

Chapter VII

Remaking a Social Text: *Jazz*

In her prefatory note to *Circles of Sorrow, Line of Struggle: The Novels of Toni Morrison*, Gurleen Grewal says:

Novels such as *The Bluest Eye* show me something I had always suspected but never fully realized, either in the literature I had read or in the ways of reading I had been taught: the saving power of narrative, its capacity to open a door, to point out the fire and the fire escape--in short, the profound work that narrative can do for the social collective, and the work that such a narrative in turn demands from us. (x)

The profound quality of such a narrative, its saving power to resist readers to accept any single "truth" and also urging them to remake the "truth," so long inferred, is one of the most remarkable and unique features of Morrison's fictional projects. Literary texts that reflect representational "truth" of history/trauma influence readers in reshaping their thoughts, in remaking them, not by the narrative's autonomous and deterministic closure, but by its power of igniting imagination. The pedagogic process of making and remaking of meaning thus forms a new representation of historical "reality," which contributes to add to the process of making a social text. *Jazz*

(1992), Toni Morrison's sixth novel, which is set in the age of Reconstruction after the Civil War and Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, registers a collaborative/mutual space between the speaker and listener, the writer and reader, who in their joint venture of surveying the past, the African American social history, forge a livable present and a viable future: "Narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is being created." Morrison's Nobel Lecture confirms it and the final part of the speech reconfirms the significance of the writer-reader venture in remaking history/sociology: "'Finally,' she says, 'I trust you now. I trust you with the bird that is not in your hands because you have truly caught it. Look. How lovely it is, this thing we have done-together'" (272-273).

Jazz is a sequel to *Beloved* in recalling a traumatized past. In *Unclaimed Experience* Cathy Caruth noted: "The belated experience of trauma . . . suggests that history is not only the passing on of a crisis but also the passing on of a survival that can only be possessed within a history larger than any single individual or any single generation" (qtd. in Grewal 118). Morrison's project in the novel is to present before the public a painful past, a history of dispossession and loss not in the manner of a chronicle historian but as a therapeutic historian/sociologist. The

avoidance of a painful history or its suppression cannot heal the traumatized but often makes the victim behave in a misbalanced and unruly manner which may cause further pain and that can be threatening for social and political arrangements. The novel opens with the gossiping voice of a narrator who casually fills in the readers with some facts of Joe and Violet's hard case:

Sth, I know that woman. She used to live with a flock of birds on Lenox Avenue. Know her husband, too. He fell for an eighteen-year-old girl with one of those deepdown, spooky loves that made him so sad and happy he shot her just to keep the feeling going. When the woman, her name is Violet, went to the funeral to see the girl and to cut her dead face they threw her to the floor and out of the church. (3)

Very soon the readers are informed that the case is not registered juridicially "because nobody actually saw him do it, and the dead girl's aunt didn't want to throw money to helpless lawyers or laughing cops when she knew the expense wouldn't improve anything." Violet's misbalancing/unruly behaviour is not considered agreeable enough to regard her as "someone needing assistance" by "Salem Women's Club." So, the Joe-Violet case demands a careful study, a different hearing/counter hearing, in order to write a

different social text by a responsible reader. Readers' position is like that of Violet's who is "left" "to figure out on her own what the matter was and how to fix it" (4). It is not a question of ". . . who shot whom" that matters but a different investigation, critical in itself, must be adopted to bring therapeutic solution not only for the particular victims but also for those who suffer the traumas of history (6). In the novel the present occupies a space of absence with a sense of loss and abandonment; what is traumatic is the repetition of the violent past Joe and Violet left behind. *Jazz*, as its name signifies, supplies readers solos, duets, trios and also a mediator, the know--everything, mysterious narrator. The reader should be alert not to let the traumatic past encompass the present. In order to release the present from the trap of that past a retrospective/ re-imaginative pattern of individual/collective stories must be told and retold both by speakers and listeners. Toni Morrison once said,

The only thing I can do, and have done, and will do is somehow to incorporate into the world that horror you feel when something awful happens, to redistribute the moral problem so other people can have this connection with another's pain.

That what art does. It manages that kind of

horror, it makes it possible for the person to go on. (qtd. in Walsh par. 23)

Jazz like *Beloved* was inspired by a real document Morrison had read in Camille Billop's manuscript, *The Harlem Book of the Dead*, which contains photographs and commentary by the great African American photographer James Van Der Jee. Van Der Jee narrated to Camille Billops the peculiar origin of the photograph of a young woman's corpse thus:

She was the one I think was shot by her sweetheart at a party with a noiseless gun. She complained of being sick at the party and friends said, 'Well, why don't you lay down?' and they taken her in the room and laid her down. After they undressed her and loosened her clothes, they saw the blood on her dress. They asked her about it and she said, 'I'll tell you tomorrow, yes, I'll tell you tomorrow.' She was just trying to give him a chance to get away. (qtd. in Henry Louis Gates, jr., 53)

The young woman rescued her lover by refusing to identify him. The mystery of such love, which is of course a woman's love, moved Morrison. She protected the seedling of this story line, nurtured it carefully until her creative mind bloomed it into *Jazz*, her sixth novel.

In her 1985 interview with Gloria Naylor Morrison explained that she was obsessed by two or three little fragments of stories which she heard from different places; one was a newspaper clipping about a woman called Margaret Garner, a run away slave woman who had killed her daughter to save her from enslavement and another was the funeral story, mentioned above. Both are the stories of black women and their sacrifices: one gives up her self for her child and the other sacrifices it for her lover. About the inter-relation between these two stories, Morrison explained to Naylor in the same interview:

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

(207)

"And that this woman," continues Morrison, "had loved a man or had such affection for a man that she would postpone her own medical care or go ahead and die to give him time to get away so that, more valuable than her life, was not just his life but something else connected with his life"

(208). Morrison also explained to Naylor what made her interested in those two separate stories in which she noticed certain correlation:

. . . what it is that really compels a good woman to displace the self, her self. So what I started doing and thinking about for a year was to project the self not into the way we say 'yourself,' but to put a space between those words, as though the self were really a twin or a thirteenth or a friend or something that sits right next to you and watches you, which is what I was talking about when I said 'the dead girl.' (208)

In her project of rewriting the history of black women, Morrison depends largely in her power of imagination. In order to make the story of textual traces like *The Black Book* or *Harlem Book of the Dead* more "real" she has great confidence in her power of fictional representation. The "dead girl" image is an all encompassing issue of Morrison's reclamatory project. By imagining the life of the "dead girl," Margaret killed, Morrison wants to focus on the interior region of her people, especially that of black women and thus she makes a new representation of black women's tales of love, betrayal, dispossession and death.

This "dead girl" image is the embodiment of absence/loss that engulfs the present. In the first few pages of the novel the narrator supplies almost all the information: the thirty years' troubled marital status of Joe and Violet, Joe's shooting of the eighteen year old girl Dorcas, with whom Joe had fallen in love, Violet's revenge in defacing the corpse, her craving for a baby that once had almost led her to "stealing" a baby (*Jazz* 21), Joe and violet's "restless nights" (13) after the incident etc. When the readers think that there is nothing left to know about the tragic triangulated love affair, the narrative takes a sudden twist with "Good luck and let me know," as Violet decides to gather the information of Dorcas: "May be she thought she could solve the mystery of love that way." So she questioned everybody: from Malvonne, an upstairs neighbour she came to know that her apartment was used as "a love nest" by Joe and Dorcas, the legally licensed beauticians informed her "what kind of lip rouge the girl wore" (5) and finally she reached to Alice Manfred, Dorcas's aunt, who showed Violet a picture of Dorcas and also allowed her to keep it for a few weeks. Violet kept the photo on the fireplace mantle. Now this photograph like an isolated historical document such as the Van Der Zee photograph becomes the most necessary thing for passing the "restless nights" of Joe and Violet. The dead girl's

face does not tell them what they need to know but ignites in them a keen desire to know a distant past which would probably help them to comprehend their present situation:

And a dead girl's face has become a necessary thing for their nights If the tiptoeer is Joe Trace, . . . then the face stares at him without hope or regret and it is the absence of accusation that wakes him from his sleep hungry for her company. No finger points. Her lips don't turn down in judgement. But if the tiptoeer is Violet the photograph is not that at all. It is the face of a sneak who glides over to your sink to rinse the fork you have laid by her plate. An inward face--whatever it sees is its own self. You are there, it says, because I am looking at you. (11-12)

The "dead girl" becomes an "inward face" of both Violet and Joe, watching them curiously as though "a twin or thirst or a friend. . . ." (Morrison, Interview with Gloria Naylor 208). Thus Dorcas who is no more in the present encompasses both Joe and Violet in such a manner that they themselves have become an embodiment of the "dead girl"/absence/loss/dispossession. Their present epitomizes what they have lost, which they want to forget. But forgetting a history, whether it is of an individual or

that of a collective cannot be a solution for the traumatized; it must be brought into daylight to represent in a new text of (sociology) with its reconstructed meaning for the healing of the traumatized.

Jazz opens in 1926, when Harlem seems to be the centre of a new historical era. On January 7, 1921, *New York Dispatch* published an article entitled "The Hope and Promise of Harlem" which reflected on the economic security, offered by Harlem Renaissance: "Here, where money will say more in one moment than the most eloquent lover can in years, a happy, thrifty people are working out a greater destiny for the Race, (*italics mine*) by solving their economic and political problems day by day" (qtd. in Vincent 75). In the novel the narrator expresses the mood and feelings, generated by the approach of the new era with her strong fascination for the city, which she emphasizes with capital "C":

I'm crazy about this City. . . . A city like this one makes me dream tall and feel in on things. . . . City in 1926 when all the wars are over and there will never be another one. The people down there in the shadow are happy about that. At last, at last, everything's ahead. . . . History is over, you all, and everything's ahead at last. (7)

"History" in this passage refers to painful experience of slavery that had happened with black people in the past; it is something to be forgotten; its "sad stuff" and "bad stuff" must be left behind. This passage sums up the "philosophy of New Negro, as envisioned by the leaders of the Harlem Renaissance" (Grewal 121). But in reality the "smart one" and the "new" (*Jazz* 7) are the black intellectuals of the urban North, the cosmopolitan elite class in Harlem Renaissance, the prototype of white superiority, who are far away from the rural black masses, who were migrated in the city for the betterment of their lives. The author notes, "The wave of black people running from want and violence crested in the 1870s; the '80s; the '90s but was a steady stream in 1906 when Joe and Violet joined it" (33). Hazel Carby points out in *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of Afro-American Woman Novelist*, "the overwhelming majority of blacks were in the South, at a vast physical and metaphorical distance from those intellectuals who represent the interests of the race. After the war, black intellectuals had to confront the black masses on the streets of their cities and responded in a variety of ways" (164).

Jazz highlights a wide gap between what seemed to be the fulfilment of all desires, a keynote to Harlem Renaissance and what it turned out practically. The novel

seems to revise the image of the "New Negro." The formation of subjectivity of the Negro and that of his identity was the dynamic force of the Jazz Age. His identity was to be formed not according to the perception of whites as an intellectually and spiritually inferior being but as a "Man." On October 10, 1919, Roscoe Dunjee, addressing a white audience, claimed, ". . . the cornerstone upon which rests all our difficulties is YOUR UNWILLINGNESS TO RECOGNIZE THE NEGRO AS A MAN. Now the Negro is a man and a free man" (qtd. in Vincent 65). This image of "New Negro" is replaced by working class men and women, whose status are totally different from the glamorous position of the writers and musicians, patronized by whites. In the novel Joe Trace is a door to door salesman of Cleopatra beauty products. Before he starts selling cosmetic goods he "cleaned fish at night and toilets in the day" (127); his wife does hair; Malvonne cleans offices and Alice is a seamstress. More often the novel conveys a strong sense of a promised land for African Americans in Harlem but they rarely have an access to the sphere of social, economic and educational opportunities. The narrative voice points out the inequities that were prominent in the city thus:

. . . everything you want is right where you are: the church, the store, the party, the women, the men, the postbox (but no high schools), the

furniture store, street newspaper vendors, the bootleg houses, (but no banks), the beauty parlors, the barbershops . . . and every club, organization, group, order, union, society, brotherhood, sisterhood or association imaginable.
(10)

The novel also focuses on the bitter socio-economic realities faced everyday by black people in the city where racial violence is internalized, made visible in the interiority of their lives, lived everyday. Joe remembers struggling with Violet in their early years in Harlem, marching in the Armistice parade for the coloured regiments, and overcoming the "lighter-skinned renters" who wanted to keep them out of Lenox Avenue's nicer apartments: "When we moved from 140th Street to a bigger place on Lenox, it was the light-skinned renters who tried to keep us out. Me and Violet fought them, just like they was whites" (127). In an atmosphere of dispossession and longing people were exploiting each other. The husband has betrayed his wife but kills another girl for "betraying" him. The wife treats the girl most savagely for dispossessing her of her husband. Alice Manfred is scared and feels herself "truly unsafe because the brutalizing men and their brutal women were not just out there, they were in her block, her house" (74). In her utter confusion

about the lifestyle of black people, Alice keeps her niece away from the "kind of Negro," "The embarrassing kind" (79). She cannot make out what made people act so violently? So she asks Violet, "Don't they fight all the time? When you do their hair, you're not afraid they might start fighting?" (84). Her ironical comment on the furies and revenges, inflicted on blacks by blacks is noteworthy:

Black women were armed; black women were dangerous and the less money they had the deadlier the weapon they chose. . . . What the world had done to them it was now doing to itself. Did the world mess over them? Yes but look where the mess originated. . . . But in God's eyes and theirs every hateful word and gesture was the Beast's desire for its own filth. The Beast did not do what was done to it, but what it wished done to itself: raped because it wanted to be raped itself. . . . Their enemies got what they wanted, became what they visited on others. (78)

This passage reflects the internal conflict that had consumed the whole community of blacks like the side effects of some powerful drug which the black people had swallowed in the name of Harlem Renaissance. The "New Negro" image and its slogan of self assertive manhood,

ashamed the black man in his own failure. A sense of lacking "something" is so much dominating in him that "the new negro" image drowned his manhood and aroused in him a sense of self doubt and self-hatred which, on the other hand, also contributed to bringing injuries to each other. The narrative voice replicates on the slavery's system of disparity in wages between the male and female workers:

"There were bully cotton crops in Palestine and people for twenty miles around were going to pick it. Rumor was the pay was ten cents for young women, a quarter for men"

(102). This manner of keeping discrimination between black men and women not only humiliates the black men but also spurs their manhood to prove their superiority within their own home and the relationship between black men and black women worsens.

Morrison explains in her interview with Nellie McKay, "Jazz always keeps you on the edge. There is no final chord" (155). The function of jazz is to speak desire and in Morrison's novel "Jazz" becomes the voice of unfulfilled desire. She sees in this unfulfilled desire a quality of hunger and disturbance which is specifically African American's and that it is "an ineffable quality . . . that is curiously black" (153) as she has said in the interview. What is traumatic is not only a sense of loss but also its reiteration as something lacking/absent that persists and

occupies a palpable emotional space: the presence of absence. The music that Alice Manfred hears is not "real music--just colored folks' stuff . . . not real, not serious. . . . It faked happiness, faked welcome, but it did not make her feel generous, . . ." (59). The experience of loss is felt not only by individuals who have been separated from parents, children, spouses, lovers, but by an entire community who have been uprooted by a legacy of cultural dislocation: "We picked cotton, chopped wood, plowed. I never knew what it was to fold my hands. This here is as close as I ever been to watching my hands do nothing," says Violet to Alice (112). Ann Douglass opined that African Americans "whose ancestors were kidnapped from their native land and sold into slavery in an alien country, were, in fact, America's only truly orphan group" (83).

While representing the experience of loss, Morrison has populated *Jazz* with a number of orphans: Violet, Joe and Dorcas--who in their sufferings of loss and abandonment also suffer a sense of lacking, (physical and emotional) because of denial and dispossession by their parents. Violet became orphan when her "phantom father" (100) deserted the family to seek his fortune, leaving his wife Rose Dear, to raise their five young daughters. Rose, being separated earlier from her mother and later from her

husband finally could not recover the trauma of dispossession of her house and land and committed suicide by jumping into a well. Violet was so moved by her mother's distress that she took an important decision in her life, ". . . never never have children" (102). The decision of remaining childless later haunts her and creates a kind of "mother hunger" in her, so intense that she "started sleeping with a doll in her arm" (129). The sense of loss which was first felt by a daughter inside Violet later changes into something different, a mother's longing/ yearning too intense to overlook. The presence of that absence becomes so much acute in her that she imagines Dorcas, as a girl young enough to be that daughter who ". . . fled her womb?" (109). The narrative voice speculates the violence of Violet in mutilating the face of the dead girl as being "a crooked kind of mourning for a rival young enough to be a daughter" (111). Dorcas Manfred is raised by her aunt Alice Manfred after her father is "pulled off a streetcar and stomped to death and her mother "burned crispy" in her house on fire (57). For Dorcas, the pain of loss is discerned in her faded memory of the St. Louis race riots which not only killed her parents but also preyed on her "clothespin dolls." The narrative goes on, "There was no getting in that house where her clothespin dolls lay in a row. In a cigar box. But she tried anyway to get them.

Barefoot, in the dress she had slept in, she ran to get them, and yelled to her mother that the box of dolls, the box of dolls was up there on the dresser can we get them? Mama?" (38). Joe Trace, being abandoned by his mother at birth and raised by another family retains his "trace" (Joe Trace) as his parents "disappeared without a trace" (124). In his utter disappointment to fill up the "inside nothing" (37) Joe makes "three solitary journeys" to find "the woman he believed was his mother" (175). In the novel Wild who is referred to as Joe's mother is present in her absence; "everywhere and nowhere" (179). This sense of absence and loss in Joe draws him closer to Dorcas, in whose "faint hoof marks," "underneath her cheekbones" Joe traces his mother Wild (130). Dorcas, another orphan in the novel, in her anguish remembers the "lap across her face, the pop and sting of it" which was given by her mother to the child daughter who "yelled" to her mother for getting her "box of dolls" from the fiery house. She can never forget that slap because "it was the last" (38). Both Joe and Dorcas suffer from emotional abandonment and in their utter yearning to fill up the gap of "inside nothing" (37) they try to fill it up for each other: "Somebody called Dorcas with hooves tracing her cheekbones and who knew better than people his own age what that inside nothing was like. And who filled it for him, just as he filled it for her,

because she had it too" (37-38). John Bowlby says that a person who has experienced a loss "mislocates" the absent figure in some other figure in his or her life, regarding that person as "in certain respects a substitute for someone lost," but for whom ultimately no substitute can suffice (161). Thus Morrison's Joe Trace, in his obsession with his mother, follows the trail from ". . . where is she?" (184) to "There she is" (187). The yearning to fill up the emptiness that the son inside Joe feels, ends up in locating a wrong figure, in his young lover, namely Dorcas who herself is the personification of absences. When Dorcas leaves him in preference for a younger man Acton, Joe shoots her as if to stop the endless circle of betrayal, caused to black people by the treason of history. In his bold attempt to stick to his "tracks," Joe repeats the violence of history and Dorcas has to sacrifice to the repetition of the process of history. He soliloquises in his utter disappointment,

In this world the best thing, the only thing, is to find the trail and stick to it. I tracked my mother in Virginia and it led me right to her, and I tracked Dorcas from borough to borough. . . . Something else takes over when the track begins to talk to you, give out its signs But if the trail speaks, no matter what's in the way,

you can find yourself in a crowded room aiming a bullet at her heart, never mind it's the heart you can't live without. (130)

Another orphan's story in *Jazz* is that of Golden Gray's. When he reaches the age of eighteen Vera Louis, his foster mother told him that his father was a "black-skinned nigger" (143). In his way of tracking his father in the Virginia woods Golden Gray finds out the cabin of the woodsman Henry Lestroy/Les Troy. It is the same Virginia woods where many years later Joe would search his mother. While waiting for the arrival of his father, he reflects on his missing father in visceral terms as an amputation of an arm:

Only now . . . now that I know I have a father, do I feel his absence: the place where he should have been and was not. Before, I thought everybody was one armed, like me. Now I feel the surgery. . . . I don't need the arm. But I do need to know what it could have been like to have had it. It's a phantom I have to behold. . . . This part of me that does not know me, has never touched me or lingered at my side. . . . I will locate it so the severed part can remember the snatch, the slice of its disfigurement.

(158-159)

This passage articulates most explicitly the presence of absence, a sense, produced by a child's experience of abandonment from parents, an irreparable loss, cast on African Americans by slavery and its aftermath. Morrison has articulated that sense of rejection and desertion, felt by real orphans by such a convincing narrative that readers can feel that pain and participate in the sufferings of the characters.

At the nexus of the history of loss lies the history of black women who suffer dispossession, betrayal, natal alienation along with the age-long oppression of black people in general. According to Grewal, "Jazz highlights the consciousness of black women's struggle to survive the violence of disfranchisement reverberating across generations, across the North-South and rural-urban divide, a violence that is rendered in the elusive and mute figure of Wild" (123). Wild is also an embodiment of "the dead girl" about whom Morrison has talked in her interview with Gloria Naylor. In the novel this mute figure eludes us to follow the trails back to 1873, when Morrison's *Beloved* opens with Seth and Denver as the "only victims" of a "baby's venom" and ends in the same year with Beloved's leaving, taking "the shape of a pregnant woman, naked and smiling . . . she stood on long straight legs, her belly big and tight" (3, 261). In *Jazz* when Golden Gray reaches

the age of eighteen he goes ". . . a long way from home," in search for his father and sees "In the trees to his left, . . . a naked berry-black woman . . . covered with mud and leaves . . ." The narrative goes on, "As soon as she sees him, she starts then turns suddenly to run, but in turning before she looks away she knocks her head against the tree. . . . Her terror is so great her body flees before her eyes are ready to find the route of escape" (144). Wild's reaction to Golden Gray is similar to Beloved's terror of "men without skin" (*Beloved* 210). Thus Wild in *Jazz*, "indecent speechless lurking insanity," (179), is an incarnation of African American women who have endured the brutality of slavery; her muteness speaks of their wound of tongue, harnessed or clamped by an iron bit. She lays bare the history's wound of denial and dispossession, done to blacks and particularly to black women. Even years later the condition of black women does not change. In the city, after the Reconstruction, Violet experiences the exploitative work conditions; as she does not have the necessary license required for a beautician, she must be at the "beck and call" of women who want to have their hair done and in return of low wages as well. The task of reclaiming "Wilds"/black women must be rendered into someone responsible readers who would collect bits and pieces of black women's "lived lives" and weave a new

story/history by rendering their imagination into it that would not only heal their wound by enabling them resist the trauma but also open up a new narrative technology, based on a negotiation between reader and writer. Thus a narrative becomes a healing as well as a collective and interactive project. By setting her story in the Harlem of the 20s, Morrison reminds us of how the movement failed in fulfilling the black female desires when Harlem itself was an enactment of the fulfilment of all desires: ". . . it does pump desire," the narrative voice says (34). The black women's age-long hunting for something better worsens the situation with the physical transference from rural South to urban North and black women at which they can't do any thing but conceal their sorrow "they don't know where from " (161). In the city the longing for rest is attractive to Violet, "but" as the narrator says, "I don't think she would like it . . . these women . . . they wouldn't like it." That much span of time in the name of rest though is alluring for these black women, they feel suffocated in overpowering drowsiness, created by idleness:

They are busy and thinking of ways to be busier because such a space of nothing pressing to do would knock them down . . . They fill their mind and hands with soap and repair . . . because what is waiting for them, in a suddenly idle

moment is the seep of rage. Molten. Thick and slow-moving. Mindful and particular about what in its path it chooses to bury. (16)

Violet's "private cracks" is not hers alone but of all black women's who have endured negligence and humiliation for ages. Her "private cracks" are part of that "dark fissures in the globe light of the day" (22) which is itself "imperfect"; "Closely examined it shows seams, ill glued cracks and weak places beyond which is anything. Anything at all" (23). Violet sees that she is living other's life: "In each one something specific is being done: food things, work things; customers and acquaintances are encountered, places entered. But she does not see herself doing these things. She sees them being done" (22). She feels that the dominant ideology does not see woman as its agent. In Violet, Morrison wants to project that self which would be her own. She alludes to that in her interview with Naylor,

I had been living some other person's life. It was too confusing. I was interested primarily in the civil rights movement. And it was in that flux that I thought . . . there would be no me. Not us or them or we, but no me. And you knew better. You knew inside better. You knew you

were not the person they were looking at. . . .

And I wanted to explore it myself. (199)

Violet's unconscious "stumbling" into the "cracks" (23)

makes her action violent such as defacing the dead body of Dorcas. But ultimately her violent action brings the subjectivity for herself which she can claim as her own.

In the later part of the novel Violet shares her experience of transformation with Felice. She says that she "messed up" her life by letting the world change her. In her blind

imitation of the image of dominant ideology assigned for woman she wanted to become "White. Light. Young again."

She forgot that it was her life and nobody else's and so she just ran up and down the streets wishing she was

"somebody else" (208). Felice then asks her what she did to this image and Violet replies, "'killed her. Then I killed the me that killed her.'" When she is asked,

"'who's left?'" Violet says, "'Me'" in such a way as if

". . . it was the first she heard of the word" (209). Thus

Violet demonstrates her ability to create herself through the process of killing that part of her which stood as an impediment to achieving that personality. Of course such transformation for Violet has become possible as a result of sharing fragments of her stories with Alice who listened to Violet and also told her own and thus both of them

formed a bonding after the death of Dorcas. Together they

contemplated the travails of black women: "Eating starch, choosing when to tackle the yoke, sewing, picking, cooking, chopping. Violet thought about it all and sighed. 'I thought it would be bigger than this. I knew it wouldn't last, but I did think it'd be bigger.'" Both recognize tinges of sorrow in each other. Dorcas's death, metaphorically the presence of absence which they filled up for each other, brought the two women closer. As Alice stitches up the torn linen of Violet's coat, she listens to Violet minutely and repairs her own tattered self. The narrator says, "By this time the women had become so easy with each other talk wasn't always necessary. Alice ironed and Violet watched. From time to time one murmured something--to herself or to the other" (112). This shows how the solidifying bond between women can hasten the therapeutic process of healing on blacks who have been affected by the traumatic effects of geographical and emotional dislocation, that the Migration had brought them. By the end of the novel, the wounded triad of Joe-Violet-Dorcas is replaced by the healing triad of Joe-Violet-Felice. Though the history of denial, dispossession and depression is almost unavoidable in the lives of black women, they must not allow themselves to be subdued by its reiteration. The trauma of history must be prevented from being all consuming. True to the spirit of the Age is the

title of the novel *Jazz* in which a note of yearning as well as a sense of loss vibrates and reverberates in its music, i.e. in its solos, duets, trios; the characters are bound to it yet they have space to improvise and go ahead of the beat.

Jazz offers healing to those who survive the trauma of a repressed past. With the bond of sisterhood Violet finds out her "me" inside; Alice is no longer scared of Violet, whom she categorises as one of the women "with knives" (85); Joe is no longer stuck in the track and trails of "faint hoofmarks" (130); Felice is not anybody's "alibi or hammer or toy" (222). Thus by focussing on the interior experience of black people, Morrison has represented a "truthful" account of the history of black women in an unconventional manner. She is no less faithful to the traces of the past like *The Black Book* or Camille Billop's manuscripts, yet in her representation she resists any single or determined meaning. The unfolding of various strands of individual stories in the novel is so complicated and varied that the novel does not offer any single totalizing meaning. In her *Paris Review* interview Morrison explained: "It is important not to have a totalizing view. In American literature we (African Americans) have been so totalized--as though there is only one version. We are not one indistinguishable block of

people who always behave the same way" (117). The danger of master narrative is its grand resolution, in which the outcome has been decided already and the individual players do not have any role in it unless they contribute to its predetermined resolution. While filling up the gap between the master narrative and a "real" account of everyday lives of the people of her community, Morrison relies strongly on her power of imagination. In the novel the wide gap between the "slippery crazy words" of the "explanatory leaflets," distributed by the demonstrators at the Fifth Avenue march and the silent staring child Dorcas is articulated in Alice's attempt to find out connections:

She read the words and looked at Dorcas. Looked at Dorcas and read the words again. What she read seemed crazy, out of focus. Some great gap lunged between the print and the child. She glanced between them struggling for the connection, something to close the distance between the silent staring child and the slippery crazy words. (58)

Morrison's novel emphasizes the role of narration in the rewriting of history. Though at first the narrator seems to be overconfident in predicting the narrative action, later the deterministic nature of the narrative is realized. The narrative voice confesses how she missed the

most "obvious" and the most "original" aspect of the characters; that they are the most "complicated," "changeable" and the very nature of their "humanness"--were all that she failed to understand while "meddling" in their lives. Overconfident of her capability of "finger shaping," she was quite sure that "one would kill the other" because ". . . the past was an abused record with no choice but to repeat itself at the crack and no power on earth could lift the arm that held the needle" (220). Through such narrative confession Morrison seems to acknowledge that historical violence can never make life static and that characters go ahead of history's age-long treason, treachery and violence. It is the function of both the writer and the reader to lift the arm of the creative historian/sociologist "that held the needle" deep down the grave of things "too terrible to relate" (Morrison, "The Site" 112). The history of a people written in such a manner as the narrator in the novel says which will be both "snug and wide open" (221). If the focus of the narrative is on the damage of history, such confession on the part of the narrative voice also registers a space for narrative reparation. In "Art of Fiction" Morrison links the ability of learning something out of a mistake to jazz as a mode,

In a performance you make mistakes, and you don't have the luxury of revision that a writer has; you have to make something out of a mistake, and if you do it well enough it will take you to another place where you never would have gone had you not made that error. So, you have to be able to risk making that error in performance. (116-117)

The narrative voice then announces her task of ripping "the veil drawn over 'proceedings too terrible to relate'" (Morrison, "The Site" 112) through the mute figure of Wild so that an alternative or counter narrative can be offered to displace the hegemonic narratives: "I wouldn't mind. Why should I? She has seen me and is not afraid of me. She hugs me. Understands me. Has given me her hand. I am touched by her. Released in secret" (221). In the attempt to lay bare the wounds, inflicted on black women by the treason of history, the narrator urges a space for agency so that the "Wilds" would not remain speechless any longer. The novel ends with a readerly/writerly desire: "Say make me, remake me. You are free to do it and I am free to let you because look, look. Look where your hands are. Now" (229). This talking voice is an appeal to the readers to lay hands on the past so that a new interpretation can be delivered by the joint venture of the reader and the

writer. Thus Toni Morrison's *Jazz* registers reader's participation in remaking/rewriting a social text that resists the predetermined cycle of history.