

Chapter VIII

Conclusion

Toni Morrison's fiction addresses the current debates about cultural diversity, the controversies regarding the identities of minority groups, their territorial positions in relation to the mainstream culture, and the like. Her rewriting project invites an analytical mind to explore the deep and thought provoking ideas on the aesthetics of the racial, gendered and economical disposition of a minority group. Morrison criticism examines in different ways what it means to be a black and a woman in a society that betrays a sort of cultural imperialism despite professed values of liberty and equality. Morrison says, "novels are always inquiries" (Interview with Jaffrey 7), and the present study, too, is a fresh inquiry in a broader context into how black American women's writing has shaped the identity of a nation by being race specific and yet universal at the same time. Such investigation seems more crucial and justifiable particularly at the moment when the notion of American exceptionalism is increasingly withering away, yielding place to multiculturalism and cultural pluralism. The distinctiveness of each ethnic community has instead acquired paramount importance, enriching rather than eroding the socio-cultural fabric of the US. The present project has addressed these issues in the context of African

Americans, especially black women, as a community and as individuals who claim to be heard. The uniqueness of their history, of their cultural identity contributes to the cultural diversity that redefines the American dream today. The study has dealt with Morrison's first six novels beginning with *The Bluest Eye* (1970). It does not go beyond *Jazz* (1992) in detailed analysis for constraints of time and space; but the scope remains for an extended examination of the later works in similar critical perspectives.

In rewriting black women's history, a project that demands a reinscription of several phases of general black experience in the US, Morrison has followed individual lives closely because it enables her to (re)construct a history that is not predetermined. The danger of narrating monumental history lies in ending up with a master narrative in which there is no space for little narratives, for local stories of individuals or marginalized groups, because that runs counter to the grand resolution of the master narrative whose outcome has been decided before the commencement of writing. The individual players are unimportant in those grand narratives or in that monumental history except that they contribute to their/its predetermined conclusion. While rewriting the black women's history, Morrison has explored the hitherto unexplored regions of everyday lives of her people and thus woven a new story/history that

challenges the very texture of the "national" canonical literature and creates a necessary space for resistance and agency through her counter narrative for those human beings.

Morrison's fiction foregrounds a new agenda not only for the study of black women, but for the whole black community, revealing how individual and collective experience of African Americans "opens up the possibility of transmitting the experience of the oppressed, making redemption possible" (Nutting "Remembering the Disremembered"). The present project shows that the premise of history does not remain circumscribed within the rigid boundaries of the cause-effect continuum, but its scope goes beyond that in the hands of a historian/fiction writer who with his/her convincing narrative can rearticulate past experiences (taken either from memory, legends, folktales or from the excavated materials, newspapers articles, museums, recorded things etc.) and modify the present. Such (re)writing has the potential to pave the way for a better future of a community. Through her rewriting project Morrison is constantly in the process of "rediscovering the past." Past, for the author, is in fact a "living history" (Interview with Bessie W. Jones and Audrey Vinson 171) which she has re-interpreted in her fictional reconstruction in a way that has allowed her to reshape the silences of the so-long unwritten tales of black women or to lay bare before

her readers their internal pains and sufferings. Morrison's new history, in her own words, is an attempt to focus on the "unwritten interior life" of her people ("The Site of Memory" 111). As a creative historian, Morrison depends on "what remains were left behind" in order to "reconstruct a world that these remains imply (112). In her interview with Shange, Morrison says, "We have a tendency to carry . . . things from the past around with us. Sometimes we look them in the face and sometimes we do not, but . . . moral resurrection . . . is possible only by confrontation with the dead past" (qtd. in Schreiber 156). She (re)writes the history of her people by confronting a dead past, which she challenges and then reshapes by way of her new representation. Her reinscription of the past reshapes the cultural conscience of a community and reaches out to others, irrespective of race and gender, with an appeal as well as a demand. The author's rewriting project thus etches out a new history for African Americans, particularly for her women, by giving speech to the speechless, and this certainly affects our understanding of the contemporary "real" world. Morrison's text is "both aesthetically beautiful and politically engaged" (Peterson 465) in the sense that her characters, particularly black women, in their unique individualities do not only write their

history, but also disrupt the established conventions and modify patriarchal inscriptions.

Diana Walsh spoke of Morrison thus: "She gives meaningful order to the fragments of the past, and through language and narrative, helps us connect to one another, helps heal the wounds that drive us apart, the wounds of historical trauma" ("A Tribute to Toni Morrison's Healing Vision" 3). In representing the tales of black women Morrison deliberately deconstructs the master narratives and reconstructs her own that not only uncovers the buried/forgotten past but also adds new meaning to the acquired meaning of blackness. The present thesis has striven to offer a fresh outlook on the subjectivity of black women who are racially, sexually and economically marginalized. Through her novels Morrison has addressed the "differences and otherness" (Fultz 20), interwoven in the predetermined racial, cultural and economical dispositions, so distinctively that her work adds a new dimension to the picture of black women in the US. The rewriting project of Morrison sheds light on the changing scenario of black women's writing; instead of remaining circumscribed within the periphery of the given racial and gendered status, it breaks new grounds, meets new challenges and proves new worth. Morrison has also created a new space for black women writers who, in Gates's terms, had been far too long

"the subjugated, the voiceless, the invisible, the unrepresented and the unrepresentable" (qtd. in Schwartz).

Morrison's rewriting blockades everything which is predetermined; in her new representation of black women she registers a narrator's resistance but champions her people's voice, particularly her black women's as against longstanding mainstream neglect and dismissal. It is through the joint venture of the reader and the writer that the author completes her rewriting project. The narrative voice in *Jazz* confesses to certain limitations: ". . . while I was the predictable one, confused in my solitude into arrogance, thinking my space, my view was the only one that was or that mattered. I got so aroused while meddling, while finger-shaping, I overreached and missed the obvious" (220). Such confession on the narrator's part also registers a space for narrative reparation. The author reflects on the subject in a *Paris Review* interview: "I thought of myself as like the jazz musician: someone who practices and practices and practices in order to be able to invent and to make his art look effortless and graceful" (111). Unlike monumental history, Morrison's new/different her-story questions any fixed referent and yet foregrounds an African American political commitment to the crucial cultural memory, keeping the past alive in order to construct a better future (Davis 241). For Morrison, "the

best art is political and you ought to be able to make it unquestionably political and irrevocably beautiful at the same time" ("Rootedness" 345). In her alternative narrative/fictional reconstruction, she has authenticated black women's voice by challenging "America's aggregate history of racism and sexism" and thus "offers a model for transcending that history's limitations" (Thompson 240).

The Bluest Eye (1970) demystifies a hegemonic social process and shows how power works to make minorities collude in their own oppression by internalizing a dominant culture's values as "original" in the face of great material contradiction. By interrogating the historical disposition of "knowledge" Morrison has destabilized certain norms of abstract values that consign a little black girl into insanity. The entire novel explores the forces that lead to Pecola's desire for a pair of blue eyes. Because privileged social status in America has been historically coded in white terms, the accession of black people to that status rests on a disavowal of their own culture. As Pecola demonstrates, this socially mandated charade of being something one is not and of not being something one is makes one invisible, while the split mentality it entails ends up in insanity. The novel critiques the process of identity formation for black people in general and black women in particular in US society, who in their attempt to conform to

the "normal" come far away from their own values and eventually suffer an irreparable loss. *The Bluest Eye* actually strips off the mantle of American (read: white upper/middle class) superiority that has a long history in the colonization of blacks.

While interrogating the history of white supremacy, Morrison is no less critical of the self-complacent people of her own community. Characters such as Geraldine build their "inviolable world" "stick by stick" and maintain their class distinctiveness. Pecola's narrative does not just reveal the discrepancy and ambiguity in the basic social structure of the dominating power that colonizes "others" but also carves out a space for the victimized (here Pecola) to claim her "own" that would supposedly never hurt her or cause her to feel the "inexplicable shame ebb" (43). The narrative voice explains, "She owned the crack that made her stumble; she owned the clumps of dandelions whose white heads . . . she had blown away. . . . And owning them made her part of the world, and the world a part of her" (41). Apparently the network of power politics never reaches Pecola's periphery, though ironically the freedom of a "dangerously free man" (125) snatches away from Pecola her world and she achieves her own "freedom" by "possessing" a pair of blue eyes. Aunt Jimmy's network of women, on the other hand, provides a counter narrative in the form of a

healing therapy for the "sickness" of Pauline and other black women in the north. By sharing each other's sorrows, and helping each other, as evidenced in the death scene of Aunt Jimmy, these women carry "a world on their heads." In this manner Morrison, in her new representation, has secured a solid and specific ground for black women, which is unique in "the difference" among ". . . all the difference there was" (110).

Sula (1973) begins with a sense of loss and disruption of "intimate things in place" (Morrison, Interview with Robert Stepto 11). The narrative is a commemorative act for an extinct community, the "Bottom," now replaced by suburbs and a golf course. It is a painful remembrance of a past displaced and forgotten by the post-integrationist era. In her essay "City Limits, Village Values," Morrison discusses the community values, which she calls "village values":

"When a character defies a village law or shows contempt for it, it may be seen as a triumph to white readers, while Blacks may see it as an outrage" (38). Sula's "unusualness"/ "experimental life" is seen as offensive by her community because the age-old historical blindness to black women's issues does not allow the Bottom community to accept Sula's zeal as affirmative; rather they go on rejecting her and negating all that she stands for. Sula, "a woman of force" (Morrison, Interview with Betty Jean

Parker 63), fails to create turmoil in the restrictive community of Bottom. Though concerned with the whole community, the focal point of this novel seems to be, as Grewal notes, "social death of the female self" (43). Grewal further adds that "if collective marginalization brings about a group's cohesiveness, it also makes the group critical of radical departures from its norms," (44) especially when such departures are made by its women. The tensions between Sula's autonomy and the values of the restrictive community are expressive of "the counter pressure exerted by black nationalist ideology on a feminist articulation of black femininity" (Gates, Jr., 20). While critiquing the historic erasure of feminist concerns by the politics of nationalism, the novel does not, however, replicate the errors of nationalism by advocating the priority of feminism over other larger concerns of the time.

The revolutionary spirit in Sula might have been welcomed wholeheartedly if she had not taken the wrong decision of keeping her grandmother in an old age home. The accent here is on responsibilities to the elders/ancestors, which in the name of celebrating individuality are disappearing gradually from society. In Morrison's new history Sula's "experimental life" gets a new meaning/subjectivity not because she is a nonconformist but because her "spirit" can be used as a spark to envision a

better community for the Bottom. Her death brings a sense of "dislocation," a kind of "restless irritability" (*Sula* 153) among the people of Bottom, though they hoped that a brighter day would emerge because Sula was dead. The aloofness characterizing the post integrationist era, all in relation to blacks, is temporarily replaced by their joint venture to expel Sula because she was a pariah in their eyes. Through the figure of Sula Morrison has projected an idea of constructive evil that is necessary to glue the cracks inherent in the scheme of things. The novel opens up a new possibility of awakening a sense of belonging through the remembrance of a forgotten past. This does not anyway reduce the importance of Sula's consciousness about black womanhood. In fact, black suffering is here portrayed not only in black-and-white terms, it is intra-cultural, too. But it is always out of such conflict that a community redefines itself. Sula gives the Bottom community a sense of solidarity, in an inverse way though; but her "idiosyncrasies" tell another story of female identity struggle.

Barbara Smith points out that "books by black women authors are the richest written source [of information on black womanhood] because in the creation of the work, we can assume that little has stood between the black woman and the telling of her story" ("Doing Research" 4). Black women

authors have insisted on the exploration of a legacy so as to reinterpret the excavated materials, revise and re-examine the important issues regarding their situation in American society and culture, and have advanced their reclamatory project. They believe that the search for their legacy will authenticate their identities and create a strong bond between the past and present. For Morrison, "the reclamation of the history of black people in this country is paramount in its importance" because an acknowledgement of one's ancestors not only ensures his/her identity but also gives it "the confirmation and the affirmation of the life . . . of that organism to which I belong which is black people in the country (Morrison, Interview with Christina Davis 224, 225).

Morrison's third novel *Song of Solomon* (1977) reassesses the black legacy from a daughter's perspective. The novel works through a slow process of dismantling the hero's superficially imposed cultural values by initiating him into the knowledge of his ancestry so that he can acquire the "discredited knowledge" of African American history ("Rootedness" 342). It centres on a family quarrel that is not just between Macon and Pilate, between a brother and a sister, but between northern urban black mobility and the jettisoned southern past. The novel foregrounds the blues tradition that Macon has left behind and Pilate has

kept up. Milkman, the protagonist, in search of his familial history is caught in a dilemma that becomes complicated when he is supplied with stories, full of ambiguities and enriched with varieties. By putting together the bits and pieces of those incomplete stories, by deconstructing and reconstructing their meaning, and by retracing language back to its source when the codified language was not discovered, Milkman discovers the original names of his family beneath the acquired ones. Morrison has engaged her hero in finding out his "roots," which lies not only in his own family and ancestors but also in his community and his people. The rediscovery of the history thus retrieves the obliterated facts and even metaphorically prods the protagonist to reinterpret the world with a growing sense of awareness. Thus *Song of Solomon* contributes to the enrichment of black history and culture by adding a new meaning to it. Pilate's teaching of "five or six kinds of black" (colour) modifies the meaning of blackness metaphorically:

You think dark is just one color, but it ain't. There're five or six kinds of black. Some silky, some woolly. Some just empty. Some like fingers. And it don't stay still. It moves and changes from one kind of black to another. . . .

Well, night black is the same way. May as well
be a rainbow. (41)

Like the ever changing black (colour), the history of African Americans does not "stay still" either but rather goes on changing. By reinscribing the past through stories, words and songs Morrison has made her novel a beautiful statement on the survival of a legacy as well as on the legacy of a survival. The legacy endures through the collective memories that keep alive all rituals from birth to death. In the name of modernization one should not turn away from one's past, it must be reinterpreted for the survival of and betterment of a community. It is the black women's spiritual wisdom which keeps up the legacy in the ever changing world.

Tar Baby (1981) re-examines the conflicts that have surfaced distinctly in the three preceding novels. The problem with the black characters is how to negotiate a place for them within a dominant culture and how to situate them in relation to their own history and culture. According to Grewal, the novel "depicts the struggle over cultural definitions and identifications in a postmodern world. In *Tar Baby*, Morrison allows the reader to see the African American crisis of identity and alignment in colonial and postcolonial terms" (79-80). The expansionist motto of Euro-American capitalism entraps the public with

its alluring principle of commodity consumption in such a manner that it blurs their vision by its glamour, makes them its puppet and a part of this scheme. Thus American capitalism colonizes their body and mind, levelling out all cultural distinctiveness and making all conform to a single pattern. This novel is a critique of the dominant socio-economic ideology of commodification of "blackness" and an exploration of black survival strategies by creating a cultural resistance that will decolonize their minds and actions.

Jadine Child's Euro-centric education has dissociated her from her blackness; as a fashion model she is loyal to the aesthetics of commodification and as a student of art history she has subjugated herself to incorporate hegemonic ideologies. She says, "Picasso is better than an Itumba mask" (*Tar Baby* 74). Morrison, in her interview with Charles Ruas, explains the dilemma of characters like Jadine, whose education in post integration America has made her face another kind of problem in spite of all the amenities capitalist culture of the new world has offered her:

This civilization of black people, which was underneath the white civilization, was there with its own everything. Everything of that civilization was not worth hanging on to, but

some of it was, and nothing has taken its place while it is being dismantled. There is a new, capitalistic, modern American black which is what everybody thought was the ultimate in integration. To produce Jadine, that's what it was for. I think there is some danger in the result of that production. It cannot replace certain essentials from the past (105).

The novel comes closest to Morrison's first novel *The Bluest Eye* in critiquing the dominant consumer culture. Pecola's failure to achieve selfhood in 1941 gives way four decades later to Jadine's apparent self-achievement. But on closer analysis, both are two sides of the same coin; both are colonized subjects. One is convinced of her ugliness, another of her beauty as corroborated by the prevalent ideologies of "beauty." Jadine is no more self-defined than Pecola. Jadine's character is a site for reconsidering the conception of liberal womanhood in black culture. In the name of equality of sex she is actually celebrating her outward image of a fashion model and so she is threatened by the woman in yellow dress with three eggs in her right hand, who spat at her. In this novel Morrison's stinging criticism of the contemporary "liberal woman" is unmistakable, who gives up her individuality in the name of sexual parity and disregards family values altogether. The

author says, "the conflict of genders is a cultural illness . . . caused not so much by conflicting gender roles as by the other 'differences' the culture offers" (Interview with Nellie McKay 147). Morrison's depiction of relationships in the plantation household of Valerian Streets significantly exposes the ways Imperialism wields its weapon, "cultural bomb" (Ngugi 3), to construct a self-alienating materialist world view, which in turn creates conflicts between classes and genders. Jadine's education, instead of being utilized for her community, takes her away from her people, "producing instead an educated alienation from the working class" (Grewal 90). Though Son does not want to succumb to white hegemonic ideals of consumerism, his romantic idealization of black womanhood does not escape the authorial contempt either. Neither Jadine's self-alienating cultural views nor Son's provincial, nostalgic romantic sensibilities about the past can fulfil the requirements for an "authentic" African American experience. In the critical contemporary world Morrison thinks that it is neither to "stay right where we are" nor to "pretend that there was no past," but the "ideal situation is to take from the past and apply it to the future, which does not mean improving the past or tomorrow. It means selecting from it" (Interview with Charles Ruas 112).

Beloved (1987), Morrison's *magnum opus*, sheds new light on the nature of history, authenticity of historical truth/fictionality of history, memory and several other controversial issues in postmodern America. Set in 1873 and 1874, ten years after the Emancipation, *Beloved* takes stock of the slave past. In most slave narratives the past with all its inhumanity is something to leave behind. The master narrative of the slaves' history sought to avoid contradictions as much as it could by deleting certain records and highlighting others according to its conveniences. The "produced" meanings offered by the traditional slave narratives can hardly project everyday lives as "lived" by blacks. Their "interior regions" remain unfocused since the master narrative "naturalizes" them as their own property and writes them off as "subjects" with their claim on "themselves." *Beloved* aims to reclaim the ownership of black people's selves, particularly that of slave women's, by focussing on their interior lives in their day-to-day world. *Beloved*, in its fictional reconstruction of an actual event in a slave woman's life that the author came to know of while editing *The Black Book*, offers a new story/history of a slave mother by deconstructing the stereotype of the black woman as a submissive and subservient breeder of slaves and reconstructing her image as a bold and violent, as well as a loving and caring

mother, who is not to be subjugated by the dominant power when the security of her children is in question.

Although Morrison's historical project is to unveil "proceedings too terrible to relate" ("The Site" 110), many things nevertheless remain inaudible or buried in the novel. In exploring her characters' traumatic memories, something that is rarely done in subjective or objective historical accounts of slavery, Morrison is telling a story that creates a "space of trauma," (qtd. in Grewal 14) where the traumatic materials get both individual and collective ventilation. The narrative offers disjointed stories, psyches and memories that must be woven together to make a single story for the healing of a group. Like Sethe's wedding dress, made up of scrapes of clothes, Morrison wants to rewrite the history of slave women by joining the fragmented memories shared by her people. Still it seems difficult to have a "total" reconstruction of a historical past, nor did the novelist ever want it that way, and the gaps must be filled up by readers' active participation in the history making process. Unlike traditional history's sequential narrative, Morrison's "history" stresses the fact that black Americans, particularly freed slaves, never experienced time/history as an ordered/linear sequence of events. Remembrance of slavery, for Morrison, is "national amnesia" ("The Pain of Being Black" 257) and people try to

avoid it for the purpose of survival because historically a beleaguered people cannot look backwards; they must keep going to meet the demands of the present. It is in her fictional reconstruction that Morrison likes to make the horror of slavery "real" by letting her characters confront their hideous past but in such a manner that memory does not overpower imagination in a destructive way. Sethe's deliberate way of creating a "timeless present" (*Beloved* 184) in order to "get to the no-time waiting for her" (191) can never be a solution for the demands/complaints of a repressed past. Her idyllic creation of "no-time" present in 124 must be broken; otherwise she will be strangled as she had been almost in the Clearing Scene, and her history, namely the history of all black women, will be erased from the cultural memory of African Americans. The "unspeakability" of slavery that has made her people voiceless and thus "absent" in the enlightenment tradition is a challenge for Morrison, who in her new history has made them powerful by giving them their own voice and thus provided a "present" presence rather than an "absent" presence for African Americans as in mainstream literature. Sethe's raw act of defiance runs counter to the dominant power politics that tries to interfere with a mother's choice. Through her reconstruction of the life of the slave mother Morrison wants to understand what psychic power one

has to have to resist devastation in an unconventional way. *Beloved* makes it brutally clear that aside from the equality of oppression that black men and women suffered, black women were also oppressed as *women*. They were routinely subjected to rape, enforced childbirth and natal alienation from their children. The novel investigates the cost of Sethe's resistance. Her infanticide is registered as a heroic act of resistance that Morrison defines as a "desperate strategy" (qtd. in White) in an interview.

Jazz (1992) is a sequel to *Beloved* in recalling a traumatized past. As a therapeutic historian, Morrison has presented before the public a history of dispossession and loss in such a manner that it is not autonomous or predetermined, but rather open-ended with an invitation to modify/remake it. In her Nobel Lecture Morrison noted, "Narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is being created." *Jazz* registers a mutual space between the speaker and listener, the writer and reader, who in their joint venture of surveying the African American past make the present lovable and envision a better future. The narrative voice gossips about Joe shooting his eighteen-year-old lover, Dorcas, and about his wife Violet running to deface the corpse. It is through the complexity of survival that individual story becomes a part of a larger history. History is never over; past repeats itself and it also gets

rewritten. The narrator not only intrudes but comments on her own ability to make the story "right." Her role in recreating a past, using her imagination to supplement history, is continually highlighted in the novel. *Jazz* seeks to reconstitute the social history of America by constructing historical knowledge from the vantage point of its oppressed players. In the novel the male, middle class New Negro is replaced by working class men and women who exploit each other mutually in an atmosphere of dispossession and longing. 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. Though Dorcas falls victim to both Joe and Violet, all three are finally victims of an oppressive society. Traumatic memories exert themselves viscerally in involuntary acts of the body. Nevertheless, the trauma of history is prevented from being all-consuming. By the end of the novel the troubled triad of Joe-Violet-Dorcas is replaced by the healing triad of Joe-Violet-Felice. According to Grewal, "*Jazz* highlights the consciousness of black women's struggle to survive the violence of disenfranchisement reverberating across generations, across the North South, rural-urban divide. . ." (123). Though the history of denial and dispossession is unavoidable in the lives of black women, they must not allow themselves to be

subdued by its reiteration. Morrison has shown how the emergent bond among black women may hasten healing of the blacks who have been distracted by geographical and emotional dislocation, caused by migration. Alice, Dorcas's aunt, finds that she is not far removed from the woman she once called "Violent." Eventually they find a steady friendship, each seeing in the other a reflection of her own tortured self. True to the spirit of jazz, the characters are bound yet have space in which they can improvise and go ahead of the beat. The narrative voice urges a space for agency in order to expose the wounds cast on black women by the treason of history. The novel ends with a readerly/writerly desire: "Say make me, remake me" (229); the narrative voice appeals to the reader to lay hands on the past so that a history of a group can be delivered anew by the joint venture of both writer and reader.

My thesis does not include separate chapters on *Paradise* (1998), *Love* (2003) because of time and space constraints. But here I wish to add that the first of the last two novels also deals with the key moments of African American history to focus on the complex issue of black identity. The text extends the project begun with *Beloved* and *Jazz* in recalling traumatic histories, by using religion and spirituality in innovative ways that try to lessen the pains of history. According to Romero, "the novel

encourages its readers to re-imagine more inclusive, accepting communities that disrupt the violent exclusions that characterize both mainstream American and traditional African American conception of race, history, and nation" (415). In spite of Ruby's superior self-narrative, a fissure comes up between the community's perfect and stable self-image and its actual conditions/cultural practices. Most ironically, however, when it comes to defining themselves in relation to a group of unconventional women, both young and old males connive, if you will, to unleash terror on that group. Rather than a perfect paradise, the novel ends up presenting a conservative, patriarchal, thoroughly racialized and violent community. It not only deconstructs the master narrative of American isolationism and exceptionalism but also "enforces a response in literature" whereby readers "care about," "dislike," or "dismiss the characters based on important information" other than race, and it is also "a way of saying that race is the least important piece of information about another person" (qtd. in Fultz 79). *Paradise* thus offers a counternarrative that resists any (totalizing) national historical narrative, Eurocentric or Afrocentric, and seeks an agency not only for the African American community but also for those excluded "others." The novel again authenticates readers' participation in reinterpreting the

history of a nation, an action that, instead of working out narrow ideas of constructing and achieving paradise, focuses on the connection between an individual/community and the rest of the world.

Love (2003) is about a charismatic but dead hotel owner, Bill Cosey. It is interesting to note how the people around him continue to be affected by his life even long after his death. The characters sharing his mansion used to be friends but are now sworn enemies. Morrison's split narrative helps her sustain the reader's interest till the very end. She once again introduces a character as a medium to connect the dead Bill Cosey to the world of the living. Morrison's latest novel *A Mercy* (2008) to be published in November will be Morrison's ninth and last novel so far, which looks at racism in three periods of American history: in the year 2000; colonial beginnings in 1660; and a "middle period" of legalised racism.

Morrison's fiction rewrites predetermined white discourses on blacks and brings up African American writing to a level of global recognition. She forges anew new identities for her people in a manner that is of utmost socio-political as well as of aesthetic interest. Morrison's re-reading and rewriting of the history of black women modifies and widens the world's outlook on a minority group in a way that broaches and yet transcends gender,

class and race. Here lies the greatness of the author who can work from both within and without--with equal understanding and gusto. Her constant experiments with form, style and narrative strategies in order to make her stories speak, attest to the power of her work to engage her readers in her illuminating forays into the political and cultural contradictions of America, past and present. Language in her hands becomes a tool to inspire humans towards love and liberation, and she is acutely aware, as she makes it clear in her Nobel Prize Lecture, of its potential to be misused. The present thesis may generate further study of Toni Morrison who always looks forward to a better society that would narrow the vast gap between the privileged and the oppressed. Above all, Morrison's work challenges us all to deal with the "bird" in the tale of the "old woman" (I refer to the Nobel Lecture) and make it as "lovely" as we can: "Look. How lovely it is, this thing we have done-together" (273).