

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

IDENTITY AND RESISTANCE IN TONI MORRISON'S SONG OF
SOLOMON, BELOVED AND PARADISE

BY

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DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original work and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere. All references to the works of other people have been duly acknowledged.

Candidate's Name: Joseph Kodjo Nomo

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Supervisors' Declaration

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis, on quest for identity and the use of resistance in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon, Beloved and Paradise, examines the African-American's search for an authentic self and the various forms of resistance they resort to in their quest. In Song of Solomon, the protagonist, Milkman leaves home in search of gold that would buy him his freedom but rather ends up on a journey in search for his roots; the discovery of which eventually earns him his identity. In Beloved, Sethe, the protagonist, and others had to resist slavery at Sweet Home, the ironically named slave plantation, in search for their freedom and identity and to resist recapture and return to slavery; Sethe had to kill her baby daughter, Beloved. Sethe has to live through a lot of trauma before being redeemed. Again, in the quest for an authentic self, an identity based on racial purity in Paradise, nine 8-rock men from the town of Ruby murder five harmless women in a nearby Convent because they suspect the women of being stumbling blocks in their quest. The thesis shows the extent to which the search for a genuinely moral and cultural identity depends on a revisionary historiography. We cannot really claim ourselves morally or politically until we have reconstructed our individual and collective identities, re-examined our dead and our disremembered. This project is not simply one of adding to one's ancestral line, it often involves fundamental discoveries about what ancestry is, what continuity consist in, how cultural meanings do not just sustain themselves through history but are in fact materially embodied and fought for.

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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Your Country? How came it yours? Before the Pilgrims landed we were here. Here we have brought our three gifts and mingled them with yours: a gift of story and song-soft, stirring melody in an ill harmonized and unmelodious land; the gift of sweat and brawn to beat back the wilderness, conquer the soil, and lay the foundations of this vast economic empire two hundred years earlier than your weak hands could have done it; the third, a gift of the Spirit Would America have been America without her Negro people?

W. E. B. Dubois

The Souls of Black Folk

Cited in Krumholz, (p. 107)

The concept of identity stretches back through history in the philosophical development of human thinking about the self and the human condition. Identity may be defined as “the quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration, absolute or essential sameness; oneness”. Identity, according to Steven Weiland is first and foremost the vivid realization of the actuality of and durability of the “self” that promises to remain so even as one grows and adapts to opportunity and change and this “self” according to Carl Rogers is “ an organized consistent set of perceptions and beliefs about oneself: it includes my awareness of “what I am,

“what I can do” and influences both my perception of the world and my behavior; we evaluate every experience in terms of it and most human behavior can be understood as an attempt to maintain consistency between one self-image and our actions (Roger, 1961 in Gross 1987, 224). The search for an authentic self (a self that is owned and controlled by the individual, not enslaved to or subject to anybody) is always associated with place that is, where the individual finds himself/ herself. In a situation where the individual is removed from his or her place of origin to another place, usually through force, the individual may lose a sense of an authentic self and may experience an identity crisis. The concern with place and displacement is where the special post colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place. Identity crisis resulting from place and displacement and the search for an authentic self-identity has been major features of post colonial literatures. A valid sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or ‘voluntary’ removal for indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by cultural denigration, the conscious or unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model (Ashcroft et al, 1989: 9). The alienation of vision and the crisis in self-image which this displacement produces is as frequently found in the accounts of Canadian “free settlers” as of Australian convicts, Fijian, Indian or Trinidadian-Indian indentured labourers, West Indian slaves, or forcibly colonized Nigerians or Bengalis (ibid:9) and chattel slaves in America. In their quest for a valid sense

of self which may have been eroded by dislocation, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or voluntary removal for indentured labour, the individual experiencing the loss of a valid sense of self tends to resist the dominant “Other”. Resistance has always been a means in the quest for an authentic self- identity as it is a way of asserting one self and showing one’s deep-seated refusal of that which others make of him or her.

Background to the Study

The quest for identity and the use of resistance as a means in the quest for identity by African Americans are themes many writers of African descent in the Diaspora try to explore in their writings. Prominent among such writers is Toni Morrison. The African, having been taken to America as a slave and having been treated by the white man (the slave owner) as less than a human being, seems to have lost his/ her identity as he has been separated from his land of origin and is not accepted as a human being in the land of his sojourn. Those enslaved found creative, if also often desperate, ways of adjusting to their bondage, of course relying heavily on familiar ideas and practices but adopting innovations out of necessity. The struggle for survival began in Africa, which certainly helped to shape the struggle that continued in the Americas (Lovejoy, 2000:2). The ways in which enslaved Africans adjusted to the conditions of racialized servility in the Americas involved continuities and discontinuities, inventions and re-inventions. According to Mintz and Price,

the beginnings of what would later develop into ‘African- American’ cultures must date from the very earliest interactions of the enslaved men and women on the African continent itself. They were shackled together in coffles parked into ‘factory’ dungeons, squeezed together between the

decks of stinking ships, separated often from their kinsmen, tribesmen, or even speakers of the same language, left bewildered about their present and their future, stripped of all prerogatives of status or rank...and homogenized by a dehumanizing system that viewed them as faceless and largely interchangeable (cited by Lovejoy, 2000:16).

In slavery, Africans in America lost their names as they were given names which were meant to further heighten their loss of identity. They were given “names which are a part of the dominant signifying order, those denoting ownership, appropriation, those originating in slavery, those which deny group identity and African origins” (Rigney, 1991:145). Names such as Negro, Nigger, Black, Afro-American, African American, are testament to the “desolated center where the self that was no self made its home” (Morrison: 1987: 140). To be named by others is to be deprived of identity (Finney, 1998:110). Such names heighten the alienation of vision and crisis in self-image which displacement produces in the individual or group. Such names made the African in America lose touch with their African origins. Ironically, such names also strengthen the lack of a sense of connection to the land of sojourn. He has almost no real self-esteem; he has almost no identity of himself as he is treated as though without the white man (the slave owner) he is not a complete human being in himself. Having been denied all freedom and opportunity, the African in America has almost no identity of himself and can only regard himself as a ‘human’ based on his dependence on his white overlord (the slave owner). The African who is enslaved in America is seen as the property of the slave owner (the white man) and his worth depends on the use to which his owner (the white slave owner) puts him. He is the property of his owner-chattel. Being the property of his white owner, the chattel slave’s “human

features are erased beneath a number; they are quantified in death, as they had been in life by a property system that measured wealth in terms of a body count” (Wyatt, 1998:219). Under the auspices of American chattel slavery, the slave owner has the right “to define truth, to exercise physical domination over the body of the enslaved individual, and consequently, subjugate (any) knowledge (truth effects) produced by (the individual’s) system of reasoning” (King, 1998:281). He/she has no control over his/her being and the white slave owner does whatever he likes to his African slave. He can decide to sell, kill or maim him/her and go scot-free as there was no law at the time to protect the rights of the slave to life and freedom. The fate of the enslaved African in America is therefore worse than death and that of the woman worst since she is further reduced to a mere sex object to pamper the lusts of her white master and his male children.

The African woman in America suffers what we may call “double jeopardy”. She undergoes both physical and mental torture as she is exploited by both the black and white men. Just as Africans as a group “were relegated to an underclass by virtue of their race, so were women relegated to a separated caste by virtue of their sex. Confronted on all sides by racial and sexual discrimination, the black (African) woman has no friends but only liabilities and responsibilities. Responsible for their own and their children’s well-being and future, these women had to face daily the reality of their relationships with white men, with white women and above all, with black men” (Sumana, 1998:21). To be a (black) African female in America is to suffer from the twin disadvantages of racial discrimination and pronounced gender bias. “Being black, the African women

suffered from racism; being females they were the victims of sexual atrocities at the hands of the white patriarchs as well as the blacks “(Sumana, 1998:22). Thus, the African woman in America is made a victim of double jeopardy— racism and sexism.

It is this worse than death fate that sometimes compels some of the enslaved Africans to risk their lives by running away from their white masters even though they are very much aware of the calamitous consequences that await them should they be caught. Some even try to take their own lives and that of their children to free themselves from that worse than death fate and to save themselves from being “dirtied” by the whites. Even after emancipation (1st January, 1863), when the African slave in America is said to have been liberated, he/she still has almost no identity. He/she therefore has to struggle to assert himself/herself in order to have his/her true identity as all doors of opportunity are closed in his/her face.

The problem of the African in America is basically that of his/her race and his/her status as a slave in American society for, many or all of black Americans have a personal link with slavery and have been subjected to various forms of discrimination and indignity on the basis of their colour and status. This situation of the African American has been the subject for African American writers. Writers like James Weldon Johnson, Frederick Douglass, and W. E. B. Dubois have written on the racial problems in America and the black man or the coloured man’s quest for identity in a turbulent society; a society that threatens to wipe out

the black race or hold it in perpetual slavery. These writers expose, in their writings, the evils of slavery, which the whites had been trying to make invisible.

In his article “Of Our Spiritual Striving”, W. E. B. Du Bois talks about the striving of the Black American and his quest for identity even after emancipation. He talks about the African American being looked upon as a kind of half man, a second-class citizen, making him/her have no true sense of who he/she is. Du Bois uses the concept “double consciousness” to describe the identity crisis that confronts the African American. The African American’s quest for identity, then, is how to merge his African and American identities into a unitary whole:

After the Egyptian and Indian, Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of 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 see himself through the revelation of the other world. 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. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self with a better and truer self. In this merging, he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face (Northon, pp. 694- 695).

To attain his/her place in the world, the African American finds that he must be himself and not another and

for the first time he sought to analyze the burden he bore upon his back, that dead-weight of social degradation partially masked behind a half-named Negro problem. He felt his poverty; without a cent, without a home, without land, tools or saving, he had entered into competition with rich, landed, skilled neighbours. To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships. He felt the weight of his ignorance, -not simply of letters, but of life, of business, of the humanities; the accumulated sloth of and shirking and awkwardness of decades and centuries shackled his hands and feet. Nor was his burden of poverty and ignorance. The red stain of bastardy, which two centuries of systematic legal defilement of Negro women had stamped upon his race, meant not only the loss of ancient African chastity, but also the hereditary weight of a mass of corruption from white adulterers, threatening almost the obliteration of the Negro home (Northon, p. 697).

The Blackman in America wants his freedom, his identity. He wants to be free from the shackles of slavery. According to Du Bois few men ever worshipped Freedom with half such unquestioning faith as did the American Negro for two centuries. To him, so far as he thought and dreamed, slavery was indeed the sum of all villainies, the cause of all sorrow, and the root of all prejudice. Emancipation was the key to a promised land of sweeter beauty than ever stretched before the eyes of wearied Israelites.

James Weldon Johnson in his novel Autobiography of an Ex- Coloured Man (1997) also observes that the white man was constantly struggling to deny the identity, social recognition, and the freedom of the African American. Thus he talks of “the battle (struggle) being first waged over the right of the Negro (the

Blackman) to be classed as a human being with a soul; later, as to whether he has sufficient intellect to master even the rudiments of learning; and today, it is being fought over his social recognition” (Northon, pp 830 – 831).

As the Blackman in America is relegated to the background and treated as a nonentity, he is bound to assert himself; quest for his identity and social recognition. James Weldon Johnson sees the racial issue as “the dwarfing, warping, distorting influence, which operates upon each and every coloured man in the United States. He is forced to take his look on all things, not from the viewpoint of a citizen, or a man, or even a human being, but from the viewpoint of a coloured man”. He says, “it is wonderful to me that the race has progressed so broadly as it has, since most of its thought and all of its activity must be run through the narrow neck of this one funnel” (Northon, pp 810). The African American is forced to take his position as defined by the white man, the definer.

Not content with his/her relegated and demeaning status as a Blackman, the African- American has to struggle against the white man in his quest for identity and recognition and resist all attempts by the white man to subjugate him and deny his identity:

.... the tremendous struggle which is going on between the races in the south. It is a struggle; for though the Black man fights passively; he nevertheless fights; and his passive resistance is more effective at present than active resistance could possibly be. He bears the fury of the storm, as does the willow tree. It is a struggle; for though the white man of the south may be too proud to admit it, he is, nevertheless, using in the context his best energies: he is devoting to it the greater part of his thought and much of his endeavour. The south today stands panting and almost breathless from its exertions. And

how the scene of the struggle has shifted! The battle was first waged over the right of the Negro to be classed as a human being with a soul; later, as to whether he has sufficient intellect to master even the rudiments of learning: and today it is being fought over his social recognition” (Northon, pp 830 – 831).

Because of his/her colour, race and status, the African American is segregated and discriminated against and is treated as a nonentity and as Martin Luther King Jr., says in his “Letter from Birmingham Jail”, (1997) “segregation”, to use the terminology of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, substitutes an “I-it” relationship for an “I-thou” relationship and ends relegating persons to the status of “things” (Northon, p. 1900). This consciousness of the African American that his identity can be attained if he fights for it, makes him resist all attempts by the white man to perpetually hold him in the shackles of slavery for, as Martin Luther King Jr., says, the Blackman in America knows “through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed” (Northon, p. 1898) hence the African American’s quest for his/her identity and the use of resistance to achieve that aim.

In whatever situation people find themselves, they are always conscious of who they are or always try to assert themselves to show who they are. Thus, they try to maintain/create their true identity. The African who has been sold into slavery and who is enslaved by the white man in America seems to have lost all identity of himself; he has no longer any truer self. His loss of identity stems from the fact that he has no control over his own person, has no control over the children he gives birth to as the white man (the slave owner) can take such children and sell them away with the parents having nothing to say.

Again, the Blackman in America has no means of production and no ownership of property in a land of dollars. He is denied social recognition and freedom; he is not even classed as a human being with a soul. According to James Weldon Johnson, he is not even considered as having sufficient intellect to master even the rudiments of learning. He is therefore denied education on the grounds that he would become discontented with his status as a slave if he is educated and would become unmanageable. As Baby Suggs says, “there was no bad luck in the world but white people” (Beloved, p. 89). The African American is constantly oppressed by the white man to the extent that he sees himself as a misfit in American society. As Maya Angelou says in her The Heart of a Woman, (1967) “oppression has made orphans of black Americans and forced us to live as misfits in the very land we have helped to build” (p. 78) and that “the entire power of the United States was arrayed in fury against the very existence of the Afro-Americans” (p. 169). “We are people,” says Vus, a character in The Heart of a Woman, “the root cause of racism and its primary result is that whites refuse to see us simply as people”. (p. 207). As Guitar points out in Song of Solomon, (1977) because the white man refuses to see the Black American as a human being, there was no law to protect his rights or his person. There was therefore lynching of Blacks; systematic legal defilements and rape of Blacks. “Eighteen seventy- four and white folks are still on the loose. Whole towns wiped clean of Negroes, eighty seven lynchings in one year only in Kentucky, four coloured schools burned to the ground; grown men whipped like children; children

whipped like adults; black women raped by the crew; property taken; necks broken” (Beloved,1987:180).

The African American cannot forever sit down and let these crimes be eternally perpetuated against him and his race. As Sethe says in Beloved, (1987) “you just cannot mishandle creatures and expect success” (p. 150). They are bound to resist and assert themselves. As Hugh Hurd says in Maya Angelou’s The Heart of a Woman, (1967) “as black people we had a dignity and a love of life, those qualities have to be defended constantly” (p. 78).

It is these mishaps that have befallen the African American that have led him to quest for his identity and in the process use resistance as a means to that end. This had even led to the emergence of various movements that struggle for the African-American identity in America. Among such movements are the Black Arts Movement, which was a radicalisation of the Civil Rights Movement, and the Black Panther Party for self-defence. These movements agitated for change by any means necessary including violent social upheavals. These movements, like the Seven Days in Song of Solomon, (1977), basically sought for the recognition of the humanity and individual and collective freedom/identity of the black man in the heat of the numerous forms of discrimination to which the black American has been subjected.

Many enslaved African Americans in their quest for freedom and identity ran away from their slave masters at the possible peril of their lives. An example is Sixo in Beloved. Others, like Sethe when caught , either take their own lives or that of their children as a way of resisting white oppression and to save them from

a fate worse than death because, they would not like to be further “dirtied” by whites.

After emancipation in (1st January 1863), many African Americans who tried to settle in white communities were turned away. Others who tried to settle in communities that were soliciting Negro homesteads were also disallowed on the basis of their poverty and skin colour. Even though these people came prepared, they were not allowed to settle in such communities. Such is the case of the people of Ruby in Toni Morrison’s Paradise, (1998). Because of their bitter experiences and sufferings in the hands of both whites and blacks, they decided that, “the generations had to be not only racially untampered with but free of adultery too – ‘God bless the pure and the holy’ indeed. That was their holiness” (Paradise, p.217). They therefore resisted violently any outsider whose actions would pollute or contaminate their racial purity. They go to extremes in their quest.

Many African Americans who after emancipation managed to acquire property and joined the bourgeois class, also tried to carve for themselves a kind of identity that enabled them to protect themselves against white racism and oppression and their marginal position in American society. Their whole life is devoted to property acquisition. They tend to behave like the white racists and oppressors and maltreat or oppress their unfortunate fellow African Americans who could not make it to join the property owning bourgeois middle class. Because of this false identity they have carved for themselves, they seem “dead” to society and all social values especially African values. Such is Macon Dead in

Song of Solomon (1997). Their whole life is devoted to the scramble to acquire property. There are some like Macon Dead II, however, who are not prepared to put on this “white mask” over their black face. These go on a search for their African roots in order to get their true identity. Such is Milkman Dead who must flee the petty bourgeois capitalism of his family in search for his African roots in order to get his true identity. There are also those who violently resist white racism and oppression in their quest for identity. These constitute themselves into vigilante groups like the Black Panthers who scare the living day light out of white racists and try to bring freedom to blacks by whatever means possible. The Seven Days in Song of Solomon (1977) epitomize this group.

Many writers especially those of African descent in the Diaspora have written on the American Negro’s quest for identity and his use of resistance as a means in his quest. Toni Morrison is one of such authors. She presents the issues glaringly in her novels, hence the selection of her novels as the basic material in this research.

Statement of the Problem

The literature on Morrison’s Song of Solomon, Beloved and Paradise is enormous. These novels have been variously examined from diverse perspectives. The issues of subjectivity, identity formation and articulation in Morrison’s novels have engaged the attention of many critics and researchers on Morrison. However, there has yet to be a systematic study of identity and resistance in the three selected novels.

Purpose of the Study

By this research, I explore the following: why the quest for identity by the African American; why the African American uses resistance as a means in his quest for identity; how resistance serves as an effective tool in the hands of the African-American in his quest for identity; whether the African-American has been successful in his/her quest for identity from Toni Morrison's point of view.

Significance of the Study

This study is an educational study, which examines the themes of quest for identity and resistance in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon, Beloved and Paradise. It highlights the literary contribution of Toni Morrison to the struggle against racism and gender discrimination in American culture. But more importantly, this study will add to the existing body of knowledge in the literature on Morrison. Finally, this study is meant to demonstrate to students that further research is possible, even though several writers have dealt with the theme of the quest for identity in Morrison's novels.

Limitations

Even though several writers whose works touched on the themes of quest for identity and the use of resistance are cited in this research, our focus is on Morrison's Songs of Solomon, Beloved and Paradise. Given the volume of literature on the subject of cultural identity and racism, it would be unrealistic to review all the reflections on the subject matter. We therefore limit the review to the most influential works that have stood the test of time.

Definitions of Terms

The term **identity** is central to the issues discussed in this study. Therefore, it is important to set the parameters for our use of **identity**. In his article “One Life ‘After’ Another: Influence, Identity, and Academic Careers”, Steven Weiland says, “Identity is first and foremost the vivid realisation of the actuality of and durability of the “self” that promises to remain so even as one grows and adapts to opportunity and change,” (1997:257). Weiland quotes Erickson in his discussion of identity and the quest for it as saying that “man, to take his place in a society, must acquire a “conflict free”, habitual use of a dominant faculty, to be elaborated in an occupation; a limitless resource, a feedback, as it were, from the immediate exercise of this occupation, from the companionship it provides, and from its tradition; and finally, an intelligible theory of the processes of life” (Erickson 1959, 118). Weiland argues that, “influence” plays a key role in identity formation.

Weiland says the struggle for identity is a version of the desire for individualism: “That, more than a simple synonym for that term, identity fills out, so to speak, the desire to be an individual with a theory of how the body, the mind, and society (its history and institutions) all work together in producing human behaviour” (Erikson 1959, 174). We find Weiland’s article illuminating in one significant way: Erikson’s views on identity formation cover the specific area of concern of this thesis which focuses on the quest for identity by the marginalized, oppressed and alienated African American for his freedom, identity and social recognition as a human being in American society.

According to David Snow in his article “Collective Identity and Expressive Forms,” (2001), identity has always been a characteristic feature of human interaction, whether the interaction was among early preliterate humans or among those in the modern social world. To note this is not to ignore the sociological truism that the issue of identity becomes more problematic and unsettled as societies become structurally differentiated, fragmented, and culturally pluralistic. But historical variation in the extent to which matters of identity are problematic does not undermine the double-edged observation that the reciprocal imputation and avowal of identities is a necessary condition for social interaction and that identities are thus rooted in the requisite conditions for social interaction. Snow identifies three distinct types of identity: personal, social and collective. Personal identities, Snow observes, are the attributes and meanings attributed to oneself by the actor and that they are self designations and self-attributions regarded as personally distinctive and that they are likely to be asserted during the course of interaction when other-imputed social identities are regarded contradictory, as when individuals are cast into social roles or categories that are insulting and demeaning. Social identities are the identities attributed to others in an attempt to situate them in social space. That whatever their specific socio-cultural base, social identities are fundamental to social interaction in that they provide points of orientation to “alter” or “other” as a social object. Collective identity, according to Snow, invariably suggests that its essence resides in a shared sense of “one-ness” or “we-ness” anchored in real or imagined shared attributes and experiences among those who comprise the collectivity and in

relation or contrast to one or more actual or imagined set of “others.” Embedded within the shared sense of “we” is a corresponding sense of “collective agency.” That this latter sense, which is the action component of collective identity, not only suggests the possibility of collective action in pursuit of common interests, but also even invites such action (Snow, 2001).

Thus, in his quest for identity, whether personal, social or collective, the African American’s aim is to “alter” or “other” his status as a slave, a nonentity or “thing” to which he has been relegated for his recognition and eventual classification as a human being and a right to freedom and to have ownership of his freed self, to own property and means of production because, as Sethe says in Beloved,(1987) “freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another” (p. 95).

Authentic self – By authentic self we mean a self that is not controlled by anybody else but by the individual himself or herself and where the individual can act freely without fear or favour from anybody provided one’s actions conform with the natural order of things and provided such actions do not adversely affect the inalienable rights of others.

Theoretical Framework

In this study I borrow from two important approaches: the exponential approach and reader-response (oriented) theory. The exponential approach to literary interpretation is concerned with themes in literary works. This is because my interest was in the themes of identity and resistance and how they manifest themselves in the selected novels mentioned above. I used this approach because

it urges the critic to learn how to follow these patterns by looking at their exponents that is, those people or characters, objects and words that represent or symbolise the patterns. Since my aim is to examine the themes of identity and resistance in the selected novels mentioned above, and to bring to the fore how these themes manifest themselves in symbols and images in the texts and artistic weaving of these instances into patterns, the exponential approach provides the theoretical frame for my analysis.

Reader-oriented theory emphasises the active role of the reader in the meaning making process. There are several versions of reader-oriented theory. The major proponents in the field are Gerald Prince, Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jaus. The various reader-response theories seem to agree that we can no longer talk about the meaning of a text without considering the reader's contribution to it. One assertion of the reader-response theories is that it is the reader of a text who applies the code in which the message is written and in this way actualises what would otherwise remain only potentially meaningful. The reader is often actively involved in constructing a meaning and a text has no real existence until it is read. Proponents of the theory assert that the meaning of the text is never self-formulated; the reader must act upon the textual material in order to produce meaning and that literary texts always contain "blanks" which only the reader can fill. "A literary work does not pop out into the world as a finished and neatly parcelled bundle of meaning. Meaning depends on the historical situation of the interpreter (reader)...By filling the gaps, the readers take

the text into their consciousnesses and make it their own *experience* (Raman, 1989:119&121).

Reader response criticism suggests that a piece of writing scarcely exists except as a text designed to be read: indeed, scarcely exists until somebody reads it. As a critical procedure, the reader response approach does not so much analyze a reader's responding apparatus as scrutinize those features of the text that arouse, shape, and guide a reader's reading.

Adena Rosmarin, for instance, said that a literary text may be likened to an incomplete work of sculpture; to see it fully, we must complete it imaginatively but also responsibly, taking into account what exists (Ross Murfin and Supryia M. Ray, 2003, p 319)

According to Stanley Fish, a major proponent of reader response theory, any school of criticism that sees a literary work as an object, claiming to describe what it is and never what it does, misconstrues that very essence of literature and reading. Literature exists and signifies when it is read, and its force is an affective force (p 392).

Wolfgang Iser also argues that texts contain gaps (or blanks) that powerfully affect the reader, who must explain them, connect what they separate and create in his or her mind aspects of a work that are not in the text but that the text incites. As Iser puts it in The Implied Reader, and as quoted in Ross Murfin and Supryia M. Ray, (2003 p 393), the “unwritten aspects” of a story” draw the reader into the action “ and “ lead him to shade in the many outlines suggested by

the given situations “ Such “ Outlines “ influence how the implied reader subsequently reads the text.

Within the redefinition of literature as something that only exist meaningfully in the mind of the reader, with the redefinition of the literary work as a catalyst of mental events comes a redefinition of the reader. No longer is the reader the passive recipient of those ideas that an author has planted in a text. The reader is active, Rosenblat insists. He or she is an active maker of meaning. He or she is someone who is sufficiently experienced as a reader to have internalized the properties of literary discourse, including everything from the most local of devices (figures of speech, etc) to whole genres. He or she also possesses the semantic knowledge assumed by the text.

Even though other approaches could have effectively been used in carrying out this research, the exponential approach and the reader-oriented theory were more appropriate as they emphasize the active role of the reader in the meaning-making process.

Organisation of Research Work

This thesis is organised into six chapters: Chapter One is Introduction which introduces the reader to the background, statement of the problem, purpose, limitations, and theoretical framework. Chapter Two deals with Literature Review; Chapter Three is Textual Analysis of Song of Solomon; Chapter Four is Textual Analysis of Beloved; Chapter Five is Textual Analysis of Paradise and Chapter Six deals with our main findings and conclusion followed by Bibliography.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This Chapter deals with literature relevant to the topic under discussion, that is, identity and resistance in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon, Beloved and Paradise. Several writers have written extensively on the works of Toni Morrison, examining the various themes explored by Toni Morrison in her works. This chapter reviews some of the related issues on Identity and Resistance in Toni Morrison's works.

In the article "Class in Relation to Race and Gender: Song of Solomon", (1998), K. Sumana says the novel is about Milkman's quest for his identity and acknowledges the fact that "though Milkman's quest for his identity is the dominant strand in the novel, the major obstacle he must overcome is the deadening effects of his father's need to own as much property as possible in order to protect himself against racism" (pp.81-82). That there are three distinct yet interconnected developmental stages in Milkman's quest, the pre-liminal stage, the liminal stage, and the post-liminal stage, that progressively lead to his increased race and class consciousness. That the pre-liminal stage is "marked by his low level of consciousness about his people's race and class oppression manifested in his very nickname- Milkman" (p.85) and that this stage marks Milkman's full awareness of his lack of identity. That the liminal stage marks

Milkman's discovery of the answers to crucial questions of identity and an acceptance of the responsibility of adulthood in general and Africanhood in particular (p.89). That the post-liminal stage marks the height of Milkman's consciousness, characterized by his initiation into a new society, the society of the Shalimar hunters.

Even though this article discusses Milkman's quest for identity in Song of Solomon, it is silent on resistance as tool in his quest. Nothing is also said about the search for the gold that eventually leads to Milkman's quest for his identity. Again, the article is silent on the threat posed to Milkman by Guitar out of the latter's deadly hate. Much as I appreciate the article's acknowledgement of Pilate as Milkman's pilot in his quest, it is silent on how Pilate pilots Milkman in his quest and the processes involved in the quest. Finally, the article does not clearly state whether Milkman achieves his aim or not.

In "From the Sublime to the Beautiful: The Aesthetic Progression of Toni Morrison", (2000), Marc C. Conner discusses quest for identity in Song of Solomon. He rightly discusses what prompts the hero, Milkman to embark on his quest and his eventual discovery of his roots and his identity after his long odyssey, his painful pilgrimage. The article also rightly discusses the fact that Pilate serves as Milkman's pilot in his quest and that it is she who initiates him into his quest. Although I agree with Conner in his treatment of Milkman's quest for his identity in Song of Solomon, there are a few omissions which I consider as critical issues the article should have dealt with. The article is silent on the activities of the Seven Days and the threat to Milkman's life by Guitar, a

committed member of the Seven Days. Guitar, suspecting Milkman of pulling a fast one on him turns his deadly hatred on Milkman and this hatred eventually leads to his killing of the innocent Pilate. The article is also silent on any form of resistance on the part of Milkman in the course of his quest. Again, the article glossed over Milkman's search for the gold that eventually leads him to Shalimar where he discovers his roots and his identity. Treatment of these lapses is central to my analysis of the quest for identity in Song of Solomon.

In their article "Liminality and the Search for Self in Song of Solomon," (1990), Wilfred D. Samuels and Clenora Hudson-Weems discuss Milkman's quest for identity in Song of Solomon. They point out that Milkman's quest is driven by a need to escape the existential vacuum of his pointless and aimless life. That what Milkman quests for is "a transcendental life, one that surpasses the material world of his parents" (p.64). The article says that the quest is in three stages: the separation stage, the transition stage, and the incorporation stage; and that the combination of these stages constitutes rites of passage. The article further recognizes that Pilate initiates and serves as Milkman's pilot in his quest. The article brilliantly traces Milkman's quest from the beginning to the end.

However, the article is silent on the activities of the Seven Days and how Guitar, a member, in an attempt to kill Milkman out of hatred ends up killing the innocent Pilate. Again, the article is silent about Milkman's broken bottle and knife fight with Saul in Shalimar which constitutes a test Milkman must pass as part of his initiation rites in his quest. These omissions are issues central in my analysis of the quest for identity in Song of Solomon.

In discussing quest for identity in Song of Solomon in her article “Song of Solomon: The Struggle for Race and Class Consciousness,” (1991), Doreatha Drummond Mbaila says the protagonist, Milkman’s quest, is in three related and interconnected stages: the preliminal, liminal, and postliminal stages. That Milkman’s quest is initiated by Pilate who pilots him through his odyssey, his pilgrimage. That Milkman’s quest is prompted by his discovery that he lacks a coherent self, and the desire to free himself from the capitalism of his family. The article discusses the leaps and bounds in Milkman’s quest until he discovers his roots and identity in Shalimar.

However, like the other articles above, this one is also silent on the activities of the Seven Days and its relation with the quest for group identity. It also says nothing about Guitar killing Pilate in his attempt to kill Milkman. The broken bottle and knife fight involving Milkman and Saul in Shalimar, an act which serves as a test and a rite of passage Milkman must pass in his quest, is also not mentioned in the article. Neither is any mention made of resistance on Milkman’s part in the course of his quest. The article is also silent on the ritual on Solomon’s Leap which is the final part of Milkman’s pilgrimage. These omissions are treated as key issues in my analysis of quest for identity in Song of Solomon.

Aoi Mori’s article “Transcending a Given Name: Recovery of African-American Identity,” (1991), traces how the protagonist, Milkman goes about his quest for identity in Song of Solomon. Mori points out that Pilate initiates and pilots Milkman in his quest. That it is “through his material hunt for gold that Milkman begins the more legitimate, emotional—indeed spiritual— search for his

roots”(p.48); that “it is the song Pilate often sings that holds another key to Milkman’s discovery of his ancestors” (p.50). The article traces Milkman’s journey from home to Shalimar where he eventually discovers his roots and his identity.

The article is however silent on the final part of Milkman’s odyssey which takes place on Solomon’s Leap. It also makes no mention of the broken bottle and knife fight involving Milkman and Saul in Shalimar; an act which constitutes a test Milkman must pass as part of his rites of passage in his quest. Neither is there any mention made of any resistance on Milkman’s part as he goes about his quest. Again, the article is silent on the activities of the Seven Days and their quest for group identity. Nor is there any mention made of the threat posed to Milkman’s life by Guitar whose deadly hate leads to his killing the innocent Pilate.

In the article, “The Disruption of Formulaic Discourse: Writing Resistance and Truth in Beloved,”(1998), Loyalerie King discusses why Sethe and the other slaves at the ironically named Kentucky plantation, Sweet Home, have to embark on an identity quest using resistance as a means. King discusses the relative peace enjoyed by the slaves on the plantation under Garner who claims all his slaves “are men”, before the coming of Schoolteacher as the overlord of the plantation. King goes on to say that Schoolteacher upon taking over Sweet Home effected and enforced changes in the rules at Sweet Home thus denying the slaves certain basic rights granted them by Garner. With his scientific discourse, Schoolteacher reduces the Sweet Home slaves to the status of animals, measuring and writing their “characteristics on the animal side of the paper”.

Beating the slaves becomes part of schoolteacher's slave discourse. The various forms of ill-treatment that schoolteacher metes out to the slaves make them realize their worth only as property. This compels Sixo, Morrison's symbol of resistance throughout the novel to initiate moves for the slaves at Sweet Home to escape from Sweet Home to freedom.

To buttress the argument that under such ill-treatments, resistance is the only tool left in the hands of the oppressed to deal with the situation, King quotes from the preface to The Wretched of the Earth (1990) by Frantz Fanon:

He has come to believe that the domestication of the "inferior races" will come about by his conditioning of their reflexes. But in this he leaves out of account the human memory and the ineffaceable marks left upon it; and then, above all there is something which perhaps he has never known: we only become what we are by the radical and deep-seated refusal of that which others have made of us (quoted in King, 1988:272).

King says even though the initial escape attempt fails and Sixo and Paul D are rounded up and caught, Sixo refuses to surrender and he resists unto his death; that by "punishing Sixo, and later murdering him, schoolteacher asserts his right, under the auspices of American chattel slavery, to define truth, to exercise physical domination over the body of the enslaved individual" (King, 1988:281). King makes it clear that resistance is key in the quest for identity under American chattel slavery.

Much as I agree with King in this article, there are some shortfalls in the article. The article does not talk about Sethe's (the principal character in the novel's) quest for identity, her escape from Sweet Home and her objective position, to Cincinnati, Ohio and subjective position and where she eventually

achieves an authentic self; the various forms of resistance Sethe has to adopt in her quest; Sethe's battling with her past and the disturbing presence of Beloved, the reincarnation of the murdered daughter who has to be exorcised for Sethe to achieve wholeness. All these omissions are addressed in my thesis.

In his article, "Transfiguring the Narrative: Beloved – from Melodrama to Tragedy," (1998), Terry Otten discusses the search for an authentic self by Sethe, the principal character in Beloved, along tragic lines. The article discusses the tragic effects of Sethe's actions on her as she struggles to assert herself and achieve subjective status. Otten in his discussion, compares Sethe with Medea and then with Oedipus and says Sethe is responsible for her actions. The article further discusses Sethe's efforts not to remember, her haunting past which she must grapple with in her attempts to assert herself and to achieve an authentic self-identity. The article also talks about Denver's role in saving her mother from the all-devouring presence of Beloved, the reincarnation of Sethe's murdered daughter and the symbol of Sethe's haunting past.

The article focuses much on the tragic aspects of the novel rather than on Sethe's quest for her authentic self and the various forms of resistance Sethe has to put up in her quest. Also, the article is silent on life at Sweet Home and what prompted Sethe to embark on her quest. The arrival of Schoolteacher in 124 Bluestone Road to recapture Sethe and her children and send them back to Sweet Home to perform the task that the plantation badly needs; an action which prompts Sethe to commit the infanticide as a way of resisting recapture and slavery, is glossed over in the article. Amy Denver's assistance to Sethe in her

odyssey to freedom is also not discussed in Otten's article. These omissions are all treated in my thesis.

Jan Furman, in his article, "Sethe's Rememories: the Covert Return of What Is Best Forgotten," (1998) also discusses Sethe's quest for identity. The article discusses in detail Sethe's life at 124 Bluestone Road, her infanticide and the pain she has to live through as she tries to keep the past at bay, remembering as close to nothing as possible. It further goes on to discuss the fact that even though Sethe tries to protect her children, she ends up losing almost everything as her two sons, Howard and Buglar run away from the ghostly presence that haunts 124 Bluestone Road.

The article also talks about Paul D trying to bring Sethe back into the community; an action that symbolizes a new life and a future for Sethe. The article dwells much on the return of Beloved to torment Sethe and notes that Beloved's return is Sethe's reckoning. That as Beloved gradually wears Sethe out, someone has to break the hateful link between Beloved and Sethe and that that job goes to Denver, Sethe's only child left and who symbolizes the future. The article also discusses in detail how thirty women from the community led by Ella exorcise Beloved from Sethe's life and thus enabling Sethe to reclaim herself and her community.

In its brilliant discussion of identity quest in Beloved, (1998), the article makes no mention of life at Sweet Home and what compels Sethe to embark on her quest. Nothing is also said about Sethe's long and arduous odyssey to freedom, the numerous forms of resistance she has to put up in the course of her

quest and the healing rituals performed by Amy Denver and Baby Suggs as part of Sethe's recovery process.

In the article, "Beloved and the Tyranny of the Double", Denise Heinze (1998) discusses Sethe's quest for identity and the pain and difficulties she has to go through to achieve that desired aim. The article focuses much on the return of Beloved, the reincarnation of Sethe's murdered daughter to haunt and torment Sethe as Sethe tries to put the past at bay. The article says Beloved returns to exact vengeance on Sethe and that for her to achieve that aim, she first drives away Paul D and his formidable presence from 124 and also manages to distance Sethe from Denver. That Beloved does this systematically, befriending the lonely Denver, and seducing Paul D and finally by demanding exclusive attention from Sethe. In detail, the article discusses how the vampiric Beloved feeds vicariously on Sethe and eventually reduces Sethe to sitting at a corner in the house licking her fingers. That as Sethe loses control of her self, Denver has to go out to the community to seek help; that the women of the community exorcise Beloved from Sethe's life thus enabling her achieve an authentic self.

Despite the beautiful treatment in this article of Sethe's quest for her identity, the article focuses its discussion only on what happens from Beloved's appearance to exorcism from Sethe's life. Life at Sweet Home, Sethe's escape to Ohio, the roles of Amy Denver and Baby Suggs in Sethe's quest and the infanticide are not dealt with in this article.

In the article "Paradise and Storytelling: Interconnecting Gender, Motif and Narrative Structure,"(2003), Ingrid G. Daemmrch talks of Ruby and the

Convent as two paradises of male and female realizations pitted against each other in a deadly contest. Ingrid talks of Ruby, Oklahoma as the prosperous, orderly and rigidly patriarchal town founded and run by a few exclusive male dominated families who, proud of their heritage, are determined to preserve it at all cost. The convent, Ingrid says, is a temporary refuge created by an all inclusive, disparate group of women. The article talks of Zachariah “Big Daddy” Morgan as the one who led the people of Ruby from Louisiana first to Haven and then to Ruby. In a brilliant exposition, the article briefly discusses the all inclusive Convent as the ideal paradise on earth which the people of Ruby see as a threat to their own existence hence the nine 8-rock men massacre the convent women in order to protect their rigidly defined borders.

In spite of the article’s discussion of the identity quest in Paradise, (1998), the focus is mainly on Ruby and the Convent. Nothing is said about what compels the 8-rocks to leave Louisiana and Mississippi to found, first Haven and then Ruby. Nothing is also said about the “Disallowing”. The article says Zechariah “Big Daddy” Morgan led the 8-rocks from Louisiana to Haven and then to Ruby but according to the narrative in Paradise, Zechariah “Big Daddy” Morgan never made it to Ruby. Nothing is said about the Oven too.

In “Reading and Insight in Toni Morrison’s Paradise,” (2001), Linda J. Krumholz discusses the quest for identity by the 8-rock people of the town of Ruby, Oklahoma and the quest by the stray women at the Convent, 17miles away from the Ruby township. The article dwells at length in its discussion on the founding of Ruby, the struggle of the people of Ruby to protect and maintain their

racial purity devoid of any adulteration. The article juxtaposes in its discussion, life in Ruby, the all-black 8-rock town and life in the Convent inhabited by an array of women fleeing from various forms of assaults committed against them. That in their bid to protect and maintain their racial purity, putting their blames for all Ruby's misfortunes on the Convent women, nine 8-rock men of Ruby storm the Convent and murder the women. But the article makes no mention of what compelled the ancestors of Ruby to leave Louisiana and Mississippi and the founding of Haven before founding Ruby. The "Disallowing" is just briefly mentioned in connection with the rigidity of the Ruby men in their quest

In the article, "Re-Imagining" Agency: Toni Morrison's Paradise," (2002), Megali Cornier Michael treats the search for collective or group identity by both the people of Ruby and the women in the Convent not far from Ruby. The article traces the identity quest of the all-black 8-rock people of Ruby from Louisiana and Mississippi to the founding first, of Haven and then Ruby, the role of Zechariah Morgan on the journey, the "Disallowing" witnessed in Fairly, Oklahoma which makes them become rigid in their quest for their authentic self and their quest for their earthly paradise of exclusion and inclusion, and their binary opposition to the women of the Convent.

The article says, intent on maintaining their racial purity untainted and unadulterated, the people of Ruby see the women of the convent as a threat to their earthly paradise. That nine 8-rock men of Ruby storm the convent and murder the five free, unarmed women whom they blame for all their personal and the town of Ruby's problems. That, in killing the women, the people of Ruby

have become what they have been running from; that it is rather the convent that promises hope and not Ruby.

The article however does not discuss the dispute over the inscription at the mouth of the oven. The article seems to concentrate so much on the convent and the women there. These issues are addressed in my thesis.

It is clear from the above that the issues of identity in Morrison's Song of Solomon, Beloved and Paradise have been variously discussed. However it is also clear that resistance, as tool of identity creation, has not been given the attention it deserves. What is unique in this thesis therefore is the treatment of the lapses mentioned in the above review.

CHAPTER THREE

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS: SONG OF SOLOMON

Morrison's Song of Solomon provides an ideal point of entry for a discussion on the issue of identity and resistance among African Americans. It provides an ideal point of entry in this thesis because it is the best achieved of Toni Morrison's earliest works. It deals with mature adults and with themes of depth and range. At the center of Song of Solomon (1977) is the sojourn of a young protagonist, Milkman Dead, who, at the age of thirty, is alienated and still lacks social identification. Milkman, a modern subject who needs a temporal unification between the past and the future in the present, realizes that he is fragmented, that he lacks wholeness, and that he does not know who he is. Looking in the mirror, he becomes cognizant of the fact that his face lacks "coherence, a coming together of the features into a total self"(p.169). Until this moment in his life, Milkman has lived a careless, uninformed and haphazard life. He is selfish, self-centered, and spoiled. "His life was pointless, aimless, and it was true that he didn't concern himself an awful lot about other people. There was nothing he wanted bad enough to risk anything for, inconvenience himself for"(p.107). He has contempt for everyone. He strikes his father for slapping his mother, not knowing the history of his parents' relationship. He sends his cousin and girlfriend, Hagar, a Christmas present and a farewell letter at the same time.

He tries to break Corinthians' one love affair because he thinks that her boyfriend, Porter, is not good enough for her, and he steals from his aunt Pilate. Finally, he is a prisoner of his father's upper middle-class household, which is completely objectified and commodified.

After recognizing his alienation and fragmentation and his lack of social identification, Milkman thinks constantly of escape and adventure: he wants to fly but like the peacock perched on the rooftop of the defunct Buick, Milkman cannot fly away because he cannot "give up the shit that weighs (him) down" (p.179). For Milkman, to fly like a bird is to become completely different: to escape commitment, family, and history, to give up his material possessions, and become totally free and adventurous. What Milkman quests for is a genuine humanity; a humanity from which all anteriority vanishes- a humanity from which all external trappings cease. Milkman is prepared to reject the past; but he has not found a human destiny: "He just wanted to beat a path away from his parents' past, which was also their present and which was threatening to become his present as well... [but] he could not visualize a life much different from the one he had"(p.180). He therefore wants to leave home, leave the country and be on his own. The longing to leave becomes so acute that he wants a total break from the area: "He wanted to feel the heavy white door on Not Doctor Street close behind him and know that he might be hearing the catch settle into its groove for the last time"(p.163).

In devising her strategies to resolve Milkman's dilemma, to find his "human destiny," Morrison provides Milkman with two options to negotiate in generating a balanced identity: he has the upper-middle-class, materially,

emotionally, and spiritually stifling lifestyle of his father, Macon Dead, Sr. and the empty, rootless urban black bourgeoisies; and he has the free, spontaneous, and emotionally and spiritually filled lifestyle of his aunt, Pilate and his cultural past. Milkman grows up in Macon Dead, Sr.'s house. Macon Dead, Sr. is the epitome of the modern entrepreneur who surrenders himself to the urban-industrial imperatives with fanatical conviction. Macon Dead, Sr. grew up with a father, another Macon Dead whose name was messed up by a drunken Yankee. This other Macon Dead was able to balance human warmth and compassion with industriousness. He showed care and love for his two children at the same time that he built an empire. Macon Dead

had come out of nowhere, as ignorant as a hammer and broke as a convict, with nothing but free papers, a Bible, and a pretty black-haired wife and in one year he'd leased ten acres, the next ten more. Sixteen years later he had one of the best farms in Montour County (p. 237)

Macon Dead, Sr. in pressing for wealth adopts the bureaucratic, managerial type of culture characterized by mass consumption and economic self-seeking. His quest for freedom, his accumulation of wealth is turned into a system of oppression. He becomes "a hard man, with a manner so cool it discouraged casual or spontaneous conversation" (p.15). In his struggle to acquire material wealth, Macon Dead Sr. becomes sexually, spiritually, and emotionally dead as his name signifies. Macon Dead Sr.'s freedom is achieved at the expense of his treating others in objective (not as humans) and instrumental terms. He puts Guitar's grandmother, Mrs. Bains – whom he does not see as a person – out on the streets when she cannot pay her rent because she has to feed her children.

Macon Dead remembered- not the woman, but the circumstances at number three. His tenant's grandmother or aunt or something had moved in there and the rent was long overdue (p.21)

He refuses to send Milkman to college because to him, "college was time spent in idleness, far away from the business of life, which was learning to own things" (p. 69). He marries Ruth strictly for personal advancement rather than for love. Ruth becomes no more than another piece of real estate to which he holds the key.

Macon Dead Sr.'s quest for freedom wreaks a devastating havoc on his family. He lives in a house that is quiet but not peaceful. In his quest, he remains locked in an acrid life of unfulfillment that manifests itself in the hatred, criticism and disapproval of his family, particularly his wife: "His hatred for (Ruth) glittered and sparkled in every word he spoke to her" (p.15). Ruth begins "her days stunned into stillness by her husband's contempt and (ends) them wholly animated by it" (pp. 10-11). Once when the Dead family are on their way to the beach and Ruth reminds Macom Dead Sr. of his driving too fast he replies, "If you say one more thing to me about the way I drive, you are going to walk back home. I mean it." The water mark she observes on her fine mahogany table, and which like the vessel that made the mark is imported and forced into the house, symbolizes her flawed existence, which is also externally anchored.

Ruth looked for the water mark several times during the day. She knew it was there, would always be there, but she needed to confirm its presence. Like the keeper of the lighthouse and the prisoner, she regarded it as a mooring, a checkpoint, some stable visual object that assured her that the world was still there; that this was life and not a dream. That she was alive somewhere, inside, which she acknowledge to be true only because a thing she knew intimately was out there, outside herself. (p. 11)

Like the table, Ruth's life is blemished and not whole.

It is her propensity to fashion an identity outside herself that leads Ruth to validate her essence and being through Milkman, whom she sees as her one aggressive act. He is, after all, the living evidence of the last time her husband made love to her. Ruth's unwillingness to let go marks the relationship; she nurses her son far beyond infancy for her own satisfaction: "He was too young to be dazzled by her nipples, but he was old enough to be bored by the flat taste of mother's milk" (p. 13). He gains the name "Milkman" (he is named Macon Dead III) at age six when Ruth's ritual is discovered by the town's gossip, Freddie.

As Lawrence Vogue rightly points out in "The Retreat from Modernity," (1996), Macon Dead Sr.'s calculating, impersonal, and rational style has an equally ruinous effect on his two daughters (Retreat from Modernity, p. 35). Because of their father, First Corinthians and Magdalena called Lena grow up to become pathetic cripples:

Under the frozen heat of his glance they tripped over doorsills and dropped the salt cellar into the yolks of their poached eggs. The way he mangled their grace, wit and self-esteem was the single excitement of their days" (1996: 10)

They lived at home through their thirties, spending their time making velvet roses. Unable to define their worth within his business design, Macon Dead, Sr. stifles their growth, personal identity and voice. His "disappointment in his daughters sifted down on them like ash, dulling their buttery complexions and choking the lilt out of what should have been girlish voices" (p. 10).

Macon Dead Sr.'s capitalist attitude and his scramble to acquire wealth make his family live an inauthentic life-meaningless, unfulfilled life. Macon Dead

Sr.; much like his wife Ruth, is driven by emptiness to seek vicarious meaning through Milkman. He tells Milkman to “Own things and let the things you own own other things. Then you’ll own yourself and other people too” (p.55). Ironically, he fails to see that he does not own himself, for he has become enslaved to the things he owns. The slum houses, Packard, and position do not fulfill him: “he felt as though the houses were in league with one another to make him feel like the outsider, propertyless, landless wanderer” (p. 27). Spiritually impoverished and physically alienated from self, family and community, Macon Dead Sr. wanders in the dark one evening to his sister Pilate’s house, where, unnoticed, he listens outside her window to her singing: “Near the window, hidden by the dark, he felt the irritability of the day drain from him” (pp. 29-30).

Aware of Macon Dead Sr.’s sense of nothingness and his inability to love others or himself, Milkman rejects his father. In fact, Milkman does everything he can to be different:

Macon was clean-shaven; Milkman was desperate for moustache; Macon wore bow ties; Milkman wore four-in-hands. Macon didn’t 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 (pp. 62-63)

Milkman lacks interest in the choices made available to him by his parent and by his community:

All he knew in the world about the world was what other people had told him. He felt like a garbage pail for the actions and hatred of other people. He himself did nothing. (p.120)

By age thirty, Milkman has a need to escape the existential vacuum of his pointless and aimless life, to escape his father's house which is threatening to engulf him, to beat a path away from that of his parents and to escape his father's petty bourgeois capitalism which offers him no redemption, as well as the effort of those around him to work "out some scheme of their own on him . . . Everything they did seemed to be about him, yet nothing he wanted was part of it" (pp. 165 – 166). As the self he discovered in personal reflection suggested, he "lacked coherence, a coming together of the features into a total self" (pp. 69-70). Milkman resolves to take control of his life by declaring, "I want to live my own life" (p. 223), a pronouncement that, like Nel's self-affirming, "I am me" achieves *nommo*, creating or self-creative (selfhood) (Samuels and Hudson-Weems, 1990:64). This pronouncement by Milkman does not imply a desire for an experimental life but for a transcendental life, one that surpasses the material world of his parents.

To push through with his quest, Milkman has to resist his father's attempts to keep him at home. Macon Dead tries to induce him (Milkman) with what he (Milkman) stands to inherit from him (his father): "You'll own it all. All of it. You'll be free. Money is freedom, Macon. The only real freedom there is"(p.163) says his father who thinks having money is all that one needs to assert oneself and get one's freedom and identity. It is this capitalist idea which he tries to put into Milkman's head when he tells him (Milkman); "Let me tell you right now the one important thing you'll ever need to know: own things. And let the things you own own other things. Then you'll own yourself and own other people too. Starting

Monday, I'm going to teach you how" (p.55). But the identity Milkman pursues is not what his father envisages for him. He therefore resists his father's attempts to pin him down to the life he wants him (Milkman) to lead. He thus tells his father: "I know, Daddy, I know. But I have to get away just the same. I'm not leaving the country; I just want to be on my own"(p.163).

At this stage in his awakening, Milkman, like his father, sees money as the vehicle that will allow him to be free, to fly, to escape the past and present of his family. He thus asks his father who, to achieve social status, acquires and accumulates property; whose keys, a sign of importance, represent the houses he owns; whose houses and car are his "way of satisfying himself that he was indeed a successful man," and who to acquire social respectability, marries the only daughter of the only black doctor in town, to let him (Milkman) have some of his money, "Let me use some of it now, when I need it. Don't do like Pilate, put it in a green sack and hang it from the wall so nobody can get it. Don't make me wait until-"(p.163) It is this mention of Pilate's "gold" that brings Guitar, Milkman's friend into his quest who in the end turns his twisted love and deadly hate on Milkman when he suspects Milkman of pulling a fast one on him (Guitar). Guitar belongs to and is a committed member of the Seven Days whose mission is to kill randomly selected white people in direct numerical retaliation for black deaths.

Despite the ruthlessness of such a response to white violence, the Seven Days claim that their actions are justified because they stem from a pure motivation: love for the black race. They believe that in their fight for survival, blacks cannot escape the white man's strokes or the murderous fantasies of their

brothers and sisters hence, they must either play the numbers game with its grim arithmetic –with Guitar and his Brotherhood, the Seven Days – and make even the number of deaths among whites and among blacks, or they can try to conjure death through some old trick, by playing humorously or imaginatively with it.

The Seven Days constitute a vigilante group whose activities echo the calls of the Black Power Movement and Malcolm X for violent resistance against white racists in the black man's quest for freedom and identity. In a sense of "we-ness", the Seven Days exercise a collective action in pursuit of a common interest–freedom and identity of the Blackman. But Milkman fears that apart from whites in general, the Seven Days can "off anybody" and that the young dudes among members are subject to change the rules so that their victims would no longer be whites only. This proves to be true in the end as hatred becomes the force by which Guitar is driven to pursue Milkman's death even at the possible expense of his own and in the event, kills Pilate.

It is Milkman's desire for money in his quest, and Pilate's "gold" that lead him to Danville, Pennsylvania, where Reverend Cooper makes him aware of his people, his "links". It is Pilate's lost or misplaced gold that initiates Milkman on a journey that will change his entire life and it is this same Pilate who serves as Milkman's pilot in his quest. With reverence for the legacy, her secrecy and defiance, she becomes Milkman's pilot, the guiding force, the pedagogue who introduces him to the mysteries of life and death, and of blackness. She initiates Milkman into the wisdom and beliefs and souls of his people and challenges his indifference and ignorance. Milkman then foresees a future, is given a sense of

purpose. His first visit to Pilate's house initiates his journey into the legacy: "in the wine house of this lady who had one earring, no navel and looked like a tall black tree," amid the pervading odor of fermenting fruit and pine, Milkman is reborn. Pilate and her house, in sharp contrast to his father's house of death, bring a promise, suggest the possibility of flight. It is the seedbed of cultural activity. Symbolically it is for Milkman the threshold, both margin and limen, which represents the liminal phase of his rites of passage, the precursor of a real and permanent change that will involve a long and exacting pilgrimage.

When Milkman first undertakes his odyssey toward freedom, he flies away from the unbearable pain of his spurned love for Hagar, the conflicting demands of his parents, and the disturbing intensity of Guitar Bains' hatred. This attempted escape is coupled with Milkman's greedy interest in gold, the lost fortune from his family's past. As he leaves his life long home for the first time Milkman is elated.

The airplane ride exhilarated him, encouraged illusion and a feeling of invulnerability. High above the clouds... it was not to believe that he had ever made a mistake, or could... This one time he wanted to go solo. In the air, away from real life, he felt free, but on the ground...the wings of all those other people's nightmares flapped in his face and constrained him. Lena's anger, Corinthians' loose and uncombed hair, Ruth's stepped-up surveillance, his father's bottomless greed, Hagar's hollow eyes... but he knew he was fed up and he knew he had to leave quickly (p.220-221).

Milkman leaves, cursed by one of his sisters who expose his ignorance, vacuous and indifferent to other people's feelings. He sets off to find the gold that will buy him his freedom—faithful both to the mercantile spirit of his father, and to the historical heritage of slaves, striving to buy their freedom.

After leaving the airplane, Milkman travels to Danville, Pennsylvania, his father's boyhood home where Reverend Cooper and Circe make him aware of his people, his "links". In Reverend Cooper's house where Milkman goes to seek information, he is astounded by the Reverend's enthusiastic response to his name; "I know your people!" the Reverend shouts. This is the beginning of Milkman's education in the meaning of such terms:

Milkman smiled and let his shoulders slump a little. It was a good feeling to come into a strange town and find a stranger who knew your people. All his life he'd heard the tremor in the word: "I live here, but my *people* . . ." or: "She acts like she ain't got no people, or: Do any of your *people* live there?" But he hadn't known what it meant: links (p.229).

Circe, who sheltered the young siblings Macon and Pilate after their father was killed and his farmland seized by local whites, tells him the names of his grandparents; directs him to the cave, and he plunges into the dark and treacherous woods in search of gold. Circe clearly defies time. How old is she? It is immaterial. What is critical is that she has lived past (and through) time to assure that the myth Milkman needed to reclaim his legacy – would one day be his. She alone is able to retell the story he must hear if he is to solve the riddle that is his life. Milkman, who tells her, "They think you are dead" (p. 246), is easily claimed by her mythic dimensions. The fruity, ginger odor of her house that smells like Pilate's and her dark embracing presence draw him into her fabric. Time is suspended long enough for him to lose his place in the dangerous present that threatens his spirituality and find his place in a nurturing past. (Holloway, 1999:74)

Milkman's true journey begins with Circe, the image of a witch from his childhood nightmares, whose terrifying embrace he enters, and who directs him on his journey. His falling into the creek and going "completely under"(p.249) the water, signifies the washing away of all the trappings that weigh him down initially and was making it difficult for him to fly. His citified clothes and shoes are gradually ruined as he undergoes a "ritualistic stripping of his sense of power and egoism"(Schultz 138). Finding no gold in the cave, Milkman becomes disappointed and deciding that Pilate may have earlier retrieved the gold and hidden it in Shalimar, Virginia, resolves to continue his quest there.

Milkman's Danville experience marks the point of his separation from the Deads and begins a rite of passage that will allow him to metaphorically take flight into self. His ascension to the cave as initiate (his cultural womb) is an act that brings him closer to aggregation – to his grandfather and lost community. It necessarily involves the symbolic testing of strength and ritual cleansing which he experiences in the climb and by his submersion in the creek that the liminal hero must encounter. Significantly, this is a process that requires him to shed his artificial past, symbolized by his soiled, torn clothing and his shoe, which he removed, indicating his humility as initiate. This ritual cleansing is a form of new birth. Upon reaching the creek's edge, he breathlessly hoists himself from its body, much in the manner that Pilate birthed herself after her mother died during delivery. This action signifies his completion of the preliminary preparation of his flight to self (Samuels & Hudson-Weems, 1990:66)

Milkman's journey to Danville and Shalimar places him in the presence of his past. It marks the point of his separation from the false community of the Deads and begins the rite of passage that will result in his incorporation into his ancestral community, allowing him to transcend his present fostered existence in a spiritual flight to self. At this point his status as liminal hero is evident. Genevieve Fabre points out that Morrison deftly underlies the ambivalent character of each of Milkman's decisions or steps, which are at the same time an escape from and recognition of the legacy. As he progresses into his journey, however, his resistance and estrangement weaken. Committed to paying his dues, he finds himself immersed in a heritage he can no longer deny. As he is acknowledged as one of the tribe by those who have known his ancestors, he rises in fuller recognition of the meaning of kinship, of the rich filiation of several generations. He travels back in space and time to the wood life of Pennsylvania and the wilder backwoods of Virginia, to the days of slavery when blacks moved in wagons toward the Promised Land. He gets closer to home, to the South and to Africa from where the flying Ancestor, the one with the real name came (Genevieve Fabre, 1998: 112).

After a determined search, Milkman finally locates Shalimar through serendipitous chance when his seventy-five dollar used car breaks down in front of Solomon's General Store in the center of the town. In Shalimar, Virginia, Milkman uncovers the last pieces of his puzzled past—the part of his cultural heritage that exists unchanged in the present. In Shalimar, Milkman is immediately recognized as an outsider. His materialistic attitude, along with his

exploitive attitude toward women, informs the people of Shalimar that he is not one of them:

They looked with hatred at the city Negro who could buy a car as if it were a bottle of whisky because the one he had had broken ... They had also seen him watching their women and rubbing his fly ... They had also seen him lock his car as soon as he got out of it in a place where there couldn't be more than two keys twenty-five miles around ... They looked at his skin and saw it was black as theirs, but they knew he had the heart of the white men who came to pick them up in the trucks when they needed anonymous, faceless laborers (p.266).

In Shalimar, the entire community of the rural Virginia town takes part in Milkman's discovery of identity through the entangling of his past. The young men do this with the fight, the old men with the hunt, the women with the provision of the reward in the person of Sweet, and the children with their song and dance of Milkman's genealogy. Here, he undergoes a transformation that reconnects him to his earthy past. This transformation is accomplished through the series of tests. First, he is tested by the young men when he finds himself in a knife- and- broken bottle fight, which he survives. Second, through a hunt, he is tested by the old men who want to know if he can survive without his material possessions and with his bare essentials.

There was nothing here to help him – not his money, his car, his father's reputation, his suit, or his shoes. In fact, they hampered him. Except for his broken watch, and his wallet with about two hundred dollars, all he had started out with on his journey was gone: his suitcase with the Scotch, the shirts, and the space for bags of gold; his snap-brim hat, his socks, and his shoes. His watch and his two hundred dollars would be of no help out here, where all a man had was what he was born with, or had learned to use. And endurance (p. 277).

On the hunt, Milkman is confronted with his alienation not only from the life rhythms of the earth, but also from the concomitant basic survival skills.

This hunting trip marks an unmistakable epiphany in Milkman's journey, which occurs after he becomes separated from the other men. Following the baying dogs is a difficult and unaccustomed ordeal for Milkman: he begins to limp on his aching short leg, and he is soon left behind. Milkman becomes aware of the subtle communication between man and animal and realizes the animal's sounds are not only a form of language, but also a kind of music:

All those shrieks, those rapid tumbling barks, the low sustained yells, the tuba sounds, the drumbeat sounds, the low liquid *hown hown*, the reedy whistles, the thin *e-e-e-e-e-e's* of a cornet., the *unh unh unh* bass chords. It was all language. (p.278)

Suddenly alone in the woods, Milkman's "isolation, fear, and pain prompt memory, affection, and guilt" (Schultz p.138). Guitar had once taught Milkman a macabre joke: "My name is Macon ... I'm already Dead" (p.118) and "previously, Milkman had accepted his name as a talisman against death ... He did not realize that his name had described his spiritual state; following his experience in the wilderness, it describes, plainly and profoundly, the fact of his mortality and his common bond with human kind."(Schultz, p.139) As he sits in the moonlit woods with his back against a tall and firmly-rooted tree, Milkman finally understands and accepts his name for what it is: "'Milkman' as a testimony to his mother's need for love after the loss of her father, 'Dead' as a testimony to his father's need for possessions after the loss of his father" (Rushdy, 1998:316)

and acknowledges his own responsibility for the pain he has caused others through his lifelong selfishness.

Ironically, Guitar chooses the moment of Milkman's enlightenment to try to strangle him. In the ensuing struggle Milkman manages to fire his gun into the air, and Guitar quickly runs away and disappears into the woods. As Milkman leaves the woods after this encounter, he "found himself exhilarated by simply walking the earth. Walking like he belong on it ... And he did not limp" (p.281). He awakens to man's historical relationship with the earth. Milkman leaves the forest a new man, one who has been shaped not solely by the environment but also his distinct choices and actions: by his decision to live, to walk the earth as 'Self'.

As Samuels and Hudson-Weems rightly point out, in his coming to grips with his whole self, Milkman learns that he cannot circumvent his racial and cultural identity. He can now interpret and understand the sacra and lore that he discovered concisely encoded in Shalimar's folklore about Solomon, the flying African. He is in fact the spiritual and biological heir of Solomon who rebelled against his bondage in slavery with his flight back to Africa and whose history is recorded in Pilate's blues song about "Sugarman," which he heard for the first time when he visited her home at twelve and now hears in Shalimar's children's ring game (Samuels & Hudson-Weems, 1990:67):

Jake the only son of Solomon
Come booba yalle, come booba tambee
Whirled about and touched the sun
Come konka yalle, come konka tambee

Left that baby in a white man's house

Come booba yalle, come booba tambee
Heddy took him to a red man's house
Come konka yalle, come konka tambee

Black lady fell down on the ground
Come booba yalle, come booba tambee
Threw her body all around
Come konka yalle, come konka tambee

Solomon and Ryna Belali Shalut
Yaruba Medina Mohammed too.
Nestor Kalina Saraka cake.
Twenty-one children, the last one Jake!

O Solomon don't leave me here
Cotton balls to choke me
O Solomon don't leave me here
Buckra's arm to yoke me

Solomon done fly, Solomon done gone
Solomon cut across the sky, Solomon gone home (p. 303).

In his transformation, Milkman reconnects to a cultural past. He learns from Susan Byrd, a distant cousin, that his grandmother, Sing, left with his grandfather, Jake, "on a wagon headed for Massachusetts." He also discovers Solomon's Leap, Ryna Gulch, and the "song of Solomon," which is a song that embodies his own history and heritage – a song that Pilate has been singing all her life. Milkman's discovery of the song symbolically represents his discovery of his membership in a family, a community, and a history:

He was curious about these people. He didn't feel close to them, but he did feel connected, as though there was some cord or pulse or information they shared. Back home he had never felt that way, as though he belonged to anyplace or anybody (pp. 292-293).

This connection with the people of Shalimar begins the resolution to Milkman's alienation and fragmentation, his lack of social identification and his lack of historical continuity, as well as the end to his hedonistic, exploitative, and materialistic ways. It begins the coming together of his "incoherent face." In the transformation, Milkman identifies himself through a constructed, African history and thereby transcends his alienation.

The change in Milkman begins to manifest itself immediately. He becomes a more sensitive and compassionate individual. He begins to see the people of Shalimar not in objective and instrumental terms, but as people. He begins to treat women differently. The description of Milkman's and Sweet's brief time together lovingly shows an egalitarian spirit Milkman has acquired by alternating "he did" and "she did."

Unlike Milkman's many previous sexual encounters, his lovemaking with Sweet is unselfish and mutually fulfilling. For the first time, Milkman understands that giving love must be wedded to taking love. Later, in his dreams, Milkman flies "over the dark sea, but it didn't frighten him because he knew he could not fall. He was alone in the sky, but someone was applauding him, watching him and applauding" (p.298). The unseen source of this applause may be the ghostly hands of his ancestors, with whom he is finally beginning to connect. Discovering in the people of Shalimar a sense of belonging, he becomes a part of a whole. In addition, he begins to understand his mother's "hopeless, helplessness," and regretfully acknowledges that although "his mother and Pilate had fought for his life" since he was in his mother's womb, "he had never so much as made either of

them a cup of tea”(p.331). He also develops compassion for his father’s mission in life.

The town children’s circle rhyme of the song of Solomon that tells the story of a flying African named Solomon, sung when Milkman first enters Shalimar and which Milkman later realizes as the story of his family, works as a chorus and transmitter of genealogy. This song is key to Milkman’s discovery of his link with Jake, his grandfather, the son of Solomon, whose flight back to Africa is commemorated in the song. Elated by his new knowledge, Milkman grabs Sweet and rushes to Shalimar’s nearby river for a baptismal celebration. As he plunges into the water, Milkman “began to whoop and dive and splash and turn. ‘He could fly! You hear me? My great-granddaddy could fly! Goddam!’ He whipped the water with his fists, then jumped straight up as though he too could take off” (p.328).

Milkman’s newfound knowledge in Shalimar leads him back to Pilate. There is “something he felt now – here in Shalimar, and earlier in Danville – that reminded him of how he used to feel in Pilate’s house.”(p.293) He returns to his community a changed person, but learns the world has not changed because of his awareness. Although he cannot undo his past mistakes, Milkman at last achieves honest human understanding through sorrow for Hagar’s death, and thus gains a shot at redemption. He persuades Pilate to return with him to Shalimar to bury her father’s bones after revealing to her his recent discoveries, which finally explain the true origin of the sack of bones Pilate has carried with her for decades; bones Pilate believes are those of the white man her brother Macon attacked and

killed in self-defense after their father's death and left the body in a cave. Years later, Pilate dreams of her father who tells her, "You just can't fly on off and leave a body,"(p.147) which Pilate interprets as a command to return to Pennsylvania to collect the skeleton of the white man, and does so, placing the bones in a sack which she hangs in her room. Milkman informs her that the bones are her father's and she realizes that she must bury her father's remains in Shalimar, his birthplace.

The most significant evidence of Milkman's awareness of the principle of reciprocity as related to women is his commitment to guide Pilate to Shalimar to bury her father's bones, just as she has guided him to bury the Dead in him. In fact, in his revolutionized consciousness – which prizes humanism and egalitarianism – he becomes the pilot, the source of life. Thus the name "Milkman" is transformed to signify that which is positive, not negative. The protagonist becomes the Milkman who is capable of carrying the source of life for those in need. On Solomon's Leap, they find enough earth for the burial: "Pilate squatted down and opened the sack while Milkman dug. A deep sigh escaped from the sack and the wind turned chill ... Pilate laid the bones carefully into the small grave" (p.335), and instead of a rock or cross, Pilate "reached up and yanked her earring from her ear, splitting the lobe" (p.335) and placed the snuffbox containing a piece of paper on which her name, the only word her father ever wrote, atop her father's grave. But as Pilate stood up, "it seemed to Milkman that he heard the shot after she fell" (p.335). As Pilate's life bleeds away, her only regret is: "I wish I'd a knowed more people. I would of love 'em all. If I'd a

knowed more, I would a loved more” (p.336). As she lies dying, she asks Milkman to sing for her, and like Ryna and Hagar before him, Milkman pleads in abandoned despair:

Sugargirl don’t leave me here
Cotton balls to choke me
Sugargirl don’t leave me here
Buckra’s arms to yoke me (p.336).

Realizing Pilate is dead, Milkman sings “louder and louder as though sheer volume would wake her. He woke only the birds, who shuddered off into the air” and one of the birds “dived into the new grave and scooped something shining in its beak before it flew away” (p.336). As Pilate’s name earring soars away, Milkman suddenly knows “why he loved her so. Without ever leaving the ground, she could fly” (p.336), just as the deep sigh that escaped from the sack and made the wind turn chill symbolizes the flight of his grandfather’s spirit.

Guitar Bains’ love out of a perverted sense for an abstract concept has driven him to stalk and attack the very people he wants to protect, and he fires the bullet that kills the innocent Pilate. Now Milkman stands up to face the murderous love of Guitar Bains, ready to give everything for love, replete with the hard-won knowledge that a truly connected love is not bondage but freedom. Duplicating the flying leap of his famed ancestor, without “wiping away the tears, taking a deep breath, or even bending his knees” (p.337), Milkman launches himself into the cold night air:

As fleet and bright as a lodestar, he wheeled toward Guitar and it did not matter which of them would give up his ghost in the killing arms of his brother. For now he knew what Shalimar knew: If you surrendered to the air, you could ride it (p.337).

Milkman's last action is an echo, literally of Robert Smith's act in the opening scene. Milkman's jump, however, unlike Smith's of desperation, is reminiscent of the boy in the middle of the circle dance of Solomon's song. Milkman calls to Guitar: "You want my life? ... You need it? Here," (p.337) As Milkman leaps, he transcends the literal community and flies away like Solomon though perhaps not as heroically. In Milkman's leap, there is the pure motion of flight, a dance to the heavens, witnessed by the rocks and hills near Solomon's Leap and Ryna's Gulch, where "Life life life life" (p.337) is the chorus that echoes to those of us in the community beyond.

In the last swift scene, each gesture and act, unreal as they are, assume perfection and finality. They are the reenactment of familiar rites and rituals, and Milkman's leap, the fulfillment of a dream, is an act of faith in the legacy, an act of communion with Pilate, and with his flying ancestor. Milkman's and Pilate's names can enter the legend, for a new story to be written, a new song invented, that will record the story and secrecy of their lives and deaths.

From the above analysis we have seen that the quest for identity in Song of Solomon can be demonstrated from the perspective of several characters. However, it is pertinent to note that Morrison is clearly interested in Milkman's attempt at self-definition. Milkman's quest then becomes the driving force which determines the various events, locations and people who serve as transformative agents in his attempt to set himself apart from his overly capitalist father and the radical or revolutionary Seven Days represented by Guitar. Milkman's journey can also be viewed as a racial odyssey that culminates in his realization and final

acceptance of his African roots. In the context of Morrison's narrative ideology, Milkman's triumph transcends the personal and offers a collective vision of people's historical genesis. Milkman's journey into the past validates the axiom that to make a stake a claim for the future one must first situate his/her historical genesis.

CHAPTER FOUR

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS: BELOVED

And it was so, that all that saw it, said, there was no such deed done nor seen from the day that the children of Israel came up out of Egypt unto this day. CONSIDER OF IT, TAKE ADVICE, AND SPEAK YOUR MINDS-Judges xix: 30. Extract from a sermon by Rev. H. Bushnell and quoted by Samuel J. May in his article "Margaret Garner and seven others" (p. 34)

He has come out to believe that the domestication of the "inferior races" will come about by his conditioning of their reflexes. But in this he leaves out of account the human memory and the ineffaceable marks left upon it; and then, above all there is something which perhaps he has never known: we only become what we are by the radical and deep-seated refusal of that which others have made of us.

Jean Paul Sartre "Preface" to The Wretched of the Earth by Frantz Fanon, (quoted in King, p. 272).

The theme of identity search or quest for identity and the use of resistance through violent or passive means permeates Toni Morrison's fifth novel, Beloved, (1987). At the center of this quest for identity is a runaway slave mother, Sethe who in her search for self (identity) and freedom, resorts to violent means of preventing herself and her children, her best things from being taken back to slavery; a fate worse than death, a living hell. But this violent means of resistance through which Sethe seeks to liberate herself and her children (she kills her daughter as a means of resisting recapture as a fugitive slave and being returned to chattel slavery and preventing her daughter's characteristics from being written on

the animal side of the paper) remains a haunting past which Sethe must grapple with in order to assert herself for, as she says “ Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another” (Beloved p. 95)

Whereas in Song of Solomon Morrison explores the golden legacy of Milkman’s racial heritage, which leads to his slave roots, in Beloved, in contrast, she reveals why the ex-slaves tried to run away from slavery. Specifically, the novel describes how the ex-slave Sethe, who lives near Cincinnati in 1873 – 1874, remains haunted by memories of her slave experiences at the ironically named Kentucky plantation, Sweet Home. In 1855, after the death of her supposedly enlightened and good slave master, Garner, and her maltreatment and humiliation at the hands of Garner’s successor, Schoolteacher, Sethe makes her difficult flight to freedom only to be tracked down by schoolteacher one month later, leading to the infanticide and to Sethe’s subsequent haunting by the ghost of her dead baby daughter. Brooks Bouson J. captures the essence of trauma in Beloved when she says, “As Morrison insistently dramatizes the pain and shame endured by Sethe, she depicts the nightmarish world inhabited by victims of trauma, using the device of the ghost to convey the power of trauma to possess and trap its victims”, (2000:134).

The slaves at Sweet Home, Sethe and her co-male slaves, and Baby Suggs were treated fairly by Mr. Garner their owner who claimed all his slaves “are men”. The kind of treatment meted out to the slaves at Sweet Home by Mr. Garner their owner made them feel at home on the plantation. On the death of Mr. Garner and the taking over of the plantation by Schoolteacher and the

nephews, the plight of the slaves became worse as Schoolteacher changed the rules to their disadvantage and denied them certain rights granted them by Mr. Garner.

Before schoolteacher took over affairs of Sweet Home, Sixo, Paul A, Paul F, Paul D and Halle used rifles to hunt game, but

Schoolteacher took away the guns from the Sweet Home men and, deprived of game to round out their diet of bread, beans, hominy, vegetables and a little extra at slaughter time, they began to pilfer in earnest, and it became not only their right but their obligation. (pp. 190-91)

When Sixo steals a shoat and schoolteacher encounters him eating meat from the shoat, schoolteacher first asks and then answers his own question. Sethe recalls that Schoolteacher acted “like he was just going through the motions – not expecting an answer that mattered:

“You stole that shoat, didn’t you?”
“No sir,” said Sixo, but he had the decency to keep his eyes on the meat.
“You telling me you didn’t steal it, and I’m looking right at you?”
“No sir, I didn’t steal it.”
Schoolteacher smiled, “Did you kill it?”
“Yes sir, I killed it.”
“Did you butcher it?”
“Yes sir.”
“Did you cook it?”
“Yes sir.”
“Well then. Did you eat it?”
“Yes sir, I sure did”.
“And you telling me that’s not stealing?”
“No sir. it ain’t”
“What is it then?”
“Improving your property, Sir”
“What?”
“Sixo plant rye to give the high piece a better chance. Sixo take and feed the soil, give you more crop.

Sixo take and feed Sixo give you more work” (p.190)

By this, Sixo disrupts the flow of Schoolteacher’s supposedly empirical reasoning and following the exchange, Sethe observes that Sixo’s argument was clever, “but Schoolteacher beat him anyway to show him that definitions belonged to the definers – not the defined” (p.190). After this beating, Sixo “started watching the sky” and “you could tell his mind was gone from Sweet Home”(p. 197). In Sixo’s confrontation with Schoolteacher, “the former’s capacity for human reasoning coupled with his power over language, reverses the objective of Schoolteacher’s formulaic discourse and thwarts the slaveholder’s attempt to circumscribe Sixo’s identity” and deny him his humanity (King, 1998:277). Drastic changes took place at Sweet Home: Schoolteacher effected and enforced more restrictive rules. Paul A was whipped for the first time, “Schoolteacher arrived to put things in order. But what he did broke three more sweet Home men and punched the glittering iron out of Sethe’s eyes, leaving two open wells that did not reflect firelight” (p. 9).

Affectively and cognitively invested in ripping the veil historically drawn over proceedings too terrible to relate in Beloved, Morrison details the oppression of slaves especially slave women as she tells the story of Sethe, who learns of the shaming power of the white definers: their power to define her as less than human (Brooks Bouson, 2000:139) and although Sethe has the “amazing luck of six whole years of marriage” (p. 23) to a man who fathers every one of her children, after the death of Mr. Garner and the arrival of Schoolteacher, she learns of her value and function as a breeder slave woman, as “property that reproduced itself

without cost” (p.228). Schoolteacher asked the Sweet Home slaves questions and then wrote down what they said in his notebook with the ink Sethe mixed for him.

He liked the ink I made. It was her recipe, but he preferred how I mixed it and it was important to him because at night he sat down to write in his book. It was a book about us but we didn’t know that right away. We just thought it was his manner to ask us questions. He commenced to carry round a notebook and write down what we said (p. 37).

Sethe “think it was them questions that tore Sixo up. Tore him up for all time” (p.37) Schoolteacher, despite his “pretty manners” and “soft” talking and apparent gentleness (pp.36 - 37), is a cruel racist. A practitioner of the nineteenth century pseudoscience of race, which included the systematic measurements of facial angles, head shapes, and brain sizes, Schoolteacher, is bent, as he makes his “scientific” inquiries, on documenting the racial inferiority of the Sweet Home slaves (J. Brooks Bouson, 2000:140). At first Sethe is not concerned about Schoolteacher’s measuring string. “Schoolteacher’d wrap that string all over my head, ‘cross my nose, around my behind, number my teeth. I thought he was a fool. And the questions he asked was the biggest foolishness of all,” Sethe recalls (p. 191). Nancy Stepan, says J. Brooks Bouson, describing the biosocial investigation of racial difference in the nineteenth century, which was given “political urgency” by the abolitionist movement, notes how the “ scientific” study of race served to “elevate hitherto unconsciously held analogies” – such as the long-standing comparison of blacks to apes – into “self-conscious theory” (Race 43,42). A theory that codified the shaming of blacks and white contempt for the “lower” races, the study of racial differences functioned to give so-called

scientific confirmation of the superiority (pride) of the higher and civilized white race and the inferiority (shame) of the lower and degenerate black race. (Bousoon, 2000:140).

Faceless and nameless, Schoolteacher becomes the speaking subject of slavery's discourse. Taking advantage of his position as the possessor of language (he wields the power of the word; he is the definer who defines others- the slaves), he notes with scientific detachment the animal-like characteristics of Sweet Home's slaves. He, for instance, has his nephews – studying under his tutelage – do the same as in the instance where he made them write Sethe's characteristics on the animal side of the paper:

He was talking to his pupils and I heard him say, "Which one are you doing?" And one of the boys said, "Sethe" That's when I stopped because I heard my name, and then I took a few steps to where I could see what they was doing. Schoolteacher was standing over one of them with one hand behind his back. He licked a forefinger a couple of times and turned a few pages. Slow. I was about to turn around and keep on my way to where the muslin was, when I heard him say, "No, no. That's not the way. I told you to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don't forget to line them up" (p.193)

Sethe's identity, circumscribed by these "scientific" practices, is subject to the effects of Schoolteacher's discourse and the treatment she receives as an object of violence. That the contempt of another has the power to degrade the individual's "value as a person" by equating the individual "with a debased, dirty thing – a derided and low animal" – and that the purpose of contempt is to instill in the

individual a sense of “self-disgust and therefore shame at self-unworthiness” (Wurmser, Mask 81, Nathanson, Shame and Pride 129) is illustrated in this scene.

The contemptuous racist discourse of Schoolteacher engenders feelings of self contempt in Sethe, who feels dirtied when she is suddenly exposed to the magnitude of Schoolteacher’s disgust for her race. As a result of Sethe’s inscription into Schoolteacher’s shaming discourse on essential racial differences, she feels blameworthy, believing that she has somehow collaborated with Schoolteacher, “I made the ink, Paul D. He couldn’t have done it if I hadn’t made the ink,” she tells Paul D later (p.271). Sweet Home then becomes to Sethe a traumatic reminder of pain and bestialities. After learning from Mrs. Garner what “characteristics” mean and therefore opening her eyes to what Schoolteacher and the nephews were doing to her, Sethe’s only resolve from then on was how to assert herself, to liberate herself from the shackles of slavery, dehumanizing an institution as it was, in order to have ownership of her person and to move from the animalistic and object position and racial Other where slavery has placed her into a subject position, the real self – identity.

But what last straw broke this female camel’s back? The beating she received in the hands of the nephews after Sethe told Mrs. Garner what the nephews did to her when they milked her like a cow actually served as the last straw that broke Sethe’s back thus making her “cut and run.” Sethe tells Paul D, the one Sweet Home man to escape slavery alive and whole:

Those boys came in there and took my milk. That’s what they came in there for. Held me down and took it (p.16)
I am full God damn it of two boys with mossy teeth, one sucking on my breast the other holding me down, their

book-reading teacher watching and writing it up . . . Add my husband to it, watching, above me in the loft . . . looking down on what I couldn't look at, at all . . . There is also my husband squatting by the churn smearing the butter as well as its clabber all over his face because the milk they took is on his mind (p. 70).

Objectified as the racial and sexual Other, Sethe is treated like a sexually aggressive wet nurse and mammy when Schoolteacher's nephews sexually assault her in the barn, nursing from her breasts and stealing her milk. She is also treated like an animal, milked as if she were "the cow, no, the goat, back behind the stable because it was too nasty to stay in with the horses" (p.200). For telling Mrs Garner what has happened to her, Sethe is beaten like an animal by Schoolteacher's nephews,

I told Mrs. Garner on em ...Them boys found out I told on em. Schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still (pp.16 – 17)

Following Schoolteacher's orders, the two boys (the nephews) dig a hole in the ground to protect the foetus (Sethe was pregnant with Denver) – which is considered to be the property of the white slave owner – and then brutally beat Sethe on her back with cow hide:

Felt like I was split in two . . . Bit a piece of my tongue off when they opened my back. It was hanging by a shred. I didn't mean to. Clamped down on it, it came right off. I thought, Good God, I'm going to eat my self up (p.202)

Sethe is tormented and humiliated not only by the memories of how schoolteacher defined her as animal like but also of how his nephews treated her like an animal. Sethe's body is doubly violated: once when its nutriment was stolen, then again

when torn open by a whip. Just like the page of Schoolteacher's notebook, Sethe is divided and marked, inscribed with the discourse of slavery and violation. With all these happening to Sethe and her fellow slaves at Sweet Home, Sweet Home was no longer Sweet; it has become a kind of jungle with Sethe and her fellow slaves treated as animals as Paul D says in answer to Denver's question later:

How come every one runs off from Sweet Home can't stop talking about it? Look like if it was so Sweet you would have stayed – Denver (p.13)
True, true. She is right, Sethe. It wasn't Sweet and it sure wasn't home – Paul D (p.14)

Sethe and her fellow slaves must resist the jungle life at Sweet Home, flee for their freedom to where they can have their humanity, a self that is self – their identity for , as Paul D says, “ If a Negro got legs he ought to use them. Sit down too long, somebody will figure out a way to tie them up” (p.10) and as Henry Highland Garnet says in his speech “An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America,” (1843) in every man's mind the good seeds of liberty are planted; that

NEITHER GOD NOR ANGELS, OR JUST MEN,
COMMAND YOU (the Slaves) TO SUFFER FOR A
SINGLE MOMENT. THEREFORE IT IS YOUR
SOLEMN AND IMPERATIVE DUTY TO USE EVERY
MEANS, MORAL, INTELLECTUAL AND PHYSICAL
THAT PROMISES SUCCESS (Anthology, 1997: 282)

and that the God of heaven would smile upon every effort which the injured might make to disenthral themselves. He even urges them to let resistance be their motto because, no oppressed people have ever secured their liberty without resistance:

Awake, awake; millions of voices are calling you. Your dead fathers speak to you from their graves. Heaven, as with a voice of thunder, calls on you to arise from the dust. Let your motto be *resistance! Resistance!* RESISTANCE! NO Oppressed people have ever secured their liberty without resistance. What kind of resistance you had better make you must decide by the circumstances that surround you, and according to the suggestion of expedience (Anthology, 1997:285)

Thus, the Sweet Home slaves in quest for their freedom and identity must decide on what kind of resistance to resort to, depending on the circumstances that surround them, as they struggle to emancipate themselves from the quintessential Schoolteacher, figure of white male authority, wielding the power of the word as well as the whip; to escape from Sweet Home where even Mister, the cock, is freer than they, the slaves:

Mister, he looked so . . . free. Better than me. Stronger, tougher. Son a bitch couldn't even get out the shell by himself but he was still king and I was . . . – Paul D (p. 72).

In planning their escape, Sethe and her fellow Sweet Home slaves have to depend on Sixo, the wild one because he was the only one of them who crept away at night; also it was Sixo that learned about the “train”. Sixo is Morrison’s most dramatic symbol of resistance. He “stopped speaking English because there was no future in it” (p. 25) thus resisting the discourse of slavery and being inscribed by it. As a way of resistance, Sixo violates a Sweet Home rule by walking 17 hours each way to visit a woman who was, Sixo said, a friend of his mind: “ She gather me man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order. It is good, you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind” (pp. 272 -273).

Realizing that schoolteacher had discovered their hiding place, following their escape attempt, Sixo pushed Patsy – the Thirty Mile Woman – away from him and hopefully towards safety. He and Paul D were subsequently captured, surrounded, and bound, but Sixo grabbed a rifle and began to sing. Swinging the gun, he was able to injure one of Schoolteacher’s accomplices but could do little with bound hands. Schoolteacher at first instructed his men to take Sixo alive, not willing to lose his “property”, but soon changed his mind and decided that “this one will never be suitable” (p. 226). They tried to burn Sixo at the stake while he laughed and called out “Seven – O! Seven -- O” even as his feet were cooking. Sixo’s exclamation “Seven – O! Seven – O” is a reminder to the slave holder-Schoolteacher- and his accomplices that after him, other slaves would also resist in a similar manner as long as slavery persists for, he is six and those after him would be the seven. Finally, his persecutors had to “shoot him to shut him up” (p. 226).

Sixo, Morrison’s most dramatic symbol of resistance in Beloved, is a highly disruptive presence in a system that defines him as less than human – he refuses to speak the language of his oppressors as he sees no future in it; deliberately ignores certain rules that deny his humanity and that foster an unnatural sexual environment (bestiality); adheres to certain behaviours, traditions and customs that feel natural, right or comfortable to him; plans an escape, resists capture, and laughing in the face of physical death. Sixo dares to claim the right to full humanity even while Schoolteacher is engaging in the practice of distinguishing between his human and animal characteristics. He dares to assert

his own version of truth and to claim ownership of himself. He personifies resistance unto his death. Even as he is tied to a tree and set afire, he continues to call upon his inner reserves to resist. Thus, by resisting unto death, Sixo has claimed himself – identity. His spirit of resistance will endure and will perhaps, be incarnate in Seven – O and others as long as there are numbers on the number line (King, 1998: 281).

By punishing Sixo, and later murdering him, schoolteacher asserts his right, under the auspices of American chattel slavery to define truth, to exercise physical domination over the body of the enslaved individual, and consequently, to subjugate the knowledge (or truth effects) produced by Sixo's system of reasoning; the knowledge produced serves as a different version of truth. Morrison's recovery process throughout the text allows Sethe, Paul D, Denver, and other characters to recollect and appropriate these and other local knowledges and to put them into play as strengthening strategies (King 281). Schoolteacher's system of control leads ultimately to the loss of free labour that Sethe, her children, Halle, Sixo and both Paul A and Paul D would have performed at Sweet Home.

Sethe, having already sent her children ahead, managed to escape from Sweet Home uncaught. But before she could reach Ohio and be united with her children whom she has sent ahead and Baby Suggs, her husband Halle's mother, the pregnant and traumatized Sethe went into labour and has to be delivered by Amy Denver, an indentured white girl on her way to Boston, "the raggediest-

looking trash you ever saw” (pp. 31 -32) on the “bloody side of the Ohio River” (p.31).

Sethe forms her first partnership immediately upon embarking on her journey from death to life as she takes flight from Schoolteacher, his nephews, Sweet Home, slavery, and Kentucky: “the bloody side of the Ohio River” (p.31). With a back mutilated by the slaver’s whip, breast raw from the mossy teeth of young violators and thieves, and feet swollen beyond human recognition, Sethe reaches the zenith of her excruciating journey to freedom, believing she has reached the threshold of death. Here, she meets Amy, the daughter of a former indentured servant who, like Sethe’s mother, had died leaving her offspring to a life of bondage and oppression. Sethe’s and Amy’s plights are similar in other ways, although Sethe, at nineteen is the mother of four, while Amy, at eighteen, has never had a child. Both are teenaged women-children, poor and fugitives. Outsiders, both are searching for a life away from the liminal world they had known on the other side of the Ohio River. Sethe is traveling to Cincinnati, Ohio and her children, while Amy is on her way to Boston where she hopes to purchase some velvet. Though both women are runaways, Amy does not have to conceal her identity. Her race alone gives her a freedom of movement that Sethe cannot experience. Amy can travel by day, open and visible, without the need of a pass, without restriction. Though she is, according to Sethe, “the raggediest looking (poor white) trash you ever saw” (pp. 31 -32), Amy can walk upright during the lap of their brief pilgrimage together. Sethe must literally and figuratively crawl

on her hands and knees, although she is six months pregnant and seriously injured.

Unlike Amy, who identifies herself as “Miss Amy Denver” while perceiving Sethe as no more than a “nigger woman,” Sethe must live in fear, concealing her real identity from even her travel mate, whom she tells to call her “Lu.” “However far she was from Sweet Home, there was no point in giving out her real name to the first person she saw” (p.33). Amy challenges Sethe not to surrender her life to death. With her assistance Sethe is able to embark on the road to recovery. Finding sanctuary in an abandoned lean-to, Amy begins Sethe’s restoration by massaging her swollen feet until she cried salt tears, assuring Sethe that “anything dead coming back to life hurts” (p. 35). Amy’s role as resurrectress is more evident in the treatment of Sethe’s back, whose labyrinthine scars are testimonials to her oppression. Although the tree Amy sees in the scars must be perceived as a “tree of life” - as a symbol of Sethe’s history - it is also a symbol of the cross or burden she bears (Wilfred Samuels and Hudson Weems, 1990:115).

Discovering Sethe’s disfigured back and the pain that emanates from the branches, Amy, with the organic and herbal skills of Milkman’s Aunt Pilate, continues her curative role. Turning to nature, in the tradition of the *curandera* that she is, Amy gathers two palmfuls of (spider) web, which she cleaned of prey and then draped on Sethe’s back, saying it was like stringing a tree for Christmas (p. 80)

When Amy, who claims she is good at sick things (p. 82) treats Sethe’s injured back, she describes the pattern made by the seeping and pus-filled wounds as a

chokecherry tree - a description that serves to aestheticize the shame and trauma of Sethe's situation. "It's a tree," Amy tells Sethe. "See, here's the trunk - it's red and split wide open, full of sap, and this here's the parting for the branches. You got a mighty lot of branches, leaves, too, look like, and dern if these ain't blossoms. Tiny little cherry blossoms, just as white. Your back got a whole tree on it. In bloom" (p. 79).

Years later, when Paul D and Sethe are reunited at Sethe's haunted house, Paul D lovingly touches the "sculpture" of Sethe's scarred back, which is "like the decorative work of an ironsmith too passionate for display" (p. 17). And yet after Paul D and Sethe make love, he thinks of "the wrought-iron maze he had explored" as a "revolting clump of scars" (p. 21) - this change in Paul D's perception exemplary of the way the narrative alternates between providing an explicit and revolting depiction of slavery's atrocities and aestheticizing what it describes.

Sethe's scarred back is a visible reminder of her traumatic abuse, both her physical violation and psychic wounds, and it also concretizes her marked identity as the racially and stigmatized Other. The fact that even Paul D, comes to react with revulsion to Sethe's scarred back points to the way that victims of extreme trauma and humiliation may be viewed by others as tainted and damaged. Thus, Paul D, even though he identifies with and honours Sethe's suffering, also perceives her, on some level, as an object of shame and disgust (J. Brooks Bouson, 2000:142).

When Sethe goes into labour immediately upon reaching the Ohio River, she has to depend upon the strong hands of Amy Denver, her teenaged companion woman-child, to give birth to her premature baby girl, Denver for the baby was “face up and drowning in the mother’s blood” (p. 84) and the child is able to live because Amy is there to assist her. Leaving Sethe after she (Amy) has helped her to deliver her (Sethe’s) premature baby girl, Amy insisted that Sethe eventually tells her baby daughter that “Miss Amy Denver” of Boston (p. 85) had helped to bring her into the world.

Sethe is later ferried across the Ohio River into Ohio territory by Stamp Paid, the conductor on the Underground Railroad. Born Joshua, Stamp Paid

renamed himself when he handed over his wife to his master’s son. Handed her over in the sense that he did not kill anybody, thereby himself, because his wife demanded he stay alive With that gift, he decided that he didn’t owe any body anything. Whatever his obligations were, that act paid them off. ... so he extended this debtlessness to other people by helping them pay out and off whatever they owed in misery. Beaten runaways? He ferried them and rendered them paid for; gave them their own bill of sale; so to speak. “You paid, now life owes you” (pp. 184 – 185).

Sethe’s crossing the Ohio River into Ohio territory is very significant in her quest for identity and freedom. It symbolizes Sethe’s crossing from death (Kentucky) to life (Ohio). It also marks the beginning of her claiming herself; it marks Sethe’s rebirth, a crucial stage in her odyssey, her long, arduous, painful and exacting pilgrimage to freedom where she can have ownership of her body and that of her children, and where she can have a self that is self and where she can move from the animalistic and object position and the racial Other where the institution of

slavery has placed her, into a subject position, the real self-identity. With the help of Ella and her husband John, Sethe eventually arrives at 124 Bluestone Road where she says she can now love anybody and as she tells Paul D later, proud of her escape with her children.

I did it. I got us all out. Without Halle too. Up till then, it was the only thing I ever did on my own. Decided. And it came off right, like it was supposed to. We was here. Each and every one of my babies and me too. I birthed them and I got em out and it wasn't no accident. I did that. I had help, of course, lots of that, but still, it was me doing it; me saying, *Go on*, and *Now*. Me having to look out. Me using my own head. But it was more than that. It was a kind of selfishness I never knew nothing about before. It felt good. Good and right. I was that big, Paul D, and deep and wide, and when I stretched out my arms all my children could get in between. I was *that* wide. Look like I love em more after I got here. Or may be I couldn't love em proper in Kentucky because they wasn't mine to love. But when I got here, when I jumped down off that wagon – there wasn't nobody in the world I couldn't love if I wanted to. You know what I mean? (p. 162).

Freedom for Sethe necessarily involves not only her physical and psychological liberation but also the welfare of her children. Thus when she arrives at 124 Bluestone Road and is united with her children, her joy knows no bound that “Sethe lay in bed under, around, over, among but especially with them all”, that when, “the little girl dribbled clear spit into her face, Sethe’s laugh of delight was so loud the crawling-already? baby blinked” (p. 93).

At 124 Bluestone Road, Sethe finds sanctuary established by Baby Suggs, holy, who after sixty years of enslavement had her freedom bought by her son Halle, Sethe’s husband. Although her life at Sweet Home had been relatively atypical, for while there “nobody, but nobody, knocked her down”. (p. 139), and

although she even questioned the need for freedom at her age, Baby Suggs discovered upon crossing the Ohio “that there was nothing like it (freedom) in this world” (p. 141). Baby Suggs’ newfound freedom had allowed her to discover her own heart beat and to occupy her time at 124 Bluestone Road “giving advice, passing messages, healing the sick; hiding fugitives; loving, cooking, preaching, singing, dancing and loving everybody like it was her job and hers alone” (p. 137).

Although Sethe arrives at 124 Bluestone Road “all mashed up and slit open” (p. 135), for the first time in her life she is able to claim herself with the assistance of Baby Suggs. Not only does she have women friends, but she encounters days of healing under the skilful hands of her mother -in-law, who “bathed her in sections, wrapped her womb, combed her hair, oiled her nipples, stitched her clothes, cleaned her feet, greased her back” (p. 98). An “uncalled, unrobed, and unanointed” preacher (p. 87) and healer, Baby Suggs offered her great big heart, in a manner similar to Amy’s offering of her strong hands. It took both, the rational Amy and the emotive Baby Suggs to enhance Sethe’s journey to recovery and self. Both make a difference in Sethe’s life.

It is through Baby Suggs, holy, that Sethe is able to garner the ultimate, exhilarating experience of community; for Baby Suggs alone leads her to the ritual grounds of the clearing where, as ritual priestess, she conducts the rite of cleansing that leads Sethe to the catharsis she needs and allows her to transcend her liminality (Samuel’s and Hudson- Weems, 1990:117). Ritual grounds, as explained by Robert Stepto and as quoted by Samuels and Hudson-Weems, offer the exhilarating prospect of community, protection, progress, learning, and

religion” (Samuels and Hudson-Weems, 1990:117). The clearing is without a doubt such a place. Here, although she would summon the children to laugh and men to dance, Baby Suggs, holy, would command the women to “cry ... for the living and the dead. Just cry” (p. 88). At the end of this rejuvenation ritual, in which the women would eventually stop crying and dance, Baby Suggs’s words were sacramental, for she “told them that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine” (p. 88). In her Sermons Baby Suggs exhorts the ex-slaves to replace shame with pride, to love their black flesh, flesh that is despised by the white man. She implored them to realize and accept the value of self-love as the only true vehicle to rebirth:

“Here” she said, “in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it hard ... More than lungs that have yet to draw free air. More than your life-holding womb and your life – giving parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the price” (p. 88-89)

Specifically for Sethe, Baby Suggs’ was a reassuring and encouraging voice that admonished her to abandon her burdens:

Lay em down, Sethe. Sword and Shield. Down, Down.
Both of em down. Down by the river side, Sword and
Shield. Don’t study war no more. Lay all that mess down.
Sword and Shield (p. 86).

Thus,

Bit by bit at 124 and in the clearing,
Along with the others she (Sethe)
Had claimed herself (p.95).

For, “freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another” (p.95).

At 124 Bluestone Road, Sethe enjoys twenty-eight days of peace with Baby Suggs before “the Misery,” which is Stamp Paid’s term for Sethe’s “rough response” to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 (p.171). Sethe has twenty eight days of happy family and community life, of “having women friends, a mother- in-law and all her children together; neighbours at all to call her own” (p.173). Equated with a lunar month, with “the travels of one whole moon” (p.95), this period of Sethe’s “unslaved life” (p. 95) is of paramount importance; for like the lunar cycle to which the narrator alludes, it signifies a period of regeneration and renewal – of life, death, and rebirth. Thus Sethe is able to transcend her marginality through the acts of “groundation,” in short, through her incorporation into a community of women and into a community at large (a neighbourhood). She thereby achieves a dimension of identity that Sula rejected but Milkman accepted (Samuels and Hudson – Weems, 1990:118).

The necessity and significance of this act of bonding is to be found in the initiation rite that Baby Suggs, holy, conducts for Sethe with her communal feast for ninety who “ate so well, and laughed so much, it made them angry” (p.136). The gathering becomes a confirmation ceremony which adopts Sethe into the community. Although formally without a structured self in slavery, Sethe was no longer an outsider or transitional being. The total experience allows her to continue her metamorphosis to centre and self, her ultimate journey. “Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another” (p.95). But Baby Suggs’ generous gesture stirs smouldering feeling of class resentment and envy among the ex-slaves, who wonder where Baby Suggs gets “it all”, and

why “she and hers” are “always the centre of things” (p. 137). Baby Suggs’ neighbours are also angry about the privileges that they assume she has enjoyed in her life.

Loaves and fishes were his powers – they did not belong to an ex-slave who had probably never carried one hundred pounds to the scale, or picked okra with a baby on her back. Who had never been lashed by a ten-year- old whiteboy as God knows they had. Who had not even escaped slavery – had in fact been *bought out* of it by a dotting son and driven to the Ohio River in a wagon... and rented a house with two floors and a well from the Bodwins – the white brother and sister who gave ... clothes, goods and gear for runaways because they hated slavery worse than they hated slaves (p.137).

Because of the community’s resentment towards the bountiful Baby Suggs, nobody warns Sethe and Baby Suggs of the approach of four white men with the “righteous look every Negro learned to recognize along with his ma’am’s tit,” the look that “telegraphed and announced the faggot, the whip, the fist, the lie, long before it went public” (p. 157).

Schoolteacher’s appearance brings to completion the lunar cycle-full moon or death; it brings to fruition Sethe’s “short-lived glory” (p. 173). It is to be sure, her symbolic death, for if Schoolteacher’s purpose is carried out she will once again possess the status of chattel, property to be returned to Sweet Home and Kentucky. Also, it is the precipitation of the physical death of Beloved, Sethe’s “best thing” (Samuels & Hudson Weems, 1990:119).

As danger looms large with the approach of Schoolteacher and with no safety in Ohio for fugitive slaves, Sethe dares to do a daring deed to prevent herself and her children from being taken back into slavery, a dehumanizing institution as it is.

But Ohio had no sacred fane
To human rights so consecrate,
Where thou mayst shield thy hapless ones
From their darkly gathering fate.
Then, said the mournful mother,
If Ohio cannot save,
I will do a deed for freedom
She shall find each child a grave.
I will save my precious children
From their darkly threatened doom,
I will hew their path to freedom
Through the portals of the tomb. (Harper, 1999: 22)

When Sethe saw Schoolteacher and the slave catchers coming to take her and her children back into slavery, when she recognized schoolteacher's hat,

She heard wings. Little hummingbirds stuck their needle beaks right through her head cloth into her hair and beat their wings. 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. And the hummingbird wings beat on (p.163).

Sethe prefers to go dancing to the gallows with her children rather than to go back to Sweet Home, the site of her trauma and pain.

I couldn't let all that go back to where it was, and I couldn't let her (Beloved) nor any of em live under Schoolteacher. That was out (p.163)

Having been dirtied by schoolteacher with his slave master's discourse, Sethe would not allow her best things to be further dirtied by schoolteacher, a fate far worse, which was

what Baby Suggs died of, what Ella knew, what Stamp saw and what made Paul D tremble. That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forget who you were and couldn't think it up. And though she and others lived through and got over it, she could never let it happen to her own. The best thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty *her* all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing—the part of her that was clean. And no one, nobody on this earth, would list her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper. No. Oh no. Maybe Baby Suggs could worry about it, live with the likelihood of it; Sethe had refused - and refused still
(p. 251)

To resist capture, Sethe marks her crawling already? baby girl with a profound form of inscription. She draws a handsaw across her throat, as she tells Paul D later when he belatedly learns about the infanticide, “I stopped him . . . I took and put my babies where they'd be safe” (p.164). Sethe's intention is to emancipate herself and her children from the shackles of slavery and the tyranny of her owner, Schoolteacher, rather than accept being forced to return to slavery and have her children suffer an institutionalized dehumanization. For, as Frederick Douglass said when he addressed an assembly celebrating the twenty - third anniversary of West Indian Emancipation and as quoted by Ashraf H. A. Rushdy in his article “Daughters Signifyin (g) History”

The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims, have

been born of earnest struggle. The conflict has been exciting, agitating, all absorbing, and for the time being, putting all other tumults to silence. It must do this or it does nothing. If there is no struggle there is no progress . . . This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them. . . The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress . . . If we ever get free from the oppressions and wrongs heaped upon us, we must pay for their removal. We must do this by labour, by suffering, by sacrifice and if needs be, by our lives and the lives of others. (1999:43)

Thus in her quest for freedom and identity for herself and her children, Sethe plunges a knife into the bosom of her infant to save it from the hell of Christian slavery or the “seething hell of American slavery” (Beloved – A Case Book,1999: p.43).

When the four horsemen came – Schoolteacher, one nephew, one slave catcher and a sheriff – the house on Bluestone Road was so quiet they thought they were too late. And indeed they were too late! Aware that fugitive slaves sometimes “do unbelievable things,” like grabbing at the mouth of a rifle or throwing themselves at the person holding the rifle, they act cautiously for “unlike a snake or a bear, a dead nigger could not be skinned for profit and was not worth his own dead weight in coin” (p. 148) But Sethe has already done her deed for freedom for

A moment in the sunlight,
She held a glimmering knife,
The next moment she had bathe it
In the crimson fount of life.
They snatched away the fatal knife,

Her boys shrieked wild with dread;
The baby girl was pale and cold,
They raised it up, the child was dead. (Harper, 1999:23)

When they arrived, a spectacular sight greeted them.

Inside (the shed), two boys bled in the sawdust 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 the men spent staring at what there was to stare at – the old nigger boy (Stamp Paid) ran through the door behind them and snatched the baby from the arch of its mother's swing. Right off it was clear, to Schoolteacher especially, that there was nothing there to claim. The three (now four – because she'd had the one coming when she cut) pickaninies they had hoped were alive and well enough to take back to Kentucky, take back and raise properly to do the work Sweet Home desperately needed, were not. Two were lying open-eyed in sawdust; a third pumped blood down the dress of the main one – the one Schoolteacher bragged about, the one he said made fine ink, damn good soup, pressed his colors the way he liked besides having at least ten breeding years left. But now she'd gone wild due to the mishandling of the nephew who'd over beat her and made her cut and run (p.149).

In the racist discourse of Schoolteacher and the other white onlookers, Sethe is constructed as the racial Other, the uncivilized, violent primitive. Sethe's action is explained as an example of degenerate African behaviour, a reversion to animal savagery.

Suppose you beat the hounds past that point that away. Never again could you trust them in the woods or anywhere else. You'd be feeding them maybe, holding out a piece of rabbit in your hand, and the animal would revert – bite your hand clean off . . . see what happened when you overbeat creatures God had given you the responsibility of – the trouble it was, and the loss (pp149 -150).

The white sheriff sees Sethe's action as a "testimony to the results of a little so-called freedom imposed on people who needed every care and guidance in the world to keep them from the cannibal life they preferred" (p.151) But Sethe's action, though seems a testimony of schoolteacher's assertion that " you just can't mishandle creatures and expect success" (page 150), is her deep-seated refusal of that which others have made of her.

In committing her act of infanticide, Sethe wants to protect her children from being victimized by the destructive, dehumanizing forces of slavery and from succumbing to the defining and dirtying power of racist discourse, which constructs white identity as racially and biologically pure and black identity as impure or dirty (Bouson, 2000:146) Not only is Sethe determined to prevent her children from taking on their prescribed social role as the biologically inferior and racially stigmatized Other, but she also, in attempting to keep her child – the part of her that is clean – from being dirtied, acts to defend against or undo her own shame and recover the pride of an idealized self –image. But to Paul D, Sethe, who talks about "safety with a handsaw," does not know "where the world stopped and she began" (p. 164). He tells her that her love is "too thick" and that what she did was wrong (pp. 164, 165). Insisting that there must have been some other way, he humiliates her in the same way that Schoolteacher did. Revealing his own internalization of Schoolteacher's racist thinking, Paul D compares Sethe to an animal. "You got two feet, Sethe, not four," he tells her only to later realize how quickly he "had moved from his shame to hers" (p.165). "Too thick, he said. My love was too thick. What he know about it?" Sethe subsequently says to

herself as she justifies her act. “Who in the world is he willing to die for? Would he give his privates to a stranger in return for a carving?” (p. 203), she asks herself, referring to yet another dirtying act she committed: her shameful, Jezebel – like “rutting” (p. 5) with a white stone mason so she could have the word “Beloved” carved on the headstone of her murdered daughter.

Even though one cannot condone Sethe’s act of infanticide; one cannot condemn her looking at the context or situation under which she commits the act. Sethe’s own mother kills all her children fathered by the whites who raped her. As Nan tells her, “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 black man. She put her arms around him” (p. 62).

Another important person who helps Sethe through the exorcising of her painful memories and who it is hinted has also committed infanticide is Ella, who would not nurse her hairy child fathered by the “lowest yet”. (p256). By placing such a frame around Sethe’s story, Morrison insists on the impossibility of judging an action without reference to the terms of its enactment – the wrongness of assuming a transhistorical ethic outside a particular historical moment (Beloved – A casebook, 1999: 47). Reaffirming her own humanity as well as her children’s, Sethe denies Schoolteacher the right to “possess” her family as slaves. Sethe’s “rough choice” in killing Beloved, a decision that Baby Suggs cannot “approve or condemn” (p.180), is represented as an act of fierce mother love and resistance to slavery, but also as a brutal act. The infanticide is also an act of

revenge against Schoolteacher – as Sethe’s determination to “out hurt the hurter” (p. 124), that is, to turn the tables by wounding the wounding schoolteacher – and as an expression of “rage” that is “prideful, misdirected” (p. 256).

If the infanticide is at once a protective and brutal act that grows out of Sethe’s intense shame (her feelings of dirtiness) and shame – rage (her desire to “out hurt the hurter”), to members of the black community like Ella, Sethe’s crime is “staggering” while her “pride” outstripped even that” (p. 256). The black people gathered outside 124 Bluestone Road are shocked by the “clarity” of Sethe’s “knife – clean” profile as the sheriff takes her away. “Was her head a bit too high? Is her back a little too straight? Probably. Otherwise the singing would have begun at once . . . Some cape of sound would have quickly been wrapped around her, like arms to hold and study her on the way” (p.152). Because of her apparent pride and defiant individualism, Sethe does not enjoy the benefits of group solidarity. Members of the community did not come to the aid of Sethe, who tries “to do it all alone with her nose in the air” (p. 154). Shame begets shame as Sethe’s desperate act to protect her children from being dirtied leads to the public shaming of members of her family, who became ostracized by the black community (Bouson, 2000:148). After the infanticide a brokenhearted and exhausted Baby Suggs takes to her bed. At the time Stamp Paid thinks that shame is what drives Baby Suggs to her bed, but later he thinks that her fatigue resulted from the cumulative impact of her years of suffering. Baby Suggs, who “devoted her freed life to harmony,” when she died, is buried amidst “a regular dance of pride, fear, condemnation and spite,” and the townspeople long to see Sethe

“come on difficult times,” for Sethe’s “outrageous claims, her self – sufficiency,” seem to demand it (p.171).

Sethe’s twenty-eight days of happiness are followed by eighteen years of “disapproval and solitary life” (p.173). After her release from jail, Sethe retreats to 124 Bluestone Road and defensively withdraws to a walled off and presumably safe place. But the isolated and secretive world she enters affords her little protection against her painful past. That Sethe remains psychically numbed by her slavery past is revealed in the fact that her scarred back, a visible reminder of her persecution as a slave, has no feeling. While Sethe works hard to forget her past, she suffers from memories that is, spontaneous recurrences of her traumatic and humiliating past. Caught up in the dialectic of trauma, Sethe lives a constricted, diminished life as she attempts to avoid reminders of and forget the emotional distress of her past and reassert some semblance of control over her inner life. (Bouson, 2000:149). But the past returns to haunt Sethe in the form of the ghost of her dead daughter. Persecuted by the emotionally volatile ghost of her dead daughter, Sethe lives in a house that commits insults against and feels “lively spite” for its inhabitants, a house “full of a baby’s venom” and “palsied by the baby’s fury at having its throat cut” (pp.3, 5). Unable to cope with the ghostly presences that haunts 124, Sethe’s two sons, Howard and Buglar “run away by the time they were thirteen years old” (p.3) and by 1873 Sethe and her daughter Denver were its only victims” (p. 3).

When Paul D initially walks into the house and through “a pool of red and undulating light” – the red pool an insistent and spontaneous memory of the

baby's spilled blood – he feels a “wave of grief” soak him so completely that he wants to cry (pp. 8, 9). When Paul D finds his way to Sethe's haunted house, Sethe thinks that perhaps she will be able to “feel the hurt her back ought to” and to “remember things” because Paul D, the “last of the Sweet Home men,” is there “to catch her if she sank” (p. 18). Paul D's emotional response to the ghostly presence is to oust it:

Leave the place alone! Get the hell out! . . . You want to fight, come on! God damn it. She got enough without you. She got enough! (p. 18).

Thus Paul D shouts as he grabs a table by two legs, bashed it about, wrecking everything, screaming back at the screaming house as he drives out the ghostly presence from 124, thus getting “rid of the only other company” (p. 19) that Sethe and Denver had.

Although Paul D seemingly ousts the ghostly presence from 124 Bluestone Road, the past is not so easily gotten rid of, and thus Beloved, the embodiment of the ghost and the remembered past, comes to life. A “greedy ghost” that “needed a lot of love” (p.209), Beloved returns from the dead as a physically traumatized and emotionally abandoned child in an adult body. With eyes expressionless and empty, failed memory and her disintegration anxiety, Beloved fears that she will “fly apart” and end up “in pieces (p.133). She pulls a tooth and then speculates:

Next would be her arm, her hand, a toe. Pieces of her would drop maybe one at a time, maybe all at once. Or on one of those mornings before Denver woke and after Sethe left she would fly apart. It is difficult keeping her head on her neck, her legs attached to her hips when she is by herself. Among the things she could not remember

was when she first knew that she could wake up any day and find herself in pieces. She had two dreams: exploding, and being swallowed. When her tooth came out - odd fragment, last in the row - she thought it was starting (p. 133).

Suffering from the basic pain of unlovability, Beloved, as the abandoned and abused-murdered child, is desperately needy for her mother's responsive eye and voice. She tells Denver, Sethe "is the one I need. You can go but she is the one I have to have" (p. 76), Beloved's purpose of coming back is to see Sethe's face:

"What did you come back for? - Denver asks. Beloved smiled, "To see her face". "Ma'am's? Sethe's?— asks Denver. "Yes, Sethe," - Beloved answers. (p.75)

From the outset, Beloved can not "take her eyes off Sethe," who is "licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved's eyes" (p. 56) Seth is "flattered by Beloved's open, quiet devotion" at first. "Like a familiar," Beloved hovers near Sethe, staying in the same room where Sethe is unless she is told to leave, and waiting for Sethe to return each day from work (p. 57). When Beloved touches Sethe, her touch, though "no heavier than a feather," is "loaded . . . with desire," and the "longing" in her eyes is "bottomless" (p.58). Beloved's hunger for maternal love is expressed in her craving for Sweets. "It was as though sweet things were what she was born for" (p. 55). What lies behind Beloved's "petlike adoration" (p. 64) are unspoken demands for Sethe's undivided attention.

Although Beloved fears of her body flying apart and decaying, she does not decay. Like a vampire feeding vicariously, she becomes plump in direct proportion to Sethe's increasing gauntness. Sethe has lost control of herself as she tried desperately to please Beloved and explain to her that she took her (Beloved)

life out of pure love. Vengeance is not the Lord's; it is Beloved's. Her very body becomes a manifestation of her desire for vengeance and Sethe's guilt. She repays Sethe for her death but the punishment is not quick or neat. Her attempt to choke Sethe to death at Baby Suggs' clearing and the lingering pain of that encounter is but the beginning of Beloved's taking over Sethe's life (Harris, 1999:132). When Denver later accuses Beloved of making Sethe choke, Beloved claims that Sethe was choked by the "circle of iron," (p. 101) – that is the iron collar used to restrain the slaves. Sethe's near strangulation, as she helplessly claws at invisible hands and thrashes her feet in the air, is a rememory of the murder of the baby who died by having its throat slit. In this rememory, however, the victimized baby/reincarnated ghost turns the tables and exacts revenge by victimizing Sethe. Before Beloved can accomplish her vengeance on Sethe, she must extricate the most formidable opposition, Paul D. Beloved makes herself irresistible to Paul D, seduces him and gradually forces him, through each sexual encounter, to retreat farther and farther from the territory she has claimed as her own. Her "shining" or sexual latching on to him causes him initially to sleep in a rocking chair in the kitchen, then in Baby Suggs' keeping room behind the kitchen, then in the store room, and finally in the "cold house" outside the main house. "She moved him," and Paul D "didn't know how to stop it because it looked liked he was moving himself" (p. 114). Their three weeks of sexual encounters in the cold house result in a guilty Paul D trying to confront Sethe with the news only to find that he cannot; Beloved's control over him together with his discovery of Sethe's killing of her baby, force him off the premises altogether.

When Beloved induces Paul D to have sex with her, he sees her as a promiscuous Jezebel, as a “lowdown something” who has “fixed” him, and he couples with her “in the midst of repulsion and personal shame” (pp. 127,264). Embodying the sexual shame of the slave woman, Beloved becomes a kind of literary container for the shaming stereotypes used by hegemonic culture to define the racial and sexual Otherness of black identity (Bouson, 2000:152). She also comes to represent the collective suffering and shame-rage of the “black and angry dead” (p. 198) as well as the psychic woundedness of those who survived the Middle Passage and were victimized by slavery. A powerful presence and yet an empty void, Beloved objectifies the fragmented selfhood of the traumatized victim of slavery, who is aware of “the desolated center where the self that was no self made its home” (p. 140). Moreover, the fact that Beloved comes back as an incarnated ghost conveys not only the peculiar dissociative quality – the depersonalization and derealisation – of extreme trauma but also the haunting quality of traumatic and humiliated memory (Bouson, 2000:152)

Paul D’s departure makes it clear that Beloved has used her body to drain him not only physically but spiritually as well. He becomes a tramp of sorts, sleeping where he can, drinking excessively, literally a shadow of his former self. From the man who was strong enough to exorcise a spirit, Paul D reverts to his wandering, unsure of his residence from day to day and unclear about what kind of future, if any, he has. The picture of him sitting on the church steps, liquor bottle in hand, stripped of the very maleness that enables him to caress and love the wounded Sethe, is one that shows Beloved’s power (Harris, 1999:133). Paul

D's retreat to the church represents his continued if not desperate quest for psychological and spiritual wholeness. Finding that his effort to achieve it through Sethe had failed, he turns to a more conventional avenue, religion, even though other members of the community, as Stamp Paid assured him, would gladly have offered him shelter. It is clear, however, that he desires more than what they have to give. It is soon made evident as well that the church is ineffectual.

Although Paul D finds asylum solely in the cellar, he continues to seek refuge in his warm bottle of wine: "The damp cellar was fairly warm, but there was no light lighting the pallet or the washbasin or the nail from which a man's clothes could be hung" (p. 218). As Samuels and Hudson-Weems (1990) say, the absence of light here and Paul D's lack of respect for the cross that rockets from the building – he is accused of desecrating it by drinking wine in front of it – indicate his inability to find redemption in the Church of the Holy Redeemer. For him, traditional Christianity, as it is practiced in his environment, does not lead to the path of spiritual and psychological self. Like Soaphead Church of the Bluest Eye (1970) and Shadrack of Sula, (1974), Paul D must reject such conventional avenues because they made the individual depend too much on the external for the realization of the self, impeding the achievement of a more authentic existence (Samuels & Hudson-Weems, 1990:132).

Failing to offer fulfillment and reaffirmation of self through the existential action of the individual, the church in Beloved (1987) emerges as yet another symbolic death experience in Paul D's life. Paul D's life as the text successfully

establishes with the recurring themes of death and rebirth, is not a passive one but a continuing effort to overcome and transcend the social, political and economic restraints that surround him. Thus, when the church emerges as a form of psychological bondage and spiritual impotence, it is logical that he would seek to overcome it as well. Consequently, he leaves the darkness of his cellar for the light on the porch and more important, a conversation with Stamp Paid, whose very name embodies personal affirmation and authenticity. Stamp Paid acted to chart the direction of his own life in the significant rite of naming and sacrificing himself for others, acted to benefit others in sacrificing himself. He had become a truly holy redeemer. Paul D's conversation with this Christ - like figure paves the way for his resurrection from his grave (cellar) renewed with an awareness of the meaning of his own life as well as the gift of love that he, too, has to share with humanity, beginning with Sethe. Thus in another curious act of topsy-turvy, Morrison makes Paul D's cellar both his grave and maturing womb that will serve as a vehicle for his final rebirth. And his rebirth here is more significant, because he returns, like Christ, with the "good news" that Sethe needs to hear as she lies on her deathbed.

After Paul D leaves 124 Bluestone Road, Sethe and her two daughters enter, for a brief period of time, a joy filled world free of shame and trauma, "She aint even mad with me," (p.182). Sethe ironically thinks of Beloved when things initially click into place and she identifies Beloved as her dead but magically resurrected daughter. Sethe, who cannot hear the voices that surround her house "like a noose," shuns the outer world, finding "all there is and all there needs to

be” at 124 Bluestone Road (p 183). Sethe aims to create a sanctuary for three in a place where dangers from the past can be forgotten. This self contained, insular world will offer possibility, a future, all that Sethe has given up. As she says to no one in particular, “My love was tough and she back now. I knew she would be” (p 200). Beloved gives back the 18years that Sethe put on hold and Sethe is restored as a mother to “tend her (daughter) as no mother ever tendered a child” (p. 200). Now Sethe “can look at things again. After the shed (she) stopped” (p. 201). She even makes plans for their future: planting in spring, watching the sun rise, noting the colour of grass. Sethe is relieved that she “ain’t got to remember no more”. She can “Do like Baby said: think on it then lay it down – for good” (p. 182). The close-off world of mother - daughter intimacy and merging identities is depicted in Sethe’s words

Beloved
Your are my sister
Your are my daughter
You are my face: you are me
I have found you; you have come back to me
You are my Beloved
You are mine
You are mine
You are mine (p. 216).

But Sethe is deluded. The joy and safety of this mother-daughter world of this blissful intimacy and merging identities are illusory. For the interior voices of the women, with their “unspeakable thoughts, unspoken” (p. 199), are mixed in with other voices that nooselike, ring the house. Stamp Paid hears from the road the loud “pack of haunts” (p. 170) that plague 124 Bluestone Road: the “conflagration of hasty voices -- loud, urgent, all speaking at once”; “the

mumbling of the black and angry dead” and the “roaring” noise made by the “people of the broken necks, of fire-cooked blood” (p. 172, 198, 181), (Bouson, 2000: 153).

Initially, the blissful merging of Sethe and her daughter’s appears to be healing; a way for Sethe to overcome her traumatic and humiliated memories. But whilst Sethe thinks that she can lay down her burdened past and live in peace, she instead becomes involved in a deadly battle for survival. The happy days during which Sethe and her two daughters play together is followed by “furious arguments, the poker slammed against the wall ... shouting and crying,” (p. 239) which eventually gave way to quiet exhaustion as Sethe, Denver and Beloved become “locked in love that wore everybody out” (p. 243).

Beloved seeks revenge against Sethe and gets it nonetheless. She initially causes Sethe to leave her job, thereby relinquishing the ability to feed her self. By denying Sethe the power to support herself, Beloved attacks her spirit of independence. She sends Sethe into a stupor. But Beloved is not content to stupefy Sethe; she is after her life force. She drains Sethe by slowly starving her and, as the neighbors believe, beating her (p.255). Beloved’s return is Sethe’s reckoning. Hungry for the life that she lost and with Sethe her only resource, “Beloved ate up (Sethe’s) --- life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it” until Sethe is reduced to sitting in a corner “licking her lips like a chastened child...” (p.250). Both try feverishly to make time but what is gone is gone. Beloved has the bad manners of the unparented girl she is. And Sethe evinces the tentativeness of a doting mother feeling guilty of neglect. “When once or twice Sethe tried to assert

herself – be the unquestioned mother whose word was law and who knew what was best –Beloved slammed things, wiped the table clean of plates, threw salt on the floor, broke a window pane”(p.242). The apparently pregnant Beloved blossoms, glows, and continues to plump as the shrinking Sethe literally becomes a skeleton of her former self. Sethe, like Paul D, loses will power, thereby losing the ability to control her own body or her own destiny.

Beloved becomes the arbiter of life and death so playfully so that Sethe acquiesces in her own decline. The struggle between Sethe and Beloved is so lunatic in fashion that it is thought, “if the white people of Cincinnati had allowed Negroes into their lunatic asylum they could have found candidates in 124” (p.250). “It was as though her mother has lost her mind ----” (p.240) Denver thinks of Sethe who becomes entangled in a deadly emotional impasse with Beloved. Attempting to undo the past, Sethe aspires to satisfy the insatiable Beloved who cannot get enough of anything –“lullabies, new stitches, the bottom of the cake bowl, the top of the milk” –and who, after Sethe runs out of things to give her daughter, invents “desire” (p. 240). Then, when the mood changes and the arguments begin, Beloved complains and Sethe apologizes. The more Beloved takes – “(t)he best chair, the biggest piece, the prettiest plate,” - the more Sethe tries to justify the past, by describing how much she has endured for the sake of her children. “None of which made the impression it was supposed to. Beloved accused Sethe of leaving her behind. Of not being nice to her, not smiling at her. She said they were the same, had the same face, how could she have left her?” (p. 241). Beloved’s incessant demands on Sethe makes literal what Amy Denver told

Sethe that “anything dead coming back to life hurts” (p. 35). Arriving at a “doomsday truce” the two reenact the infanticide. “Sometimes she (Beloved) screamed, ‘Rain! Rain!’ and clawed at her throat until rubies of blood opened there, made bright by her midnight skin. Then Sethe shouted, ‘No!’ and knocked over chairs to get to her and wipe the jewels away” (p. 250).

In a repeated drama, Sethe tries to make amends for the handsaw and Beloved makes her pay for what she has done. During the times Beloved becomes quiet and withdrawn, Sethe stirs her up again by “muttering some justification, some bit of clarifying information,” forcing Denver to recognize that Sethe does not “really want forgiveness given”, but wants it “refused” (p. 252). Sethe, who has been overtaken by the past and caught in an interminable feeling trap, begins to waste away. Denver feels ashamed when she sees Sethe serving Beloved and is deeply pained when she watches her mother, as they run low on food, go without. Over time, Sethe, who gives in to Beloved’s incessant demands, becomes depleted, diminished, while Beloved grows fat: “The bigger Beloved got, the smaller Sethe became Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it. And the older woman yielded it up without a murmur” (p. 250).

Someone has to break the hateful link between Sethe and Beloved and that job goes to Denver and the community. Denver understands that without her intervention, Sethe will perish. In Denver’s view, Sethe is “trying to make up for the handsaw” and Beloved is “making her pay for it” (p. 251). Breaking out of the cocoon Sethe had created, where Denver fed off stories from the past, she “leave(s) the yard” and “step(s) off the edge of (her) world” (p.243), leaving

Sethe and Beloved behind. For Denver this decision is tantamount to leaping into a void: “She would have to leave the yard; step off the edge of the world ... She stood on the porch of 124 ready to be swallowed up in the world beyond the edge of the porch” (p. 243). Denver fears that the community will devour her fragment her much as Pecola was fragmented by her community; or that she will be rejected by the community, left, like Sula, to fend for herself in isolation. Instead, the community embraces Denver, offering her help and giving her a sense of belonging that contrasts explicitly with the fate suffered by Pecola (Conner, 2000:69).

Denver goes to the home of Mrs. Jones, the schoolteacher she once knew. When Mrs. Jones hears the troubles at 124, her response is immediate and sympathetic: “Oh, baby” (p.248). Mrs. Jones’ response initiates Denver into the world of the community, the community that is nurturing, protective and sheltering. This initiation brings Denver towards adulthood and responsibility: “She did not know it then, but it was the word ‘baby,’ said softly and with such kindness that inaugurated her life in the world as a woman” (p. 248). As Denver gains aid from the community and looks for work to save her household, she finds a sense of identity forming within her for the first time: “it was a new thought though, having a self to look out for and preserve” (p. 252).

Like Baby Suggs before her, Denver goes to the Bodwin family for employment. Thus, like Milkman retreading the path of his ancestors, Denver, by following in the steps of her grandmother, enacts a rite of passage back into the community from which she and her family were sundered with the death of

Beloved. This makes the community aware of Beloved's reincarnated presence in 124. When Ella learns of Beloved's presence in the human world, she determines to take action to rid the community of the specter:

As long as the ghost showed out from its ghostly place – shaking stuff, crying, smashing and such – Ella respected it. But if it took flesh and came in her world, well, the shoe was on the other foot. She didn't mind a little communication between the two worlds, but this was an invasion (p. 257).

The actual presence of Beloved is too much for Ella to bear. She gathers a company of thirty women and they march to 124 to exorcise Beloved from their midst. When they arrived, their chant reaches back towards the same mythic, pre-linguistic sound that the hunters gesture towards in Song of Solomon:

They stopped praying and took a step back to the beginning. In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like (p. 259).

The power of the women's voices joined together has a creative capacity that symbolizes and ritualizes Sethe's cycle from spiritual death to rebirth. Their chanting summons Sethe and Beloved from the house. Invoking "the beginning" in which there were "no words" – only "the sound" – black women's voices revise scripture and carry Sethe from a kind of apocalyptic end to a new beginning. The effect of their chant upon Beloved is devastating: she vanishes.

The exorcism of Beloved is a purgation ritual, a baptismal cleansing and rebirth, and a psychological clearing:

For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building

voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash (p. 261).

The women's voice, sound without words, have the power of cleansing waters, bringing Sethe back to the clearing and to Baby Suggs' ritual during Sethe's brief period – between slavery and the return of schoolteacher – of freedom.

During the communal exorcism Sethe spies (the)

black hat wide-brimmed enough to hide (Schoolteacher's) face but not his purpose. He is coming into her yard and he is coming for her best thing. She hears wings. Little humming birds stick needle beaks right through her head cloth into her hair and beat their wings. And if she thinks anything, it is no. No, No, No, Nonono. She flies. The ice pick is not in her hand; it is her hand (p. 262).

Sethe, in effect, re-enacts the original event – remembering, repeating, and working through the primal scene. This time, however, Sethe directs her response to the threatening Other rather than to her best thing” – her children. Yet it is not only Sethe but the community itself that re-enact the earlier scene. Because the community had failed to send warning of the slave captor's approach the first time, its “sin of omission” makes it no less responsible for Beloved's death than Sethe's “sin of commission”. In a scene of collective re-enactment, the women of the community intervene at a critical juncture, to save not Beloved but Sethe. Thus, by revising her actions, Sethe is able to preserve the community, and the community, in turn, is able to protect one of its own. The exorcism restores Sethe's mental health, and she becomes reintegrated within the society. By her disappearance, Beloved bequeaths Sethe with the wealth of restored health and

reunion with the community and Paul D. Paul D returns to Sethe and finds her emotionally exhausted and near despair following Beloved's exorcism. Finding her contemplating colors as she lies on Baby Suggs' bed at Bluestone Road, Paul D listens as Sethe tearfully laments the final departure of her baby Beloved. "She was my best thing," she tells him; he responds, "You your best thing, Sethe. You are" (p.273). The profundity of his utterance is sustained by the crucial ritual of cleansing that follows, for he offers to wash her feet and bathe her in sections, reminiscent of Baby Suggs' washing of Sethe when she finally arrived in Ohio. This washing of Sethe's feet is her final rite of passage. It enables her transcend her liminality. It gives her a sense of self that is the real self – identity. With the return of Paul D who "wants to put his story next to hers" (p. 273) – an effort to join the two of them together that will allow them each to find their full sense of self-identity - Sethe achieves spiritual wholeness. When Paul D tells her, "You your best thing, Sethe. You are," Sethe responds, "Me? Me?" (p.273). An answer that implies a return to her self following her near-fatal encounter with Beloved.

CHAPTER FIVE

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS: PARADISE

The theme of identity search or quest for identity permeates Toni Morrison's Seventh novel, Paradise (1987) which is the third novel in her trilogy, the others being Beloved (1987) and Jazz.(1992 Resistance also features prominently as a tool or means in the search for identity in Paradise (1987).

Paradise (1987) presents a community of Africans, ex-slaves whose quest for identity is based on the sole aim of maintaining their racial purity devoid of any adulteration and who seek to establish a kind of paradise for themselves on earth where all other people who are not members of their group would be excluded. Ex-slaves and three of whose children got elected to rule on state legislatures and in country offices; they were reduced to penury and / or field labor because of their skin color- Eight – rock:

Descendants of those who, after the Civil War, had defied or hidden from whites doing all they could to force them to stay and work as sharecroppers in Louisiana. Descendants of those whose worthiness was so endemic it got three of their children elected to rule on state legislatures and country offices: who, when thrown out of office without ceremony or proof of wrongdoing, refused to believe what they guessed was the real reason that made it impossible for them to find other mental labor. Almost all of the Negro men chased or invited out of office (in Mississippi, in Louisiana, in Georgia) got less influential but still white - collar work following the purges of 1875 ... But they alone (Zechariah Morgan and Juvenal DuPress in Louisiana, Drum Blackhorse in Mississippi) were reduced to penury

and / or field labor. Fifteen years of begging for sweatwork in cotton, lumber or rice after five glorious years remaking a country. They must have suspected yet dared not say that their misfortune's misfortune was due to the one and only feature that distinguished them from their Negro peers. Eight – rock (p. 193)

Determined to reverse the misfortune which their color has brought on them, nine large 8-rock families decided to leave Louisiana and Mississippi to found their own town. Led by Zechariah Morgan, the nine large 8-rock families and other 8-rocks left the two Louisiana and Mississippi parishes in search of a fitting place to settle. Originally named Coffee at birth – a misspelling of Kofi – he renamed himself Zechariah Morgan:

He renamed himself. Coffee was his birth name – a misspelling of Kofi, probably. And since no Louisiana Morgan or any of the Haven people had worked for any whites named Morgan, he must have chosen his last name as well as his first from something or some place he liked. (p. 192).

Searching for a place to establish a home that is home and where their true identity can be established, the nine large 8-rock families and their relatives and other 8-rocks left their places in Mississippi and Louisiana to Oklahoma but encountered a lot of rebuffs from both whites and light skinned blacks which

explained why neither the founders of Haven nor their descendants could tolerate any body but themselves. On the journey from Mississippi and two Louisiana parishes to Oklahoma, the one hundred and fifty-eight freed men were unwelcome on each grain of soil from Yazoo to Fort Smith. Turned away by rich Choctaw and poor whites, chased by yard dogs, jeered at by camp prostitutes and their children, they were nevertheless unprepared for the aggressive discouragement they received from Negro towns already being built. The headline of a feature in the *Herald*, “Come Prepared or Not at All,” could not mean them, could it?

Smart, strong and eager to work their own land, they believed they were more than prepared – they were destined. It stung them into confusion to learn they did not have enough money to satisfy the restrictions the “self-supporting” Negroes required. In short, they were too poor, too bedraggled-looking to enter, let alone reside in, the communities that were soliciting Negro homesteaders. This contemptuous dismissal by the lucky changed the temperature of their blood twice. First, they boiled at being written up as “people who preferred saloons and crap games to homes, churches and schools”. Then, remembering their spectacular history, they cooled. What began as overheated determination became cold-blooded obsession. “They don’t know we or about we,” said one man. “Us free like them; was slave like them. What for is this difference?” (pp. 13-14).

The one rebuff that puts them off from other people and that hardens them in their identity quest is the one they encountered in Fairly, an all-black town inhabited by light skinned blacks. The people of Fairly refused to allow the 8-rocks to settle in their midst. This disallowing changed the wayfarers forever and heightened their unity and group identity:

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. Their horror of whites was convulsive but abstract. They saved the clarity of their hatred for the men who had insulted them in ways too confounding for languages : first by excluding them, then by offering them staples to exist in that very exclusion:(p.189)

“Everything anybody wanted to know about the citizens of Haven or Ruby lay in the ramifications of that one rebuff out of many” the narrative remarks of the “Disallowing” of the original wayfarers by the people of the all-black town of

Fairly, Oklahoma (p.189), a humiliating event that becomes seared in the memories of the Old Fathers and has a formative influence on the collective Ruby memory and group identity. Having been “shooed away” in Fairly, the wayfarers realized,

This time the clarity was clear: for ten generations they had believed the division they fought to close was free against slave and rich against poor. Usually, but not always, white against black. Now they saw a new separation: light-skinned against black. Oh, they knew there was a difference in the minds of whites, but it had not struck them before that it was of consequences, serious consequences to Negroes themselves. Serious enough that their daughters would be shunned as brides; their sons chosen last; that colored men would be embarrassed to be seen socially with their sisters. The sign of racial purity they had taken for granted had become a stain (p.194).

The wayfarers’ contemptuous dismissal by the people of Fairly – a “rejection” that the founders of Haven “carried... like a bullet in the brain” (p.109), made them band themselves against all other people and in a collective sense of weakness, pressed on with their quest. They “refused each other nothing, were vigilant to any need or shortage” (p.109). When the band of travelers, who are on foot and are lost, are refused entry into Fairly, they become both ashamed and angry.

It was the shame of seeing one’s pregnant wife or sister or daughter refused shelter that had rocked them, and changed them for all time. The humiliation did more than rankle; it threatened to crack open their bones. Steward remembered every detail of the story his father and grandfather told, and had no trouble imagining the shame for himself (p.95).

Even in 1973 in the protected world of Ruby, Steward remains bound in a feeling trap of shame-rage as he recalls how some “highfalutin” black people disallowed his ancestors, telling them to “Get away” from Fairly, Oklahoma.

- - - the thought of that level of helplessness made him want to shoot somebody. Seventy-nine. All their belongings strapped to their backs or riding on their heads. Young ones time-sharing shoes. Stopping only to relieve themselves, sleep and eat trash. Trash and boiled meal, trash and meal cake, trash and game, trash and dandelion greens (p. 96)

Denied and guarded against, they altered their route and made their way west of the unassigned lands, south of Logan County, across the Canadian River into Arapaho territory. Becoming stiffer, prouder with each misfortune, the details of which were engraved into the twins’ powerful memories (p.14).

Determined to search for their identity and to establish a kind of haven, a paradise for themselves where all others would be excluded, they journey further and away from Fairly, Oklahoma, as shown by Zechariah Morgan’s master narrative. Turning shame into pride, Zechariah Morgan’s master narrative of what happens after the Disallowing seeks to define the essential nature and collective destiny of the 8 – rock people. Countering the racist ideology of the light-skinned people of Fairly, Zechariah Morgan’s controlling story represents the 8 – rocks as God’s chosen people. Like a biblical prophet, Zechariah guides the original wayfarers to Haven during their journey, which is presented in the official Ruby history as an amalgam of the Old Testament exodus and search for the Promised Land. In a recasting of the shaming image of the helpless, rejected and lost wayfarers, Zechariah’s story tells of the walking man with a satchel – the supernatural angelic apparition or ancestral spirit announced by thundering

footsteps that Zechariah summons with his humming prayer and that guides him for twenty-nine days, leading the way to Haven (Bouson, 2000:198).

During the founding of Haven, Zechariah Morgan corals some of the men into building a brick oven which functions as a community kitchen and becomes a symbol of communal nurturing and group solidarity. The Oven also recalls the slavery past of the Old Fathers, serving as a visible reminder of their pride in the fact that none of their 8-rock women had worked in white kitchens as slaves, work that carried with it the likelihood of the rape of the slave kitchen workers and thus the tainting of pure African 8-rock blood. The words that Zechariah Morgan places on the five-foot-two-inch iron plaque he forges and cements to the base of the Oven's mouth – "Beware the Furrow of his Brow" – carries another reminder of the past. Zechariah Morgan's words memorialize the deep and enduring "burn" of shame-rage felt by the Old Fathers, for the inscription was meant as a "threat to those who had disallowed" the 8-rock people of Haven (pp. 194, 195). The fact that Zechariah Morgan's sons take secret pleasure in the subsequent failure of some of the all-black towns founded by ex-slaves, which they view as a sign of God's favour on their town and judgment against their rejecters and enemies, points to their reactive desire to turn the tables on and witness the humiliation of their black humiliators.

When the Old Fathers found the town of Haven in 1890, they remove themselves from the larger society with its shaming categories of difference only to forge their own system of inclusion and exclusion which they pass down, to the Ruby descendants. Yet the 8 – rock politics of separatism also creates a strong

sense of group identity, cultural belonging, and moral purpose in the people of Haven so that their town survives – indeed by 1932, it is thriving - while other all-black towns disappear or come to resemble slave quarters or become obsessed with wealth of hoard money and deeds while falling into disrepair. Maintaining a sense of communal togetherness, the people of Haven share everything and are vigilant to each other’s needs. They also create a separatist community where they are safe from “the violence of whites, random and organized, that swirled around them” (p.108). Just as Zechariah Morgan – also known as Big Papa or Big Daddy – had predicted, by staying and working and praying and defending together, the 8-rock people are kept from the fate of black people in places like Downs, Lexington, Sapulpa, and Gans, where people are run out of town, or the fate of those who end up dead or maimed in Tulsa, Norman, and Oklahoma City, or those who become “victims of spontaneous whippings, murders and depopulation by arson” (p.112).

Yet over time Haven, “a dreamtown in Oklahoma Territory,” becomes “Haven, a ghost town in Oklahoma State” (p. 5) as people are forced to move elsewhere to survive. Determined to “repeat what the Old Fathers had done,” fifteen families move out of Haven in 1949 and found Ruby in 1950 (p.16). Veterans of World War II, the founders of Ruby return home, see what has happened to Haven and recognize that they are living through the Disallowing Part Two, as they hear stories about missing testicles of black soldiers and about black veterans having their medals ripped off them by rednecks and Sons of the Confederacy. Going deep into Oklahoma, “as far as they could climb from the

grovel contaminating the town their grandfathers had made,” they determine that it will never happen again, that “nothing inside or out rots the one all-black town worth the pain” (pp.16, 5) and as they think in founding Ruby they are once again “on their way to paradise (p. 202).

Like the original Haven founded by the Old Fathers, Ruby provides protection from the dangers lurking Out there

Ten generations had known what lay Out There: space, once beckoning and free, became unmonitored and seething; became a void where random and organized evil erupted when and where it chose – behind any standing tree, behind the door of any house, humble or grand. Out There where your children were sport, your women quarry, and where your very person could be annulled; where congregations carried arms to church and ropes coiled in every saddle. Out There where every cluster of white men looked like a posse, being alone was being dead. But lessons had been learned and relearned in the last three generations about how to protect a town (p.16).

In Ruby, where people are “free and protected,” a sleepless woman can safely walk down the road at night since “Nothing for ninety miles around thought she was prey” (p.8). Living in a safe but also a circumscribed community suspicious of outsiders, the people of Ruby are “protective, God-loving, thrifty but not miserly” (p.160). But the problem is that Ruby replicates Haven in all ways and is thus doomed to repeat its failures: It thrives while it is being constructed in the spirit of coalition but slowly evolves into a fascist enclave when keeping its own in and others out becomes its primary means of ensuring its identity and survival at all costs (Magall, 2002:649). In spite of the seemingly ideal situation in Ruby, Reverend Richard Misner, a recent arrival in Ruby, detects evidence of the town’s “unraveling” in the “glacial wariness” between the townspeople, in the

community discord over the Oven, and in the troubled behaviour of some of Ruby's young people, like Menus, who has become the town drunk, and Billie Delia, who runs away (p.161).

"You in long trouble if you think you can disrespect a row you never hoed," Deacon Morgan says to members of Ruby's younger generation who want to clarify the meaning of Zechariah Morgan's inscription on the Oven's iron plaque, which reads "- - - the Furrow of His Brow" because the first word was lost when the Oven was moved from Haven to Ruby (p.86).

The impact of respect and disrespect on intergenerational relations is reflected in the community conflict over the Oven's inscription. To the older generation, in particular the powerful men of Ruby who demand strict adherence to the old order, the old ways of running things, the old stories of the treks from Louisiana to Haven and from Haven to Ruby, and the rituals (like the Oven itself) that grew up around those legendary deeds, the message found on the Oven's plate is a clear command: "Beware the Furrow of His Brow" orders the people to be obedient to God's will and to sustain the dream of the Old Fathers. But the young people of Ruby, who anger their elders with their disrespectful backtalk, argue that

No ex-slave would tell us to be scared all the time. To 'beware' God. To always be ducking and diving, trying to look out every minute in case He's getting ready to throw something at us, keep us down (p.84).

Under the sway of Reverend Richard Misner - the new Baptist minister who is considered militant by some people in Ruby because of his active support of the Civil Rights Movement - the younger generation wants to change the wording of

the Oven's inscription. In their view, it should read "Be the Furrow of His Brow": that is, the people, as a race, should be God's chosen instruments for social justice, and be "the power," an idea that is blasphemous to the older generation (p.87). Their further shift from "Be the Furrow of His Brow" to "We Are the Furrow of His Brow" (p. 298), with its replacement of the imperative by the declarative mood, implies that they are indeed engaging in a participation, that they are explicitly joining with each other, with the other participants in the novel, and with the cosmos in a mutually ongoing process of creativity (Page, 2001:639)

To steward Morgan, who is disgusted with the attitudes of the town's young people, "Cut me some slack" is the slogan Ruby's youth really want to paint on the Oven. Young and naïve, they have no idea of what it took to build Ruby: the things they were "protected from" and the "humiliations they did not have to face" (p.93). Steward scoffs at their black power backtalk and desire for Africanized name changes, "as if word magic had anything to do with the courage it took to be a man" (p. 95). In the view of Deacon, the Oven, which was once a vital community meeting place where the baptized entered "sanctified life," has been "reduced" to a gathering place for Ruby's lazy young people (p.111). Once a symbol of 8-rock solidarity, the Oven comes to signify community dissention and the loss of group consensus about what to respect and value.

In Haven and then Ruby, the Fathers (p.6) rule and the darkest "8 – rock" (p.194), coal-black skin is privileged; others are driven away or marginalized. Holding onto the "logic of hierarchical opposition," the town must enforce its borders, given that defining "an identity, a closed totality, always depends on

excluding some elements” (Young, p. 303, quoted in Magall, p.648). As Pat recognizes, “People get chosen and ranked” based upon “skin color” in Ruby (p.216). For example, the community forces Menus to “return the woman he brought home to marry. The pretty sandy-haired girl from Virginia” (p.195) and marginalizes Roger Best’s wife (Delia), daughter (Pat), and granddaughter (Billie Delia) for their sunlight skin” (p.196), which marks them as Other. When Roger Best brought his lighter-skinned wife (Delia), Steward Morgan, who was at the forefront of the New Father’s efforts to maintain “pure” African blood said, “He is bringing along the dung we leaving behind” (p.201). That these examples are all women is not surprising, given that the town patriarchs consolidate their power through an unspoken but extremely tight control over women. As Pat recognizes, “Everything that worries them must come from women” (p.217). “Did they really think they could keep this up? The numbers, the bloodlines, the who fucks who?” Pat Best wonders. In Ruby, where skin color determines how people are chosen and ranked, women hold the key to the racial purity of the 8 – rocks.

The generations had to be not only racially untampered with but free of adultery too. “God bless the pure and the holy” indeed. That was their purity. That was their holiness. That was the deal Zachariah had made during his humming prayer. It wasn’t God’s brow to be feared. It was his own, their own (p. 217).

Billie Delia recognizes that the rumors and verbal battles between the men that ensued when Arnette is found pregnant out of wedlock and then loses the baby have to do with “disobedience, which meant, of course, the stallions were fighting about who controlled the mares and their foals” (p.150).

As Linda Krumholz points out, in Ruby, the attempt to retain an ideal of purity and righteousness, to repeat the past without change, creates the greatest changes of all: Communal spirit shifts to individual acquisitiveness, old interpretations and memories are authorized to squelch dialogue and dissent, and values rigidify into repressive dogma. In the desire to repeat the past exactly, to make it sacred law, the New Fathers become what they had shunned (Krumholz, 1999: 26-27).

In their attempt to maintain their racial purity and “unadulterated and unadulteried 8-rock blood” (p.217) and confronted by community dissents especially from the youth and other problems facing the community, the New Fathers of Ruby see the women in the Convent as the source of all their problems

Outrages that had been accumulating all along took shape as evidence. A mother was knocked down the stairs by her cold eyed daughter. Four damaged infants were born in one family. Daughters refused to get out of bed. Brides disappeared on their honeymoons. Two brothers shot each other on New Year’s Day. Trips to Demby for VD shots common. And what went on at the Oven these days was not to be believed. - - - The proof they had been collecting since the terrible discovery in the spring could not be denied: the one thing that connected all these catastrophes was in the Convent. And in the Convent were those women (p.11).

The men of Ruby’s desire for purity of race, sexuality, and Christianity leads to the scapegoating of the women of the Convent, the construction of the Other as the impure that must be destroyed. There is no room for unmarried “women who chose themselves for company” (p.276) in a town in which women’s “identity rested on the men they married” (p. 187) or the fathers to whom they were born; consequently, Ruby’s patriarchs can only interpret the Convent community in

demonic terms, in terms of a witches' "coven" (p.276). In order to retain their identity as a separatist, patriarchal, all-black town, Ruby's men must get rid of the human "detritus" (p.4) on its edge; they must "make sure" that "nothing inside or out rots the one all -black town worth the pain" (p.5). The Convent women become scapegoats for all the town's problems, as the men assert that "everybody who goes near them (the Convent women) is maimed somehow and the mess is seeping back into *our* homes, *our* families" (p.276). They are seen as women who "never step foot in church" and that "(t) hey don't need men and they don't need God" (p.276). In order to justify their violent actions, Ruby's men dehumanize the Convent women as "female malice" (p.4) incarnate, "strays" (p.114), "bitches. More like witches," "heifers," and "sluts" (p.276).

In the essentialist racist discourse of the 8-rock people, the Convent women are represented as the impure, uncivilized, degenerate Other. Intoning the shaming discourse of defilement and pathology, the Ruby men construct the Convent women as "slack" and "sloven" women and as "detritus: throw away people," and the Convent, itself, as the site of community impurity and shame; as "deceased," a place of filth" (pp.8,4,8,3). "Bodacious black Eves unredeemed by Mary," the Convent women are sexually unrestrained "whores" and racially impure "slime" (pp. 18, 228). They are "nasty" women who draw Ruby people to the Convent "like flies to shit" (p.275).

In their quest, the men of Ruby go to extremes; they become fanatics as they tend not to tolerate anybody or group of persons whose presence they consider a threat to their identity, their racial purity and their haven, their

paradise. They become obsessed towards the Convent women. The extent of not only their hatred but also their fear of the women is reflected in the weaponry they carry on their raid of the Convent; nine men arrive with “rope,” “handcuffs”, “Mace,” and “clean, handsome guns” (p.3) to oust five non-armed women – an absurdity the men fail to recognize. As Billie Delia puts it, Ruby is

A backward noplace ruled by men whose power to control was out of control and who had the nerve to say who could live and who not and where; who had seen in lively, free, unarmed females the mutiny of the mares and so got rid of them (p.308).

The patriarchal and racist separatism that grounds Ruby’s identity allows for no other response than hate and violence to the threat that the Convent community poses to that identity. In contrast to the Convent women, Ruby’s patriarchs “did not think to fix it (the town’s problems) by extending a hand in fellowship or love” (p.275). That Ruby’s own women (and even some men) occasionally seek out the Convent community for renewal indicates that some of the town’s citizens, particularly those with little power, at times feel confined by Ruby’s separatism, grounded in hierarchy, hate, and violence. This attraction to the Convent for some of Ruby’s inhabitants points not only to cracks within Ruby’s positioning of itself in binary opposition to the Convent but also to a recognition of the potential of versions of separatism that are non-hierarchical and grounded in caring (Magall, 2002:657).

The Convent, by contrast to Ruby, is a transitional work in progress. Built by a liquor dealer with a taste for eroticism, the old stone house with pornographic ornamentation was converted by nuns into a school for Indian girls

and later into a haven for a diverse number of women fleeing across the country or from the nearby town from a variety of abusive situations. Together, these refugees gradually create their own paradise of love, peace, and freedom from fear by engaging in the domestic tasks of gardening and cooking, as well as listening to each other's stories and healing their own and each other's pain.

Morrison interweaves these two paradises into a complex plot of moves and countermoves, planned strategies and initiative responses that combine the suspense and action of the "blood" narrative with fluid connectedness of the "milk" narrative. The novel opens with male aggression: "They shoot the white girl first - - - They are nine, over twice the number of the women they are obligated to stampede or kill (p. 3). Why do the nine men attack the five defenseless Convent women? Their answer is that these "Bodacious black Eves unredeemed by Mary" (p.18), who have dared to build a paradise "permeated with a blessed malelessness, like a protected domain" (p.177), threaten their own "hard-won heaven" (p.276). Only by destroying this menace to their definition of bliss is their male-defined idyllic town safe.

In contrast to the calculated moves of the men of Ruby to preserve their rigidly artificial construct of paradise by excising all threats, the women's strategies to create their transient paradise are portrayed as initiative, experimental, even mystical. Though their tales and needs are disparate – in contrast to Ruby's single canonical story – once they have reached the safety of the old house, they are invited to assist in actively creating an environment that emphasizes independent soul-searching, healing, experimentation with the

possibility of failure, and a dynamic community life that ranges from supportive listening to angry disputes. When their leader Connie realizes that isolated soul-searching does not promote communal healing, she invents ritualistic circular painting. Each woman contributes her pose expressing her freedom from the demons haunting her past. The circle both connects and disconnects their bodies and spirits: “Never put one on the other. Eve is Mary’s mother. Mary is the daughter of Eve” (p.263). Transferring their individual stories of pain to their naked pointed images liberates them so that they can embrace peace, unity, and joy in each other’s company. Once freed, they are ready for Connie’s mystic tale of Piedade, “who sang but never said a word” (p.264), thereby emancipating herself from the tyranny of judgmental words.

Under Consolata’s (Connie) guidance the Convent women came to meet the beloved part of the self – the “unbridled, authentic self” (p.177) presaged in their names: Albright, Grace, Seneca and Divine Truelove. Over time, they alter, having “to be reminded of the moving bodies they wore, so seductive were the alive ones below” (p.266). When the longed-for purifying rain comes, they dance in the rain, entering a state of religious ecstasy that heals them of their sorrow and pain, allowing Seneca to let go of the terrible state in which she was abandoned, Gigi to witness the cleansing of the bloodied shirt of the boy, Mavis to move in the shuddering dance of the rose of Sharon, and Pallas to hold close her son while the rain rinses away her fear of the black water (Bouson, 2000:210-211). Afterward, the women, tired but happy from their night dance listened to Consolata’s soothing stories about the mystical, poetical Piedade, “a singing

woman who never spoke” (p.285). As Bouson points out (ibid: 211), Paradise juxtaposes rhapsodic descriptions of the Convent women’s discovery of the beloved or divine part of the self-depicting them as “holy women dancing in hot sweet rain” (p.283) – with grim accounts of the Ruby men honing their evidence against the women and carrying out the assault. To the Ruby men, the Convent women represent a danger to the community. The men see them as

Bitches. More like witches - - - Before those heifers came to town this was a peaceable kingdom. - - - These here sluts out there by themselves never step foot in church. - - -They don’t need men and they don’t need God (p.276).

Each of the men, as the narrative explains, is looking for someone else to blame for personal or family troubles or for problems in the town: Sargeant, for the backtalk of Ruby’s youth; Wisdom Poole, for the shooting between his brothers, Brood and Apollo, over Billie Delia; Arnold and Jefferson Fleetwood, for Sweetie’s defective children; Menus, for his loss of the redbone woman; Harper, for his failed first marriage; K. D., for his lasting grudge against Gigi; and Steward and Deacon, for the threat Consolata’s affair with Deacon represents to their family pride and Ruby dream.

With all these grudges against the Convent women, the nine 8 – rock men of Ruby, intent on maintaining their racial purity and protecting their haven, their paradise, and intent on getting rid of the threatening Other represented by the Convent women, with their “clean, handsome guns” (p.3), take aim to save Ruby. They first shoot the white girl and then at their leisure, shoot Consolata in the forehead and gun down the rest of the Convent women as they run through the

backyard. Immediately after the assault on the Convent, the people of Ruby are disheartened about what has happened.

How hard they had worked for this place; how far away they once were from the terribleness they have just witnessed. How could so clean and blessed a mission devour itself and become the world they had escaped? (p.292).

As Bouson rightly points out, in a scene that calls to mind the strange disappearances of the literary predecessors of the Convent women – Beloved and Wild – the bodies of the Convent women mysteriously disappear without a trace (Bouson, 2000:211-212). Relieved that there are no dead to report, the people of Ruby over time change the story of the assault “to make themselves look good,” and the families of the nine men support them by “enhancing, recasting, inventing misinformation” (p.297). Pat Best believes

that nine 8-rocks murdered five harmless women (a) because the women were impure (not 8-rock); (b) because the women were unholy (fornicators at the least, abortionists at most); and (c) because they could – which was what being an 8-rock meant to them and also what the “deal” required (p.297).

To Billie Delia, similarly, the men “had seen in lively, free, unarmed females the mutiny of the mares and so got rid of them” (p.308)

Most of the Ruby men involved in the massacre remain unchanged but Deacon Morgan, however, does change. After the massacre, a remorseful Deacon Morgan publicly walks barefoot to Reverend Richard Misner’s house where he confesses that he has “become what the Old Fathers cursed: the kind of man who set himself up to judge, rout and even destroy the needy, the defenseless, the different” (p.302). Reverend Richard Misner ponders this:

They think they have outfoxed the Whiteman when in fact they imitate him. They think they are protecting their wives and children, when in fact they are maiming them, and when the maimed children ask for help, they look elsewhere for the cause. Born out of an old hatred, one that began when one kind or black man scorned another kind and that kind took the hatred to another level, their selfishness had trashed two hundred years of suffering and triumph in a moment for such pomposity and error and callousness it froze the mind. Unbridled by scripture, deafened by the roar of its own history, Ruby, it seemed to him, was an unnecessary failure. How exquisitely human was the wish for permanent happiness, and how thin human imagination became trying to achieve it. Soon Ruby will be like any other country town: the young thinking of elsewhere; the old full of regret - - - How can they hold it together, he wondered, this hard-won heaven defined only by the absence of the unsaved, the unworthy and the strange? (p. 306).

After the Convent women are presumably killed and mysteriously disappear, Reverend Richard Misner and Anna Flood visit the Convent where Anna has a vision of a door and Misner of a window, both of which symbolize the threshold or passage way between the material and spiritual worlds. “What would be on the other side? What on earth would it be? What on earth?” (p.305). What is found on the other side is another place that is “neither life nor death” and is “just yonder” (p.307). Existing in this liminal state and able to travel between the material and spiritual worlds, Gigi talks to her imprisoned father in the magical place where two trees grow near a lake and Mavis comforts and makes peace with her daughter, Sal, while both Pallas and Seneca appear before but do not acknowledge their mothers and Consolata re-unites with her mystical mother, Piedade, “who sang but never said a word” (p.264).

Even Consolata's (Connie) murder by the men of Ruby and the women's flight from the Convent cannot destroy the paradise that they have created together and that Piedade's singing mystically embodies. For unlike Ruby, this paradise is not based on a location or single traditional story, but on the freeing act of creating endlessly new stories of bliss: "Now they will rest before shouldering the endless work they were created to do down here in Paradise" (p.318). Ruby, as Reverend Richard Misner says, "was an unnecessary failure" (p.306) for in their quest, they go to extremes, becoming fanatics and in the end, becoming what they are running from. But, even as *Paradise* focuses on the horrific consequences of racial shaming as it describes the scapegoating of the Convent women, the closure also presents the healing and redemptive gesture – for the Convent women – foreshadowed in the novel's epigraph

And they will find me there,
and they will live,
and they will not die again
for, they will forever live in paradise.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Toni Morrison is one of the great African- American writers whose literary works serve as a medium of the African -American's reclaiming himself/herself. Toni Morrison has dealt with the themes of identity crisis, resistance and double jeopardy of the Africa-American in America and seeks to point the way leading to the recovery of an effective and subjective self-identity of the African-American. Hers is an ongoing process to liberate and reclaim the African-American (physically and mentally) personality from his / her status as chattel.

In Song of Solomon, it could be seen that Milkman at the end is able to achieve the desired goal in his quest. He sets out on his journey piloted by Pilate in search of the gold that would buy him his freedom but at the end of his journey, it is not the supposed gold that he finds but a discovery of his lineage, his past, his identity and his freedom. Milkman's journey is a succession of leaps and falls, of attempted deaths and incomplete rebirths, of blunders and triumphs, of moments of vulnerability or exhilaration. The real goal of his journey is disguised even to himself and is only realized when he achieves wholeness. As he progresses into his journey, however, his resistance and estrangement weaken. He finds himself in a heritage he can no longer deny. Acknowledged as one of the tribe by those

who know his ancestors, he rises in fuller recognition of the meaning of kinship, of the rich filiations of several generations. He travels back in space and time to the woodlife of Pennsylvania and the wider backwoods of Virginia, to the days of slavery when blacks moved in wagons toward the Promised Land. He gets closer to home, to the South, and to Africa wherefrom the Flying Ancestor, the one with the real name came. Milkman's quest also brings to the fore the sharp contrast of the collective identity being sought for by Guitar and his brotherhood of the Seven Days with their grim arithmetic of randomly killing of whites for the "death of every Emmet Till by whites" in maintaining the ratio of the racial killings; violent as it is in sharp contrast to Milkman's passive resistance in his quest. Milkman's quest also shows that resistance is vital in the search for freedom and identity as he has to resist all attempts by his father, who behaves like a white man, before he is able to go on his quest. If he has not resisted his father's attempts to keep him at home, he would have only succeeded in carving out a different kind of identity for himself, and be like his father. When Milkman hears his ancestor's name in the Song of Solomon, he frees himself from the emotional death of Macon Dead (his father), the obsessive terrorism of Guitar, and the clinging guilt of Hagar's love.

Song of Solomon, through Milkman Dead's extraordinary journey of awakening, provides a clear expression of Morrison's belief that "understanding self and past is always a project of community" (Rushdy, 1999:304) (quoted in Van Tol, 2002:3). Thus, Morrison shows that community is very important in one's search for authentic self-identity, for the Shalimar community plays a

crucial role in Milkman's awakening and reclaiming himself. It is in Shalimar that Milkman discovers his roots, thus enabling him to reclaim himself with various forms of assistance from the Shalimar community. Milkman initially does not know the importance of community and at first simply reacts to the values and demands of the black community in his native Michigan, but he is slowly drawn into the world of his kinsmen in Danville, Pennsylvania. By the time he reaches Shalimar, Virginia, his involvement with the community is direct and physical. His linear journey from North to South is therefore, paralleled by a movement through increasingly smaller social circles that instead of suffocating him; lead him to transcend death in his final flight and to embrace the life of humanity (O' Shaugnessy, 1999:125). Thus Milkman is able to beat a path away from that of his parents, which would only lead to a dead end. Milkman's quest is made possible by Pilate, "an arresting figure who emerges as the focus of moral concern, a guardian for those lacking her strength, whose major significance becomes progressively evident. She has carried with her, unwittingly, the clue to her inheritance, a sack of bones and rocks from her childhood, with a spool of thread for each element of the Afro-American's dual tradition. Through her death, rendered in place of her nephew's, the invitation to soar, a central motif is extended" (Allen, p. 30).

Between Mr. Smith's fatal leap at the beginning of the novel and Milkman's flight in the air (Fabre, 1998:112), Fabre says the protagonist's awkward yet persistent exploration of the legacy, is in many ways archetypal. The journey, as in many other quests in American literature, must be redemptive of

past flaws and weaknesses, and retributive. It must do justice to the dead and the living. Milkman's journey is a succession of leaps and falls, of attempted deaths and incomplete rebirths, of blunders and triumphs, of moments of vulnerability or exhilarations. The real goal of his journey is disguised even to himself. He leaves the Dead house to free himself from "the wings of other people's nightmares." He leaves cursed by one of his sisters who exposes his ignorance, vacuous and indifferent to other people's feeling. He sets off to find the gold that will buy him his freedom – faithful both to the mercantile spirit of his father, and to the historical heritage of slaves, striving to buy their freedom.

Milkman's transformation from an indulged and self-indulging child into a dangerously won maturity shapes the narrative line of event and perception. Morrison achieves an unusually skillful transition from a precisely described Michigan town into a timeless mythological world of quest for meaning and identity. At the end of Milkman's journey is not the gold which triggered it, but the dismantling of his personality and the acquisition of a difficult knowledge of himself and those closest to him (Allen, 1998:30).

In Beloved, too, Sethe and then Paul D and Denver achieve wholeness and their identity at the end of the novel, through the aid of the community especially for Sethe and her daughter Denver. Even though Sethe shuns the community and the community also shuns her after her infanticide and the death of Baby Suggs, the community comes to her aid by exorcising Beloved from her life, thus freeing her and claiming her as one of them and Sethe in turn claims her community and herself – identity. Here, as in Song of Solomon, Morrison shows the importance

of community in search for an authentic self that is self – identity – for, without the assistance of the community, Beloved would have taken Sethe's life piece meal as she (Beloved) like a vampire, feeds vicariously on it.

Sethe has to struggle against the oppressive system of slavery which seeks to deny her her humanity in order to achieve her human dignity denied her by the system of slavery. To achieve her authentic self, her identity, Sethe has to employ all forms of violent resistance at the possible expense of losing her life, to claim herself-identity, including the infanticide as she can no longer endure the atrocities of slavery.

Beloved reminds us not only of the existence of past atrocities, but that these atrocities can never be totally annihilated. Beloved serves as a textual space in which the horrors of slavery and the sometimes equally horrific responses to it by the (formerly) enslaved are not simply denied, or justified, or explained away, but are presented through an empowering use of oral traditions and language so that they become digestible (Solomon, p.7). According to Solomon, quoting from Rafael Perez-Torres' "Knitting The Narrative Thread – Beloved As Postmodern Novel," Beloved confronts "a facelessness the dominant culture in America threatens to impose on black experience, (and) forges out of cultural and social absence a voice and identity. Beloved creates an aesthetic identity by playing against and through the cultural field of postmodernism" (Solomon, p.8). Solomon says in examining the problems of identity of a number of the novel's characters, Boudreau concludes that " *Beloved* persistently asks its readers where selfhood is located and seems to imply that language and memory already

dissolved by pain, bear responsibility for constructions of self” (Boudreau, p. 457) quoted in (Solomon, p.29).

Beloved depicts slavery’s insidious power to distort the two most basic human emotions and instincts: love and self-preservation. Morrison in this novel explores her most persistent theme , “love or its absence,” from every imaginable angle: Sethe’s brand of mother love, which is a “killer”; Baby Suggs’ loving embrace of her community; Denver’s adoration of her father and sister; Beloved’s obsessive love for her mother; Stamp Paid’s loving allegiance to Paul D; and Paul D’s possessive love for Sethe. In the shadow of slavery, love inevitably results in destruction or betrayal of another or oneself. This theme is played out in Paul D’s love for Sethe, which leads to his self-imposed exile in the basement of a church, just as Sethe’s absolute love for her children leads her to take a handsaw to her daughter’s throat, resulting in imprisonment and the virtual banishment by her community. Morrison shows how every natural instinct and emotion is in some way twisted or stunted by the experience of living in a culture that measures individual worth by resale value and the ability to reproduce oneself without cost (Ayer, 1998: 190).

In Beloved, Morrison orchestrates meaning in a dialogue about fundamental human problems: the meaning of manhood, of womanhood, and of love. By manipulating metaphor and amplifying the meanings of words, she unsettles assumptions and heightens understanding not only of Sethe’s act of love/murder but also of the actions of a people and what they had to do to survive. In

Beloved, Morrison creates a new context for understanding the meaning of slavery, and of freedom (Ayer, 1998:201).

Always as concerned with process as product, Morrison focuses in Beloved on the healing process that returns dignity to a people from whom it had been unceremoniously stripped. But only in remembering, recounting, listening to, and accepting their individual and collective pasts does healing take place. In reclaiming and recreating the lives of those who lived through slavery, Morrison writes a new history that enables her characters and readers to reconsider the wounds of a shameful past in a manner that exorcises the ghost of Beloved (Mckay, 1999:17). Although Beloved is the embodiment of slavery's legacy and her behaviour pushes everyone to the edge of insanity, she is also the catalyst for change, first by forcing Sethe to face her suppressed memories. When she vanishes, Denver takes a job, and Paul D returns, their model home takes on the element of hopeful possibility. But Beloved is more than just a character in the novel, though she is the embodiment of the past that must be remembered in order to be forgotten: she symbolizes what must be reincarnated in order to be buried properly: "Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name. Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her" (p.274).

In Beloved Morrison, like Du Bois in *Souls*, negotiates the legacy of slavery as a national trauma, and as an intensely personal trauma as well (Krumholz, 1999:108). Both works challenge the notion that the end of institutional slavery brings about freedom by depicting the emotional and

psychological scars of slavery as well as the persistence of racism. And both Morrison and Du Bois delve into the stories and souls of black folk to tap the resources of memory and imagination as tools of strength and healing.

In Beloved, Morrison gives a chilling account of a compassionate yet resolute self-emancipated mother's tough love. Sethe cut the throat of one (Beloved) of her four children and tried to kill the others to save them from the outrages of slavery that she had suffered. Guided by the spirits of the many thousands gone, as inscribed in her dedication, Morrison employs a multivocal text and a highly figurative language to probe her characters' double consciousness of their terribly paradoxical circumstances as people and non people in a social arena of white male hegemony (Bell, 1998: 168).

At the end of the novel, something that is healing happens. Sethe's narrative ends with her considering the possibility that she could be her own "best thing". Denver has left the front porch feeling less afraid and more sure of herself. Now that Beloved is gone there is the feeling that perhaps Sethe can find some happiness with Paul D, who "wants to put his story next to hers" (p. 273). "Disremembered and unaccounted for," "Beloved returns unnamed, to the water and is "quickly and deliberately" forgotten "like a bad dream," for remembering her seems "unwise" (p.24). Sethe can now live a whole life where the self that is self makes its home.

As in Song of Solomon and Beloved, quest for identity by African Americans runs through as the central theme in Paradise. In Paradise, the people

of Ruby struggle for a group or collective identity that is based on racial purity. At the heart of the novel is the “Disallowing”. The founding families of Ruby were excluded from a frontier settlement named Fairly and made up of light-skinned blacks, simply because of their darker complexions. The bitterness of being rejected by members of their own race has a permanent effect on the band of former slaves, who include among their members men who held office in state government during Reconstruction. In response, they build their own town, Ruby, and isolate themselves from the world that had once rejected them. They proclaim their town to be “the one all-black town worth the pain” (p.5). But in 1976, when Ruby is on the verge of falling apart, its inhabitants try to keep the town’s utopian veneer intact by themselves inflicting pain on a convenient group of female scapegoats in a Convent. The people of Ruby see themselves as God’s chosen people and in their attempt to remain as such and to maintain their racial purity, they try to keep themselves separate from others especially the Convent women whom they see as impure and a possible source of contamination of their racial purity.

Separatism thus functions quite differently in Ruby and in the Convent, even if its impetus is survival in both cases. In Ruby, separatism aims to keep everything and everyone it does not claim outside its borders and is enforced by the town patriarchs through the threat of violence or, at times, violence itself. For example, Ruby defines itself explicitly in binary opposition to the Convent. In contrast, the separatism of the Convent is in part imposed upon it (by geography and by the town of Ruby) and aims to lovingly nurture and strengthen, within a

communal setting, women who have been hurt in different ways by violent, male-centered culture so that they may once again face the world at large. The combination of a patriarchal structure and a racist agenda makes Ruby into a doomed but nevertheless dangerous separatist entity. As horrendous as the murderous assault on the Convent women is, however, it thus produces a wake-up call for the town, which opens the door for moving past the hatred and violence (Michael, 2002:657-658). As Reverend Misner recognizes near the end of the novel, Ruby's men "think they have outfoxed the whiteman (through their separatist town) when in fact they imitate him" (p.306). After the massacre of the Convent women, the whole town wonders "how" Ruby's "so clean and blessed a mission (could) devour itself and become the world they had escaped?" (p.292).

As rightly pointed out by Ana Ma Fraile Marcos in her article "The Religious Overtones of Ethnic Identity-Building in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*" (p.108), the circularity of the novel, made structurally obvious by ending it almost where it began with the assault on the Convent women – is thus further underlined by the adoption of the jeremiad rhetoric and its unlimited cycles of peril and redemption. Ruby's redemption however is never definitive or total. They are trapped in the circularity of the cycles, neither damned nor saved. They will not be saved and wholly redeemed until they understand that the reversion of the hegemonic Manichean pattern of identity formation does not but reproduce the very essentialising they were trying to shun; until as Marcos says and to borrow from Toni Morrison's Nobel lecture, they "take the time to understand other languages, other views, other narratives". "Had they", Morrison advances, "the

heaven they imagined might have been found at their feet, complicated, demanding, yes, but a view of heaven as a life; not heaven as post-life” (Marcos, 2005:108).

Formally encoding the Puritan history of identity formation through the adoption of the typological rhetoric of Biblical symbolism and the structure of the jeremiad, Paradise warns about the dangers of essentializing “black identity” and the African American community. The novel turns then into a contemporary jeremiad. Simultaneously, Paradise imagines the possibility of individual and communal identity-building free of all constraints in the society represented by the Convent women. As Davis points out (Davis, p. 323) and quoted in Van Tol (Van Tol, p.3), while the white world that surrounds Morrison’s black characters is usually a symbol of violation and oppression, she “rarely depict white characters, for the brutality here is less a single act than the systematic denial of the reality of black lives” (Davis, p. 323). Morrison’s writing, then, is an ongoing attempt to reclaim the collective past to African Americans in order to allow the definition and maintenance of a personal and cultural identity.

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