for a child, as it is terrible, and it is the inside which is less dangerous as Claudia understands it. Claudia sees Pecola as “a bird in an eternal, grotesquely futile effort to fly. Beating the air, a winged but grounded bird intent on the blue void it could not reach (TBE 162). Geraldine looks at her contemptuously and thinks that “grass wouldn’t grow where they lived [...]. Tin cans and tires blossomed” (TBE 72), indicting that Pecola comes from such a family. The candy salesman Yakobowski when confronts Pecola feels a distaste that he even does not want to waste the effort of a glance (TBE 36). Sometimes a person or a thing changes with the way they are signified and the effect is carried over to the readers. One can consider Morrison’s description of how prostitutes have been represented in her novels, or the letter Soaphead Church writes to God in which he describes the ways the meanings of various things are rearranged by people (so that cruelty to inferiors becomes authority). Morrison says about Cholly Breedlove’s life that she requires a musical score to connect the fragmented pieces. All these show the reality and meaning of reality that stand outside and not affected by signification.

Morrison’s novel, in many respects, are realist novels, in which one would not expect to find examples of “modernist” stylistic experimentation of the kind that Kristeva privileges as a revolutionary form of writing. Yet Morrison is not entirely committed to the realist paradigms. For one thing, she fragments perspective into different points of view. For example, she

begins each and every chapter of TBE with words that cannot make out any significant meaning but runs without any punctuation, "hereisthe housegreenhereisthehouseitisgreenand white[...]playjaneplayjane. (TBE 2) and further there are no chapter numbers but given the names of the seasons in which each season tells the tragic condition of Pecola: putting outdoors, insult and rejection by her mother, rape and signs of insanity. Paradise also contains such techniques that each chapter is devoted to every character in the novel. What the structuralism envisages in the form of phonology, morphology, syntax or semantic levels, the novel subverts and it is seen in the examples of typography Morrison uses.

Henry Louise Gates Jr. identifies the African American practice of Signifyin(g) as a significant tradition in relation to black writing. By introducing such a term he refers to the way in which, in black vernacular discourse, the ambiguities, ambivalences and indeterminacies of language are played upon for a powerful effect. Gates thinks that a certain antithetical meaning exists between the standard English usage of 'signifying' and African American usage of 'Signifyin(g)'. This exposition enables to see abjection in Morrison's fiction as a sign capable of 'signifying' and conventional 'Signifyin(g)' an oppositional meaning simultaneously. Kristeva theorises this abjection as the dynamics of the psyche and in the practice of writing. The body engages in dynamic process, exchanging things it takes in (food, air and water) for things it expels (excrement, menstrual blood, vomit, pus) to maintain its healthy constitution. Things received are either expelled or assimilated. But when a virus enters the body cannot be expelled easily. Due to this, an untenable situation arises and the bodily function weakens. Similarly, while taking ideas in and assimilating positive, expelling negative and if this dynamic exchange mechanism breaks down, introjection of



unassimilable yet unejectable concepts creeps into the psyche. This concept Kristeva calls “abjection”. One experiences such psychological abjection and suffers a breakdown of identity. Thus, in Morrison novels, childhood witnesses a psychological abjection according to the notion Kristeva presents. This is clearly brought out by Morrison in presenting Golden Gray in Jazz. He is neither slave nor son, but a mixed-race figure. This figure historically existed and is an anomaly in the ideological system of racist equations. In both communities (black and white) such figures function as the abject. He is neither black nor white; hence he is named as “Gray”. In her characterisation Morrison explores abjection in relation to both sides of the binary: oppressed or oppressor and uses the mixed-race figure to deconstruct the authority of racism. Again Dorcas’ complexion arises in the complexities of racial politics. The reference to Dorcas colour ‘sugar-flawed skin’ (Jazz 40) “Signifies” on the history behind the skin-colour by alluding to sexual exploitation of the blacks in the sugar plantations and further Dorcas’ colour is contrasted with Violets’ boot-black. And the colour differentiation is part of a series of physical differences between the two who are the object of Joe’s affections. Similarly the same abjection continues in Paradise between the families of 8-R and the light-skinned families. A mother, Sweetie Flood, after keeping vigilance over her ‘defective’ (because they are light-skinned) babies collapse into insanity and seek asylum in the Convent because of the abjection.

Deleuze and Guattari, who are the proponents of post structuralism in the mid-seventies, would be interested in the interplay of territorialisation and deterritorialisation in the novels and in the way space is demarcated for the sake of power. An exploration of Macon’s and Pilate’s childhood experiences gives an insight into territorialisation and deterritorialisation. Geographical isolation turns into devastating psychological isolation of the two children,

Pilate and Macon. When Jake territorializes land and makes it his own, the white deterritorialises it by shooting him “five feet up in the air”, which results in the ensuing tragedy of childhood in SOS. In TBE the white world confronts often the black world but, on the reverse, it crosses the realm. Maureen Peal and Pecola first befriend but immediately cease the friendship on the ground that Pecola is black and Maureen heaps insult on her. The white teachers of her class isolate her only because she is ugly. So the white world while isolating her (deterritorialises) Pecola often crosses this realm only to get rejection. Poland and China and Mary (Maginot Line) symbolise the vast territorial field as their names bear the nations of the world in which Pecola is always welcomed. The schoolteacher in BVD defines new territories to the slave children but confrontation takes place in deterritorialising them. Joe and Violet train-dance into the City from their poor and squalid condition of South, which is emblematic of territories of racial cruelty, get deterritorialised when they enter into the cultural world of Harlem in a different and unexpected way. Similarly Pauline and Cholly settle in Lorain after migrating from the South. These deterritorialisations create disharmony in their life. Almost all the novels show a crossing of realm when the Southern blacks occupy North but their deterritorialisation of the old way of life and territorialising the new settlement make them to be reborn again as African American children.

Black space allows a mixing or crossing of realms that might be prevented in white domesticities. TBE looks at this from the perspective of the disempowered. Foucault's disciplinarity, one would not expect Morrison to depict power of disciplinarity in Morrison's novel. It is enforced but succumbs to it. Morrison says of the Breedloves “the master had said, ‘You are ugly people.’ They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to

contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, and every glance. ‘Yes’, they had said. ‘You are right. (TBE 28)’. Thus the Breedloves succumb to disciplinarily by accepting their cloak which fate has presented to them. In *Sula*, “a nigger joke”—the story of the Bottom—is surrendered to the disciplinarity. When the master said, “That is bottom land, rich and fertile, but it is high up in the hills, said the slave,” (Sula 4) the old slave heeds to what the white says to him. The slave accepts this agreement with the slave master’s disciplinarity and is a disempowering act on the part of the slave. The same disempowerment is seen in the lives of Medallions because, “They let it run its course, fulfil itself, and never invented ways to alter it, to annihilate or to prevent it to happen it again. So also were they with people” (Sula 89–90). This disempowerment is the “visible glitch” in the lives of both children and parents of Morrison’s novels.

On the feminist point of view, Morrison’s works have unique place in American life and literature. Morrison is conscious of this uniqueness and states that “there is some thing inside that makes them different from other people. It is not like men, and it is not like white women” (Parker 252) In the case of white women, at least they have some support to fall back upon but that is not the case with black women. Therefore they may very well seem to be idiosyncratic or eccentric or weird. In TBE, Morrison makes this clear that those who survive the crime of being black women have a tight situation to every eccentricity over the years: “White Women said, ‘Do this’, white children said, ‘Give me that’. White men said, ‘Come here’. Black man said, ‘Lay down’. The only people they need not take orders from were black children and each other” (TBE 108). The contrast they present is not merely differences but aberrations. For instance, the narrator says, “They beat their children with one hand and stole for them with the other. The hands that felled

trees also cut umbilical cords; [...], and sacks rocked babies into sleep” (TBE 108). They are strong as opposed to weak; server as opposed to served’ unfeminine as opposed to feminine, ugly as opposed to beautiful, promiscuous opposed to moral, displaced opposed to well placed, and poor as opposed to rich (Kashinath 205). Without a doubt, such attitudes towards black women have political, social and economical implications. So they have triple consciousness—they are differentiated not only in terms of male standards and poverty but most importantly by Euro American standards. This sense of triple consciousness develops a dilemma in them and the response to this dilemma is an attempt to adhere to the Western ideals of beauty and aesthetic.

Morrison says at one point that the ideals of romantic love and physical beauty are lies foisted on woman. In TBE Morrison projects Pecola as the most victimised girl for this conflict. Pecola yearns for blue eyes, a symbol of white beauty; however her eyes cannot be changed into blue eyes in reality. She searches for self-esteem and self-worth as a means of escaping the chaos of her world. Her parents discard, and friends and teachers reject her on the basis of ugliness. The only solution for this to fantasise in a child’s manner, is to dream for the impossible. “Each night she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently for a year. Although some what discouraged” (TBE 35). This shows that her innocence is being betrayed on the ground of Western beauty standards. But her friend Claudia and Frieda face the same world that Pecola faces but their response to this dilemma is entirely opposite. Claudia destroys white dolls and she effaces even the concept of white being the standard one can measure the meaning of beauty. She states, “I hated Shirley, not because she was cute, but because she danced with Bojangles who was my friend, my uncle, my daddy (TBE 19). The egocentricity of childhood causes Claudia to reject that which

is alien and threatening to her. She does so because her parents have instilled uniqueness of self that enables her to outlive Pecola. So by providing two similar black female characters Morrison reveals how white Euro-centric standards play havoc on the life of African American girlhood.

Sula presents a matriarchal world in which male dominance practically does not exist. The Peace Women Morrison presents are stoic and counter all havoc in their life. Eva is more courageous and even cuts her leg in order to preserve her family due to the absence of her husband. She, as a creator and sovereign is, “directing the lives of her children, friends, strays, and a constant stream of hoarders” (Sula 34). Sula searches for her authentic self and dismisses herself from the ties and codes that bind the people in Bottom ( Sokoloff 432). She defies all the codes, and morals, rules and customs of society. She refuses to marry and even betrays the Medallion women by taking their husbands. The sexuality Sula expresses herself is an indication to develop a positive self-image. A repression of sexuality becomes a tool to perpetuate strict adherence to gender roles. Repressed sexuality is also connected to the personal hindrances which trap a character. So Sula tries for an endless liberation from the clutches of male dominance. But her friend Nel keeps an entirely opposite feministic view that she leads a conservative life. SOS shows the confrontation of man-female dichotomy and its confrontations by introducing Dead Children. Lena’s fiery words to Milkman reveals that the girls in the house are subjugated “You have been laughing at us all your life. Corinthians. Mama. Using us, ordering us and judging us [...] who are you to approve or disapprove anybody or anything (SOS 216). Lena challenges the very power of Milkman. She knows that he is supreme because he is a boy enjoying all the privileges and not a girl like her. It is his manhood that helps him to rule the house. In Love Morrison introduces a poor girl

whose life is under the subordination of a man whose age is equal to her father. Heed “heeds” to Bill Cooney to whatever the demands he puts forth as child-bride. Finally Morrison tries to convert the Hotel from the male-centred universe to a female-centred one. Paradise constructs a women-centred universe symbolised by a Convent in which all the hapless women take refuge.

Hence Morrison’s novels are the strong critique of male dominance and, as a result, her women characters try to create a world of their own. TBE demonstrates how lack of proper role model creates havoc in the life of a female child. Sula rebels her self to counter the males and defies the norms of society. Her early childhood witnessed the sexual perspective` of the community, which is reflected in her later years. In Sula Morrison creates a women-centred universe as in Paradise. In the same fashion as Pecola, Jadine is influenced by the dominant culture but she is at least partially aware of her situation as a black and female. All her life she tries to be feminine—a role model that is the creation of white capitalist culture—rather than a feminist. Though SOS is basically about the search for identity of a young black boy it also provides an insight into the male dominant world. It is Sethe, the protagonist of BVD, who expresses the black consciousness in a significant way. Based in slavery, she realizes that her life is lesser than that of an animal. She learns her womanhood and motherhood are being trampled, at the hands of white masters. She often repeats, “They took my milk” and shows the fossilised imprint of a choke cherry tree on her back. As a result, she flees and commits the most heinous crime of killing her own baby girl to protect it from the evils of racism. Jazz exemplifies the betrayal of a woman’s treasure of taking her husband and as a result of revenge seething into her mind that she even surprises the congregation of funeral mass in the church. Violet’s

mutilation of the dead body of the girl, Dorcas reveals her reaction against hurting of her pride. Thus Morrison weaves into her fabric the different feministic perspectives and defines a feminine space of her own separated from the conventional Euro-centric feminists' concepts. Morrison's works of literature are feminist not because they criticise the pathologies of womanhood but because they offer images of women forming supportive communities or relationships that can enable either the struggle to make a post-patriarchal world or the attempt to survive within patriarchy. In this process they wrench their babies, reject, and sometimes save them from the dangers lurking beneath the male dominant world.

A historicist approach to the novels of Morrison closely adheres to re-interpreting and re-valuating the African American history. Morrison's literary creativity tries to see history in a new light that she brings forth what others do not see in interpreting the history of African Americans. In the 1950s, blacks militated for change more forcefully than before, borrowing lessons from the successful campaign of non-violence by Indians against British colonial rule. By the 1960s, African Americans convinced the federal government to pass legislations against outlawing racial discrimination. But poverty and economic racism remained obstacles for blacks, and a number of violent insurrections by blacks in the mid-1960s took place. These helped spur attempts at remediation on the part of the federal government, and as part of that effort, a study was conducted by the Department of Labour that would be called "The Moynihan Report," although its full title is "the Negro Family: A Case for National Action." The report, which appeared in March of 1965, described in official social scientific languages many things about black life that was described in fictional language by Morrison in her novels. Indeed, passages from the report could easily serve as thematic glosses for the novels,

although the report's controversial conclusion – that the matriarchal family structure that resulted from the systematic dispossession of black men was one cause of the continuing culture of poverty amongst blacks – was probably not one Morrison would agree with.

Both the novel TBE and the report might be said to share a rhetorical gesture of indictment and warning. The report discusses in detail the three centuries of exploitation that has had great impact on the black lives and the core of contention is “the consequences of the historic injustices done to Negro are silent and hidden from view”. Perhaps Morrison might have understood that unless this damage is repaired, all the effort to end discrimination, poverty and injustice will come to naught. A detour through her novels exposes how she has attempted to present the injuries met with the African American people and particularly their progenies.

Set in small Western town in Lorain, Ohio during the Depression TBE reveals the historical amplitude of the post reconstruction era. The black children are drawn to the seductive beauty the white culture imposed on them. Therefore, she has selected Pecola as her thematic representative of extreme poverty and deprivation. One would find in Pecola, a child, suffering from identity crisis that is the hall mark of all children of bygone history. She hid behind, concealed, veiled and eclipsed from the main stream of historical events. Further Cholly's sexual act in his childhood with a girl of his age posit light into the way whites look upon the basic instincts of human being for centuries. They witness this sexual act with ecstatic pleasure and compelled him to complete within his presence. “Get on wid it, nigger... I said, get on wid it. An' make it good, nigger, make it good” (TBE 116). He is paralyzed, pours all the blame on his love Darlene, and not on the white hunters. The historical fact that the white derives pleasure out of sadism from the agony



and paralysis felt by the African American children is explicit in the passage. Cholly takes a rebirth in North with this insult lurking in his recess, which ultimately collapses his family life. Again Ogunyemi asserts that the names of prostitutes evoke the helplessness of China, Poland, and France in the face of more powerful forces during World War II, the historical setting of TBE. Ogunyemi states, “By bringing in the names of the typically defenceless in the international politics, Morrison has succeed in broadening her theme and making universal and existential problem in which the strong prey on the weak with impunity (114).

Sula is set in Bottom, Medallion a valley Town which occupies a unique place in the fictional geography of Morrison’s novels as it presents historical ironies to the readers of the novel. Although Medallion blacks live in Bottom, their community is actually located at the top of the hill, as a result, the narrator relates that it is a “nigger joke” of the kind white folks tell when the mill closes down and they are looking for a little comfort somewhere” ( Sula 4). Bottom seems to represent the past, the rural South and a reservoir of culture that has been uprooted. Another important historical irony is that chapter bears the title 1919 yet much of the action takes place before the end of the World War; and very little occurs in this particular year. When the grand tunnel work starts, Bottom gives way to Medallion Golf Course by uprooting some of the Bottom families and their lives. The narrator says “In that place where they tore the nightshade and blackberry patches from their roots to make room for the Medallion City Golf Courses, there was once a neighborhood” ( Sula 3).

In the report submitted by Moynihan it is said that, the black is given liberty, but not equality. Therefore, life remained hazardous and marginal. Of the greatest importance, the male black, particularly in the South, became an

object of intense hostility, an attitude unquestionably based, in some measure, on fear. This is illustrated in TBE and Jazz by the migration of the Breedloves and the Joe Traces settling in the North. Cholly becomes an abandoned child in the South when his aunt dies, so he is compelled to migrate to North and settles in Lorain. This is particularly shown in SOS by bringing forth an under-plot of Guitar Bains story incorporated in the text. Untellable miseries and persecutions of racial atrocities are unleashed on the blacks in the South and the news of lynching, rapes, mutilations and killings flash across the country. Guitar in his tendril sap-green days witnesses his father's sliced up body in the mill and when the dead body is brought home, the unpolluted mind gets troubled and all the innocence stored are washed away from this child. It is aggravated when the white gave candies to the children. Later he joins a terrorist group of Seven days and starts the retribution. This has been the history of blacks in the American continent, in which even equality is denied. When Jim Crow (Southern laws instituting segregation and denying equal rights to blacks) makes his appearance towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it may be speculated that it is the negro male who is most humiliated. The law exacts segregation and the submissiveness, and it is more destructive to the male than to the female personality. Keeping the Negro "in his place" can be translated as keeping the "Negro male in his place"; the female was not a threat to anyone. Unquestionably, these events worked against the emergence of a strong father figure. The report suggests that slavery and economic distress after slavery worked to break down and interrupt the transaction of appropriate nurturing behavior from one generation of males to another in the black community: "Negro children without fathers flounder and fail." (Ryan 128).

But in those historical presentations by the Euro-centred system, many

shocking events of slave narration are willfully forgotten. When Morrison scrapes through the slave narratives, she comes across the Black Book, known as the scrapbook of the folk journey of the Black America. The narration finds many stories connected with painful slavery in which a runaway slave Garner from Kentucky figures. She blends this story in a beautiful fabric by employing history, myth, folklore and ghost stories. Hence BVD set in the nineteenth century, primarily in the gruesome pre-and- post Civil War era artistically dramatises a haunting amalgam of the past and present experiences of an escaped female slave. Ever present is a reminder of the past is Beloved, a baby spirit, whom her mother slashed with a handsaw in what she considers a mercy killing. After haunting her mothers' home for eighteen years the spirit becomes flesh and walks into her mother's abode. In charting the forgotten history, the unspeakable past, of innumerable mothers and wrenched babies Morrison uses the technique of memory and re-memory and a series of flash backs. Above all BVD belongs to an historical genre and offers personal accounts of black slaves and ex-slaves of their experiences in slavery and their efforts to obtain freedom. BVD chronicles incidents after incidents in the ex-slave mind providing the reader with insights not only into Sethe's thoughts and actions "but also into the structure and workings of the plantocracy that denied her basic human and political rights. Thus, as true of the more traditional slave narrative, BVD records the cruelty, violence, and degradation—whether physical floggings or the psychological fragmentations of the black family that often victimized slaves" (Samuelss & Weems 96), irrespective of children or their parents or male or female. But this slave narrative is presented in the form of a Judo-Christian mythical structure that the action moves from the idyllic state of Garden of Eden into the wilderness, the struggle for survival and the providential help and arrival into the Promised Land which parallels the mythical aspect of childhood—from the

innocence to the tragedy of innocence—as the history African American children move.

Morrison's trilogy BVD, Jazz and Paradise provide a historically contextualized, multi-generational view of crime and the process of criminalization: of the roles that the law and judiciary, and the masters and the slaves play in the search providing a space of security and safety. From slavery to Reconstruction in BVD, to the Harlem Renaissance and Northern migration in Jazz, to Black Nationalism and the Civil Rights Movement in Paradise, Morrison's trilogy offers a rich historical perspective for understanding characters' roles as victims and perpetrators of crime. Paradise also contributes to the work of prison abolitionism by carefully anatomizing the complementary and sometimes contradictory ways in which race, class, and gender shape the logic of putting one behind the lock-up and punishment practices. BVD powerfully suggests that Sethe's murder of her own child may serve as a logical, rather than pathological, response to the state-sanctioned, communal crime of slavery. Furthermore, the novel suggests that Sethe's process of coming to terms with her action requires the community's simultaneous efforts to come to terms with its own barbaric history. Baby Suggs advises Sethe "Not a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief. We lucky this ghost is a baby [...]. You lucky. You got three left. Three pulling at your skirts and just one raising hell from the other side. Be thankful, why don't you?" (BVD 5).

In telling the story of Joe Trace, Jazz draws attention to forms of violence that erupt as symptoms of our communal failure to reckon with the violent legacy of slavery. Joe's desire to establish and preserve a connection with his mother seems to motivate his desire to preserve his connection—through murder—with a young woman named Dorcas. Jazz also tells the story

of black women who have fled violence and poverty in the South yet yearn to exercise violence as a means of survival in 1920s New York City. According to the novel, black women in Harlem are always “thinking of ways to be busier” because “what is waiting for them, in a suddenly idle moment, is the seep of rage.[...]. Mindful and particular about what in its path it chooses to bury” ( Jazz 27). In order to protect them from harm that the law implicitly sanctions and even abets, “black women all over the country were armed; black women are dangerous and the less money they have the deadlier weapon they chose. Any other kind of unarmed black woman in 1926 was silent or crazy or dead” ( Jazz 100).

In Paradise, it is the men of Ruby, Oklahoma who bear arms against the women of their community. The novel opens in July 1976, with Ruby’s male citizens setting out to kill five women who seek refuge in a former racial house, big house, home Convent on the outskirts of town. Paradise then moves between the present-tense time of the massacre and the events leading up to it, beginning in 1890 when Ruby’s nine founding families leave Mississippi and Louisiana in order to settle in the all-black town of Fairly, Oklahoma. When these coal-black, “eight-rock”<sup>5</sup> families experience rejection by Farley’s lighter-skinned blacks, they become “a tight band of wayfarers bound by the enormity of what happened to them.” As the narrator states, Everything anybody wanted to know about the citizens of Ruby lay “in the ramifications of that one rebuff out of many” ( Paradise 189). After establishing their own all-black town in Haven, Oklahoma, Ruby’s ancestors move West again when Haven shows signs of deterioration, and they found Ruby in 1949. The pain of their initial rejection, compounded by the failure of Haven, leads Ruby’s founding fathers to embrace a dangerous and exclusionary form of cultural nationalism. In order to protect their earthly

Paradise—their hard-won, male-defined standards of racial purity, sexual morality, economic security, and communal safety—the men of Ruby ultimately wield against the women of their own community the discriminatory forms of policing that they have attempted to escape themselves. Paradise narrates this dynamic by emphasizing the founding fathers' movement from the position of crucified to the position of crucifier. The novel juxtaposes depictions of the literal and figurative crucifixion of African American men—through state-sponsored structures of racial inequality, war, incarceration, and capital punishment—with depictions of the crucifixion of African-American women that results when black men embrace the black nationalist family narrative. Although Ruby's founders embrace Black Nationalism as a bulwark against state-sanctioned racism, their attempts to uphold imprisoning racial and gender norms actually further the state's policing of the black community. The men of Ruby provide a prime example of what Wahneema Lubiano calls “the aesthetics of state repression dressed up in blackface” (Lubiano 251). In the words of Ruby's Reverend Misner, “They think they have outfoxed the white man, when in fact they imitate him[...] How exquisitely human was the wish for permanent happiness, and how thin human imagination became trying to achieve it” (Paradise 306). In these entire historicist readings one can find the vision of childhood moving from worse to the worst.

The narrative style Morrison employs to show the tragic vision of childhood is significant at this stage. In narrating the story she has adopted various styles and techniques according to the demands of the text. A unique method as a means through which omniscient narrator mostly keeps addressing the reader, but at times allows other characters to relate their stories from their own point of view. In this way, TBE becomes a child-epic

in print because she accepts the way a child narrates the story which has a breathless quality. Claudia presents the picture of children whose job is to hunt toys and bicycles during their vacation, for this they sell marigolds to earn some amount but upon hearing the tragedy of her friend her chanting, obstinacies and problems with adults give way to tragic situation. This situation compels her to tell the story in an adult way. Although Pecola is the central character, Claudia's way of narration makes the reader to ponder into the tragedy of a child and comes to the conclusion that Claudia serves as a child-prophet in the novel as she takes the reader from the 'how' of life to the 'why' of existence. Claudia retells the story with the assistance of other external narrators for external amplification. Further Miss Mary soothes out her pain by singing Blues, which softens Pecola's tensions.

The narrative technique changes when Morrison deals with Sula. Through rich ironical statements she brings forth the significant tragedy of childhood. The words like 'mellow' the ripeness and 'sinister beauty' indicate the innocent lust of adolescent girls while 'ice cream', 'vanilla' and 'lemon' are suggestive of the community's sexual perspective. The narrator watches the adults when the girls pass them, "they tipped their hats". She extols season's play with rich verbal play as "the summer limped with the weight of the blossomed things" (Sula 56) as if she is a poetess. She waves mythical symbols and allegorical terms to tell the tragic conditions of childhood. For example she pictures Eva, the grandmother as the primordial mother Eve who nurtures the generation with love and compassion. She employs the Western myth, death by water, in the accidental death of the child Chicken Littlehead and the burning of Plum in the conflagration which are closely linked with the mythical concept of childhood.

Jazz presents multi-perspective narration in which all characters appear

to be Jazz performers, each taking a turn to improvise upon his respective part and then merging into the basic composition. Morrison says of using this technique that “familiar material to express various sentiments, uniting performer and audience” (Max 565). She uses this narrative to create a feeling to the readers that they are having an experience of watching and listening to a Jazz performance. Firstly, the narrator introduces the basic theme—the love affair of Joe and its tragic end. The narrator informs that he has been living in a rented house with his estranged wife who always attends to a parrot chirp, “I love You”. In the various stages of improvisation the voice comes and goes while relating the complex stories of characters and allows each character to come forward and make his own creative improvisation and then recedes. This is made possible through monologues, flashbacks, reveries and introspection. Meanwhile the main voice keeps making felt its presence by intervening with other voices. In the beginning the voice appears “Sth, I know the woman. She used to live with a flock of birds on Lenox Avenue. Know her husband, too. [...] so sad and happy he shot her just to keep the feelings going (Jazz 3). Keeping its mysteriousness, the voice improvises further, “I’m crazy about this City. Daylight slants like a razor cutting the buildings in half [...] A city like this one makes me dream tall and feel in on things ( Jazz 7). Sometimes it goes very high when sudden and intense pain or pleasure occurs in the lives of the characters.

Morrison uses Blues, which is a part of Jazz music, for it is well-known for its tragic accent and haunting melancholy. When the boy, Golden Gray, reveals his tragedy of childhood, because he is born to a black father and an unmarried white mother, Morrison converts the tone of her narration into Blues. The mother has to go into hiding to give birth to the boy with golden hair and gray eyes. When he is on the look out of his father, and stands



on a place that turns out to be his father's house, he looks forward to meeting him but it makes him intensely sad. The boy remembers that all these years he is a one-armed man, and all his sorrows of not finding his father overflows like a man subjected to surgery "Only now... that I know I have a father, do I feel his absence. The place where he should have but not. Before, I thought every one was one-armed. Now I feel the surgery. The crunch of bone when it is sundered, the sliced flesh and the tubes of blood cut through....I am going to freshen the pain, point it so we both know what it is for (Jazz 188).

Morrison further highlights the Blues through the simple call-and-response device as well as its version of the technically sophisticated antiphona method. For instance, the childless Violet momentarily suffers a crack, steals a baby from the wicker-carriage and walks on. The attending girl screams on seeing the empty carriage: " ' Philly! Philly's gone! She took Philly!' " (Jazz 32). A crowd gathers around casts doubt: " 'She who? Somebody asked' 'Who took him?' 'A woman!' 'I was gone one minute' 'You left whole live baby with a stranger to get a record' [...] 'Who misraised you?' 'Call the cops' 'what for?' They can at least look" (Jazz 32-33). So Morrison adds a new innovative and creative art of narration in presenting the tragedy of childhood. Similarly in BVD she uses the broken memory to interpret and reflect the condition of childhood. Morrison uses many modes to create a world. Her narration begins the tale, and immediately allows interplay of voices to begin. Torn fragments of the past float out of Sethe and Paul D, who meet again after eighteen long years to exchange the forgotten memories of torture they underwent during slavery. Their voices join those of Beloved and her ghostly appearances, of plantation life and the torture, of Baby Suggs, dead for eight years, and of Denver, for whom the present matters. The narration set world spinning—the world of slaves and slavery whose horrors can no longer be imagined at present but whose sounds of pain cannot be

wiped out easily. “Toni Morrison’s ability to charge the vernacular with power and sound enables her to give a mythic form to the story of her people, the Afro-Americans” (Rodrigues. CLC Vol.87, 298). While in Love, she uses the split narrative method with pulsing poetic qualities to describe the lives of characters and particularly of Heed who is locked up in the arms of the gigantic man Bill Cosey as a child-bride.

Thus the various approaches help to trace the lost glory of childhood in Morrison’s novels. Innumerable approaches and readings have also appeared pointing on different strategies employed by Morrison. But one must agree that, as Angelo Burton puts it:

Morrison’s status as recognized commentator on black America seems to rest uneasily with the centrality she gives to black disempowerment in her fiction. Her major protagonists resort to bizarre types of crisis resolution including murder, incestuous rape, bestiality and self- mutilation often within the context of parent-child relationship (170).

## **Conclusion**

A solitary sorrow best befits

Thy lips and antheing a lonely grief.

Keats "Hyperion" bk.III

No writer can do away with this theme because it becomes part and parcel of the avenues of human affairs. The writer as well as his creations must pass through this important stage of life, which foretells his actions and behaviours in the larger space of human actions. Ultimately both travel through the meandering paths of life's situations and reach second childhood; and then take spiritual birth or rebirth. Every generation is subjected to this process of coil of death and birth, and consequently, every domain of life or death through successive incarnations must pass through childhood—through innocence and then experience, and finally through the second childhood and vice versa. So great thinkers, philosophers and writers are convinced of this perennial philosophical aspect of childhood and their works reflected the need of innocence but Morrison concentrates on the tragic state of innocence, particularly on the plight of African American children by taking into consideration the trampling of their innocence, later adult experience and reaching their final doom.

Childhood connotes many a symbol and meaning to the writers. It suggests purity and simplicity; the perfect joy and innocence, or the beginning of life and rebirth, the dawn of a new culture or any realm of human affairs. The theme is a powerful medium to certain writers to express the plight of human conditions because the self of the characters is rooted in their childhood. They think that if the seeds of human beings are nurtured and brought up well, can solve the human misery to some degree. Some advocate

that the inner psyche of the characters can easily be studied if childhood is explored at the literary level, for literature is the only powerful medium in which the ontology of child can be analysed in its fullest sense. Some go through the existential problems of modern man and believe that the resultant traumatic experiences, to some extent, are the results of his unfavourable childhood days. Others allow their characters to go back to their nostalgic days to look back for a solace, and then offer them to retrace their steps through memory and imagination to get even with that bygone blissful period, which they never receive in their tension-filled life. Sartre and Proust assert in their autobiographical works that one carries his beautiful memories of childhood to his death-bed and these memories always lurk at the subconscious level, which found reflections in their literary works. But Morrison deconstructs this theme to interpret the suppressed feelings of persecutions unleashed on the African American generation. Many of her child characters, as William Gaddis Jr. points out, discover not the intimacy of love and affection but the intimacy of terror.

A writer cannot fully represent any theme realistically unless there are some experiences, memories and reflections of his childhood because through the innocence and perception of a child one can faithfully portray the realistic picture. These revelations sometimes come through the clear perspective of a child. Morrison has perceived the complexity and subtlety of her characters relationship to the earth, to the society, to work, and to each other as she has had the experience of observing them, feeling them at close quarters while she was a child. One can see that, after going through her novels, these perceptions she carried throughout her literary career. She has observed and learned many lasting lessons in her childhood about the black people and their struggles to find out their own identity which find expressions in her works.

Her novels are, therefore, the kaleidoscopic picture of what she has seen or witnessed during her childhood.

Morrison's familial background as well as the childhood memories of family members reflects in her oeuvres. In one of the interviews, she admits that her father is a racist and the underlying principle of all her works are deep rooted in racial consciousness mainly because of her father's influence. Her grandmother's stories and singing had a profound impact in Morrison's childhood. These songs have made her to acquaint with the black lore that is being permeated in her fiction. The terrifying stories told by her parents during her childhood, particularly her father, have become the genesis of mysticism and magic found in her novels. Morrison tells that she is the only child who does not get any attraction from other members of the family so that she does all sorts of thing to attract them. This feeling of rejection from the other members of her family is of paramount importance in her works. So the familial background and the childhood experiences, with an ambience of historical and social consciousness help Morrison to fashion her craftsmanship.

An exploration of the novels of Morrison would help one to conclude that the theme of childhood and its tragic end are the patterns recurrent in her works. These patterns show that the tragedy occurs due to various reasons such as racial, historical and sociological background and at the same time each and every character bears the brunt of childhood trauma. The trauma sings their young ones and carries it always at the back of their mind, which is being reflected in their adult lives. TBE shows that in the pursuit of Western ideals and aesthetic beauty, a girl is almost torn apart. It is this desire of the black girl that connotes the eternal conflict between the bad and the beautiful of two cultures—a conflict between Western culture and African American

culture. One of the peculiar characteristics of the novel is that it is narrated through the candid eyes of a child Claudia MacTeers. Her lamentations about her classmate with the tinge of sorrow help the readers to feel that it is realistic as the naivety and the innocent way of narration of child assure the credibility of the readers. It is this child's excursion into the "how and why" of life that sets the novel in motion. At the beginning she already knows the answer to the problem but difficult to find out the "why". As the novel progresses, she explores the answers one by one with the help of other narrators as if she is doing a home work and her transformation is a passage from innocence to the perception of terrifying facts. The novel further highlights the influence of childhood tragedies of parental figures, in turn, makes their toddlers life even more tragic.

The theme childhood stands conspicuous in the novel Sula. The novelist affirms that almost all the characters have the simplicity of a child but most of them have had crippled childhood, as the community of Bottom is unconcerned about the little toddlers in whom the welfare of future generation rests. Sula expands the theme of childhood but in a different way. Though the novel presents the shouting and joys of children in the beginning, it becomes tragic towards the end with the death of Chicken Littlehead. Morrison thinks that without the joys and shouting of children, Nature is bereft of its grandeur. But Bottom, where the seeds of humanity are nurtured is not a congenial place as planting (nurturing the children) is backbreaking. Isolated by location, race and economical imbalance, Bottom accepts all evils in a prosaic manner and allows letting it run its course in its own way. Their attitude towards children and their fellow beings are not different. It is this attitude of the community that fails in nurturing their children. The Bottomites do not concentrate on the upbringing of the girls in a natural way but enjoy their physical features and

look them down upon with lust. As a product of this community, Sula becomes a social outsider, a pariah, a rebel by nature because the soil she grew up is “bad for certain kinds of flowers”. Being an estranged girl from the larger society, Sula lives on the fringes of it. Due to the social ostracisation from childhood to adulthood, she becomes a whore, a prostitute in her mother’s ways. As Sula senses no hindrance from her parents, family and society; she gets an inspiration and courage to go astray from the normal social order by inheriting this habit from her own mother. Her mother passes this trait to her daughter which, she in turn, has inherited from her own mother. Hannah, her mother is least bothered about her daughter which is explicit in her unpleasant comment. Sula overhears this comment which presents her a sense of alienation. As a reaction to the alienation offered by her mother, she coolly watches her mother burn in the conflagration without any emotional disturbance. Further, this women-centred universe fails to provide the nurturance of children as there are no male counterparts to direct the mothers in Bottom to look into the becoming of girls in their tender years. In fact, the parental figures are proved to be the tools of extinction of their own offspring.

The quest for selfhood is the central theme of the novel—a facet of childhood theme. Childhood connotes the yearning for purification and innocence, which are always inherent in the pattern of life. Sula’s quests for selfhood, the yearning for purity and innocence have not been fulfilled because of the horrible conditions provided by her mother and the community around. To escape from this sordid reality, she lives out her days exploring her own thoughts and emotions, giving them full reign, feeling no obligation to anybody and finally becomes a wayward girl. Sula suffers acute isolation after the accidental drowning of her playmate, Chicken Littlehead. The fateful

event has a lasting impact upon her mind and follows it all through her life. A sense of guilt haunts her, which does not allow her any respite. She determines to forget her mother's remark: "the sting in the eye". Now she has only an alternate before her, to forget the carelessness she experienced in the family and community and emerge as a new girl. Unlike the passive nature of Pecola, she becomes stoic to counter anything. First she finds a company, Nel, to exchange her pains and sorrows. They develop camaraderie between them and it is intense and sudden. This common chord makes them to develop a symbiotic relationship. Morrison, through this companionship, combines the psychological, the symbolic and the philosophical concerns in her portrayals of Sula and Nel, at the same time she blends the two aspect of childhood in one character, Sula.

The parenting performed in the novel is to create contempt and rejection among the children towards their parents, which are detrimental to the growth of happy childhood. Psychologists are of the opinion that imitating dangerous and undesirable things from parents inevitably invite detrimental problems in their adult life. Both Sula and Nel experience the absence of fathers. The absences result in their emotional isolation. Similarly they are brought up without having any brothers or friends to share their feelings for achieving socialisation nor do they have any guidance from their parents. At the same time, Morrison depicts Eva, as a "terrible" mother as well as the saviour of children. Though she loves all children and does not find any difference in them but when occasion demands, she takes the cudgel against her own child. Her choice of death of her son and daughter by fire are related to the myth of childhood as it suggests purification and rebirth. Death by fire indicates a return to the purity of the soul and retrieving the lost bliss of childhood in the other world.



The ultimate quest for self, which is the characteristic of childhood, is explicit in SOS and that the quest for cultural identity by its hero Milkman is conspicuous. Most part of the novel deals with the story of becoming of Milkman and his turbulent rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. During the process of becoming, the conflicts and confrontations, overcoming the crisis resolutions Milkman experience are revealed through the kaleidoscopic view of the places and its communal black life. In his pursuit of his authentic personality, the secondary characters serve him as mentors, educators, and sometimes companions and lovers. If anything Milkman is born into, he leads an entirely unnatural existence; his life is marked from the very beginning by distortion and disaffection. He tries to overcome these undesirable things, and understands from the very beginning of his life that he is a 'Dead', his mother is a 'Dead' and his sisters are all 'Deads'. This shows that not only his childhood but also the childhood of all characters are pictured as paralysed and stunted in the novel.

\*The parental figures distort the life of this young boy. Macon's do's and don'ts bridle the growth of Milkman, which ultimately lends a negative reaction and a defiant attitude towards his father. So he does everything contrary to the expectation of his father. His mother acts as a distant one to him because she lives somewhere and constantly indulges in the memory of her father, unmindful of her only son. As he matures, he is convinced of his own family that he is a burden, and develops a concentration on things behind. He thinks that there is no future for him. His quest for selfhood and a desire to reach out for innocence, which he lacks in his early years, are constantly working in him. For finding a solace, he retreats to the ancient world called Shalimar and then for Pennsylvania where he listens to the songs and dances played by children. Their rendition of the song is related to his

heritage.

Morrison shows that, through songs, children are responsible for sustaining the remnants of the myth of Milkman's ancestor Solomon. Therefore the title of the novel itself reveals its connection to the theme. It is the song that helps to retrace and remember the bygone days of childhood. It is through the song that the children receive the archetypal imagery of their race, and it matters not, whether a loving mother or rejecting mother sings these songs, so long as children listen to them. Thus, Morrison emphasises that for the nurturance of childhood, memory and music coming from women and children are inevitable. Those are the lifelines of survival for those who have lost their childhood memories. The mythological aspect of childhood, which is closely related to the theory that an African could fly, is extracted in the text deciphering the children's song and is interwoven in the narrative of Milkman's family. It is the folk tale of the flying African, Solomon, who one day discovers his magical power and uses it to fly from slavery to his African home. The flying image to a heavenly abode is connected with the theme of childhood as it is the quest for a heavenly bliss inherent in every being. Milkman also conducts an escape into his ancestral heritage. However the flight is an attempt to recapture the bygone days in which all the qualities of childhood prevailed. In other words, for attaining the lost qualities of childhood Milkman escapes into his ancestral world

BVD becomes, more or less a tragic epic of childhood as it sweeps through the heart-rending experiences of children caught in racial onslaughts. The memories of childhood days of the characters reflect slave history, which is clouded by memories of horrible experiences. She makes the child ghost, Beloved, a signifier of the forgotten children of slavery. Many of the hapless children got strangled to death by the hands of their own mother in order to

keep away from the cruelties of slavery so that, the mothers hoped, their children would be safe with their destiny where the slave masters cannot do anything against them. Many of the children were thrown to the waters while they are being shipped from the shores of Africa. Morrison makes Beloved to resurrect from the waters is a reminder of this historical fact. Therefore, Beloved seems to be the representative of all those children who perished during slavery either at the hands of their mothers or were thrown to the waters by the slave owners. The novelist blends fact and fiction by making the dead children to reappear. It serves to remind the living the historical facts about African American children, that their innocence was trampled during slavery. The resurrection of Beloved, in a way, is remembering the forgotten history of children and it paves the way for re-enacting the crucial situation in the lives of African Americans, which Morrison thinks, shall make conscious of their slavery past. The African Americans live through the revival of the memory of their dead children and it is this consciousness that haunt them always. Thus Morrison exploits the child persona to evolve the history of slaves over a period of 300 years or more. She uses the child to dig out the past, which the characters try to forget as it is the cruel memories of slavery.

The insecurity of the children is a recurrent pattern in the novel. The insecurity and bewilderment create a lot of problem to the development of the personality of a child. To live with these perceptions is a horrible state as far as a child is concerned. Like Beloved, Denver, the second child in the novel, bear the brunt of the nightmarish thought of being killed by her mother. From the very beginning of her life, she is forced to suck the blood of her sister whom her mother killed while she is drinking the maternal milk. In order to escape this trauma, she often escapes to a bower encircled by leaves surrounded by a stream. This escape is a Paradisal syndrome—a yearning for

purification and a desire to return to the delightful period, which is closely linked with the myth of childhood. Not only Denver but almost all the characters show a tendency to go back to their childhood for their outer world is chaotic.

BVD thus becomes the epic of childhood and its ensuing tragedy. Because of the racial violence and injustice done to the black community, they had to wrench their babies' necks and cannot nurture their seeds in a proper way. Those children of bygone ages of history met a tragic fate not because of their fault but because of the callous attitude of the whites. The ghost of the murdered child, Beloved stalks through every page of the novel to remind the tragic depth of childhood. In the novel, the child personae are used to connect the memory and the re-memory of forgotten history of slaves. Even though Beloved appears a second time, her infantile existence continues with the passage of time because her growth is halted after the killing. She remains a baby throughout in the novel unable to change from the infantile existence to a cheerful adult. This shows that the children of slavery could not grow into adulthood, even if they became adults, because the slavery presented them a frozen existence.

TAR sketches the confrontation between old and new values and culture: Old in the sense the bygone history of slavery and new, the cradle of culture or the beginning, which connotes childhood. Nature and culture are presented by Son and Jadine respectively. Jadine's obsession with the white world and her polished Western manners produce a rupture in her relation with the unsophisticated Son. Jadine's authentic self is covered by the fancy of white culture in which she is brought up causing an estrangement from her black identity. But TAR is Morrison's guidelines for stressing the importance of educating the children of her community. It shows how acquiring education

and Western culture can deteriorate a child of black race through the presentation of Jadine. In the case of Jadine, it is true that she is proved to be one of the lost children of her race. Her behavioural pattern to the tune of Western standards and drifting into the elite class of the bourgeois class show that when they acquire education, majority of them do not show any allegiance to their community. Jadine, an educated and orphaned girl, when becomes a model and wealthy, despises the persons who toiled to bring her up. She even shows contempt towards them and tries to forget her ancestral roots. Jadine thinks that child-parent relationship is only a welcome distraction and nothing more. She has no sincere affection or gratitude towards Sydney and Ondine but she plays and pretends to be their daughter. Her education worsens her person, changes her Nevertheless, the uneducated blacks like Ondine and Sydney stand for solidarity of their race. This fact is amplified in the novel by projecting the confrontation between the educated Jadine and the uneducated Son who are the two children “violently yoked together” by Morrison.

The setting of the novel—the lush Caribbean island symbolises a man-made Eden. Men and women meander there like children of Nature reminding of the mythical children Adam and Eve. Valerian leads complacent life of second childhood without bothering anything with his much younger wife, Margaret. After leaving Philadelphia, they lead a primitive life of simplicity and keep away from the bustling world. It is the beginning of a new life for them, far from the flurry of modern city life—an unpolished, unpolluted and unsophisticated life. The straight forwardness, the simplicity and innocence—the qualities of childhood— apparently prevail among them. Even Son’s alighting on the island is seems to be the evolution of a child and its growth from innocence to experience. In the prologue of the novel, Son’s plunge into

the sea suggests not only an attempt of death by drowning but after many strong efforts he makes a rebirth.. At the end of the novel, he emerges from the sea on to the land in a sequence that mirrors the evolution of life; crawling, standing and eventually walking upright like a child does. But when his racial ancestry is confronted, he escapes the childhood qualities and becomes an agent of racial solidarity.

Morrison presents an extremely different parental mirror in the novel—Valerian Street and his wife Margaret Lenore—both of them are shown to be ‘distanced parents’ of white community and are opposite in view of nurturing their child Michael. Though Valerian Street is leading an infantile existence in the family, he loves his son, Michael, in his heart of heart. Morrison by portraying Margaret Lenore in the mother role exposes the attitude of white fashionable ladies who forget the holiness and worthiness of nurturing and nursing their children. They, in fact, make their children’s holistic period tragic. Margaret always expresses her worries about her only son Michael but when the novel progresses, she is proved to be the most masochist, sadist and narcissistic character. In order to take revenge upon her husband and the world outside, she pinches the back of the child and takes delight in its noiseless crying. The child after leaving this Paradise-like home never returns because the gruelling childhood memories due to his mothers’ affliction never fade from his mind.

Morrison names her characters in the novel dexterously perhaps because of their exhibition of childhood qualities or they are incapable of doing any adult work expected by white standards. They are looked upon as ‘African American children’ by their owners. Valerian names his servants and their foster-child as Ondine Childs, Sydney Childs and Jadine Childs respectively. Everyone called the black fugitive “Son” though his name is

William Green. The theme of the novel itself spins round a child who never turns up in the novel. The mythical aspect of childhood and the myth related to tar baby also shows the tragic state of childhood in the novel as the characters are stuck up in tar unable to extricate from their psychological, social and racial stigma. Further all characters show an eagerness to return to their lost Eden in the novel. It is a novel of transition from innocence to experience or from childhood to becoming in which several overtones of childhood theme occur.

The theme of childhood represented in TAR continues in Jazz, though differently, but varies from other novels of Morrison, as it is the story of fusion between new and old culture. During the period of Harlem Renaissance, many Southern black families migrated to North leaving their past miserable life in the South. Culturally, they were reborn in the North and can be thought of undergoing the period of childhood. In the North, the blacks were drawn towards the bewitching lyric of Jazz, and they sloughed off their old culture and have started a new culture called Jazz culture. The sloughing off the old culture was equivalent to becoming a child in new culture.

\*The theme of the novel stems from the inner and outer conflicts that the characters experience in their childhood days. Joe Trace is brought up by foster-parents and his childhood is very miserable, as he is an 'orphan' even while his mother is alive. He has been tracing his mother but when he finds her, she outrightly rejects him. This rejection is the root cause of all his actions in his later years of life. Violet also is a victim of the unhappy childhood. The bitterness of unhappy childhood compels Violet to take a decision not to have children and tries to correct her ways and regrets for not becoming a mother. Her instant longing for getting a child is explicitly scattered in the pages of the novel. She is fascinated by the holiness, purity,

and innocence and all that suggests for a child. This transition of her mind-set is a welcome change, which prompts her for self-realisation. She is stricken with grief when she thinks of her baby, lost in miscarriage, and mother-hunger wells up from her recess. This hunger prompts her to become a child-snatcher. Her mental distraction is due to the absence of the bliss of childhood and then childlessness, which in turn makes her sleep with dolls cast in the form of children.

Though Dorcas is rightly given the moral schooling in her tender age by her aunt, she is lured into the sweeping Jazz culture. The new culture presents lots of children a mesmerizing feeling resulting in the destruction of holiness of childhood. Instead of elevating the souls, Jazz music and Harlem culture foster moral decay among children. Morrison presents Golden Gray, a child born to a white woman, Vera Louse and black man, Henry Lestroy. Like Joe searching for his mother, Golden Gray's incessant quest is to find out his father. Gray's ignorance of his parental origins and ignorance to the fact that he is not a black and at the same time not a white, result in his tragedy of childhood. The characters in Jazz under consideration all crave in common for parental-figures whose presence is crucial in their formative years but Golden Gray and Joe Trace are unfortunate ones. It is intriguing to ask what has separated and kept the parents and children so far apart. Jazz demonstrates that the separations are made by the unfairness of race, gender, and class, not by their will.

Each and every chapter of Paradise begins with a woman whose childhood is either sexually abused or abandoned; or the women have proved to be the crucifier of childhood. Haven is built by the forefathers after migrating from the Southern parts of the country and they finally settle in Ruby. They pass laws called "blood-rule" and children are looked upon on the



basis of this law and skin colour. Yet this story of Haven's founding is also a reminder of the sufferings of children: the child abuse, abortions and infanticide in order to maintain social aloofness; and the cruel and indifferent attitude of mothers who think that their babies are the stumbling block to their to unbridled authentic self. Morrison brings into focus a Convent, which witnesses the tragedy of childhood with women who are abandoned, rejected or sought asylum. An exploration of their childhood shows that they are introduced either as the victims of sexual abuses in their early life or their parents abuse them during their childhood. One of the respected ladies of Ruby town desires miscarriage of her third child in the Convent. Another seeks shelter in the Convent for her successful attempt to abort foetus because she conceived it out of wedlock. So the walls of the Convent silently reverberate the wailing of babies who are not fated to lead an earthly life because their mothers want to keep the rigid rule of the community going.

Paradise offers the mythological concepts of childhood. It includes a yearning for Paradise by the characters when they are confronted with harsh realities in life. The novel presents many of the characters moving towards an asylum called Convent in Ruby town for a vivid renewal of life when they experience their splintering of self. It is the radical transfer from the external world to the internal world and is a retreat from the desperations of the wasteland to the peace of everlasting realm—the childhood—that is within. So Paradise expands the theme of childhood by re-scripting the narrative of Christian sacrifice, giving earthly form to the possibility of a world in which healing, redemption and safety are not predicted on child's crucifixion.

Love (2003) also shows the characters' agony of childhood while some are floating in the memories of their bygone blissful days. It seems that the novel is clearly a parodic version of the configuration of America as the

innocent virgin despoiled by the all-conquering hero. The child Heed stands for the innocent virgin and Bill Cosey becomes the symbol of coloniser. Numerous scholars have documented this dominant cultural convention of rape as the sexual exploitation by the Europeans on the American settlement. Further, among several readings of the novel, Morrison wants to assert that sexually abusing a girl is a kind of sadistic pleasure for keeping the male pride. A young girl wedded at an age of eleven, when she does not know what sex is and even before her period starts, is the tragic element in the novel. She also depicts different perspectives of love—love that is imparted by a perverted man and a child drawn towards it mistaking it for a true love. The child character, Heed, realises when looking back, that her childhood has been robbed off. Morrison shows that parental negligence often leads to sexual exploitation of children by presenting the lewd nature of love in her last novel. Morrison describes the life of another girl, Junior Viviane, in the novel as a “Settlement dog” whose childhood is unbearable—worse than a dog. Isolation and rejection awaits her at the School. But she adjusts among her friends, and knows better how to consider these girls and behaves as though the rejection and isolation are victory, smiling when she confronts the one recess friend retreat into her original fold. Morrison here presents the stoicism slowly taking place in her character. She seems to complete the metamorphosis from the defenceless nature of Pecola to the stoicism of Christine.

In short, Morrison presents the world of children whose psyches are wounded and who undergo the resultant trauma in different ways. It brings insanity, destructiveness and implosion to Pecola, Sethe, Beloved, Violet and Cholly, while it produces balance, understanding and constructiveness in Paul D, Milkman, Son and June. Morrison characters are like children; none is

good or bad and possesses no dichotomy of objects. Their inner recesses are filled with Paradisal syndrome and innocence, which often leads to detrimental circumstances. They see things through the candid eye of a child because most of them are innocent in nature but when circumstances force them to strip off their childhood qualities; they become “dangerous and salt tasters”. When they mature, they often look back to their good-old days of childhood for a speck of relief when tension fills their mind. She constructs her character’s becoming—the transformation from innocence to experience so that they can be understood in their fullest sense as one’s childhood helps the writer to reveal what is imbedded in his personality from the beginning itself. Their childhood is unearthed so that the readers can see in the clear light how they are understood in their own world.

Irrespective of their features, Morrison loves them most. They are two prominently recurring types. The first is the type around whom Morrison usually gathers her story. For example, TBE is woven around the child Pecola Breedloves’ sufferings; the essence of the story of Sula is the growing up of the child Sula as an outcast of society. In SOS, a boy enjoys the centre stage of the theme and his effort is to liberate from the undesirable parental sojourn to self-realisation. They are the kind of characters who undergo a process of becoming, of maturing and finally reaching the point of self-realization or self-discovery. Beloved, Jadine and Joe Trace either construct or deconstruct what is expected and unexpected in the slave history. The other types comprise of ‘dangerously free’ people or the “salt tasters” though they have layers of simplicity and mystery of good and evil. They often express either an effort of the will or a freedom of the will. Cholly Breedlove, Guitar Bains, Son, Violet and Christine fall to this group. So Morrison employs the theme of childhood on both types to get a clear picture of the characters’ inner psyche

and uses them to exploit what is forgotten in the racial history.

Psychologically, to love and to be loved are the earnest desires of an individual especially during his childhood—a period of intimacy and love. But this most essential need during the tender years is denied to Morrison's child characters, forcing them to a hopeless existence because all of them are brought up in a world of ethnical and racial violence and trauma. Morrison gives love as a panacea for her children's sufferings, which is the only redemptive force to save them from the entangling chains of life. They are the victims of their social circumstances and therefore it moulds and shapes their behaviour according to the nature of circumstance.

Morrison's ending of the novels seems to suggest that belief in the loss of human innocence [Childhood] is a necessary step toward redemption and that suffering precedes the essential knowledge of this loss. She uses the child image to rediscover the history and cultural roots of the black race by presenting *Beloved*, *Jadine* and *Pat Besty*. At the same time, she asserts in *TBE* and *Jazz* that the African American children's predicament of borrowing identity models from the superior white race is the dominant characteristic of the cultural heritage. This cultural disillusion paves the way for the loss of innocence (Childhood) as shown in *Jazz* and *TAR*. She seems generally concerned with the importance of each character's relationship with the others, particularly with the dominant white culture that provides the prevailing, acceptable image of self, in other words, childhood. In that case her approach is often Sartrean. She reveals each character's awareness of self (Childhood) indirectly through his or her relationship with others, especially through visual perception or, to borrow from Sartre, "the Look". One might argue that children like Pecola, Sula, Milkman and the like and their parents fall victim to their failure to transcend the imposing definition of "the Other's

look”. “Reduced to a state of ‘objectness’ (thingness), each remains frozen in a world of being-for-the-other and consequently lives a life of shame, alienation, self-hatred and inevitable destruction” (Samuels and Hudson 10). So she uses the “mirror image” or the ‘Demeaning Look’ of African American children in which they see themselves as stunted selves with their spirit crumbled. According to Jacques Lacan, the mirror stage is considered as an entrance to the outer visible world and a child recognises his image in relation to the mirror reflection and its connection with the outer environment which provide them only disappointment. Therefore Morrison’s “children” become signifiers of cultural and historical failures as well as sociologically inferior beings with crumbled self and posit a “damaging look” than a Demeterian look.

She offers psychological insight into her characters' tortured psyche and the devastating effects of low self-esteem. She advocates that in the lower strata of African American family, children are deprived of basic needs of love and security because society is either ignorant or careless about their toddlers. Particularly, in the African American family set up, adults are struggling with personal problems like economic, social, sexual etc; parents are likely to forget and sabotage a child's efforts to stand on its own feet, to find its own identity and loss of self- esteem. If anything a child needs, it is the encouragement to achieve autonomy, and independence at the crucial stage. In Erickson’s view, "the consequence of a failure to develop autonomy at the crucial stage of life [childhood] is a lasting sense of shame, guilt, doubt and insecurity" (Mary Winn 108). This is what Morrison intends to project in her novels by focussing on the psychological problems of children. Pecola, Sula, Beloved, Denver, Joe Trace, Michael, Billie Delia and Heed carry their lasting sense of shame and guilt, doubt and insecurity from their beginning of

lives.

Social scientists assert that the loss of self-esteem creates a kind of psychic disturbance in a child, which results in the cultivation of self-hatred in a chaotic racial set up. In order to assert the stability of positive identity one must have the power to recognise one's own qualities or self-esteem, which generally the African American children lack. One organises a self-perception in an organic and unitary frame by understanding and assimilating one's actual self (Childhood). In the case of the African American children, inner friction always occurs between their actual self and ideal self (expected by white standards). By allowing their actual self to remain latent, they follow the ideal self, which is the world of their aspirations and illusions. It includes the values and roles that the social institutions propose on them and the manner of their perceptions of these social projections create self-hatred. Morrison's characters are seen obsessed with the memories of their past, and their childhood plays an important role in their later life. Most of them suffer from a miserable childhood that moulds their behavioural make-up in their adult life. She broods over the problem, pours her heart to tear the dirty veil of social injustice and writes the poetry of the bleeding heart of childhood.

The study of the theme of childhood in Morrison's works becomes significant due to various reasons. Morrison makes it clear that without proper rearing up; children acquire unnatural behaviour and develop distorted personalities. Family, race and society determines the fate of African American children as they are found to be the first object of victimisation due to socio-familial distortions. But the socio-familial fabric set up of their own race is not bothered about the investment that a child can make for posterity nor does it take any remedial measures to develop them. While the status of world children are declining and increasing number of women and children in

America and elsewhere are falling into poverty, the future of African American children looks even bleaker. Of course some are thriving; some are being educated and getting employed. Yet, a large percentage of them live in poverty, in dilapidated housing and on squalid and crime-ridden streets. However, in recent times world's commitment to children is decreasing.

Under Indian context, just like African American children, children belonging to socially and educationally backward classes scheduled Castes, scheduled Tribes and other minorities are still deprived of their basic rights. Socially, psychologically, culturally and economically they are at the beaten track. They live under abject poverty and suffer the stigma of inferior social status. The superior castes are not at all bothered about the existence of socially and economically inferior children. The children in their attempt to internalise their superior beings usually forget their own cultural roots and often drift to the rank of dangerous criminals. Further, every morning, the shocking news arrives in every family of children getting killed, mutilated, and raped at the hands of their parents or friends or under some other circumstantial set up in some remote corner of the country. Thus, Morrison writes not only for the African Americans and for their tiny tots but also attempts to bring out the heart-rending conditions of childhood trauma which plague the world of children who still lie in wait under the lower strata of society. She is thus elevated to the role of a Universal Mother pouring out her sympathy, love and affection upon children distress all over the world

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